Addressing the phenomenon of young South Africans leaving the church: A practical theological investigation of the role of parents in faith formation

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

ABSTRACT

There is an international trend of young adults leaving the church and seemingly abandoning their faith once they finish school and go off to college or seek employment. Hypocrisy in the church, dissatisfaction with outdated church programmes, the judgement or irrelevance of the church, disillusionment with religious structures, outdated teachings and the church's failure to cater for their needs are some of the main reasons young adults leave the church and often turn from the faith. Studies have shown that the problem begins long before young adulthood (18-29 years old), as many young people abandon their faith while still in their teenage years. While the church has a definite role to play, parents are the primary agents of faith formation in the lives of their children. Faith formation is equipping people to be disciples of Jesus Christ. This occurs through discipleship, which entails a mentor-learner relationship in which behaviour is formed through observation and practice, rather than merely communicating information. The parent-child relationship is the primary setting for discipleship and faith formation. How do parents understand and approach the faith formation of their teenaged children? Answering this question and thereby challenging the phenomenon of young adults leaving the church and often the Christian faith is the focus of this study.

KEY TERMS

Church

Discipleship

Faith

Faith formation

Leaving the church

Parents

Teenagers

Young adults

OPSOMMING EN SLEUTELTERME

OPSOMMING

Daar is 'n internasionale neiging dat jong volwassenes die kerk verlaat en oënskynlik hul geloof laat vaar sodra hulle klaar is met skool en die ouerhuis verlaat om te gaan werk of te studeer. Geveinsdheid in die kerk, ontevredenheid met eeue-oue kerkprogramme, die veroordelendheid of irrelevansie van die kerk, ontnugtering met godsdienstige strukture, verouderde leringe en die kerk se gebrek om aan hul behoeftes te voorsien is van die hoof redes waarom jong volwassenes die kerk verlaat en dikwels van die Christelike geloof af wegdraai. Studies het getoon dat die probleem lank voor jong volwassenheid (18-29 jaar oud) begin, aangesien baie jongmense hul geloof laat vaar terwyl hulle nog in hul tienerjare was. Terwyl die kerk 'n definitiewe rol speel, is ouers die primêre agente van geloofsvorming in die lewens van hul kinders. Geloofsvorming stel mense in staat om dissipels van Jesus Christus te wees. Dit vind plaas deur dissipelskap wat 'n mentor-leerder-verhouding behels, waar gedrag gevorm word deur waarneming en oefening, eerder as deur blote oordrag van inligting. Die ouer-kind-verhouding is die primêre omgewing vir dissipelskap en geloofsvorming. Hoe verstaan en benader ouers die geloofsvorming van hul tiener-kinders? Die fokus van hierdie studie is juis die beantwoording van hierdie vraag, om sodoende die verskynsel van jong volwassenes wat die kerk asook dikwels die Christelike geloof verlaat, aan te spreek.

SLEUTELTERME

Kerk

Dissipelskap

Geloof

Geloofsvorming

Kerk verlating

Ouers

Tieners

Jong volwassenes

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DEFINITIONS

Centennials: Also known as "Generation Z", they are people born between 1999 and 2015

Church: All born-again believers (John 1:12-13; John 3:3-5), irrespective of denomination or affiliation; also called the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It includes, but is not limited to, the church buildings, structures and programmes used by the church to bring the Gospel message to the world. It consists of families, which in turn consists mainly of parents and their children.

Discipleship: The process of leading someone to become a follower of Jesus Christ. It involves teaching, modelling and mentoring.

Faith formation: Equipping people to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It occurs through discipleship. Another term for 'faith formation' is 'spiritual development' and these two terms are used interchangeably.

Millennials: Also known as 'Generation Y', born between 1984 and 1998. The Barna Group sometimes refer to this generation as "Mosaics", due to their "eclectic relationships, thinking styles, and learning formats, among other things" (Kinnaman, 2011:246).

Parents: Although "parents" usually refers to someone's biological parents, in this study it will refer to the primary caregivers in the lives of children and teens.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFM: The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa

AGS: Die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika

NWU: North-West University

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

"The number of young people leaving the church over the past twenty years is staggering." (McDowell & Wallace, 2019:30) "Millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years" (Kinnaman, 2011:5). According to the Barna Group, in 2011, 59% of young people with a Christian background had left the church after they turned 18 and this after they attended church regularly during their teen years (Kinnaman, 2011:23). More recent studies have shown an even greater decline in church attendance amongst young adults in the Unites States. The Lifeway Research Survey, completed in 2017, showed that 66% of young adults stopped attending church after the age of 18 (Earls, 2019). According to both McGowen (2018) and Sherwood (2018), the statistics are similarly alarming in Europe. Young adults leaving the church is also a problem in Canada (Young, 2015), Australia (Brant, 2016) and South Africa (Pew Research, 2018; Shahid & Zuettel, 2012:6).

One might argue that it is a phase these young people go through and that they will return to the church at a later stage in their life, yet research shows that this is not the case:

> Fewer than one out of ten young adults mention faith as their top priority, despite the fact that the vast majority…attended a Christian church during their high school years…our tracking research suggests that today young people are less likely to return to church later, even when they become parents. (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007:23)

Even more concerning is the fact that not only do many young adults leave the church, but many also turn away from the Christian faith. The Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute (2018:24-25) show that religiosity have been falling for decades: "'Americans' beliefs are becoming more post-Christian" and "religious identity is changing…The percentage of Gen Z that identifies as atheist is double that of U.S. adults." According to Sherwood (2018), 70% of 16- to 29-year olds in the UK don't identify with any religion, 63% never pray. Sherwood also mentions similar statistics for other countries in Europe.

McDowell and Wallace (2019:32) show that leaving the church and often the Christian faith is not something that young people suddenly decide when they finish high school, but many of them turn from their faith during their teenage years. Many will continue to attend church with their families, but they have serious doubts about the church's teachings. Cox (2017),

Taunton (2013) and Gray (2016) concur with these findings. This usually occurs between the ages of 10 and 17.

According to Kinnaman (2011:21), this problem is a "faith-development or a disciple-making problem" and it seems that "the church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture". The question this study is interested in, however, is whether the reason for this phenomenon can solely be sought in faith development at church level or if other faith development agents, such as parents, should also be investigated. In this regard, Kinnaman (2011:23) suggests:

> Adults identify as Christians typically because they had formative experiences as a child or as a teenager that connected them to Christianity. But that connection is often shallow and on the surface, having more to do with cultural identification than it does with deep faith.

Studies (Heyns, 1986:24-25 as cited by Wiid, 1997:15; Fowler, 1995:16-17, 74-77; Schoeman, 2017:18; Balswick & Balswick, 2014:146) have shown that the family unit is the primary source of faith formation, development and education for any individual. The family is the most important structure, because it has the greatest forming influence on the person's life and outlook on life. What happens in the household has a great impact on the family members and especially the children. "The Christian family plays a crucial role in the development of faith." (Balswick & Balswick, 2014:150) Smith and Denton (2005:261) explain that grandparents, other relatives, mentors and youth workers are also very influential in the lives of adolescents, but "parents are most important in forming their children's religious and spiritual lives".

Faith formation differs at different ages (Balswick & Balswick, 2014:146-150; Joiner, 2009:140-146, 154; Fowler, 1995:117-211). This study focuses on faith formation amongst teenagers, because it is during the teenage years that faith truly becomes personal and internalised (Balswick & Balswick, 2014:149; Fowler, 1995:112-113, 151-185). It is therefore of utmost importance to lay firm foundations during this stage of personal and faith development to help teenagers remain faithful to God and the church when transitioning to young adulthood.

The great number of youths leaving the church can thus also suggest that there are challenges regarding the faith formation teenage children receive at home. This study is interested in engaging this role of parents from a practical theological paradigm in order to understand and challenge this phenomenon.

1.2.   State of the current research

An extensive literature search, with regards to young adults leaving the church, faith formation and discipleship in the home and the role of parents in faith formation and discipleship, was conducted making use of the library search facilities of the NWU, which include the NWU Library Catalogue as well as the following databases: EBSCO Host (Elite Database for Academic Search), SACat (the national catalogue of books and journals in South Africa), SAePublications (South African journal articles), NEXUS (the database of the NRF providing current and completed research dissertations and thesis) and ProQUEST (international theses and dissertations).

The following information is relevant to this study:

The religious landscape is changing rapidly, especially amongst young adults. An alarming and increasing number of young adults are leaving the church (Dyck, 2010:16-18; Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007:23). The trend also seems to be worsening: According to Kinnaman (2011:22), the church dropout rate amongst adolescents leaving the faith during their transition to young adulthood was 43%. In 2019 this number has jumped to almost 70% (Earls, 2019; McDowell & Wallace, 2019:30).

Not only is church attendance declining amongst the younger generation, but also religiosity in general. Many are not just leaving the church, but also the Christian faith. White (2017:21-32) shows how belief in God, the Bible and Christian doctrines, as well as Christian practices like prayer have declined from generation to generation. No wonder White (2017:11) and others (Barna Group & Impact 360 Institute, 2018:24-26, 36; Lesley, 2019) call this latest generation the first truly "post-Christian generation".

Reasons why adolescents leave the church and often the Christian faith include: the church being overprotective, irrelevant, anti-science, judgemental, old-fashioned, exclusive, close-minded, too political and hypocritical (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007:29-30; Kinnaman, 2011:92-93; Barna & Kinnaman, 2014:49-53; Young, 2015; Gray, 2016; Earls, 2019).

The abovementioned reasons for leaving the faith have been the focus of most studies cited, but most studies do not address the influence parents have on the continuation of faith of teenagers as they transition into young adulthood – the period in which most of them leave the church and often the Christian faith itself. As already indicated in section 1.1, those who finally leave the church when they become young adults have often already abandoned the Christian faith while still in their teenage years – still living with and still attending church with their parents.

Faith comes by *hearing the Word of God* (Rom. 10:17), but how can someone hear if there is no one to share the good news with them (Rom. 10:14). Jesus gave the command to proclaim the good news of salvation to everyone (Mark 16:15). Not only should the good news be proclaimed, but through it and by it, we should *make disciples* of those who accept the good news proclaimed (Matt. 28:19). This is known as "The Great Commission".

From the above we see that *faith formation* occurs through *discipleship* – the process of making one a disciple. This occurs through *teaching*, as Jesus clearly stated in Matthew 28:20: "and *teaching* them to obey everything I have commanded you…"

According to Dean (2010:111), "Luther was convinced that Christian formation began with youth ministry, and he was convinced that youth ministry started at home". She continues to say that "parents matter most in shaping the religious lives of their children" (Dean, 2010:112).

Parents' first obligation and primary responsibility in this regard is their own children. Children are the primary disciples of parents. The apostle Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the *training* and *instruction* of the Lord."

With regards to young adults leaving the church, the role of parents in faith formation and discipleship of teenagers, the researcher could not find many sources based on South African studies, much less in the Vaal Triangle specifically.

Some South African studies (Schoeman, 2017; Veldsman, 2005; Wiid, 1997) have been conducted in this regard and it will be interesting to see whether their findings correspond to the findings of this specific study.

1.3. Main research question

The main research question of this study is: What guidelines can a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in the faith formation of teenage children yield to assist parents in discipling teenage children in order to challenge the phenomenon of youths leaving the church?

Questions arising from the main research question are:

- How do parents *understand* and *approach* faith formation with regards to their teenage children?
- What are some of the *reasons* underlying the current approaches of parents to the faith formation of teenage children?

- How does the Bible *define* the role of parents with regards to the faith formation of teenage children?
- What *guidelines* can a practical theological study yield to assist parents in faith formation of teenagers to challenge their exit from the church?

1.4.   Aim and objectives

The main aim of this practical theological study is to provide guidelines with regards to the faith formation of teenage children to challenge the phenomenon of the youth leaving the church.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- engage parents' *understanding* and *approach* to the faith formation of teenage children;
- identify some of the *reasons underlying current approaches* of parents to the faith formation of teenage children;
- investigate the *Scriptures* and *theological sources* with regards to the faith formation of teenage children; and
- articulate a number of *practical theological perspectives* to assist parents with the faith formation of teenagers to challenge their exit from church.

1.5.   Central theoretical argument

Parents of teenagers are in need of guidelines regarding the faith formation of teenage children to challenge the phenomenon of youths leaving the church.

1.6.   Methodology

1.6.1.   The practical theological nature of this study

According to Bennett, Graham, Pattison & Waltont (2018:19), practical theology starts and ends with the practice of the church – as individuals and as a community. It attempts to combine relevant insights, methods and perceptions from which different understandings of practice, experience and the world emerge (Bennett *et al.*, 2018:22). Swinton and Mowat (2006:v) explain that practical theology has its starting point in human experiences and then seeks to reflect on those experiences from a theological perspective, in order to develop a "transformative and illuminating understanding of what is going on in these situations".

This study is about young adults leaving the church once they graduate from high school, due to a seemingly lack of deep faith formation during their teenage years. It asks what

parents, as the primary agents of discipleship of their children, understand with regards to discipleship – the means through which faith formation occurs – and how they approach discipleship of their teenaged children. The study is of a very practical nature, because it focuses on what parents *understand* and *do* in real-life situations – in practice. It is also of a deep theological nature, because it focuses on the spiritual lives, faith development and discipleship of teenagers. A practical theological approach is thus best suited for this study.

1.6.2. The qualitative nature of this study

> Qualitative research involves the utilisation of a variety of methods and
> approaches which enable the researcher to explore the social world in
> an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals
> and communities inhibit it. (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:29)

Qualitative research approaches its subject matter in a naturalistic and interpretative manner. It is ideographic and holistic in nature, seeking to understand social life and the meaning people attach to situations.

While quantitative research centres more on statistics, seeking to explain, predict and control phenomena, qualitative research, working in an exploratory fashion, seeks to *describe* and *understand* the nature of phenomena from the participant's point of view (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2010:64-66)

This study investigates parents' *understanding* of faith formation and discipleship and how they approach their teenage children, based on the *meanings* they attach to faith formation and discipleship. Therefore, a qualitative approach would be more appropriate for this specific study than a quantitative approach, which would be more helpful if one sought to derive the number of young adults leaving the church due to insufficient faith formation in the home during their teenage years or to determine the number of parents actively involved in discipling their teenage children.

1.7. Research design

1.7.1. Model chosen for this study

There are different models in the field of practical theology that can be followed to execute the task as a researcher, including the models of Zerfass (1974), Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991), Muller (2005), etc. This study makes use of the model of Osmer (2008), which approaches practical theological research as four tasks, namely (1) the descriptive-empirical task, (2) the interpretive task, (3) the normative task and (4) the pragmatic task.

The descriptive-empirical task

The essence of this task is the systematic gathering of information to determine and describe *what is going* on in the specific situation, episode or context (Osmer, 2008:4).

Osmer (2008:5-6) indicates that the gathered information helps to discern patterns, dynamics, perspectives and feelings as well as meanings attached to these, which all place the actions taking place in a "longer narrative framework". *Careful listening* is very important in this regard.

This study endeavoured to determine what is currently going on in the homes of some Christian parents in terms of the faith formation of their teenage children. A literature study of relevant books and articles was conducted to determine what has been documented about parents' understanding and approach to faith formation and discipleship of their teenage children. Narratives of parents themselves were gathered, by way of focus groups, to determine what is currently happening in our own specific context. These data collection methods are discussed in greater detail in section 1.7.3.

The interpretive task

Following the descriptive-empirical task, the gathered information is interpreted to answer the question: "Why is this going on?" (Osmer, 2008:4).

According to Osmer (2008:6-7), one needs to make sense of the information that has been gathered in the descriptive-empirical task. It is important to determine the *theories* that will help the researcher to better understand and explain the information gathered during the previous task. "Theories help us understand and explain certain features of an episode, situation, or context but never provide a complete picture" and therefore the researcher should always "remain open to the complexity and particularity of people and events and refuse to force them to fit the theory" (Osmer, 2008:80).

The written sources studied provided the theoretical perspectives from which the information gathered in the descriptive-empirical task were viewed and interpreted. The written source material was compared to the narratives of parents in the sample group. This provided information that was interpreted to determine *why* parents understand and approach faith formation and discipleship of their teenage children the way they do.

The normative task

The focus of this task is to determine *what ought to be going on*, i.e. what the ideal situation would look like. In practical theological terms one makes use of "theological concepts to interpret" the situation while "constructing ethical norms to guide our responses and learning from good practice" (Osmer, 2008:4).

According to Osmer (2008:8), this task involves *theological reflection* whereby theological concepts are used to interpret the specific episode, situation or context under study. It also requires "the use of *ethical principles*, *guidelines*, and *rules* that are relevant to the situation" which can "guide strategies of action". Past and present practices of the Christian tradition must also be incorporated. These "provide normative guidance in shaping the patterns of the Christian life".

Through Scriptural investigation a theology of parenting discipleship is suggested. The researcher focused on Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalm 78:1-8 and 2 Timothy 1:3-5, because these passages deal directly with one generation transferring faith to the next generation. Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:1-4 deal with rearing children in the ways of God. Because this study focuses on faith formation through discipleship the researcher also made use of the following discipleship passages: Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16 and Acts 2:37-39. Commentaries were consulted to determine the socio-, cultural and historical contexts and practices found in these passages as well as to glean hermeneutical interpretations in order to determine principles that are also valuable in the researcher's own context.

The theology of parenting discipleship was then compared to the current narratives to determine *what*, from a theological point of view, *should be happening* in the Christian home with regards to faith formation and discipleship.

The pragmatic task

In the pragmatic task strategies of action are determined that will influence the situation towards the desired or ideal outcome (Osmer, 2008:4). This task thus answers the question "*how might we respond*?" or "*what can be done* about the situation?" It focuses on "strategies and actions that are undertaken to shape events towards desired goals" (Osmer, 2008:10).

The knowledge gained about *what is happening*, *why it is happening* and *what should be happening* enables the formulation of suggestions to challenge existing practices. Action strategies can be suggested, which can bring what is happening more in line with *what should be happening*. Suggestions can also be made for further research to be conducted in this field.

By determining what is currently happening in Christian homes in our area, with regards to faith formation and discipleship of teenage children by their parents, and also ascertaining the reasons for the current situation to then compare the current situation with Scripture's teachings about these matters, conclusions were drawn and strategies recommended to bring current practices in line with Scripture.

1.7.2. Research context

This study was limited to parents from the AFM churches in Vaalpark, Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark.

1.7.3. Data collection

Two data collection methods were used for this study: a literature study and focus groups.

Literature study

A literature study of relevant books and articles was conducted to determine the information documented about parents' understanding and approach to faith formation and discipleship of their teenage children. A literature study situates the research topic in a larger knowledge pool or context, creating a foundation for the research to be conducted. It enables the researcher to determine what research has already been conducted in the specific field of study; highlights current issues, helpful methodologies and pitfalls, as well as areas in need of further study.

After data collection, literature reviewed helps to identify and explain similarities as well as differences between analysed data and existing knowledge (De Vos *et al.*, 2010:134-135). While a preliminary literature review is provided in this chapter, an in-depth literature study was conducted, specifically with regards to faith formation occurring in the home as parents disciple their teenage children and the findings are presented in Chapter 2.

The researcher utilised the search facilities provided by NWU to collect books and articles with information relevant to this study. These facilities include the following databases: SACat (the national catalogue of books and journals in South Africa), EBSCOHost (international journal articles), SAePublications (South African journal articles), NEXUS (the database of the NRF providing current and completed research) and ProQUEST (international theses and dissertations). Passages from Scripture relevant to the focus of the study were also consulted.

Focus groups

De Vos *et al.* (2010:342) explain that "interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research". Interviews are a way of gaining insight into the stories of participants – and "telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process". There are various types of interview methods one can use in qualitative research, including one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews.

Because this study investigates the meaning parents attach to faith formation and discipleship, interviewing would be the most appropriate way in which information for this study is gathered. In turn, focus groups were most beneficial for this study, because it focused not only on behaviour – in terms of discipleship in the home – but also on thoughts and feelings surrounding the specific behaviour. De Vos *et al.* (2010:341) state that focus groups are especially beneficial "to explore thoughts and feelings and not just behaviour". As Cyr (2019:2) states, "researchers use focus groups to get at the substance of what people say...Focus groups excel in revealing what participants think and why they think as they do". Focus groups are also likely to bring more things to the fore than one-to-one interviews, due to group dynamics (De Vos *et al.*, 2010:362). According to Cyr (2019:2), "When it comes to the value of focus groups for the social science researcher, the whole tends to be greater than the sum of its parts".

Osmer (2008:54) explains that focus groups usually consist of ten or fewer people who discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a discussion leader. The information that is gathered is in the form of verbal data. Reaching consensus on the topic that is discussed is not the goal, but rather to encourage a range of responses, ideas or feelings in order to gain an understanding of the opinions, behaviours, attitutudes or perceptions of the participants (De Vos *et al.*, 2010:362-363). In order to elicit a wide range of responses, "carefully formulated and sequenced questions based on the purpose of the study" need to be developed (De Vos *et al.*, 2010:369). The focus group questions may range from structured to unstructured depending on the needs of the specific study. Questions should be asked in a conversational manner and should be clear, direct, comfortable, short and simple.

Focus groups tend to make use of less structured questions, according to Cyr (2019:10-11), allowing participants to "speak freely about the issue raised". While the questions guide the conversation, the discussion may evolve and create the opportunity for other relevant issues or themes to come to the fore. The less structured questions should also be open-ended, allowing the necessary flexibility in the questioning route. It furthermore encourages the participants to "construct their own responses, providing access to their language and meanings" (Osmer, 2008:62).

This study is aimed at determining how parents understand and approach discipleship of their teenage children in order to challenge the phenomenon of teenagers leaving the church and often the Christian faith once they become young adults. To achieve this aim questions were designed to stimulate discussion around meanings and practices parents currently follow with regards to discipleship in the home. Literature regarding discipleship in the home was consulted as a frame of reference in designing the focus group questions. Based on the proposed methodological framework and the preliminary literature review, the following were taken into consideration in designing the research questions:

- How do parents understand their role in the faith formation of their teenage children?
- What religious practices do parents employ in facilitating faith formation in their teenage children?
- Why do parents think their young adult children have remained faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?
- Why do parents think their young adult children have left the church and/or the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?

The formulated questions, based on these considerations, are attached as Appendix 1.

The number of focus groups

Two focus groups sessions were planned – each no longer than 90 minutes in duration: one with parents who have children that left the church and/or the Christian faith during their teenage years or during/after they transitioned into young adulthood and another with parents who have children that remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith during their teenage years and into young adulthood. Should new, unforeseen information have come to light during the first round of focus group interviews, one or at most two additional focus groups would have been organised if needed.

Location of focus groups

The focus group interviews were held at the AFM church in Vaalpark for the following reasons: (1) locality - Vaalpark is situated between Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark; (2) familiarity – all participants would be from the AFM congregations in the area; (3) accessibility – the researcher is a pastor at AFM Vaalpark and therefore has full access to the church and its facilities. Permission was obtained from the AFM Vaalpark church board.

Recording of interview data

A voice recorder was used to record the focus group interviews and notes were also taken during the interviews – especially of non-verbal communication and cues. Participants were informed about the recording of the interviews as their consent was required.

1.7.4. Data analysis

Due to this study being of a qualitative nature, a statistical analysis was not conducted. According to the aim of the study, the goal was to record and document the experiences and practices of, as well as reasons behind and meanings attached to those experiences and practices of parents with regards to discipleship and faith formation of their teenage children.

The data gathered during the focus group interviews were transcribed into written text. Transcribing the data is the first step in analysing the data (Cyr, 2019:86) and helps the researcher to become deeply familiar with the data.

After transcribing the focus group interviews, the researcher used coding to identify themes, relationships and patterns in the data from within and across the focus groups. These were then categorised. The identified themes and categories were sorted and interpreted. The findings were compared with that of others found in the literature study and other studies.

1.8. Sampling frame

According to De Vos *et al.* (2010:365), "focus groups rely on purposive sampling." This means that all participants should be selected according to the purpose of the study. It is important that the participants have the specifics of the study in common. Homogeneity helps with the free flow of the conversation and also saves time, because the participants "spend less time explaining themselves to each other and more time discussing the issues at hand".

This study focuses on parents' role in faith formation in their teenage children in order to challenge the phenomenon of teenagers leaving the Christian faith and the church as they transition into young adulthood. Parents of young adults who have left the church and/or the Christian faith as well as parents of young adults who have remained faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith are therefore the best candidates for this study.

Due to time and resource constraints associated with a master's degree, this study focused mainly on the area of Vaalpark, Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark - more specifically on parents from the AFM churches in Vaalpark, Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark. Limiting the study to this

specific area does influence the generalisability of the study results, however, this may be negated by comparing the study results to those of similar studies conducted elsewhere.

The researcher aimed to have at least two focus groups of ten or less people, hence five couples per group taking part in the study. In light of the location of the study, saturation of the sample group was met in this way.

1.8.1. Inclusion criteria

It was required that participants to the study be active church members of any of the AFM churches in Vaalpark, Sasolburg or Vanderbijlpark. They should be parents of young adults who recently (at most three years ago) finished high school. For the one group their young adult children should have left the church and/or Christian faith during their teen years or as they transitioned to young adulthood. For the other group their young adult children should have remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith.

1.8.2. Exclusion criteria

As this study focused on the role of parents in the faith formation of their teenage children in order to challenge the phenomenon of these young people leaving the church once they transition to young adulthood, parents who were not themselves active church members at the time of this study were excluded. Parents of younger children were also excluded as this study focused on parents of young adults who left the church and/or the Christian faith, as well as those of young adults who remained faithful. Parents of young adults who finished high school more than three years ago were also excluded to ensure more recent data.

1.8.3. Participant recruitment

After gaining permission from the ethics committee of the North-West University, the recruitment of participants commenced. Appointments were made with senior pastors of the AFM churches in Vaalpark, Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark. As the researcher is a youth pastor at the Vaalpark AFM congregation, the senior pastor of Vaalpark was approached to recruit participants and to act as gatekeeper for participating congregations. At these meetings, the purpose of the research was thoroughly discussed and the pastors were requested to help identify and select parents from their congregations who fit the inclusion criteria. A formal letter, drafted by the researcher and endorsed by the supervisor, was sent to the identified participants inviting them to voluntarily partake in the study of which the focus group discussions would take place at the AFM church in Vaalpark, Sasolburg.

1.9. Estimated risk level and precautions

The researcher estimated a low to minimal risk level for this study. Participants did not experience any discomfort or stress not ordinarily experienced during their daily circumstances. Participants were afforded the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time should they experience any discomfort.

1.10. Goodwill permission/consent

1.10.1. Informed consent

The senior pastors responsible for the recruitment of participants had to explain the matter of informed consent. The letter inviting parents to participate explained the following:

- The academic nature of the study
- The aims and objectives of the study
- What is required of the participants
- The benefits of the research
- The expected timeframe for the research
- The confidentiality level
- How the information gathered and the research outcomes would be managed
- That participation is voluntary, withdrawal is optional and there are no consequences to the participants for withdrawing from the study

A consent form was included with the letter. This form was signed by the participants, the senior pastors who recruited participants, as well as the researcher.

1.10.2. Incentives and remuneration of participants

No incentives were provided to stimulate participation, other than the foreseen benefits of the study itself. Travelling costs of the participants were covered by the researcher up to R 100.00 per parent couple (or single parent) per focus group session.

1.10.3. Announcement and distribution of the study results

Once the study results are published, participants will be notified via email on how the results may be accessed. The results of the study will be shared with the participants within three months of obtaining approval of the completed study.

1.10.4. Privacy and confidentiality

Participants' identity and personal information is kept confidential. For the sake of anonymity codes were assigned to participants during the focus group interviews, transcription and processing of the data. These codes were used in the final research report. A further measure to ensure privacy and confidentiality included the signing of a confidentiality form by all participants. This not only served to protect the privacy of participants, but also of the young adults whose participation in the faith community came under discussion.

1.10.5. Management of data

With permission of the participants, focus group interview data was recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recordings were transcribed, coded and processed by means of the researcher's personal computer. All recordings and transcriptions will be stored on the researcher's personal, password-protected computer for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed.

1.10.6. Monitoring of the research

The researcher was responsible for the completion of the study. All ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process. The complete process was monitored by the appointed supervisor.

1.11. Benefits of the study

1.11.1. To participants

Participants had the opportunity to share their narratives with the researcher, thereby contributing to the pool of knowledge with regards to faith formation and discipleship in the home. They also have the benefit of knowing that their input may help other parents to, in their turn, develop strong faith foundations in the lives of their teenage children in order to help them remain in the faith and loyal to the church. Some of the participants also have other children that are still in their teenage years, so this study may also provide them with insight into how to approach discipling these children in order to help them build a strong and lasting faith.

1.11.2. In general

The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to the discourse regarding the role parents play in the faith formation of their teenage children in order to challenge the phenomenon of these teenagers leaving the church and often the Christian faith as they transition into young adulthood. The investigation of parent's narratives, with regards to their understanding and approach to faith formation of their teenage children, and comparing them with what current research shows in this regard, as well as with what Scripture teaches, provides invaluable information for parents of teenagers in order to help them form strong spiritual foundations in the lives of their teenage children. This may help the faith of these teenagers to remain strong when transitioning into young adulthood.

1.12. Chapter outline

Chapter 1:   Introduction

Chapter 2:   Faith formation in the home

Chapter 3:   Parents' understanding of faith formation

Chapter 4:   Interpretation of findings

Chapter 5:   A biblical perspective on faith formation

Chapter 6:   Faith formation in youths: principles and strategies for parents

Chapter 7:   Summary, conclusions and recommendations

CHAPTER 2: FAITH FORMATION IN THE HOME

2.1. Introduction

This chapter, along with the next one (Chapter 3), focuses on the descriptive-empirical task (Osmer, 2008:4, 31) of answering the question: "What is going on?" In light of this study, parents' understanding and approach to the faith formation of their teenage children are explored. The question may thus be phrased as follows: What is currently going on in Christian homes with regards to the faith formation of teenage children and what role do parents play therein? Because the focus is on faith formation, it must first be determined *what faith is*, before shifting to *how faith is formed* and to *who the main role players in faith formation are*. A literature study was conducted to provide an overview of research conducted on faith, faith formation and the role players in faith formation, with specific reference to the important role of parents in developing faith in their children, especially during their teenage years.

2.2. Faith defined

Before it can be determined what *faith formation* is, the concept of *faith* needs to be defined. In the New Testament there is only one Greek noun for faith, namely *pistis* (πίστις) and one verb, namely *pisteuō* (πιστεύω). These are usually translated as "faith", "belief", "believing" and even "faithfulness" (Myers, 2019:37). The problem is that the words "'faith" and "belief" are used in a variety of ways, often with completely different meanings. The context in which the word appears must be considered to ascertain its specific meaning (New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, 2000:488).

2.2.1. Wishful thinking

We often use the words "faith" and "belief" as synonyms for "hope" or "wish", as in, "I believe it will rain tomorrow" or "I have faith in the weather forecast". In this sense "belief" of "faith" is closer to wishful thinking, since we cannot be absolutely sure that it will rain tomorrow or that the weather forecast is accurate.

While "faith" is closely associated with "hope" in Hebrews 11:1, it is clear that the kind of hope mentioned there is not simply wishful thinking, but rather a hope that is linked directly to the promises of God, evidenced by the faithfulness of God fulfilling His promises in the past (The Lexham Bible Dictionary, 2016). This is evidenced by how the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 exercised their faith – their trust in God, based on His promises to them, as well as His faithfulness in the past. It is therefore not a "blind" faith, but one that

can be likened to receiving a cheque from a faithful and trustworthy friend – the hope of receiving the money is strengthened by the knowledge of past faithfulness and trustworthiness of the friend. In fact, it was sometimes used as a legal term carrying the meaning of a guarantee or security. In certain contexts, *pistis* appears as a direct synonym for truth (Jer. 7:28) and therefore stands in direct contrast to "blind faith".

2.2.2. Mental assent

"Faith" or "belief" is also often used in terms of mental assent or what might also be called "head knowledge" or "'intellectual faith". The writer of the book of James shows the difference between lived, saving faith versus mere mental assent (Jam. 2:14-26). The writer of James states repeatedly that a faith that does not bring about a change in one's life is dead and cannot lead to salvation (Jam. 2:14, 17, 20, 26). True saving faith must find fruition in a changed life. Works cannot save us (Eph. 2:8-9), but true salvation, by Christ alone, through faith alone, works (Eph. 2:10). In discussing the second chapter of James, *The Holman New Testament commentary* asserts that merely knowing that something is a fact does not necessarily involve the will or lead to a change in thinking or lifestyle:

> People who have only intellectual faith may uphold orthodox doctrines and support evangelical principles. The problem is that they have only made a mental commitment to the belief. They have not involved their wills, and they do nothing to demonstrate the reality of their faith. (Lea, 1999:294)

Lea (1999:294) continues to show that true salvific faith is a commitment to Jesus Christ, which involves the willingness to obey Him and not merely the acceptance of right teachings about Jesus (John 3:36).

The Lexham Bible dictionary (2016) concurs with this idea and states that faith is much more than simply a mental assent to a checklist of beliefs or religious ideas "that disregards a person's life and practices". The concept of "trust" in the Old Testament is "a practice that entails obedience to Torah (the law) and its specific requirements." Also, in the Greek understanding, faith (*pistis*) is much deeper than simply accepting religious ideas, but has to do with conviction, commitment and faithfulness.

It is however true that mental assent is a necessary element of salvific faith, since one cannot truly believe unless one also assents to the truth received. Mere mental assent however is not enough if it does not lead to the appropriation of the will as well as the change of heart and life. Faith should not live merely in the mind, but should be seated in the heart.

2.2.3. Body of Christian doctrine

Another meaning of the words "faith" or "belief" is that of the combined Christian doctrine, as in "a set of beliefs" one adheres to. We find this meaning of the word *pistis* in the New Testament, for example Acts 6:7; Galatians 1:23; Ephesians 4:5; Jude 1:3; etc. Here "faith" is not referring to simple "belief" or "believing", but rather a "creed" or "body of doctrine" (The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, 1915:1088; Dictionary of Bible Themes, 2009; Youngblood, Bruce & Harrison, 1995).

Doctrine teaches us about God, His character, His works, etc. and is therefore essential for getting to know God better. The goal should not be only to gain knowledge about God, but rather to get to know Him through the knowledge we gain about Him. Religious teaching is part of faith, but the essence is the integrity of a relationship with God (The Lexham Bible Dictionary, 2016).

The danger of seeking knowledge about God, without seeking to know God Himself better is beautifully summed up by Jesus in John 5:39-40: "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

2.2.4. Trust

The Lexham Bible dictionary (2016) provides an in-depth explanation of the Biblical concept of faith – it summarises it as: "reliance upon and trust in God". This trust is not simply accepting something as true or a trust for mere physical or material needs, but rather a profound personal trust in Jesus Christ for salvation (Dictionary of Bible Themes, 2009).

According to the *NASB Topical Index* (1992), "the full sense of faith involves not only a knowledge of the object of faith, but the response of the whole person in trustful commitment in accordance with whom or what is believed".

According to Grenz and Smith (2003:39), faith "denotes a central aspect of the stance that humans are to have in relationship with God". Faith is shown to be the human response to God and His promises. It entails both intellectual assent and trust and results in commitment and it leads to obedience.

Trusting in God for salvation is like trusting in a parachute. Simply knowing and believing a parachute can save your life, while you are sitting in a plane that is falling, will not help at all. One must put on the parachute and jump from the falling plane – a leap of faith. In the same way we should throw ourselves on the mercy of God, fully entrusting our lives to Him to save us.

2.2.5. Covenantal commitment

According to *The Lexham Bible dictionary* (2016) the Scriptural view of salvific faith is a covenantal commitment, which implies relationship, faithfulness, cooperation, spiritual perception and the expression of Christian hope. Faith also has to do with receiving Jesus (John 1:9-13) and thereby becoming a born-again child of God (John 3:3-5). This again divulges the relational and covenantal aspect of Biblical faith. Faith is however focused on a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, with whom we should have a relationship, in whom we should trust, whom we should obey, follow and live for, rather than on a set of laws – for salvation comes through faith not the works of the law (Eph. 2:8-9).

Carpenter and Comfort (2000:56) show that faith is the foundation of the Gospel and Christian life, as "the righteous shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Faith is the assurance of what we hope for, the certainty of what we do not see (Heb. 11:1). It is the basis for God's approval of the saints (Heb. 11:2, 6). It is further shown that the Hebrew word *'emunah* (אמנה), used in Habakkuk 2:4, from which Paul quotes to show the righteous shall live by faith, means "firmness", "steadfastness", "fidelity", "faithfulness" and "faith". It describes a faithful man. Again, we see that the Biblical concept of faith is much more than simply acknowledging a truth, it has a very practical side to it. True faith is belief that flows into a lifestyle of faithfulness.

The *New dictionary of biblical theology* (2000:487-493) indicates that the Biblical Hebrew and Greek terms for faith "are typically applied to people in relationship". Faith has to do with being persuaded (i.e. mental assent), but it goes deeper – it also entails a covenantal relationship built on trust and obedience. The faith that God requires, that leads to salvation, is also shown to be based on the character of God Himself, being faithful – the relationship between God and humankind is therefore one of mutual faithfulness. Trust in Jesus is shown to be more than Jesus only being the object of faith, through mental assent, but also the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Heb. 12:2). True faith in Christ therefore involves trust in Jesus, but also union and relationship with Him.

2.2.6. A working definition

From the above it is clear that Biblical salvific faith – the kind of faith parents long to see forming in their children – can be defined as follows:

A deeply rooted and hopeful trust in and reliance upon God, based on the revelation of God, a personal relationship with Him, as well as a sound and growing knowledge about Him and His faithfulness, which results in practical and observable spiritual fruit.

2.3. Faith formation

Now that a working definition of faith is established, *faith formation* can be discussed.

2.3.1. Faith formation at different levels of development

Since mental assent, i.e. acknowledgement and acceptance of the truth, is a part of faith, it follows that personal faith and the capacity for it develops as one develops cognitively. Stated differently, faith requires one to be able to understand the truth so that it can be acknowledged and accepted, which requires a certain amount of cognitive ability and in turn develops along with basic human development. Some interesting studies have been done with regards to the development of faith and how this relates to the mental, cognitive and psychological development of human beings, for example James W. Fowler's *Stages of faith* and the more recent James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim's *Christian formation: integrating theology and human development*.

Fowler (1995:119-211) discusses seven stages of faith formation, namely undifferentiated faith (ages 0-2), intuitive-projected faith (ages 2-7), mythic-literal faith (ages 7-12), synthetic-conventional faith (ages 12+), individuative-reflective faith (ages 21+), conjunctive faith (ages 35+) and universalising faith (ages 45+). Of relevance to this study is the synthetic-conventional faith stage and its transition to the individuative-reflective faith stage.

▪ Synthetic-conventional faith: The synthetic-conventional stage usually occurs during the teenage years, as personality and self-identity emerges. Experience of the world now extends more greatly beyond the family. Faith must now provide a coherent orientation, a basis for identity and a synthesis of values and information in the midst of more complex relationships – family, friends, school, media, church, etc. and therefore the adolescent is very easily influenced by the expectations and judgements of significant others. Many people remain in this stage. Transition to the next stage usually occurs when serious clashes or contradictions occur between valued authority sources; when there are significant changes in practices that were deemed as sacred or when the adolescent encounters experiences or perspectives leading to critical reflection of previously held beliefs and values. Leaving the home may often lead to this form of critical examination of self, values and beliefs.

Because adolescents are very easily influenced in their faith, the role parents play during this stage of faith is extremely important, since it will usually impact the faith orientation of the adolescent for the rest of his/her life. If the foundations upon which the

adolescent's faith is built is strengthened enough during this stage, faltering faith during transition to the next stage is less likely.

- Individuative-reflective faith: This stage usually takes form during young adulthood. Healthy transition from synthetic-conventional faith to individuative-reflective faith is critical, because it is in this transition that the late adolescent or young adult begins to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his/her own lifestyle, values and beliefs. Self-identity is formed in greater depth than in the previous stage and becomes more independent from social structures, demythologising previous and corporate held views. Authority shifts from the group to the individual self. It is often during this stage that many leave their childhood faith and some never return.

It might be argued that Fowler's stages of faith discuss the human capacity for faith and its growth rather than salvific faith itself. Most people are born into a specific faith tradition, e.g. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc. In these cases, they grow up in rich traditions of ritual and story where the successive faith stages elaborate on the patterns of commitment, observance and valuing of the contents of the faith tradition. This may occur with or without a conversion experience. Fowler (1995:282) states that conversion is possible at almost any stage and transition within the model. Conversion has, however, more to do with a change in the content of faith than a change in the stage of faith, although these may go hand-in-hand (Fowler, 1995:285-286).

In this regard Estep and Kim (2010:83) make the noteworthy observation that if faith and/or one's capacity for it is seen as directly proportional to the rational mind and its development, then "analytical knowledge becomes a dependent cause of faith". This leads to the inevitable conclusion that young children and mentally challenged individuals cannot really have faith and in theological terms cannot be saved, for we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is however also true that salvific faith does require some form of intellectual ability to understand and accept the truth. From a Pentecostal perspective, infants belong to the Lord, regardless of their familial background according to Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 18:14, Matthew 19:13-15 and 2 Sam. 12:21-23. When they reach the age of accountability, they need to hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17) and respond to it by accepting Christ (John 1:12-13) and place their trust in Him (Rom. 10:9-10). This conversion experience can occur at any stage after the age of accountability. Once born again, one is a spiritual infant, regardless of one's physical age, and should grow from being a spiritual infant (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:2) to becoming mature in Christ (Eph. 4:11-15; Heb. 5:14; Heb. 6:1-2).

In this sense spiritual growth in faith also progresses in stages, even from a Biblical perspective – from infancy to maturity. If faith comes by hearing, understanding and accepting the Word of God, according to Romans 10, and if it grows by that same Word, according to 1 Peter 2:2, then there certainly is a side to maturity in faith that is linked to the intellectual development of the individual. In that sense Fowler's model of showing that development of intellectual capacity in relation to faith capacity is still useful. Depending on one's stage of faith, according to Fowler's model, this growth in faith might be slower at a younger physical age, due to an underdeveloped capacity for faith, and faster at an older physical age, due to more advanced faculties.

To this end Estep and Kim (2010:37-59) agree that developmental theories are very useful in facilitating the formation and growth of faith in individuals based on their mental and intellectual development. Developmental theories give good insight into the way individuals perceive and understand the spiritual and physical reality in which they find themselves. With these insights one can better present the truth of Scripture in different ways to make it more understandable to each age group or stage of faith, as Fowler calls it.

Estep and Kim (2010:104-105) also show that it is during adolescence that the individual truly begins to form their own identity by establishing "self-definition and a philosophy of life". During this stage of life, the individual questions even the self-concept that is infused by parents during the earlier stages of life, in the quest to form a personal identity. Life becomes more complex as the teen starts to "grapple with existential, social, moral and spiritual questions". This stage of life is therefore of critical importance with regards to faith formation. Without the proper support, input and guidance transitioning to young adulthood can be detrimental for one's faith.

Research (Barna, 2003:43) reflects that people are much more likely to accept Christ as saviour during their childhood and teen years than later in life.

When we take these factors into account, we cannot deny that mental and intellectual development has an influence, at least in the growth of faith, even salvific faith. Herein development theories concur that the adolescent years are of critical importance when it comes to the necessity for support and guidance needed to strengthen their faith in order to help prevent them from leaving the church and/or the Christian faith as they transition into young adulthood.

2.3.2. Role players in faith formation

2.3.2.1. The Triune God

According to the *Dictionary of Bible themes* (2009), God is the initiator of salvific faith, i.e. even faith is a gift from God according to Romans 12:3, Philippians 1:29, Ephesians 2:8-9, etc.

God does not desire anyone to perish, but rather that everyone should *repent* (John 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 17:30-31) and *come to the knowledge of salvation* that is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:3-6). Because of this, God the Father *initiates faith* in the hearts of sinners, so that they can come to Jesus to be saved. He draws sinners to Jesus unto salvation (John 6:44).

Jesus Christ is the *mediator* between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). He sacrificed Himself to God as the *ransom* and *atoning sacrifice* for humankind's sin (1 Tim. 2:6; 1 John 2:2). It is through the *atoning sacrifice* of Jesus that God draws all people unto Jesus, so that they can be saved (John 12:32-33). The salvation bought with Jesus' blood is only applied to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16). Jesus Christ is thus the *object of faith* (Rom. 5:1-11); the *content of faith* (John 1:1-14; Rom. 10:9-17); as well as the *author* and *finisher of faith* (Heb. 12:2). Without faith in Christ it is impossible to be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). As one's *relationship* with and *knowledge of Christ* grows, so does one's faith.

Faith is generated by the *hearing* of the *Word of God* (Rom. 10:17). The Word of God was written under *inspiration of the Holy Spirit* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is the Holy Spirit that *explains the Word of God* in the hearts of the hearers, thereby *generating the faith* to believe the gospel (2 Pet. 2:19-21). The Holy Spirit *regenerates* the hearts of those who accept the gospel (Titus 3:5), granting them the grace to become children of God through the *new birth* (John 3:3-8; John 1:12-13). Once they are children of God the Holy Spirit *sanctifies* them (1 Cor. 6:11), gives them *assurance of salvation* (Rom. 8:16-17) and *empowers* them to be faithful witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8). Once faith is formed, the Holy Spirit helps it *grow* by helping Christians in their walk with God (John 14:16); *guiding* and *teaching* them (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:10-12); and *leading them in all truth* (John 16:13) whereby their *faith grows to maturity* (1 Pet. 2:2). The Holy Spirit applies what the Father has purposed and the Son has accomplished.

From this we understand that the Triune God is the initiator and maintainer of salvific faith. He causes faith in the human heart, by the Holy Spirit through His Word. It is, however, through people that God works and brings the gospel truth into the world. Generally, He

works through the church, families and more specifically parents to lead people to encounter Him.

2.3.2.2. The Church

According to the *Holman illustrated Bible dictionary* (2003:295-297), the church is the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4). As the body of Christ, the church is the main vehicle through which God works in the physical world. The church was given the mandate to make disciples of all people (Matt. 28:19), through the preaching and living of the gospel (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:15). Though the buildings, institutions and programmes are important, these do not constitute the church, but are only some of the means by which the church fulfils its mandate.

The church is the people, the believers themselves. In the strictest sense of the word "church" is not a place one goes to for worship services, but a body of believers to which one belongs. This is why the New Testament uses the word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), which means "'gathering of believers" (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 2003:295) or "called-out ones" (White, 2017:71) – emphasising the countercultural aspect of the church as being set apart and holy unto God (1 Pet. 2:9).

The church plays a crucial role in the faith formation and development of every believer, but also specifically in children and teenagers (Barna, 2003:16; Joiner, 2009:44). The church provides a spiritual support network, a community, a spiritual family. It also provides teaching and equipping to help in the formation and growth of faith so that believers, including the youth, can reach maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). These include ministries like Sunday school and youth gatherings where youth are taught Biblical truths in age-appropriate ways. While age-group specific ministries are important, the church should be careful not to completely segregate the age groups in all its ministries. Sunday worship, for example, forms a central part of church life and should be intergenerational that faith may be transmitted across generations (Roberto, 2007:6).

While we should never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit working during church services, youth gatherings or Sunday school, being able to transform lives, from a purely human perspective, the church only has an average of 40 hours per year to try and effectively influence teenagers' lives and that even if there is very regular attendance of the various church ministries (Joiner, 2009:85-86). When we take this into consideration, it becomes clear that the church cannot be the primary agent of faith formation in the lives of youth.

The church consists of people, in most cases families, which in turn consist of parents and their children. These families form friendships and therefore also provide social networks which all have an influence on the faith formation of children and teens.

2.3.2.3.   Social circles

> The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the
> wicked leads them astray. (Prov. 12:26) (Bible, 1982)

The social circles one moves in can be either beneficial to faith formation or detrimental. Social circles influence one's perceptions, viewpoints, character, values and therefore also one's faith (1 Cor. 15:33). "We choose our friends and they change us" (Bettis, 2016:229).

It is specifically during the teenage years that social circles have the greatest influence on one's faith formation, due to the forming of one's identity during this life stage (Fowler, 1995:172-173). Because the opinions of their peers are very important to teens, peer pressure is a serious cause of moral breakdown for many of them (Melton & Dean, 2009:171-174; Barna Group & Impact 360 Institute, 2018:41). According to Barna's research (2018:49-51), teens mostly affiliate with peers from different beliefs rather than those with which they were raised. Most teens feel that "what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society" (Barna Group & Impact 360 Institute, 2018:55-59). Their moral compass is therefore not based on the absolute truth of the Bible, because most teens believe that truth is relative rather than absolute (Barna Group & Impact 360 Institute, 2018:64-67), but rather on the social circles in which they find themselves.

There is, however, also good peer pressure, where spiritually mature Christian friends have a very positive effect on the faith formation and growth in teens. Peer evangelism and discipleship is one of the most effective ways to reach teens and to help their faith grow (Barna, 2003:52).

2.3.2.4.   Family

While the church represents one's spiritual family, in most cases it also consists of one's physical relatives such as parents, siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents. In most cases people have very close ties with their relatives and are therefore also deeply influenced by them.

Bengtson (2013:99-112) discusses how grandparents play an increasingly important and active role in the lives of their grandchildren, due to increasing life expectancy and health, thanks to medical advancements; more time spent together, due to the busy schedules of parents; and more ways to communicate, thanks to advances in technology. In many cases

grandparents play the primary role in the faith formation of children and teens. This may be due to uninvolved parents or religiously indifferent parents. Bengtson calls this the "skipped generation" influence. Sometimes grandparents subvert the spiritual influence of parents, causing conflict within the family. Other grandparents simply disregard the spiritual upbringing of their grandchildren. This often occurs when the grandparents are not religious. The ideal situation, however, would be where grandparents reinforce or even enhance parents' influence on faith formation and development of their children.

Siblings also play a significant role in faith formation, albeit not so much as parents or grandparents (Barna, 2003:61). They also offer wonderful opportunities to help each other grow in faith. Siblings are often the ones who lead each other to Christ and who disciple each other. Often it is one of the children who comes to know Christ first and then leads the rest of the family to Him. Older siblings can furthermore guide and help their younger siblings to learn from their mistakes and not make the same mistakes. On the other hand, sibling rivalry can also be detrimental to faith development.

2.3.2.5. Parents

Studies by Barna (2003:16, 88-101; 2018:80-107), Bengtson (2013:54-66), Bettis (2016:3-34), Dean (2010:109-130), Joiner (2009:42-77), Melton and Dean (2009:59-79) and others have shown that humanly speaking, parents are the most important influence on faith formation in children and teens.

Following are some reasons why parents are the most important agents in the faith formation of their children:

(1) It is obedience to the Great Commission (Melton & Dean, 2009:47-56; Bettis, 2016:5-6). Jesus sent His church into the world to make disciples (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). The very first disciples parents should make are their own children.

(2) Availability (Melton & Dean, 2009:59; Joiner, 2009:86-96): The church, as institution, only has on average 40 hours per year to try and form and develop faith in teens. Comparing this to the hundreds and thousands of hours of other influences, the church is simply outnumbered and out-influenced if it stands alone in this task. Parents, on the other hand, spend on average 3000 hours per year with their teens, even in households where both parents work full-time.

(3) Unique parent-child love and relationship (Melton & Dean, 2009:60; Bettis, 2016:15): Other than God, no one loves children more than their parents – not school, their friends, or even fellow church members. More is caught than taught. The best teaching methods are one-to-one tutoring and imitation, which is why the truth is best transferred in direct person-to-person relationships.

(4) Intimate knowledge (Melton & Dean, 2009:60): Other than God, no one naturally knows children better than their parents.

(5) Commanded by God (Melton & Dean, 2009:33, 60; Bettis, 2016:4-5): The role of the church is to equip the saints – to teach them how to evangelise and disciple - but parents are commanded by God to disciple their own children (Deut. 6:6-7; Ps. 78:5-7; Prov. 1:8; Joel 1:3; Eph. 6:1-4). Parents are to fill the earth with godly offspring and image-bearers (Mal. 2:15; Gen. 1:26-28).

(6) Parents have what it takes (Melton & Dean, 2009:61). Even the disciples were uneducated and untrained, yet they had boldness and were recognised as having been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Under normal circumstances parents would do anything for their children, because of their love for their children (natural boldness). The most important requirement is to have Jesus – to be a follower. If parents love their children and have been with Jesus and follow Him, then they have what it takes to disciple their children.

(7) Faith can be seen as part of everyday life (Dean, 2010:111-119). Children can draw direct connections between what they are taught of faith and the everyday lives of the people they love, respect and trust. This is very difficult to do if you receive teaching in the faith only once or twice a week at church, often with no real connection to real life – as if faith is practiced in a vacuum. It is in the lives of parents that children and teens can see Christian tradition being translated into lived faith, i.e. how Christian faith is applied to everyday situations. This causes faith to move beyond mere belief into trust – as children and teens see and experience their parents' trust in Jesus it compels them to start trusting in Jesus themselves, instead of just believing in Him.

(8) It is the most wonderful privilege (Bettis, 2016:4, 17). What a wonderful privilege to raise children and teens in the ways of the Lord. God did not just give parents the command to raise their children in His ways, but He gave them the opportunity and He entrusted those specific children to those specific parents, because He has enough faith in those parents that they will be able to raise those children in His ways.

2.3.3.   Elements of faith formation

2.3.3.1.   The Word of God

> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message
> is heard through the word about Christ. (Rom. 10:17)

The *Dictionary of Bible themes* (2009) shows that faith is engendered and grows by the word of God – the reading, preaching, acceptance and knowledge thereof (John 2:22; John 20:30-31; John 4:41-41; Acts 11:19-21; Rom. 10:14-17; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:2).

The Bible is not only necessary for the initiation of faith, but also for its growth. The apostle Peter states this clearly in 1 Peter 2:2: "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (Bible, 1982).

Parents should saturate their children's lives with the Word of God (Bettis, 2016:32, 128-136; Melton & Dean, 2009:123-127, 149-154). They should be taught the Scriptures from the beginning of their lives, like Timothy of old who was taught the Scriptures from infancy (2 Tim. 3:14-15) by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Children should be fed the Word as spiritual nutrition (Matt. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:2) and that on a daily basis, like Israel of old had to learn from the manna they had to collect every day (Deut. 8:3). This is done by reading the Bible to them while they are young and to let them read it for themselves as they get older. It is also done by constantly talking to them about God – letting God be part of every situation and conversation.

2.3.3.2. Personal evangelism

The gospel message of salvation, i.e. the doctrine of salvation, forms an integral part of the Word of God. While it is important to train a child in the whole Word of God, it is particularly important to lead them to personal salvation by making use of the salvific elements of Scripture. In general, this is called "personal evangelism."

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that
> brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the
> Gentile. (Rom. 1:16)

The gospel is the good news about Jesus' atoning death on the cross for our sins in our place, on our behalf (1 Cor. 15:1-3), through which we have forgiveness and redemption (Eph. 1:7). It is about His burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4), through which we have eternal life (1 Cor. 15:20-22). Those that hear, believe and respond to this gospel – by calling on the Lord – will be saved (Rom. 10:9-17).

The *Holman illustrated Bible dictionary* (2003:550) states that the gospel must be heard, understood and accepted before faith can happen. This leads to the hearer calling upon Christ for salvation (Rom. 10:9-13). Calling on Christ to save shows trust in God and His Word with regards to forgiveness and cleansing of sin. When Christ is received, the believer is born again, i.e. born of the Spirit of God, the believer's life is changed and the believer is empowered to live his/her life by the Spirit.

Bettis (2016:64-70) explains how parents can prepare their children for the gospel by means of Biblical discipline. Biblical discipline does not only correct bad behaviour, but it is aimed at eternity – as they learn to obey their parents, they also learn to obey all that Jesus has

commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). Discipline gives the perfect opportunity to apply the gospel – it provides the opportunity to discuss our sinfulness and why we need Jesus. It should always be done with tenderness and affection (Melton & Dean, 2009:111-112).

Parents should minister the salvific elements of Scripture, i.e. the gospel, to their children (Bettis, 2016:72-82; Melton & Dean, 2009:156-158). Children and teens need to hear the gospel in a "loving and winsome manner". They need to understand they are created in God's image, but have a sinful heart that needs to be regenerated (John 3.3-8). They need to realise their sinfulness and need for the Saviour. They need to know and understand Jesus' substitutionary death – how He paid the penalty for their sins. They need to understand what it means to repent and to put their trust in Christ. What a wonderful privilege parents have to share the best news with their children.

2.3.3.3. Doctrine

According to Bisset (cited by Bettis, 2016:30), young people often leave the faith due to troubling, unanswered questions; being confronted with scientific theories that differs from the Bible; and the lack of proactive explanations of the reasons for the Christian faith.

While the teaching of sound Christian doctrine is one of the primary purposes of the church as institution, it is still the parents who should instil these truths in their children and more so once they become teenagers. The fundamental Christian doctrines like the Trinity, the Bible as the Word of God, the sinfulness of man, salvation, regeneration, sanctification, baptism, etc. should indeed be taught in depth during Sunday school, youth groups and church services, but this can only be done at church in a theoretical way. The practical application of these doctrines need be taught and seen at home (Barna, 2007:121-125).

Bettis (2016:207-226) discusses the power of apologetics (coming from the Greek word *apologia* meaning "defence", i.e. defence of the faith), as we find in 1 Peter 3:15. Children and teens need to be afforded the opportunities to ask serious questions and to express doubt. They are, however, not always willing to bring up the questions they struggle with. Parents should ask regularly whether their children have questions with regards to these matters and be assured that they are always welcome to raise questions and express doubts, so these can be discussed. It is very helpful to show excitement when questions and doubts are raised, as this will encourage trust and openness in the future. Parents should also not be afraid to ask serious questions to uncover their children's thoughts on these matters. Parents should also warn their children and teens beforehand of challenges and questions they will come across when it comes to their faith. It is not enough to simply teach a child *what* to believe and not *why* to believe. Parents should also educate their children on

other faiths (Barna, 2007:122). This enables their children to defend their faith in conversations with people from other backgrounds.

2.3.3.4. Family devotions

One of the best ways to nourish children and teens with the Word and to saturate them with the Word is through family devotions (Bettis, 2016:153; Melton & Dean, 2009:127-129). Bettis (2016:154-162) provides a number of practical guidelines that are very helpful: (1) keep it simple and consistent – discuss what is read; (2) expect to fail, but start again; (3) the father should lead, as priest of the family – family can read along in their own Bibles; (4) variety is key – keep it interesting and age appropriate; (5) tie it to a daily prompt, e.g. a family mealtime; and (6) memorise a verse or main idea.

Family devotions also presents an opportunity to discuss personal devotions (Bettis, 2016:157), which encourages children to have personal devotions as well. This can be enriched by having the whole family reading the same parts of Scripture during their personal devotions, then bringing their insights and questions to the family devotions. Children can furthermore be encouraged to read Christian books and then discuss these.

If family devotions are done properly and consistently, it provides a wonderful framework in which the Word of God, the gospel and Biblical doctrine can be taught in a relaxed and sober manner (Bettis, 2016:161).

2.3.3.5. Prayer

Prayer is commanded by God (Luke 21:36). While parents should have a prayer life (Matt. 6:6), they should also have a life of prayer (1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18). What a privilege to be able to talk to God (Phil. 4:6).

Parents should first pray *for* their children and teens (Bettis, 2016:186-194; Melton & Dean, 2009:112-113), as Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17). As followers of Jesus, parents need to pray for their primary disciples – their children and what a privilege it is to pray for those you love – to ask Him to bless, protect and save loved ones. Prayer first changes the one who prays. In the context of parenting, before praying for their children, parents should first pray that God changes their own hearts. Parents should pray for personal holiness, wisdom and guidance, asking the Holy Spirit to help them pray according to God's will (Rom. 8:26-27). They should ask God to also reveal the secret things in their children's lives – so that these matters can be addresses. "The deceptive child becomes the deceptive adult" (Bettis, 2016:191).

Parents should also pray *with* their children. Asking children and teens what one can pray for them provides the opportunity to hear what is going on in their hearts and minds (Bettis, 2016:191). Often this can reveal issues that bothers them that the parents did not know about. Parents need to pray with their children at meal times, during family devotions, after disciplining them, but also when bad things happen – surrendering the situation to God, on joyous occasions – being thankful, when they ask for prayer and when the parents are prompted by the Holy Spirit to pray with their children.

Parents should teach their children to *pray themselves* (Bettis, 2016:195-196). While only the Holy Spirit can give one a heart for prayer, parents can and should teach their children to talk with God. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, so should parents teach their disciples to pray. From the moment they start talking themselves, parents should encourage their children to pray themselves.

Bettis (2016:197-202) provides some practical ways parents can teach their children to pray, which include: (1) give them a structure – e.g. the ACTS acronym (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication); (2) give them a method – journal or notebook with a prayer list; (3) requests for themselves – their current needs and wants, confessing their sins and asking for forgiveness, important decisions they need to make, for answers to questions and doubts; and (4) requests for others – their parents, siblings, family, friends, the church, those in authority, their enemies, the persecuted Christians and the lost. Parents should also teach their children that prayer is both a duty and a delight. Teach them to ground their prayers in the gospel and the promises of God. They need to learn to seek the Lord in times of crises, but also to record and celebrate answered prayer – even when the answer is "no".

2.3.3.6. Church attendance and participation

> The best thing you can do for your child's soul is to become actively
> involved in a gospel-preaching, gospel-living church community. (Bettis,
> 2016:21)

The gathering of believers for worship and hearing of the Word of God being preached is a very important facet of faith formation and development. Attending church was very important to Jesus – He was spending time in the temple even at age 12 (Luke 2:41-51). When Jesus got older, it was His habit to attend church (Luke 4:16). We are also commanded not to fall into the habit of neglecting the worship gatherings (Heb. 10:24-25).

Through Biblically sound youth activities, e.g. youth groups, Sunday school, Christian camps, etc. the church provides opportunities for teens to be involved in Christian social circles (Barna, 2003:36-37; Barna, 2007:107). By doing so it also allows other significant

Christian adults into the lives of teens. Many teens find it easier to talk about certain issues with another adult they can trust than with their own parents. These youth workers can have a great impact on the faith formation and development of teens, especially if what they say, teach and live reinforces that which the parents also say, teach and live at home (Barna, 2007:107; Joiner, 2009:199-202). Fowler (1995:286-291) calls this "sponsorship", which is basically the ongoing affirmation, encouragement and guidance the converted person receives from his/her faith community after the conversion experience. The importance of such "sponsors" cannot be overstated. They should provide both models and experiences that help further spiritual growth. This can be summed up in one word, namely discipleship. "Disciple-making parents actively connect their children to other godly examples." (Bettis, 2016:56)

Parents should encourage their children to become involved in church activities and ministries, especially evangelism outreaches (Bettis, 2016:168-173; Melton & Dean, 2009:159-166). This places them around other Christians who are passionate about God and serving Him with their lives. This will inspire passion and purpose in the teen's life. Jesus said in John 4:34: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work." "Many of our children are starving from the lack of that type of food." (Bettis, 2016:173)

2.3.3.7.   Friendship

It is very important that parents teach their children from a young age about friendship – the value of good friends and the dangers of bad friends – so that they will make wise decisions in choosing their friends, especially when they reach their teenage years (Bettis, 2016:228-238).

Parents should teach their children to choose their friends intentionally: Friends should spur each other on to become more Christ-like, by encouragement, challenge and even rebuke. Children should be taught to be friendly to all, but friends only to some. To gain friends one must learn to be a friend – like Jesus. Children must however also be taught to recognise the temptations and how to say "No!" This can be done by always emphasising that Jesus should be the purpose and Lord of our friendships. Parents should "equip their children to form Biblical friendships" (Bettis, 2016:237).

Parents can influence their children's choice in friends (Barna, 2007:69-67), without causing resentment on the child's part, by not outright criticising potential friends and rather "asking pointed questions about behaviour or beliefs that were substantially different" from what is allowed. For this to be possible, parents need to spend a substantial amount of time with their children and their potential friends, to obtain a good sense of their family background,

core values, beliefs, etc. Parents can then strongly encourage friendships with those who seem a good influence and gently discourage it with less desirable playmates. Parents that are this close to their children often also have a very positive effect on the friends themselves.

2.3.3.8. A godly example

> Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1)

The first and greatest teacher is *example*. Jesus first invited His disciples *to spend time with Him* before He sent them out for ministry (Mark 3:14). During the time spent with Him they observed His example, only then did Jesus send them out to imitate His ministry.

Children watch their parents closely. They learn first by imitating before they learn by hearing. A parent's life "either commends or condemns the gospel…Disciple-making parents focus on their own walks first" (Bettis, 2016:39). Children will first absorb their parents' example and then evaluate it (Bettis, 2016:40-41). They quickly pick up when their parents are hypocritical, driving them away from God.

With regards to the Bible: Children should see their parents study the Bible, hear them talk about it and experience them living it (Barna, 2007:103-105). Children will never be excited about the Bible unless their parents are excited about it (Bettis, 2016:43-44, 133-152). Parents will not be able to fill their children's lives with Scripture unless their own lives are saturated with Scripture (Barna, 2007:102-103).

When it comes to the gospel, parents should show how the gospel affects their own lives. They should not be hypocritical, but open about their own faults and mistakes. Children need to see their parents mess up, but more importantly also own up to it, confess it and repent of it. This shows their need for the Saviour and the grace and forgiveness found in confessing and repenting (Bettis, 2016:41-45; Barna, 2007:85-86).

In terms of doctrine: Children should experience their parents' firm belief in absolute moral truth, based on a Biblical worldview, with God as the absolute moral compass (Barna, 2007:105-106). They should see their parents' confidence that the Bible has the answers to life's daunting questions. Parents should acknowledge when they don't know the answers, but then seek out the answers with their children (Bettis, 2016:216).

Prayer: Children should see and hear their parents pray, especially for them as children (Bettis, 2016:186). They should see their parents not only having a prayer life, but also a life of prayer – constantly talking with God. If children see prayer is important to their parents and the effect it has on their parent's lives, it will also engender in them the desire to pray.

With regards to church: If church attendance and participation are not important to the parents, it will not be important to the children (Bengtson, 2013:63). Godly parents follow Jesus and His example – it is their habit to go to church (Luke 4:16). If parents love and participate in the church, it is very likely that their children will also love and participate in church (Barna, 2007:106-108). "The best way to get most youth more involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities" (Smith & Denton, 2005:276).

When it comes to friendship, parents should lead by example. Parents cannot expect their children to seek out devoted Christian friends and then have worldly friends themselves. Parents should model friendliness to all, while only pursuing deep friendships with those that also love the Lord.

Parents should be in control and children should know that their parents are in control (Barna, 2007:81-84). Parents must lead, not follow. This provides security to the children – they feel loved and safe. Healthy discipline produces children with good character, but more importantly it teaches children to also stand under the Lordship of Christ and to live within the boundaries He sets out in His Word.

Ultimately parents should try to create the environment in which their children have the best chance of having an encounter with God. Children encounter God through the love of their parents, especially through loving discipline (Barna, 2007:108-110). When parents create the loving environment in which their children can encounter God, learn about Him – His love and sacrifice for them, then when the time is right, the children themselves will most likely choose Jesus, because they themselves will fall in love with Him (Barna, 2007:110-111).

2.3.4. Challenges for faith formation

2.3.4.1. Abdicating parental roles

Due to life becoming more hectic, heavier workloads, more difficult economic circumstances, maintaining expensive lifestyles, as well as the general social and cultural trends, many parents have started to abdicate some, if not most, of their parenting roles and responsibilities to schools and the church (Barna, 2007:10-11, 27-28). Schools' main responsibility is to educate children academically, not to disciple them or to cultivate their character – that is the primary role of the parents. The role of the church as institution is to equip believers for their service and while this is part of discipleship, it should never replace the parents as primary disciple-makers (Bettis, 2016:16, 56). As already mentioned, the church only has about 40 hours per year to influence a teen. This pales in comparison with the thousands of hours of worldly influence through the media and other worldly influences.

If parents do not teach their children to follow Jesus, the world, the media and the enemy, will teach them no to.

2.3.4.2. Absent fathers

Bengtson (2013:76-79) has found that having a close relationship with one's father has an even greater impact on faith formation, than the relationship with one's mother. The distant, or non-affirming father is often the catalyst for "conversion to another faith or dropping out of religion altogether". According to Melton and Dean (2009:76-79), fathers must take up their responsibility as spiritual leaders of their families, as the God-appointed priest in the house. Without fathers actively involved in discipling the family, children grow up in a spiritually dysfunctional home, with "no experiential understanding of a biblically ordered home" in regard to respective family roles of fathers and mothers, family devotions and commitments to church and the gospel. This can potentially destroy the faith of children. Fathers need to take responsibility for the faith formation and growth of their families.

2.3.4.3. The "dump and run strategy"

When it comes to church attendance, many parents follow the "dump and run strategy" (Barna, 2007:106-108). Many parents simply drop off their children at Sunday school or church, then run off until it is time to pick them up again. This process is repeated week after week in the hopes that a "dose of spiritual experience" will help their children grow up as followers of Jesus. If church is not important to the parents, it will not be important to the children as they grow up.

> If the parents are not themselves involved in religious activities, if their actions are not consistent with what they preach, children are rarely motivated to follow in their parents' religious footsteps. (Bengtson, 2013:72)

2.3.4.4. Working against the church

One of the greatest struggles pastors and youth pastors experience are parents who do not align with what is taught at church and youth ministries. Some parents even work directly against the teachings the church seeks to convey to teens (Barna Group & Impact 360 Institute, 2018:80-90). This destroys the limited influence the church has in the lives of teens; it creates confusion and ultimately leads to youth rejecting the faith rather than embracing it. There is thus a great need for parents to become involved with pastors and leaders to work together, talk the same talk and walk the same walk (Joiner, 2009:78-99).

2.3.4.5. Age segregation

While age-segregated Sunday school and youth ministries have their place, it often happens that congregations segregate most of their activities by age, to the point where children are even separated from their parents during main worship services. This makes faith transmission across generations very difficult and causes a rift between generations of faith. Many children grow up never attending a formal intergenerational worship service and are instead kept busy or entertained until they become adults. They never see, hear or experience how mom and dad or the other adults worship God. As a result, the adult worship service seems alien to them and has no attraction to them when they reach young adulthood. Parents should sensitise church leadership to form an environment where there is a greater focus on family-integrated ministries, in which all age groups grow together in faith.

2.3.4.6. Lack of family worship and devotions

According to Barna (2007:31), fewer than ten percent of born-again families read the Bible, pray or worship together during a typical week. Even fewer discuss faith principles as a family over the course of the week. Melton and Dean (2009:25-26) indicate that the total average time spent on biblical training is less than five hours per week, while the average non-biblical influence, from various sources, exceeds 80 hours per week. Subsequently children and teens are lost to the world. Without daily family devotions and discussions about God and His principles, there is no way that parents can expect their children to grow in their faith and to follow Jesus when they grow up.

2.3.4.7. Insufficient "know-how"

Many parents feel that they don't know how to disciple their children (Melton & Dean, 2009:63). They feel inadequate, not knowing where to start or how to approach their children. They would rather leave it to the "experts" to disciple their children. Insufficient "know-how" does not however remove the responsibility. We all need to grow in faith and one cannot lead others where one has not yet been oneself. Lack of "know-how" often reveals a lack of own spiritual growth. Parents can and need to grow with their children, especially with regards to faith. The church is there to help and equip parents (Barna, 2007:56-58), not to take their place.

2.3.4.8.   Doubts

It is a sad reality many churches and families shy away from difficult questions. Asking serious questions and expressing doubt are often frowned upon and deflected with cliché answers such as "we shouldn't doubt, only believe". This mind-set is counter-growth for faith. Kinnaman (2011:185-198) shows how doubt is not always the enemy of faith, but in most cases leads to growth and deepening of faith. Many parents dread the daunting questions regarding the Christian faith, because they feel that they do not have the answers. Not providing the opportunity for children and teens to ask questions about and to discuss the issues that bother them will cause them to seek and find answers from nonbelievers and those with completely different worldviews, which will cause them to reject the biblical worldview. There are sound scientific and biblical answers that promote the biblical worldview. Parents should encourage their children to express their doubts and to ask difficult questions. Parents should not fear to acknowledge it when they do not have the answers, but rather journey with their children in search of appropriate answers (Bettis, 2016:208-225; Melton & Dean, 2009:124-125). Doing so will promote faith in God, trust in His Word and in the family network.

2.3.4.9.   Time constraints

Many parents feel that due to the hectic pace of life there is just not enough time to really focus so much on discipling their children and the church must step in to fulfil this role (Melton & Dean, 2009:63). Regardless of the fact that in many households both parents work fulltime, in most of these families parents still spend about 3000 hours per year with their children – this includes mealtimes, travelling to school and other activities, recreation time, etc. The solution is not in transferring the responsibility of discipling one's children to the church, but rather in changing how available time is spent. It is all about priorities. The most important gift parents can give their children is their time. It is claimed that quality time is more important than the quantity of time spent. Studies (Melton & Dean, 2009:103-106; Barna 2007:89-92) have shown this to be false. "The places where your children spend their time will be what shapes their lives." (Melton & Dean, 2009:105)

2.3.4.10. The "digital age"

According to *The telegraph* (cited by Melton & Dean, 2009:39-40), back in 2009 teenagers spent an average of 31 hours per week online, which includes two hours a week viewing pornography and five and half hours on social media like YouTube and chat rooms. Another two and a half hours was spent on cosmetic surgery, family planning and pregnancy websites. A third of teens admitted that they tried to hide what they were viewing from their parents. This is compared with the less than five hours a week spent on biblical influence.

"The non-biblical influence easily wins out shortly after our children leave home. As a result, our children and future generations are lost to the world." (Melton & Dean, 2009:25)

Fast forward to 2017 and research (White, 2017:42) reflects that millennials are commonly referred to as "digital natives" due to their innate abilities, familiarity with and elevated usage of technology, mobile devices, the Internet and social media. Teens spend an average of 63 hours per week on the Internet. According to the teens themselves, their parents may care somewhat about the content, but not the amount of time spent online. "In fact, parents seem to be the enablers." White explains that parents give their children multimedia devices from a young age, thereby enforcing multimedia overload rather than curbing it. The advancements in technology has placed a smartphone in almost every hand and thereby constant access to the Internet, causes parents to have almost no control over what their children view or do online. Multiplying 63 hours per week with 52 weeks per year comes to an astounding 3 276 hours per year spent being bombarded by secular, worldly and often sinful influences, compared to the 40 hours per year of biblical influence from the church and the almost non-existent biblical input at home. This leaves teens saturated with worldliness and sinfulness rather than godliness. Parents need to "equip their children to rule over the temptations of this age" (Bettis, 2016:240).

2.4.   Summary

In this chapter a working definition of faith was constructed from a literature overview of what salvific faith is. It was determined that faith consists of much more than wishful thinking, for it is based on the promises of God and His proven faithfulness in the past. While faith starts with mental assent to the truth, it goes much deeper than mere academic/theoretical knowledge – it leads to a change of mind, heart and life and includes conviction, commitment and faithfulness. It also includes the body of Christian doctrine through which one grows in knowledge of God and gets to know His character better. It also includes personally trusting in Jesus for salvation – not simply knowing what He has done on the cross to purchase salvation, but surrendering one's life to Him in total trust that He will save you, which leads to a personal covenantal relationship of mutual trust and faithfulness with Him.

Faith formation was discussed in the light of this definition as well as how faith is formed during the teenage and transitioning to young adulthood years. The different role players in faith formation were expounded upon, namely God, the church, social circles, family and parents. The critical role parents play in faith formation was highlighted. Elements that contribute to healthy faith formation in teenagers were explained, namely the Bible, personal evangelism, doctrine, family devotions, prayer, church, friendship and a godly example. The

critical role parents play in each of these areas was then highlighted. Finally, factors that constrain faith formation in teenagers were explained, namely parents abdicating their roles, absent fathers, the "dump and run strategy", parents working against the church, too much age-based segregation within the church, lack of family worship and devotions, insufficient "know-how"' on the part of the parents, doubts not appropriately addressed, time constraints and issues arising from this "digital age".

In the following chapter (Chapter 3) parents' understanding of faith formation is discussed.

CHAPTER 3: PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH FORMATION

3.1. Introduction

Along with Chapter 2, this chapter continues with the descriptive-empirical task of answering the question: "What is going on?" According to Osmer (2008:4), the descriptive-empirical task is about gathering information that is helpful in identifying patterns and dynamics in specific episodes, situations and/or contexts.

Chapter 2 focused on the relevant literature about faith, faith formation, role players in faith formation, elements of faith formation and challenges to faith formation.

In this chapter the focus is on the empirical part of the research during which data was gathered by way of focus groups conducted with parents of young adults, some of which remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith and also with parents of children who have become estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith. The purpose of the focus groups was to establish what is currently going on in Christian homes with regards to the faith formation of teenage children and what role parents play in this: in cases where teenagers remain faithful to the church and where not. The parents that participated were divided into two separate focus groups: one (Group A) where the children remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith, the other (Group B) where the children became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith. The reasons for dividing the parents into these two groups were: (1) the sensitivity of the subject - so that parents in Group B would not feel inferior to those of Group A, due to Group B's children being estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith; and (2) to determine whether the approaches differed between the two groups – thereby hinting at probable reasons why some young adults remain faithful while others do not.

It was expected that comparing the data gathered from the focus groups with that found in the relevant literature, as discussed in Chapter 2, would be helpful in determining whether or not what is going on in Christian homes are in line with principles and practices recommended by the literature, specifically with regards to elements that facilitate faith formation, namely the Bible, personal evangelism, doctrine, family devotions, prayer, church attendance and participation, friendship and a godly example, as discussed in Section 2.3.3.

In combining the data from the literature study (Chapter 2) and the qualitative data from the focus groups (this chapter) the first objective of this research project is also addressed, namely: to engage parents' understanding and approach to the faith formation of teenage children.

## 3.2.	Research methodology

Children becoming estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith is a sensitive and difficult subject for parents to discuss – focus groups are therefore well suited for this specific study, since they "provide a safe environment for sharing ideas and perspectives on sensitive or difficult subjects" (Cyr, 2019:7). Furthermore, focus groups bring individuals together to discuss a specific topic with its related questions, it privileges spontaneity and affords individuals the opportunity to provide their honest feedback in a social setting, leading to rich experiential data (Cyr, 2019:5) – in this case providing an opportunity to determine parents' understanding of faith formation and discipleship, as well as the Christian practices they followed to facilitate the spiritual formation in their teenage children.

### 3.2.1.	Sampling frame

Due to the fact that some parents in the church have children that remain faithful to the church throughout their young adult and adult lives, while other parents' children became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith, it was decided to engage both groups. The sensitive nature of the topic led to two separate focus groups being formed: one with parents whose child(ren) remain faithful to the church (Focus Group A) and another with parents whose child(ren) are estranged from the church (Focus Group B). The intent was to determine whether there were different approaches or practices employed by these two groups which may indicate the reasons some children remain faithful as they mature, while others leave the church.

The focus was on parents from the AFM churches in Sasolburg, Vaalpark and Vanderbijlpark (the researcher's local area). These parents were easily accessible due to the close affiliation the researcher has with the pastors of the local AFM congregations.

A prerequisite for participation was that the parents should have children that have left the home no more than three years ago, to gain the most recent information possible. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 national lockdown, as well as the fears associated with it, it was difficult to find parents who were willing to participate in this study and so this prerequisite was broadened to include parents of children who left the home between the ages of 18-25 years – i.e. still in young adulthood.

It was decided that five households where the young adult children remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith and five households where the young adult children became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith would be sufficient to gather enough

data to determine what is going on in Christian homes with regards to the faith formation of teens.

3.2.2. Question protocol

Developing an effective question protocol involves careful formulation of questions that are: (1) making the most of the limited time available; (2) concise; and (3) focused on the research at hand – i.e. geared towards addressing the objectives of the study (Cyr, 2019:55).

The questions chosen for the focus groups were specifically formulated to address the first two objectives of this study, namely (1) engage parents' understanding and approach to the faith formation of teenage children; and (2) identify some of the reasons underlying current approaches of parents to the faith formation of teenage children. The specific questions were:

Question 1 (all): Please introduce yourself to the group and share with us why you have decided to join this study.

Question 2 (all): Please share with us your understanding of faith formation and discipleship, especially with regards to teenagers.

Question 3 (all): Please share with us the religious practices you employed to facilitate faith formation in your teenage children.

Question 4 (Group A): Why do you think your children remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?

Question 4 (Group B): Why do you think your children left the church and/or the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?

Each group was also asked to partake in icebreaker activities to get the participants to relax and work together (Cyr, 2019:75-76). The activities were done between questions 1 and 2, the first of which was for each participant to describe today's youth in one word. The second activity was for the group to discuss what they believe are the five most serious influences in the lives of youth today. These activities were not only fun or helpful for the group to work and discuss together, but they also provided useful data and laid the foundation for the rest of the focus group discussion.

3.2.3. Recruitment of participants

There are two AFM churches in Sasolburg, one in Vaalpark and three in Vanderbijlpark. Focusing on five of these congregations provided enough participants: one parent or parent couple for each focus group from each congregation.

The researcher met with the senior pastors of each of the congregations. The aim and objectives of the study were explained to them in detail and they were asked to serve as gatekeepers, i.e. recruiters. The use of gatekeepers is a way to promote the trustworthiness of the research project, not allowing the researcher to do the recruitment him-/herself, thereby mitigating the possibility of biased recruitment.

The researcher met with the pastors between 16 and 23 March 2020. All of them agreed to recruit participants. They would discuss the study with the participants as well as provide them with an information leaflet (Appendix 2 and 3).

An information evening was to be held on 17 April 2020 at the AFM church in Vaalpark, to which all participants would be invited. The senior pastor of AFM Vaalpark was asked to act as moderator at the information event. At this event, the study would once again be explained and opportunity provided for participant questions. Thereafter Focus Group A were to be held on 24 April 2020 and Focus Group B on 1 May 2020.

On the evening of 23 March 2020 a national lockdown was announced in South Africa, to be enforced from 26 March 2020, due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The recruitment process was put on hold. The information evening and focus groups had to be postponed until after the lockdown restrictions were lifted or relaxed.

From 1 June 2020 many of the lockdown restrictions were relaxed. This afforded the opportunity to resume the study. The gatekeepers were contacted and asked if they were still willing to recruit participants. Given that many of the lockdown restrictions remained in place, it was decided to not host a separate information evening and rather conduct an information session directly prior to each focus group session.

Only seven parent couples agreed to participate: three in Focus Group A, the other four in Focus Group B. What made recruitment more difficult was the underlying extra caution due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as some parents' great reluctance to participate in groups, due to the sensitivity of the subject – many did not feel comfortable discussing their situation in a group setup.

3.2.4. The focus groups

Both focus groups were to be conducted at AFM Vaalpark, as it is the most centrally located of all the AFM churches in the area, but due to movement between provinces being restricted, it was decided to conduct two focus group sessions in Vanderbijlpark and two in Vaalpark. The senior pastors of both the Family of Love & Faith AFM in Vanderbijlpark and AFM Vaalpark were contacted and their respective church boards agreed that their facilities may be used.

Two parent couples from Vanderbijlpark agreed to participate, both in Group A. One focus group session was held in Vanderbijlpark on 27 June 2020. Five parent couples from Vaalpark and Sasolburg agreed to participate, one from Group A and the other four from Group B. Two focus group sessions were held on 4 July 2020 at AFM Vaalpark. One session included the couple from Group A and a couple from Group B. Only one couple attended the second session: one couple was unable to come due to illness and another due to unforeseen circumstances. Another session was held with the latter couple on 20 July 2020.

Directly before each focus group an information session was conducted providing ample opportunity for questions from the participants. Once all participant questions regarding the study were answered and all participants filled in the necessary forms, the focus groups commenced. The pastors who acted as gatekeepers were not able to attend the focus groups themselves, nor the information sessions. The senior pastor of AFM Vaalpark acted as moderator at these information sessions, explaining the study again to all participants. He also completed the gatekeeper declaration forms for all participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions, additional protocols needed to be followed, including social distancing, the wearing of masks, provision of hand sanitiser, measurement of temperatures and a health and safety form for each attendee. A copy of the form used is attached to the information brochure (Appendices 2 and 3). Catering is usually provided at focus groups, but again, due to the COVID-19 restrictions this could not be done. This was explained to the participants and they understood the situation.

The researcher conducted the focus groups as moderator. This afforded a more hands-on approach in the data gathering, allowing follow-up questions or questions for clarity to be asked as related themes or issues arose for which another moderator could not be necessarily trained.

The focus group sessions were recorded on a voice recorder as well as on a cell phone for backup. The sessions were also video recorded on camera – again for backup purposes. All

participants gave their permission for these recordings. Notes were furthermore taken by the researcher during the sessions.

3.2.5.   Analysis of focus group data

3.2.5.1.   Transcription

Each focus group session was transcribed word for word, also indicating non-verbal data where necessary. Confidentiality was ensured by omitting the participant names from the transcripts and rather assigning a code for each participant. The code is composed according to focus group, participant number and gender, e.g. A03F represents Focus Group A, participant number 3, female. The researcher/moderator was assigned the letter R to indicate his interventions in the discussions. Each participant was also assigned a colour in which his/her interventions were highlighted to make identifying and sorting of each participant's interventions easier. Transcription and coding were also done as soon as possible directly after each focus group session to keep the conversation as fresh in the mind as possible.

3.2.5.2.   Coding the data

Each transcript was read through carefully. Key terms or phrases were highlighted and then copied and pasted into a new document for each question. The key terms or phrases from each transcript were combined to give a more holistic picture of the data gathered from the different focus groups. The key terms and phrases were then sorted into themes and subthemes to make it easier to discuss the findings and to compare them with the themes discussed in Chapter 2. The originally sorted keywords and phrases of each transcript were also retained to cross reference and compare findings and to double check that nothing was missed.

3.3.   Focus group findings

3.3.1.   The descriptive-empirical task

The previous chapter (Chapter 2) along with this one focus on the descriptive-empirical task of answering the question: "What is going on?" To answer this question, the focus was placed on Questions 1 to 3 of the focus groups, which provide information on why parents decided to participate in this study; how they understand discipleship and faith formation; and what religious practices they employed in order to facilitate the faith formation of their children. The question of what is currently going on in Christian homes with regards to the

faith formation of teenage children and the parents' role therein are adequately answered by these questions.

Question 4 focuses on why parents believe their child(ren) either remained faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith or became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith. The information gathered from this question is more suited for answering the question asked in the interpretive task, namely: "Why is this going on?" The information gathered from Question 4 of the focus groups are therefore discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

3.3.2. Why participate?

The general consensus within each focus group was that the topic is very relevant. All the participants have young adult children who have left the home quite recently to either undertake tertiary study or to work. Most of the participants also have at least one child still in high school.

Half of the parent couples' young adult children remains faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith, the other half sadly have children who became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith.

Most of the participants are or were involved with Sunday school or youth ministry and have witnessed first-hand how many teenagers disappear from the church pews once they finish with school. Few of them return in later years. The participants felt really concerned about this, especially because some of these children were their own or children of their family or friends. This confirms that the phenomenon of youth leaving the church as they transition into young adulthood is also experienced by parents in the Vaal Triangle, which worries them greatly.

The participants were eager to share their own experiences in the hopes that others might learn from it. They were also eager to hear and learn from other parents' experiences, to determine where they could still improve with regards to their approach to the faith formation of their children that are still in the home.

3.3.3. Description of today's youth

Words or phrases used to describe today's youth include confused, distractible, unsure, complex, unique, emotional, challenging, rebellious and disrespectful. In discussing these it became apparent that parents felt that today's youth really struggle with their identity. While the parents acknowledged that this is nothing new and that it is during the teenage years that personal identity is mostly formed, they still felt that the identity crisis teens experience today is much more intense than with previous generations. According to the participants,

this is partly due to the many more influences teens experience today than in previous generations.

3.3.4. Greatest influences on today's youth

The focus groups discussed a range of influences on today's youth. These were divided into the following themes: technology, peer pressure, family setup, school/university, church and personal choices.

3.3.4.1. Technology

According to the participants, technology is one of the greatest influences on youth today. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Tok are seen as the most influential. Most parents felt they do not really have much control over their children's social media lives. Many teens have profiles that parents do not even know about. The youth also know how to very quickly delete or hide content they do not wish their parents to see. Some have more than one profile on various platforms – profiles their parents know about and other profiles they keep secret or hidden. This is a deep concern for most of the participants.

Multimedia, including TV, streaming services, music and films closely follow social media as very influential in the lives of the youth. The participants felt that in most instances a secular worldview is being presented that does not line up with Scripture and even directly questions and degrades the Bible and the biblical worldview and values. Teens also constantly compare themselves to the role models presented on multimedia and attempt to live up to their standard, which is usually completely contrary to the Bible's teachings. Seeing and hearing what is being presented on secular media and comparing it to what has been presented over the last 30 to 50 years shows a definite decline in moral standards.

Many of the applications and games teens use and play on cell phones, tablets, computers and gaming consoles are designed to be more and more immersive, thereby becoming more and more addictive. Some of the participants specifically mentioned how they can clearly see a change in their teens' behaviour and even personalities when they are using technology all the time from when their access to technology is restricted.

According to the participants, technology has a deep impact on teens' perception of life and reality as well as on their moral compass in deciding what is right or wrong, normal or abnormal and that which is generally acceptable.

3.3.4.2. Peer pressure

Due to personal identity being formed during the teen years and personal identity being closely linked to social structures, peers play a very important role in the faith formation of

teenagers. Friends and fellow students have an enormous influence on teens. Teens want to feel accepted; they have a deep need to belong. The identity formation process places teens in a phase in their lives where the temptation to experiment with new things is great. For this reason, teens are very vulnerable spiritually and can often be easily drawn by their peers into situations and activities where their faith is in jeopardy.

Bullying also plays a big role during the teenage years. Those who do not participate in questionable activities or activities that go against their Christian values and upbringing are often bullied into participating. This includes all forms of bullying, from verbal to physical. Due to the public humiliation they often experience in these situations, teens often do not want to talk about it with their teachers, youth pastors or even their parents.

Peer pressure is furthermore closely related to technology, since it is through technologies such as social media that teens often relate with their peers. It is often on these platforms that teens experience bullying – called cyberbullying. One major issue with cyberbullying is that it regularly occurs where very few other people realise what is transpiring. Physical bullying can be spotted and addressed – fellow students sometimes intervene and stand up for the victim of bullying, whereas with cyberbullying those being bullied find themselves alone and having to fend for themselves, amplifying the risk of deep emotional and spiritual damage.

3.3.4.3. Family setup

The family setup also has a large impact on the faith formation of teens. Many teens come from broken homes, single parent homes, composite families, abusive families, etc. These often cause instability in the faith formation of teenagers. Participants were very open about the importance of having both parents involved when it comes to spiritual matters and practices in the home. When one parent is not involved, it often has a detrimental effect on the faith formation of teens.

Sometimes the parents are still together and have a good relationship with each other, but are so busy with work and earning a living that they often neglect their relationship with their children and in most cases then also the spiritual development of their children. The children may have more than they need materially, but because they experience rejection from their parents, albeit subconsciously from the side of the parents, they act out in rebellious and often sinful ways in an effort to gain attention.

Other teens come from broken, single parent and even composite families, but because their parents are deeply involved in their lives and focus consciously on their faith formation, they develop into psychologically and spiritually strong individuals.

Participants felt that the family setup forms the foundation for the other influences. Depending on parental involvement and how strong the relationship is between the parents and the children, parents can have greater or lesser control over what, how and how often technology is used, what multimedia is allowed and the children are friends with. Parents also have the opportunity to be involved in what their children learn from church, school, university, etc. and can influence their children to test everything according to Scripture.

3.3.4.4. School/university

In many schools the practicing of Christian faith is prohibited. With previous generations most school activities were still started with Scripture reading and prayer and most curriculums included Bible class or some other form of religious education. Lately this is not the case. Many schools shy away from any Christian education. The participants felt that this creates a gap in the faith formation of children, especially when children are taught other worldviews at school and university that often contradict the Biblical worldview. According to the participants, children spend more time at school and with school activities than at church or any other activities – what they are taught at school will therefore have a greater impact on them than for example than the instruction given by the church teaches once or twice a week.

Of great concern is the fact that parents do not always have the time to monitor everything their children learn at school or university. Parents are sometimes blissfully unaware of what their children are learning at school and do not always realise the effect it has on their faith.

On the positive side, despite the fact that teachers are not allowed to witness verbally about their Christian faith in class, the participants did mention that some teachers are deeply devoted Christians and witness to the children in their personal capacity and through their example. For this they are grateful.

3.3.4.5. Church

The church plays an important role in the faith formation of everyone, including that of children and teens. All the participants are active church members whose children grew up in the church for at least part of their upbringing. Especially during the teenage years, the participants' children spent a significant time at church and were actively involved in Sunday school and youth groups. According to the experiences of the participants, the influence of the church can however be positive or negative. These positive and negative aspects of the church's influence are discussed in greater depth in later sections.

3.3.4.6.   Personal choices

As teens grow older and as their personal identity becomes more established, they also start to become more autonomous and want to make their own decisions. Parents also want their children to grow up and be responsible adults, being able to make their own choices. In this transition from having parents making all the decisions for them to where they have to make their own choices and take responsibility for the consequences there are often times where children clash with their parents.

Often children make decisions that their parents do not agree with. Depending on the relationship between the children and the parents, as well as how open the lines of communication are between them and how deep the trust built between them is, parents' degree of influence will be greater or lesser. If the relationship is very strong, the trust very deep and the lines of communication very open, parents may be able to sway their children to make a better decision. This, however, is not always the case.

Children's choice of friends, multimedia, social media and later spouse is often outside of parents' control and becomes more so as the children grow older. More relevant to this study are the spiritual choices teens make. Parents can take their children to church and do everything in their power to help with the faith formation of their children, but ultimately the children will have to decide for themselves whether they want to know and follow Jesus. The choices they make can either strengthen their faith formation or have detrimental effects on their faith.

3.3.5.   Discipleship and faith formation

3.3.5.1.   Discipleship

According to the participants' discussion, discipleship is about making someone a follower of Jesus. It is about instilling biblical truths, principles and values.

Discipleship entails leading by example, to "talk the talk and walk the walk" as one parent put it. Parents should *teach* truth, but also *show* it in their lifestyle. It should be *a way of life*. One father (B01M) said" "your children should see you pray, read the Bible, have personal devotions, worship God, trust God, witness to others, and minister in some or other way." Children should be able to walk in their parents' footsteps and find Jesus there. Much like the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Pattern yourselves after me *[follow my example]*, as I imitate and follow Christ (the Messiah)" (Bible, 1987).

Because discipleship is about making someone a follower of Jesus, it must include teaching about Jesus – *who* He was and is as a person, *what* He has done for us and *why*.

Participants agreed that discipleship is, however, much more than simply *teaching knowledge about Jesus*, it is about *sharing the gospel message of salvation* with one's children, i.e. to evangelise one's children and lead them into a *personal relationship with Jesus*, so they can know, follow and serve Him personally. Children should be taught to find their identity and purpose in Christ.

Discipleship is also about creating teaching moments. Parents should find ways to bring Jesus into every circumstance and every discussion, even into the most mundane everyday situations, thereby showing how God is part of every moment of our lives.

According to the participants, parents are primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children. Parents should be *intentional* and *consistent* in discipling their children. One parent (A02F) said: "If you don't teach your children to follow Jesus, the world will teach them not to." Parents should also be emotionally and spiritually *mature* – one of the fathers (A01M) said: "you cannot lead your children where you have not been yourself." Another parent (A03M) stated: "you must know your own faith well", meaning the *doctrines* of the Bible, otherwise a parent will not be able to teach his/her children.

Discipleship requires a *deeply involved relationship* of understanding, communication, trust, and accountability. Without such a relationship with one's children, discipleship and faith formation through it becomes very difficult.

The general consensus amongst the participants was that it is through the intentional and consistent discipleship of one's children that faith is formed and grows.

3.3.5.2.   Faith formation

Even though the question focused on faith formation and discipleship, especially with regards to teenagers, all the participants felt that faith formation should and does not start during the teenage years – it starts at birth and continues throughout their lives. Some of the most important years for faith formation are during the *foundation* and *formative years*.

How does faith formation occur? According to the participants, it occurs through the *process of discipleship* – the *intentional* and *consistent teaching* and *example* of the parents. Faith also grows over time and this growth is not coincidental, just as getting better in a sport, for example, does not occur accidentally – it requires hard work and training. Faith formation should not be left to chance, but should be *approached purposefully*. It is a *preparation process* whereby children are prepared to go out into the world as strong believers in God, able to *defend their faith* and *give account of the hope inside them* (1 Pet. 3:15).

Faith formation also entails *growing together* as a family. Parents also grow in their faith. As they grow, they should share their growth with their children. When children have questions that parents do not have the answers to, it creates special opportunities for the whole family to grow in faith by finding the answers to those questions together.

While the truths and principles remain the same, the approach to faith formation is adapted as children grow older. When they are young, choices are made for them, the parents take the *lead*. As the children grow older, they are allowed to make their own choices and the parents take the role of *providing guidance* and *advice*. This requires a *deep relationship* built on *mutual trust and accountability*.

3.3.6.   Religious practices facilitating faith formation

In answering the question "please share with us what religious practices you employed to facilitate faith formation in your children" the following practices came to the fore, especially amongst those whose children stayed committed to the church and the Christian faith.

3.3.6.1.   Bible study

A05M said: "The Word of God is what changes people." The Bible should be read often. The parents from Group A were committed to personal Bible study as well as reading the Bible to their children from an early age and teaching their children to read and study the Bible for themselves as they grew older. While they were younger the Children's Bible was used to teach the children the main stories and characters of the Bible. As they grew older the focus shifted more to the deeper meaning of these stories and to the study of Biblical doctrines.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the promises of God and on memorising key Scriptures. As the children started to study the Bible for themselves, they were encouraged to journal their questions and to keep track of the answers they found through further study, along with other discoveries they made. It builds faith and trust in the Bible when youth experience God speaking to them personally when they read and study the Bible for themselves.

3.3.6.2.   Prayer

Parents should pray with their children from the very beginning. Children can be asked to share their prayer requests, which also enables parents to find out what is going on in the minds and hearts of their children. As the children grow older parents also shared their problems and prayer requests with their children so that the whole family can pray together for the issues each one faces. The family members took turns to pray, teaching and encouraging children to pray themselves.

Participants also mentioned how they prayed with their children in the mornings before they go to school and work, as well as before challenges they know they will face during the day. In the evenings, the daily events were discussed and it was wonderful to hear how the children testified of God's help during those specific challenges. This made the presence of God a "felt reality" for the children – a personal experience of God's presence and help in their lives.

Parents also encouraged their children to journal their prayers and keep careful note of the answers received, how it was received and when. In times of doubt such journal entries can be a great source of comfort and also boosts one's faith in God.

Parents and children shared with each other when God answered their prayers and then the family would thank God together.

3.3.6.3.   Family devotions

During family devotions the family also read the Bible together, discussed what was read, and prayed together. Devotions were not rigid – there was time for play, for discussions, questions and different views. While the children were young, the family would role play the Biblical characters – this helped the children to immerse themselves into the story and experience it on a personal level. As the children grew older the focus was shifted to more detail on how these Biblical stories relate to them personally in this modern time. Time was also spent on singing songs and worshipping God.

3.3.6.4.   Church attendance and participation

The children were *raised in the church environment*. One mother (A04F) said: "For us Church is a way of life." It is of utmost importance to choose the correct church – one where the family really experiences God; where the church feels like family; where the whole family, parents and children, experience spiritual growth; with a strong family ministry focus. The family should also worship together and not be too segregated into the various age-group ministries – "children should see and hear their parents worship God with the congregation".

The children were encouraged to participate in Sunday school, youth group, church services and outreaches. They were never forced to participate, rather encouraged and invited. Parents tried to set an example of really being excited to go to church and to participate wherever they could. Shared ministry is a powerful way to help children discover and develop their spiritual gifts.

When it comes to children and youth ministries it is very important to choose a church where these ministries speak the same language, spiritually, as that which the children hear at home. The youth workers' message, values and beliefs should correspond to that of the parents. Sometimes there may be differences of opinion and in such cases parents should be very careful how they handle conflict and should work together with the youth pastors and even senior pastors of the church to resolve it in a loving, caring and Christian manner. Not doing so can have devastating effects on the faith formation of children, especially teens.

3.3.6.5. Family meetings

Sometimes issues do arise that need to be addressed. Family meetings are a great way of doing this. It provides the opportunity for each family member to present their point of view and to listen to the others. The family can then go to Scripture together to find answers and guidance. Handling issues in such a calm and open way leads to intimate family time together, the children realising that their views are also important and that their parents are on their side, only wanting what is best for them. This in turn builds trust and accountability. Complete honesty from the parents' side, even admitting when they are wrong themselves and submitting to the truth of Scripture goes a long way in building relationship, trust and faith.

3.3.6.6. Personal evangelism

It was very important for the participants of Group A that their children have a personal relationship with Jesus – that they personally know, follow, trust and serve Him. They shared their own testimony with their children of how they as parents themselves found the Lord Jesus, surrendered their lives to Him and became born again by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; John 1:12-13). They made a deliberate attempt to lead their children to Jesus personally by sharing the gospel message of salvation with them – teaching them about their sinful nature and their need for the Saviour. They were careful to help their children see that salvation is not about rules as such, but about a personal relationship with God.

3.3.6.7. Technology control

Group A's participants were very hands-on with the technologies they allowed their children to use. Whenever new technologies were introduced the pros and cons were discussed, often in the form of family meetings, as explained in Section 3.3.6.5. Parents were generally careful of what movies, TV programmes, video games, music, books, etc. they allowed in the home. They would sometimes remove certain technologies from their children if it caused worrisome problems, e.g. a cell phone that causes a child to fall into temptation. This was done in a loving and caring way, in which the teen understood why this was done.

When movies, music or books contradicted the Biblical worldview, parents would use these situations as teaching moments, not "Bible bashing" moments. That which was seen, heard or read would be measured against Scripture and explained why the parents differ from that which is portrayed.

The children would also grow up with more faith-based media like Christian films, music, books, etc. From a young age, parents would read to the children autobiographies and stories of great men and women of God throughout history, whom God has used mightily and often miraculously. These stories made a great impression on the children and many of those stories are still discussed even after many of these children left the home.

3.3.6.8.   Godly example

The parents from Group A focused on building strong relationships with their children by spending a great deal of time with them, showing interest and being involved in their lives. They would be careful to never degrade or insult their children, but rather to compliment and encourage them, even when discipline was needed. When sin or problems were addressed and discipline imposed, it was also done considerately and lovingly. When challenged with questions or doubts, they tried not to become defensive or answer in ways that closes the door on further discussion, e.g. simply "No!" or "because I said so!" They rather endeavoured to answer from Scripture and explain why they would say "No" or why they differ. Often the answer to the challenge or question is not known – in such cases it is important to be honest, but then to go and find the answer and provide it timeously.

The parents sought to bring Jesus into every situation, problem, crisis and question, to show in practical ways how He is ever present. They tried to talk about God on the way to and from school, as well as in their general everyday conversations.

The parents were deliberate, diligent and consistent in the discipleship of their children. One parent mentioned that "making children followers of Jesus is a parent's primary mission in life". According to the participants, children should see and hear their parents read the Bible, pray, live holy lives, follow Jesus, share their faith, love the church and be serious about their relationship with God.

3.3.6.9.   Managing other influences

With regards to school – the parents felt that it is important to know what their children learn in school in terms of ideologies, worldviews, philosophies, etc. They should discuss these with their children and measure everything according to Scripture. They should also expose their children to more in-depth biblical teaching regarding these, e.g. evolution teachings – children are taught about this at school, but parents can also expose their children to

creationist teachings from accredited scientists who are also creationists. Children should not be taught to shy away from engaging these teachings, but rather to approach all views critically and test them according to Scripture. Parents have the opportunity to expose their children to the world, other religions and other views and beliefs in a controlled environment and manner.

When it comes to friendships – parents encouraged their children to form friendships with Christians. This was made easier by letting the children grow up in the church environment. The friends they knew from childhood were mostly other children from the same congregation.

3.3.7. Religious practices hampering faith formation

When answering the question "please share with us what religious practices you employed to facilitate faith formation in your children" participants from Group B agreed that the abovementioned practices are best, but generally felt that they failed to incorporate these principles in a healthy way into the parenting of their children.

3.3.7.1. Negligence and inconsistency

Bible study, prayer, family devotions and church attendance were often neglected or when practiced, it was not done consistently.

The Bible was mostly used for "Bible bashing", i.e. the Bible only serving to keep children in check. When the Bible was read, in some cases, it was kept very personal and not really shared with the rest of the family.

The prayer life of many of the parents were also not consistent. Prayer was often only for times of trouble, need or crisis – like a spare tyre or crutch and not part of a daily lifestyle. Parents did not pray regularly with their children and neglected to teach the children to pray themselves.

If family devotions were practiced, it was mostly superficial and done in a hurry – to just get it over and done with – soothing the conscience.

With regards to church attendance: When the children went to Sunday school, youth group or church, they were often only dropped off and the parents did not really attend or participate themselves.

Some of the parents mentioned that while their children were still in school, they were too busy – they neglected to spend time with their children to build relationships with them. They were absent parents, leading to fragile relationships with their children.

3.3.7.2. Religion with no relationship

Some of the participants went to church regularly, but found themselves in a congregation where there was no real focus on family ministry and that neglected to follow up or show interest in the family, specifically the children. There were very few other children of the same age as their children. The sermons and teaching were also not relevant to current issues, questions or problems. They furthermore did not equip or challenge parents to disciple their children. When the children did not want to go to church with the parents, they were often forced.

3.3.7.3. Too involved

Some couples became so involved in the church and in church ministries that they were at church almost every night of the week, engaged in church services, seminars and conferences, even serving on ministry teams. They ended up neglecting their own family time and experienced "spiritual burnout", which was also very detrimental for the children's faith formation.

3.3.7.4. Antagonism

In other cases, the parents worked against the church. They became angry when the pastor's messages addressed sins and matters pertaining to them. They then often turned very negative towards the church and degraded the church and its leadership in front of their children. This caused confusion and disrespect for the church and its leadership in the hearts of their children.

3.3.7.5. Lack of evangelism

One couple mentioned that while their children were still in school, they as parents were not really saved themselves – they did not know the Lord personally. Consequently, there were no intentional effort to discuss salvation with their children to lead them to Christ. Some participants mentioned how they were simply too busy with other things that they also neglected to personally make an effort to lead their children to Christ.

3.3.7.6. Bad example

In some cases, either one parent or both parents did not serve God, thereby setting a very bad example for their children in the form of a sinful and reckless lifestyle. When they did go to church, it was to soothe their own conscience and their lives at home and work were very different than the hypocritical façade they presented when at church.

Some of the parents were churchgoers, did family devotions now and then, but mostly they abdicated their parental responsibilities to the school for secular upbringing and the church for spiritual upbringing of their children.

3.3.7.7.   Lack of concern

Some of the parents, due to their absence and distant behaviour towards their children, did not show concern for what their children were taught at school or at church. When the Christian faith was challenged or when difficult questions regarding morality, faith, God, etc. came up, they would rather shy away from these questions, trying to avoid conflict, or would rather not seem unintelligent for not knowing the correct answers.

This was also true when it came to technology and multimedia. The parents were often not really concerned with what their children watched, listened to or participated in on social media. Monitoring and discussing the influence of these technologies were neglected. Anything was basically allowed, even though, in most cases, unknowingly.

3.3.7.8.   Insufficient know-how

Many of the parents in Group B only came to Christ later on in life, when their children were already in high school. They saw the damage their recklessness and neglect caused and found it very difficult to connect with their teenaged children on a spiritual level. They also lacked the necessary knowledge of the Bible and their new-found faith. Additionally, they had insufficient knowledge of how to lead their teens to Christ, i.e. being still young in the faith themselves, they felt ill-equipped.

3.4.   Summary

This chapter along with the previous chapter (Chapter 2) focused on the descriptive-empirical task of answering the question, "what is going on?" In this study we sought to determine what is going on in the homes of Christian parents with regards to the faith formation of their children and what specific religious practices they employed in order to facilitate faith formation in their children. This was done by making use of focus groups for which parent couples were recruited as participants.

The participants were grouped into two groups: Group A consisted of parents who have young adult children who have remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith and Group B consisted of parents whose young adult children became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith. This helped to determine whether there exist differences in the way parents approach faith formation in the home. The focus groups were held during

July 2020. The data that was gathered was transcribed and coded presenting the themes further elaborated on in this chapter as well as in the next chapter (Chapter 4).

Parents agreed to participate because they felt the topic is very relevant: they witnessed and were concerned about the growing number of youth leaving the church once they finish school; they wanted to share their experiences and also learn from others' experiences, since most of them still had teenagers in the home.

As today's youth were discussed, the participants' description of them can be summed as confused, complex and challenging, with words like distractible, unsure, unique, clutter of emotions, rebellious and disrespectful. According to the participants, today's youth has an identity crisis and in their search for their identity they are very susceptible to the influences and temptations of this world and the peer pressure to participate therein.

The greatest influences on today's youth, according to the participants, include technology, peer pressure, family setup, school/university, church and personal choices. These were discussed in Section 3.3.4.

Parents understood the formation of faith as something that is lifelong – it starts at birth and continues throughout their lives. Early childhood is seen as a critical time for laying the foundation of the Christian faith. Discipleship, i.e. making someone a follower of Christ, is seen as that which is *shown* and *taught* and, according to the parents, it is *through discipleship that faith formation occurs*. By teaching one's children about Jesus and showing them how to follow Him through one's own lifestyle, their faith forms and grows.

3.4.1.   What is currently happening in Christian homes?

Some parents – mostly those in Group A - focused *consciously*, *deliberately* and *consistently* on their children's faith formation. Bible study, prayer, family devotions, church attendance and participation, family meetings, personal evangelism, technology control and a godly example is part of their *way of life*. Their lives are centred around their faith and everything is linked to their relationship with God. They are also deeply involved in their children's lives, building strong relationships based on mutual trust and accountability. They made deliberate attempts to lead their children to Jesus. These discipleship practices that facilitates faith formation are discussed in Section 3.3.6.

Sadly, some parents – mostly those in Group B – found and surrendered their lives to the Lord only later on in life, when their children were already in their teen years. Even though they are now following the Lord wholeheartedly, during their younger years they neglected the abovementioned religious practices or performed them inconsistently. For some, their

religion consisted of religious practices without a personal relationship with God; their religion was hypocritical and stood separate to the other parts of their lives. Some were distant or uninvolved in their children's lives – the relationship with their children are in some cases fragile even today. They were often antagonistic towards the church, others in the church, as well as the church leadership. Some were caught up in sinful and reckless lifestyles, setting a bad example for their children. Due to their lack of personal relationship with God, they also neglected to evangelise their children and lacked general concern over what their children were involved in with regards to technology, friends or other worldly influences.

When some of them became devoted followers of Jesus, they became so involved with the church that they neglected their relationship with their children and they themselves experienced "spiritual burnout…" Others who also came to the Lord when their children were already in their teens, found themselves lacking the necessary know-how to share the gospel message of salvation with their children. They shied away from addressing spiritual issues, because they were afraid that they would not be able to answer unexpected questions. This often led to an even greater rift between them and their children. These religious practices that hamper faith formation were discussed in Section 3.3.7.

It is clear that in homes where there is a healthy relationship with God from the parents' side, it often leads to a healthy relationship with God for the children. The contrary is sadly also true – a home where one or both parents do not really know or serve God, the children will also likely stray from the church and/or the Christian faith. This is however not set in stone, since in some homes there are wonderful Christian parents, who truly love and serve God, but then one or more of their children turn away from their Christian upbringing when they leave the home. On the other hand, some children find God and surrender their lives to Him and serve Him with all their hearts, even when they come from homes where one or both parents did not know or serve God at all.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) focuses on the interpretive task, which seeks to answer the question: "Why is this going on?" In terms of this study it is answering the question: Why do parents understand and approach faith formation the way they do and how does this influence their children with regards to whether or not they remain in the church and/or the Christian faith.

CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) the focus was on the descriptive-empirical task of determining what is going on in Christian homes with regards to the faith formation of children, especially teenagers.

This chapter attends to the interpretive task of answering the question: "Why is this going on?" (Osmer, 2008:4, 6) or in terms of this study: "Why do parents understand and approach faith formation the way they do and how does this influence their children with regards to whether they remain in the church and/or the Christian faith or not." Answering this question achieves the second objective of this study, namely to identify some of the reasons underlying current approaches of parents to the faith formation of teenage children.

This chapter also presents the findings of Question 4 of the focus group question protocol, wherein parents presented their views of why they believe their children either remain faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith or became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith and how this phenomenon relates to their faith formation in the home.

This chapter answers not only the question of why parents understand and approach faith formation the way they do, but also why, according to the parents, their children either remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith or why they became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith.

4.2. Reasons underlying current approaches to faith formation

4.2.1. Upbringing

Most of the participants mentioned their own upbringing as a major source of influence in the way they raised their children, be it good or bad. This coincides with Bengtson's (2013:54-56) findings in his study on faith transmission across generations, whereby one's own upbringing greatly determines one's approach to parenting and faith formation.

Some came from very devout homes, where the church, the Bible, prayer and devotions were part of daily life. Everything was tested against Scripture and thoroughly prayed over. These principles were carried over into the participants' own approaches to parenting and faith formation.

Some came from very strict religious homes, where religion was forced upon them. They were forced to go to church, to read the Bible, to pray, etc. The experiences were that of a dead religion without true relationship with God. This caused a dislike in formal Christian upbringing, causing the participants to shy away from deliberate and active efforts at a Christian upbringing of their own children.

Others came from non-religious homes. Religion played no major role in their upbringing - they were raised apathetic towards faith. Whether they wanted to believe in God or not, was left to their own choice. This apathetic approach to religion sadly also carried over to a large part of their parenting and faith formation approach while their children were still young.

Still others were raised in homes of mixed religious backgrounds. In some cases, one parent was a non-believer and the other was a churchgoer. In other instances, the parents came from a totally different faiths. Some came from homes where their parents were from differing Christian backgrounds, e.g. one parent a Roman Catholic and the other from the Old Apostolic Church. The participants that came from such mixed backgrounds related that their Christian upbringing ranged from being apathetic to very confused. This caused the participants to also have varied approaches to the faith formation of their own children, similarly ranging from apathetic to very confused.

Even in these personal stories one can see the major impact parents can have on their children with regards to faith formation – it becomes a cycle that often repeats itself from generation to generation.

4.2.2. Relationship with God

Most of the participants from Group A had a personal relationship with God from a young age, due to growing up in very devout homes, with strong faith formation occurring in their own lives as they grew up. They personally experienced God working in their own lives and families. This empowered them to also provide a lifestyle of faith, Biblical principles, values and beliefs for their own Children. God is such an integral part of their everyday lives that their parenting style incorporates Him into everything they do.

Many of the participants from Group B only formed a personal relationship with God when their children were already in high school. During their children's younger years, they did not really know or follow the Lord personally, even though they were somewhat religious with regards to sporadically attending church, reading the Bible and praying in times of trouble. During that time God was pushed to the religious compartment of their lives and not deemed pertinent to any other part of their daily routines. Once they did find the Lord and started

serving Him daily, the damage to their children's faith formation was almost irreversible. One mother exclaimed: "How do you fix it now that the damage is done?"

Some parents are deeply religious, with a strong relationship with God. Their faith is, however, very personal to them. They struggle to relate their relationship with God to their children. They find it difficult to talk about their faith or to pray in front of others. While they would encourage their children to read the Bible, pray and attend church, they do not really make an active effort to teach their children how to really study the Bible, how to pray, how to worship God or participate in church. They hope that their children will learn from their example only.

4.2.3. Relationship with spouse

Participants from both Groups A and B discussed the importance of the relationship between spouses in the faith formation of children. Children need to see the love between their father and their mother. They need to see and experience how the parents work together and not only with regards to their marriage, but also with regards to their faith. This principle is also mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:22-33, where he discusses the relationship between marriage partners. He states that marriage is supposed to be a picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), i.e. children should be able to see and experience Christ in the loving relationship of their parents with each other as well as their relationship with God.

Parents from Group A generally mentioned how they as parents worked together as a team in the faith formation of their children. Fathers took up their role as king and priest of their home, leading the family in Bible study, prayer, devotions, church attendance, worship and shared ministry. Mothers played a decisive role in nurturing, helping with schoolwork – also testing it against Scripture, offering guidance, support, encouragement and prayer. They worked hard towards having their children understand that they as a family are a team and that they as the parents only want what is best for their children.

Some of the parents from Group B mentioned how, earlier in their marriage, either one or both parents did not know or serve the Lord. It was especially difficult for those who tried to serve the Lord when their spouse was not interested in God. In many cases the uninterested spouse would either be passive, leaving the other spouse and the children to make their own choices with regards to faith or be very antagonistic and outright oppose the rest of the family when they brought up the topic of faith or religion. This made faith transmission and formation extremely difficult, not only for the spouse who sought to know and serve God, but especially for the children.

4.2.4. The church

Some of the parents are in congregations that have a strong family focus in their ministries. Parenting courses are frequently presented, equipping parents with the necessary tools to facilitate the faith formation and growth of their children. Many of the parents from Group A attended such courses early on in their marriages and these aided them significantly in their understanding and approach to the faith formation of their children.

Other parents found themselves in congregations that were not as focused on the family in their ministries. They found their congregations lacking in family support and training with regards to parenting, discipleship and faith formation. These parents were often at a loss when it came to parenting, not knowing how to approach the spiritual aspects of parenting.

The church plays a critical role in faith formation – that of equipping parents for this fundamental aspect of parenting. If the church neglects to equip and empower parents, it can be detrimental to the faith formation of upcoming generations.

4.2.5. Children's behaviour

Children's behaviour is often a deciding factor in parent's understanding and approach to faith formation in the home. In some cases, parents realised early on that they needed to intervene due to their children's behaviour. One parent couple decided to home-school their children. In hindsight they are grateful for making this decision, since some issues came to the fore that would have radically changed the course of their children's lives had they not made this decision. If for example a child has the tendency towards addiction- be it to drugs, technology, pornography, whatever the case may be - and this tendency can be discovered early on, then it may be wise for the parents to take interventive action as early as possible. Home schooling one's children may afford the opportunity to be more hands-on with helping them manage their addictive tendencies, thereby mitigating the effects these tendencies may have on their faith formation. Home schooling may, however, not be a viable option for a variety of reasons, e.g. in many cases both parents have to work full time and do not have the luxury of being able to home school their children. In such cases closer relationships with the teachers at school and youth workers at church are critical.

Some parents do not know or follow the Lord themselves, but then one of their children becomes a Christian and starts to live for and follow the Lord wholeheartedly. The change in the life of the child can result in the child leading the parents to Christ and then they too surrender their lives to Jesus and their lives are changed. This then also impacts the parents' understanding and approach to faith formation.

4.2.6. Social network

Parents' social network can positively or negatively impact their understanding and approach to parenting and faith formation.

Most of the participants in Group A mentioned how they experience the congregations they form a part of as "family". Their closest friends are families from the same congregation. The social network they belong to thus shares common beliefs, values, worldviews and often approaches to parenting and faith formation. They help each other and learn from each other. They also attend the training provided by their congregations together and therefore experience the same training and equipping in parenting skills.

The participants from Group B also experience this strong Christian social network, but this has not always been the case. Many of them had stronger social ties to unbelievers or people who are not truly following or living wholeheartedly for Jesus. Therefore, their children also did not have many Christian friends who could influence their faith formation in a positive way.

Others were part of congregations where they had strong ties to other believers, but there were not really families with children of the same age as their own children. Their own social network thus had a strong influence on their own understanding and approach to faith formation, but their children still built friendships that were detrimental to their own spiritual growth, due to the lack of close Christian friends their own age.

4.3. Why some youths remain faithful and others leave

The answers participants gave to Question 4 of the focus group question protocol, namely, "why do you think your children either remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith or why do you think they became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith, and how does this relate to their faith formation?" were analysed and the following themes emerged:

4.3.1. "Way of life"

When asked the question "why does your children remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith?" one of the mothers from Group A answered: "Church and faith is their way of life." Her, and the rest of the parents in Group A's children, grew up with their lives built around their faith and their church, with consistent Bible, prayer, devotions, church attendance, etc. They grew up in a strong Christian environment. It laid a firm spiritual foundation with solid values, principles and beliefs that were truly internalised and then lived out from a young age. It also adequately prepared them for the world and its challenges.

Due to their lifestyles being highly spiritual and saturated with God, His Word, and His people, they simply continued this way of life into young adulthood.

On the other hand, most of the parents from Group B said that their children grew up, at least until they were in their teens, with a lifestyle wherein Bible study, prayer, devotions and church attendance were often inconsistent or even absent. This left them with a weak spiritual foundation and a faith that is easily shaken when challenged. The parents felt sad that they themselves did not, in most cases, know the Lord themselves until their children were already in their teens and that they as parents were so late in attempt to lay a firm faith foundation. Teens with lifestyles devoid of Bible study, prayer and church will most likely continue to go without these practices into their young adult and even adult lives, unless God intervenes.

4.3.2. The church's influence

The parents from Group A all agreed that the church plays a key role in young people remaining faithful to the church and the Christian faith. They explained how their specific congregations were very family focused and the relationships built with other church families really made the congregation feel like a family.

They also explained that their congregations presented activities that focus on the youth, the Bible is explained on their level and the church is relevant and current with regards to topics, issues, problems, questions and challenges that teens face and it equips them with the necessary Biblical answers and tools to live out their faith in the modern world.

Another prominent reason is the fact that their children really experience true and exponential spiritual growth in their congregations. They are challenged to participate, often out of their comfort zone, causing them to grow in areas of the faith they never thought possible.

The parents also mentioned their close relationship with the church leadership, especially the youth workers, and how they are interested and involved in what their children learn from the church, Sunday school and youth activities. They work together with the youth pastors to disciple their teens.

When their children were younger, some parents from Group B forced their children to attend church, Sunday school or youth activities, even when sometimes not attending church-related activities themselves.

Others mentioned how the congregation they belong to lacked youth ministries and while their children were growing up there were few children in the church of the same age as their children. This left their children with few Christian friends while growing up.

Due to the low number of teens in some congregations, they often do not focus on the youth and their issues, questions and challenges, thereby becoming irrelevant to the younger generation. When people do not find the church relevant to their lives, church becomes boring and they do not experience growth there. When their most pressing questions are not answered and their challenges not met, they begin to feel the church has no answers to the Bible critics and secular worldviews. This causes the younger generation to lose faith in the church and often also in God.

One parent mentioned how her son truly found the Lord during his teen years and how he personally experienced God working in his life. The church was glad to hear about his newfound faith and they made an appointment to visit him, but never showed up. This happened a few times, causing her son to later lose interest. He felt the church did not care about him. Due to the church's neglect in follow-up work, they lost a young man to the world.

Some youth are very negative about the church and any form of structured religious practices, often because of the negativity towards church they experienced from their parents. One parent (B03M) explained how he was himself very negative towards any kind of church before he became a Christian. He often ridiculed and degraded the church, especially if the pastor said something he did not like or agree with. This disrespect for the church and its leadership caused his children to also have no respect for the church.

Some of the participants mentioned that some congregations, in their attempt to be relevant, have become so much like the world in terms of their music, activities and teachings that they have lost their influence on the youth. There is no challenge to worldly norms or values, no call to repentance and no examples of being changed by God. Instead of challenging the worldly norms, values and beliefs, they incorporate it. While this approach may draw many young people to the church, it does not bring forth a change in lifestyle, behaviour or faith.

Another concern raised by participants was that the church often confuses teens and young adults with regards to what is right or wrong; what is acceptable and what is not; what is true and what is false. For many years, issues such as homosexuality, transgenderism and co-habitation before marriage were regarded as sinful and shown from the Bible as being sin and preached against by the church leaders. Many churches have changed their views regarding many of these things. Many of the same church leaders who preached against these practices now preach for it, using the same Bible. This creates confusion amongst the youth and generates distrust in the church. The fact that some churches still regard these

practices as sinful while other churches now regard these practices as acceptable adds to the confusion. This issue will be elaborated on in Chapter 6 (Section 6.4.5).

While age segregation for some church activities are at times necessary, one couple complained that the church often separates children from their parents for almost all church activities. This is a problem, especially in terms of main church services. Some children grow up in in a church environment where Sunday school and the main church services take place at the same time and then the children are kept busy, while their parents worship God in the main service. These children are kept busy with Bible stories, games and other activities, but the format differs greatly from the main service their parents attend. As they grow up, they attend very few main services and upon finishing school, they have no idea how to participate in a main church service. No wonder they find main church services strange. Moreover, they never really see or hear their parents worship God in church services, robbing them of this important example. Apart from age segregation of the main services, many congregations have men's camps, women's camps, youth camps, kids' camps, etc., but very few ministries for the whole family where they can learn and grow together as a family.

As with the previous theme, most parents in Group B felt that they started too late with consistent church attendance and participation, noting that if they had started sooner it might have had a much deeper impact on their children's faith formation and might have bonded them closer to the church and God, causing them to remain faithful rather than leaving.

4.3.3.   Personal relationship with God

Most of the parents in Group A personally shared the gospel message of salvation with their children, leading them to a personal commitment to God and faith in Jesus Christ. For these parents this was an essential element of faith formation. Their children responded to the gospel by personally receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour and surrendering their lives to Him as Lord. They personally experienced God working in their lives as they love, trust, follow and live for Jesus. Because their parents focused on teaching them to find their identity and purpose in Christ, their lives are grounded in this identity. They were also encouraged and guided to discover their own spiritual gifts and to practice these to thereby live out their calling. These parents not only equipped their children to grow in their own faith and relationship with God, but to also share their testimonies and to evangelise and lead others to Christ. For these parents, their children's personal relationship with God was the most important factor contributing to them still being faithful to the church and the Christian faith.

Most of the parents from Group B said that their children know about God, but there is a lack in personal relationship with God. They neglected to intentionally discuss personal salvation with their children, i.e. how to be saved and become a child of God. This was instead left to the church. In many of these cases the parents felt inadequate to lead their children to God. They felt they lacked the necessary know-how. In some cases, when the children asked about it, they referred them to the youth pastor or Sunday school teacher rather than accepting this responsibility themselves. The lack of a personal relationship with God will most likely cause a teenager to become estranged from the church as they transition into young adulthood, since there is nothing to draw them to church or God.

4.3.4. Relationship with parents

The parents of Group A described their relationship with their children as strong, close, intimate and based on mutual trust and accountability. They have been, and still are, very much involved in their children's lives. Their children are confident to approach them with issues, problems, questions and challenges because they have experienced their parents as open, considerate, loving, caring and concerned only for their wellbeing and always having their best interests at heart. This creates opportunities for great influence on the part of the parents. As a family they also grew together in their love and trust for each other, as well as in the Lord. They experienced God together, through good and hard times. The children saw God's work in the lives of their parents, as well as their parents' love and trust in God. This also influenced the children to seek and trust God with their lives and life's challenges.

Some of the parents in Group B described their relationship with their children as fragile and complicated. In many of the cases one or both parents were not really involved, especially with the spiritual formation of their children. In many cases, especially during the children's earlier years, one or both parents were not saved themselves. Little faith transmission or formation, from the parents' side, occurred during those years.

In other cases, the children were pampered too much and received everything too easily. The parents put their own personal lives on hold and did everything their children wanted. The children did not learn to take responsibility for their own lives and choices.

In other instances, the parents were too overprotective. They never exposed their children to the world and different viewpoints, beliefs, etc. in a controlled manner, but rather shied away from these and sheltered their children from it, even by force. Taboo topics were never allowed to be discussed, robbing the children of the confidence to ask serious questions or to discuss certain issues or challenges they faced, causing the mutual trust between the parents and the children to deteriorate. In these cases, parents often said "NO!" and

"because I said so!", without really providing explanations or discussing the reasons for the decisions taken. When teens transition into young adulthood and come out from under such domineering and controlling environments, they often go overboard and so lose their way.

This leads one to conclude that a warm, loving, close and affirming relationship with one's parents will help greatly with healthy faith transmission from parents to their children. The opposite is true for distant, controlling and fragile relationships, which are often detrimental to faith formation. This conclusion corresponds to Bengtson's (2013:96-97) argument that the quality of the parent-child relationship greatly influences faith transmission and formation.

4.3.5. Social circle

Group A's parents were careful whose company they kept and the kind of friends they exposed their children to. Having one's closest friends from the same congregation has some wonderful advantages. When issues arise, this social circle offers a strong support network from which to gain wisdom, guidance and support. Another advantage of being in such a social network is that the families keep each other accountable. When one of the families seems to struggle the others are quick to raise concern and to help where they can with problems.

These parents also taught their children from a young age to make wise choices when it comes to friendship and showed them the dangers of having the wrong friends. They encouraged their children to make friends with Christians who share their principles, values and beliefs; to build friendships wherein they could encourage each other to grow closer to Christ and to hold each other accountable.

One couple shared how some young men in their congregation, who have been friends since primary school, came to know the Lord as friends while in high school, even though some of them had parents who did not know or follow Jesus. They had a strong and positive effect on each other, as they grew together in the faith. Whenever one of them seemed to start slipping away, the others would step in and bring him back to the Lord. They are young adults now and they still love and serve the Lord and are still active in their church community.

Another couple related to the group how their teenage daughter and her friends started an online Bible study on their own initiative during the national COVID-19 lockdown. As a group of friends, they share what they learn from the Bible and how God is working in their lives, which in turn helps their faith to grow. This is an example of the church in action.

On the flipside, some parents from Group B related how they themselves often kept the wrong company. Their friends were often worldly and unbelieving, having not only a negative impact on them as parents, but also damaged their testimony to their children. One mother said that if she could do it all over again, she would focus on keeping good Christian company from early on. How can parents teach their children to have good Christian friends if the company they themselves keep are not very Christian?

Many of the parents from Group B also mentioned how their children were very much involved with non-Christian friends, who often challenged their Christian values and beliefs. They pulled them into activities that went against their moral principles. Children spend a great deal of time with their friends and the bond between friends are often stronger than the parent-child bond, especially when the parents are too busy to spend time with their children. The influence of these friends sooner than later begins to overtake the influence of the parents. Doubt grows and faith diminishes as the challenges and questions regarding faith go unanswered.

If one does not teach one's children, from an early age, about the dangers of having the wrong friends and to rather build friendships with Christians who will draw you closer to Christ, it becomes very difficult to influence them later, when they already made close friends with unbelievers. Parents' and children's choice in friends may be beneficial or detrimental to faith formation. Good Christian friends may lead children to remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith, while worldly friends may influence them to become estranged from the church and often to even leave the Christian faith.

4.3.6.   Personal choices

The personal life choices that youth need to make can have serious consequences for their faith trajectory. The choices that have long-term life implications include choosing a spouse, a career, which church to join, etc. For parents from both Groups A and B, this specific point was close to their hearts. They were all very concerned about the choices their children will make once they leave the home.

Parents from Group A prayed since their children were born that God would guide their children in making the correct choices with regards to these matters. They also spoke with their children about these important topics, raising them to choose a God-fearing spouse: one that will draw them closer to God, His Word and His church. They furthermore strived to train them to be discerning when it comes to choosing a church – to test everything against Scripture and to find a church where they experience God, can grow spiritually and, in turn,

raise their children to grow up in the presence of the Lord and His people. In short, to base their important life choices on Scripture.

Some parents from Group B acknowledged that they neglected to focus on this area when it came to raising their children. As they, as parents, found the Lord later on in life, when their children were already teens, it became very difficult to discuss these topics and often turned into heated arguments when their children started dating and became involved in more serious relationships.

Some parents raised their children in a traditional Christian home, applying almost all the above-mentioned good parenting and Biblical principles. They were very involved in the church and their children grew up in the church, Sunday school and youth group environment. Then their children's own personal choices affected their faith, however, especially when it came to the choice of a spouse. One couple related the heartache of seeing their child marrying a non-believer. As months went by, their child completely stopped going to church and adopted the spouse's secular lifestyle. The mother (B06F) explained that in her daughter's own heart she may yet yearn for the principles and truth she was raised in, but the longer she stays away from the church and the more she becomes like the world, the more her feelings of guilt grow and those feelings of guilt and shame may make her afraid to come to church again.

4.3.7. Other influences

Often teenagers and young adults are challenged at school, university, work or via the media with regards to their faith in God and the Bible. This occurs through teachings of for example evolution, secular philosophies or different religions, as well as their interactions with the diverse religions of their teachers, peers, fellow students or colleagues. If their faith foundation is not solid enough and if they are ill equipped to deal with these challenges, their faith may be shaken to the point where they reject the Christian faith and become estranged from the church. Some of the parents from Group B explained that this is exactly what happened to their young adult children. Many of them were active in their church attendance, Sunday school and youth activities, but when they went off to university or moved out of the home and started working, their faith was shaken by the challenges experienced in these new environments and many of them turned away from the church and/or the Christian faith.

Most of the parents from Group A focused on equipping their children specifically for these challenges and made sure that the congregation they were a part of adequately addressed these challenges. Specific focus areas included: teaching about Jesus – who He is, what He has done and is doing and how to follow Him; teaching to trust God; teaching identity and

purpose in Christ; teaching discernment with regards to false ideologies, worldviews and teachings – to test everything against Scripture; teaching how to share and stand up for one's faith; and teaching them how to stand up when they have fallen. They exposed their children to the world, other religions, views, etc., but did so in a controlled manner. This prepared their children to face the world with its challenges and they are so grateful to see how their children grew up as strong believers in God, able to defend their faith and to share it with others.

4.3.8. The grace of God

Many of the principles and practices discussed so far may come across as very mechanical, sounding almost like following a specific recipe guaranteeing a specific result. This is, however, not the case. Bettis (2016:19-22) writes that there are no guarantees, since children are their own moral beings, who grow up to make their own decisions, and who also have to take responsibility for those decisions.

The first response from every couple who was part of Group A in the focus groups, when asked why their children remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith, was a resounding: "the grace of God!" One father (A01M) said: "There is no magic bullet, we simply have to do our best, and trust God for the rest."

Even though they did many things right and followed the principles, in some cases to the letter, they all felt that they could have and should have done so much more. They all stated that although they are thankful that they could be part of God's work in the lives of their children, it was still a miraculous work of God that regenerated their children and by His grace and mercy protected them from the wrong choices. Only God can change a heart and a life and only God can save a soul. Without His intervention and work in the hearts, minds and lives of their children, who knows where they might have ended up. This principle is evident in the fact that some parents from Group B did everything right, from a human perspective – they followed all the principles, was wonderful Christian examples to their children and lovingly raised them in the church environment - and yet as their children grew older they turned their backs on what they were taught as children and went their own way.

One should not, however, simply leave one's children's faith formation to chance. God created parents and gave them their specific children, seeking to use them as parents to extend His grace to those children. The parents become the vehicle through which God wants to introduce and reveal Himself to those children and therefore the parents play a critical role in the salvation God wants to work in those children. When this process fails, due

to the children's own choices, parents who have done their utmost should not feel guilty and blame themselves. More is said on this in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3).

4.4.   Summary

In this chapter the focus was on the interpretive task of answering the question "why do parents understand and approach faith formation the way they do, and how does this influence their children with regards to whether they remain in the church and/or the Christian faith or not?" Answering this question addresses the second objective of this study, namely, to determine some of the reasons underlying current approaches of parents to the faith formation of their teenage children.

Reasons underlying parents' current understanding and approaches to faith formation include:

1. The parents' own upbringing has a large impact on their own perspectives and approaches to faith formation and is often duplicated in the way they raise their own children.
2. The parents' own relationship with God dictates how they approach parenting and faith formation. Those with a deep and strong relationship with God feel accountable to God when it comes to raising their children. Others who do not really know or follow God have no real concern whether their children do so or not.
3. The relationship with one's spouse either helps or hinders efforts to raise one's children for the Lord. If the spouse also loves, follows and serves God, then the team effort is of great value to the efforts at faith formation in the children. Should the spouse is an unbeliever, antagonistic towards religion or from a different faith, it can create a great deal of confusion in the children and difficulty in raising them in the Christian faith.
4. The church's role in parent's understanding and approach to faith formation is of equipping and support. If the congregation parents belong to are not family focused with good training and equipping resources, it can have a detrimental effect on parents' attempt at faith formation in their children.
5. Children's behaviour can be great indicators of whether parents need to adapt their parenting and faith formation approach. Parents need to be sensitive to behavioural cues and act sooner rather than later when probable issues are identified.
6. The social network parents belong to can be a source of mutual support, guidance and accountability if they share the same values, principles and beliefs, thereby having a very positive effect on parents' understanding and approach to faith formation in their

children. Social networks can, however, also be a negative influence and make faith formation difficult.

According to the parents, some reasons they believe their children either remained faithful or became estranged from the church include the following:

1. Their "way of life": Were they raised with strong Christian values, principles, and beliefs from an early age or not? Their young adult and adult life will, in most cases, reflect the same spiritual trajectory they were set on from an early age.
2. If teenagers experience the church as relevant to their everyday lives, providing answers to pressing matters and questions; equipping them to face life's challenges; and providing a place where they personally experience God and spiritual growth, then they are much more likely to remain faithful to the church. Sadly, many congregations fail in this task and even worse, is often a source of spiritual confusion rather than guidance. It will most likely cause youth to abandon the church and sometimes even the Christian faith.
3. The key determining factor in whether youth will remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith is probably their own personal relationship with God. If they have personally received Jesus as Saviour and surrendered their lives to Him as Lord and learned to walk with Him, follow Him and serve Him, then it is much more likely that they will stay this course as they transition into young adulthood.
4. The youth's relationship with their parents determines to a great effect whether they will follow in their parents' footsteps with regards to faith and religious practices. If they have a close, warm and affirming relationship with their parents, the influence their parents have in their lives, even during the transition into young adulthood and beyond, are much greater than if the relationship was cold, distant, fragile or tumultuous.
5. The social circle teens and young adults find themselves in helps to form their identity, perspective on life and their faith. The wrong friends are in most cases detrimental to their faith formation and may often cause them to walk away from the faith. Christian friends, on the other hand, can have the direct opposite effect – pulling them closer to God, holding them accountable and providing support – often causing youth to remain faithful.
6. The personal life choices teens make as they transition into young adulthood, especially with regards to whom they marry, their career choices and which congregation to join (if they move away from home), will also be a key factor in whether they remain faithful to the church and Christian faith.
7. Other influences such as school, university and the media usually promote secular worldviews, often ridiculing the Bible and Christian values. Temptations are also offered

up on a silver platter. Fellow students and colleagues are often also from a variety of different faiths and conversations with them may often lead to questions and challenges to the Christian faith. If children are not taught from a young age how to defend their faith, then this may also lead them to more easily abandon the faith as they grow older and leave the safety of their Christian home.

8. The grace and work of God should never be left out of the picture, regardless of how parents raise their children. Some parents seem to do everything right and follow all the necessary principles to raise their children and yet, when their children leave the home, they choose a different path. Other parents have no desire to know God and do nothing with regards to faith formation and yet, by the grace and work of God in their children's lives, their children find the Lord and live for Him and serve Him wholeheartedly.

The parents from Group A built their lives around their faith and the church as a way of life. They consistently saturated their children's lives with God, the Bible, prayer, family devotions, church participation and Christian friendships. They intentionally evangelised their children to lead them to faith in Christ. They had warm, loving, trusting and open relationships with their children, allowing them to ask serious questions and to doubt and sought out answers to their questions and doubts along with their children. They taught their children, from an early age, to make wise decisions with regards to friends, marriage, careers and church. They did not shy away from other influences like other worldviews or religions, as presented at school/university, the media, etc., but rather addressed these in a controlled manner, equipping their children to test these influences against Scripture. These parents are thankful that the grace of God worked through them as parents to reach their children and to this day their children remain faithful to the church, the Christian faith and Jesus Christ.

Today all the parents from Group B are devout, sincere followers of Jesus. This was however not always the case. Most of them were not believers during their children's childhood years and only came to God when their children reached their teen years. During their children's childhood years most of these parents did not set a good example: they neglected church, Bible study, prayer, and family devotions. Most of them never personally made attempts to evangelise their children to lead them to personal faith in Christ. The relationships with their children were in most cases fragile and complicated, and the children did not really come to them for advice, but rather sought to figure things out on their own. Most of them had non-believers as close friends and allowed their children to be friends with non-believers. They were often unconcerned with what their children were taught at school/university and the content they viewed or listened to on multimedia. Many of these things changed when they as parents became sincere followers of Jesus during their

children's teen years, but according to the parents it was already too late, the damage to the spiritual foundation of their children had already been done and as their children transitioned into young adulthood they left the church.

According to this specific study, it would seem that if parents are consistent, intentional and diligent in raising their children for the Lord, from the time their children are very young, the chances are very good that their children will remain faithful to the church and the Christian faith. If parents are negligent and unconcerned with regards to these matters, however, chances increase that their children will turn away from the church and/or the Christian faith.

There are, however, exceptions to the above. Some children and teenagers do find the Lord; receive Him as their personal Lord and Saviour; commit their lives to Him; and follow Him wholeheartedly even into young adulthood and beyond, despite growing up in homes where their parents did little to facilitate faith formation in their lives. In a few other cases, children become estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith irrespective of the fact that their parents did everything in their power to facilitate faith formation.

The normative task of answering the question "what ought to be going on?" is addressed in the next chapter, which also addresses the third objective of this study, namely, to investigate the Scriptures and theological sources with regards to faith formation.

CHAPTER 5: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FAITH FORMATION

5.1.   Introduction

According to Osmer (2008:4, 8), the normative task of practical theology is about answering the question: "What ought to be going on?"

The normative task is a threefold task involving the following:

1. The use of theological concepts to interpret specific situations, episodes and contexts – How might God be acting, and what should be our response to the problem or phenomenon in the specific situation, episode, or context?
2. Finding relevant ethical guidelines, rules and principles which can guide necessary action
3. Exploring practices of the Christian tradition (past and present) that provide normative guidance in shaping Christian life and behaviour

In this chapter we aim to determine the perspectives the Bible provides in terms of the role of parents with regards to the faith formation of teenage children. Relevant portions of Scripture are discussed, using Bible commentaries to determine Biblical perspectives that can shed light on Christian parenting, specifically as it pertains to faith formation through the discipleship of children and teens. Relevant principles and practices of past and present Christian tradition are also discussed. From these sources we can form theological remarks on parenting discipleship, which can then be compared with current narratives in order to determine what, from a theological point of view, should be happening in the Christian home when it comes to faith formation and discipleship of children, specifically teens.

5.2.   Sources used

The sources utilised in this chapter range from older sources to some of the latest sources available to the researcher. The reason for the inclusion of older sources is to provide a comprehensive overview of how faith formation was understood and viewed throughout church history.

5.3.   Approaches to faith formation

Nel (2018:311-317) provides an overview of four approaches to youth ministry in terms of faith formation:

1. Pedagogical/education approach: The knowledge of the Bible is central to this approach. The focus is on spiritual education and "learning" through Bible studies. More

"mature" Christians would educate the younger "immature" Christians on Biblical knowledge and doctrine. Biblical content and the transfer of information are often prioritised at the expense of other aspects such as relationship building, service, etc.

2. "Programme" approach: The focus is on programmes that address certain needs. These programmes often include Bible study; discussion of issues, problems in the world, ethics, and other relevant matters; and social and relaxation events. The idea is to attract the youth and keep them off the streets. The downside to this approach is that it often only keeps the youth occupied and lacks Biblical depth.

3. "Service" approach: This approach focuses on rendering a service to youth, but also to allow them to render services to one another and the community – a commitment to mission. Again, the priority is often so much on service that personal spiritual growth in other areas is sometimes neglected.

4. "Decision" approach: Winning the youth for Christ is the focus of this approach. The emphasis is often so much on youth "giving their hearts to Christ", "accepting Christ as Saviour", "to be converted", etc. that it over simplifies what it means to also live for Christ and follow Christ on a daily basis. As Nel (2018:316) states, it is an "almost against a 'disciple-making approach'". Nel (2018:317) further highlights that the danger of this approach is that the relationship with God should never be watered down to a single decision.

Nel's (2018) book *Youth ministry: an inclusive missional approach* centres on presenting a case for a "discipleship" or "disciple-making" approach to youth ministry, with parents as primary agents in faith formation (Nel, 2018:257-258) and the church as supporting agent. A discipleship approach incorporates the other approaches' strengths.

Discipleship is about making disciples, i.e. "followers of Christ". In that sense an argument can be made that everything the church does is about discipleship, be it evangelism, wherein people are led into a decision to follow Christ; be it teaching the doctrines of the Bible; be it programmes wherein activities and Christian friendships are built; or be it service to each other and others. All these elements are aimed at leading those who do not know Christ to Him, as well as helping those who have already started to follow Jesus to grow in their relationship with Him and to follow Him obediently. This is the reason this chapter focuses on presenting a Biblical perspective on faith formation through discipleship.

5.4.   Faith formation through discipleship

One of the most well-known passages regarding discipleship is arguably Matthew 28:18-20. This passage centres around the following:

1. It bases the great commission on the *authority of Christ* (Matt. 28:18) (Carson, 2010).
2. It includes leading others to acceptance of Christ as Saviour (Matt. 28:19a) – "Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations…" (Bible, 1982)
3. It includes initiation into the church (Matt. 28:19b) – "…*baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Bible, 1982)
4. It includes education and modelling in the Christian faith (Matt. 28:20a – "*teaching* them to *observe* all things that I have commanded you…" (Bible, 1982)

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus gives His final command to His disciples before leaving earth to return to the Father and to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). This command is to go and make disciples of all nations and is given as the mandate of the church. According to Chamblin (2010:1488–1489), Matthew 28:19-20 shows how disciples are to be made: It begins with the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 24:46-47), those who embrace the gospel by believing in Jesus are baptised (Matt. 28:19b) and then taught to obey His commands (Matt. 28:20a).

This concurs with what Barbieri (1985:93-94) writes: disciples are to proclaim the gospel. Snook (2019:67) writes: "Preaching…grows congregational members as disciples and strengthens them as missionaries." In the context of Matthew, those who believe the gospel are to be baptised as proof of their association with Christ. They are then to be taught to obey the Word. Making disciples thus entails all three participles of "going", "baptising" and "teaching". Since New Testament times many churches, mainly in the Reformed tradition, have accepted covenant baptism that precedes the public confession of faith. In this view Christian parents promise to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, i.e. disciple them up to their own personal public profession of faith. In both views the one being baptised is initiated into the body of Christ through their baptism.

According to Carson (2010), making disciples is binding for all followers of Jesus – to make others what they themselves are – followers of Jesus Christ. Wiersbe (1992:101) explains that making disciples is about winning souls, initiating them into the Christian community and building them up in the faith. MacDonald (1995:1312–1313) states that "the essence of discipleship is becoming like the Master, and this is brought about by systematic teaching of, and submission to, the Word".

France (1994:944) states that making disciples is not a call for a superficial response, but for total commitment to Christ and the community of His body, the church. This is symbolised by baptism. It is also a call to a life of obedience, governed by everything Jesus commanded. In the Reformed tradition, total commitment with regards to baptism rests with the parents'

promise to raise their children for the Lord. Baptism precedes for the baptised the response of total commitment, figuring later in the public confession of faith.

Blomberg (1992:431-432) argues that though making disciples includes missionary work in other countries, the "main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be". Making disciples further entails more than merely leading someone to a profession of faith, but is followed by baptism as a decisive initiation into the Christian community and then thorough teaching in all of Scripture, so new disciples can grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. Again, within the Reformed tradition, baptism is the sign of initiation into the covenant of grace, whereafter Christian parents would teach their children in all of Scripture that they may grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. The focus is still on baptism and teaching as part of the disciple-making process.

In this regard Dockery (1992:567) states that making disciples entails all believers duplicating themselves in others – leading them to faith, baptism and obedience to Jesus' commands. Turner and Bock (2005:376) says that the core responsibility of disciples is to reproduce themselves, i.e. to make more disciples.

Osborne (2010) states that "every single person who is won to Christ must be anchored in Christ and taught how to live for Christ in day-to-day decisions". Weber (2000:486) as well as Wilkins (2016) show that teaching involves guiding believers from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood, i.e. faith formation and growth through the teaching in the knowledge and obedience of the Word.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (1997:63) and later Jarvis and Johnson (2014:539) connect the command of "go, make disciples of all nations" as found in Matthew 28:19 with the corresponding passage in Mark 16:15-16. In Mark's account the command is to preach the gospel and baptise those who believe the gospel that is preached. From this we can deduce that salvific faith is engendered by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of hearers of the gospel as the gospel is being preached, which concurs with what the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:14-17.

According to Edwards (2002:506) and Grassmick (1985:195), the gospel is of universal importance. The disciples are sent "into all the world" and the gospel is to be preached to "all creation". This includes children of believing parents: They too need to hear the gospel so they can believe and be saved.

Exell (s.a:714-716) shows that "preaching the gospel" in Mark 16:15 encompasses "all church work for the spread of the gospel". No limits are placed on where or whom, therefore it also includes children, even of believers. This command includes parents teaching their

young and "influencing their own households". This is also done through an exemplary life for "every prayerful, earnest, godly life is a sermon". Jarvis and Johnson (2014:540) contend that the preaching of the gospel entails much more than simply leading someone to faith in Christ. It entails all aspects of life being brought into conformity to the message of the gospel.

In Acts 2:14-36 we find Peter preaching the gospel to the multitude in Jerusalem, just after the Holy Spirit had been poured out (Acts 2:1-13). Upon hearing the gospel, the crowd was deeply moved (Acts 2:37) and asked how they should respond. Their desire to respond proves their belief in and acceptance of Peter's sermon. Peter tells them to repent and be baptised. Upon doing so they will receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He says that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for them and their children, as well as all who are far off, all those whom God will call to Himself. The promise is multigenerational and therefore, the prerequisites of repentance and baptism is by implication also multigenerational, for all who hear and believe the gospel, just as for the original hearers. In this regard Keener (1993) writes that "this universal outpouring of the Spirit was reserved in the Old Testament for the end time and was expected to continue throughout that time", referring to the church age. Barry, Mangum, Brown, Heiser, Custis, Ritzema and Bomar (2016) explain that "for your children" (Acts 2:39) refers to the message reaching all generations to come.

According to Radmacher, Allen and House (1999:1370-1371), first-century fathers had tremendous influence in their homes. In most cases when the father came to faith in Christ, his children would also surrender to Christ as Saviour and Lord (Acts 2:26-39). It is further shown that after their baptism, the new believers had to be trained in the doctrine of the apostles, fellowship of the church, the Lord's Supper and corporate prayer (Acts 2:41-47). By implication this would mean that fathers who became believers would teach their wives and children to also follow Christ, by word and by example, in adherence to Peter's message that the salvation experience is also for their children.

These principles of the doctrine of the apostles, Christian fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer are all part of the "teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you", i.e. discipleship – forming and growing faith. An interesting aspect is found in verses 46 and 47 of Acts 2, where it is stated that, "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God…" Gangel (1998:32) writes that God grows the church through believers who worship, work and witness together. "Let's not miss the order – first godly relationship with each other, then growth." It is in the everyday life and relationships that growth occurs, also spiritual growth. This would especially be true in family relationships – faith is formed and grows through discipleship. Arnold (2016) and Swindoll (2016:69-70)

similarly highlight the importance of "fellowship" – the type of fellowship of the early church caused them to grow in favour with the people and more and more people became believers – first relationship then growth or growth through relationship, i.e. discipleship.

From the above we deduce the following: The gospel should be preached in word and deed to everyone (Mark 16:15) – this includes first and foremost one's own children. Faith is formed in the hearts of hearers by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 10:14-17). Those who respond to the gospel message through faith and repentance become followers of Christ. Within the New Testament context, baptism is the first act of testifying of one's faith. Thereafter, new believers should be taught to obey Christ, i.e. to follow Him daily by persevering in the doctrines of the apostles, the fellowship of believers, the Lord's Supper and prayer – the foundational aspects through which faith grows. This is the process of faith formation and growth through discipleship, occurring through godly relationships and fellowship within the Christian community of which the family unit is the ultimate foundation. As the church developed, after New Testament times, covenant baptism became the norm in many church traditions, whereafter children are to be taught to follow Christ by persevering in the doctrines of the Bible, the fellowship of believers, prayer and after their public profession of faith, also in the Lord's Supper.

5.5. Parental responsibility

In the previous section a theological foundation was provided for faith formation through discipleship. This section builds on this principle, but focuses more on parental responsibility in the task of faith formation in the youth through discipleship. It does this by discussing the following: (1) Biblical sources, including Moses, Asaph and Paul; (2) early church sources, including the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers; and (3) Reformation and post-reformation sources.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (Moses), Psalm 78:1-8 (Asaph) and Ephesians 6:1-4 (Paul) were specifically chosen for representing the law of Moses, the writings and the New Testament views of parental responsibility with regards to raising children for the Lord. There are other parts of Scripture that could also have been used, but for the purposes of this study these provide sufficient principles, offering themes that line up well with those already determined in Chapters 2 to 4.

The rest of the section provides an overview of the main principles highlighted throughout the church's history.

5.5.1. Biblical sources

5.5.1.1. Moses

In Deuteronomy 6:4-5 we find what is called the *Shema* from the Hebrew word for "hear": "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". This was referred to by Jesus as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-30). Moses continued by saying that this commandment should be on Israel's hearts (Deut. 6:6), but they should also impress it on the hearts of their children (Deut. 6:7).

While Israel had the Levitical priestly order, who was commanded to perform the temple duties as well as to teach the people the Word of God (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10), it was the parents who were commanded to teach their children the Word of God and to love God with all their heart, soul and strength. In regards to Deuteronomy 6:7, Merrill (2017:275) writes that parents must repeat the words of the *Shema* as well as the rest of God's instruction to their children with "strong intentionality that issues in constant instruction by word and deed about devotion to God""

The reason the priests are not solely and primarily responsible for teaching the next generation about God is because they often only see the children once a week and constant instruction is necessary, which only parents can provide, being the ones who spend the most time with their children. The role of the priests was much the same as the role of the church today, namely to equip God's people for their service (Eph. 4:11-12), which in this case are parents who are equipped weekly to teach their children on a daily basis.

In discussing Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Brown (2008) shows that religious education should be both formal and informal. He applies these principles to today by saying that "this obligation of spiritual education still lies on Christian parents and needs to be taken very seriously". Barry *et al.* (2016) write that this revelation of God, His laws and statutes should be constantly talked about and often repeated, implying that parents themselves should know the content of their faith very well. These should also be taught throughout every situation and all parts of life, i.e. God's people "are to make the laws of God the focal point of life".

Parents are first commanded to love God themselves, with their whole being (Deut. 6:5-6). Their love and devotion to God should encompass their entire lives, even down to the most mundane tasks – their entire lives should be saturated with God and His Word (Deut. 6:7-9) (Block, 2012; McConville, 1994:207). In this way children are taught, in word and deed, to also love God and have Him saturate their lives as well. This is true discipleship – living for and teaching about God throughout everyday life – by which faith is formed and developed.

This task is the primary responsibility of parents, while the church fulfils the role of equipping parents for this task.

5.5.1.2. Asaph

> …we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
> his power, and the wonders he has done. (Ps. 78:4)

Psalm 78 is called "a *maskil* of Asaph". Verse 1 starts with the words: "My people, hear my teaching…" The word *maskil* is Hebrew for "insight" or "instruction", hence the psalm is also often called a didactic psalm (Warstler, 2017:844). Asaph instructs the nation of Israel by means of a history lesson on the faithfulness of God. The psalm starts with what Israel heard from their fathers (verse 3), but also says that it shall be taught to the next generation (verse 4). In fact, it was God's commandment to make God's goodness and faithfulness known to subsequent generations (verse 5). Verse 6 makes it clear on whom the responsibility rests to teach the subsequent generations: "so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children". Asaph says that the primary responsibility of teaching children about God, His law, and His mighty deeds are the parents – not the king, the priests or the prophets.

The reasons why generation upon generation should be diligently taught God's law and about His goodness and faithfulness is given explicitly in verses 6 through 8 – so that the next generation will:
- know God, His mighty deeds, and His faithfulness;
- know and keep His laws and instructions;
- put their trust in Him;
- not forget His deeds;
- not become like their ancestors who were rebellious, disloyal and unfaithful and
- give their hearts to God and remain faithful to Him.

This speaks of a relationship with God based on trust in Him and His Word and promises, due to Him proving Himself faithful throughout history, i.e. faith formation and development through parents discipling their children to know, trust and follow God.

5.5.1.3. Paul

> Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the
> training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

According to Wallace (2017:1879), Fowl (2012:194-195) and Fee and Hubbard (2011:674), it is parents' responsibility to discipline and to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, i.e. take responsibility for their children's faith formation. While this passage addresses the important role of specifically fathers, as the head and priest of the household, in rearing children in the training and instruction of the Lord, it does not exclude mothers. Vaughan (2002:121), while affirming the focus on fathers in verse 4, explains that the Greek word used for "fathers" in this passage can also refer in a broader sense to both parents, as in Hebrews 11:23. This view furthermore fits nicely with the context, since in Ephesians 6:1-3 the Apostle Paul had been addressing both parents.

Vaughan (2002:121) continues to show that the Greek word *ektrephō* (ἐκτρέφω), translated here as "bring them up", refers to the formation and development of character, of the nurturing of the whole person into maturity in all aspects. "Instruction", also translated as "admonition", conveys the concept encompassing correction and warning. Both "bring them up" and "instruction" should occur in terms of a relationship with the Lord. "It is training and correction administered by the parents, but proceeding from the Lord." Klein, Garland, Still and Rupprechtet (2006) explain that "training" includes correction through action, while "instruction" relates to training by words.

With regards to Ephesians 6:4, Stott (1979:245-250) contends that while delegating some of the responsibility of rearing children for the Lord to church and school, the primary responsibility remains that of Christian parents themselves and they should "jealously guard their responsibility. It is their own God-given task; nobody can adequately or completely replace them". He adds that parents should take the time and make the effort with their children, without which many problems arise later in their children's lives.

Foulkes (1989:169-170) calls the bringing up children for the Lord "the highest duty of parents". He cites Dale when he says that "parents should care more for the loyalty of their children to Christ than for anything besides" including their health, intellectual development, material prosperity, social position or their exemption from great sorrows or misfortune.

Paul addresses both parents and children directly in Ephesians 6:1-4, suggesting that children were regarded as part of the congregation and also attended services with their parents, as families, so unlike many age-segregated services often found today.

Nurturing in the instruction or teaching of the Lord through word and deed is nothing other than making disciples, i.e. discipleship, which the Apostle Paul makes very clear in this passage is the responsibility of the parents, especially fathers as the head and priest of the household.

5.5.2. Early church sources

5.5.2.1. Ante-Nicene Church Fathers

> …let us train up the young men in the fear of God; let us direct our
> wives to that which is good…Let your children be partakers of true
> Christian training… (Clement of Rome, 1885:11).

Clement of Rome wrote the above in his first epistle to the Corinthians. The focus is on fathers teaching their household to follow Christ, hence the mention of wives and also children and the youth, in this case specifically young men. Children partaking in Christian training may include receiving catechism by the church and even through public schooling, but it is still the primary responsibility of parents, especially fathers, to see to it that the training their children receive is soundly Christian.

Following Paul's admonition in Ephesians 6:4, both Polycarp of Smyrna (69-156AD) (1885:34), in his epistle to the Philippians, and Ignatius of Antioch (died 110AD) (1885a:81), in his epistle to the Philadelphians, also taught that rearing children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord is the primary responsibility of parents. We find this same principle in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202AD) (1885:441), the Shepherd of Hermas (Roberts, Donaldson & Coxe, 1885:11, 35, 39), Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD) (1885:294), Tertullian (155-220AD) (1885:469) and Cyprian of Carthage (200-258AD) (1886:481).

In the writings of the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers (Ignatius of Antioch, 1885b:92; 1885c:96) children are addressed alongside their parents, again suggesting that children attended church with their parents.

The early church fathers did not provide very clear instructions on how to disciple children specifically, but the primary obligation of parents in nurturing their children and bringing them up in the fear and instruction of the Lord is repeated by nearly every early church father.

5.5.2.2. Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers

Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD) (1887:412) write how true fathers desire and indeed endeavour that all members of their households, including specifically the children, should know, worship and follow God.

John Chrysostom (347-407AD) (1889b:225) admonishes those who neglect corporate worship, especially fathers for not bringing their children to church. He urges them to return to church with their wives and children. In his homily on Matthew 18:7 John Chrysostom (1888:371) asserts that some have become so busy with life and chasing after money and

success that they have neglected the most important responsibility, namely the salvation and spiritual wellbeing of their children.

John Chrysostom also emphasises in his homily on Ephesians 6 (1889a:154-155) the importance of parents, especially fathers, teaching their children the Scriptures to shape them as Christians. He contrasts the importance of education in secular work with that of education in the Scriptures, showing how knowledge of the Scriptures have eternal value while that of secular education only has temporal value. By this he encourages Christian parents to get their priorities in order by focusing on what is more important first.

Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340AD) (1890:265-266) writes how Ammonius was brought up as a Christian by Christian parents and then states the following of Origen: "for the doctrine of Christ was taught to Origen by his parents." Not only do we see that Eusebius held the view that parents have the responsibility to raise their children in and for the Lord, but to also teach them doctrine.

Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373AD) (1892:510) writes that fathers ought to raise their children well and be diligent in teaching them "in accordance with his own upright conduct". This highlights the importance of not only educating with words, but also, and more importantly, by example.

Jerome (347-420AD) (1893:192) contends that neglecting children's spiritual upbringing after they have been promised to God through their baptism is sacrilege. Regardless of one's view of baptism, Jerome's argument holds true - whether one promises one's child to God through baptism or dedication. Children are a gift from God (Ps. 127:3) and they belong to Him (Matt. 19:14). God only entrusts them to their parents to raise them up for God, in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Basil of Caesarea (330-379) (1895:130) highlights the importance of showing love to one's children not only through words, but also through prayer. This, according to Basil, distinguishes Christian love from that of the world.

From the Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers we find that parents, and especially fathers, have the responsibility of leading their families in the knowledge and worship of God - not only in words, but also by example. Parents are admonished to become active and faithful church members themselves, as well as to bring their children with them to church. Teaching the Scriptures and Christian doctrine to children should be of higher priority than secular education or material success. Prayer is highlighted as one of the best ways to express Christian love.

5.5.2.3. The Ecumenical Councils

Schaff and Wace (1900:98) show how the Synod at Gangra (365AD) regarded parents who neglect instructing their own children in piety and the fear of the Lord as anathema, i.e. cursed.

At the Council of Chalcedon (451AD), Schaff and Wace (1900:163) record, the council stated that believers have the responsibility to teach their children the doctrines of the holy Scriptures.

The church's first ecumenical councils did not really provide guidelines for parents in raising their children in the training and instruction of the Lord, other than mentioning the responsibility of parents to educate their children with regards to Christian doctrine. It is noted, however, how seriously the church fathers viewed parents neglecting this parental responsibility.

5.5.3. Reformation and post-Reformation sources

5.5.3.1. Martin Luther (1483-1546)

According to Luther (1896:63), it is the chief duty of parents to "first bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God" and then have them engage in secular study. Luther goes so far as to say that if parents neglect this duty, they are "at risk of losing divine grace".

Luther (1896:155-156) further exhorts parents to bring up their children in Christian doctrine as well as the "right understanding of it". He explains that it is necessary to teach children the Scriptures and it's doctrines, prayer, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments and the creeds from a young age, so they can be "accustomed to them from their youth upwards". He admonishes fathers to know they are bound by God's command to teach their children these principles and practices or to see that they are taught these in the correct manner.

5.5.3.2. John Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin (2011:410) writes that children are entrusted to parents by God – to nourish, govern and teach them, i.e. to raise them in the training, discipline, counsel and admonition of the Lord. He adds that the youth should be guided in wisdom and experience, also by example.

Calvin (2011:1461) also contends that it is the parents' responsibility to teach their children doctrine, with the help of the church, through catechism. It is interesting that Calvin does not see catechism as the primary responsibility of the church, but rather that of the parents as he writes that "if this discipline were in effect today, it would certainly arouse some slothful

parents, who carelessly neglect the instruction of their children as a matter of no concern to them…"

In his commentary on Psalm 78, Calvin (2010:231-233) writes that fathers ought to know the doctrine of the law themselves and diligently instruct their children in it. By doing so the fathers are instrumental in "maintaining the pure worship of God" as well as providing for their children's salvation. This by no means suggests that parents can save their children, for salvation is of God through the working of the Holy Spirit. God however does not need prayer to bring about His will, but chooses to use it as a means to bring about His will. So He does not need parents to save their children, yet choose to use them in the process of salvation of their children. What a privilege and responsibility parents have, to instruct their children in the Word of God that can lead to their salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

5.5.3.3. John Wesley (1703-1791)

Wesley (1903:96-97) considers the greatest enemy of religion, i.e. doing God's will, is self-will. Self-will is the root of every sin. Heaven and hell depend on submitting to God's will or following self-will. He contends that it is the duty of parents to subdue wilfulness in their children, thereby working together with God in the saving of their souls. He writes that a parent who indulges the will of his/her children "does the devil's work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable; and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body forever".

In contrast to this, Wesley (1903:97-98) recounts how his parents, especially his mother, raised him and his siblings for the Lord. He writes how they were taught the Lord's Prayer as soon as they could speak and how they had to repeat it every morning and every evening. As they grew older personal prayer was added to the Lord's Prayer. As their memories could bear, short catechisms and portions of Scripture were also added. Furthermore, the importance of distinguishing the Lord's day from the other days of the week was also emphasised from an early age. They were furthermore taught to read by using the Scriptures. Worshipping God through hymns and Psalms was also part of their daily routine.

5.5.3.4. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Spurgeon (2009a:2) deem families the main focus area of where catechisms should be taught, placing the responsibility on parents to teach their children about God. Spurgeon (cited by Krause, 2014) states:

> Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that Sunday school is
> intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most

natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Spurgeon (2009b:99-102) contends that children can be saved from a young age. He would have them "taught all the great doctrines of truth without a solitary exception". He argues that sometimes children have a greater grasp of theological truths during their youthful years, due to their innocent simplicity of faith. Neglecting to diligently teach children and the youth the truth leads to them only being taught error by the world and the enemy.

Not only does Spurgeon encourage doctrine be taught and the use of catechisms, but he also highlights the importance of parents praying with and for their children (Spurgeon, 2009b:19, 65, 71-73). He states that "you will see your children converted when God gives you to individualise their cases…and with the door closed to pray with them and for them" (Spurgeon, 2009b:154).

Spurgeon (2009b:32-33) further shows how important godly example is in the raising of children and the youth. He states that this godly example should not only be on Sundays, but every day and in all situations.

Not only should parents teach their children the Scriptures and the Christian doctrines, according to Spurgeon (1873:710-711), it is also their responsibility to introduce their children to the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ and the "principles and plan of salvation". He writes that it provides great joy to Christian parents to perceive that their children not only understand the gospel, but that they also accept it and receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, especially when salvation becomes evident in the children's lives.

5.6.   Biblical examples of discipling parents

In Section 5.5 it was shown that parents are primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children. This was demonstrated by means of Scripture as well as the writings of the early church fathers, the Reformers, post-Reformers, as well as more recent commentary sources.

This section focuses on providing Biblical examples of parents and primary caregivers and how they approached the faith formation of the children in their care. The focus is on (1) Lois and Eunice with Timothy; (2) Joseph and Mary with Jesus; and (3) Eli with Samuel. Though there are many more Biblical examples of parents parenting their children, these three cases provide sufficient practical principles for the sake of this study.

5.6.1. Eli with Samuel

> The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. (1 Sam. 3:19-20).

Samuel's own parents did not raise him. They only saw him once a year when they came to the tabernacle for the annual sacrifice (1 Sam. 2:19). Samuel was raised by the high priest Eli (1 Sam. 1:25-28; 1 Sam. 2:11; 1 Sam. 3:1). Eli was thus the father figure for Samuel, the one who raised him and taught him. Some positives we find from the father-son relationship between Eli and Samuel are as follows:

- Voice of God: Eli taught Samuel how to recognise and respond to the voice of the Lord (1 Sam. 3:8-9), i.e. how to get to know the Lord.
- Priestly duties: Eli taught Samuel the priestly duties (1 Sam. 2:11; 1 Sam. 2:18). According to Beyer (2017:414), the word "ministering" used in both verses 11 and 18 of 1 Samuel 2 refers to priestly ministry in the tabernacle and later temple, as is also found in Deuteronomy 10:8 and 1 Kings 8:11. Eli taught Samuel how to serve the Lord.

Eli's training created the opportunity for Samuel to meet and know the Lord. This led to Samuel becoming one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, as seen in 1 Samuel 3:19-20.

Yet we also see a negative effect Eli had on Samuel when it comes to the discipline of one's children. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were godless and wicked sons (1 Sam. 2:12-17). Even though the Lord warned Eli to strongly discipline his sons, he did not do so (1 Sam. 2:27-36; 1 Sam. 3:17-18). Their wickedness and sin were so great that God destroyed them as well as their father (1 Sam. 4:17-22). This bad example set by Eli had a similarly negative impact on Samuel's in raising and disciplining of his sons, who turned away from God. Their sin was similar to that of Eli's sons (1 Sam. 8:1-3) (Beyer, 2017:420; Radmacher *et al*., 1999:356). This serves to prove that in many ways, good or bad, children may become like their parents.

5.6.2. Joseph and Mary with Jesus

> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. (Luke 4:16)

There are beautiful spiritual habits that Jesus displayed during His earthly life. Many of these habits can be traced back to the way Joseph and Mary raised Him. Not much is said about Jesus' childhood or about the life of Joseph or Mary, but we do get a number of glimpses from Scripture from which we can draw certain inferences that are relevant to this study. Some of these habits include:

- Frequent prayer: One of the most beautiful prayers found in the Bible is that of Mary (Luke 1:46-56). Her prayer displays a deep and trusting personal relationship with God as well as a deep knowledge of the Scriptures (Liefeld & Pao, 2009). One of the things the gospels mentions the most about Jesus is how often He prayed (Luke 5:16; Heb. 5:7). Jesus' prayers were similar to Mary's – also showing a very deep and personal relationship with God (John 17:1-26). It was this familiarity with God that caused the disciples to also want to learn to pray like Jesus (Luke 11:1-4).

- Surrender to God: When Mary was visited by the angel, her response (Luke 1:38) was one of self-surrender to God's will: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Bible, 1982). Edwards (2015:50) states that "she surrenders herself absolutely to God's will". We find the same self-surrender in Jesus when He prays to the Father (Matt. 26:39): "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will".

- Obedience: Joseph was a just and faithful man (Matt. 1:19). He was quick and diligent to obey God (Matt. 1:20-25; Matt. 2:13-14, 19-21). We find Jesus obedient to His parents (Luke 2:51) and later also obedient to God (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8).

- Religious faithfulness: Joseph and Mary were faithful in their religious practices. They circumcised Jesus on the eighth day (Luke 2:21) and they brought the firstborn offering (Luke 2:22-24). They also had the habit of attending the feasts (Luke 2:41). According to Swindoll (2017:83), while women and children were not required to go up to Jerusalem for the feasts, devout women did attend, indicating Mary's devotion to God. We find the same religious faithfulness in Jesus (Matt. 5:17). He had the habit of worshipping at the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Butler (2000:63) relates this habit to Jesus' parents' influence.

Jesus' parents raised Him in a godly home with Biblical principles. They not only taught Jesus through their words, but also through their actions – they lived exemplary lives. The results of His godly upbringing are beautifully described in Luke 2:40: "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him". Their personal devotion, surrendered lives, obedience and religious faithfulness to God also shone through the life and ministry of Jesus. Bock's (1994) words on Luke 4:16, namely "the piety of Jesus' parents continues in Jesus", hold true for all the habits described above.

5.6.3. Lois and Eunice with Timothy

> I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother
> Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you
> also. (2 Tim. 1:5)

Paul encourages the young Timothy by reminding him of the sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother, Lois, then in his mother Eunice and now also in him. It is a beautiful example of the power of lived faith and its capacity to transfer across generations. We find four elements of salvific, livid faith in this verse. Biblical livid faith is:

- Sincere:

    It is the Greek word *ἀνυπόκριτος* which, according to Thomas (1998), means "genuine", "sincere" or "without hypocrisy". *The amplified Bible* says that this type of faith is "the leaning of your entire personality on God in Christ in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness" (Bible, 1987). It speaks of a life saturated with God and wholly surrendered to Him.

- Indwelling:

    The Greek word is *ἐνοικέω*. It is the same word used in Romans 8:11 and 2 Timothy 1:14, where Paul writes about the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer. This word refers to the permanent indwelling of something rather than an occasional occurrence (Spencer, 2014:82; Yarbrough, 2018:353). The type of faith Lois, Eunice and Timothy had was a permanent indwelling faith.

- Visible:

    How did Paul know it was the same faith in Lois, Eunice and now in Timothy? Their faith became evident in their love and devotion for God and the spiritual fruit they produced by and through their actions (Exell, s.a.:8).

- Contagious:

    The faith of Eunice was also caught by her son Timothy – as the saying goes: "more is caught than taught." The faith of Eunice and Lois was so obvious that Timothy could not help but be strongly influenced thereby. This is the power of livid faith being expressed in everyday life.

Spencer (2014:83) brings 2 Timothy 1:5 in direct relation to 2 Timothy 3:14-15 when explaining how this sincere faith was transferred from Lois to Eunice and then also to Timothy, namely through careful instruction in the Holy Scriptures – in Paul's words: "and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures".

It seems that Timothy was not only taught the basic content of Scripture, but also its application through doctrine, since Paul continues that "…which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" in referring to the doctrine of salvation. This inference is made also based on Paul's focus specifically on exhorting Timothy about sound doctrine throughout the two epistles written to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:10; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:3) as well as the direct context (2 Tim. 3:7, 13-17; 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

When Radmacher *et al.* (1999:1610) comment on 2 Timothy 1:5 as follows: "The prayers, witness, and faith of his godly mother and grandmother were central factors in the spiritual development of Timothy." The view that Lois and Eunice lived a life filled with prayer is not a farfetched idea. Having sincere, genuine faith in God presupposes a deep and personal relationship with Him. Relationships start and grow through communication. God communicates with human beings primarily through His Word, the Bible, while human beings communicate with God through prayer.

Furthermore, according to Yarbrough (2018:425-426), the verb used for "learned" in 2 Timothy 3:14 is the Greek word *μανθάνω*, which is cognate to the noun for "disciple", *μαθητής* in Greek. This word, *μανθάνω*, is also used in Romans 16:17 when Paul refers to doctrine that is learned and in Ephesians 4:20 when he refers to a way of life that is learned. Philippians 4:9 puts it beautifully: "Whatever you have *learned* or *received* or *heard* from me, or *seen* in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you". The focus here is therefore on discipleship – learning through systematic teaching and example. Timothy's faith was formed and developed through the discipleship he received from his mother and grandmother, as well as from the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. 3:10).

The effects of Timothy's deeply devout upbringing are astounding. He became an elder and pastor of the church at a young age (1 Tim. 4:12), able to disciple others and teach them regarding the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2). He even became Paul's successor, being regarded very highly by Paul as a workman for the gospel (1 Cor. 16:10).

5.7. Theological reflection on parents discipling their children

It has been determined that faith formation occurs through discipleship. Discipleship is leading someone to faith in Christ, initiating them into the body of Christ and then teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. This teaching includes both *formal education* as well as *modelling*, which is clear from Matthew 28:20 itself: "*teaching* them to *obey* everything I have commanded you…" It is not simply the transfer of information, i.e. teaching, but also an example to be followed, i.e. modelling. Wilkins (2016) states: "The goal

of instructing new disciples of Jesus is obedience to what He has commanded, so that their lives increasingly become like their Master."

The Great Commission Jesus gave to His church is to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15) and making those that receive it through faith His disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The church to whom this command was given consists of families, which in turn consists of parents and their children.

Jesus says in Acts 1:8: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth". Jesus' original listeners found themselves in Jerusalem and He was thus telling them to start making disciples where they were and from there to go further outwards unto the ends of the earth, making disciples as and where they go. The same principle is just as valid for every Christian today – to start to make disciples where they are. The best starting place is home, one's own family, one's spouse and children.

Discipleship entails more than simply teaching what it is right – as shown, it is a life that is duplicated in the one that is being discipled. The disciple will become like the disciple-maker. Children should follow the example set by their parents, which includes the realm of their spiritual lives. This is sadly not always the case. Often children choose not to follow Christ, despite their parents' every attempt to lead them to Jesus. Parents still however have the responsibility to do everything in their power, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to teach about Jesus and to set the example.

It was shown that parents are primarily responsible for the task of discipling their children in reference to Biblical, early church, Reformation and post-Reformation sources.

From the Biblical sources it was indicated that parents should bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), which includes nurturing the whole person to maturity, loving discipline and correction and teaching. This is the highest calling of parents and should enjoy a higher priority than any secular training or development.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 highlights the relationship aspect of discipleship, which entails parents themselves loving God with their whole being and then teaching their children to love God with their whole being. It also highlights how everyday life should be saturated with God and His Word.

Psalm 78:1-9 also highlights that parents are primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children. Relationship with God is again the focus – to know God, His mighty deeds and His faithfulness as well as to obey Him, to trust Him and to remain faithful to Him.

The early church fathers highlight the importance of fathers to take responsibility as spiritual leaders of their homes, parents setting the example, catechism/Sunday school, church attendance, doctrine, personal evangelism of children, Bible study and prayer.

Important elements surfacing from the Reformation and post-Reformation sources include the importance of spiritual education over secular education, teaching in doctrine, Bible study, prayer, the sacraments, catechism, a godly example and personal evangelism of children, as well as how these are the primary responsibility of parents.

The Biblical examples of Lois and Eunice with Timothy, Joseph and Mary with Jesus and Eli with Samuel highlight how faith and faith practices are transferred from parents to their children through sincere, indwelling, visible and contagious faith; careful instruction in the Scriptures and doctrine; prayer; personal testimony; godly example; church attendance; and obedience and faithfulness to God. These principles should be consistent spiritual habits in parents.

The example of Eli and Samuel also highlights the negative effects a lack of these principles can have and how, just as with godly principles and habits, bad habits and sins can also transfer to one's children.

5.8.   Summary

In this chapter a Biblical perspective on faith formation was formulated. It was established that faith formation occurs through discipleship. Discipleship is the making of disciples, i.e. leading others to and teaching them to follow Jesus. This entails more than simply the transfer of knowledge – it includes an exemplary life that is being duplicated through the message of salvation, the teaching of Scripture, Christian doctrine, devotions, prayer, church attendance, godly relationships and friendships.

It was determined, by looking at Scripture as well as church history that it is not the church that is primarily responsible for the discipleship of children, i.e. faith formation, but the parents. The church must fulfil a complementary role, equipping parents for their task as well reinforcing what parents teach their children - be it through catechism, youth gatherings, summer camps, etc. Parents should never abdicate their role to the church or any other institution, for God will ultimately hold them responsible for the task of discipling their children.

Some of the discipleship principles and spiritual habits that parents should strive for include:

1. Personal evangelism (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16)
2. Relationship with God (Deut. 6:4-5; Ps. 78:7)
3. Surrendered life, saturated with God (Luke 1:38; Matt. 26:39; 2 Tim. 1:5; Deut. 6:4-9)
4. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 42)
5. Teaching and modelling (Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; Luke 2:41)
6. Doctrine (Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:15)
7. Church attendance and participation (Acts 2:42, 46; Luke 4:16)
8. Bible study (2 Tim. 3:15; Ps. 78:5; Deut. 6:6-9)
9. Prayer (Acts 2:42)
10. Catechism (2 Tim. 3:14-15)

In the next chapter the findings from the previous chapters are combined to formulate an answer for the pragmatic task of answering the question: "How are we going to respond?"

CHAPTER 6: FAITH FORMATION IN YOUTHS: PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter 5) the *normative task* of answering the question "what ought to be going on in Christian homes with regards to faith formation in the home?" was addressed. A Christian perspective of faith formation was presented from Scripture and church history, showing how parents are primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children, as well as providing Scriptural basis for religious practices that facilitate faith formation.

The focus of this chapter is the *pragmatic task* of answering the question, "how might we respond?", whereby strategies of action are determined that can influence the current situation (Osmer, 2008:4) or, more in terms of this study, whereby practical theological strategies are determined that can assist parents with regards to faith formation of teenagers in order to challenge the youth's exit from the church.

The primary aim of this chapter is to provide strategies and guidelines for parents with regards to faith formation of their children. Guidelines for the church as the principle support structure for parents in faith formation are also addressed, albeit not in as much depth since the focus of this study is primarily on the parents and their role in the faith formation of their children.

6.2. Principles and strategies for parents

6.2.1. Parental responsibility

It has been established through the literature study (Chapter 2), the focus group interviews (Chapters 3-4) and the Scriptural study (Chapter 5) that parents are primarily responsible for the faith formation of children and teens. Other influences such as family, the church, social circles, school and university play a secondary and complementary role.

Many parents might feel inadequate to perform this role effectively for various reasons, e.g. insufficient know-how or time constraints. While the feelings of inadequacy are natural, parents can be encouraged that they themselves are in the best position to fulfil this role.

According to Melton and Dean (2009:47-56), God has commanded parents to disciple their children as part of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). God will never command us to do something without providing the means, guidance and resources to do so.

As discussed in Section 2.3.2.5, God has provided parents with availability, the unique parent-child relationship, intimate knowledge of their children, as well as natural boldness. He also provides His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), His Spirit (John 16:13), His presence (Matt. 28:20) and His church (Eph. 4:11-13) to assist parents in this task. With these tools and help at their disposal parents have everything they need to take up the responsibility of discipling their children, thereby assisting in their faith formation and development. In this regard Bettis (2016:6) writes that Christ's desire is for parents "to do all they can to raise regenerated, obedient, God-glorifying disciples using all the means of grace possible".

If parents neglect this crucial responsibility, they increase the chances of their children being lost to the world and even for eternity. As was seen in the literature study and the focus group interviews, if parents do not teach their children to follow Christ, the world, secular media and the enemy, will teach them not to.

6.2.2.   Rationalisations, objections and fears

Among the rationalisations that lead to excuses, objections and fears parents often have when it comes to discipling their children include:

1. Feelings of inadequacy

    Parents often feel they lack the training to disciple their children. Melton and Dean (2009:63) write that no trained professional can disciple a child better than the parents and all that a parent needs is a personal relationship with Jesus, a Bible and prayer.

    If one does not know how to lead one's child to personal faith in Christ, most churches offer different evangelism and discipleship courses that teach how to lead others to Christ and a growing faith. This is explained in greater detail in Section 6.2.7.4.

    Some parents dread difficult questions with regards to faith, fearing that they will not have the answers to these questions. There is no shame in admitting that one does not know the answer. These questions can be addressed as a family, where parents and their children search for the answers together. This helps the family members grow in their relationships with each other and it grows the faith of both the parents and the children. More on this can be found in Section 6.2.7.8.

2. Time constraints

    Many parents feel they do not have the time to disciple their children, due to both parents having full-time jobs, the extra-curricular activities of the children, etc. It has been shown (Section 2.3.4.9) that regardless of busy work and school schedules, parents still spend

an average of 3000 hours per year with their children, including travelling to and from school and other extra-curricular activities, mealtimes and recreation time.

The key is not necessarily in finding more time, but instead to use the time that is spent together more constructively by teaching about God when rising in the morning, when together at home, when travelling and when going to bed, according to Deuteronomy 6:7. Mealtimes, especially, are wonderful opportunities to spend time together as a family and to discuss faith, conduct family devotions and pray with and for each other.

Some parents may be able to take more serious measures like working from home, starting a family business or even home schooling their children, thereby creating more opportunities for spending time with their children.

In the end it comes down to priorities. Much precious time is wasted on less important things like social media, multimedia and other activities that exclude one's family rather than involving them. Parents need to look at their priorities and realise that there is nothing more important than their personal relationship with God and secondly, their relationship with their children.

3. "I turned out fine without my parents discipling me"

There exceptions to the rule. Some people come from families where there is very little to no discipleship, or even no religion at all, and then they find the Lord and their lives are radically changed. This is however not the outcome in most cases. As various studies reflect (Melton & Dean, 2009:xvii; Bettis, 2016:9-10; McDowell & Wallace, 2019:34-36; White, 2017:21-32), most young people leave the church once they graduate from high school and usually never to return. The question is whether Christian parents are willing to take the risk that their children become part of the statistics of those who left the church and/or the Christian faith or are they going to accept the responsibility and do everything in their power to help their children find the Lord and learn to follow Him.

6.2.3. Parental relationship with God

Before parents can focus on their children's faith formation and on leading and teaching them to know and follow Jesus Christ, they themselves need to have a living and growing personal relationship with God. One cannot lead someone else where one has not been personally. Parents cannot expect to have a positive spiritual influence on their children if they themselves do not know or follow the Lord.

Parents who do not know the Lord personally need to realise their own sinfulness (Rom. 3:10-20, 23), the end result of their sin (Rom. 6:23; James 1:13-15; Rev. 21:8), their need for the Saviour (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), but also that God loves them and do not want them to perish (John 3:16-17). They need to repent (Acts 17:30-31), call on the Name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13), receive Jesus as their personal Saviour (John 1:12-13) and surrender their lives to Him as Lord (Acts 2:36-39; Col. 2:6). Then they need to follow Him daily and grow in their own faith through study of the Word of God, prayer, church attendance and participation, and applying what they learn to their daily lives.

This does not mean that parents need to be perfect or super mature Christians to be able to disciple their children, only that they should at least be a few steps ahead, leading their children as they themselves grow in their faith and relationship with God.

6.2.4. Parent-child relationship

Research (Barna, 2007:27-34; Bengtson, 2013:71-98; Bettis, 2016:32, 93-117; McDowell & Wallace, 2019:63-78; Melton & Dean, 2009:71-79, 107-119) has shown the importance of a warm, loving and affirming parent-child relationship in the transfer of faith across generations. "Truth is best learned and sustained in relationship" (McDowell & Wallace, 2019:64). Guidelines for building parent-child relationships include the following:

1. *Involvement:* Melton and Dean (2009:95-106) contend that the greatest gift one can give one's children is one's time – not just quality time, as worldly values promote, but quantity time. They show how the places where and activities on which children spend their time will shape their lives. Building relationships takes time, both quality and quantity. Parents should remember that being parents is their primary job.

2. *Authenticity:* Subconsciously parents think they should give the impression that they have all the answers and live perfect lives, otherwise their children will not look up to them. Children are intelligent: They know when their parents are not authentic. Hypocrisy builds distrust rather than trust. Being honest when one does not know the answer, confessing when one falters and taking responsibility for one's mistakes teaches children important life lessons, builds trust and accountability. They learn to take responsibility for their actions, confess when they falter, move on from failure, repent when they sin, seek answers when in doubt and be authentic themselves.

3. *Hobbies* that build relationship rather than mindless entertainment: Parents should consider the activities their family is involved in – do they build relationship or are they pulling the family apart. Focus on outdoor games like baseball, hide-and-seek, hopscotch, etc. or indoor activities like board games, puzzles, colouring, etc. Use these as opportunities to also discuss the things of God.

4. *Discipline:* Biblical, loving, understanding and caring discipline not only corrects bad behaviour, but also builds character, trust and relationship. Healthy boundaries, rules and appropriate consequences for transgressing these, provide children with safety and security.

5. *Warm relationship:* Children need to feel loved, accepted, wanted and appreciated by their parents, in all circumstances, even when they mess up and need to be disciplined. Parents should make it easy and natural for their children to be obedient.

6. *Focused:* Parents should be focused on connecting to each child's heart, to really get to know them – their dreams, hopes, fears, interests, etc. The main focus should not be on behaviour management, but transformation of the heart.

7. *Communicate:* Constant, intentional and purposeful communication is key. Family conversations focused specifically on Biblical principles and values is a powerful way to inculcate faith in children. Communication should be calm, loving and caring. Even when disciplining children parents should never insult, belittle or degrade their children, but should always build them up and encourage them. When children do wrong, address the issue without belittling the child's character. Parents should also learn to really listen to their children – quick to listen, listen well, question for clarity, think and pray before responding.

8. *Faith activities:* As a family engage in faith activities that model the integration of faith into everyday life. Bible study, worship, prayer, church attendance and participation build trust, accountability, love, warmth and faith when done together as a family.

9. *Room to fail:* Parents should not be overly protective of their children. "Failure is not terminal. Every failure is an opportunity for a young person to grow" (McDowell & Wallace, 2019:64). Parents should provide space for their children to fail and then learn from those failures, but then also be present to go through the process with them.

A warm, loving and affirming parent-child relationship, based on mutual trust and accountability, provides children with confidence and security. The closer children feel to their parents the easier faith is transmitted, formed and developed in their hearts, and the greater the parental influence will be in their lives.

6.2.5. Goal

Melton and Dean (2009:35-46) indicate that most parents are sadly primarily intent on having their children work towards earthly, worldly and fleeting success, which have only temporary value and neglect the most important things, those that have eternal value. Parents work so hard to make sure their children are academically, culturally, materially and

financially successful that their efforts towards their children's spiritual success pale in comparison.

According to Powell and Argue (2019:28-29), one of the greatest struggles parents and teens face is *busyness*. The family, instead of being a source of love and support, "has become the vehicle that drives teenagers from one activity to the next". Families have forgotten what it means to be together and have evolved into thinking that driving children to their other activities is support, participating in every possible activity is love and "providing any and every opportunity is selfless nurture". All this is keeping families running around, always busy with activities that most often do not include the family really spending time together as a family.

What does it help if one's child excels in every subject, every sport, every art and cultural activity, etc. at school and university, becoming very successful in business, reaching the highest achievements in life, but is lost for eternity? Many parents realise too late that by keeping their children busy with all the earthly things, pursuing worldly success, they have lost their children not only with regards to themselves, but also with regards to God. Jesus says in Matthew 16:26: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

While success in school, university and life is important, it is not the most important aspect of human life. God did not create human beings to be busybodies. He created them for relationship – relationship with Him as their Heavenly Father and relationship with each other. The most important thing parents are called to do with their children is not to help them excel at anything and everything at school and later university, but rather to lead them to really know and follow God personally. God's purpose for human beings is that they, through their growing relationship with Him, become like His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29-30; Gal. 4:19).

The main calling of parents is to facilitate the shaping of their children to become like Jesus, in terms of their character, lifestyle, worldview and purpose. It is a singular goal against which everything else should be measured and with which everything else must align. Any activity that takes away from this does not belong in the lives of their children, nor in their lives as Christian parents. To achieve this goal, parents need to rethink their family schedules. Rather remove activities that are not absolutely necessary or do not align with this goal, then more time will be available for the family and with God.

6.2.6. Early formation

While this study focuses on the faith formation of teenagers, it has become apparent through the literature study, the focus group interviews, as well as the Scriptural study that parents should not wait until the teen years, but should start as early as possible. Laying a strong spiritual foundation during the formative years is key to having a much easier time discipling one's children when they reach their teen and young adult years.

According to Melton and Dean (2009:66-67), waiting until the teen years to attempt discipleship causes much heartache. Parents suddenly see their children start to act, dress and talk differently; they become argumentative and withdraw from family activities; and prefer their friends' company to that of their parents. While it is not impossible to restore order in the home and to disciple one's children from their teen years onwards, starting as early as possible is essential for avoiding such heartache. Melton and Dean (2009:66-67) show that discipleship begins while one's children are still in the womb. One should pray for them and read the Bible to them while they are still babies and throughout their childhood years.

McDowell and Wallace (2019:41-43) write that the average age of personal conversion is eleven. Older teens and young adults are less likely to become Christians due to intellectual scepticism. They further show that "the age of cynicism and doubt appears to be dropping". They argue that parents should start early – even before children can verbalise their questions. Many parents think that the church can address the more serious issues when their children start attending youth group, but McDowell's and Wallace's research data shows that by then it is already too late, for many teens have by then already turned their back on Christianity, even if they still attend church with their parents. Parents should start as early as possible.

Bettis (2016:24-34) shows that most people who follow Christ during their adult lives received Him as Saviour while they were still children. He cites 2 Timothy 3:14-15 to explain how children need to *learn* about the Christian faith while they are young and as they get older, they need to *become convinced* of its truths. During the foundation and young childhood phase children need to be immersed in the Scriptures, prayer, church, worship and the Christian example set by their parents. As they grow older, children need to move from *simple belief* to *conviction* – where the faith they hold is no longer the faith of their parents, but they have *become convinced* of the truths of Christianity for themselves. During the early teen years children's cognitive understanding and their personal awareness of God begin to grow. Questions about faith become troubling to them. They need to be assured that their parents will walk with them through this phase of doubts and uncertainty and that

there is always room for questions and doubt, because it is through questions and wrestling to find the answers that the faith of their parents become real to them personally and that their own faith grows.

6.2.7. Resources

Parents have many resources at their disposal for discipling their children and thereby assisting in the formation and development of their faith. The importance of these resources has been discussed in previous chapters, but in this section some more practical guidelines, principles and/or strategies are provided.

6.2.7.1. The Bible

As shown in Section 2.3.3.1, the Bible is the main source of faith formation and growth (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 2:2). It should be taught from a young age (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Parents should study the Bible for themselves and for their own spiritual growth, then teach their children to read and study the Bible for themselves. Many dread this thought because they feel that reading and studying the Bible is a daunting task and they do not know where to start (Melton & Dean, 2009:123-124). Some practical guidelines are as follows:

1. Read the Bible *systematically*. Opening anywhere and selecting a random verse will lead to great confusion, since then there is no context to the content. It is the equivalent of reading a story book by opening at any random page and selecting a random sentence to start reading. Select a Bible, start from the first verse and continue daily until finished with the book. Then go to another book.
2. *Do not read too much* at once, otherwise little is remembered. Read a chapter, pericope or even just a few verses a day. Often a single verse is rich in spiritual truth and is enough to keep the mind busy for the day, proverbially chewing on and digesting it.
3. Ask *practical questions* such as: "*what* is happening?", "*why* is it happening?", "are their *commands* that needs to be obeyed?", "are there *sins* addressed than need to be confessed, repented of, or to avoid?", "is there a *prayer* to pray?", "how can this be *applied* practically?" and "with whom can this be *shared*?"
4. Make use of Bible guides, commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries and different translations. These provide background information to each portion of Scripture. There are software packages and websites available that include many of these resources for free, e.g. e-sword, www.biblestudytools.com, www.biblehub.com.

5. *Memorise* key verses. The Bible is full of promises, warnings, commands and exhortations. These key verses should be memorised and internalised to be remembered, so they can be applied or offer reassurance when the need arises.

6. *Apply* what is read. It is not enough to simply read the Bible to gain knowledge. The goal should be to apply it in everyday life. As James writes in James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says".

When it comes to children, parents should approach Bible study in an age-appropriate manner. While children are still young, the focus should be on the Biblical stories and the facts. This will help children to gain an understanding of the overall narrative of the Bible. They get to know the Bible characters, locations, circumstances and events. Through these they learn about the character of God, His intervention in human affairs, as well as what God requires of human beings on a literal level. As they grow older and become teens the focus should shift more to the underlying principles, truths and meanings of why the events occurred as they occurred, as well as to the more doctrinal passages of Scripture. As young children they learn *what* to believe and as they grow older the learn *why* they believe.

6.2.7.2.   Prayer

The power of prayer should never be underestimated. According to Bettis (2016:32, 186-188), prayer changes the parents – it brings them in line with God's will and purpose and thereby guides them in becoming instruments whereby God brings about change in their children.

Parents should pray *over* their children, *for* their children and *with* their children. This entails praying Scripture *over* them, interceding *for* them and seeking God *with* them. Prayer with one's children should start at the womb and end at the grave.

Many people think that they do not know how to pray, mainly due to a misunderstanding what prayer is, namely a heartfelt conversation with God. Some guidelines to pray more effectively are as follows:

1. A *daily prayer life:* It is a special time of the day to connect with God, without distractions, where the focus is on God and Him alone (Matt. 6:6).

2. A *life of prayer:* Prayer should not be limited to the daily prayer life, but life should be saturated with prayer. One should pray about anything and everything (1 Thess. 5:17). God is accessible in every situation of our lives.

3. The *heart* is more important than the words. God is more interested in the condition of one's heart than the words one uses.

4. A simple guideline. The use of the acronym ACTS (based on Matt. 6:9-13) is useful:

a. A = Adoration: of God, worshipping God for who He is

b. C = Confession: confession of sin and one's need for God

c. T = Thanksgiving: showing gratitude towards God for what He has and is doing

d. S = Supplication: asking God for what is needed

Bettis (2016:197-202) provides guidelines for teaching children how to pray. Young children should be taught to pray as they feel, by simply speaking with God as their heavenly Father, expressing their hearts and minds in simple words.

In later childhood one can provide more structure, e.g. the ACTS acronym, thereby teaching them different aspects and types of prayers. They can also be taught to journal their prayers and answers to their prayers. Parents can start to share their own prayer requests with their children, so their children can also pray for them and their needs. Bedtime is a good time for confession, i.e. asking children if they need to confess something.

During their teen years children become busier and often start neglecting prayer. Parents should encourage their teens to pray "as both a duty and a joy". They should also be taught to ground their prayers in the gospel; seek the Lord in crisis; rejoice in answered prayer; confess their sins; pray about difficult challenges and decisions; and pray for their parents, family, friends, the church, those in authority, their enemies, persecuted Christians, and the lost.

6.2.7.3.   The church/faith community

As shown (Sections 2.3.3.6; 3.3.6.4; 4.2.4; and 4.3.2), the church plays an integral part in the faith formation of parents and children. The church should form an integral part of family life and children should be raised in the church environment. Choosing the right church is of critical importance (Melton & Dean, 2009:142-143) and the following aspects must be considered:

1. What is *taught*? Is it *Biblical*? Is it *relevant* to current issues and challenges in life? Does it incorporate the *same Biblical principles and values* parents seeks to instil at home?

2. What is the *goal*? Is the church focused on conforming to the world to gain numbers or are they *focused on the gospel* to bring about *transformed lives*?

3. Are there *age-appropriate ministries* focused on discipleship and growth in faith?

4. Are there *family-integrated ministries* where parents and their children grow together?

5. Are *training courses* offered to equips parents in their task?

6. Is *true spiritual growth* experienced by both the parents and their children? Are the sheep fed or are only the goats entertained? Are they *challenged* to change and grow?

7. Is there a *true Christian community* and *fellowship of believers*? Are there *other mature Christians* serving as good examples to influence and mentor children? Are there *other Christian friends* of the same age as one's children?

Parents should also build *strong relationships with the church leadership*, not only for the sake of their own spiritual growth through mentorship by these leaders, but also that the parents and church leadership can work together as a team in discipling their children. This way the church affords the opportunity for parents to introduce their children to other spiritually mature Christians to act as mentors in the lives of their children.

When issues or differences of opinion arise, parents should be careful how they address these. They should be careful not to belittle, insult or bad mouth the church or the church leadership, thereby sowing confusion and negativity about the church in the hearts of their children. They need to lovingly discuss these with the church leadership so a Biblical solution can be found.

Even though the church is the body and bride of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, it still consists of broken people who still often sin due to their sinful nature. When people act hypocritical or sin in a moment of weakness, it causes confusion in the hearts of children and the youth. Bettis (2016:59-61) provides a number of guidelines for teaching children on how to handle hypocrisy in the church:

1. Remind them that Jesus predicted hypocrisy and even worldliness in the church.
2. Agree with them that the bad behaviour is wrong and express sadness in this regard.
3. Remind them of the effects of sin, as well as their own sinfulness, but also of the great Saviour we have in Christ.
4. Teach them to forgive and pray for those who fall into sin.

In this way children are taught that the church is not a social club for perfect Christians, but a hospital for broken people that need the Saviour.

Church attendance and participation should also be a priority. Not only is it commanded by God (Heb. 10:24-25); exemplified by Jesus (Luke 4:16), the Apostles (Acts 1:13-14), and the early church (Acts 2:42, 47); but it also shows that one truly loves God and His people in their desire to spend time with Him and His people (1 John 1:1-7).

Parents should encourage their children to attend and participate in church activities that are geared towards youth, e.g. Sunday school, youth groups, evangelism outreaches, etc. as

well as family integrated activities like main church services, communion services, baptism services and training seminars, thereby pulling the family closer together and closer to God.

6.2.7.4. Evangelism

Throughout this study it has been shown that the first disciples parents should make are their own children. Making disciples starts with leading someone to personal faith in Christ. This is called evangelism. It is the most wonderful privilege to lead someone to personal faith in Christ and to see the results as their life begins to change. So often children come to their parents saying that they want to give their hearts to Jesus or asking what they must do to be saved, only to be sent to the Sunday school teacher or youth pastor. In so doing, the parents miss out on the wonderful privilege of leading their own children to Jesus and being used by God as the instruments through which their children find salvation in Christ. Most parents that send their children to Sunday school teachers or pastor do so because they fear they do not know how to lead their children to Jesus or are afraid they will approach or explain it in the wrong way, but this fear is unfounded since the gospel is so simple that any child can understand it.

Elements of the gospel:

1. God created us to live in a *loving relationship* with Him (Gen. 1:26-28; Acts 17:27)
2. All have *sinned* and it separated us from God (Rom. 3:10-18, 23; Is. 53:6a)
3. The result of and just punishment for sin is *death and hell* (Rom. 5:12; Rom. 6:23; Jam. 1:13-15; Rev. 21:8)
4. *God loves us* and does not want anyone to perish (John 3:16-17; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9)
5. Therefore, He sent *Jesus* to pay the penalty for our sins (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Is. 53:6; 1 John 2:2)

People are saved by responding to God's grace in Jesus Christ by personally:

1. *calling* on the Name of Jesus (Rom. 10:13; Acts 4:12);
2. *confessing* one's sin (1 John 1:9) and repenting thereof (Acts 17:30-31);
3. putting one's *faith* in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:15-17);
4. *receiving* Jesus as Saviour (John 1:12-13) and His gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9); and
5. *surrendering* one's life to Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:36-39; Col. 2:6)

These are the basic elements of most evangelism methods and can be used as a guide when leading children to faith in Christ. These principles should be taught, explained and touched on throughout family Bible studies, devotions, general discussions, etc. Most churches provide evangelism and discipleship courses. These include courses like *The way*

of the Master by Living Waters, *EEIII* by EE International, *Making disciples* by Every Nation, etc. Parents can make use of these to learn how to share the gospel message with their children and how to lead them into becoming vibrant followers of Christ.

6.2.7.5.   Family devotions

As shown in Section 2.3.3.4, family devotions are a powerful way to saturate children's lives with the Word of God. Many parents dread the thought of leading family devotions because they do not know where to start. With regards to the Bible reading and discussion part, the same principles apply as with Bible study, discussed in Section 6.2.6.1. Guidelines provided by Melton and Dean (2009:127-129, 132-135) and Bettis (2016:153-162), as well as some additional ones discussed by the parents in Chapter 3 include the following:

1. It should be a *daily practice*. Just like Israel needed fresh manna every day (Ex. 16) so families need daily time together with God. It builds family relationships as well as relationship with God and faith in Him.
2. Incorporate *worship*. Sing songs of praise, adoration and worship to God as a family. If some of the family members can play musical instruments, let them use their talents to worship God. Children need to see and hear their parents praise and worship God.
3. *Pray* with and for each other. Family members should share their prayer requests and then pray with and for each other, as well as others. Praise God for answered prayers.
4. *Share* personal insights. These include insights from personal Bible study, devotions and experiences.
5. Foster *dialogue*. This can be done by asking open-ended questions. Parents should ask questions about the Bible passage read, the day their children had, challenges their children face and issues with which they struggle. Devotions should not be "preach at" moments, but rather *discussion times*.
6. Allow children to ask *questions*. Parents should allow their children to ask questions about the Bible passage read, but also anything else they have questions about or concerns they may have. It is a good practice to repeat the questions to make sure one understands the questions correctly.
7. Allow children to *teach*. As they get older and become more proficient in personal Bible study, it is good practice to allow them to take turns in leading the family devotions. This will develop their communication, leadership, Bible study, exegetical and interpersonal skills. It also allows the parents to discover where their children still need instruction in Biblical doctrine.

8. Make it *fun and exciting*. When the children are younger allow time for play. Let them roleplay the characters and so become immersed in the stories. As they grow older address specific issues that are relevant to them and their current circumstances.

9. Keep it *simple*. Elaborate discussions are not necessary every time. Sometimes only reading the portion of Scripture and praying afterwards are enough. Other times the Scripture reading prompts questions from the children's side, leading into an elaborate discussion. Keep it simple, but allow it to evolve as needed.

10. Be *consistent*. Daily short and simple, but consistent, beats fancy and elaborate that only occurs for three of five days, then burn out.

11. *Expect failure,* but start again. Often, due to the busyness of life, demands of work, etc. families stop having family devotions for a time. If this occurs, do not be discouraged or give up. Confess failure and start again.

12. Connect it to a *daily prompt*. Family mealtimes are great prompts, especially the evening mealtime when the whole family is usually together. It helps to remember to have devotions, produces momentum and creates expectation in children.

13. Read *Christian books* together. Christian classics such as *Pilgrim's progress* by John Bunyon, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, etc. and Christian biographies such as: *The autobiography of George Müller; No compromise: the life story of Keith Green* by Melody Green, etc. These serve as testimonies that build faith in God and provide wonderful discussion opportunities.

6.2.7.6.   Family meetings

Bettis (2016:93-116) discusses the importance of good communication in making a heart connection with one's children. "Training with action dominates for young children, while training with words increases as the young people grow older" (Bettis, 2016:99).

It is important that children, of any age, feel heard. Truly listening to one's child brings about deeper understanding. Really listening for understanding is a skill that needs training, of which the best is "on-the-job" training. "Good communication needs time" (Bettis, 2016:102). Discipleship requires intentional, prayerful and skilful conversations.

One should also not be too quick to answer statements, questions or challenges. One should consider carefully and prayerfully what has been presented and then seek to answer Biblically.

Family meetings provide opportunities where serious questions or issues can be discussed in an ordered, calm, loving and Christian way. Some guidelines for family meetings are as follows:

1. *Pray together* for the Lord's guidance in discussing the question or issue.
2. Allow *ample time* for each family member to present his/her point of view.
3. Truly *listen intently*, in order to understand each other's point of view.
4. Allow each family member to *discuss positives and negatives* of each presented view.
5. Go to *Scripture* to find answers or guiding principles with regards to the issue/question.
6. Be completely *honest*. Admit and confess when wrong and submit to Scripture.

Working through serious questions and issues in this manner binds the family together as a team, builds trust and accountability as well as faith in God and His Word.

6.2.7.7. Ministering together

Melton and Dean (2009:159-166) discuss the importance of families ministering together. This should be a natural occurrence, as part of everyday life, whether it be discussing God and His faithfulness while visiting friends; sharing the gospel with a car guard at the mall; leaving a gospel tract with the tip at a restaurant; or sharing take-away food with a homeless person, etc. God may also stir in one's heart the desire to become involved in a specific ministry, through the local church, e.g. evangelism outreaches, providing food for the poor, cleaning up the neighbourhood, etc. or even in the family's own capacity, reaching out to a neighbour in need, making extra food to share at school with those who have none, etc. It might even be as simple as using one's personal talents to serve in the local church, e.g. a family with a strong musical background using their talents to serve the local assembly. There are many practical ways in which a family can minister together. This will draw the family closer together and to God.

Bettis (2016:163-173) provides some helpful guidelines in this regard. Parents should:

1. Live a life of *passion*, *purpose* and *mission*. When the children see the excitement in their parents, it will also excite them to become involved.
2. Train children toward a life of *self-denying service*. Most sports, arts and other activities are geared towards selfishness – working towards personal prizes and rewards. Parents should rather train their children to have *hearts of service* that reduces self-absorption.
3. Serve together with their children to *build the local church*. Serve during worship time, connect with the elderly, visitors, the lonely and downtrodden. It helps children to learn to be like Jesus.
4. Connect the drudgery of life with the *bigger vision*, showing how everything works together to glorify God.

5. Introduce their children to *other passionate and purposeful Christians*. It inspires not only the children, but also the parents to be more passionate about Jesus. It helps to praise those purposeful Christians in front of one's children. It causes them to look up to and aspire to also work for Christ in such ways.

6. Present the *needs of the world* to their children. It gives a proper perspective on life. Children need to see the physical, but also the spiritual need of others. Children must realise the horrible end of not personally knowing Jesus. They also need to know about the many Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

7. Cast a *vision for greatness*. Children should be reassured constantly that God has a plan for their lives and be encouraged to seek God's specific purpose for their lives.

8. Serve with their children in ministries as close to the *Great Commission* as possible. There are very few experiences so powerful and exhilarating than leading someone else to salvation in Christ and connecting with them personally in discipleship and seeing how they grow in the Lord.

A family that ministers together grows together.

6.2.7.8. Apologetics

Often children are challenged with regards to their faith. These challenges come from a variety of sources, including fellow students from different faith backgrounds, philosophies and theories taught at school or university, multimedia and social media. Some of these challenges are presented in very persuasive ways and often cause doubt. Parents often feel dumbfounded and inadequately trained when these questions and challenges are raised.

It is not necessary to be afraid of these doubts and questions, since these afford opportunities for not only the children to grow in their understanding of the Biblical doctrines and their faith, but also for the parents.

Most teens do not discuss these doubts with their parents, according to Bettis (2016:210), but rather choose to avoid conflict and to work through these on their own. This can be mitigated by building strong relationships of trust with one's children from an early age. Parents should however also stay abreast of current trends with regards to challenges to Christian faith and then intentionally raise and discuss these with their children.

Bettis (2016:208-227) provides the following guidelines for addressing doubts and questions:

1. *Never shy away* from doubts or questions. When children raise these, be excited that they asked.

2. *Ask children regularly* whether they have questions or doubts about God, the Bible or faith.

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3. Show *confidence* that answers can be found. Often the answer is not known, but there are enough resources available to find the answer.

4. *Prepare* children for these challenges. Warn them that such doubts and challenges will arise. When it comes, they will be expecting it.

5. Build the *fundamental truths* and doctrines into them from an early age. Teach them not only *what* to believe, but *why*.

6. Present them with *specific arguments* against the faith and provide the Biblical answers.

7. Know what they are taught at school or university. A simple glance at the table of contents of prescribed books may often be sufficient. Also ask them about and discuss what they learn at school/university. These conversations can change their lives.

8. Make use of *apologetics resources*. Parents should read books, watch videos and attend apologetics seminars with their children. In this way parents and children grow together in their faith and understanding.

There are many resources available that can aid parents in guiding their children in finding answers to questions about the Christian faith. These include websites such as www.rzim.org, www.creation.com, www.str.org, www.answersingenesis.org, www.reasonablefaith.org, www.crossexamined.org, etc.; as well as books like *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, *The case for Christ* series by L. Strobel, *Cold case Christianity* by J.W. Wallace, *I don't have enough faith to be an* atheist by N.L. Geisler and *Evidence that demands a verdict* by J. McDowell.

6.2.7.9. Social networks and friendship

> Do not be so deceived *and* misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt *and* deprave good manners *and* morals *and* character. (1 Cor. 15:33) (Bible, 1987)

Friendship can either build or destroy faith. The same goes for one's reputation and testimony. In this regard parents themselves should first and foremost be careful what company they themselves keep.

As discussed in Sections 2.3.3.6, 4.2.6 and 4.3.5, some guidelines for parents when choosing their own friends are as follows:

1. Choose friends with the *same beliefs*, *values*, *principles*, *worldview* and *approaches to parenting and faith formation*. This way the families encourage each other to deeper growth in faith.

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2. Choose friends from the *same congregation*, providing a network with strong mutual support, guidance, wisdom and accountability. The families grow together in their faith, as they are on the same journey as the rest of the congregation.

3. Focus on families that have children of *roughly the same age* as one's own children. This way the children can grow up together in an environment with a common background, providing Christian friends from a young age.

4. Build friendships with other *significant mature Christian adults* who can act as mentors in the lives of one's children (Bettis, 2016:55-59). These may be youth pastors/workers, Sunday school teachers, elders, deacons, elderly couples, etc. Their love, compassion, mentorship, friendship and godly example are powerful tools that enhance the faith formation strategies parents employ.

Some guidelines (Bettis, 2016:228-237; Barna, 2007:69-67) for parents when teaching their children to choose the right friends, as per the discussion in Sections 2.3.3.7, are as follows:

1. *Define* friendship. Friendship is more than simply a mutually supportive and affectionate relationship, it is a relationship around a common interest (Bettis, 2016:230).

2. Teach them to build friendships *around the gospel*. Specifically seek out friends with the same beliefs, values and principles, who will pull one closer to Christ – with Christ as the common interest.

3. *Pray* for the right friends. Parents should pray for their children and teach their children to pray for the right friends. God knows the value of true friendship (Prov. 18:24) and will always provide what His children need (Phil. 4:19).

4. Teach them to be *intentional*. Be friendly to all, but friends to only some – those who truly follow Christ. A true friend is the one that always tells the truth, even when it rebukes or hurts – what is needed even if not wanted.

5. *Be* their best friend. Close-knit parent-child relationships enable easier influence when teaching children to choose the right friends. When children feel safe and secure in their relationship with their parents, their parents have much greater influence when their children start building other friendships.

6. Teach them to say "*No!*" and to recognise temptations and stand firm in their convictions. The best strategy is to teach them about peer pressure before it occurs. Teach them, as early as possible, to love Jesus more than popularity.

7. Teach them to *appreciate times of loneliness* and use such times to draw closer to their closest friend, Jesus Himself. Sometimes God allows times of loneliness to wean them off dependence on others, so they can become more dependent on Him.

8. Teach them to *take the initiative:* to find friends, be a friend – reach out to the outcasts and marginalised. By being a friend, in Christ, one will make friends, in Christ.

9. Teach them to submit their friendships to the *Lordship of Christ.* This may require breaking off friendships that do not honour God or that draw them away from Jesus.

10. Spend *quality time* with them and their friends. This way a good understanding of the character of their friends can be established.

11. *Influence* rather than decide for them. Parents should never outright criticise potential friends or directly prohibit friendships. Based on the knowledge gained by spending quality time with these potential friends, parents can ask their children pointed questions about the behaviour and beliefs that differ from what is allowed. These conversations discourage friendships with less desirable playmates in a gentle way.

Parents can greatly utilise friendships with fellow Christians and Christian families to enhance their strategies to facilitate faith formation in their children.

6.2.7.10.   External influences

Melton and Dean (2009:167-216), Bettis (2016:239-248) and McDowell and Wallace (2019:161-176) discuss the dangers of secular influences. The media (television, movies, music, magazines, books and the Internet), social media (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tok, Snapchat, etc.) and the secular education system (school and university curriculums) constantly bombard children and their parents with secular worldviews, immorality, perversion and contra-Biblical perspectives, while the Biblical worldview, beliefs, values and principles are challenged, downplayed and even ridiculed. These worldly influences are amplified by technologies, such as smart phones and tablets, making these influences readily available anywhere and anytime. According to Bettis (2016:239), teens spend an average of nine to eleven hours per day on media and multimedia.

Some guidelines for addressing these influences are as follows:

1. *Saturate:* Children who are saturated in the truth of God's Word will more easily recognise the lies, immoral values and secular worldviews when they are confronted with it.

2. *Isolate:* Some influences are directly opposed to God's will and are inherently sinful, e.g. pornography, extreme violence, etc. Parents should do everything in their power to isolate themselves and their children from these influences completely, by any means possible. Guidelines for addressing these are as follows:
   a. Build strong relationships with one's children that promote trust and accountability.

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b. Discuss the dangers before any exposure occurs, expounding on why these content types are contrary to Scripture.

c. Encourage children to confidently raise the matter when they are exposed.

d. Introduce an "open phone policy" – where parents have complete access to all mobile devices at all times.

e. Install content filters on computers and mobile devices. Though not completely fool proof, these do offer an extra layer of protection against temptation.

f. When exposed, do not overreact towards the child. Deal with it prayerfully, lovingly, gently and Biblically, leading the child back to restoration.

3. *Evaluate:* Other content should be evaluated against Biblical values. While not all secular media, multimedia and social media are inherently sinful, parents should be attentive to the worldview these present. Some guidelines for approaching secular influences are as follows:

a. Test everything and teach the children to test everything against Biblical principles.

b. Use movies, music, video games, television, etc. as teaching moments.

c. Identify neutral, negative and positive aspects.

d. Ask children to answer questions such as: What is the focus? What is the main message? What does it teach about the world? What does it teach about God? What is positive about it? What is negative? Does it draw us closer to God?

e. In this way children are exposed to secular worldviews, different religions, sinful behaviours and worldly perspectives in a controlled manner. They are also taught to evaluate secular influences from a Biblical perspective.

4. *Model:* Parents should set the example when it comes to technology and media usage. Some guidelines are as follows:

a. Limit own use of multimedia and technology.

b. Install accountability software/filters on own computers and mobile devices.

c. Set family rules for both parents and children to follow.

5. *Privilege:* Media and technology should be treated as a privilege, not a right. The use of technology comes with responsibilities and temptations. As it is allowed, it can also be taken away. Some practical guidelines are as follows:

a. Explain how the use of technology and media is a privilege.

b. Explain the responsibilities and temptations.

c. A written contract is an excellent way to set out responsibilities and consequences if these responsibilities are not met.

d. If boundaries are breached, rescind the privileges – do so with understanding, patience and kindness.

6. *Introduce:* Technology and media privileges should be introduced at appropriate times.
   a. As children display greater maturity entrust them with greater freedom.
   b. In this way amount and content are effectively controlled.
7. *Limit:* Not only content is the issue, but also the time spent or wasted on technology and multimedia. Many children become addicted to technology and media when its use is not limited by parents. Some guiding principles may include the following:
   a. Consider putting all electronics in a common room at bedtime.
   b. Introduce a weekly technology-free "Sabbath" – turn the Internet off for the day.
   c. Limit electronics use to specific hours and only when homework and a certain amount of reading are done.
   d. Encourage using a physical Bible and notebook at church and during devotions.
8. *Prioritise:* Teach children to prioritise real family relationships and friendships over electronics. Face-to-face conversations are valued by God and His people (3 John 14). Social media are deforming interpersonal skills. Some guidelines include the following:
   a. Train children in electronics self-denial.
   b. Emphasise the value of face-to-face communication.
   c. Prioritise specific times for family discussions without technology, e.g. mealtimes.
9. *Bond:* When multimedia and technology are used appropriately and shared in moderation, they can create family bonds. Sports, movies, and music used and enjoyed together can draw families closer together. The media per se is not necessarily the issue, but the family segmentation it often causes.
10. *Like-minded:* Befriending like-minded families with similar standards makes it easier to go against the worldly culture and makes it easier for children to submit.

Disciple-making parents equip their children to rule over technology and multimedia. They teach their children to thoughtfully engage the world around them. They love their children enough to protect them and to help guide them to adulthood.

6.2.8.   Parental examples

Melton and Dean (2009:67-79, 142-143) and Bettis (2016:32, 41-54) explain how the example parents set for their children are of utmost importance to the faith formation of their children. Parents are the role models of their children for a season, during which the children look up to them and emulate them. Parents' lives will either commend the gospel or condemn it. Their example will either assist in the faith formation of their children or hamper it.

With regards to setting a godly example, the guidelines provided throughout this study can be summed up as follows:

1. *Visibility*: Children should *see* their parents study the Bible, pray, attend church, share the gospel (with them as children and with others), worship God, serve God, love God, forsake the world and build God-honouring friendships, and do so enthusiastically and with excitement. They should see how their parents' lives revolve around their faith. They should see their parents using their gifts to minister to others, including the church, fellow Christians and the needy. Children need to see their parents confess, ask for forgiveness and repent when they sin. Parents' growth in faith and holiness must be visible to their children. Growing parents lead to growing children.

2. *Audibility*: Children need to *hear* their parents read the Bible, pray (especially for and with them), worship God and share the gospel (with them as children and with others) with excitement and enthusiasm. Children should also regularly hear their parents talk about God with their friends, colleagues and others. They should hear their parents speak well about the church, its leadership and activities, and encouraging them, and others, to participate. Children should also hear their parents ask for forgiveness when they falter and sin, especially when they do so against the children themselves. Parents should initiate intentional conversations about God, faith, the Bible and questions and doubts their children might have.

3. *Alertness*: Children should experience their parents being alert to worldliness and temptations and how their parents actively avoid or address these in their lives. Parents should also be inquisitive by asking their children deliberate questions focused on getting to know their children – their desires, fears, hopes, dreams, doubts, etc. This builds relationship, trust and accountability and helps to develop a Biblical worldview in their children. Parents need to be alert to the temptations, challenges and dangers their children face at school, friends and online. They should teach their children to be alert themselves and to approach and address these in a Biblical manner and avoid where possible. This requires good listening skills and then prayerful and loving response.

4. *Availability*: Children need to know that second to God, they are their parents' first priority. They have to know they can go to their parents anytime, anywhere and with anything, with no reservations. This requires time – not just quality time, but quantity. Spending time with one's children affords opportunities to set a godly example. Parents should be their children's best friends and confidants. If parents are not deeply involved in their children's lives, their children will find others to lead them, often astray.

5. *Authenticity*: Hypocrisy is not about failing to live up to the standard of Christ, but to not confess and repent when one falters; to not care about "lukewarmness"; to not be

genuine and authentic about one's failures, weaknesses and sinfulness; and not attempting to grow closer to Christ. It is about being self-righteous and not relying on Christ for His righteousness, forgiveness, strength and help. Children need to experience authentic faith in their parents. Children are very smart: they know when their parents are not genuine in their faith and love for God. If parents are hypocritical in their faith, it will drive children away from God rather than pull them closer to Him. Authentic faith will teach them how to handle failure, temptation and sin.

Discipleship starts with observation and then grows into imitation. Children will first absorb parents' example and then, as they grow older, they will evaluate their parents' example. Setting the goal and using the resources will have the opposite effect if the parents themselves do not set the example by practising and living what they preach.

> Disciple-making parents will live the gospel at home. (Bettis, 2016:54)

6.2.9. Consistency, purposefulness and diligence

Melton and Dean (2009:143-147) argue that irregular religious practices, a lukewarm example and a focus on the bare minimum is not true discipleship and would destroy a child's faith rather than form it. God commands parents to teach their children *diligently* (Deut. 6:7). Diligence takes great care, effort and time. Teaching requires communicating the truth of God and practical application thereof to the heart. It involves equipping children for every good work, using the Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Teaching the Word diligently requires the careful laying of a spiritual foundation and then also progressing from the first principles of the gospel to the more advanced knowledge of God (Heb. 6:1-6), i.e. children should be discipled from being infants to maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28-29). The sad reality is that many parents themselves are still infants in Christ (Heb. 5:12). This necessitates parents to grow themselves by being properly discipled (more on this in Section 6:3), but it also creates the opportunity to grow along with their children.

As discussed in Section 6.2.5, the goal is to help shape children to conformity in Christ, i.e. bring them to maturity in Christ – this is the *purpose* of parenting. Having something to work towards provides direction and a way to measure growth. Parents should therefore not simply follow religious customs for the sake of being religious or set a godly example for the sake of setting an example – they have to be *purposeful*, working towards the goal of becoming like Christ and leading their children to do the same. This requires *consistency*.

> You shall whet and sharpen them so as to make them penetrate, and
> *teach* and *impress them diligently* upon the [*minds* and] *hearts* of your
> children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when

you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.
(Deut. 6:7) (Bible, 1987)

God requires parents to be *consistent* in the discipleship of their children. They need to disciple constantly. Notice how God tells Moses that His words should saturate every part of everyday life – "…when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up". God is not providing a schedule for religious praxis, but rather stating that every opportunity should be utilised to teach children about Him and His Word. Parents should pray for wisdom and seek out ways to constantly point their children to Christ.

Building relationship with God is wonderful. Building relationship with one's children is great. Setting the goal is of critical importance. Making use of the resources is necessary. Setting a godly example is paramount. All these need to be done *consistently*. If inconsistent, it does more harm than good. When parents are inconsistent in their relationship with God, their relationship with their children, their religious practices and their godly example, it sends a clear message to their children – that to them as parents God is not really important. If their children follow in their footsteps, then God will not be important to them either. When parents are consistent in these, however, it will have a profound effect on their children.

It is true that sometimes parents fail to be consistent. When this occurs, parents should not give up. They should get up, own up to it, confess it, ask for forgiveness from God and their children, repent, stand up and start again. Consistency is the key.

6.3.   No guarantees

Bettis (2016:19-22) shares a very important truth about discipleship and the faith formation efforts of parents: There are no guarantees. He discusses *three myths* that parents often believe with regards to Christian parenting:

1. *Doing all the right things consistently guarantees children will follow the Lord.* Discipleship is, however, not a method, but an approach. In general terms, research has shown that children mostly follow in the footsteps of their parents. This is not however always the case. There are many instances in which parents do everything right, yet their children choose not to follow God. In other cases, parents do everything wrong and yet their children find God and follow Him faithfully. The reason for this is that children are their own, independent moral beings. They have to make the choice for themselves.

2. *The ultimate goal of the Christian life is to have children that follow the Lord.* Even though parents are primarily responsible for discipling their children, some parents

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are willing to sacrifice their own walk with God, their health and even their marriage for their children. This is idolatry. One "should not make an idol out of having perfect Christian children" (Bettis, 2016:20). Parents should not find their identity in their children, but find it in Christ alone. The first priority should be God, then one's spouse, then one's children, then the church and then the world. Parents should move away from being a child-centred family to being a Christ-centred family.

3. *Successful discipleship is all up to the parents themselves.* Some parents withdraw from others, even the church, isolating themselves from everything and everyone in their attempt to disciple and protect their children. This way they become not only emotionally but also spiritually isolated. The fact is that parents cannot disciple their children alone. Parents need the local church. Even though parents are the most important influence, humanly speaking, in their children's lives, they should not be the only influence. The church provides others who present the gospel clearly, are good examples to influence one's children, encourage prayer and are good friends to encourage families in their walk with God.

> The best thing you can do for your child's soul is to become actively involved in a gospel-preaching, gospel-living church community. (Bettis, 2016:21)

Some might argue that "if there are no guarantees, why try so hard?" The fact of the matter is, as already stated, that in most cases children follow in the footsteps of their parents. If parents live consistently close to the Lord, their children will most likely also live close to the Lord and remain close to the Lord, and vice versa. Parents who have done their absolute best should never feel guilty if their children turn away from God. God will not hold a parent accountable for the decisions their children make, but He will hold them accountable for the example they themselves set. Bettis (2016:20) says it best: "[Parents'] goal is not 'successful' parenting per se, but faithful parenting."

In the end, the best thing parents can do is to create the environment in which their children can encounter and experience God. When their children encounter God, thanks to the efforts of their parents, and God's loving revelation of Himself, their children will be presented with a choice – to either also follow God or to reject Him. Seeing and experiencing the loving relationship between their parents and God, and His working in their lives, will make it much more difficult to reject the love of God.

6.4. Principles and strategies for the church

6.4.1. Responsibility of the church

Barna (2003:83-101) and Jones (2015:5-14) contend that most parents in Western cultures abdicate the responsibility of the faith development of their children to the church. This is mainly due to the precedent set by their own parents, the cultural trend of outsourcing everything to "professionals" and parents feeling inadequate to fulfil this very important role.

Churches often amplify the problem by complying with this approach. They become pleased that people rely on them for help. In most cases the church enrols children in programmes and the only contact it has with parents is to encourage parents to attend church services and to continue to bring their children. The parents are satisfied, their children receive at least some form of spiritual input and the church is serving people. "This sounds like a wonderful win-win situation except for one issue: the approach is completely unbiblical" (Barna, 2003:87). This approach perpetuates the problem, whereby the church usurps the responsibility of the parents and creates an unhealthy dependency upon the church for children's faith development.

The church does have an important role to play, but the Biblical approach is for parents to be the primary agents in the faith formation of children and for the church to fulfil a supplementary role, as an intimate and valuable partner, supporting the parents in this endeavour.

The church should start by returning the primary responsibility of the faith formation of children to the parents and taking up the role of support network and primary vehicle of training and equipping parents for their task as primary agents in their children's faith formation.

6.4.2. Equipping parents

According to Paul (Eph. 4:11-13), the purpose of the church and its leadership is to *equip* its members so that *their works of service* can *build up* the church and *nurture it* until all members come to maturity in Christ. The sad reality is that in many instances the church leadership attempts to build up and nurture all members themselves, which is impractical and unbiblical. Jones (2015:17-66) provides the following guidelines the church can follow to equip parents for discipling their children:

1. Help parents regain a sense of *urgency*: Often parents think they have lots of time and then put off the discipleship and faith formation of their children for later. The

reality is that the enemy is not waiting. Sermons, seminars and resources can be provided to help parents realise the urgency and to motivate them to start as early as possible.

2. Teach parents Biblical *doctrine*. Parents need to know what to believe, as well as why they should *believe*, so they in turn can teach Biblical doctrine to their children.

3. Teach parents how to *study the Bible*, *pray*, *worship* and *seek answers* to tough questions. Provide resources, training courses and seminars to facilitate these.

4. Teach parents how to hold *family devotions*. Church leadership should also set the example by doing so in their own families. Provide guides to facilitate family devotions.

5. Equip parents to *evangelise* their children. This should not be a one-time event, the salvific elements of the gospel should be interwoven with family devotions, discussions and everyday conversations. Many evangelism resources are available for this task. This can be done through training videos, seminars, books, etc.

6. Teach parents to be *disciples-makers* of their children. Parents should not only lead their children to faith in Christ for salvation, but also to love, follow and serve Him in and through their daily lives. Discipleship entails not only teaching, but more specifically modelling – i.e. living out the faith. Parents should model following Christ.

7. *Follow up* regularly to motivate parents to adhere to the abovementioned strategies. Elders and deacons who act as mentors to families can be utilised for this task.

8. Invite parents to participate as a family in *church services* – and to do something for the church, using their talents to build up the church.

9. Invite parents to participate as a family in *outreaches*, be it evangelism outreaches or service outreaches to the needy. Training beforehand should be provided to equip parents and their children for greater effectiveness.

6.4.3. Reinforcement of foundations

The church should reinforce that which parents already teach their children at home by means of its various ministries. As one of the participants (A02F) in the focus groups explained: The church and parents should work together and towards the same goal. They should teach and model the same values, principles and beliefs, otherwise the youth become confused.

Jones (2015:79-88) shows how young adults, in their moving away from home and finding their own independence from their parents, also often move away from the church and the faith of their parents in an attempt to "base their beliefs on their own personally-vetted convictions". Here the church should play the important role of equipping these young adults

with the necessary tools with which they can "personally analyse the legitimacy of their worldview and practice". In this way the truth they have learnt during their childhood years can be tested, analysed and internalised – becoming true for them personally, instead of simply believing because it is what their parents taught them. This is also an example of the critical role the church should play in the reinforcement of faith foundations.

6.4.4. Support network

According to Jones (2015:82), the Bible calls Christians the family of God. He is "our Heavenly Father" and Christians are His children (Rom. 8:16-17). The church is also called the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Jones (2015:12) contends that the church, representing one's spiritual family, should "nurture its members within a rich matrix of multigenerational relationships".

The church should provide the following:

1. *Leadership:* According to Ephesians 4:11-13, it must equip each member for their service to the rest of the church and in terms of this study, parents for discipling their children.
2. *Mentors:* The youth are mentored by older, mature Christians, singles by married couples, new parents by "empty nesters", families by elders and deacons, etc.
3. *Spiritual parents:* Mature Christians also become spiritual parents to the youth who come to Christ, but whose biological parents do not know or serve God.
4. *Christian friendships:* The church affords the opportunity for both parents and their children to build friendships with fellow Christians who share the same beliefs, values and principles. They also work towards the same goal, namely, to follow Christ and in so doing become more Christ-like. Such friendships afford mutual growth, accountability, encouragement, motivation and support.

People are relational beings. When they experience the loving relationship with their spiritual family, the mutual growth and support the church provides, those meaningful relationships will prevent them from seeking support elsewhere. The support they receive from the church should however be genuine, sincere, meaningful and relevant.

6.4.5. Addressing concerns

Age segregation: While age-appropriate ministries do have a place and an important role to play, age segregation often become a problem when almost all ministries become age segregated. The church has been complaining about the generational gaps that exist between generations for ages, when all the while the church itself is any many cases part of

the problem. Many churches have ministries for every age group: children's ministries for children; youth ministries for teens; young adult ministries for students and singles; ministries for married couples; ministries for the elderly, etc., but very little multigenerational ministries or family ministries where the different age groups are integrated: where grandparents, parents, and children can learn and grow together. That is why Barna (2003), Bettis (2016), Jones (2015) and Powell and Argue (2019) advocate a more family-integrated approach, whereby church ministries shift more towards serving families as a whole instead of different age groups separately. Church leadership should evaluate their own approaches in their congregations and if the problem exists in their congregations, they need to implement strategies to correct this trend. Many resources are available to help church leadership in shifting their ministry style towards a more family-integrated approach – these include books like *Family ministry field guide* by T.P. Jones, *Practical family ministry* by T.P. Jones and J.D. Trentham and training curriculums like *The basics of family ministry* by Lifeway.

Irrelevance: Barna and Kinnaman (2014:97-102) show that many teens, young adults and even adults find the church *irrelevant* because the church often (1) ignores the problems of the real world; (2) seems antagonistic towards science; (3) shies away from critical questions and doubts; (4) fears the beliefs of other faiths or do not address these appropriately; and (5) practices a shallow form of Christianity. This causes many to leave the church and often the Christian faith, never to return.

These findings of Barna and Kinnaman resonate strongly with the views parents expressed in the focus groups on why many young adults leave the church (Section 4.3.2), as they also expressed concern that many young people find the church irrelevant due to not focusing enough on the youth and their specific problems, questions and challenges.

Many churches, in their attempt to be more relevant, have opted for a more "seeker-friendly" approach, incorporating more entertainment and less spiritual depth. It seems that this approach has more of the opposite effect than what the church intended. Though this approach often draws many teens to have a fun time, very little life change occurs, leading to shallow faith that is often destroyed once they transition into young adulthood. Attempting to attract more youth through worldly means may seem to make the church less "boring", but in reality it makes the church less relevant. The young adults and many adults that have left the church long to see the church powerfully living out authentic faith in everyday life. They need to see the power of the living God truly transforming lives, not just church life, but Christian lives in the secular world. The church should not water down its message in the hopes of drawing more people, but should apply the message more efficiently, truly addressing people's doubts and questions; scientific issues and challenges; and life's problems, with

clear, deeply rooted, Biblical teaching and living – thereby showing how the Bible is relevant to all generations. The church is not relevant when it conforms to the world, but the church is relevant exactly because it is different (Rom. 12:1-2). The greater the difference between the church's light and the world's darkness, the greater the impact the church will have on the world.

Confusion: Barna and Kinnaman (2014:97-102) explain that the church is often confusing in its approaches and teachings, when it proclaims its message in a way that comes across as disconnected from the real world. Christians often live lives of non-integrated Christianity, where their spiritual lives are far removed from their secular lives, leading young people to experience it as hypocrisy.

Barna and Kinnaman (2014:100-101) show how the church's teaching on sexuality is another source of confusion to young people. Many feel the church is out of step or dated when it comes to matters of gender and sexuality. It would seem, however, that "the problem has more to do with how churches express these positions than with the standards themselves". In many cases the church becomes so judgemental with regards to these issues that it leaves no room for proper, Biblical discussion. In many other cases the church completely avoids addressing these matters, causing greater *confusion* and making the church even more *irrelevant*, since gender and sexuality issues are at the forefront in today's world. The church needs to firmly, Biblically, but also humbly and lovingly address these matters and provide sound Biblical, scientific and philosophical background and reasons for why they take a particular stance.

As touched on in Section 4.3.2, the church confuses young people on the question of what is right or wrong; what is acceptable and what is not; and what is true and what is false. Participants of the focus groups indicated that for many years the church has preached that homosexuality and transgenderism are sinful. Many churches have changed their view in this regard and the same churches and preachers that preached against homosexuality and transgenderism now preach for it, using the same Bible. This creates great confusion amongst church members and specifically teenagers and young adults. To them it seems the church itself is confused about what they believe and why. While the gender and sexuality debate in the broader church is far from over and regardless of one's view on these matters, these parents raise a very valid point – while the church should be open to changing its views on any matter, based on Scripture as the only authority, it should be prayerful, mindful and careful when making such changes, explaining clearly and Biblically the reason for the change. The church should also be careful not to make such changes lightly, based on political or social pressures, thereby conforming its views and teachings to

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worldly standards out of fear of being prosecuted or even persecuted, and in the process lose its effectiveness. They should use the Bible as the only authority and stand firmly upon its teachings, obeying God rather than man, when political and social systems threaten its very existence. History has shown that the true church grows fastest during times of persecution if it remains faithful to the teachings of Scripture. Young people need to see the church take a stand for what is right and true, regardless of the consequences, thereby showing confidence and faith in God, His Word, power and presence.

6.5.   Summary

This chapter focused on addressing the pragmatic task (Osmer, 2008:4, 175-218) of answering the question "how might we respond?" by providing strategies and guidelines that will influence the current situation. In terms of this study, this chapter sought to provide practical guidelines for parents (Section 6.2) to facilitate the discipleship and the faith formation of young people in an attempt to address the phenomenon of the youth leaving the church as they transition to young adulthood. Some guidelines were furthermore offered for the church (Section 6.4) in terms of its involvement with parents in assisting and equipping them for the task of discipleship and faith formation of their children.

In doing so, the final objective of this study was also addressed, namely: "articulate some practical theological perspectives to assist parents with the faith formation of teenage children to challenge their exit from the church."

Parents were encouraged to take the responsibility of being the primary agents in the discipleship and faith formation of their children (Section 6.2.1). God commands parents to fulfil this duty. He has also provided everything needed for this task, including placing them in the best position, the unique parent-child relationship, His Word, His Spirit, His presence and His church. If parents fail to take this responsibility seriously, they increase the chances of having their children becoming estranged from the church and even the Christian faith when they leave the home.

Next some rationalisations leading to excuses, objections and fears were discussed (Section 6.2.2). Feelings of inadequacy can be addressed by parents receiving training and equipment from the church. With regards to time constraints, parents can address this matter by simply using the time already being spent with their children in more effective ways and by removing unnecessary activities from their own and their children's schedules. Some argued that they themselves turned out fine, without being discipled by their parents. Studies have shown that most teens leave the church and often the Christian faith as they transition into young adulthood, in most cases never to return. Are parents willing to take that chance?

Parents need to focus on their own walk with God first (Section 6.2.3). Parents cannot expect to lead their children to Christ and have them follow Him if they themselves do not know the Lord or follow Him. The example set by the parents will have a profound effect on their children. If parents do not follow Christ themselves, their children will most likely not follow Him either. If the parents do follow Christ wholeheartedly, the chances are good that their children will also find, get to know and follow Him.

Parents also need to build strong relationships with their children (Section 6.2.4). A warm, loving and affirming parent-child relationship makes the influence of parents on their children much stronger and therefore the formation of faith in their children much easier. Parents should be involved, authentic, warm and intentional. They should discipline their children in a loving and Biblical way. Parents should incorporate family-inclusive hobbies and faith activities in their interaction with their children. They should also allow room for failure and use these as teaching moments. Communication with their children need to be regular, consistent and purposeful.

The goal of parenting should be to lead one's children to become like Christ (Section 6.2.5) in terms of their character, lifestyle, worldview and purpose. All other aspects of life should align with this purpose. Setting this goal enables parents to work towards something and to measure growth in themselves and their children.

The faith formation of children should start as early as possible (Section 6.2.6). Laying firm Biblical foundations during the formative years makes discipleship and faith formation a great deal easier during the teen and young adult years.

There are many resources at parents' disposal to facilitate the discipleship and faith formation of their children (Section 6.2.7). These include the Bible, prayer, the church, evangelism, family devotions, family meetings, ministry together, apologetics and Christian friendships. Specific guidelines for using these were discussed. The guidelines for addressing other influences such as technology, multimedia and social media include: saturation in the truth; isolations from sin; evaluation of content; modelling proper usage; regarding technology as a privilege not a right; introducing influence at the appropriate time and in a controlled manner; limiting content and usage; and prioritising real relationships.

Parents should set the example (Section 6.2.8) in all the above-mentioned matters by being visible, audible, alert, available and authentic. Consistency, purposefulness and diligence are of utmost importance (Section 6.2.9). Inconsistent, aimless and careless efforts will lead to children rejecting parents' instruction and to much frustration and heartache. When parents fail, they should however not give up, but rather confess it, repent and start again.

In Section 6.3 it was shown that there are no guarantees. Parents should do their utmost best to lead their children to Christ and to follow Him wholeheartedly. In the end all parents can do, by combining the abovementioned principles and guidelines, is to create the environment in which their children can find, meet and experience God. They will then have to make the decision themselves to follow God or not. It is not about successful parenting per se, but rather about faithful parenting.

Section 6.4 provided a number of guidelines for the church. The church should recognise and fulfil its true responsibility (Section 6.4.1) of playing a supplementary role in supporting parents in the discipleship and faith formation of their children. They should equip parents (Section 6.4.2) by helping them realise the urgency; teaching them how to study the Bible, pray and hold family devotions; inculcating Biblical doctrine; teaching parents how to evangelise and disciple their children; invite families to participate; and follow up regularly. The church can reinforce the spiritual foundations parents already laid at home in the lives of children by means of its various ministries (Section 6.4.3). They should also provide a support network (Section 6.4.4) in the form of leadership, mentors, spiritual parents and Christian friendships. Finally, the church should address the concerns (Section 6.4.5) of too much age segregation, irrelevance and confusion.

Using these principles and guidelines parents, with the help of the church, will hopefully be able to establish firm spiritual and Biblical foundations in the lives of their children, from as early as possible, and engender a living and growing faith that will help them remain faithful to the church and to Christ, even during the tumultuous teen and young adult years.

The next chapter (Chapter 7) concludes this study by providing a summary of this study, conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This study focused on the role of parents in the discipleship and faith formation of their teenaged children, in order to challenge the phenomenon of many teenagers leaving the church and often the Christian faith, as they transition into young adulthood.

The study sought to engage parents' understanding and approaches to the faith formation of their teenaged children (Chapters 2-3); to identify some of the reasons underlying their current understanding and approaches to faith formation (Chapter 4); to investigate the Scriptures and other theological sources with regards to the faith formation of teenaged children (Chapter 5); and to articulate some practical theological guidelines to assist parents with the faith formation of teenagers to challenge their exit from the church (Chapter 6).

In this concluding chapter the research findings for each of these objectives are summarised, conclusions are drawn and recommendations for further studies are made.

7.2. Summary of research findings

7.2.1. Faith and faith formation

In Chapter 2 a working definition of faith was constructed from a literature overview of salvific faith. After discussing the different elements of faith: mental assent to the truth, Christian doctrine, trust and commitment, it was determined that Biblical faith is a deeply rooted and hopeful trust in and reliance upon God, based on the revelation of God, a personal relationship with Him as well as a sound and growing knowledge about Him and His faithfulness, which results in practical and observable spiritual fruit.

Faith formation was discussed in the light of this definition as well as how faith is formed during the teenage and transitioning to young adulthood years. The different role players in faith formation were expounded upon, namely: God, the church, social circles, family and parents. The critical role parents play in faith formation was highlighted. Elements that contribute to healthy faith formation in teenagers were explained, namely: the Bible, personal evangelism, doctrine, family devotions, prayer, church, friendship and a godly example. Finally, factors that constrain faith formation were explained, namely: abdicating parental roles, absent fathers, the "dump and run strategy", parents working against the church, age segregation within the church, lack of family worship and devotions, insufficient "know-how"

on the part of the parents, doubts not appropriately addressed, time constraints and issues arising from this "digital age".

7.2.2. Parents' understanding and approaches to faith formation

Chapter 3 focused on determining how parents understand faith formation and the specific religious practices they employed to facilitate faith formation in their teenaged children.

Parents understood faith formation as something that is lifelong – starting at birth and continuing throughout life. Early childhood is seen as a critical time for the foundation of the Christian faith to be established. Discipleship is understood as that which is shown and taught and it is through discipleship that faith formation occurs. By teaching one's children about Jesus and showing them how to follow Him their faith forms and grows.

Some parents focus consciously, deliberately and consistently on their children's faith formation. Bible study, prayer, family devotions, church attendance and participation, family meetings, personal evangelism, technology control and setting a godly example are part of their way of life. Their lives are centred around their faith and everything is linked to their relationship with God. They are also deeply involved in their children's lives, building strong relationships based on mutual trust and accountability. They also make deliberate attempts to lead their children to Jesus.

Sadly, some parents neglect the abovementioned religious practices or perform them inconsistently; practice a hypocritical religion – one without a personal relationship with God; are distant or uninvolved in their children's lives; are antagonistic towards the church; are caught up in sinful and reckless lifestyles, setting a bad example for their children; and/or lack concern over the nature of their children's dealings with technology, friends or other worldly influences.

Others do follow the Lord, but becomes so involved with the church that they neglect their relationship with their children and experience "spiritual burnout" themselves; find themselves lacking the necessary know-how to evangelise their children; and/or shy away from addressing spiritual issues in the fear that they would not be able to answer unexpected questions. This often leads to an even greater rift between parents and their children.

It is clear that in homes where there is a healthy relationship with God from the parents' side it often leads to a healthy relationship with God for the children. The contrary is sadly also true – in a home where one or both parents do not really know or serve God, it is likely that the children will also stray from the church and/or the Christian faith. This is however not set in stone, since in some homes, despite the parents truly loving and serving God, one or

more of their children turn away from the church and/or God. On the other hand, some children find God and surrender their lives to Him, even when they come from homes where one or both parents did not know or serve God at all.

7.2.3. Reasons underlying current understanding and approaches

In Chapter 4 the focus was on identifying some of the reasons underlying parents' current understanding and approaches to the faith formation of their children.

Reasons underlying parents' current understanding and approaches to faith formation include: *their own upbringing* – which is often duplicated in the way they raise their children; *their own relationship with God* – determines whether they feel accountable to God in how they raise their children; *their relationship with their spouse* – depending on whether the spouse also loves and serves God, this can either help or hamper the faith formation of the children; *the church they belong to* – whether it is family focused, equipping the parents for discipling their children; *the children's behaviour* – determines whether parents should adapt their approach; the social network of the parents – whether it consists of others with the same values, principles and beliefs, thereby providing mutual support, guidance and accountability.

According to the parents, some reasons they believe their children either remained faithful or became estranged from the church include: their way of life – were they raised with strong Christian values, principles and beliefs; *the church* – whether they experienced God and spiritual growth there personally and were they equipped for life's challenges and challenges to the Christian faith; *personal relationship with God* – those who personally received Jesus as Saviour, surrendered their lives to Him as Lord and personally learned to follow, serve and love Him are much more likely to stay this course in young adulthood; *relationship with parents* – if close, warm and affirming, the likelihood of youth coming to Christ and remaining faithful to Him increases; *social circles* – form identity, worldview and faith - wrong friends are detrimental to faith formation, while Christian friends draws one closer to God; *personal life choices* – spouse, career, congregation, etc. can either build faith or destroy it; other influences – school/university, media, technology, work colleagues, etc. often present worldviews contrary to Scripture, provide temptations to sin, and challenge the Christian faith. Without proper equipping from a young age to address these, the chances increase that the youth will abandon the church and/or the Christian faith as they transition into young adulthood.

The grace and work of God should never be left out of the picture, regardless of how parents raise their children. Some parents seem to do everything right and follow all the necessary

principles to raise their children and yet, when their children leave the home, they choose a different path. Other parents have no desire to know God and do nothing with regards to faith formation and yet, by the grace and work of God in their children's lives, their children find the Lord and live for Him and serve Him wholeheartedly. This however does not negate parents' responsibility towards their children and towards God for doing everything in their power to assist the faith formation of their children.

7.2.4. Biblical perspectives on faith formation

Chapter 5 provided a Biblical perspective on faith formation. It was established that faith formation occurs through discipleship. Discipleship is the making of disciples, i.e. leading others to and teaching them to follow Jesus. This entails more than simply the transfer of knowledge – it includes an exemplary life that is being duplicated through the message of salvation, the teaching of Scripture, Christian doctrine, devotions, prayer, church attendance, godly relationships and friendships.

It was determined, by looking at Scripture as well as church history, that those primarily responsible for the discipleship and through it the faith formation of children are not the church, but the parents. The church must fulfil a complementary role, equipping parents for their task as well as to reinforce what parents teach their children, be it through catechism, youth gatherings, summer camps, etc. Parents should never abdicate their role to the church or any other institution, for God will ultimately hold them, as parents, responsible for the task of discipling their children.

Some of the discipleship principles and spiritual habits that parents should strive were highlighted and include:

1. Personal evangelism (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16)
2. Relationship with God (Deut. 6:4-5; Ps. 78:7)
3. Surrendered life, saturated with God (Luke 1:38; Matt. 26:39; 2 Tim. 1:5; Deut. 6:4-9)
4. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 42)
5. Teaching and modelling (Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; Luke 2:41)
6. Doctrine (Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:15)
7. Church attendance and participation (Acts 2:42, 46; Luke 4:16)
8. Bible study (2 Tim. 3:15; Ps. 78:5; Deut. 6:6-9)
9. Prayer (Acts 2:42)
10. Catechism (2 Tim. 3:14-15)

7.2.5. Practical theological guidelines to assist parents

Chapter 6 focused on providing practical guidelines for parents to facilitate the discipleship and faith formation of young people to challenge their leaving the church as they transition to young adulthood. Guidelines were also provided for the church in terms of its involvement with parents in assisting and equipping them for the task of discipling their children.

Parents are encouraged to take the responsibility of being the primary agents in the discipleship and faith formation of their children. God commands parents to fulfil this duty. He also provided everything needed for this task. If parents fail to take this responsibility seriously, they increase the chances of having their children becoming estranged from the church and even the Christian faith when they leave the home.

Some rationalisations leading to excuses, objections and fears were addressed. These included feelings of inadequacy, time constraints and feeling that they, as parents, turned out fine without intentional discipleship during their childhood years and it is therefore not necessary for their children.

Practical guidelines for parents in facilitating faith formation in their children include: (1) focusing on one's *own walk with God* first; (2) building *strong relationships with one's children*; (3) *setting the goal* of leading children to become like Christ; (4) *starting as early as possible*; (5) making use of *available resources* including the Bible, prayer, the church, evangelism, family devotions, family meetings, ministry together, apologetics and Christian friendships; (6) setting the *example* in the abovementioned religious practices; (7) and being *consistent*, *intentional* and *diligent*.

Practical guidelines for the church with regards to faith formation of children include: (1) recognising and fulfilling its *true responsibility* – that of supplementary role in supporting parents in the discipleship and faith formation of their children; (2) *equipping* parents by helping them realise the urgency, teaching them how to study the Bible, pray, hold family devotions, evangelise and disciple their children, how to inculcating Biblical doctrine, inviting families to participate and by following up regularly; (3) *reinforcing* the spiritual foundations parents establish at home; (4) providing a *support network* in the form of leadership, mentors, spiritual parents and Christian friendships; and (5) addressing the *concerns* of too much age segregation, irrelevance and confusion.

Using these principles and guidelines parents, with the help of the church, will hopefully be able to establish firm spiritual and Biblical foundations in the lives of their children from as early as possible that will engender a living and growing faith that will help them remain faithful to the church and to Christ, even during the tumultuous teen and young adult years.

## 7.3.	Conclusions

The literature study (Chapter 2) and the focus group interviews (Chapters 3 and 4) showed that the youth leaving the church and/or the Christian faith as they transition into young adulthood is an international phenomenon that needs to be addressed. It is a concern not only for the church, but for Christian parents as well.

One of the main causes of this phenomenon is a lack of adequate faith formation in Christian homes. Christian principles and practices are often neglected and this causes insufficient spiritual growth in the lives of the youth, leaving them vulnerable to challenges to their faith.

Faith formation occurs through discipleship – where children are led to personal faith in Christ through evangelism, taught to follow Jesus and shown how to follow Jesus by an exemplary life. Parents are the primary agents in this regard and they are primarily responsible for this task. The church plays a secondary, supportive role in this endeavour, by training and equipping parents for this task.

Sadly parents often neglect the important task of discipling their children due to: (1) a misconception of Biblical, salvific faith; (2) the absence of salvific faith and a personal relationship with God in their own lives; (3) not realising the urgency, their responsibility or their accountability towards God; and/or (4) not being adequately equipped to facilitate faith formation in their children.

The church, on the other hand, often aggravates the problem by: (1) allowing parents to abdicate their responsibility of discipling their children to the church; (2) not providing an adequate family focused environment; (3) age aggregating ministries to the point where families become divided instead of integrated in their growth in faith; (4) becoming so much like the world in its pursuit to be seeker-friendly that it loses its relevance and power (2 Tim. 3:1-8); and/or (5) sowing confusion with its approaches to changes in doctrinal views.

Parents can impact the lives of their children by: (1) building their own relationship with God; (2) building strong, warm, loving and affirming relationships with their children; (3) building strong friendships with fellow Christians; (4) consistently, intentionally and diligently practicing religious disciplines; (5) intentionally attempting to lead their children to personal faith in Christ; and (6) seeking support and training from the church.

The church can make an impact on the faith formation of children by: (1) equipping parents in the task of discipling their children; (2) reinforcing the spiritual foundations parents establish in their children's lives; and (3) providing a support network for parents and children.

There are, however, no guarantees. Parents, with the help of God and the church, can create the environment in which their children can find, meet and experience God. The children will then have to decide themselves whether they will follow God or not. It is not about "successful parenting" per se, but rather about faithful parenting.

7.4. Limitations of this study

- Only parents from the AFM congregations in Sasolburg, Vaalpark and Vanderbijlpark were included in this study. All the participants were white, middle-class South Africans. Engaging parents from other areas, denominations and cultures may yield similar, additional or different insights.

- While touching on faith formation from childhood to young adulthood, the primary focus of this study was more on the faith formation of teenagers. It came to the fore that faith formation should start much earlier and continue throughout life.

- Only parents were engaged. Engaging the young adults themselves, their teenage siblings, their other family members and their pastors could have provided much deeper insights and other perspectives on faith formation in the home.

7.5. Recommendations for further studies

- It is recommended that further studies be embarked upon wherein parents from other areas, congregations and cultures are engaged to determine whether or not their experiences, understandings and approaches to the faith formation of their teenaged children yield similar, additional and/or different results.

- It is also recommended that further studies with regards to parental roles in faith formation be conducted with a focus on all age groups – from baby, toddler and early childhood to young adulthood to provide more insights, perspectives, principles and guidelines, maybe in a more structured way, e.g. specific age-specific guidelines.

- It is recommended that further studies be conducted amongst young adults who left the church and/or the Christian faith, despite growing up in devout Christian homes. The focus could be on their experiences, specifically with regards to their view of their parents' approaches to discipleship and faith formation, and whether there is a link between these approaches and their leaving the church and/or the Christian faith.

- Other studies may also be conducted wherein the siblings, grandparents, other family members or pastors of young adults that left the church and/or the Christian faith are engaged with regards to faith formation and the role each of these parties play therein.

7.6.   Reflection on the study

The researcher experienced the study as an exhilarating challenge. It was exhilarating to discover what faith is; what faith formation is; how faith formation occurs through discipleship; what parents are doing or not doing with regards to discipleship and faith formation; what the church is doing and should be doing; and what principles and practices may be helpful to facilitate faith formation in children and teenagers.

For the researcher, this study has highlighted the seriousness of the phenomenon of the youth leaving the church. It has a huge impact not only on the church, but also on Christian parents who are worried about their children becoming estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith. The researcher shares their concern, because he himself has a son who will become a teenager in a few years.

Through this study the researcher has learned the importance of the role parents play in the lives of their children with regards to faith formation. Being a parent, the researcher has learnt that in order to raise his son for the Lord he needs to be consistent, purposeful and diligent in his personal walk with God; his relationship building with his family and specifically his son; spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, family devotions, church attendance and participation, evangelism, etc.; and setting a godly example in these practices. The researcher also learnt the importance of making definite attempts to personally lead his son to personal faith in Christ and to teach and show him how to follow Jesus in everyday life.

Being a pastor, this study taught the researcher about the important role the church plays in the faith formation of children – not in taking the responsibility from the parents, but rather to draw their attention to the urgency and need for discipleship in the lives of their children and to train and equip them to reach their children for Christ. The correct balance of parents as primary agents in the faith formation of their children and the church as secondary, supporting agent needs to be restored. This is something the researcher will surely attempt to do in his own congregation.

The researcher has learnt that there is no "magic bullet" when it comes to faith formation and discipleship. There is no recipe to guarantee success, because discipleship is based on relationships. The best thing parents can do is to build their own personal relationship with God; build their relationship with their children; and consistently and diligently set the example with regards to spiritual discipline. In doing so parents can create the circumstances and environment in which their children can encounter God, experience His love and goodness. Then hopefully they will also choose to give their hearts to Him, surrender their lives to Him and then follow and serve Him throughout their lives.

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APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

Please introduce yourself to the group and share with us why you have decided to join this study.

QUESTION 2

Please share with us your understanding of faith formation and discipleship, especially with regards to teenagers?

QUESTION 3

Please share with us the religious practices you employed to facilitate faith formation in your teenage children

QUESTION 4 – GROUP A (PARENTS OF YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE REMAINED FAITHFUL TO THE CHURCH AND/OR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH)

Why do you think your children remained faithful to the church and the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?

QUESTION 4 – GROUP B (PARENTS OF YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE ABANDONED THE CHURCH AND/OR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH)

Why do you think your children became estranged from the church and/or the Christian faith and how does this relate to their faith formation?

APPENDIX 2: RECRUITMENT LETTER GROUP A

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
MAFIKENG CAMPUS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP A

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:

Addressing the phenomenon of young South Africans leaving the church: a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in faith formation.

ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBER: NWU-01926-19-A6

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Prof. Alfred Brunsdon

POST-GRADUATE STUDENT: Johannes Nicolaas van As (Hannes)

ADDRESS: 15 Van Staden Street, Vaalpark, 1947

CONTACT NUMBER: 072 428 9969

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my **Master of Theology Degree in Pastoral Studies**. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

➢ *This study will be conducted in **April 2020** at the **AFM church in Vaalpark** and will involve **semi-structured interview questions,** which will form part of **group discussions**. The researcher is an **experienced interviewer** who previously conducted successful interviews while studying for his Honours Degree in Theology. **Eight to ten participants** will be included in this study.*

➢ *The **main aim** of this study is to conduct a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in the faith formation of South African youth to challenge the phenomenon of young adults leaving the church.*

*The **specific objectives** of this study are to:*
- *engage parents' understanding and approach to the faith formation of their teenage children;*
- *identify some of the reasons underlying current approaches of parents to the faith formation of teenage children;*
- *investigate the Scriptures and theological sources in this regard; and*
- *articulate some practical theological perspectives towards a more effective faith formation of teenagers to challenge their exit from church.*

Why have you been invited to participate?

➢ *You have been invited to be part of this research because you are **a parent of a young adult who remained faithful to the church and/or the Christian faith** during their teenage years as well as now during their young adult life.*

➢ *You also fit the research because you are an **active church member of an AFM church in Vaalpark, Sasolburg** or **Vanderbijlpark**. Your **young adult child(ren) finished high school (no more than 3 years ago)**.*

What will be expected of you?

➢ *You will be expected to participate in a **focus group interview** that focuses on parents' understanding and approaches to discipleship and faith formation of their teenage children. The focus group interview will last **approximately one and a half hours during which semi-structured interview questions,** aimed at addressing the objectives of this study, will be discussed.*

*The focus group interview will be conducted during the month of **April 2020** at the **AFM church in Vaalpark**. A minimum of **four questions** will be discussed with the possibility of a **follow-up focus group interview**.*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

➢ *You have the opportunity to **share your experiences** with regards to discipleship and faith formation in your children while they were still teenagers in your home.*

➢ *The insights gained from your experiences in this regard will help with the **development of better understanding, approaches and practices** enabling other parents to influence the faith formation in their teenage children in a positive way, in order to curb the phenomenon of teenagers leaving the church and/or the Christian faith while they transition into young adulthood.*

➢ *If you still have other teenage children, this study will also help you to gain insight into how to **have a greater impact** on their faith formation.*

Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research?

➢ *Refreshments and short breaks will be provided during the focus group discussion(s), thereby negating any discomfort you may experience due to fatigue or hunger.*

➢ *Your privacy is of utmost importance and will be respected at all times. Your identity will not be disclosed in any of the research transcriptions, finding or reports to ensure anonymity.*

➢ *All recordings, transcriptions and analysis of the data will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer.*

➢ *You also have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions.*

Who will have access to the data?

➢ *Anonymity will be ensured by not making any reference to the identity of participants during the process of transcribing or reporting of the data. Confidentiality will be ensured by keeping all data, analysis and results in a password protected computer. Reporting of findings will be anonymous by using pseudonyms in all transcriptions, analysis and final documents. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and electronic data will be password protected. As soon as data have been transcribed it will be deleted from the recorders. Data will be stored for five years after which it will be destroyed.*

What will happen with the data/samples?

➢ *This is a once-off collection and data. The data will only be used for this study. It will be transcribed, analysed, stored for five years and then destroyed.*

How will you know about the research findings?

➢ *Once the study results are published, you will be notified via email on how the results may be accessed. The findings will be shared with you within three months of obtaining approval for the completed study. Electronic copies of the findings will also be made available on request once approval of the completed study has been received.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

➢ *This study is funded by the researcher with assistance of a bursary from the North-West University.*

➢ *You will not be paid to participate in this study since this study is strictly academic. Any travel expenses you may incur to travel to the site where the focus group interviews will be conducted will be paid for by the researcher, up to a maximum of R100 per participant couple or single parent participant. Refreshments will be served at the venue where the focus group interviews will be held. There will therefore be no costs involved for you, other than your time.*

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

➢ *You can contact the researcher, **Pastor Hannes van As**, at **072 428 9969** or at **hannesvanas@gmail.com** if you have any queries or encounter any problems.*

➢ *You can also contact the **Faculty of Theology Research Ethics Committee** via **Dr. R.A. Denton** at **Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za** if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.*

➢ *You will receive a **copy of this information and consent form** for your own purposes.*

Declaration by recruiter/gatekeeper

I (name) ………………………………………………….. declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to ……………………………………………
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Singed at (place) ……………………………….. on (date) …………………….. 20………..

………………………………………   ……………………………………………

Signature of recruiter/gatekeeper   **Signature of witness**

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I …………………………..…………. agree to take part in a research study titled:

Addressing the phenomenon of young South Africans leaving the church: a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in faith formation.

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressured to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed.

Signed at (place) ....…….……………. on (date) …………..……….. 20......

………………………………….   ……………………………………
Signature of participant   **Signature of witness**

Signed at (place) ....…….……………. on (date) …………..……….. 20......

………………………………….   ……………………………………
Signature of researcher   **Signature of witness**

APPENDIX 3: RECRUITMENT LETTER GROUP B

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
MAFIKENG CAMPUS

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP B

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:

Addressing the phenomenon of young South Africans leaving the church: a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in faith formation.

ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBER: NWU-01926-19-A6

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Prof. Alfred Brunsdon

POST GRADUATE STUDENT: Johannes Nicolaas van As (Hannes)

ADDRESS: 15 Van Staden Street, Vaalpark, 1947

CONTACT NUMBER: 072 428 9969

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my **Master of Theology Degree in Pastoral Studies**. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

➢ *This study will be conducted in **April 2020** at the **AFM church in Vaalpark** and will involve **semi-structured interview questions,** which will form part of **group discussions**. The researcher is an **experienced interviewer** who previously conducted successful interviews while studying for his Honours Degree in Theology. **Eight to ten participants** will be included in this study.*

➢ *The **main aim** of this study is to conduct a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in the faith formation of South African youth to challenge the phenomenon of young adults leaving the church.*

   *The **specific objectives** of this study are to:*
   - *engage parents' understanding and approach to the faith formation of their teenage children;*
   - *identify some of the reasons underlying current approaches of parents to the faith formation of teenage children;*
   - *investigate the Scriptures and theological sources in this regard; and*
   - *articulate some practical theological perspectives towards a more effective faith formation of teenagers to challenge their exit from church.*

Why have you been invited to participate?

➢ *You have been invited to be part of this research because you are **a parent of a young adult who have left the church and/or the Christian faith** during the time of their teenage years and transitioning into young adulthood.*

➢ *You also fit the research because you are an **active church member of an AFM church in Vaalpark, Sasolburg** or **Vanderbijlpark**. Your **young adult child(ren) finished high school (no more than 3 years ago)**.*

What will be expected of you?

➢ *You will be expected to participate in a **focus group interview** that focuses on parents' understanding and approaches to discipleship and faith formation of their teenage children. The focus group interview will last **approximately one and a half hours during which semi-structured interview questions**, aimed at addressing the objectives of this study, will be discussed.*

   *The focus group interview will be conducted during the month of **April 2020** at the **AFM church in Vaalpark**. A minimum of **four questions** will be discussed with the possibility of a **follow-up focus group interview**.*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

➢ *You have the opportunity to **share your experiences** with regards to discipleship and faith formation in your children while they were still teenagers in your home.*

➢ *The insights gained from your experiences in this regard will help with the **development of better understanding, approaches and practices** enabling other parents to influence the faith formation in their teenage children in a positive way, in order to curb the phenomenon of teenagers leaving the church and/or the Christian faith while they transition into young adulthood.*

➢ *If you still have other teenage children, this study will also help you to gain insight into how to **have a greater impact** on their faith formation.*

Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research?

➢ *Refreshments and short breaks will be provided during the focus group discussion(s), thereby negating any discomfort you may experience due to fatigue or hunger.*

➢ *Your privacy is of utmost importance and will be respected at all times. Your identity will not be disclosed in any of the research transcriptions, finding or reports to ensure anonymity.*

➢ *All recordings, transcriptions and analysis of the data will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer.*

➢ *You also have the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions.*

Who will have access to the data?

➢ *Anonymity will be ensured by not making any reference to the identity of participants during the process of transcribing or reporting of the data. Confidentiality will be ensured by keeping all data, analysis and results in a password protected computer. Reporting of findings will be anonymous by using pseudonyms in all transcriptions, analysis and final documents. Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and electronic data will be password protected. As soon as data have been transcribed, it will be deleted from the recorders. Data will be stored for five years after which it will be destroyed.*

What will happen with the data/samples?

➢ *This is a once-off collection and data. The data will only be used for this study. It will be transcribed, analysed, stored for five years and then destroyed.*

How will you know about the research findings?

> *Once the study results are published, you will be notified via email on how the results may be accessed. The findings will be shared with you within three months of obtaining approval for the completed study. Electronic copies of the findings will also be made available on request once approval of the completed study has been received.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

> *This study is funded by the researcher with assistance of a bursary from the North-West University.*

> *You will not be paid to participate in this study, since this study is strictly academic. Any travel expenses you may incur to travel to the site where the focus group interviews will be conducted will be paid for by the researcher, up to a maximum of R100 per participant couple or single parent participant. Refreshments will be served at the venue where the focus group interviews will be held. There will therefore be no costs involved for you, other than your time.*

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

> *You can contact the researcher, **Pastor Hannes van As,** at **072 428 9969** or at **hannesvanas@gmail.com** if you have any queries or encounter any problems.*

> *You can also contact the **Faculty of Theology Research Ethics Committee** via **Dr. R.A. Denton** at **Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za** if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.*

> *You will receive a **copy of this information and consent form** for your own purposes.*

Declaration by recruiter/gatekeeper

I (name) …………………………………………………….. declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to …………………………………………
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Singed at (place) …………………………………….. on (date) …………………….. 20………..

………………………………………   …………………………………………
Signature of recruiter/gatekeeper   **Signature of witness**

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I …………………………….…………. agree to take part in a research study titled:

Addressing the phenomenon of young South Africans leaving the church: a practical theological investigation of the role of parents in faith formation.

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressured to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed.

Signed at (place) ....….......……………. on (date) …………...……….. 20......

…………………………………….   …………………………………………
Signature of participant   **Signature of witness**

Signed at (place) ....….......……………. on (date) …………...……….. 20......

…………………………………….   …………………………………………
Signature of researcher   **Signature of witness**