PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY CHILDREN’S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University
2016
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Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2016

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ABSTRACT

The issue of parental involvement in religious education is an important one for the family, the church, the Christian school, and society. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education as evangelical Christian parents in Midwestern communities. This research addressed four research questions: (a) What are evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? (b) What informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? (c) What content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education? (d) Why do evangelical parents get involved in their children’s religious education? (e) What barriers do evangelical parents encounter when participating in the religious education of their children? The research involved 12 participants, parents who exhibited the phenomenon of parental involvement in their children’s religious education. Church leaders recommended the participants for involvement in the study. The data collection from these participants included interviews, site documents, and a focus group. The data were analyzed through immersion into the participants’ expressed experience, identification of essential qualities of the experience, and synthesis of individual experiences to describe the general essence of the experience. This process led to the identification of eight themes including foundations, forms, facilities, functions, foci, fruit, fights, and feelings of parental involvement in their children’s religious education. This analysis also incorporated the qualitative practices of bracketing and member-check.

Keywords: parental involvement, religious education, evangelical, phenomenology
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to the families seeking to pass along their faith in Him to their children.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wife, Becca, who was truly the involved parent allowing me the time to work on this dissertation. I could not have completed this without her support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my kids for graciously allowing me time to complete this project. I would also like to thank my church family for their support and encouragement during the dissertation process.
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List of Abbreviations

Parental Involvement (PI)

Parental Involvement in Religious Education (PIRE)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (Q-DAS)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Many evangelical religious leaders and educators have encouraged parental involvement (PI) in their children’s religious education (Barna, 2003; Haynes, 2009; Witmer, 2012). This involvement may look like parents and children praying, reading religious literature, discussing faith topics, or serving in a religious endeavor together. The call to PI is not surprising given the traditional religious significance of the parental role in religious education (Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, & Cassel, 2010) and the student success linked to PI (Dugan, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001). Yet, despite the perceived importance of PI in children’s religious education, little research has been done to learn about the actual experiences of the parents who are involved in their children’s religious education (Karlsen, Coyle, & Williams, 2014).

Background

Historically the church has viewed PI in religious education (PIRE) to be very important (Frabutt, et al., 2010; Morgenthaler, Keiser, & Larson, 2014). Frabutt cites over 300 years of Catholic Church edicts giving precedent to the importance of involved parents. Historically, Protestants have also viewed the role of parents as central to religious education. Baxter (1799) encouraged pastors to enlist parents in the religious education of the family. “I beseech you therefore if you desire the reformation and welfare of your people do all you can to promote family religion” (Baxter, 1862, p. 92). Baxter encouraged parents to lead their families in prayers, reading of scripture, and observance of the Lord’s Day.

The historical importance of parents began to fade away, as ministries such as Sunday school and private religious schools were granted to the job. By the 2000s, religious leaders and educators noticed the decline and renewed the call for PI (Barna, 2003; Fowler, 2005). Barna’s
(2002) research indicated that a decline in PIRE was a contributing factor for youth’s diminishing biblical worldview.

Parental involvement has not only been heralded as important for religious education, but also general education (Dugan, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001). Policy makers are convinced that PI is an important part of children’s education (Public Education Network, 2004). Its importance has led researchers to develop theoretical constructs and typologies of PI (Epstein, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These constructs played a foundational role in this research.

Recently, religious educational leaders have developed ministry approaches that combine the effort of the church and parents in the religious education of children (Haynes, 2009; Joiner, 2009). The theme of their writings emphasizes churches developing partnerships with parents, encouraging their participation in their children’s religious education. This partnership forms an application of the biblical call for PI (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-4; Ephesians 6:4, English Standard Version). The role parents play in spiritual formation has been the topic of recent research (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Flanagan, Loveall, & Carter, 2012; Power & McKinney, 2013; Uecker & Ellison, 2012).

Parental involvement in religious education is a historical and relevant phenomenon, one that many are encouraging, yet few understand. This research sought to add valuable understanding to this under researched topic. The results of the research should be helpful to religious educational leaders as they gain better understandings of PI. It will help parents who are seeking to better understand their role in their child’s religious education. This research will also provide valuable insight for curriculum writers who are currently developing PI elements for their curriculum. Increased understanding of religious PI could greatly improve the religious education of children and is a topic of personal interest for many parents.


Situation to Self

The topic of PI in children’s religious education is very important to me. Therefore, it is logical for me to endeavor to understand and study this phenomenon. I am currently an associate pastor of children and family ministries at a church in the Midwest. Previously, I served on the mission field and as the director of children’s ministries at a church in Southern California. I have given the greater part of my career to religious education, specifically within the evangelical church. Because of my experience and the scripture passages previously mentioned, I believe that parents should be involved in the religious education of their children.

My parents were involved in my religious education. I do not remember a time when my family did not regularly attend church. We actually did more than attend; we were involved. We served. We established close friendships. I have been involved in religious education from my youth. My parents made sure that my siblings and I were brought to and taught in a Bible believing church.

I remember one Sunday, when for whatever reason we did not go to church, my mom took my siblings and me on a walk in the dessert. We climbed up a sand dune, pulled out our children’s Bible, and began reading. This is one of the few times I remember doing this type of family worship, but I know it was not the only time. My parents modeled PI in my own religious education.

I am now a father of three children. I find myself always evaluating my own involvement. What is the right way to disciple my children? How can I talk to them about faith? What will make the biggest impact in their religious education? All the while, I am tasked with the responsibility in my church to encourage and equip other parents in their role in their children’s religious education. I am a motivated researcher.
I hold several other presuppositions beyond the necessity of PI. I am an evangelical Christian, who holds to the inerrancy of scripture. I believe that there is ultimate and final truth and reality to be found in the ancient pages of the Holy Bible. The tenants of my faith are delineated in the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA Spiritual Heritage Committee, 2011). With such a definitive view of truth and reality, it may strike some readers as odd that I will use a research method that is traditionally critical and constructivist in nature.

I follow in the footsteps of other researchers who have held to a biblical worldview while approaching inquiry in the phenomenological tradition (Milacci, 2000). I also understand that biblical truth must be applied by the people who choose to follow it. It is here where phenomenology begins for me. What are the experiences of people as they apply truth? How do they make meaning of their life in light of ultimate reality? As I better understand others, I am better suited to fulfill the second greatest commandment; “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

I want to understand this phenomenon as it is experienced by others. Therefore, I sought to “bracket” my own opinions and beliefs to hear the voices of my participants. “Bracketing” in qualitative research is the process of separating the researcher’s own views and experience from that of the participants’ (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). This process permitted my findings to be presented in a manner that allows readers to draw their own conclusions about the nature of this phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This phenomenological approach will capture the essence of PIRE and address some of the challenges associated with this phenomenon.
Problem Statement

This research sought to address the issue of PI in children’s religious education. This problem is both academic and pragmatic. Academically, there is a large gap in the research when it comes to the phenomenon of PI in the specific realm of religious education of elementary age children. Little has been invested to understand the experience of parents as they seek to participate in their children’s religious education. Pragmatically, authors, radio talk show hosts, pastors, and curriculum writers continue to encourage PI without commenting much about the phenomenon. Often, they do not present a working knowledge of what parents are experiencing. This research adds to the general understanding of this phenomenon.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education as evangelical Christian parents in Midwestern communities. For the purposes of this research, parental involvement in religious education is generally defined as those activities parents do to encourage, teach, disciple, and help their children develop an evangelical Christian faith. This purpose statement provided the direction and impetus for every aspect of this research.

Significance of the Study

This study builds on and enhances an understanding of PIRE. First, it provides insights into what parents actually experience as they seek to implement the ideas of contemporary religious leaders (Barna, 2003; Fowler, 2004; Haynes, 2009; Joiner, 2009; Witmer, 2011). Second, it indicates if PI typologies and constructs for general education (Epstein, 1992; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005) also apply to involvement in religious education and spiritual development. Third, this research
broadens the spectrum of understanding by expanding the participant base beyond that of parents of teens and emerging adults (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011; Leonard, Cook, Boyatzis, Kimball, & Flanagan, 2013; Negru, Haragas, & Mustea, 2014; Power & McKinney, 2013; Ueker & Ellison, 2012). This research will also have practical significance.

Practically, the study provides valuable insights for religious educators who desire to encourage PI. It can be a resource for curriculum publishers that desire to develop resources that reach parents in the midst of their involvement. Finally, this research may provide encouragement to parents who are in the midst of discipling their children. In order to reach this potential significance, the study will address five research questions.

**Research Questions**

**Research Question 1**

What are evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? This is the broadest research question. It seeks to place PIRE within the spectrum of types of involvement (Epstein, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997, 2005). It reflects other researchers’ suggested research into specific religions (Dollahite, 2003; Mahoney, 2010; Power & McKinney, 2013). This type of research question was also addressed by Dollahite and Thatcher (2008).

**Research Question 2**

What informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? This question specifically seeks to understand what foundation parents have for their involvement in children’s religious education. Other research has suggested that foundational elements may be their church ministries (Fowler, 2004; Haynes,
Research Question 3

What content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education? Streib (2005) hypothesizes that religious content is connected to an individual’s faith development style. Streib considers content analysis to be a major piece in qualitative research of faith development. The content that parents choose to pass down to their children reflects important aspects of the family members’ faith development (Alexander & Carr, 2006).

Research Question 4

Why do evangelical parents get involved in their children’s religious education? This question reflects the thinking of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 2005) in developing the reasons for PI. Applying Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s involvement theory to religious education includes considering potential links between parental participation, self-efficacy, and invitations for involvement from church, teachers/pastors, and students.

Research Question 5

What barriers do evangelical parents encounter when participating in the religious education of their children? Traditionally, the education literature points to barriers of self-efficacy and invitation (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005). From the religious perspective, leaders have sighted parents’ lack of training (Haynes, 2009), resources from the church (Joiner, 2009), or theological foundation (Witmer, 20011). Dumas and Nissley-Tsiopinis (2006) suggest that parents’ own struggles with God often reduce their efforts in parental investment. This research question will add new understanding to this area of the literature.
Research Plan

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research seeks to avoid presuppositions and approach an experience with a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). This was appropriate for the topic because it sought to understand the phenomenon of PI from those currently experiencing it. It was fitting to hear their stories and give voice to their experiences. A qualitative approach was also suitable for the under explored construct of PI within religious education. Qualitative research allows themes to be identified without the imposition of preconceived constructs (Patton, 2002).

This phenomenon was investigated through interviews, site documents, and a focus group with evangelical parents living in Midwest communities. Phenomenologists (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002) generally agree that a sample size of 10-15 participants is sufficient for this type of research; this research involved a sample size of 12. Moustakas (1990) suggests that data analysis at its broadest level incorporates immersion in the data and incubation of thematic content as it is identified. I followed this type of process as I collected, read, contemplated, took notes on, coded, and synthesized the data.

Delimitations and Limitations

The boundaries of this study include only evangelical parents with at least one child between the ages 5 and 12. The participants are bounded by evangelicalism since that is the specific religious demographic of interest and reflects a gap in the literature. The participants are parents of elementary aged children because this is also a missing element in current research. The sample was gathered through a modified snowball sample, finding parents who were involved in their children’s religious education based on the perspective of their churches’ religious leaders.
Limitations of this study include the geographic location of the participants in Midwestern rural and suburban communities. All the participants in the study were Caucasian and parents in two-parent families. The participants came from three different churches representing two different evangelical denominations. Two of the churches participated in a national midweek children’s ministry called Awana.

Summary

The experience of parents as they participate in their children’s religious education is an under researched phenomenon. However, it is an experience that is widely encouraged by religious educators. This research developed a phenomenological description of PI in children’s religious education to address the gap in the literature and provide valuable insights for parents, pastors, and religious educators.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The cry from educators, both sacred and secular, has been for parental involvement (PI). Researchers have shown that academic success is often facilitated by PI (Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005). Recognizing the importance of PI, legislation has been passed encouraging schools to have parental engagement programs (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Barna Research Group (2003) indicated that PI is instrumental in lasting faith development. Fowler (2004) and Haynes (2009) joined Barna in calling for PI based solely on biblical principles, such as those found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (The English Standard Version). Many have recognized that religious education and academic education tend to thrive in the presence of PI.

However, the actual practice of PI often seems insufficient. Perhaps it is connected with an overall deterioration of the family. “For some reason or another, the family does not count as it used to do. It is not the center and the unit that it was formerly. The whole idea of family life has somehow been declining” (Lloyd-Jones, 2014, p. 281). Deficient PI practices may be linked to an overall failure of educators and churches to invite their participation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Perceived insufficiencies in PI have no doubt motivated secular and religious educators to urge an increase in parental activity.

With such a diverse call for PI in students’ education, it raises many of the research questions contained in this research. What are parental concepts and practices of PI? What informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of PI? What content do these parents consider important? Why do they get involved? And, what barriers do they encounter? The primary concern of this literature review pertains to PI within religious education. However, it will consider the rich resources and research of PI in educational and psychological disciplines.
The literature indicates several areas of PI in religious education. Many researchers highlight the role of parents in spiritual development, religiosity, spiritual disclosure, and educational endeavors. Parents’ sanctification of their role and feelings of spiritual generativity also play a role in their PI. These themes and related theories must be explored for a complete understanding of the literature on PI in religious education of children.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is grounded in several diverse theories. The theoretical constructs include parental involvement, biblical understandings of parenthood, faith development, and spiritual development. The theoretical understanding of PI relies largely on the construct of Hover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997 & 2005). The evangelical perspective on PI in religious education is formed from the biblical text and current understanding and application of the texts (Barna, 2003; Joiner, 2009; Witmer, 2011). Streib’s (2001 & 2005) modified faith development theory and constructs of spiritual development (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Yocum, 2014) provide a structure for understanding how PI in religious education may influence a child. These theories provide the framework for this research.

Parental Involvement

Theories on PI have been largely attributed to the research of Epstein and that of Hover-Dempsey and Sandler (Dugan, 2009; Jasper, 2009; Green, et al., 2007). These theories have reflected the development of thought on how parents get involved and their motivation for doing so. Epstein’s typology and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s theoretical model have been subject of numerous studies (Dugan; Jasper; Green, et al.; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).
Epstein (1992 & 2007) proposes six school-family partnership categories: (a) providing, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering at the school, (d) learning at home, (e) decisions and policy formation, and (f) community collaboration. These six different ways that schools and families partner together has provided consistent terminology and categories for research. They isolate areas for educators to emphasize as they seek to encourage PI for the students in their institutions.

Schools have applied Epstein’s typology by promoting at-home parent and child activities to bolster their relationship, including parent columns in school newsletters, inviting parents to speak at and lead school activities, conducting student-led parent-teacher conference, and many other initiatives (Epstein, 2005). As schools make efforts to increase Epstein’s six types of involvement, student performance and behavior has improved. However, this is not easily done since new teachers find working with parents to be one of their toughest tasks (Markow & Martin, 2005). Such a challenge led to the consideration of PI motivations.

Going beyond the activities of PI in Epstein’s typology, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1997, 2005) theoretical model provides a structure to examine the motivations parents have for PI. They break down into three broad motivational factors: parent beliefs, involvement invitations, and parents’ life context (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). These PI factors have been developed through their own research and other theories. Most notable is Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy and Epstein’s PI typology (Epstein, 1992). While Epstein’s typology focuses on specific activities in which involved parents engage, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s theoretical model specifically targets motivational factors that can be facilitated by educators.

Their model for PI aims to describe and predict factors that will encourage parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey, et al. (2005) explain,
We note also that in pursuing these goals we have focused on parents who are involved, in whatever degree, in their children’s education. Our broader interests, of course, include all parents, because parents are an integral, usually primary, part of the social context that influences their children’s educational outcomes. (p. 124)

Through their focus on involved parents, it is possible to extrapolate what would produce other involved parents. It may also provide a starting point for considering why some parents are not involved, especially in their children’s education.

Parents’ motivation for involvement centers on their beliefs about their role and their beliefs about the efficacy of that role (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Parental beliefs about their role are usually created socially, reflecting the views of social groups, and by personally held beliefs. Researchers have found that schools may help to form these beliefs to positively foster PI (Hoover-Dempsey, et al.). Promising results have come from schools fostering positive role construction among ethnic groups and collaboration between parents and educators. The second area of motivation is self-efficacy. This is the belief parents have that they will make a difference through their involvement, which can be positively influenced by educators (Hoover-Dempsey, et al.).

Parental involvement also hinges on the invitations they receive for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Invitations may come from school culture, teachers, and students. Each of these invitations can motivate PI in specific ways. Invitations communicate to parents that they are welcomed, valued, and expected to be involved in their students’ education. Educators can facilitate each of these invitations. Parents who know they are wanted as part of the education process will be far more likely to get involved.
The final portion of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model focuses on life context (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). In this area, the research focuses primarily on knowledge, skill, time, and energy. The school can address some of these. However, parents must ultimately choose to alter life contexts that are hindering their involvement. Hoover-Dempsey, et al. defended their decision to limit the focus on socio-economic status because it is an area in which educators have little influence. However, educators can supply resources, which is one of the more important factors in socio-economic standing. The educational value of PI is reflective of the religious value of PI found in the biblical text.

**Biblical Parental Role**

Parental involvement has been the expectation of Judeo-Christian religious leaders from the time of Moses. The most foundational passage on this topic is Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (Haynes, 2009; Fowler, 2004).

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

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 contains foundational material for PI that was applied throughout Israel’s history. “There is a sobering revelation here about who is ultimately responsible for the stewardship of eternal truth. It’s not Moses or the child, but the parents who are ultimately
responsible for what should be learned” (Joiner, 2009, p. 66). Fowler (2004) stated that other passages echo parents’ responsibility and privilege to foster faith in their children (Deuteronomy 32:46; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 78:5-6). This parental responsibility is continued in the New Testament era with such verses as Ephesians 6:4 and 2 Timothy 1:5. The former specifically highlights the important role of fathers in religious instruction to their children (Fowler, 2004; Witmer, 2012).

Haynes (2009) explained that the call to PI in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 begins with the parent’s own faith experience. From this point of authenticity, parents can then naturally begin to share their faith with their children. The nurturing of faith in children’s lives is a daily activity in which parents are primarily responsible to engage. According to this passage, parents engage in discipleship through normal everyday activity. It is not an extra class or activity tacked on to the week. It is through every activity of the week that faith should be discussed and passed down to the next generation.

The scriptural importance of PI is further reinforced by one of God’s first covenants with man, the Abrahamic covenant. “For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (Genesis 18:19). From the beginning of Judeo-Christian religions PI was central. Through PI, faith was to be maintained and passed on to future generations.

Historically, the teachings of religious educators have emphasized the importance of PI in religious education (Alexander, 2014; Baxter, 1862; Frabutt, Holter, Nuzzi, Rocha, & Cassel, 2010). Alexander (2014) used the term family worship and indicated that it has existed in every generation of Judeo-Christian history. Alexander, citing the ancient writing of Tertullian (155-220 A.D.), provided evidence that even the earliest Christian parents were involved in their
children’s religious education. These early Christian families practiced prayer at three hours during the day, before meals, and baths. They ended visits with their brethren with prayer as well. During the Reformation, the government of Scotland even created a Directory for Family Worship, providing instructions for their citizenry on proper PI in religious education (Alexander, 2014).

Post-Reformation pastors and leaders continued to encourage PI in religious education. Citing the experience of various parents and religious educators, Hooker (2014) called for increased PI in religious education for the conversion of the world.

Christian parents: Our children have too long been educated without that direct and single reference to the glory of Christ, and the good of this fallen world, that becomes us. Their dedication to the work of Christ, too, has been exceedingly imperfect. For this reason, among others, the work of evangelizing the world has gone slowly. (Hooker, 2014, p. 316)

Parental involvement during this era of Christendom focused on training children in Christian piety and faith in Jesus Christ (Doddridge 2014; Hooker, 2014). The principle means of this involvement was gentle communication (Bunyan, 2014; Hooker, 2014).

The 20th Century also had its own voices calling for a renewal to Christian PI. Lloyd-Jones (2014) focused the necessity of Christian PI on Ephesians 6:4.

In the forefront of the minds of Christian parents must ever be the thought that the children are to be brought up in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and as Lord. That is the peculiar task to which Christian parents alone are called. This is not only their supreme task: their greatest desire and ambition for their
children should be that they should come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and as the Lord. (Lloyd-Jones, 2014, p. 280)

This call to PI was not only a call to basic moral education, but to instruction in true Christian faith. Realizing the limited nature of what can be accomplished on a Sunday morning, Lloyd-Jones encouraged parents to supplement and apply the teachings of the church while at home. This appeal is a kind of forerunner to the encouragement from current religious leaders.

However, in recent history parents seem to have passed the responsibility of nurturing their children’s faith to the church (Barna, 2003; Fowler, 2004; Haynes, 2009). Barna’s research found that while 85% of parents believe they have primary spiritual responsibility for their children. However, more than 66% of them turn that responsibility over to the church. The research also indicates that only 1 out of 10 parents who regularly attend church will read the Bible, pray, or do an act of service as a family. Even fewer will have any type of worship together as a family in a given month (Barna, 2003). It seems parents view spiritual development as a church thing, not a home thing.

There are several suggested reasons why this has taken place. Many parents may feel inadequate for the task (Fowler, 2004; Haynes, 2009). Families may feel too busy to engage in children’s faith formation. Parents may think that it is the job of church professionals (Haynes). Barna (2003) summarizes all the reasons parents give as a feeling of being “overmatched” in the task of passing on their faith. Churches have been too eager to step into the parental role instead of equipping parents for PI in the religious realm (Barna; Fowler; Haynes).

The biblical requirements clearly point to the importance of PI in the faith formation of children. This important role cannot be relegated to the church or the school. Pastors (Haynes, 2009; Witmer 2012), researchers (Barna, 2003), and educational leaders (Fowler, 2004) all see
the need for PI when it comes to fostering faith through religious education. Parents have a very important role in the faith development of their children.

**Modified Faith Development**

Streib (2001) suggested a significantly modified faith development theory. The most common approach to faith development is attributed to Fowler. Fowler’s theory has been the starting point for numerous studies (Streib, 2005). While popular, the wholeness of this faith development theory has been debated (Dehann, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). Streib (2001 & 2005) theorizes that the traditional faith development theory places too much emphasis on structural development and progression through the stages. Finding groundings in the works of Noam, Riccour, and Merleau-Ponty, Streib suggests a more phenomenological approach to faith development. Specifically, he suggests that the life-history, life-world, and religious content (Streib, 2001 & 2005) become integral parts of understanding an individual’s faith development.

This phenomenological approach allows faith development to be seen holistically. The impact of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships play a part in this theory because it is here that one’s faith is formed. The revised faith development theory also does not necessitate the rigid structure of stages proposed in Fowler’s faith development theory. Streib (2001) proposes faith development styles that roll in and out of one’s journey like waves. As these styles emerge and submerge, they may return to the surface again in some fashion. This accounts for what Streib (2001) calls the “fundamentalist revival.”

There are five faith development styles as Streib (2001) envisions them:

- **Subjective:** This style is primarily seen in early childhood and parents may be seen as God representations. When in this style, children can develop basic trust.
• Instrumental-reciprocal: This religious style reflects the emergence of the children’s self-awareness. Along with self-awareness, this style sees the beginning of the God-human relationship, which is often characterized by punishment of evil and reward of good.

• Mutual: When in this style, individuals seek out a community holding shared beliefs. Partners in religion become very important and God may even be seen as a partner in life.

• Individuative-systemic: This style reflects the development of position and role of religion in society and the individual within the religious community. During this style, religious symbols may be transformed into propositions.

• Dialogical: The final religious style finds the individual at a place to openly discuss other religious viewpoints. It is a position of learning and benevolence.

In each of these five styles, Streib (2001) clearly emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships. Streib also asserts that faith is not self-invented; rather it is passed along generationally or culturally. This approach to faith development postulates an important role for parents in faith development. Parents are the primary source for interpersonal relationships in the first two, perhaps even three, styles. This type of development not only affects the particular faith of individuals but the spirituality of their lives.

**Spiritual Development**

Closely related to theories of faith development are those of spiritual development (Brelsford, Marinelli, Ciarrochi, and Dy-Liacco, 2009; Dehann, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011; Mahoney & Cano, 2006). The related constructs of religion and spirituality are often defined separately in research (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm; 2011; Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010;
Karlsen, Coyle, & Williams, 2014). Religiousness tends to be defined in terms of faith based creeds and practices (Astin et al., 2011) and institutional beliefs (Holder et al., 2010). Spirituality has been conceived in more individualistic terms (Paredes-Collins & Collins, 2011; Yocum, 2014). “Religion involves an association with and commitment to an established set of customs and rituals, whereas spirituality is characterized by an individual pursuit for meaning, purpose, truth, and value, however elusive the quest may be” (Paredes-Collins & Collins, 2011, p. 75).

“Spirituality is a topic on which everyone is an expert. However, each person's expertise is a function of a particular history of experience with spirituality traditions” (Gorsuch & Walker, 2006, p. 101). While many attempts have been made to define spirituality and its development, complete agreement by researchers is illusive (Dehann, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). The difficulty in defining can be attributed to the complexity and diversity in religiosity and spirituality (Brelsford, Marinelli, Ciarrochi, & Dy-Liacco, 2009). Roehlkepartain, Benson, Ebstyne King, and Wagner (2006) explain the difficulty in synthesizing research due to the philosophical bent of various researchers encompassing developmental, ecological, and constructivist views on spirituality. “Spirituality is difficult to define because of deep ambiguities of everyday usage that have encouraged educational theorists, policy makers, and practitioners to pursue diverse social, cultural, and political aims, agendas, and outcomes in the name of spiritual education” (Alexander & Carr, 2006, p. 74).

The attempts made at defining spiritual development focus on various aspect of one’s inner life. Astin, Astin and Lindholm (2011) see it as the personal ways people find sacred meaning in their lives, education, dilemmas, and experiences. Many definitions agree that spiritual development is, in some respect, the seeking or quest for sacred meaning (Brelsford,
Spirituality is the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred - something greater than the self. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped, and expressed through a wide range of religious narratives, beliefs, and practices, and is shaped by many influences in family, community, society, culture and nature. (2006, p. 8)

However, the work of defining spirituality and its development is not over. Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) encourage researchers to continue to hash out a definition that reflects the complexity of the issue since it is too early in the field of research to operationally define spiritual development.

Frameworks for Spiritual Development. There are various proposed frameworks for spiritual development (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Yocum, 2014). These models include spirituality for thriving (Lerner et al.), ecologies for spiritual development (Roehlkepartain & Patel), and spiritual needs, motivation, and volition for spiritual development (Yocum, 2014). All three models suggest an interaction between one’s context and individual processing of the context. Yocum (2014) places more emphasis on the individual’s spiritual needs while Roehlkepartain and Patel emphasize the influences of congregations and community. Lerner et al. place spirituality in the larger context of promoting
thriving and well-being and see this development as continuous and dynamic interactions between the individual and context.

Spiritual development is in part a social event. Spiritual development is done within community and the young people also act on that community as they develop. As this relationship is positive and healthy, the young person can develop spiritually and thrive (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006). The influences on children's religious and spiritual development are theorized to be influenced by congregational context and culture and by congregational dynamics and settings (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006). Roehlkepartain and Patel delineate three main points of contact for children's spiritual development. They are community, congregation, and family, which is the closest point of contact. The congregational dynamics that impact spiritual development are sacred symbols and spaces, relationships, environment and climate (warmth and openness), beliefs, worship and ceremonies, educational, social and leadership opportunities, and policies and processes. Yocum (2014) places many of the social interactions within the construct of spiritual motivations. These motivations derive from the influence of family, education, which includes both implicit and explicit curriculum, and stressors, which may be positive or negative. While acknowledging the role of context, these theories also recognize the individual in the realm of spiritual development.

Spirituality cannot be isolated as only socially constructed. Yocum (2014) lists three intrinsic attributes under spiritual volition. These include personal experience, communal expression, and service and sacrifice. Beyond just socialization, spiritual development requires spiritual awakening (Yocum). This could be the asking of personal questions regarding life's purpose and metaphysical realities. Spiritual awakening leads naturally to finding a community for spiritual connections, which in turn leads to empowerment for spiritual self-actualization.
(Yocum). This encompasses the proposed spiritual needs of an individual. The thriving (Lerner et al., 2006) and ecological model (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006) both acknowledge the individual in their models but do not elaborate on the interaction between the individual and context in spiritual development.

Validation of these theoretical frameworks indicated that they were reliable and warranted further study. The spirituality for thriving model was quantitatively tested using data from 1984 survey of 8,165 youth (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006). Their analysis indicated that spirituality, religiousness, and thriving were all valid individual constructs. They also found that spirituality influenced thriving both directly and indirectly, mediated through religiousness. Roehlkepartain and Patel (2006) offer a qualitative case study of a Muslim young man to illustrate the applicability of their ecological model. Yocum (2014) offered a mixed method approach to validate the spiritual motivation, need, and volition model. The model, derived primarily through an autoethnographic research approach, was further supported by survey and interview data from college students. These indicated that the hypothesized model for spiritual development was valid and warranted future applications. Spiritual development integrates well with the previously discussed theories to form a solid theoretical foundation from which to examine PI in children’s religious education.

The Intersection of the Theories

Parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005), the biblical parental role (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), modified faith development (Streib, 2001; Streib, 2005), and spiritual development (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Yocum, 2014) intersect to form an ideal theoretical platform for the current research. First, the biblical command for PI makes it clear that this is a topic relevant
for churches, parents, and educators to consider. The educational theories on PI (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005) portray the supports and barriers to PI. These may be relevant to the struggle some evangelical parents feel when seeking to fulfill the biblical mandate for involvement.

Streib’s (2001 & 2005) modified faith development theory and the social nature of spiritual development (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Yocum, 2014) provide a possible explanation for the growth taking place through PI in children’s religious education. Streib emphasizes the interpersonal relationships that form the life-history and life-world of children’s faith development. Roehlkepartain and Patel place family as the closest context through which many dynamics of spiritual development occur. In Yocum’s model for spiritual development, personal influences, educational influences, and stressors are all potentially related to PI in religious education. The phenomenon of PI in religious education is related to the phenomenon of faith and spiritual development.

Modified faith development theory also provides a way to understand fundamentalism in adults. While in no way embracing fundamentalism, Streib (2001) theorizes that it is the reemergence of an earlier style, such as the instrumental-reciprocal, in order to achieve a goal of a later style. Consequently, an individual may adopt the instrumental-reciprocal; God punishes evil doctrine, in order to accomplish the defining of their own role within a religious system, which is indicative individuative-systemic style. This understanding of fundamentalism may be relevant to a study focused on evangelicals, though they may not necessarily be fundamentalist.

The theories on both academic and religious PI, faith development, and spiritual development are uniquely relevant to this inquiry. PI in the religious education of children is a more robust topic when considered through the lens of these theories. There are several peer-
reviewed research reports that elaborate the role of parents in education, religious development, and the psychological constructs of spiritual development.

**Related Research**

These theories and issues related to PI in religious education have been the topic of various studies. Streib (2005) mentioned that more than one hundred dissertations had been written around the topic of Fowler’s faith development theory. Parental involvement especially in education is researched and found to have statistically moderate effects on student achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). Research into spiritual development have found PI integral in the areas of sanctification of parenting (Brelsford, 2013), generativity (Marks & Dollahite, 2006), and spiritual disclosure (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008).

**Religious and Spiritually Focused Research**

Religion has shown to be a powerful influencer of family life. Religions tend to encourage parents to view their role in theological terms and give them religious reasons to train and educate their children. Judeo-Christian rationale persuades parents to instill respect, responsibility, and helpfulness in children. Religion also prescribes standards for relationships within the family (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). “For many people, family relationships involve more than biological, psychological, and social processes; people often believe these bonds tap directly into the spiritual realm” (Mahoney et al., 2003, p. 223). This religious sanctification of the family holds true in nearly all Eurasian religions. To say that being religious is the same as being a good family member is not an oversimplification (Mahoney et al., 2003).

While a rarity, some research has suggested that attendance of religious services is not significantly correlated to wellbeing. Based on their research in teens spirituality and religiosity,
Good and Willoughby (2014) hypothesize teens who have not internalized their spiritual processes yet continue attendance in religious services may have a less positive perception of their well-being. Such teens may be forced to attend services by parents or they may be having some religious doubt. Their results indicated a significant relationship between institutional religiosity and more negative well-being in 12th graders. Research involving 8- to 12-year-olds did not indicate a relationship between frequency of participation in religious services and happiness (Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010). Holder et al. explain this result by the likelihood that parents are determining a child's involvement in these religious observances. In a qualitative interview, one young elementary student reported that the children’s programming was his least favorite part of religious services because the adults talked too much and did not listen to the children (Karlsen, Coyle, & Williams, 2014).

Despite such research, many researchers have concluded that religion often produces positive outcomes for families (Boyatzis, 2003; Dollahite & Marks, 2001; Wen, 2014). Dollahite and Marks (2001) surmised “strong connections to the role of religion in fostering strong relationships and commitments between fathers and children and spouses” (p. 627).

Overall, existing research clearly indicates that religion is linked to important dimensions of parenting. In particular, parents with a biblically conservative orientation tend to support and use corporal punishment more frequently than other parents and also behave more warmly toward their children. In addition, parents’ level of general religious commitment has been tied to warm and involved parenting, increased family cohesion and satisfaction, and more positive child adjustment. (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006, p. 273)
Wen’s (2014) study primarily focused on the relationship of parental participation in religious services and the well-being of the family. Family well-being includes parental and child well-being as well as positive parenting attitudes. The research suggested that religious attendance by parents is associated with positive family well-being. Wen suggests that society can strengthen families by encouraging parental religious attendance.

Religious education is a key component to attending religious services. Barna (2003) and Morgenthaler, Keiser, and Larson (2014) exhorted congregations to take their educational ministries to young children seriously. Morgenthaler, Keiser, and Larson explained that experience of relationship is important to truly educating children in faith. Therefore, it is the family and the faith community that can build up children in a genuine faith. According to Alexander and Carr (2006) spiritual education can be motivated by a continuum of six different agendas (a) confessional or phenomenological spiritual education, (b) traditional or postmodern, (c) subjective-collective-or-objective education, (d) morally reducible or irreducible, (e) particular or general spiritual education, (f) cognitive or affective. Wherever a family or congregation falls on these continua, it is likely that these items will need to be taught to children and will not just innately develop as children mature (Alexander & Carr). Alexander and Carr suggest four locations for this type of education. They are the common school, the family, congregations and communities.

Religious and spiritually focused research typically suggests that religiosity and spirituality is a source for individual and family well-being. These benefits relate to the likelihood that this research is focused on the pairing to two related phenomena. Specifically, parental involvement and religion have been common constructs in religious research.
**Religious Parental Involvement.** Research has pointed to the importance of PI in many areas of education, including the religious education of children. Barna (2003) researched the Christianity of today’s children and found great “theological confusion” in America’s youth. Barna reported that 75% of 13-year-olds believed good people go to heaven and all religious writings convey the same truth. He stated that at least 50% felt there were not absolute standards for morals and ethics. After reviewing these and other findings, Barna stated, “To place these views in context, realize that only 3 percent of the nation’s 13-year-olds have a biblical worldview, which serves as the foundation for their decision making” (p. 37). Barna (2003) and Fowler (2004) both attributed these dismal statistics to the lack of Christian PI.

Barna (2003) found that a majority of parents felt that they held the primary responsibility of passing their faith on to their children. However, of the families that regularly attend church, only 10% will read the Bible together throughout the week. Only 5% of these families will have any type of worship experience other than church in a given month. Barna found that most parents are not satisfied with their PI in their children’s faith formation. This research points to a disconnect between perceived responsibility and perceived implementation of PI in religious education.

Dugan (2009) found that parents in a Christian school context exhibit many of the same behaviors as those in public education. Dugan’s descriptive research found that parents and teachers (especially under secondary level) viewed PI positively. There was a general decrease in PI and perceived benefits of PI during secondary education. This may be due to less need and less opportunity as students grow in independence. While Dugan’s research pertains to general education at a Christian school, it relates to religious research on PI in the church due to the religious similarities of the research sample.
Research has also examined the faith connection between parental practices and spirituality of children. Negru, Haragas, and Mustea (2010) found that parents modeling religious habits and parents explaining the religious meaning of the habits were central to the faith formation of emerging Romanian adults. Yocum’s (2014) spiritual development model was supported by the quantitative data indicating a stronger correlation for personal influences and “expressions of spiritual volition”. “Essentially, this implies that the influences and role-modeling provided by family, friends, and clergy are more likely to motivate us to engage in acts of spiritual expressiveness than are the influences of our teachers” (p. 97). Communication is the primary means by which families facilitate religious and spiritual development in children (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). This includes modeling religious behavior. Families pray, read, do devotions, and perform charity for others. This communication is often best when it is give and take between parents and children (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006).

Beyond communication, parental religious practice influences their children. Uecker and Ellison’s (2012) empirical study showed the link of parental religiosity and the developed religiosity of adult children. They found that the religious involvement of parents with their children functions independently of the child being from a single or dual parent home. Researchers have found that the psychological adjustment and religiosity in emerging adults may be positively correlated to perceived parenting practices and religiosity (Power & McKinney, 2013).

Research has shown that parents have diverse motives for involvement in their children’s religious education. One study indicated that some agnostic and atheist parents will even seek out church attendance for their children (Ecklund & Lee, 2011). The established motivations for this involvement were spousal faith, moral development, and socialization without violating
scientific thinking. On the other hand, Dollahite and Marks (2009) found that highly religious families had developed family processes motivated by the contexts of their convictions and religious involvement.

The research on religious PI points in two directions. First, it is considered important by many parents. Secondly, religious PI is not readily engaged in by parents. Reasons have been suggested; the current research may be able to add to the literature on this theme. Research has indicated that activities as simple as conversing with one’s children go a long way toward their spiritual development. These conversations lead naturally to spiritual disclosure within a family.

**Spiritual Disclosure.** Dollahite and Thatcher (2008) examined the phenomenon of parent-teen conversations about faith. Their grounded theory research found that teen-centered conversations were best received and beneficial to both parents and teens. Somewhat surprisingly, their participants ranked their conversations about faith as the most important religious activity they do as a family, even surpassing church attendance. This communication on religious and spiritual matters has been termed spiritual disclosure (Brelsford, 2013; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). “Spiritual disclosure is defined as the disclosure of personal religious and spiritual beliefs and practices between two or more individuals” (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008, p. 62).

Spiritual disclosure seems very closely tied to PI in religious education. A family practicing spiritual disclosure will have open conversations about religion and spirituality, which are not primarily aimed at homogenous views of religion but on life's meaning, various beliefs, and spiritual seeking (Brelsford, 2013). The research into parent-child spiritual disclosure has primarily focused on mothers and teens (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008) and parents and college students (Brelsford, 2013). Research indicated that spiritual disclosure appears to be connected
to better familial relational quality. Both mothers and older teens reported that greater levels of spiritual disclosure related more satisfaction relationally, greater collaboration in disagreements, better communication patterns, more peaceful communication, and more general disclosure (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). Brelsford and Mahoney hypothesized that the intimate nature of spiritual disclosure likely increases the vulnerability that people feel with one another. In fact, the ability to share vulnerability may be related to increased spiritual disclosure. It also may provide motivation for resolving conflicts and keeping families closely united. College students reported that their spiritual disclosure played a significant role in their relationship satisfaction and open communication with their parents. Parents also reported significant correlations between spiritual disclosure and open communication; this did not correlate with their satisfaction in the relationship (Brelsford, 2013).

Reciprocity in parent-child spiritual disclosure is also important. Brelsford’s (2013) research indicated that parents viewed their relationship with their college student as better linked to their children's interpersonal spirituality. There are unique relationships to father's disclosure and the feelings of closeness and reciprocated disclosure by college students. The importance of reciprocity was also seen in research with young children. Karlsen, Coyle and Williams (2014) did grounded theory research into the spirituality of children. A surprising finding was reciprocity of communication between children and trusted adults in matters of religion and spirituality. The two sides of the coin are the unavailability of the adult for the child and then the child's withholding openness from the adult. Lacking spiritual disclosure sends the implicit message that children are on their own to understand spirituality. All nine of the children in the study said they did not speak openly about spiritual matters with trusted adults, reasoning that the adults were unavailable. These nine children were diverse in their spirituality
and willingness to share (Karlsen, Coyle, & Williams). The research on spiritual disclosure indicates that mutual communication regarding religion and spirituality may indicate an overall healthy relationship. Spiritual disclosure offers conceptual insights into what parts of religion really matter for family functioning (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008).

Spiritual disclosure is closely related to potential activities parents may engage in during involvement in children’s religious education. The act of sharing and explaining personal spiritual understanding fosters the religious and spiritual development of children. The lack of such engagement also sends messages to children regarding their spirituality. This current inquiry is related to the practices of parental spiritual disclosure within their family and sanctification of the parenting role.

**Sanctification of the Parenting Role.** Motivations for parental investment in religious education and spiritual disclosures may be related to sanctification of the parental role. For example, Latter-Day Saints’ theology relates to nontheistic sanctification of the fathering role since the father has a moral obligation to meet his child's needs (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). Many religious perspectives present parenting as a God ordained occupation. Emphasis is put on personal sacrifice leading parents to feel a strong spiritual duty to work hard at parenting (Volling, Mahoney, and Rauer, 2009). Motivations are diverse that lead parents to sanctifying their role in their children’s lives.

Sanctification of the parenting role is another construct tied to parental involvement in children’s religious education. Researchers see two primary types of sanctification. One is theistic sanctification, which sees the parent-child relationship as a manifestation of God (Mahoney, et al., 2003; Murray-Swank et al., 2006). Theistic sanctification of parenting is religiously focused. The other type of sanctification is non-theistic. Non theistic sanctification
sees divine attributes present in a thing or experience so it focuses on qualities such as transcendence, holy, ultimate purpose, and eternal (Mahoney, et al., 2003; Murray-Swank et al., 2006). In the parent-child bond, this could be viewing the relationship with awe, wonder, or as mysterious. Murray-Swank, Mahoney, and Pargament’s research points to the fact that many parents see their parenting role as possessing spiritual and religious purposes. Moreover, these beliefs are connected with their interfamily interactions.

There are positive results linked to the sanctification of parenting. In their sample, Volling, Mahoney, and Rauer (2009) found sanctification of parenting to promote positive socialization techniques and reasoning amidst discipline procedures. Parental praise was also found to be positively correlated to moral development and sanctification of parenting. Fathers who had stronger beliefs in sanctification of parenting used inductive disciplinary techniques that correlated with their children's moral conduct. Volling et al. suggested that within Christian families the importance of putting others ahead of self may influence this trend in fathers and children. In other research involving religiously conservative mothers, sanctification of their parenting role led to more positive interactions with their children. For mothers with more liberal views, their sanctification of parenting did not have the same effects on their positive interactions with their children. However, they generally reported less negative interactions than did more conservative mothers (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006).

Family members who sanctify their relationships may demonstrate and strengthen this perception through prayer, attendance at religious services, or discussions about the influence of religion on family life. There may be more unseen influences of sanctification such as the feeling that family must be protected and sacrificed for. Families may also feel the need to be more vulnerable with each other when viewed as a sacred relationship. This sanctification of
family can have profound implications on the quality of relationships in the family (Brelsford, 2013). College students who sanctify their relationship with parents reported more open communication with their parents (Brelsford). However, spiritual disclosure was related to different types of sanctification. Parents viewed theistic sanctification as more relevant to their spiritual disclosure with children, while college students viewed non-theistic sanctification related to their openness in spiritual discussions. This study indicates that types of sanctification are important to different family members (Brelsford). Dumas and Nissley-Tsiopinis, (2006) reported that sanctification of parenting, general religiousness, and religious coping are related to child and parental functioning. “Overall, the study provides compelling evidence that…

religious and spiritual factors are important to a comprehensive understanding of how parents evaluate their own and their children's adjustment” (Dumas and Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006, p. 305). While their research found that sanctification of parenting and parental investment were related, this relationship only held with parents who did not report struggles with God in their parenting. Child function was also found to relate to negative religious coping. It seems that parents, when they encounter opposition from children may relate this negatively to God and religion. However, children who are typically compliant do not facilitate parents reflecting on their parenting experience in a religious realm (Dumas and Nissley-Tsiopinis).

There may be psychological benefits to sanctifying the family relationship. Individuals may gain a deeper meaning from their family life and receive more joy from sacred relationships. People could feel greater security sensing that God is a part of the family's relationships. Families may also perceive spiritual benefits from their sanctification of the relationships (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). Parental involvement in
religious education fostered by discussions of spirituality seems very related to parental sanctification of their role (Brelsford, 2013).

Avoiding the loss of sanctified family relationships may motivate family members to invest more time, energy and resources into these bonds. Specifically, family members may be more willing to: a) make greater personal sacrifices for the benefit of family relationships, b) forgive transgressions by other family members, c) accept core personality differences between family members, d) minimize or dismiss marital or parent child conflicts, e) engage in benign attributional processes about conflict that short-circuit hostile family interactions, f) avoid the escalation of negative affective responses such as anger and frustration during conflicts, and g) employ constructive methods to resolve disagreements. (Mahoney et al., 2003, p. 228)

Several benefits have been found when spirituality is developed in an individual’s life. Teens with positive personal spirituality and religiosity have better perceptions of their relationships with parents and perceive God in a more positive manner (Good & Willoughby, 2014). Holder, Coleman, and Wallace’s (2010) research with 8- to 12-year-olds indicated that spirituality was a strong predictor for happiness in children. This was based on their self-report and the report of parents. This relationship was confirmed even when temperament was taken into consideration. They suggest that this link to happiness may be related to the positive social interactions that are fostered by spirituality and religiosity (Holder et al.).

PI in religious education may be motivated by the sanctification of the parenting role. The research may produce themes that correlate with the literature surrounding sanctification of
parenting. As parents sanctify their role, it may produce a desire to pass along their religious view to the next generation.

**Spiritual Generativity.** Another area related to spirituality within the family is spiritual generativity. “Generative spirituality is a transcendent connection with the next generation that flows from and encourages convictions of abiding care for that generation” (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006). Boyatzis et al. describe generative spirituality as the sharing of religious views, spiritual habits, and spiritual community. Those motivated by generative spirituality will seek the relational, moral and spiritual growth of future generations. Generativity also promotes responsible parenting (Dollahite, 2003) and solutions to intergenerational conflicts (Boyatzis et al. 2006). Research has also indicated that individuals who are highly religious or spiritual are more generative (Brelsford, Marinelli, Ciarrochi, & Dy-Liacco, 2009)

Spiritual generativity has benefits for families. Dollahite (2003), using qualitative methods, found that Latter-Day Saint fathers of special needs children were more responsible and responsive because of the meaningful bond provided by generative spirituality. This type of parenting is directly tied to involvement with one’s children seeking to meet their various needs (Marks & Dollahite, 2001). Brelsford et al. (2009) reported that spiritual disclosure is strongly linked to one’s perceptions of generativity. Spiritual disclosure plays a unique role in people’s generative concern. This relationship functions independently of other interpersonal dimensions of spirituality and religion. “This finding suggests that generativity flourishes in adults who feel connected to humanity through sharing religious and spiritual views with others” (Brelsford et al., 2009, p. 158). They hypothesize that spiritual disclosure may carry its own unique influence on generativity because it involves the sharing of sacred content. Sacred content in
conversations may increase the bond between family members thereby increasing generative concern.

Not only is there the potential for generativity to influence the development of spirituality, but researchers hypothesize theological reasons for its development. The theological principles of divine plan and eternal association helped Latter-Day Saint fathers’ connections with their special needs children. The theological principles helped fathers to see their role as a sacred responsibility (Dollahite, 2003; Marks & Dollahite, 2001).

Western theology points to the ultimate sacrifice being Jesus Christ giving his life to cleanse the sins of his people. In addition, Christianity has a plethora of “generative souls” who dedicated their lives for the benefit of future generations. These people reflect the Christian teachings extolled in the Bible as “loving thy neighbor,” one of the greatest and most salient generative acts. (Brelsford, Marinelli, Ciarrochi, & Dy-Liacco, 2009)

Generative spirituality is clearly tied to parental involvement in the family. The theological underpinnings of Judeo-Christian religions make generative spirituality a likely influence in this research. While the best hopes for parenting place generative spirituality as a corner stone for their involvement, some parents can manifest negative religious PI.

**Potential Negative Influences of Religion on the Family.** Not all aspects of religiosity and spirituality in families is positive (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Casey, 2014; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003; Volling, Mahoney, and Rauer, 2009). Some religious influencing on parenting correlates with abuse and withholding of needed medical treatment. Religiously motivated negative parental involvement may cause children to view God as evil or unloving (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Volling et al. hypothesized that parents
may blame God when they fail at parenting. They may demonize their children as being influenced by the devil when they are naughty. Religion can also be used as a justification for harsh and abusive discipline (Casey, 2014; Velling et al., 2009). Mahoney et al. (2003) postulate several potential negative influences of the sanctification of family relationships. When experience seems incongruent with sanctification expectations individuals may struggle religiously. Those who are victims in religious abuse situations may be more likely to endure the abuse seeing it as a spiritual reality. The loss of sanctified relationships may hurt more and signal a greater failure for some. There could be greater conflict when family members disagree about a theological matter. Religion often sets up the model of the ideal family and when a family does not meet the criteria struggle and difficulty may ensue.

Casey (2014), in her autobiographical narrative research, explained that the religious education she received at home as a child emphasized that God was constantly angry and disapproving of her. God was especially displeased with her because she was female. Based on the religious education in her home, God was nothing more than a punisher of those who broke the rules. Casey’s family experience merged religion and violence, which affected her childhood faith development and understandings of God. The abuse of her father and mother both related back to concepts of the Divine and the judgment of God. Casey also saw that the theology of a judging and punishing God was taught in her church reinforcing the judgmentalism and abusive punishment received at home. In spite of the negative experiences of violence and religion, Casey’s faith developed in a unique way.

It is simply this – God and the Church are not the same. God is God – simple and as complex as that statement may be. And God loves me no matter what. It was the Church and abusive theology that reinforced and justified the behavior of my
parents – not God. My experience of abuse and violence at the hands of my parents and through my religious teaching informs who I am – it does not define who I am. It contributes immensely in shaping my theology and practice of ministry. I am a Practical/Pastoral Theologian who writes from a feminist perspective. (Casey, 2014, p. 131)

This autobiographical research is a stark reminder that religious parental involvement can and does go awry. Researchers must take care not to overstate the positive or ignore the challenges facing religious families.

This investigation must be accomplished with a discerning eye to potential negative influences of religion on family life. While most research has pointed to the positive influences of spiritual generativity, spiritual disclosure, religious attendance, and PI, it cannot be denied that there are exceptions. These exceptions must be acknowledged and understood for the power they have to direct a child’s spiritual and religious development in unique ways.

Religious and spiritually focused research ranges from the negative examples of PI (Casey, 2014) to the positive elements of generative spirituality (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006). This research has shown that parental involvement in the religious and spiritual development of their children can be a powerful influence. However, parental involvement is not only limited to the spheres of the spiritual. Research has indicated that PI has educational implications.

**Educational Research**

Educationally PI has been seen as beneficial. Educational research for the past two decades has pointed to the fact that PI is beneficial to the education of children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The research indicated that PI positively influences grades, higher
achievement, teacher perception, graduation, and pursuit of higher education. PI has been linked to these outcomes because of the positive psychological and motivational support of students.

There is also some evidence that parents can be over-involved (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). This is evidenced in two primary ways. When students’ personal responsibility is hindered, it may be because parents have taken on a controlling role in their children’s lives. Parental over-involvement may also be evidenced when an educational entity can no longer meet the needs of other students because of pressure from one parent.

The research on importance of PI should be tempered by the realization that few experimental models of research have been implemented. Therefore, research results cannot be applied generically across the board. Each research result is influenced by a unique context and external variables that cannot be controlled. However, there is no reason to discount the potential positive effect of PI given the growing base of research in the field (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005).

Researchers divide PI into two basic types: home-based and school-based involvement (Hornby, 2011; Jaspen, 2012). Home-based involvement includes helping students with homework, while school-based may be helping on a field trip or in the classroom. Researchers have also been interested in the motivation for both types of involvement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Jaspen, 2012). Motivations for PI can be divided into two categories also. There are internal motivators that can rarely be influenced by the school such as culture and socio-economic status. There are also external motivators such as perceived invitation and opportunity for PI. While PI trends can be examined as related to only internal motivators, many researches are interested in the external motivators, which can be influenced by educational institutions.
The research in PI can be summarized to show general positive effects in the area of academics. This is considered valid by researchers in public and private schools. Researchers have developed two categories of PI, home-based and school-based. They have also suggested that internal and external factors motivate PI. Such research is reflected in the development of PI theories and programs to implement these theories.

**Programs for Parental Involvement**

The emphasis on PI has led to the development of programs and interventions to increase PI in various educational endeavors. Zakrajsek, Shope, Greenspan, Wang, Bingham, and Simons-Morton (2013) reported positive results from an intervention, “Checkpoints,” to facilitate parent-directed teen driver safety. Their research found that this educational program, which involved parents in teen driver education, promoted less-risky driving behavior. Kang & Kim (2013) found that Parent Effectiveness Training significantly helped Korean parents with communication skills. KEEP foster-parent training has shown itself effective in positively influencing children’s behavior (Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, & Reid, 2009). Parent training has also been effective in promoting child safety and health (Almeida, Gaspar, Brandao, Alarcao, Santos, & Machado, 2012; Dickin, Hill, & Dollahite, 2013; Kulkarni, 2013; Tessier, 2010). Research-based programs and interventions are well documented for PI in the arena of public education.

However, in the arena of religious education, research-based programs are difficult to find. Most programs are based solely on the biblical mandates for parental involvement. Barna (2003) calls for parents and churches to partner together for the faith formation of children, yet does not suggest programmatic features. Petts (2011), based on his research of urban fathers, calls on churches to support men in their fathering role so they will have a positive influence in
their families. Fowler (2004) suggests a model where the church addresses the faith formation of children both directly and through parents. Once again, specific implementation steps are missing. However, the recent development of programs like Legacy Milestones (Haynes, 2009) and Orange (Joiner, 2009) provide churches and parents with guidance on reestablishing parental involvement in religious education.

Both Haynes (2009) and Joiner (2009) encouraged churches to harness the natural progressions of certain developmental milestones to inspire PI in children’s faith formation. Through Haynes’ program, parents are given the specific knowledge, skills, and resources to walk their children through the following milestones: (1) birth of a baby, (2) faith commitment, (3) preparing for adolescence, (4) commitment to purity, (5) adulthood, (6) High School graduation, and (7) life in Christ (Haynes, 2009). Parents are equipped through parenting seminars and special classes throughout the year. Parents’ interest is gained for the program as each milestone pertains specifically to the unique life stage of their child.

Emphasizing partnership of the church and home, Joiner (2009) reminds readers that every parent is involved at some level in their children’s religious education. Joiner suggests four different levels of parent partnership in religious education. They are aware, involved, engaged, and invested. The challenge for the church educator is to move parents up to the next level of involvement.

Discussion between parents and children is an important part of parental investment in religious education (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Haynes (2009) suggested two regular discussion activities that parents can do to be involved in their children’s faith formation. The first was a weekly faith talk where parents intentionally engage their children in discussions on scripture and faith. The second was God sightings where parents note and discuss ways that God has
worked in their family’s life. These activities are tied to the biblical directives from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Next, Haynes suggested the marking of each milestone with family celebrations and church celebrations. At the attainment of each milestone, families have special activities to mark the arrival of the new stage. For example, at Milestone 3 parents facilitate a weekend away to discuss the changes and challenges of adolescence. The church marks this milestone with a pre-teen retreat.

These programs seek to foster PI in the faith formation of children (Haynes, 2009; Joiner, 2009). They seek to meet the directives of scripture and the demands of research that points to a lack of PI among church going parents (Barna, 2003). Haynes’ program also parallels Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model of PI, which involves parents’ beliefs, involvement invitations, and parents’ life context (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). The theories supporting these programs are solid and should produce the desired results.

Programs to influence PI are common, especially in public education. Many of these programs have been tested to show their effectiveness. However, in the area of religious education a well-researched program is lacking. The literature would be far more beneficial and helpful if a research-based intervention was available to religious educators. The following research may be a piece to the development of robust PI interventions for religious education. This exploration of PIRE also fulfills the encouragements for future research found in the literature.

Future Research

The reviewed literature also calls for more research involving the intersection of family, parenting, religion, and spirituality (Boyatzis, 2003; Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008; Karlsen, Coyle & Williams, 2014; Vabling, Mahoney, & Rauer,
There is a need for qualitative research that specifically looks at the complexity and nature of family shared narratives and generative spirituality (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Volling et al. (2009) encourages research to consider the influences of religion on family life beyond simple discipline issues. There is a need for more nuanced research that goes beyond religious attendance and focus on the multidimensional aspects of religion within the family (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008) including childhood socialization and parenting (Volling et al.). Karlsen, Coyle and Williams suggest needed research into the experiences of parents during religious communication with children in order to better understand the cycle of unavailability and withholding of spiritual information seen in their research. “The family is probably the most potent influence--for better or for worse--on children's spiritual and religious development, but we still have much to learn about this context” (Boyatzis et al., 2006, p. 305).

**Summary**

Research supports PI as an important factor in academic success. It is purported to improve test scores, homework results, graduation rates, and the pursuit of higher educational goals. The phenomenon of PI in education has been well researched. This research has produced descriptors of types of involvement, classified as home-based and school-based. The motivations for PI can be classified as internal motivators and external motivators. Educators can seek to influence all these motivations for the betterment of their students. While research into PI may be relatively new, the call for PI is quite ancient, dating back to Abraham.

Judeo-Christian writings have emphasized PI from their inceptions. Parents have been given the responsibility and privilege to engage in their children’s faith formation. Researchers have begun to investigate parental roles in religious and spiritual development. This has facilitated the development of the emerging constructs of generative spirituality, spiritual
disclosure, and sanctification of parenting. “No one has more potential to influence a child’s relationship with God than parents” (Joiner, 2009, p. 84). This is a call that is being renewed by modern day educators, pastors, and researchers. However, the literature does not provide a clear description of the phenomenon of PI in children’s religious education. There is a lack of research specifically into the experience of PI in the religious education of elementary aged students. This investigation provides useful knowledge regarding PI in religious education.
CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Given the light coverage of PIRE within the current literature, this qualitative study sought to add to the knowledge base and expand the current understanding of the phenomenon. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education as evangelical Christian parents in Midwestern communities. This chapter explains the research design, participants, setting, research procedures, data analysis approach, and trustworthiness of the study.

Design

Parental involvement in their children’s religious education is well suited for qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is often most appropriate for examining phenomena surrounding faith development (Streib, 2005). This inquiry is not about numerical instances of church attendance, prayer, or reading the Bible. Rather this research is aimed at unearthing the essence of the experience parents have, as they are involved in their children’s religious education. “Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). A phenomenological approach is best for revealing the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by several participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2002).

A phenomenological design provided the necessary data and analysis to meet the purpose of this study. Phenomenology seeks to find a universal description of an experience (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1990) explained phenomenology as finding a new or expanded meaning of a human experience. The following phenomenology sought to find a universal description of the experience parents have as they participate in the religious education of their children. It provides rich detailed descriptions of what parents experienced and how they experienced it as
they passed along their faith to their children. Phenomenology also allowed the researcher to gather various types of data from the participants, which reflected the complexity of the human experience at the intersection of parenting and religion. The data gathered through this study was aimed at answering five research questions.

**Research Questions**

The five research questions for this inquiry were:

- What are evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education?
- What informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education?
- What content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education?
- Why do evangelical parents get involved in their children’s religious education?
- What barriers do evangelical parents encounter when participating in the religious education of their children?

**Setting**

The setting for this research was both purposive and convenient. The Midwest represented the geographical setting that was most accessible. The participants were all involved in evangelical churches. According to Pew Research Center (2008), the Midwest has America’s second highest percentage of evangelical Protestants, 23%. The demographics of evangelical Protestant churches in America are 56% between the ages of 18-49, 81% are White (non-Hispanic), and 58% have income under $49,999. Educationally 40% have a high school diploma, 24% have completed some college, and 13% are college graduates. Especially relevant
to this study, 35% of evangelical Protestants in America have at least one child living at home. Midwest evangelical participants reflect the purposive nature of the setting. These churches were located in two different communities, rural and suburban. This provided a broader spectrum to the phenomenon and may increase the studies transferability.

The churches and towns were given pseudonyms to protect the organizations’ and participants’ anonymity. The first church leader contacted for potential participants was Pastor Paul, the youth pastor for Countryside Evangelical Church. Countryside is located in a small town with a population under 200 people (Censusviewer.com, 2010). Pastor Paul was quick to suggest some names from his congregation that met the participant criteria. He also discussed potential participants with Countryside’s senior pastor and sent me more names and contact information. I also contacted Pastor Travis at Maplewood Country Church. He was the youth pastor of this rural church. He was able to provide me with four more potential participants. Maplewood is located in the country near several small towns. Both of these rural churches are about a 15 minute drive from two towns with populations of about 5,000 and 1,000. The population of these communities is more than 95% Caucasian (Censusviewer.com).

Next, I contacted the children and family pastor from Lighthouse Church, Pastor Bob. Pastor Bob wanted to contact his families first to gain permission to share their contact information. Within a few days, he supplied me with a list of 10 potential participants. Some of the potential participants suggested by Pastor Bob attended other churches. Lighthouse is in a suburban setting with a population of about 45,000 and is also nearly 95% Caucasian (Censusviewer.com, 2010). This church has multiple staff members and a regular attendance each weekend of 800. Several attempts to contact church leaders from urban and other suburban settings were made but they were either unable to be reached or unable to participate at this time.
Participants

The participants were parents who were involved in the religious education of their children. This was a purposive sampling, gathered through a modified snowball sampling procedure. Purposive sampling in qualitative research seeks to ensure that the participants have experience in the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In traditional snowball procedures, researchers ask a number of informants or other participants whom they would suggest as an ideal participant (Patton, 2002). I found my purposive participants by asking leaders of evangelical churches to identify from within their congregations people who exemplify the phenomenon of PI in their children’s religious education. This method for snowball sampling has been used in other similar research (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Dollahite & Marks, 2009). From this procedure, 12 parents were isolated for participation in the study.

These participants were parents of children ages 5-12 years old. This reflects parents whose children are clearly old enough to receive some religious education but are also under the age of the most commonly studied participants. This also represents the age when Barna (2003) suggests a child’s worldview and religious beliefs are formed. Participants’ demographic information can be found in Table 1. Participants were each given a pseudonym and some identifying information was changed to protect their anonymity in the study. The participants in the study were further protected by following agreed upon research ethics and Institutional Review Board procedures.
Table 1

Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Children’s Ages</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>7, 5, 4, 3</td>
<td>August 12, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>11, 9</td>
<td>August 13, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>13, 10, 7, 2</td>
<td>August 15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>21, 19, 16, 9</td>
<td>August 18, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Maplewood</td>
<td>23, 13, 10</td>
<td>August 15, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Lighthouse</td>
<td>10, 8</td>
<td>September 16, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Lighthouse</td>
<td>6, 4</td>
<td>September 16, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>18, 14, 12, 6</td>
<td>September 17, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Lighthouse</td>
<td>24, 22, 16, 10</td>
<td>September 17, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lighthouse</td>
<td>10, 5</td>
<td>September 26, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lighthouse</td>
<td>8, 4</td>
<td>September 26, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

The procedures of this phenomenological design provided the rigor necessary to secure the credibility of the research. The research procedure was approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to insure the protection of the participants. See Appendix B for IRB approval letter. After approval from the IRB, I contacted leaders from evangelical churches in rural, urban, and suburban settings; however, no urban families participated in the research. I gave the leaders a general explanation of the study and asked if they could recommend at least ten parents who demonstrated the phenomenon. Parents demonstrating the phenomenon were described as engaged in activities that encourage, teach, disciple, and help their children develop an evangelical Christian faith. This included reading the Bible together, conversing about faith, devotional activities, family worship, prayer, and acts of religious
service. I collected approximately four potential participants from Maplewood, eight from Countryside, and ten from Lighthouse.

I contacted these potential participants via telephone. I invited them to participate in the study using a guided script, see Appendix C. If they were willing, we set up an interview time and place. I asked them to bring any books, curriculum, or resources they use for participation in their children’s religious education. I emailed the informed consent form to them prior to the interview. The interviews used semi-structured questions and prompts and were recorded (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). See Appendix D for the interview form used during the research. The interviews were recorded using two separate recording devices. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts and detailed description of site documents, resources used by parents, formed two types of data collection. A focus group furthered the exploration of identified phenomenological themes and provided data triangulation.

The data were organized using ATLAS-ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software (Q-DAS). The analysis procedure followed a synthesized phenomenological analysis suggested by Creswell (2013). The results of the analysis are presented in a thick description that allows readers to draw their own conclusions and better understand my conclusions. Thick description is an important piece in the validation of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Not only are these procedures important to trustworthy qualitative research, clearly understanding the researcher’s role is central to valid analysis and interpretation during the study.

**The Researcher’s Role**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the “human instrument” in the inquiry. I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. It is therefore imperative that the reader
understands my role in this inquiry. My relationship with the participants and my philosophical assumptions all play a part in this research.

In many respects, I was an insider sharing similar parenting roles and religious views as the participants. Other qualitative research of religion has been done by an insider to that religion (Dollahite, 2003; Marks & Dollahite; 2009). Boyatzis (2003) commends this type of qualitative research for bringing issues of hermeneutics and theological perspective into the realm of balanced and candid research. In Dollahite’s (2003) perspective, qualitative research of religion and family is best done by an insider since they have firsthand knowledge and participants may be more open on personal issues. Yet, the participants may assume the researcher knows information and may withhold such data. Researchers may also be too quick to read in their own meanings, which were not meant by participants.

I did not know the participants in this study. Some participants inquired about my profession and to those I disclosed that I am a pastor, but that my primary role was that of researcher and a fellow parent. The church leaders who recommend the participants were my acquaintances. I did not gather data from any site where I held a position of authority.

I hold very concrete views on truth and reality. It is likely that many of my participants will share these views. However, during the process of this research I practiced epoche. According to Patton (2002), epoche involves the bracketing of the researcher’s presuppositions to allow the participants’ voices to be heard. This presentation of the data clearly states where my own interpretation of the phenomenon begins and ends, thus allowing the reader to determine the validity of the interpretation. In qualitative inquiry careful presentation, analysis, and collection of data can be very powerful in epoche.
Data Collection

Triangulation of data is a key component to rigorous phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Triangulation means that at least three data sources or types are collected to compare the identified themes throughout the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In other words, a theme should be seen in more than just one participant or one data source or type. This research used interviews, site documents, and a focus group to triangulate data. The first sources of data collection were interviews. Interviews were first because it allowed me to hear the participants’ voices as a primary source. The data provided by the interviews undoubtedly influenced my reading of site documents and the formation of focus group questions. Site documents were collected during the interviews. Collecting site documents at this point allowed the participants to explain their use of the documents. As a secondary data source, the documents formed a focus for discussion during the focus group. The focus group was conducted last, providing the participants an opportunity to collaborate on and clarify research themes. The triangulated data were collected through interviews, site documents, and a focus group.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at a location and time that was provided by the participants. Semi-structured interviews combine standardized and guided interview techniques. They provided exact wording and sequencing of questions while also suggesting an outline of topics to discuss (Patton, 2002). Patton suggests that standardized open-ended interviews normalize the interview process across participants and makes the research replicable by other researchers. However, researchers may desire to explore certain answers beyond what was possible with a standardized interview approach. For Patton, combining the standardized
and guided approach is a viable way to conduct interviews. The interviews aimed at answering the five research questions and accomplishing the purpose of the inquiry. There were seven primary interview questions with prompts.

1. Thank you for participating in this interview. Please tell me about your family.
   - What are the ages of your children?
   - What activities do you enjoy together?
   - What does a typical day or week look like?

2. Please tell me as much as you can about your family’s religious activities.
   - What kinds of religious or church activities do you and your family do?
   - Why do you do these things?
   - What are the religious activities in which your children are involved?
   - Why do you consider them important?
   - What is your role in these activities?

3. What is the religious content you want your children to grasp?
   - What are the truths about God that your children need to know?
   - What doctrines and Bible passages are most important?
   - What religious practices are central to their growth?

4. What are the things you do in your child(ren)’s religious education?
   - What things do you do at home? At church? At school?
   - Can you tell me about a recent or memorable religious activity you did with your children?
   - How do you know if they are effective?

5. How do you feel about your participation in your child(ren)’s religious education?
• What are some of the challenges you have had? Examples?
• What are some of the success you have had? Examples?

6. What supports you in your involvement in your child(ren)’s religious education?
• How have peers, your church, God, or the scripture supported you?
• What supports for your involvement do you wish you had?
• If no supports, what do you think would be helpful supports in your involvement in your child(ren)’s religious education?

7. What else would you like to tell me about your involvement in your children’s religious education?

Each question begins to purposefully develop a description of the phenomenon of parental involvement in children’s religious education. Question 1 is a general introductory question. Patton (2002) suggests that an opening general question can set participants at ease. Question 2 begins the focus on religious education. It is also a general experience and behavior question, intending participants’ self-generation of data about religious education. Questions regarding participants’ experience and behavior are important for generating phenomenological data (Patton, 2002). They fall in line with other religious activity research (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Layton, Dollahite, & Hardy, 2010; Negru, Haragas, & Mustea, 2014). These first questions are broad and form a foundation from which to delve deeper.

Questions 3-7 pertain specifically to the phenomenon of interest. Question 3 is considering the importance of religious content in faith development (Streib, 2005). Question 4 is looking for further descriptions of experiences and behaviors of the phenomenon. Questions 5-6 explore how they feel and construct a meaning of the phenomenon. These questions begin to place parental involvement into the constructs and typologies developed by Hoover-Dempsey &
Sandler (1997, 2005) and Epstein (1992). This includes motivations, perceived invitations, feelings of self-efficacy, and home-based versus organization-based involvement. Question 7 is a final catch all type of question to offer the participant opportunity to add anything not previously covered. The participants were given my contact information so they could contact me with any further thoughts or concerns they may have. None of the participants contacted me after the initial interview to clarify a comment or add more data.

The interview questions also pertain to the specific research questions posed by this research. Research question one is addressed by interview questions 2 and 4. Research questions two and four are related to interview question 2. Interview question 3 is relevant to research question three. Research question five is most closely related to questions 5 and 6 from the interview.

Following IRB approval and prior to field use, the interview questions were piloted with peers, parents exhibiting the phenomenon of PIRE. The purpose of this testing was to verify that appropriate data were generated through the questions. The questions had to be shown to have validity before used in the generation of phenomenological data. I piloted the interview with two fathers and a mother. I gained valuable experience in the interview process and received feedback from the interviewees on their interview experience. Based on the pilots I changed two prompts to generate more narrative information. These changes were approved by the IRB.

The interviews took between 20-50 minutes to complete and were conducted at a place of the participants’ choosing. The interviews took place in the participants’ homes, churches, businesses, and one interview took place at a restaurant, which affected the quality of the interview recording. The interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for both the researcher and participants. The interviews were recorded by two separate devices to increase likelihood of
a good recording and a backup. I took notes during the interviews in order to remember important non-verbal cues and content from the interviews. I transcribed the first four interviews. The final eight interviews were transcribed by a transcription service and were checked for accuracy against the original recordings. Site documents were collected from the participants during the interviews or after the interviews if participants forgot to bring them to their interview.

**Site Documents**

Patton (2002) considers documents to be a type of “material culture” (p. 293) that includes archives, books, photos, schoolwork, and other audio/visual material. Patton considers documents to provide valuable insights into society. Parents were asked to provide access to the resources they use for religious education with their children. Resources that could be loaned were taken to my office in order to describe and analyze the data. Several site documents could not leave the participants’ possession, for those photos were taken, or I procured a copy of these resources from a local library or an online bookseller. All analysis took place at my office. A few resources used by the parents were described during their interviews. Site documents may include books, curriculum, music CDs, videos, etc. I wrote a detailed description of these site documents. The content of these descriptions was organized using ATLAS-ti. These descriptions were used in the analysis to identify and synthesize themes. The site documents provided by the participants included favorite children’s Bibles, Sunday school send home sheets, workbooks provided by their church, devotionals, DVDs, homeschool curriculum, wall hangings, and a song meaningful to the family. Each of these documents provided insight into the phenomenon and research.
The site documents contained information relevant to each of the proposed research questions. This data provided insight into parents’ practices of PI in their children’s religious education, research question one. It also reflected what informs their practices, research question two. Site documents contained important religious content relevant to research question three. The site documents proved to be an important part of the support parents found in resources, pertaining to research question five. After the site documents and interviews were initially analyzed, a focus group was conducted.

Focus Group

“A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic” (Patton, 2002, p. 385). The focus group was conducted following the initial analysis of the interviews and site documents. The primary purpose of the focus group was to further refine the identified themes and subthemes. Another important aspect of the focus group was clarifying relationships between themes. Finally, the focus group provided the triangulation needed for rigorous phenomenological research.

The focus group question guide was developed after themes had been determined. Thorough notes of the analysis process and emergence of focus group questions is reported in Appendix E. The focus group questions and procedures were approved by the IRB. The focus group’s emphasis was placed on collecting data relevant to under emphasized research questions. The following questions were asked during the focus group.

1. What is your favorite part of involvement in your children’s religious education? Why?
2. What role does your child’s enjoyment of religious education play in your involvement?
3. What role does your own enjoyment play in your child’s religious education?
4. If you had a friend who was not involved in their child’s religious education, how would you encourage them to get involved?

5. The following quote is from the sixth parent note in Awana’s *T & T Ultimate Challenge Book 1* (2010). How does this support you in your parental involvement?
   “[Your Child] wants to emulate you. What a privilege! Having someone follow your example can be intimidating! But you can do it. Show [your child] the value and importance of memorizing God’s Word, and see the amazing results….”

6. This page is from an Awana Sparks *Wing Runner* book (2013, p. 63). How does a page like this support you in your involvement in your child’s religious education?

7. What else can you share about your experience of involvement in your child’s religious education?

These questions were placed in a PowerPoint presentation, one question per slide. The screen was shared with the participants of the online focus group meeting. However, technical difficulties prevented the slides from being seeing during a majority of the focus group.

The focus group was conducted via an online platform, www.zoom.us, on January 24, 2016. Patton (2002) suggests that an online platform maybe acceptable for focus group research. In this case, due to the geographic diversity of the participants, requiring travel would have proved burdensome to the participants. The focus group took 45 minutes to complete. In order to coordinate the greatest potential for participant involvement an online meeting scheduling tool, www.doodle.com, was used. The ideal number for participants in a focus group is 6 to 10 (Patton, 2002). In order to achieve this number of participants from the original 12, it was believed that all would need to be invited knowing that some would choose to skip this portion of the research or scheduling would prohibit involvement. All interview participants were
invited to attend via email. A follow up phone call was made to participants who did not respond to the email. Seven participants agreed to join the online meeting on a specified Sunday afternoon. It was planned that three rural and four suburban participants would be present. However, due to illness and a prolonged meeting only four of the seven could attend. Even with this smaller number all three church settings were represented in the focus group.

The focus group was audio recorded by two devices and transcribed to provide opportunity for analysis. I also took notes during the focus group. The transcription was organized and analyzed using ATLAS-ti. Final analysis of the data took place after the focus group has been transcribed.

Data Analysis

The data gathered consisted of interview transcripts, site document descriptions, and a focus group transcript. The data from each of these sources was analyzed following the synthesized phenomenological procedures suggested by Creswell (2013). Creswell’s procedures are simplified version of Moustakas’ approach to the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. This analysis technique is justified by its synthesis of the best qualitative analysis procedures. The phases of analysis are organization, memoing, coding, classifying, and interpretation. These steps are detailed below.

Organization

ATLAS-ti was used to organize the data. This procedure allowed for data to be moved, categorized, and easily linked to similarly themed texts (Creswell, 2013). ATLAS-ti allowed for mass updates of theme titles. Transcripts and site document descriptions, called primary documents within ATLAS-ti, were organized by similar family groups. Organization within a Q-DAS, like ATLAS-ti, allows for the remaining analysis techniques. As Patton stated, Q-DAS
“facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking—but human beings do the analysis” (2002, p. 442). Transcript files were organized within specified computer files and printed for archival purposes. Transcript segments were also linked to appropriate sections of the audio recording. This allowed me to easily listen the speakers own voice speak parts of the transcript. The printed archives were kept in organized files in locked file cabinets.

Memoing

Memoing is the process which allows researchers to track and record their own thoughts and reflections on the data as they immerse themselves in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I read the data repetitively so that themes could be identified. During these readings, I composed memos in the software indicating my own thoughts on the data and the themes being identified. My memos focused on my questions, observations, and procedures. I also memoed thoughts on how the research questions were being answered by the data. This memoing process created another set of data that represented my own thoughts as distinct from the thoughts of the participants.

Coding

Coding is the process that assigns each meaningful unit of the data a code or category, thus condensing the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2014). Schwandt (2007) continues to explain that these identifying codes can either be chosen a priori or a posteriori. In the case of this present research, a priori codes would be derived from previously researched elements of PI. I primarily sought to develop codes from the language and content in the data. During the coding step, I assigned important and repetitive themes unique codes and colors. This provided the building blocks for synthesis of the data. An important part of the coding process is epoche. As defined by Moustakas (1994) researchers should set aside the natural attitude by suspending
their own presuppositions and seek to observe the phenomenon from a fresh open perspective. The coding process and *epoché* facilitated the bracketing of the data and my own developing perspectives.

**Classifying**

After the coding is complete, phenomenological research requires that data be grouped by significant themes into meaningful units (Creswell, 2013). This classification process brought the nearly 130 codes into eight main themes, with subthemes. The classification system also delineates relationships between the themes. I classified the codes and themes to best represent the participants’ experiences of parental involvement in their children’s religious education.

**Interpretation**

During the interpretation phase, the classified themes are presented in a purposeful and orderly fashion. Moustakas (1994) uses the terms textural description and structural description. The textural description explains what has happened regarding the phenomenon of PIRE. The structural description explains how it was experienced by the parents. These descriptions are rich thick descriptions allowing the reader to “hear the voice” of the participants (Patton, 2002). Thick descriptions provide the reader with sufficient information so they can discern the credibility and transferability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba recommend thoroughly describing the research context, the interactions around the phenomenon, and the revelations regarding the phenomenon. Thoroughly describing the researcher, research method, and steps to trustworthiness are also part of a thick description (Lincoln & Guba).

Moustakas (1994) recommends that the researcher complete a textural and structural description for each participant. This is followed by composing a textural and structural description, which conveys the essence of the phenomenon. This is an important step of
phenomenology as the researcher moves from the subjective focus of individuals to the intersubjective experience of the phenomenon (Friesen, 2012). My analysis followed the steps of writing multiple descriptions. This followed the procedures suggested by Moustakas (1994). The five phases of organization, memoing, coding, classifying, and interpreting provided the structure for the qualitative analysis and provided a foundation for a trustworthy report.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness, or quality, of the qualitative research includes credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These elements are important for rigorous qualitative research. They are also important to ensure the research is real, reliable, valid, and replicable. The following steps ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

Credibility in research occurs when the assertions of the research correspond with the views and experience of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (2002) suggests that credibility is improved when *epoche* is practiced and alternative explanations are considered by the researcher. Credibility contributes to the trustworthiness of this study through my practice of *epoche*, laying aside my own assumptions and biases to capture the voice of the participants. I also considered alternative explanations and understandings of the data. Lincoln & Guba (1985) list member-checks and triangulation as important elements of credibility. Member-check provides “for the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources from which they have come” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). This increases the likelihood that the research will represent their experience. I will ask participants to read their interview transcripts and my initial description of the phenomenon. Participants were invited to provide feedback on their transcript and the research themes through a questionnaire on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) (see
Appendix G). Finally, triangulation of the three data sources also adds to the credibility and therefore the trustworthiness of the research.

Transferability is another important part of trustworthiness. Transferability is concerned that the reader can apply the research to other cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is responsible to provide sufficient information for readers to see the warranted transfer of themes between cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interpretation of the data is offered in a thick description so readers can determine applicable transfers of meaning. Any transfer of meaning that I suggest can be evaluated through the reflexivity I will practice throughout the research.

Dependability is concerned with the reliability, consistency, and predictability of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is established in qualitative research by presenting clear and complete information on the research process and procedures (Schwandt, 2007). This type of reporting allows readers to see the validity and rigor behind the claims made in the research. I kept clear records of data and memoing, which are essential to dependability. The analysis and reporting on the research includes sufficient description to understand the process and procedures taken throughout the research. Participants’ quotes provide illustration of the identified themes. Finally, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that an audit, an external examination of the research, be conducted to establish dependability. This research did not undergo an official audit but was evaluated by the dissertation chair and the dissertation committee.

Confirmability in qualitative research is achieved when the data and conclusions drawn by the researcher are demonstrated to be objective, in other words there are reasons for the interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba suggest that an audit, triangulation, and a reflexive journal are appropriate methods to establish confirmability. An easy to follow and understand audit trail is provided so other researchers can evaluate and replicate the present
study. See Appendix F for audit trail. The research conclusions are clearly linked to the data, and my own interpretations are clearly explained. As explained previously triangulation of data sources was also employed. These steps of confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility provide the trustworthiness needed for the research. Ethical treatment of the participants and the organizations involved will also enhance the quality of the research.

**Ethical Considerations**

The primary ethical concern for this research is the identity protection of the participants. The participants’ identities have remained anonymous with pseudonyms and by concealing some of their demographic information. The identities of the religious institutions have also been concealed with pseudonyms. Data were kept in locked file cabinets and password protected computers. These safeguards are recommended by Creswell (2013). In order to ensure the participants personal rights, they were given an IRB approved informed consent (see Appendix A). This delineated the participants’ right to withdraw from the study at any time and the voluntary nature of the research.

**Summary**

This research into the experience of PI in children’s religious education employed a phenomenological research method. This methodology synthesized the phenomenological procedures suggested by Creswell (2013), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Moustakas (1994), and Patton (2002). The participants were from Midwest communities and reflected the unique demographic of evangelical parents of elementary aged students. Data were generated through interviews, site documents, and a focus group. The data analysis followed a synthesized approach (Creswell, 2013). The trustworthiness of the study adhered to the suggested elements of Lincoln and Guba including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The
end result of this research is the following description of the essential qualities of PI in children’s religious education.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education as evangelical Christian parents in Midwestern communities. In order to accomplish this purpose, the following five research questions were asked.

1. What are evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education?
2. What informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education?
3. What content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education?
4. Why do evangelical parents get involved in their children’s religious education?
5. What barriers do evangelical parents encounter when participating in the religious education of their children?

This chapter introduces each participant with a thick description. Following this introduction, the research themes are discussed. These themes were identified through memoing, open coding, and analysis of three different data sources, interviews, site documents, and a focus group. These themes answer the research questions posed by the study and are based on the participants’ experiences and understanding of involvement in their children’s religious education.
**Participants**

There were twelve participants in this study. All participants came from either a rural or suburban demographic. The following rich descriptions use pseudonyms for each participant and any community identifiers to protect their confidentiality. All participants were given the opportunity to evaluate their own transcripts, which provided the content for these descriptions and theme development. Through the member-check debriefing survey, participants were also able to indicate their level of agreement with the research themes. The results of the member-check form (see Appendix G) are seen in Figure 1. Given a four-week period of response, eight participants responded to the survey.

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1*. Member-check with participants’ evaluation of their own transcripts and the research themes derived from the data analysis. These results were from a five-point scale of agreement.

**Abby**

Abby is a stay at home mom with a second grader, kindergartner, preschooler, and a 3-year-old. Her family lives on a farm. They enjoy staying busy with their outdoor activities,
sports, work on the farm, and church. Abby is involved in several ministries at the Countryside Evangelical Church. She is on the leadership team of the Mothers Of Preschoolers (MOPs) ministry at her church and she volunteers in her church’s midweek children’s ministry, Awana. Abby and I met at Countryside right before she started cooking supper for their Vacation Bible School ministry.

Abby’s passion and commitment to the ministries of her church were increased after she experienced the members’ support and love when her husband was diagnosed with brain cancer. She had many people praying for her family, providing meals, and offering encouraging words during her husband’s treatment. They had two young children at the time and the church was a source of encouragement and support. Abby wants to make sure that type of ministry continues. Her family has a special verse, which is on her husband’s cancer bracelet. Philippians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Abby’s involvement in her children’s religious education revolves around church and home activities. She brings her children to church, Awana, and Vacation Bible School. She also volunteers to help in these different ministries. At home, she and her children read Bible stories, listen to Christian music, and work on memory verses. Many of the religious activities at home happen at bedtime. Abby wants her children to understand that the “Lord loves them” with a love that continues “no matter what.” She also wants her children to have God’s Word in their hearts so it can “comfort them” during difficult times. Another source of comfort she desires for her children is a knowledge of and ability to pray.
Abby and her family attend Pine Valley Christian Camp. She misses her kids when they go to camp, but she is glad that they get loving mentors who teach them about the Lord. The kids also come home “excited about the Lord.” They also attended the family camp together. Abby hopes that all these religious activities produce kind actions toward others and proper attitudes in her kids. She also prays that God will work in them through the different activities to accomplish His will for them.

The experience of PIRE for Abby is one that she makes a “priority.” While it is important, it is also “nerve racking” since she desires to do everything that should be done for her children. One thing that comforts her is knowing that her husband had many of the same experiences as her kids, contrasting with her small rural church upbringing, which did not offer the same amount of opportunity for religious education. For Abby, hearing her children recite Bible verses is “like a breath of fresh air.” It encourages her that they have God’s Word as a resource for their future.

Abby is supported in her role by her husband who shares the priority of their children’s religious education. She also is helped by friends from church and MOPS, who are involved in the same motherhood role as her. Even though she lives a distance from her family she feels encouraged by them through their prayers. Abby feels “very supported” in her parental role.

She also uses a few resources to help her religious education of her children. She uses Bible storybooks and simple devotionals. One is *The Beginner’s Bible* (2005), which is at an early reader level with very basic Bible stories and cartoon illustrations. She also uses the Awana books with her older children for scripture memory. These resources help her accomplish her goals in her child’s religious education. She also plans to start using a resource called *How to Lead Your Kids to Christ*. 
Beth

Beth is a teacher, wife, and mother of an 11-year-old girl and a 9-year-old boy. Beth and I met near the end of her summer vacation at their picturesque acreage on the outskirts of town. They are involved members of Countryside Evangelical Church. Her husband is a part of the lay leadership team and she is very involved in ministries to children at their church. She is the “commander” of the Awana midweek ministry and occasionally helps in ministries like nursery and children’s worship.

Through her church roles, she stays very involved with her children’s religious education. However, her involvement with her children also happens at home. On Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday nights they often focus on their memory verses for Awana. For Beth’s family, Awana ministry has been “great because that is something that is already set up.” As a busy mom, she does not have to create her children’s religious education on her own, which aids with her consistency. However, Beth described their family Bible reading and prayer time as “inconsistent.” This is mostly related to their busy schedule.

Nevertheless, that busyness has not really kept Beth from being involved in her children’s religious education. She recently led a girls’ Bible study for her daughter and some friends. She explained that it was “fun for the girls” and important to keep her daughter “connected to other Christian girls.” Beth is also available to have conversations with her children. She talks with her daughter about music lyrics and her daughter’s Christian values. Beth has had several conversations with her son about salvation and when he can start taking communion. She also prays with her kids on the way to school each morning.

Beth reported that her daughter was “saved at camp” and this may be a spark to her son’s interest in also being saved. Not only is salvation an important fruit in her kids’ lives but she
also values her children “loving the Lord” and “showing patience and love and caring, especially to others.” The content she finds important also mirrors these concerns. She has a focus on the Bible’s content, Jesus as Savior, and replicating how Jesus treated others. One resource that Beth shared was her daughter’s Awana book. This is a book that is focused on scripture memory, explaining salvation, and teaching children doctrine. In each chapter of the book, there are parent letters that Beth and her daughter signed. The letters encourage various aspects of parental involvement in religious education.

Reflection on her and her husband’s upbringing helped to form what she “wanted for her kids.” Her mother, who made sure she was involved in church until achieving catechism in Junior High, raised her. Following Junior High, religious involvement was sporadic. Her husband’s mom was a leader in a fringe denomination, but his dad was not involved in church at all. When they were married and discussed having kids, they realized; “[we] needed to raise our kids in a church.” When their daughter was born they started attending Countryside but it was not until Beth was confronted with her mother’s illness that she “took faith as” her own and realized that she “needed this” for herself. Religious involvement became more than just “attendance” on Sundays.

Beth feels supported by her friends at church. Her pastor’s wife has encouraged her to do family worship. A youth pastor’s wife’s example in prayer “fueled” that desire in Beth’s life. Her husband meets with other men at church, and she tries to be involved in a Bible study or two throughout the year to encourage her own faith. Beth also experiences support from her husband who will often take on the role of praying with the kids at bedtime. Beth realizes that his more “introverted” personality may make him more reserved in initiating religious education at home,
while her “teacher” background may make her more eager to jump into the religious education of her children.

Finally, Beth just simply sees her involvement in her children’s religious education as a part of her family’s identity. She emphasized that, “This is just a part of who they are.” Thus, involvement at church really is not an issue for discussion or disagreement between her and her children. Since this has been a part of the family routine since her children’s birth, they seem to enjoy their religious education and the relationships at Countryside church.

David

David is a father of four. He has a 13, 10, 7, and 2-year-old. His family is involved in different sports activities. He is a supervisor for a company that has him traveling often. The kids and his wife can sometimes travel with him because they homeschool their children. He and his wife are active in the leadership of Countryside Evangelical Church.

David is “passionate” about his role in the religious education of his children. He uses the word “discipleship” to define education. David and his wife have their kids involved with church on Sundays and Wednesday nights but their hands-on involvement with their kids is primarily at home. Since they homeschool, they have opportunity to cover Bible curriculum at home, which normally starts out their day at 8:00 a.m. Danielle is the primary educator during the school hours, since David heads to work early. However, they do set aside one day a week for “family devotions” which David leads.

Throughout the week they also spend time praying together and having conversations about religious topics. David feels that it is “very important” for his children to develop a “biblical worldview.” This affects everything about how a person chooses to live. David places an emphasis on living and praying to glorify God. His family seeks to serve others through
foster adoption and missions trips to Haiti and to not simply enjoy their own blessings. David and his wife not only seek to model a godly life and God honoring prayers but also a consistent Bible reading habit. They have not required private Bible reading from their kids, but they are noticing the older ones picking it up on their own.

David has a strong sense of fatherly responsibility that he has a “job” to “disciple,” “teach” and “train” his kids. He feels like his responsibility is given to him, and other fathers, uniquely by God, especially in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. David’s own faith really defines and demands that he would be involved in discipling his kids and helping them to live a godly life. However, he realizes he cannot force this on his kids. He hopes that “God grabs their heart” and that his kids will make their own choice to have a “personal relationship” with Jesus.

David also sees time as a major challenge to his involvement. There are always things and tasks that threaten to take him away from what is most important. He views the time his kids would spend in an “anti-God” public school setting as limiting and harming the discipleship he and his wife can offer his kids. They also make deliberate choices to limit extracurricular activities; thus, they have enough time to prioritize what is most important.

David feels supported by his church, especially in how they prayed for his family during the adoption process for Debby, their 2-year-old. He also mentioned how he has access to many resources. Resources that have been particularly influential to him are *Family Driven Faith*, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*, and sermons by Paul Washer. He went through a resource called *Cat and Dog Theology* (2003) with his kids. This also seems to have had a great deal of influence on their family and thinking about prayer and living life.
Ed

Ed is married and the father of four kids. His oldest two daughters are college age. His son is a sophomore and his youngest daughter is in third grade. Ed and I met at a local restaurant during his lunch break from a construction manufacturing job. His family enjoys outdoor activities, watching movies together, and going to his son’s football games. They are involved at Countryside Evangelical Church. Ed is the High School Sunday school teacher; he “loves” teaching and the kids. He also helps with Awana, where he has noticed society’s decline in Bible knowledge.

At home, Ed prays with his children at bedtime and meals. His youngest enjoys praying at mealtimes. They also have a weekly prayer meeting as a family where they pray over the week’s events and challenges. He encourages his youngest to read the Bible, but doubts her understanding of much of what she reads. Ed is very attuned to the spiritual needs of his kids, especially as they leave home and make their way at college. He realizes that they face many different challenges to their faith. He feels that living the Christian life is “getting harder.” He is looking forward to his oldest daughter finding a church on her own while at college.

Ed and his wife seek to model a healthy prayer life and how to live the Christian life to their kids. Ed refers to “helping along” his children in their spiritual walk. He realizes that they will have to “learn their own relationship” with Christ but he wants to do whatever he can to help that develop. Ed places a large emphasis on the fact that there is “black” and “white” and “right” and “wrong” in the world. He strives for his children to do what is right and “admit” when they make a “mistake.”

Ed’s grandma invested a lot of time and love into him and he learned from her the value of God’s Word. However, his “strict Pentecostal” upbringing has had an influence on his own
parenting. The legalism he experienced left him with “unanswered questions” and a feeling of not being able to obey all the rules. Ed wants to be sure that his children and Sunday school students do not have those types of unanswered questions and that they know they are never too far from God’s love.

Love for his kids is the underlying foundation in Ed’s experience of PIRE. He repeatedly mentioned his love for his kids. In fact, the blessing of his children is really what motivated him to take a step of faith as a young man during a baptism service. He doubts that his faith would have grown as it has without the experience of being a father. Ed considers parenting the “ultimate” job. Moreover, the “biggest thing” in that “ultimate” job is that “you have to love your kids.”

Frank
Frank is married. He and his wife have three children. Their oldest daughter is 23 and is married, living out of state. They also have a 13-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. Frank stays busy owning his own business, where his son likes to come and tinker around the shop. His middle daughter enjoys hunting and fishing with dad. His family enjoys outdoor time and travel.

Frank also mentioned many times that they enjoy their church and religious involvement as a family. They attend Maplewood Evangelical Church. They chose Maplewood for their family because it had ministries their children would enjoy, something missing from Frank’s childhood church experience. His kids attend Sunday services and Wednesday night ministries at the church. Frank is involved in leading outdoor activities and trips through the church. He also tries to “serve” in other ways when he is able. At home, they pray at mealtimes, and they
like to climb onto mom and dad’s bed for family devotions. This is the location with “enough room for everyone” if the dogs stay off.

Conversations with his kids about religious and spiritual matters are a key component of religious education in their home. Frank thinks it is important to “be available” to answer their questions. He also thinks it is valuable to “share parts” of his own story with his kids. He is motivated by his own faith and wants his kids “to have this too.” He wants to see them in heaven someday. His conversations have also revolved around teaching of certain doctrines, especially baptism. His children attend a Lutheran school, which holds a different view of baptism than he and Maplewood Evangelical Church. Many of their peers at school have different baptism experiences, and he wants to help equip his children to understand the dissimilarities. He desires his children to be ready to defend their faith.

Frank’s main point was to “get them thinking Jesus,” which coincided with his desire for his children’s salvation. Frank referred to two accounts of Jesus’s, ministry with the disciples and welcoming children. He was focused on his children also living out their faith. This was seen even in a devotional he used, What Would Jesus Do? (Haidle, 1998). He has seen his kids developing kind and soft hearts toward others.

His children’s heart attitude toward others and the Lord reassures him that even though at times his efforts may be insufficient, “when he looks” at his kids he knows it’s not “true.” Frank and his wife both realize that they do not have the consistency they always hoped for in discipling their kids. Nevertheless, what they are doing is “working.” Frank feels supported by his wife, their friends, church, and his own personal faith. The way he talks about his kids, church, and faith indicates that he enjoys what he does.
**Gabe**

Gabe is the father of four boys ages 10, 8, 4 and their foster son is 3-months-old. He works in the finance industry and his wife is a stay at home mom and homeschools their children. They are involved in sports, hiking, camping, and fishing. They have been in the process of looking for a new church for almost a year. When they have a “home church,” Gabe is typically involved in the worship ministry.

As they have looked for a new church, the kids will either attend services with them or go to the children’s ministries at the church. They try a new church for about five weeks so they can get enough information to make a good decision. The process of finding a church has proven long. Explaining the reasoning for trying a different church to their children has been difficult. There is added pressure to find the right church, since they see it as the place where the boys will “cement” their relationship with the Lord in their High School ministries.

The main goal for their involvement in their children’s religious education is that each child would develop a “personal relationship with Jesus” and live their faith out. They seek to help their children develop “healthy rhythms” in their spiritual lives. In order to accomplish this, they pray, discuss faith, read the Bible, and serve others. While at their previous church, they participated in Awana and Vacation Bible School. This year in order to provide better academics they have chosen to homeschool. They are using a curriculum called “Classical Conversations.” This curriculum provides a method to connect various subject matter with the Bible. Scripture memory is a part of this curriculum. During prayer time, Gabe seeks to encourage open conversations of “thanks” and “confession.” They will even pray about “silly” things, but he encourages more “complexity” in the boys’ prayers as they get older.
Gabe feels “pretty good” about how he is handling the privilege and responsibility of being a parent. He sees the boys as “given” to them by God and desires that they would see a genuine relationship modeled in him. His two older boys have made a “decision” to trust in Jesus. This is a sign of success for Gabe. He also listens for his boys to generate their own thoughts and dialogue about their faith. He shared a story of his oldest son “uncharacteristically” purposefully tripping a young girl. While not pleased with the behavior, he was glad that his son was able to identify the “evil” and repent. This shows the spiritual growth he is wanting for his kids. Gabe hopes that his involvement will keep his kids from leaving the house and “taking a hard turn” in the wrong direction. He knows that he cannot control that.

Gabe also emphasizes things that need to be done in his children’s religious education, as they get older. He wants to be sure his boys have godly mentors who will encourage them in their walk with God. He also realizes that a family devotion time may be helpful with his kids, but has not implemented it yet. Gabe’s family is involved in foster care and supports a child in another country to show appreciation and pass along the “blessings” they have been given.

**Hank**

Hank and his wife have been married 20 years and they have two daughters ages 10 and 8. They enjoy travel and outdoor games. The girls really love the pool time during vacations. Hank and his family attend Lighthouse Church where he is a first grade Sunday school teacher. We met on a Wednesday night while his girls were at Awana. Hank could not say enough positives about his church and was even willing to give me a tour showing me the extensive children’s facility.

Hank has felt that “it was very important …to be involved in a leadership role” in children’s ministry while his kids were there. This has had him involved as an Awana leader and
as a Sunday school teacher. At home, Hank and his wife make good use of the many resources that are sent home from their girls’ church ministries. Hank explained how each piece is “intentional” in ministering to different aspects of a child’s faith. The Sunday school send home sheets keep the family reminded of the biblical narratives. The Awana books give extensive scripture memorization and Bible doctrine. Hank appreciates how the Awana curriculum asks helpful application and theological questions. His children memorize the answers and verses that support each answer. The 252 Home (2015) sheets focus on Christian character. His family uses these various resources almost nightly. During the summer months they will use other resources, most recently they used The Daily Bread for Kids (Bowman & Mckinley, 2014).

As Hank invests in “teaching and training” his girls with these resources, he is pleased with the results he has been seeing. In particular, he mentioned the valuable conversations he has had with his oldest daughter about baptism. These centered on salvation and the meaning of baptism. He is careful that she knows this is “her decision;” he cannot make it for her.

Hank also sends his girls to a private Christian school. This year the school’s scripture memory curriculum has added the expectation of knowing how to apply each verse. Hank finds this to be an important change. The school has also provided Christian friends for his girls. This aspect of fellowship is important to Hank and he expects his girls will carry these relationships throughout their life.

Hank gets little resistance from his girls. His feeling of success, in parental involvement with his girls’ religious education, “depends on the day.” There are days when his daughters are not too excited or focused on the Bible lesson or memory verse. Then there are other days when they are excited and ready to learn. Hank is careful not to force the religious education and wants it to be something his girls enjoy.
Ian

Ian and I met right after he finished serving as a first grade leader for Lighthouse Church’s Awana club. He is married and the father of a 6-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son. They enjoy outdoor activities like fishing, boating, camping, and even golf. That is when they are not busy at church. Ian is a deacon at the church and his responsibilities range from financial oversight and welcoming guests to laying tile at the church. He sees his work at the church as “for Jesus” with the ultimate goal that someone might come there and “get saved.”

The salvation of his children is his ultimate goal in parenting too. He has been having more conversations with his daughter about this. She has been asking questions, and he has been helping her think through and make her own decision about faith. She cannot just accept her “parent’s faith.” Ian also has challenged his daughter to seek out new friends and opportunities to show kindness. This all boils down to applying “God loves everyone.” Ian also knows the importance of modeling his faith. He knows kids are quick to spot a “fraud.” He and his wife seek to practice what they preach.

With his son, Ian says conversations are on a younger age level. He recounted fishing out at a relative’s pond. His son had a fish and was looking in its mouth. Ian seized the opportunity to spark a conversation about God being the Creator. Ian’s involvement with his kids at home revolves around conversations, devotional Bible reading, working on memory verses, and “intentional” praying. At church, he also serves in a variety of Sunday morning children’s ministries, and he seeks to bring his kids with him when he is doing various jobs around the church throughout the week.

Ian has attended Lighthouse since he was in third grade. He appreciates all the opportunities and resources provided by the church, especially the ministry of Pastor Bob. He
sees his parent’s influence and involvement in his own religious education as a key support and reason for his investment in his children. His family also lives nearby so they are a source of support simply by watching the kids so he and his wife can get away and refresh.

Ian finds that time is one of the major challenges in parental involvement in religious education. It is easy to get too busy and forget what is “most important.” With Ian, I got the sense that his love for God and for his kids helps him to rise above the busyness to be a very involved dad.

Ian uses several different resources for the religious education of his children. He uses the Awana books in helping his daughter learn the verses and pass the sections. He also will occasionally use the 252 Home (2015) sheets from church. He has used Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions for Kids (Young, 2010). His kids really enjoy The Bible App for Kids (You Version, n.d.). They can use this resource on his smart phone or on his computer tablet. Ian suggested that these resources would be a great place for a new parent to “start” religious education with their child.

Jacob

Jacob and his wife have been married for over 25 years and they have four sons. His oldest two are in High School. One son is 12 and his youngest is 6 years old. They are a family that is very involved in sports and church. Their church activities are more than the average family because Jacob is an associate pastor at a suburban Baptist church. Therefore, his boys have been in church “ever since they’ve been born.” They have gone to camps and mission trips since before “they could walk.” The older boys serve in various church ministries. The elementary aged boys are involved in Awana. Of course, Jacob is busy with several different ministries on Sunday and throughout the week; he is unavailable to serve in children’s ministry.
In fact, it is even rare that they are able to sit together during church. They do make it a priority to sit together on communion Sundays. His boys attend public school, even though Jacob sometimes questions if that was the right decision. Much of the negative “influence” from public school was on the bus, and the boys no longer ride the bus.

At home, Jacob and his wife ask their children what they “learned” in Sunday school, help them learn memory verses, and have daily morning Bible reading. They are currently reading Romans every morning at 6:30 a.m. Jacob also does an evening devotion with his youngest son each night. And, even when Jacob might want to skip, his son reminds him that they need to read or they are “going to get off track.” The older boys do their own nightly devotions. Jacob understands his fatherly role is to “facilitate” and “drive” the religious education of his family. The primary content that is critical to Jacob is the “Bible” and the salvation of his kids. He wants his boys, upon graduation, to be able to “defend” their faith and know some “apologetics.” He wants to do “everything” he can to encourage faith in his kids but knows they have to “choose” it.

Jacob has four central practices for his kids in discipleship. He compares these to “four legs” of a table. He sees intake of the “Word of God” as the first leg, which “endures forever.” Next, he emphasized prayer, communication with God. The third leg is church involvement. To Jacob this is a “non-negotiable.” His final important practice is developing Christian friends. He explained that God never “intended” people to do the Christian walk “alone.”

Jacob had a “very dysfunctional” upbringing. Later on, when he became a Christian, he started praying for a wife with a “functional, Christ-centered, God fearing” upbringing. His wife had such an upbringing and her parents have been a source of support for Jacob as he has been involved in leading his own family. Other supports have been the preaching at his church and
other Christian men who have encouraged him in his role. He also has found personal support in the scriptures and in many different resources, many of which his wife had read and recommended to him. Jacob sees his role as a “responsibility” and very “important.” His involvement in his kids’ religious education is motivated in part by his own “love relationship” with Jesus, and “gratitude” for what Jesus has done.

**Ken**

Ken is a business owner, husband, and father. He has two daughters from a previous marriage who are 24 and 22 years old. He has boys living at home who are 16 and 10 years old. He is busy with his business, renovations on his home, travel for work, and leading an adult Bible study at church. This busy schedule has left little time for family “extracurricular” activities. It also makes it difficult to keep family spiritual activities a priority. Regardless, they pray together daily, and they have weekly conversations where Ken and his family share upcoming events or struggles from the previous week. They then will discuss how scripture addresses the issues and pray about what is going on. The kids are involved in Awana, Sunday school, youth group, and serving in ministries. The family attends all three services at Lighthouse Church. They serve or attend their own ministries during the first and second services, and then they will sit together in the third service.

Ken and his wife invested a great deal of thought considering the “big decision” of what type of education their kids would receive. They considered private school. They tried homeschooling with the oldest son. However, they decided that public school was the best decision. He explains that his kids will have to get along in this world with “all kinds of people.” Ken sees that public schooling is helping them learn how to “deal” with others who do not hold
the same values. He sees that they have gained discernment regarding people’s attitudes and actions but are “blind” to outward appearances.

Ken’s marriage went through a challenging time due to him being too “self-focused.” This brought his marriage to the “verge” of failing. His boys had to walk through that marital trouble with them. Ken was open with them about his failures and explained how he and his wife “mess-up.” Nevertheless, through that difficulty he has a deeper “tenderness” and “love” for his wife. Their boys prayed for them during that time. While he wishes they did not have to see the struggle, he is glad that they got to see that “God can do amazing things.” God changed his heart and saved his marriage.

The biggest challenges currently for Ken are the busyness he is experiencing and parenting a teen. He has noticed how his oldest is pushing “boundaries” and not taking appropriate “responsibility.” Much of Ken’s time is being spent investing in this relationship and helping his oldest son to mature. In the face of these challenges, he feels very supported by his church, friends, and the many resources that are available to him. He makes a point of needing to prioritize his spiritual life similar to “breathing” and “eating.” This sustains him for all of life, including parental involvement in his children’s religious education.

Ken knows that his faith has gotten him through many struggles and difficult times. He hopes his children will have the same type of faith that supports them and helps them to “give God glory” through whatever circumstances they may walk. He knows there will always be failures when it comes to people’s lives, but God is always there to help them overcome and offer fresh starts.
Linda

Linda and I met at her home while the sounds of her husband and son playing in the basement echoed through their suburban home. Linda is mother to a 10-year-old girl and a 5-year-old boy. Her family is very involved at Lighthouse Church. She works in both the preschool and elementary aged Sunday ministries. Her husband participates in the choir. Her children attend Sunday mornings, Sunday school, and Children’s worship. They also attend the Wednesday night Awana club. Her daughter attends a public school; her son will do the same in Kindergarten. Linda and her husband discussed all the options and “landed” on public school when considering some pastoral advice. They realized that their children must learn to “deal with all kinds of people, not just Christians.” Therefore, the public school provides a training ground for them and opportunities to “witness” to other children. Linda is aware of the challenges her daughter faces there. She will often write notes of encouragement, verses, or prayers and place them in her daughter’s lunch. These serve as a reminder that “God loves her.”

Linda puts a great deal of time, “planning,” and “effort” into her involvement in religious education at home. She uses many resources, some from her church, during the 30-minute bedtime routine of devotions. Each night she makes it a “priority” to practice the memory verses, pray, and read a Bible story with each of her children individually. These times are important and the resources she uses range from children’s Bibles to church send home sheets. To improve her children’s prayer time, she uses a resource that helps kids pray about 10 different topics. Besides these nightly times, Linda plays only Christian music and has special family devotions for holiday seasons. During the Easter season, they use “Resurrection Eggs” which contain verses and figurines that explain the Passion Week, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. For Christmas time, Linda created an advent tree. Each night they place an ornament on
the tree and read a corresponding scripture. Her children “look forward” to these special times and Linda anticipates passing them on to the next generation.

The religious education that Linda emphasizes focuses on “God’s love” for her kids and their “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ. These are the most important things for her to pass along. She does this by partnering with her church and “reinforcing” what they learn there. To Linda, she and her church are on the same “team.” The church and Pastor Bob have been a great support for Linda. Her own parents modeled and instilled in her the “foundation” she needs to do the same for her children. She knows her efforts are effective based on how she sees “God’s love” showing in her children’s lives.

Busyness is one of the challenges that Linda must rise above. This time crunch not only affects her involvement but her own personal religious growth. She simply must remember the “priority” of sharing God’s love and the importance of a relationship with Jesus. Another challenge is simply facing the world’s influence. She tries to be proactive preparing her kids for the worldly views they will be exposed to. Linda has a great deal of love for her children and finds her parental role to be very important.

Megan

Megan and I met at Lighthouse Church while her oldest daughter participated in a Christmas program rehearsal. Megan has one daughter who is 8 and another who is 4 years old. Megan and her husband, Mark, have been married for 11 ½ years. Her husband is currently a stay at home dad and enrolled in online college Bible classes. Megan works in her family business. They are in leadership roles in worship and college ministries at their church. Their girls attend Sunday ministries and Awana during the mid-week. Megan also attends a weekly
women’s Bible study. The girls go to a private Christian school that teaches the doctrines and Bible knowledge that are important to Megan and Mark.

At home, Megan is involved in the girls’ religious education through practicing memory verses, reading devotionals, praying, listening to music, and discussing religious topics. Most of the scheduled activities happen a bedtime. However, they are involved in conversations throughout the day. Megan makes a point to follow-up and “reiterate” what the girls learn at church and at school. The most important content for Megan centers on developing a “genuine” faith in Christ and basing all of life on the Bible.

Megan’s and Mark’s religious upbringing and hardships play a large role in their current involvement with their own children. They both grew up with more legalistic religious backgrounds. The emphasis was on rules and not genuine heart change. However, Megan gained from her parents’ solid reliance on scripture, and they continue to be a source of support for her and her children. Mark’s upbringing, while very religious, was filled with hypocrisy. Over five years ago, it was revealed that Mark’s father had abused some children in the family. This tore apart the faith of many in Mark’s family; and it was a challenge for Megan and Mark to overcome. These events precipitated them leaving their more legalistic church and eventually finding Lighthouse. There Mark got the spiritual counsel that he was not defined by his father’s moral failure and that God remained “unchanged.” Mark and Megan grew closer to each other and God through this trial. This hardship still affects the religious education of their girls.

Dealing with the issues of sin, hell, and jail can be difficult with young children.

The driving passion for Megan is that her girls would have “genuine” faith in Christ. It is not just about showing up at church looking a certain way. They make light of rituals like prayers before meals encouraging their girls to “taste it to make sure they’re thankful.” It is not
about the “ritual” it is about a “relationship” with Jesus. Megan takes the responsibility of her girls’ religious education primarily on herself. She does not view it as the church’s or the Christian school’s responsibility. That responsibility is predominantly hers. She is a mom and a Christian who is “consumed by service.” “Consumed by living” a Christ-centered, genuine faith.

**Results**

The open coding of interview transcripts, site document descriptions, and the focus group transcript generated a total of 128 unique codes. These codes were applied to meaningful sections of data that may have included only two or three words to multiple paragraphs. Occasionally, a participant’s actual words were used as a code; the remaining codes were my own words that best described the content. See Appendix H for a complete list of code definitions. The codes were grouped according to themes that best captured the experience and concepts of the phenomenon of PIRE. Table 2 enumerates the number of times each code was used in the data and corresponding themes. Codes within each theme were present in each type of data. Table 3 displays the number of times a theme was found in each particular data set offering support for the triangulation of data.
### Table 2

**Code Enumeration**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Enumeration of open codes across all data sets</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>59</td>
<td>Facilities of Involvement</td>
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(table continues)
### Themes

The eight themes identified in this research can be used to compose the textural and structural description of the phenomenon of PIRE. The structural description is best captured in the themes of Feelings, Fights, and Foundations. While the remaining themes compose the textural description of what parents experience while involved in their children’s religious education. An image that captures how each theme relates to one another is a fruit tree and displayed in Figure 2. In fact, Gabe and David used the fruit analogy in describing the effectiveness of PIRE. “I think it’s really trying to, um, it’s trying to see any fruit that comes from them” (Gabe, personal communication, September 16, 2015). “It’s gotta show itself in real
fruit” (David, personal communication, August 15, 2015). In describing her oldest daughter Megan said; “She’s very loving and giving and, and you can see the fruits of your labor in that” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Several site documents also repeated the fruit theme (252 Home, 2015; T & T, 2010). The 252 Home sheet on initiative taught that Jesus compares our life to a tree bearing good fruit. Since the parents’ site documents pointed to this imagery as the final measure of PIRE, I choose a fruit tree to capture the themes within the phenomenon.

**Figure 2.** Parental Involvement in Religious Education Tree demonstrates the holistic interaction and positioning of the phenomenon’s themes. Note: Original tree image downloaded from pixaby.com and used with permission (see Appendix I).
Foundations of Involvement

The foundations for parental involvement for evangelical parents inform the practices and experiences of the phenomenon. They provide a type of root system reaching deep into parent’s experiences, values, and history. These can be seen in the subthemes of intrinsic motivations, circumstances, and their child’s needs.

Intrinsic motivators.

Intrinsic motivators for parents include such items as their Christian identity, parental responsibility, and the importance of PIRE for these participants. David emphasized his identity as a motivator; “Oh, just because of our faith in Christ. . . . It's who we are; it's in our fabric and so that's really important” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Beth explained that Christian identity was just a part of how their children had grown up.

Oh definitely, because I mean, we started this before they were born. Um I mean, this is just a part of who they are. Uh, I, We were just talking about this. They have friends that the parents say; “Well, you know kids sometimes don't like to go to church so you know we just don't force it because they might not want to go as an adult.” And our kids don't even think about it. And they like, I’m not saying the love, “Hey, let's go to church.” But they don't fight it. They, It's a part of our routine. And they just, they know that that's what we do. And they enjoy the people there and the Sunday school. (Beth, personal communication, August 13, 2015)

Parental responsibility also formed an important internal source of motivation. Many parents referred to their role as a job and responsibility. Ed described the seriousness and the blessing of his parental role.
A parent's job is the ultimate job, spiritually, in their, I'm extremely, every morning I'm on my knees thanking the Lord for the blessings of four kids. You know, a beautiful, and the health that they've had, the provisions that He's given. Um, I don't take being a father, especially a Christian father, I don't take that for granted. I take that very seriously. Um, like I said, it's my job. I'll be judged accordingly to what, how I raised my family. (Ed, personal communication, August 18, 2015)

Gabe also provided insight into the God given nature of his role.

Yeah, um, you know we take seriously the, the privilege that we have as parents. That, that God has given us these children, and um, it is our job to the best of our abilities to show them what it looks like to be in relationship with God. (Gabe, personal communication, September 16, 2015)

During the focus group, David referred a couple of times to the parental responsibility given in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. He summarized his focus in PIRE; “The theme that I have is that it’s the parents’ job” (personal communication, January 24, 2016). The group agreed with this statement.

Many participants also simply sited how important PIRE is to them. They make it a priority in their own lives and their families’ lives. Linda said; “It’s a priority. . . I’m hard on myself sometimes because I do know that that’s my main job. That is my main job as their, their mother” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Abby echoed that theme; “So just making sure that you make that as a priority and not just something to fill in space and letting them know why it is important” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). Ken summed up his perspective during the focus group by saying; “You know, I feel like it’s just so important to
just equip them um, with the tools that they need and prepare them for what it is life is going to throw at them” (personal communication, January 24, 2016).

These subthemes are all internal motivators that drive parents to get and stay involved in their children’s religious education. Those in the focus group indicated that they wouldn’t be swayed from their involvement by a difficult day or by their children’s disinterest. Another foundation subtheme was based on external circumstances rather than intrinsic.

**Circumstantial motivators.**

The three main circumstantial motivators for parents included their own upbringing, the starting of their family, and overcoming hardships. Participants could easily relate how their parents were involved in their own religious education. If their experience was positive, they generally wanted to emulate that upbringing. Ian reflected on his upbringing.

Cause, uh, my, my background is I have great parents, um, you know, that taught me. We would, you know, we went to church. We went to Awana's. I did all that as a kid. Um, and I, uh, you know, I think about that. I try to reflect like what out of my childhood do I want to do with my kids and what things do I want to change. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Linda also had a positive experience with her parents.

I was raised in a Christian home by wonderful Christian parents, so I had that foundation and that example, uh, growing up myself. Um, and just knowing how important that was in, in my family and my life, um, has made it a priority for me with my kids. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)
If parents viewed their religious upbringing in more negative terms, they wanted better for their own children. This motivated them to a different type of involvement than what was modeled by their parents. Jacob illustrated this as he described starting a family with his wife.

I didn’t grow up in any Christian home; I grew up in a religious home. We went, I was Lutheran. Got confirmed and then was done and glad to be done. Um, we didn’t know Christ in a relationship way, we knew him as a religious figure. Um, so I prayed. I had a very dysfunctional home, at that. And I just prayed that God would send me a wife who came from a very functional, Christ-centered, God fearing home; and God did. I mean Jill's parents are, have been pastors for 30 years, 30 plus years and they’re very Godly and she came from that environment, which helped me formulate what does a spiritual home look like. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Beth and her husband both came from diverse religious upbringings. She was raised by her mom who made sure she was confirmed in Junior High, but then religious instruction waned. Her husband was raised by “not equally yoked” parents, his mother being religious and his father not. She explained their current religious focus; “It is because we knew how we grew up and what we wanted for the kids” (Beth, personal communication, August 13, 2015). Ed echoed this theme about his religious upbringing.

Um the way I grew up, like I said, I grew up in a very strict Pentecostal family.

And yet there were so many questions, so many holes in my faith that I just kept falling away. There were too many unanswered questions [pause] I wanna make sure those questions are answered. (personal communication, August 18, 2015)
For Ed and Beth, they also were motivated to establish their families’ religious involvement with the advent of children. Beth explained her marriage as a catalyst toward greater religious commitment.

And then after we got, I got married fairly young, I was 20, he's a little bit older than me. But as we got married then we realized that, “Oh gosh we don't have anywhere to go to church.” And then we were talking about having kids; it's like we just had it in us that we needed to raise our kids in a church. (personal communication, August 13, 2015)

Ed commented that his recommitment to his faith happened after his children were born.

You know [pause] that [becoming a father] literally changed my life spiritually. I mean if [pause] I love to think even without my kids, my spiritual life would have got back on track, the way it should have, but I just don't know. But the Lord seemed fit to bless us with kids, and, and that really just focused me so much. (personal communication, August 18, 2015)

As parents reflected on their childhood and theirparenthood, it drove them to greater faith commitment and formed desires for their children’s religious experience. Another circumstantial foundation was found in hardships that the parents encountered.

Not every parent mentioned the influence of hardships. When it was mentioned by eight parents, it was definitely an important theme. The hardships these parents encountered included serious illnesses, marital problems, difficult upbringings, struggles in adopting a child, and incarceration of a family member. Through their churches’ support and the Lord’s work through these circumstances, the parents found greater commitment to their faith, more investment in their churches, and increased opportunities to discuss faith with their children.
Megan spoke a great deal about her father-in-law’s abuse of children in the extended family and subsequent imprisonment. 

And so it was a huge thing for our lives. I mean it, and still to this day we deal with it all the time. Um, you know, Missy at four is asking questions and, you know, she’s trying to figure out, like the comparison between hell and jail and, you know, its things that a 4-year-old wouldn’t know, but because of our situation, we’ve had to be very careful. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Megan and Mark found support by switching churches to attend Lighthouse Church. The pastor there helped Mark process through the hurt and betrayal he had felt from his father. Abby also found great support from her church.

When our daughter was almost two, um, so about five years ago, she [pause] my husband was diagnosed with brain cancer, over the summer [pause] I was just starting to get involved in our MOPS group, had just started helping on steering team and being more involved with that. Um, and just having that prayer support from them. And, just, that they brought me meals when we were home from doing his treatments [pause] having their support was huge for me [pause] that’s been something that’s just really important to me. So it is something that I want to continue to grow in our church. (personal communication, August 12, 2015)

Prayer support from the church was also very important to David’s family as they endured the challenge of adopting their youngest child.
Ken explained that for his family it was great to see how “God can do amazing things” as He helped Ken’s marriage strengthen. He saw overcoming this marital struggle as a success for his family.

So, um, in our life I think the biggest success that we’ve had so far in maintaining Christ-center in the home was my wife and I. My wife and I were very much on the verge of saying; “this is it, we’re just done.” …But the kids have had to come through that. And I guess from one side, I hate that they got the opportunity to do that, but on the other hand they also saw their parents work through a very difficult situation and still come back together and be more in love now than ever in the, ever before. So I have a tenderness toward my wife that I never experienced before that at the time. So, um, and so that I think as is, as a huge success that our kids were able to witness that, cause they knew that it was, there was big problems. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

The parents in this study seemed very cognizant that the trials they went through often turned out for the betterment of their spiritual journey and family’s faith involvement. Megan summarized the experience of hardship well.

So, I think that that, that’s how it molded us, in terms of looking back six years, I can say that. Now, in those moments when it crashes and you have something happen, I, I wouldn’t give you the same answer, probably, because it’s just the emotion and the rawness of it. But six years out, I mean I can see that God used that. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

It seems that perhaps every participant may be able to look at the circumstances of their lives and echo Megan’s sentiments. “God used” their upbringing, whether positive or
negative, and the challenges they faced to form their faith and the religious education of their children. The needs of their children also formed a foundational motivator for PIRE.

**The child’s needs.**

The parents also seemed aware that their children had two primary spiritual needs to be addressed. The primary need parents indicated was salvation for their children. This theme carries up through the PIRE tree (Figure 1) all the way to one of the goals of PIRE. As a main goal it becomes a foundational motivator as well. The other need addressed by these evangelical parents was a need to counter the influence of the world on their children. They presented the idea that the secular world is pressuring and exposing their children to undesirable views. Their involvement in their children’s lives sought to reverse this influence.

A person’s individual need for salvation is an important tenant of evangelical theology. Evangelicals teach that each person must come to a point when they believe in Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and to receive eternal life. Frank summed up this impact on parenting; “I want them to learn and to not be lost. I want them to … I want to see them in heaven someday” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Referring to that idea of being “lost,” Gabe said that he wanted his children to understand “their situation, and then sort of how they can remedy that” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Linda explained that remedy as something she wanted her children to learn.

Um, of course, their relationship with Him and, and knowing that Jesus died on the cross for them, um, so that they can go to heaven someday.
Um, of course it’s, that’s most important, a relationship with Him for their eternal life. Um, I guess that would be at the top of the list. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

So salvation, a personal relationship with Jesus, was a need that parents sought to provide for through their involvement. They also sought to counter the world’s influence.

Parents had a sense that the world was moving their children away from the things of God. Their involvement sought to counter the negative influences of friends, media, and public school. David’s family chose to homeschool their children to avoid the large amount of time in an “anti-God” public school structure. He explained the cultural pressure on their children.

Then I'd say the other challenge is just…we're swimming majorly up stream against the culture. So, if you don't swim and don’t fight against the culture, it's very easy to just kinda be swept along with it. With uh everything you name it. With technology, and um material possessions, that's a challenge. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Megan indicated that her involvement was effective in the conversations her daughters brought up. She said; “I mean, when your child brings up conversations that point toward the Bible or point toward Christ, to me that’s a good indication that the first thing on their mind is not something of this world” (personal communication, September 26, 2015).

The participants mentioned that the negative influences were not something to run away from, but that kids would need guidance to learn how to deal with these. Gabe and David, both homeschooling dads, have their kids in sports activities and community groups that expose their kids to people with different values. Ken and his wife chose public school as the training ground for their children.
Our kids are going to have to live in this world with all kinds of people no matter what. And we opted to go ahead and send them through the public school to give them that exposure to the, um, well, what’s reflected in the world today, just in smaller bodies. And they, they’re going to have to learn how to deal with people who may not talk the same way that we do. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Linda also elaborated on how she feels the need to counter worldly influences.

Well, the challenges would be just, um, the things they come in contact in the world that, um, I need to explain to them, like, uh, social issues that they’ll hear about, um, that I feel like I have to explain to them earlier than I necessarily want to, um, because they’re hearing it and they’re seeing it. So that’s, that’s challenging. No parent wants to have to explain those kinds of things, but we have to in today’s world. And I would rather hear them, or I would rather have them hear it from me than from the world, um, and be able to, you know, show them in the Bible what the Bible says about it, even though the world tends to think that this is okay, the Bible tells us differently. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

The needs of each child for salvation and to counter the world’s influence both played a part in why these parents get involved in their children’s religious education.

Summary.

Parents are motivated toward involvement by intrinsic motivations, circumstances, and their children’s needs. Intrinsic motivations include their Christian identity, parental responsibility, and the importance of parental involvement in religious education. Circumstances
like hardships and the parent’s own childhood also inform their involvement. Finally, the needs of their children for salvation and countering the world’s influence motivate parental involvement. These ideas make up the theme of foundation of involvement for PIRE.

**Forms for Involvement**

Moving up the PIRE tree, the next main theme is forms for involvement. This theme refers to the supports that parents value in their involvement in their children’s religious education; these may include church, family members, friends, resources, and their own personal faith. Much like the trunk of a tree holds up and nourishes the branches so do these forms hold up and nourish various aspect of PIRE for evangelical parents.

**The church.**

The church is an important support for PIRE. The church provides a place for religious instruction, service, resources, and friends for the family. Ken said; “So, uh, we’ve got an incredibly strong support system through our, through our church. And I feel just extremely blessed” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). Frank described the church support as coming from the relationships there.

And the other thing with the kids having a connection at church is us, the parents and adults, having that connection in church and people and friends in your small group or in the church where you have, you know, like a a good banter back and forth. You got people that are going to hold you accountable and you’ve got people that are going to lift you up and help with, in prayer or just helping out at, if you have a tree fall or, you know, anything like that. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)
Megan too valued the relationships at church in her comments. She said; “The church is a huge thing, as well. Um, we’ve been here almost six years now and it, you know, it, it’s been, you know, we’ve built friendships here and so friendships have been a good thing too” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). The church not only provided friendships, it provided a partnership with parents.

Several parents expressed the collaboration of religious education at home and the church. Linda stated it well.

Just the support that our church gives, um, our children’s pastor just loads us with things to use, like the, the papers they both come home with every week after church. And, um, you know, the extra things that he gives us to be able to use with our kids, um, is a big support. Plus, just all of the, um, activities and things that they have at church for the kids that back up what parents are trying to do as well. It’s like we’re a team. We’re backing each other up. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Hank also valued the partnership with the church.

Definitely this church and all these activities here, we have a great pastor here. It’s very focused just on kids, the children’s pastor. So he’s got a lot of resources. Has been doing it for many years and I know that if I even had a question about what to do in a certain scenario, he’d have an answer for me or direct me to a resource …There’s classes, so it’s very supportive, as far as kids at our church. And that’s one of the key factors….There’s a lot of support here (personal communication, September 16, 2015).
For these parents the church was a key to many different types of support. As seen in the
quotes above the pastors, resources, ministry programs, and friendships all helped parents
in their involvement in religious education.

**Friendships.**

The support of friendship was closely related to the church, since for most parents their
supportive friendships were formed at church.

We have a small group that we get together with, uh, friends from church. And
we’ve met together for years, um, since, since before I had Layton so it’s been
probably seven years that we’ve gotten together, we four families. And we get
together, uh, couple times a month. And, you know, the kids interact together
while, uh, while the parents do a Bible study or a video series, or something. Um,
and so we’ve gotten to be very close with those families, and we support each
other. And usually what we’re studying is something having to do with our
families and children, so that’s a big support, too. (Linda, personal
communication, September 26, 2015)

However, some friendships existed from schools or ministries outside of the church.
Megan mentioned how the relationships at her children’s Christian schools have helped them.
Gabe, Frank, and Abby all mentioned groups that met regularly outside of the church that
provide personal encouragement in their role.

Friendships can provide encouragement by sharing in similar parental struggles. Abby
explained the camaraderie she experiences.

Friends from church and MOPS that are involved in the same things, so it's good
to have that support system. If they're struggling with something or sometimes as
a mom you kind of feel like you're in it by yourself or nobody else's kids do that, or you know, and then you talk to someone. And it's like; “No, my kid does that too”. And you know it's just that comfort of OK, I'm not in this by myself.

(personal communication, August 12, 2015)

Gabe, explaining the value of his weekly men’s group meeting, said; “And it’s really nice to have them there to be able to bounce ideas off of. And say, my kid’s acting this way, or they did this, and, you know, how did you guys handle this, this, this” (personal communication, September 16, 2015)?

A listening sympathetic ear, mentoring, prayer, and Bible study are important supports offered by friends. Often these relationships are formed at church but occasionally they can be found in other areas. Parents in the study valued this input in their PIRE experience.

**Family.**

For many participants, family members also provided support. Nearly every participant mentioned the support of their spouse. Abby said; “When I think of people, my husband is obviously a huge supporter of that. He farms fulltime, and I stay home with our children, so he knows the importance of that” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). Jacob married a spouse that would support a “Christ-centered home” and her parents have been a source of advice and encouragement to Jacob. David and Gabe both mentioned the support and role their wives have as homeschool moms.

Parents of the participants were also often a support. Linda said, “My parents are, are involved in my children’s lives, too, which is fabulous. Um, so they’re a good support” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Megan stated; “My parents are a huge support”
(personal communication, September 26, 2015). Ian’s parents also provided help in his parenting role by allowing he and his wife to refresh.

I think having that, uh, that close family helps a lot, you know, just like little things, like, um, my parents or, and her parents are willing to watch the kids any time so we can even get away, and then refresh ourselves to come back and be, you know, more, um, more intentional with our kids and not, you know, stressed out all the time. And so I’m sure that, cause there’s quite a few people who, you know, live where there, it’s hard for them to get a babysitter and it’s becomes a challenge to get away sometimes. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Abby mentioned that her family prayed for her. Gabe mentioned that most of their family members were “fellow believers.” Family members not only provided childcare, as in Ian’s case, but Megan mentioned that her mom volunteered in her daughter’s Awana ministry and paid half of the girl’s tuition to Christian school. Family members, including one’s spouse, were supportive of PIRE for these families. Spouses supported each other in doing various religious activities with the children. These type of supports were valued by the participants.

**Personal faith.**

A parent’s own faith was another important support for their involvement. Ian stated it this way; “Um, I would say, uh, this may sound loaded, but like your whole, like my whole relationship up to that point has supported me, um…Like my walk [pause] up to this point has supported me” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Ed mentioned how his support in PIRE is prayer and then his testimony.
I didn't actually get baptized till I was, um, I think my two older daughters were kids, but, you know, I'm talking late twenties, easily. Maybe thirty. We were still living back in “Jackson.” I grew up in church. They were having a baptism service and I just wanted to go. I left my family at home, you know, because they had something going on. And it was one of those things um... you just, I look, as I was sitting there, thinking about, I was listening to the testimonies and stuff, I was sitting there thinking how much have I been blessed. You know what would my testimony be. And all I could think of was the birth of my kids. (Ed, personal communication, August 18, 2015)

David also explained that his own relationship with Jesus impacts his involvement in his kids’ discipleship.

I was one of those guys where it took me till my Junior year to college where I finally said; “Ok, what do I really believe.” I grew up in a Christian home. And I grew up knowing what to do and what to say, but it wasn't mine until my Junior year. So [pause] wanna live it, and we're all hypocrites anyway, still, but you know it's a desire to have your own personal relationship. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Beth explained how friendships and Bible study also help one’s own personal faith, which in turn helps one’s own children.

Like my husband, a couple of the, um, guys at church, you know, almost like, helping him keep going in his spiritual walk, to help the kids. So indirectly helps the kids. I'm, you know, I'm not always in a Bible study. But I like to do a Bible study or two in the [pause] well, I try to do one in the summer and one in the
winter time, so keeping myself, um, in the Word. (personal communication, August 13, 2015)

For these parents, their involvement in the children’s religious education was very much connected with their own faith relationship with Jesus. This is the genuine faith they desire to pass along to their children. The prayer, Bible study, and relationships that support their personal faith also support their involvement in their children’s religious education.

Resources.

Another important support for families was the resources they used in the religious education of their children. Many times these resources were provided by their church. Some resources were acquired on their own. See Table 4 for a list resources that were collected and used as part of the site documents for this research. Table 3 illustrates that the largest theme in the resources was the foci of religious education, or content.

Both Hank and Linda stand out as participants who brought and discussed a significant amount of resources. Hank felt almost over supported with the amount of resources. He said; “I mean that, I feel very fortunate to have this, the different resources I’ve got here, because we have a lot of good stuff there. In fact, it can be sometimes almost too much.” Linda explained that she spends about 30 minutes each night with each child going over the resources she uses.

The plethora of resources available was another theme. Jacob, illustrating this by pointing to the bookshelf in his office, said; “I think in our world and age of everything being at your fingertips, I mean I’ve got more than enough material. That’s all parenting. It’s, you know, I mean I’ve got more books than I’ve read.” David also echoed that theme.

Um, but I feel like we're in the age where there's so much, you can get so much curriculum. It's amazing, you go to a homeschool conference and there's so much
curriculum. So I don't feel like we're lacking on resources. We're in an age when electronically you can get the Bible, you can get sermons, and you can get podcasts. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Ken also felt well supported by the resources available to him saying; “There’s every possible resource available” (personal communication, September 17, 2015).

Table 4

*Resources that provide support for parent in the religious education of children.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Referenced by</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>252 Home sheets</td>
<td>Hank, Jacob, Linda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing Runner: Awana Sparks Book 2</td>
<td>Abby, Hank, Ian, Jacob, Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul</td>
<td>Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David’s Letter to Family</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat &amp; Dog Theology</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith to Grow On</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite Bible Stories</td>
<td>Frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven for Kids</td>
<td>Gabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kid Talk Cards</td>
<td>Hank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero Tales</td>
<td>Gabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is Calling</td>
<td>Ian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Answers Magazine</td>
<td>Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Father's World</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Daily Bread for Kids</td>
<td>Hank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrim’s Progress</td>
<td>Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read with Me Bible</td>
<td>Gabe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start Over</td>
<td>Megan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T &amp; T Ultimate Challenge</td>
<td>Beth, David, Ed, Hank, Ken, Linda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Your Child to Pray</td>
<td>Linda</td>
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<td>The Action Bible</td>
<td>Gabe</td>
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Summary.

The forms for involvement are important in answering research question 2 related to the items that inform PIRE. The church, friends, family, personal faith, and resources all have input into the experience of involvement in children’s religious education. The word “forms” is analogous to the wooden forms used to hold up concrete as it hardens. These supports also provide a structure that allows the fluid daily experience of PIRE to continue.

Facilities of Involvement

Home, church, and school are the three primary locations that influence parental involvement. Home and church tend to be the places where parents are most involved in the religious education of their children. However, school location is a parental choice that often has religious overtones.

Home.

Most parents reported that their hands-on involvement with their children is chiefly in the home. It usually takes place either in the mornings or in the evenings at bedtime. Jacob reported on their 6:30 a.m. routine. “I facilitate it, so I’m always involved. We’re reading through Romans right now in the mornings with the boys. I’ve read through five, six, seven different
devotional books, where you just read the devotion and have a scripture” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). Beth explained that on top of working on weekly Awana scripture memory they have other religious times at home.

I mean we'll do a devotion on sports for kids, and we'll do that, um, for a while and it gets interrupted and then we don't do it. Or then we'll pick up the children's Bible and read some stories on that. It's not every night. And then, um, we pray with the kids, especially, at bedtime but also at other times, as they come up. Most days I pray with the kids on the way to school. (personal communication, August 13, 2015)

Linda also has a very consistent bedtime routine with her children.

Um, every night before bed we, we read their, like Layton’s has a little story and then a Bible verse. And we work on their Bible verses every night before bed. Um, of course, you know, for the little ones it’s just a simple verse, um, but like for my daughter, um, you know, it could be long little sections, um, like this is just one verse. And she’ll work on two or three sections, um, each week. So it could be up to, you know, 10 Bible verses that she’s learning every week…Um, and then also every night before bed, um, besides those things, we have our own devotion books, um, and I’ve loved these books, kind of depending on their age. . . (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

If parents didn’t do daily devotions with their children, involvement at home consisted of at least daily prayer times interspersed by weekly conversations or family devotion time. Church was another important place for PIRE.
Church.

These families were very involved in their churches. All the parents were involved in leadership or some type of ministry in the church. Some parents, David, Ken, Megan, and Jacob, didn’t really work within the children’s ministries at their churches. However, most parents volunteered in the ministries that their children were involved in. Many helped in the Awana ministry. Some worked in Sunday school or VBS ministries. Parents even brought their children along to ministries not specifically geared for them. For example, Megan brought her oldest daughter to the college group ministry she leads and praise team practice. Ian brought his children to the church while he did various projects.

Sunday and midweek church attendance was a regular practice for these families. Ian’s experience summarized the busyness of these families at church.

So, obviously, um, um, Sunday mornings, you know, normal church, we’re always, always in church, and, um, we have, uh, you know, the kids do Sunday school and, um, we kind of bounce around different services cause we’re, you know, one month we’re serving at the coffee center and then the next week we’re doing, um, Discovery Kids which is like the, the younger kids…um, through Kindergarten. And then, um, let’s see, what else. Yeah, and then just normal, you know, church morning stuff. And then Wednesday nights some, we, we do, uh, help with Awanas, so that’s on Wednesday nights. Um, I suppose that’s about a pretty good summary. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Hank, who is a first grade Sunday school teacher, explained the reasons behind his family’s church involvement.
I would say obviously church attendance. And part of church attendance I would consider that a practice. Uh, the importance of the, of them being here and the reason for the importance of them being here is not only because God instructs that in the Bible, uh, to be in church and around, in a Christian assembly. But also, you develop friendships, um, even at, in elementary school with uh, um Christian friends, and I think that’s very important. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

The church tends to be an important location for parental involvement in religious education of children.

**School.**

School choice is another important aspect in parental involvement in religious education. Most parents brought up the importance of school choice without even being asked during the interview. Ken explained the schooling choice like this:

But I will let you know that we had strongly, um, considered the type of upbringing, type of education our kids ought to have as they’re growing up, whether it be homeschool, Christian, uh, you know, Christian school or, um, public school. Both of my kids that are at home right now are in public school. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

It is probable that some of the rural families do not really have the choice of private Christian school due to availability. But many had to weigh the choices.

Homeschooling dad, David said that he and his wife discussed “for about 4 years, whether we should or shouldn't homeschool…But the bottom line reason is just because we want to train a biblical worldview. You know everybody has a world view” (personal communication,
David wrote a letter to family and friends explaining their homeschool decision. In it he said; “God has continued to impress upon our heart this thought: ‘We are commanded to disciple our children. Education is discipleship. We only get to do this once.’ Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (header) has been a catalyst verse for us” (June, 2012).

Other homeschool families do not have overtly theological reasons for their choice. For example Gabe said;

You know, we’re not doing homeschooling because we’re scared of the world or, you know, we think that they’re going to learn all these evil things. No, we just feel like we could do a better job than the public school system. That’s it. I mean it’s not. . .You know, and we don’t think the public school system is the most evil thing in the world. And if we didn’t have the opportunity to homeschool, we would send them there, and it’d be fine. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

The curriculum used by Gabe’s family is overtly Christian and incorporates Bible reading and religious content into all subject matter.

Other families chose to send their children to a private Christian school. Frank sends his youngest boy to the Lutheran school that both he and his mother attended. “…All of our kids are going through a Christian school which also has helped with that, you know, with the memorization” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Hank’s daughters also attend a Christian school. He explained the benefits; “But also, you develop friendships um, even at, in elementary school with uh, um Christian friends, and I think that’s very important” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Megan chose a Christian school because of the religious education her daughters would receive. She added; “Uh, so doctrinal things, I want them to
know those, and that’s why we have them in a Christian school so that they’re just getting poured with truth that we agree with” (Megan, personal communication, September 26, 2015).

Finally, some parents chose public school. This choice was not just convenience but had to do with the religious education of their children.

Um, I guess, you know, when thinking about their, their schooling, that part of education, there are three options. There’s homeschooling, there’s Christian education, and there’s public school. And we did discuss all of those options, um, when trying to decide what to do with our children. And I guess we landed on public school because, um, our pastor said something once that kind of resonated with us that although homeschooling and Christian education are wonderful, our children are growing up in a world, well, they’ll, they will need to deal with all kinds of people, not just Christians, uh, and to be able to learn how to deal with those people as children in a public school setting, will hopefully benefit them as adults. Plus, it also gives them opportunities to witness to those children who may not have God in their lives, and to stand up for what they believe, which on the flip side is also a great challenge. (Linda, personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Even parents who may not have had the ability to choose between the schooling option see how involvement may spur on certain religious conversations with their children. Beth, Ed, and Jacob mentioned talking with their children about the pressures and influence of peers from the public school.
Summary.

The three facilities of involvement for evangelical parents, church, home, and school, begin to answer research question 1 concerning the concepts and practices of PIRE. Home is a place of hands-on involvement while church is a place of learning and serving individually and as a family. School choice, when available, also has religious implications. These facilities create the locations from which the various functions of involvement may branch off, as seen in the PIRE tree.

Functions of Involvement

The functions of involvement are the practices that parents do in the religious education of their children. These functions include, but are not limited to, Bible reading, conversations, scripture memory, prayer, teaching, modeling, serving, and listening to Christian music with their children. These practices were a regular part of these parents’ involvement with their children.

Bible reading.

Bible reading was an oft mentioned activity for these parents. This included not only reading of scripture but also devotionals and send home sheets from church. Ed said; “You know I always encourage her to, to read her Bible as much as possible. I'll ask her [pause] you know, of course she'll go through phases, you know, where she's ‘Dad, I'm reading this and reading this’” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Gabe explained how he sought to get readable Bibles for each of his boys.

We’ve tried to provide them with age-appropriate bibles that they can read. To hopefully then prompt them to ask questions. So for Gerald, who loves super heroes and all of that we got him the, um it’s called the Action Bible…Um, which
has been great, and he’s been reading that a ton, you know. And for our older boy, we gave him sort of his first NIV, you know, Bible, one that he can understand and dive into. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Much of this Bible reading goes on during the bedtime routine. Frank and his wife will often gather their kids onto their bed for devotions.

The [bed is the] focal point, yeah. I mean, we've done on other places, you know, on the different kid's beds but mom and dad's bed is bigger and everybody can fit on and so … and that's where all the Bible and the books are at. So that's where we end up sitting. Grabbing the kids and bring them in there. And if it's late and they're tired we … I would just lay them in bed and then I just pray one on one with them too and just give them a kiss, tell them good night. But, you know, when we get to devotions and have it all ready. We've got the lamps and the light in there. It’s not toys and we can sit on the bed and mostly have room; there's still some kicking and fighting up there or the feet touching but it usually works better than their beds, so. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Many of the site documents used in the research would be used during a family’s Bible and devotion reading.

**Conversations.**

Parents reported that conversations were an important way for religious education to take place. These conversations may be initiated by either the parent or child. They could be sparked by a devotional reading or an event at school. They also formed a method for parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the religious education their children are receiving.
These conversations can be started by the parents or by the child. Parents often would initiate religious conversations by asking questions.

I think the other thing is having those conversations at night, about like, what are you thankful for and you know, the confession about. I think all, like when you ask those questions, it just illuminates things. Because, you know, you start to ask those questions and then you have conversations, and then they have questions and all of that kind of stuff, too. So that, just even, just opening up, I think with any relationship, right? You open up that spiritual door a little bit, and, you know, the floodgates can come open. (Gabe, personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Ed mentioned how his daughter has initiated conversations. “We explain a lot, she's getting old enough now that, she'll listen to Pastor ‘Chuck’ speak, or she'll hear something and she'll ask us. And we'll sit her down and we'll try to explain it to her” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Beth, Frank, Hank, and Jacob all mentioned their children asking questions about Baptism.

And he keeps asking me about baptism and we have a rule in my house that I don’t baptize until seven. It’s just my personal. I just want to kinda wait until they’re for sure. So he’s like, “I, I know I can’t get baptized ‘til I’m seven, dad, but I really want to.” And I said, well, you, it’s coming, it’s coming up, but we’ll see. You know, I want to make sure. I said, do you know, you know. So his inquisitive nature of wanting to do that has been encouraging. (Jacob, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Child initiated conversations were important to parents as teaching moments.
However, these child-initiated conversations also provided a source of evaluations for these parents. Ian described it this way; “But I just, it’s mainly just, you know, wanting, letting them, letting them, teaching them enough to wanting them to ask questions and to find out on their own” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Linda also values the times her children bring up a conversation.

Um, but it is encouraging to see that they have learned. I mean there are times where they’ll say something or their actions show that they have learned. And then, so that’s very rewarding to know that, okay, they, this is working, they are learning, they do know. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Conversations provided a way for these parents to connect with their children about faith. Frank shared how he tries to foster that relationship with his kids.

I think, you know, one of the main things that helps, at least has helped us, me, in just connecting with my kids is just share parts of our story. You know, make it personal. Not just preaching to them and saying, “Well, you have to go to church because this is what you got to do.” You know, really asking about how they feel with their faith. What do you think of this? You know, when I was a kid, like we did, you know, this is how I felt. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

**Scripture memory.**

Scripture memory was important to parents in their children’s religious education. All but one family was involved in a ministry called Awana. Awana is an acronym for the phrase “Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed,” which is taken from 2 Timothy 2:15 (T & T Ultimate, 2010). The thrust of this ministry is encouraging children to memorize scripture and learn Bible doctrine in order to pass sections and earn recognition tokens and badges. Abby said this about
her children; “I think my favorite is hearing them. . . when we practice our Awana verses it usually takes a couple days for them to get it. And then hearing them recite it to you without any prompting” (personal communication, August 12, 2015).

Linda, like other parents, works with her children throughout the week on the memorization of verses. She shared their memorization practices.

I know with my son last night, we read his devotion, and, um, at that age it’s just so sweet to hear, you know, what they get out of that and his comments that he makes. So it’s always a precious time, I guess. It is memorable because it’s a precious time just to see what he’s learning, and then the excitement that he has doing his Awana cubby book and learning his memory verse. Um, and mommy gets to sign her name is his book when he, when he knows it, so he was very excited about that last night. I got to sign my name. Um, and same thing with my daughter, um, doing her devotion, and, and her Awana time, first memorization. Um, we spend quite a bit of time working on that, and I’ll sort of, um, I guess a memorable thing is I sometimes make up silly songs or something to go with the Bible verses to help, help her remember. Um, so we can get kind of silly, but it’s, but she remembers it. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Scripture memory is not only a part of the Awana ministry but Frank’s church does memory verses each week. And Hank’s daughters have additional memory verses for their Christian school.

**Prayer.**

Praying with their children was a regular habit for these families. These prayers take place before meals, at bedtime, during family devotion or prayer times, and as needed throughout
the day. Prayers were also a way for parents to see the spiritual growth in their children. Frank said; “I hear their prayers growing and the complexity that they're thinking about their prayer instead of just the ‘Come Lord Jesus’ saying where you just say it” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Beth mentioned; “It's been a while; um, but we've done like a family prayer time. Nothing real big, you know about five minutes. But we gather in the living room, again not consistent” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). Megan also discussed the importance of prayer; “We typically, no matter what I pray with the girls before they go to bed” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Jacob also valued prayer; “Prayer is uh, obviously essential, that, their communication with the God, who has communicated to us through His Word” (personal communication, September 17, 2015).

Several site documents also focused on prayer. Linda had one resource where the specific goal was expanding what children pray about. She described it like this:

Um, and then I’ve had this thing off of, I don’t know, somebody posted this on Facebook. And I thought it was so cool I printed it off, but it’s about, uh, it’s 10 ways to teach your child to pray. Um, and so every night when I pray with the kids, they say the, their normal prayer, but then we try to do one of these extra, we call it an extra thing, just to get them to think about other things to pray for other than themselves, you know, when you’re a child they kind of focus on them. Oh, God, help me at school, help me, um, Layton you know, at the age it’s so cute, help me to kick the ball better, you know. Um, but I’ve really loved doing this with them because it gets them to think about others, you know, it’s love for God, and praying, um, that God would help them to love him with their heart, soul, and mind, love for others, praying for wisdom, praying for health, praying for
friendship, character, a thankful heart, protection, purity, and the future. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Prayer was definitely one of the most heavily mentioned practices by parents. When it comes to a busy day, parents are at least sure to pray with their children before bed or at meals.

**Teaching.**

Teaching children about the Bible and faith is another important practice of these parents. This teaching takes on various ideas, practices, and terminologies. David said; “And education is discipleship; that's kind of our, one of the themes we were just talking about that when we were walking this morning” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Ed explained; “We just try to help that [understanding Bible reading] along, as much as possible. You know at that age, just like anything else, you try to teach them as much as possible” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Hank was mindful of a child’s understanding of religious practices.

I don’t think that children just, some things they do but for the most part, they just don’t pick it up. You have to be very blatant with what you’re teaching them. Very, uh, almost frank with them about okay, this word was used. This is being done because…using it as a teaching moment, because a lot of things you think they might pick up. You think that that makes sense to them; it really doesn’t after you talk to them. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Beth described her role; “I can already see that, how I, as a parent, need to take on the role to help guide and to keeping her grounded in the Word and giving her that extra” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). For these parents teaching encompasses discipling, helping along, guiding, and giving explanations. Many parents also explained that modeling was an important part of religious education.
Modeling comes down to the idea that somethings are better “caught than taught.” David explained this when responding to a section of the Awana book during the focus group.

It’s just a reminder of how much more is caught than taught. You know, we can, we can talk and teach and teach a lot. But kids remember what you do and you have memories of your parents and what was important to them and what they did. (personal communication, January 24, 2016)

Megan said; “I want them to see that mom’s different. Not because mom tries or mom, you know, is, is doing what’s right, but because Christ is in her. I want her, them to see that that’s why” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Gabe stated that education was not just telling his kids religious truth; “That God has given us these children, and um, it is our job to the best of our abilities to show them what it looks like to be in relationship with God. And to, you know, to believe in Jesus” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Linda explained the priority of modeling.

I just try to always keep, um, role modeling, I guess for them, um, the best that I can. As a mom, I feel like I’m so busy, you know, packing lunches, getting kids from here to there, and getting dinner ready, and grocery shopping, and laundry, and cleaning, you know, that, um, I really have to make the effort to stay on top of my own relationship with God so that they can see mom does this, too, it’s important to mom and dad, as well. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Modeling the Christian faith is important to these families. Ian mentioned how quick kids are to pick up on the “hypocrisy” of parents. The participants’ practice was to align their lives with
doctrinal beliefs thus modeling to their children genuine faith. Service to others was consistently modeled by these parents

Service.

Involved parents model and highly value service within the church and to others. These parents did not just attend church; they served at church. They also wanted their children to serve. David has taken his wife and their oldest son on annual mission trips to Haiti.

Those are great calibrating moments for us as far as, you know, knowing what God has given us. You know that verse, “To much has been given, much is required.” If you've been on the mission field, you know, getting out and seeing what the rest of the world deals with, we need to put our nose there and be there. Because it is too easy to come home and say wow that was a crazy trip and then back to your old life. And back to your own struggles and your own selfish things that you deal with. (David, personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Jacob's kids also all serve in various aspects of church ministry, greeting or audio visual team.

We want to do what the Bible commands to serve others, um, and to think of others’ interests, as Philippians says, not on your own. Um, so our goal is, you know, the reasons we do those things, I guess, are, you know, out of a response and as well as a calling. Um, you know, to serve and to serve others. So, you know, you don’t want to just do it out of duty, you want to do it out of love, as well, that’s the balance. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

This biblical emphasis on service was practiced by other families.
Ken's boys served at Lighthouse, usually during the service that their parents were also serving. Occasionally, they will serve at food banks and his oldest son has done some door-to-door outreach. Ken explained his reasoning for the service.

We wanted then to make this a priority for our, to train up our children with that same mindset and to be plugged in and learn what it means to serve is what really has been our driver, to not be just church attenders but actually active participants in trying to serve other members of the church. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Ken, Ian, and David both viewed the ultimate goal of life was to serve God and glorify Him. Ian explained the connection of service and glorifying God.

I would say just in general it’s just anything we do at church like whether we’re up here laying tile, you know, I’m not laying it for, you know, somebody else. I think of it as I’m, I’m working for the Lord. Um, and we all use our, our gifts and talents in different ways, and anything we can do. And you just try to always put the focus back on, on Jesus, and, and why are you doing it, that, you know, someone lost might come in here and hear the gospel and be saved. I mean that’s the ultimate thing. Anything we can to do glorify God. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Service within the church is something that parents valued and in which their children are also engaged.

Megan sought to bring her daughters to various service opportunities. Their daughters have accompanied them to praise team, college ministry, and “Fun Fair” setup. Megan also saw service as an important part of her children's religious education.
Service is huge, um. I think a lot of people miss the boat nowadays of give me, give me, give me, when it comes to church. They’re coming through these doors expecting the service and just be poured on. Whereas, I mean people got to operate this and if you look at, you know, Paul when he writes to the different churches about you’ve got be the one to serve. It’s about serving, serving, serving. So that’s a huge one for us. And we try to live that way, you know, as best as possible. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Service to others is seen as a core value in the religious experience of these families.

**Other practices.**

There were a few other practices of PIRE mentioned by the parents. These practices include special events, camp, listening to Christian music, and influence of others. These ranged from daily practices to once a year traditions.

Camp was a tradition for some families. Abby, Beth, and David mentioned the family camp experiences their families participated in. Abby explained the value of camp.

It is a place they love to go and um I, I mean I love spending time with my kids, but, and it's hard to drop them off, but knowing that um they're gonna be loved on by people who love the Lord, like I do and learn things about the Lord that maybe they wouldn't get from me, or they might get a different perspective there. Um that is something that has been exciting for both of us, even though it is hard for me not to have them for a whole week, um it is something that they look forward to, and I'm learning to look forward to because they come back and are just so excited about the Lord and about the time they had there. (personal communication, August 12, 2015)
Camp is only one of many special events parents incorporate into their children’s religious education. Linda’s and Megan’s children were involved in a children’s choir. Megan’s family has gone on a special trip to the Creation Museum. Camps and other special events are another part of PIRE.

Music was also valued by these parents. Frank mentioned the value of singing hymns in church. Gabe’s family is very musical and they listen to a lot of worship music. Abby, Linda, and Megan primarily listen to only Christian music in their homes and cars. Megan explained how she uses music with her daughters.

And then music, like I’ve said, is a huge thing that we use to, um, you know, not just hear the music, but we talk about the theology behind a lot of the, the music that we listen to, so that we’re teaching even in those joyful or playing moments. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

One song, “Start Over” (Flame, 2013), has played a role in the questions Megan’s daughter has been asking.

Parents have also sought the influence of others in their children’s life. Often this is through church. David explained the power of being around others at church.

So fellowship with the believers, being actively involved, not to check a box but to uh, encourage, you know, we’re called to fellowship because we need it. We need to be plugged in. We need to grow. Um, we’re encouraged when we’re around other people, and other people might need us. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

However, the influence of others may be sought outside of the church as well. Gabe discussed the value of mentors for his boys as they got into the teen years.
So if we can find a role model for them, you know somebody outside of us.
Whether it’s my brother-in-law, or you know, an older kid that’s in high school
that loves Jesus that can, you know, that they can go to if they have questions, or
that they know they’re a trusted person. That they, you know, that those people
can speak into them, and I think that’ll probably speak louder than, than us at
some point. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

These special events, musical habits, and the influence of others are valued by these
parents as they seek to provide a Christian religious education for their children.

**Summary.**

In the conceptual framework for this phenomenon, this theme forms the multiple
branches of the PIRE tree. However, these functions can potentially occur at multiple places.
For example, Bible reading can happen at church, home and school. Conversations usually take
place at home but encompass events from all three facilities of PIRE. Jacob summed up the
various functions of PIRE well during his interview.

I believe that there’s four legs to every table, that make it not fall. And,

obviously, the Word of God is central to that, um, every Word of God is pure as a

shield to those who put their trust in Him. You know, the Word endures forever.

So, the Word of God is central to them. Um, prayer is uh, obviously essential,

that, their communication with that God, who has communicated to us through

His Word. But prayer, um. Church is a non-negotiable. Um, you know, God

said He died for the church. So church life and serving the church. And within

the church, the church is really the hope of the world. And then lastly, strong,

Christian friends, um. You, you’ve got to surround yourself with others who are
headed in the same direction as you. Um, you can’t do it alone and, uh, God never intended us to. So you find that, obviously, within the context of church.

(personal communication, September 17, 2015)

The theme of functions of PIRE speaks directly to research question one by describing the practices and actions of involved parents.

**Foci of Religious Education**

The participants in this study had several different content foci. These various subjects were the most important to these parents and did not represent the entirety of religious education content. These parents valued the content and truths of the Bible. They wanted to help their children understand how to pray. God’s love for people, Christian doctrines, and love for others were also important to the participants. In addition, following a subtheme from the Foundations of PI, these parents wanted their children to understand how a person may be saved and who Jesus is. When asked about content, Jacob summarized many of these themes.

The Bible, I mean it’s, it’s pretty much the Bible. But uh, you know, I thought about this this week. One of my goals this year as my Senior, is I want him to be able to articulate the doctrines, the primary doctrines of what we believe, why do we believe in Jesus is the only way to God? Why do we believe the Holy Spirit, you know, is God and that, you know, why we believe that, you know, salvation is by faith alone? Why do we believe in baptism? Why do we believe in, and I want them to be able to articulate it and, and be able to share it with somebody else in, in an intelligent way. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

The site documents also demonstrated these subthemes.
Knowing the Bible.

These evangelical parents demonstrated the value of the Bible as a primary source of curriculum. In fact, the only resource that Ed reported was the Bible. When asked about important content in religious education, Beth responded “Just knowing well the Bible” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). Frank responded; “Well the Bible. (Laugh) I like it that, you know, … they [the pastors] preach the Bible, they preach not just on, you know, one piece of the Bible or another piece of the Bible” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Ed explained his valuing of the Bible by contrasting what he sees in society.

Like in Awana, with all the little kids coming through there, it used to be everyone knew the Bible; there was a Bible. What it was, basic. Now, now they're coming in and they've never seen it. Never heard it….I'll go scavenge a Bible somewhere in church and give it to them. You know, just for the fact that you have one. “I know reading is way above you but keep this with you.” I'll open up, you know, show them where this story is at. (personal communication, August 18, 2015)

Gabe stated this emphasis; “I think, um, being exposed to God’s Word. Whether that’s through them reading it, um and/or listening to, you know, to, to sermons” (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

Several of the site documents that parents used in religious education were special children’s Bibles. These told the narratives of scripture. Awana also helps parents in this endeavor. Each section of the chapter aims to help the reader understand the main concepts in the chapter. The main concepts are presented in a catechism style of question and answer. For example, “Q: What do I need to know about the Holy Spirit? A: I need to know that the Holy
Spirit is the deposit of my salvation” (*T & T Ultimate*, 2010, p. 145). The sections include explanations of these answers, supporting verses to be memorized, an application section, and a workbook section with extended reading and comprehension questions. Each chapter has about four supporting memory verses.

**Prayer.**

Parents taught their children how to pray and what to pray about. Abby explained; “And I want them to know that prayer is also important, lifting others up in prayer, or um when you are scared, that that's just your way of communicating with the Lord and hopefully finding comfort in that” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). Gabe described how prayer changed as his boys matured.

> For the older boys, so then as they grow older, what I’ve been trying to do is add more complexity, right? So, not just what are you thankful for, but who do you want to pray for? So starting to try to get them to think about others. Um, and then also I’ve been slowly adding the, what is something you want to confess to God. So kind of trying to teach them how to pray, and the different things that you do while you pray. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

David also explained how the content of prayer was important to teach.

> So we talk about that with our kids, of, so, it’s Lordship salvation that Christ is on the throne, our prayers shouldn't be: “Keep me safe; keep me happy; keep me well fed; keep me prosperous.” Which you know, I mean all of us we have things we ask for, but is it to bring God glory? If we have a Job moment, are we gonna bring God glory in those Job type moments as well as the good days? (personal communication, August 15, 2015)
Linda rotates through 10 different topics for prayer, one each night, with her children.

Other resources emphasized prayer. Frank’s *What Would Jesus Do?* (Haidle, 1998) devotional had a week dedicated to prayer. *A Faith to Grow On* (MacArthur, 2000) and the 252 *Home* (2015) sheets also had prayer encouragements for each devotional. *A Faith to Grow On* had a whole chapter devoted to prayer. This chapter explained that prayer is talking to God. God hears your prayers wherever you are. God always answers our prayers with a yes, no, or wait. When we pray we must trust God that he knows best. People must be patient for answers to prayers. Most prayers will be private between a person and God. Jesus taught the disciples to pray with praise, commitment to obedience, trust, seeking forgiveness, asking for our needs, and help to obey him (MacArthur, 2000).

**Loving others.**

Another important content focus was the value of loving others. Hank said; “Focusing on other people, that is a very important principle to learn also, or practice” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Beth stated; “You know I guess I always bring up, you know, do unto others, you know as Christ would do to you” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). Ian has a habit of encouraging his daughter to befriend new children at school. When she asks why, he answers; “God loves everybody, and so we need to be kind to everybody” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Much of the motivation behind the function of serving others is related to the content of loving others.

Resources also touched on this topic. Linda’s resource on teaching prayer focused on loving others. The *Veggie Tales: 365 Day Starter Devos for Girls* (2011) contained several messages about loving others. Day two encouraged girls to remember Jesus is a friend and loves them. They can share this love with others. Day four explained that people are to share with
others in need. Kids should act kindly. Day five repeated the importance of sharing and promises happiness to the sharer. On another day the golden rule was emphasized; it encouraged kids to treat others in the same way you want to be treated, starting at home.

**God’s love.**

Parents also valued that God’s love would be grasped by their children. Gabe said; “They would know that God created them, loved them, and died for them. So I think, you know, obviously those are very basic things” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Ian stated; “So I guess I more than anything try to drill into their minds that, um, that, that God is real and God loves them, and then try to use that to spark more things” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Abby emphasized the unconditional nature of God’s love. “I want them to understand that the Lord loves them, that He'll love them no matter what. What they do, I mean they can't do anything bad enough that He won’t love them in spite of it” (Abby, personal communication, August 12, 2015).

Parents also mentioned other qualities of God that were important for religious education. Regarding facing challenges as a family, Ken said; “God is still there. God is going to guide us through this” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). Jacob expounded on the theme referencing Joiner’s (2009) Orange curriculum.

…He loves them. Uh, let me see, I’ll go to the Orange material…they can trust him, you know that they can trust God. Um, and uh, you know, that God has a plan for their life. That God, that they’re valuable, you know. They’re loved, they’re valuable. That God has a plan for them. That they can trust Him with whatever’s going on. That their identity is in him, really. Creating that identity. Christ-like identity. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)
There were several qualities of God mentioned by parents and in site documents but the most mentioned was love.

The Site documents also reinforced this theme. Hanks resource, *The Daily Bread for Kids*, said; “... We hope you learn that Jesus loves you so much that He's given you a chance to become a part of God's family” (Bowman & McKinley, 2014, Introduction). In the *T & T Ultimate Challenge* (2010), Chapter 4 continued the focus on knowing God that He is faithful, loves the world, is the reader's authority, and cares about the reader. In the song “Start Over,” one of Megan’s resources, Flame and NF sing; “See, His love is deeper than the ocean floor. Run to His arms like an open door. God the Father sent the Son... We know unfailing love, unfailing love, it’s not too late, start over” (2013). The love of God holds an important position in the evangelical religious education of children because it is the motivation for the saving work that God does through Jesus Christ.

**Personal relationship with Jesus.**

Salvation, or a personal relationship with Jesus, for their children has already been mentioned as a foundational principle for PIRE in these participants. It is consistent that this would be a focus for these parents in the content of their children’s religious education. Beth wanted her children to know “that Jesus is our Savior” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). Linda said; “And so I just, I really try to reinforce at home what’s most important. And that’s a relationship with God... it’s really important” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Gabe continued that theme.

Um, but I think for us, the goal of all of what we do, whether it’s classical conversations or the prayer at night, or even in doing the foster care that we do, we want our kids to know that it’s not just about Sunday morning. And it’s not
just about, you know, a story or a Bible; it’s about personal relationship with God and with Jesus. And then trying to live that out and have it be real, and not just something that we do, or you know, that kind of thing. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

This makes it clear that religious education goes beyond knowing doctrine. For these parents, it was helping their children to experience something, salvation.

Ian explained trying to balance encouraging his daughter, Idalee, in a salvation decision and making sure that it is her own choice. He still tries to emphasize the appropriate content.

Jesus loves you and, you know, Idalee's going through right now about, she’s asking questions about, you know, why, you know, cause we’ll teach her things about, you know, that Jesus came and, you know, John 3:16, and that he died for our sins. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

David summarized the importance of this theme; “I think overall it would be just, um, active, true, personal relationship with Christ and that in its simplest form, that's the content we want them to grasp” (personal communication, August 15, 2015).

The T & T Ultimate Challenge (2010) book also emphasized this theme. Chapter 3 focused on the gift of salvation found in Jesus. Chapters 5 and 6 continued a focus on Jesus and that he offers salvation and forgiveness of sins. In Heaven for Kids, Alcorn (2006) explains in the last section that people can only get to heaven through Jesus (John 14:6). People must have their names written the book of life (Rev. 22:17). People must respond to Jesus in faith now to get our name written in that book. This resource used by Gabe’s family summarized the gospel in four points. (a) All have sinned (Romans 3:23). (b) The consequence of sin is separation from God but the gift of eternal life is found in Jesus (Romans 6:23). (c) This is extended to us
through Jesus while we were sinners (Romans 5:8). (d) We must confess with our mouth and believe in our hearts the truth of his death and resurrection for our salvation (Romans 10:9-10). This was a key content focus for these parents. Hank echoed this theme; “I think it’s very important that they understand what it, it means to be a Christian and what the major tenets of the faith [are]. . . .” (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

**Doctrine of the Christian faith.**

While this theme is similar to and includes others already mentioned, it is unique in specifically isolating doctrinal principles and apologetic principles parents desired their children to learn. Hank spoke about this in connection with the Awana resources.

That’s what this book goes through very well. This happens to be what our daughter went through last year and um, I don’t know how familiar you are with Awana, but it’s very good, so this is what I’m saying about the content that I want her to learn is, uh, it gives you a question. It says, “Why did God give us the Bible?” And it answers it and it gives you a verse…At, at a elementary level. “Who’s the first man and the first woman?” Um, “Why am I an important member to my family?” It all goes through all of that. Then it kinda builds on, builds on things…Even goes into a little how can I help other people. I can pray for others. Um, this one, and I have to admit, this one was really good, because this, these are the questions you get when about, you’re about fifth graders, is “What does God say about my home and family? Why should I go to church?” Uh, “What do I need to know about Satan, angels and the future?” (personal communication, September 16, 2015)
The Awana resources focused on doctrinal questions and how to answer them. David mentioned; “You know another one I'd like to be better on and we're not good at is...catechizing the kids. And that's just the idea of, you know, training them on some of the theology of, of the Bible” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Besides T & T Ultimate Challenge (2010), A Faith To Grow On (MacArthur, 2000) also provides a doctrine based devotional that taught kids theological answers to various questions.

Understanding Christian doctrine helps children defend their faith. Jacob explained; “I want them to be able to do that, as well as things like apologetics. You know, being able to defend their faith” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). Frank wanted his kids to have answers about the Christian faith.

And you want to be able to have some knowledge of that to where you're not stumbling or being made to look like a fool later if that does come up and you need to bring that back...just backing up again with faith and principles and the Christian attitude, you know, the way of life that we're trying to teach our kids. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Frank echoed this concern in during the focus group.

So when we look at devotions and things that we want to start teaching out of, we focus on really equipping our kids on how to defend their faith. And really, that’s where some of that, well a lot of that memorizing verses memorizing scripture comes, comes in to help, is that unfortunately we’re in a time in our world, in our country, when this is becoming such a huge thing we send them off to college, we send them off to these liberal places that are going to challenge them. And one of the things that is really important to us is just whatever that devotion or what it is
we focus on teaching them to defend their faith. (personal communication, January 24, 2016)

Summary.

The Foci of Religious Education is important to this research. It gives insight into what content evangelical parents prize in their involvement with their kids. This speaks to research question 3; what content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education? This theme suggests that parents consider God’s love, love for others, prayer, the Bible, doctrine, and ultimately salvation through Jesus Christ as the most important elements of religious content.

Fruits of Involvement

The fruits of PIRE are the goals or outcomes parents hope to achieve through their efforts. These fruits grow directly out of the content and actions that parents employ with their children. There are four main outcomes parents hope to find in their children’s lives. These are salvation, living out their faith, loving God, and loving others.

Salvation.

These evangelical parents suggested that the greatest goal would be the salvation of their children. This continues the similar category within the foundations and foci themes. This goal is accompanied by two caveats. This must be the decision of the child and God must be trusted for this outcome.

Several parent’s described the joy of their children making a decision to trust Jesus for salvation. Linda had this experience with her son.

Oh, and I guess I just did think earlier this spring my son, um, he was still four at the time, asked Jesus to come into his heart, and I got to, um, lead him through
that. And that was, I’ll never forget that. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

Megan also shared that her daughter had “professed” to be a Christian and was baptized. She said; “I mean Melanie's salvation is a success…she’s very loving and giving and, and you can see the fruits of your labor in that” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Gabe saw it as a success that his kids understood “their situation” and how they could “remedy” it.

I think, uh, our two older children we’ve had, like they’ve come to us. I think Gavin came to us, and asked Jesus into his heart, which, obviously as a parent, it’s a huge deal. And then our middle child, I believe did it at “United Community”, at the church we used to [attend]. . . I think those two, for us, are, you know, markers. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Jacob also reported that all of his older boys had “trusted Christ as their Savior” and been baptized. He said; “Well, you know, obviously, their salvation is the greatest success. Baptism, choosing to be baptized” (personal communication, September 17, 2015).

While salvation is important, it is seen by these parents as a goal that is out of their hands and mostly in God’s hands. David explained how his children’s salvation is out of his control.

That's [personal relationship with Jesus is] what we want to teach them, you know as parents you can't teach, you can't force that on them; you can only just fill them up as much as possible. And I believe God's gotta do the work at the end of the day, but our job is to fill them up and point them in the right direction and then hopefully God grabs their heart. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Jacob said; “So, obviously, I don’t want my children to rebel against God or walk away or, but that’s going to be their choice. They have to choose, just as I do, to follow or flee” (personal
Regarding his kids, Ed said; “They're gonna have to learn their own relationship” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Abby explained that she trusts God for His work in their lives.

But I think you can see some of it, but in other things you just pray that the Lord is just working in them and using it, you know, and building them up the way He would want them to, and for what He has for them in this life. (personal communication, August 12, 2015)

The greatest goal for these parents, the salvation of their children is not within their control and so they trust God. This makes the analogy of fruit fitting. Parents are like the farmer who cares for the tree but ultimately cannot control the final harvest of fruit. Once the fruit of salvation is present, parents desire their children to live out their faith.

Living out faith.

Parents also desired their children to live out their faith. This includes obedience to God and parents from a proper heart attitude. Another important part of living out one’s faith was holding to a biblical worldview. Megan explained that genuine faith is important.

We’ve tried to teach them, we want you to be genuine about who you are; who God designed you to uniquely be and to live out your faith, based on that. Based on using how God designed you to be and using the talents and gifts and abilities that he gave you and using that to serve him in whatever that may be. I don’t care if that’s being a stay-at-home mom or being an executive at a company. Whatever or wherever in between, I said it, you know, here is going to fade. It doesn’t, that’s not going to matter. It’s, you know, are a genuine, true believer of Christ. And at the end of the day, you know, that’s all that’s going to matter and
so living a life to support that, not just being this fake fraud who comes in here and is showy and, you know what I mean? That’s the kind of thing…that’s our intent. (personal communication, September 26, 2015)

David explained that faith has got to be evident externally but radiating from a genuine heart. I mean at the end of the day how do you know, how do you measure effectiveness on any of it, it's your fruit of the Spirit. I guess so are we showing, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control in our actions in our life? You know it’s, that's kind of the thing, is you can grow up and you can kinda know what to say and know what to do in a Christian home but that's the whole goal. Do we get it to be passed the outward check the box kind of show to does it really matter to you in your heart? Is it a personal relationship? So the way to measure effectiveness, I think, is really looking at the heart of issues. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Megan also valued the fact that heart attitude was related to obedience. She explained; “Obedience on the first time is a big thing. And we again go back to, you know, you’re not trying to be good or pleasing just to mom and dad. It’s about your heart behind it” (personal communication, September 26, 2015).

When asked about how he would know his efforts in his children’s religious education had been effective, Ed said; “Well, truthfully, I won't know until I see it in, acting out in their adult life” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Regarding effectiveness, Gabe’s answer was to look at the fruit. I think it’s really trying to, um, it’s trying to see any fruit that comes from them. Uh, I don’t expect them to be Billy Graham and go out and evangelize to all their
friends. But to hear them talk about things that bother them, or things that they care about, um, things that they notice. You know, whether it’s, you know, poverty or people not knowing Jesus, or yeah, or just or feeling bad about things.

(personal communication, September 16, 2015)

This theme shows the value that parents place on their children’s maturing faith and external manifestations of spirituality. Parents desire that their children would not be insincere in their religious experience.

**Loving God.**

Parents desired that their children would love God and live to glorify him. Ken saw this as a sovereign plan. He explained; “But if we keep following God’s plan for our life…ultimately, to serve him and stay focused on glorifying God, then the rest of it, you know what, it will eventually work itself out” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). “I would say they’re all good kids who love God. Not perfect kids, um, but they’re good kids who love God and are, you know, trying their best to, to chase after him” (Jacob, personal communication, September 17, 2015). Ed explained; “I know they all love the Lord. . . . I don't think they'll ever have any doubt” (personal communication, August 18, 2015). Beth stated; “Well, we do it because we want the kids to grow up knowing the Lord, loving the lord” (personal communication, August 13, 2015).

This fruit of PIRE springs from a Bible passage that was influential to some parents. Deuteronomy 6:5 prescribes loving the Lord and then that parents are to pass this on to their children. The *Wing Runner: Awana Sparks book 2 (2013)* asks for this verse to be memorized. This verse provides the textual reasoning for prayers to love God in Linda’s site document on prayer. This verse is really a cornerstone in Christian teaching and life.
Loving others.

Loving others, a final fruit of PIRE, coincides with the ideas of service that were valuable to these parents. For Beth, part of effectiveness was seen in “showing patience and love and caring, especially to others” (personal communication, August 13, 2015). Abby said; “I think you can see it in their actions towards others and their attitudes” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). For Frank, seeing this fruit reassured him in his efforts in PIRE.

But when I look at my kids, I know that that's not true. I think they're great kids, I think that we've obviously must be doing something right and I get people telling me that. That really kind of helps reaffirm that whatever we're doing, whether I'm failing it, some of it or not, it is working. Both of our kids have really good soft hearts. I mean, they just have a loving heart for others, for uhm each other, even though they tease and fight and … but if something really is wrong or bad, they just feel terrible. And it's good to see that empathy. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Linda simply stated; “So, yeah, to see, um, to see God’s love come out through them is, is, I guess the best way to know that it is effective” (personal communication, September 26, 2015).

This love for others is evidenced in service to others. Jacob said; “Uh, I think, I’m, I’m really proud when they choose to serve. When they jump in, they help others make an impact” (personal communication, September 17, 2015). Hank valued his daughters’ modeling their religious education.

But as they get older with kids, with kids, you can see them wanting and practicing and modeling that behavior that you desire to see by helping other
people. When being kind and different things like that, I see it modeled. That’s how I know the result from what I’m doing. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Ken described how he sees fruit in his oldest son’s life.

Macro view, overall, his desire to want to serve in the church is his, um, uh, you can just see it in his heart. He’s just a kid who on the broad view, if you look at it over, look at his life over the last couple a years anyway, he’s just a kid who has a tenderness toward people. He is very much a people person. He cares about people. He’s, he’s a kid who other kids who are struggling will, uh, talk to him, right, text. That’s like their main communication now. But text him about stuff going on to get his, I don’t know, we’ll call it advice. And he tries to be there for people. And so I think that’s Christ showing in him with that. (personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Loving others was valued by these parents as evidence that their children were growing due to PIRE. Loving others was evidenced by their children showing care, compassion, empathy, and serving others.

Summary.

The fruit of PIRE includes the themes of salvation, living out faith, loving God, and loving others. These themes relate to many of the other valued ideas in PIRE. This theme begins to answer research question four. Seeing these fruits cultivated in their children’s lives is a way parents know their involvement is effective.
Fights in Parental Involvement

If PIRE can be illustrated by a fruit tree, then the fights in PIRE might be compared to insects, disease, and harsh conditions that threaten a tree’s thriving. Parents reported several challenges in their experience of involvement in their children’s religious education. These included limited time, which led to inconsistency, unmet ideals, finding the right church, and getting the needed training. Parent’s tended to fight against these challenges to their involvement.

Limited time.

The participants most often reported busyness as being a major challenge. This was closely associated with inconsistency in their practices of PIRE. When asked about the challenges she faces Abby answered; “I think just time, I mean you get so involved with other things too…So just making sure that you make that a priority and not just something to fill in space and letting them know why it is important” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). Beth mentioned the challenge of consistent involvement and her family’s “busy schedule.”

I know I brought it up a couple of times before, the consistency. Sometimes I get hard on myself like oh, you haven't done this. You know I just brought it up with the sports devotional book. To my daughter, “Where's that at? I want to get that out, school’s starting.” You know, but I do get upset that I'm not consistent with one thing. (personal communication, August 13, 2015)

Frank explained how his wife in very aware of their inconsistency; “Because we miss, you know, multiple nights in a row and that doesn't happen and then…that stands out for her” (personal communication, August 15, 2015).
Ian also found time to be a big challenge. “I think time might be the ultimate challenge, you know, that you’re, that you’re spending the right amount of time on the right things” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). However, parents do find ways to fight against the challenge of time. Linda said; “Larry and I said years ago, we weren’t going to get our kids involved in all of these different activities that take up too much time, and we haven’t” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). David and his wife had a method for counteracting family busyness.

Oh I think the challenges are all the ones that you would think of. Um business, distractions of life, you know the [pause] being so busy with work or activities. Like she said we've kind of cut activities purposely so we're kind of non-traditional with that too. Uh, we don't sign the kids up for everything under the sun. You just, you pick and choose a little bit so you're not so busy. But that's a challenge, just time. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

Therefore, while time and inconsistency were a struggle, parents sought to limit activities in order to place a priority on the religious education of their children.

**Unmet ideals and questioning.**

Parents had subtle ways of indicating they wanted to do more. David wanted to start catechizing his children. Hank wanted to implement family service projects. Gabe wanted to implement a family devotion time. Despite much involvement, there was the desire to pursue a more involved ideal. Even if parents didn’t have specific desires for more involvement there was a questioning of how they should fulfill their ideal role.

Abby mentioned this pressure to reach an ideal. She said; “But it still of course is nerve racking just thinking [pause] well you know am I doing everything I need to be doing or, um, are
they plugged in in the right ways is it helping them” (personal communication, August 12, 2015).

Linda said; “And so it’s a lot of pressure sometimes to feel like [pause] I’m really doing them justice, doing, you know, giving them what they deserve” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Ian also evaluated; “You always think about, you know, what more could I do or like, you know, how else, what else can you do with your kids” (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

However, questioning their role or comparing themselves to an ideal didn’t dissuade their efforts in PIRE. Gabe made this clear.

I think we feel pretty good about it. I think, like any parent, we, um, you know, you question yourself. Are you doing things the right way? Are we ruining our kids? You know, with this church search, and with, you know, foster care and other things, you worry that, um, that you’re not doing maybe what you, what you should be doing. But, you just try to do your best, I guess, and just go forward. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

These parents all experienced challenges in their involvement, but it did not stop them from continued effort in the discipleship of their children.

**Finding the right church.**

Some parents experienced challenges in finding the right church. Gabe’s family has been trying to find a church for about a year.

And that’s hard; it’s hard to explain all of that to a child to help them understand like, we’re trying to, like this next place for us is, Lord willing, the place that they will do Junior and Senior High ministry, you know, you know, and really like
hopefully cement for them their relationship with Jesus. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Megan was a part of a church for years were the faith didn’t seem genuine. When asked about challenges Megan said; “Before here, before coming to Lighthouse. I would have said a church that was genuine. I probably wouldn’t have said that out loud to anybody, but I know I was feeling it” (personal communication, September 26, 2015).

To counter this challenge parents look for a church with ministries for children and support for parents. Hank said; “We do have a lot of kids here, so it’s one of the key factors as I think a lot of people come here is for that. There’s a lot of support here” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Frank also reflected on his church choice.

I didn't have connection with the church. I didn't have um, that, you know, personal, this is fun, I have friends and I got a connection that I just was going. You know, it wasn’t that I didn't believe; it was just that it was tedious. And I didn't want that for my kids. I wanted to find [pause] and we found a church that it's a really great church so it makes a big difference. (personal communication, August 15, 2015)

As a result of a move, Ed’s family had to choose a new church, which really wasn’t his “style”. He explained; “Part of the reason we started attending Countryside weekly was mostly they had good children's programs there” (personal communication, August 18, 2015).

Potentially related to finding the right church is receiving training in PIRE. Ian shared with a smile.
I wish there was somebody that could always tell me what I was doing right or wrong. Like, like someone can just like, you know, stand over here and watch you for a little while, and then say, hey, here’s, uh, you know, here’s two things you’re doing great, and here’s five things you, oh, you need to work on these things, um. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Jacob also mentioned his lack of training; “I wasn’t trained in it, so it takes a lot longer for me to know what should I be doing. What, what, is this more important or is this more important” (personal communication, September 17, 2015)? Linda also thought that a mentor, especially during the early stages of motherhood, would have been helpful. Even with some desire for more training, most parents felt supported in their PIRE efforts.

**Summary.**

Parents had to fight against several different challenges in their experiences. These fights in PIRE answer research question 5, which is focused on barriers to involvement. These barriers included busyness, inconsistency, unmet ideals, questioning the parental role, finding the right church, and getting needed training.

**Feelings of Involvement**

Despite the challenges involved in PIRE parents generally felt positive about their experience. Parents often highlighted the importance of enjoyment for themselves and their children. Resources also mirrored this concern. Parents expressed their love for their kids. Parents also reported that overall they felt successful and supported in PIRE.
Enjoyment.

Participants expressed that they wanted their children to enjoy religious education, and the parents indicated that they enjoyed their involvement. Hank valued enjoyment of the church experience.

Because you also don’t want to be at the place where they feel like they’re being forced into it. You want them to, you know, be at the place where they’re saying, this is enjoyable, I like this. I want to know more. (personal communication, September 16, 2015)

Beth reported that her children had “fun” in various religious activities like the girls Bible study, camp, and with the people at church. Beth also enjoyed talking with her son about salvation. Linda said; “The kids are both involved in the Awana program at church, which they love” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Not only was the child’s enjoyment important but parents typically felt enjoyment in their role.

Reflecting the enjoyment that parents derive from PIRE. Frank said; “I'm excited when he [my son] can. He's been asking about it. So, I'm excited when he's going to be able to go [on the father son ice fishing trip]” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Abby talked about her kids reciting verses; “That to me is just like a breath of fresh air, just know that, um, they have committed it to memory and it is something they can use in the future” (personal communication, August 12, 2015).

Resources were created in such a way to peak children’s enjoyment. Ian discussed The Bible App for Kids (You Version, n.d.) he uses with his children; “So they actually do look at that. They like that probably better than the books” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). The Awana books have fun adventures and stories to coincide with Bible themes. Nearly
all resources were colorful and were designed to draw children into the Bible lesson being taught.

During the focus group, we discussed enjoyment quite a bit. The participants valued enjoyment for their children. David valued his children’s enjoyment.

But, you know, it’s obvious we want our kids to enjoy what we’re teaching them and we want them to, you know, at the end of the day it comes down to having a personal relationship with Christ. And we want them to understand that and enjoy that. (personal communication, January 24, 2016)

Frank sought to keep religious education “interesting” so his children wouldn’t be “bored.” Linda described how she tried to keep things interesting for both her children who had different personalities.

During the focus group it became clear that these parents would not stop PIRE because their children did not find enjoyment.

Their education, Christian education isn’t going to hinge on whether they like it or enjoy it or not. We’re still going to want to, you know, encourage that and continue to move that direction with them. But again, I think it is important that they find some application or some direct connection that does bring some enjoyment so that they want to continue it on their own without their parents having to I guess push it down their throat or something. So we want to make it as enjoyable as possible, but, you know, there’s going to be times that it’s not as fun, so. (Ken, personal communication, January 24, 2016)

The parental role in their children’s education is just too important to these parents to base their involvement on their children’s reaction.
These parents also found personal enjoyment in PIRE, but it was mostly rooted in their own relationship with Jesus.

I’d say our own personal enjoyment is our relationship and passion for our faith in Christ and so we know that not every day’s a great day and not every day’s a terrible day either. But um, it plays a role in how we look at how we train our kids every day. (David, personal communication, January 24, 2016)

The focus group parents largely agreed with this assessment. Frank added how his enjoyment was derived at least in part from his children’s response.

Our enjoyment comes from seeing them grow in Christ and, obviously, we’re, we’re told to do this. We’re commanded to do that. And it gives us, you know, parents, I think, the joy to see the, your kids grow in their faith and um, you know, in the end we want to be together in Heaven. (personal communication, January 24, 2016)

The parents found enjoyment in their children’s positive responses but also outside of their PIRE experience and in their personal faith and walk with Jesus Christ.

**Love for their children.**

Another commonly reported feeling was love for their children. Ian stated; “And I think just loving them and, um, you know, teaching them those, kind of those basic things I think is probably the, the most important thing” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Linda said; “It’s most important to know that God loves them and that I do” (personal communication, September 26, 2015). Ed stated his love for his kids at least four times.

I get disappointed, um, I've always, I've never stopped loving them. You will tick me off to the point I want to put you through a wall. But I will never stop loving
you. And even at that point, I'd lay down my life. And they know that. Yeah.

That's the biggest thing. Literally, you have to love your kids. (personal communication, August 18, 2015)

Ed also called his family his “earthly treasure.” And Linda talked about her “precious” children; “Um, I guess I can feel their little souls do have God in them because I can see God’s love coming out through them. Now I’m getting like emotional” (Linda, personal communication, September 26, 2015). Love for their children was a common feeling associated with these parent’s experiences of PIRE.

**Feeling successful.**

On top of the love and enjoyment, parents generally felt successful and supported in their involvement. Frank talked about how seeing his children’s love for others convinced him that he and his wife were doing “something right.” Hank said; “Some days I feel it’s very successful, other days it’s like ughhh, let’s just try this again some time later” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Ken explained that walking through a difficult time with his family turned into a success because his boys got to see God working.

Parents reported having access to more than enough supports with resources and within the church. David said, “So yeah, from a support perspective, I think it's pretty good overall” (personal communication, August 15, 2015). Abby said; “I really feel very supported in what we do with our family and with our kids and the things we're involved in” (personal communication, August 12, 2015). Gabe also reported feeling “pretty good” about their involvement. The overall feelings of these parents were positive.
Summary.

The feelings that parents experienced in their involvement included enjoyment, love, and success. These feelings apply to research question one and help in describing the phenomenological structural description of PIRE. Some of these positive feelings were present in every participant. The feelings of involvement might be compared to the sap of the PIRE Tree. These emotions are flowing through each part phenomenon.

Summary

The results of this research into PIRE show that there are eight primary themes found in the experiences of involved evangelical parents of elementary students. These themes answer the five research questions posed by this research. These themes can be divided to create the textural and structural description of the phenomenon.

The textural description of PIRE is reflected in the forms, facilities, functions, foci, and fruit of PIRE. These parents are supported by their churches, families, friends, resources, and faith. PIRE takes place in relation to three primary facilities: home, church, and school. Parent and child functions include Bible reading, discussions, prayer, scripture memory, teaching, modeling, and involvement in special events. Parents valued content focused on the Bible, prayer, doctrine, God’s love, love for others, and the teaching of salvation in their children’s religious education. The fruit parents sought in their children’s religious education included living out their faith, loving God, loving others, and most importantly the child experiencing salvation. These themes describe what parents experience in the phenomenon of PIRE.

The structural description of the phenomenon includes the themes of foundations, fights, and feelings. The foundational motivators for PIRE were intrinsic, circumstantial, and based on the needs of the child. Parents fought against the challenges of time, unmet ideals, and finding
the right church. Parents experienced the positive emotions of enjoyment, love, and success.

These themes denote how evangelical parents experienced the phenomenon of PIRE.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to produce a phenomenological description of parental involvement in religious education from the experiences of evangelical parents of elementary students. This chapter summarizes the themes as answers to the five research questions posed by this research. There follows a discussion of how each theme relates to the larger body of research involving parental involvement, religious education, spiritual generativity, and other relevant themes from the literature. This chapter discusses the implications for other parents, pastors, and curriculum designers. The limitations of this research and sample are discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The eight themes presented in the previous chapter answer the research questions asked in this research. These themes also created the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon. Texturally, the themes of forms, facilities, functions, foci, and fruit describe what parents experience in PIRE. Structurally, the themes of foundations, fights, and feelings describe how parents experience PIRE.

Research question one asked; what are evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? The foundations of involvement explain many of the concepts parents hold regarding involvement. Various concepts encouraged PI such as intrinsic motivation, circumstances, and the needs of their child. The concepts of Christian identity and the responsibility they feel springing from this intrinsic identity play a large part in their commitment to the priority of PIRE. They view this as an important role. Its importance speaks to the biblical mandate parents receive from passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and the
importance placed on the eternal destination of their children, reflecting children’s need for salvation.

Their child’s need for salvation was a powerful concept for parents. This idea carried through to content choice and the ultimate goal of the involvement. Parents also felt a need to counter the influence of the world on their children. This countering informed their concept of PIRE to encourage them to provide Biblical explanations, church support structures, and scripture memory, to help their children defend their faith and develop a biblical worldview.

The functions that made up the practices of PIRE for these parents included Bible reading, prayer, scripture memory, teaching, modeling, service, conversations, and the influence of others. Bible reading, devotional books, and church ministry send homes provided the content for religious education in the home. Parents engaged in actively teaching, explaining, and helping their children to understand concepts from these resources. Conversations about religious content and faith were a key component of the teaching. Parents were also very cognizant of the importance of their consistent modeling of religious beliefs and practices. They sought to show their children how to pray, how to read the Bible, what to do at church, and how to serve others. They also sought to display a genuine faith to those in their families. These were the key practices of the phenomenon.

These practices were performed at various facilities by parents, but the primary location was home. Home was the place for hands on conversations, prayer, Bible memorization and reading. However, the choices of church involvement and schooling were also important concepts and practices for these parents. Finding the right church provided appropriate support and education for their children. The choice of schooling had important religious overtones for many parents. Homeschooling and Christian schooling were often chosen to include religious
education and a biblical worldview for their children. However, even parents who chose public school may have the religious goal of witnessing to others or preparing their children to stand for their faith.

Research question two asked; what informs evangelical parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education? This research question is primarily answered by the forms for involvement theme. These forms provide support and sometimes direction in what PIRE should look like. Church ministries were often used by parents in a collaborative sense thus informing parents’ concepts of PIRE. Pastors also informed the practice of PIRE through their advice and curriculum choices. Resources provided support and content that was used within the church and at home. The influence of resources helped inform the practice of PIRE in this sample. Family and friends also played a part, informing parents and sympathizing with parents in the rearing of their children. Family background also informed parental concepts of involvement in their children’s religious education.

A final subtheme informing parental practices were the circumstances that parents experienced. A parent’s own childhood created motivation to improve or replicate what they experienced. If a parent was pleased with their upbringing, they sought the same for their own children. If there were weaknesses in what they experienced in their own childhood, parents sought to improve the religious education experience for their children. Hardships also played an important role for many of these parents. Illnesses, marital problems, the advent of starting a family, and severe conflict within a family motivated greater religious commitment on the part of these parents. This greater commitment influenced the importance of passing their faith on to their children.
Research question three asked; what content do evangelical parents consider important to their children’s religious education? The content passed along to the children during the functions of involvement included God’s love, Christian doctrine, Bible knowledge, prayer, and love for others. The content that was possibly most important to parents was how a child could be saved through faith in Jesus. Salvation was also the most valued fruit of PIRE by these parents. In considering the content of PIRE for evangelicals, it is essential to note that the significance of their children’s salvation showed up in the foundations, foci, and fruit themes. This was a common thread that holds special interest to these participants. Knowing the Bible and its doctrine were also significant. This content provided ways to counter the influence of the world on their children.

Research question four asked; why do evangelical parents get involved in their children’s religious education? This can be answered by the foundations theme previously discussed as potential motivators of PIRE. They are motivated by their identity, their children’s needs, and their circumstances. Other reasons for PIRE were discussed in the fruits of involvement theme. Parents have goals of seeing certain fruits develop in their children’s lives. They want their children to love God and others. They want their children to live out a genuine faith. This is shown through obedience, prayer life, conversations, and holding to a biblical worldview. Most importantly parents desire their children to be saved. However, they don’t view this as a goal that they can control. Ultimately, each child must make their own decision of faith. The parents must trust God.

Finally, research question five asked; what barriers do evangelical parents encounter when participating in the religious education of their children? The theme of fights in involvement answers this question. Parents must fight against the busyness of their family
schedules. This busyness is often a barrier to the consistency that parents desire. Parents also have the ideal Christian parent in their mind. It is sometimes hard to reach this ideal, and parents may question their role or actions taken in the religious education of their children. Another barrier that parents experienced was finding the right church to support them in their role. Most of these parents have risen above the barriers and now experience the positive feelings of enjoyment, love, and success.

Discussion

Foundations of Involvement

Parental Involvement (PI) theory has suggested that parental beliefs about their role influence their involvement in the children’s education (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). This seems to hold true in PIRE as well. These participants held their parental responsibility and the importance of their role in the religious education of their children as key beliefs. The fact that their parental role was viewed as an important job helped the parents to prioritize their involvement and their children’s religious education. Other PI motivators isolated by Hoover-Dempsey, et al. included involvement invitations and parent’s life context. The results of PIRE indicated that involved parents did reflect on past circumstance thus motivating involvement.

This research also seems to indicate that parents felt invited into their children’s religious education. This is demonstrated in the church involvement modeled by these parents and the necessity of their help at home with their children learning verses, reading, and praying. Hoover-Dempsey, et al. (2005) also purposed that parents must ultimately choose how to overcome circumstantial barriers. These parents were willing to limit other activities so PIRE could be a priority. This aided them in overcoming the barrier of limited time.
This theme also shows close ties to research on sanctification of parenting (Brelsford, 2013; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003; Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006). These parents referred to children as a blessing and their role as parents as a priority and a job. There was a sense that scripture and God had given them this role. They didn’t take this role lightly, as seen in the foundations for involvement.

Generative spirituality (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006) also seems to play a role in PIRE. It is seen as parents sought to replicate or change the generational behaviors of PIRE. Parents’ childhoods were indicative of what they wanted to reproduce in their own children’s religious education. Parent’s love for their children also pointed to the care that should be present in generative spirituality.

Another foundation of involvement was hardships. The participants pointed to the importance of hardships in their spiritual commitments. This may parallel Yocum’s (2014) inclusion of stressors propelling spiritual development forward. These participants were very aware of how family hardships and events, like starting a family, had influenced a greater spiritual commitment in their life. Some parents were aware that their children too would encounter hardships. They thought that the religious and spiritual foundations they were passing along to their children would support them during future trials.

**Forms for Involvement**

This research proposes that the forms for involvement are the supports parents receive from family, church, friends, faith, and resources. Faith development in the context of this research is connected with the social constructs of the home and the church. Streib (2001) emphasized the interpersonal nature of faith development. PIRE in this research points to parents’ desire to connect their children to a common community, this reflects Streib’s mutual
faith style where partners in faith are vital. Parents also valued their children serving within this community reflecting the individuative-systemic faith style where an individual seeks out a position in the religious community.

The interpersonal nature of PIRE also reflects theories of spiritual development (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Yocum, 2014). These participants placed a great deal of emphasis on the connection and conversation between themselves and their children. They also emphasized the incorporation of their children into meaningful friendships within their churches. These interpersonal connections were aimed at influencing the spirituality of their children and found within both themes of forms and function of involvement.

Facilities of Involvement

The three primary facilities of PIRE were home, church, and school. Alexander and Carr (2006) suggested four locations for spiritual education, which would add community on to the locations suggested in this research. The encouragement of religious leaders (Barna, 2003; Haynes, 2009; Joiner, 2009) has all pointed to an increased partnership with church and home. For these involved parents this partnership was becoming a reality. Parents and children were often following up with the curriculum supplied by their church ministries. These parents were not outsourcing the religious education of their children to the church.

The church-home partnership seen in this study may relate to Epstein’s (1992 & 2007) school-home partnership. Epstein suggested communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and community collaboration as parts of the school-family partnership. This research pointed to collaboration between church and home through churches communicating with parents via send home curriculum, parents volunteering in children’s ministry, parents teaching at home, and parents finding support through friends and groups at church.
A potentially unique contribution to the field of religious education was schooling choice. It may be exceptional that some of these parents had religious reasons for sending their children to public school. While religious connections to private schools and homeschooling are self-evident, this was a surprising development in this research. The parental use of secular schooling experiences to further the religious education of their children may be an under researched phenomenon.

**Functions of Involvement**

The research also showed practically how the biblical admonitions from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Ephesians 6:4 are being applied by evangelical parents. It demonstrates how religious leaders like Barna (2003), Witmer (2011), and Joiner (2009) are having influence in evangelical families and churches. Haynes (2009) suggests many of the functions that were seen in this research. Parents were having conversations about spiritual things, Haynes calls these faith talks. Parents were engaging in special events that marked milestones like baptism.

Conversations and sharing of parents’ own stories was taking place as a part of PIRE. This shows that spiritual disclosure (Brelsford, 2013) was happening as a part of the phenomenon. Parents in this study sought to disclose their own religious experiences and sought to see what experiences their children generated through their conversations. This research also contributed to describing further how the family can be involved in the spiritual and religious development of children.

It is unique that this research focused on evangelical parents of elementary students. This indicated that many of the activities mentioned in other research applying to parents and teens are being practiced by parents with younger children as well. Conversations, Bible reading, prayer, and service opportunities are taking place with younger children. Parents with younger
children also placed emphasis on explicitly teaching and modeling important religious concepts and practices.

**Foci of Religious Education**

The issues related to faith development are important to this theme. Streib’s (2001 & 2005) theory on faith development echoes through this research. Streib suggested that religious content plays a role in theoretical styles of faith development. PIRE among evangelicals suggests that a child’s need for salvation motivates involvement. This concept is evangelical and rigid in some respects, specifically faith in Jesus Christ being necessary for salvation. This one doctrine alone may dissuade evangelicals from staying in Streib’s fifth style, dialogical. Parents desired to counter the influence of the world in their children; this would no doubt include doctrine from other religious points of view. While this does not necessitate the rejection of the dialogical style, it could support Streib’s suggestion that content plays a role in faith development. Parents were intentional in passing along doctrinal truth and faith beliefs to their children, which would influence faith development styles.

It should be noted that Joiner’s (2009) *Orange* curriculum and model was being implemented by Lighthouse Church and parents referred to it both directly and indirectly. In this instance, it is being effective to promulgating a model where the church and home work together. The Orange curriculum and Awana curriculum are two examples of how churches are influencing the religious education that happens at home.

**Fruit of Involvement**

In this research, PIRE is related to both religion and spirituality as differentiated by Paredes- Collins & Collins (2011). The religious aspects of PIRE encourage long established customs like prayer, church attendance, baptism, service, and Bible reading. However, these are
not the end goal of PIRE. Rather these parents had more spiritual fruit in mind like loving God, loving others, and living out one’s faith. Moreover, these were all secondary to the fruit of a personal decision each child had to make regarding their own relationship with Jesus. This personal pursuit of meaning and truth could not be controlled by the parents. Parents had to trust God for this ultimate result of PIRE, which reflects a child’s individual spirituality. Salvation through faith in Jesus also reflects historical Christian calls to PIRE (Lloyd-Jones, 2014).

Loving God is an important fruit to consider because of the literature. Deuteronomy 6:5, cited often by religious thinkers (Haynes, 2009; Fowler, 2004) when discussing parenting, specifically mentions loving God. This call to love God is to be found first in the parent and then passed down to successive generations. This is a goal that the parents in this research held and sought to model.

Another fruit for these parents was that their children would live out their faith. One aspect of living out this faith was that children would hold a biblical worldview. Barna (2003) pointed to a diminishing biblical worldview as a factor in the decrease of vibrant Christianity in today’s youth. Barna recommended that establishing a biblical worldview should be a priority of parents and churches. The results of this research indicate that a part of PIRE is helping children to develop a worldview based on Scripture.

**Feelings of Involvement**

Since this was a phenomenological study, it was able to consider emotional aspects that may be overlooked in a quantitative design. Touching on the emotional aspect of the phenomenon expresses the holistic nature of PIRE. It is possibly unique that this research began describing enjoyment as a part of PIRE. Another emotional aspect to PIRE was expressions of love for one’s children. This potentially mirrors results from Murray-Swank, Mahoney, &
Pargament, (2006), which indicated that one characteristic of biblically conservative parents was warmth toward one’s children. Feelings of success were another consideration in this research.

Feelings of success may well be associated with the idea of self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). It was suggested by Hoover-Dempsey, et al. that feeling of potential effectiveness in PI was important. The parents in this current research seemed to feel relatively successful. This may have encouraged their further involvement. However, it is interesting that the most important goal of their involvement was for their children to experience salvation. Most perceived this as a goal that was unattainable based only on their success in PIRE.

**Fights in Involvement**

Barriers to PI as suggested by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) may include time and self-efficacy. Both of these were alluded to in this research as fights against busyness and unmet ideals. Time is a limited commodity that parents must use in the way that seems best to them. Self-efficacy and unmet ideal may be opposite sides of the same coin. Parents may believe that in order to be effective in involvement you must meet a certain standard or do PIRE in a certain way. These parents were usually able to rise above these challenges.

**Implications**

The theoretical contributions of this research propose a description of an under-researched phenomenon, PIRE. The PIRE tree, Figure 1, presents a possible model on how the parts of PIRE in evangelical families may relate to one another. This model suggests that aspects of PIRE relate to and build on one another. Holistically, PIRE involves family members, churches, ministries, resources, activities, beliefs, feelings, challenges, and goals. It provides a possible way to look at the phenomenon being experienced by evangelical parent and churches.
This research provides practical insights for parents, pastors, and curriculum designers. Parent may be able to find encouragement to engage in PIRE for the first time from considering this research. The highly involved participants in this study may provide role models for other parents. This research could be used by pastors to evaluate the ministries and resources that are being provided by their churches. Are their support structures in place for parents? Are helpful resources being provided? Is the church functioning in a model that sees parents and the church as team members in the discipleship of children? Finally, this research could be used by curriculum designers. It points to the natural types of activities parents are able to engage in with their children. Resources that are valued by the parents focus on important content, producing desired fruit, and enjoyment for their family.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. The total of twelve participants was less than anticipated, but sufficient for phenomenological research. The participants for this study were a homogenous group. All were Caucasians, evangelicals, married, and primarily represented only two denominations. Two churches were from a rural and one from a suburban setting. All but one participant had children actively involved in Awana ministries at their church. This ministry is very focused on scripture memory, and parental involvement is helpful in order for children to experience success in the ministry. This creates a very specific type of sample and probably raised the importance of some subthemes like scripture memory.

These participants were also all recommended for participation by the pastors of their churches. This means that these participants were the people that pastors knew well and were possibly more involved in service activities in their churches. It is probable that other parents
who were involved in their children’s religious education but not as involved in their church’s ministries were overlooked in the sampling procedures.

This research also relied heavily on self-report data from volunteering participants. This means it primarily represents their perspectives on their own experience. This is common within phenomenological studies, but should be kept in mind by the reader. The number of participants was also less than originally planned for both the interviews and the focus group.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further study is needed on the topic of PIRE. This study specifically focused on evangelicals; future research should include other religious groups. There are also groups of evangelicals with different ethnicities and demographics. Their experiences of PIRE should also be investigated. As was originally planned in this research, the experience of urban families should be considered.

This study also suggests some themes for PIRE that could constitute the focus of further research. The Foundations of Involvement is a theme that would benefit from further investigation. The feelings experienced by parents in PIRE could also be researched in future studies.

This topic could also be approached from different perspectives. For example, how do couples experience the phenomenon together? How do single parents experience PIRE? What do elementary children experience as their parents are involved in their religious education? Exploring multiple perspectives will give more depth to the understanding of this phenomenon.

**Summary**

This research on parental involvement in children’s religious education produced a phenomenological description of the evangelical parent’s experience. This experience can be
conceptualized by eight themes all positioned as parts of a fruit tree. Ultimately these involved evangelical parents wanted their children to develop the fruits of loving God, loving others, living out their faith, and most importantly experiencing salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The development of these fruits were nourished by content focused on the Bible, prayer, doctrine, knowing God’s love and how to love others, and knowing how a person can be saved through faith in Jesus. This content is presented by the parents through various functions such as Bible reading, scripture memory, prayer, teaching, modeling, conversations, influence of others, and service to others. These functions take place in relation to three primary facilities home, church and school. The PIRE tree is supported by the parents’ churches, friends, family, faith, and various resources. These are the observable aspect of the phenomenon.

The unseen parts of the phenomenon involve the foundations that root the tree. These foundations motivate parents toward involvement. They include intrinsic motivators like identity, responsibility and the importance of the task. Circumstances such as childhood experiences and hardships also provide a foundation for PIRE. Finally, these parents’ beliefs that their children need help to stand against the opposition of the world and need salvation also motivated PIRE. Other unseen aspects of PIRE involved fights and feelings. Parents had to fight against the challenges of time, unmet ideals, and finding the right church. But despite these challenges the feelings parents had in the experience were primarily positive including enjoyment, love, and success.

The themes of foundations and feelings provide deep themes that are probably overlooked in other investigations of religious education. These may provide appropriate topics for future research. The importance of the parental role cannot be understated. The theological importance evangelical parents place on the salvation of their children is also an important
implication from this study. This is possibly a distinctly evangelical concern. It is interesting that parents, even though they know they have no control over this outcome, still pursue it with such focus.

The following quotes from the focus group and a resource used by a family seem to capture many of the themes from this research.

The theme that I have is that it’s the parents’ job. We talk quite a bit about that at our church, that if as dads we would step up and do what we’re called to do and sometimes it can almost sound, when I talk about it, it can sound anti-Awana or anti- something else. And I guess the summary I would have is, I’m not anti- any of those things, but pro-parents….And so the summary I would have would be to keep bringing that great curriculum and great supplemental things like the Awana program to the parents. But the parents have to kind of look at it as it’s really their job. So that’d be kind of my overall, I think that’s a really important thought. (David, personal communication, January 24, 2016)

You know, I feel like it’s just so important to just equip them um, with the tools that they need and prepare them for what it is life is going to throw at them. Because, you know, we do live in a fallen world….But I do want to teach them to not be afraid of what the world’s going to throw at them and that God is still ultimately in control and will always be there forever and that um, they just don’t need to, to be afraid. Like, you know, in Mathews 6:34. Don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow has enough worries of its own and that’s exactly what it is I want to train them up, just to be prepared, but not afraid of it. (Ken, personal communication, January 24, 2016)
This poem by Judith Peitsch from Frank’s resources describes many aspects of the phenomenon.

“The Hands”

Thank you Lord for dirty hands
That touch my stove and fridge;
For sticky little fingers that
Try to build a bridge
For careless hands that go astray
in search of something new;
For hands to hold and show the way
      As mothers often do.
For precious little hands in which
      Great faith so abounds;
For silly little hands that reach
      To touch a mother's frown.
And thank you for your guiding hand
That leads me to the light;
That lifts me when I stumble
And points me to the right.
As little hands reach out to me
To show them what to do,
I'm steadied, reassured and loved
      As I reach up to you.

(Canfield, Hansen, Aubery, & Mitchell, 1996, p. 114)
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APPENDIX A

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from June 5, 2015 to June 4, 2016 Protocol # 2233.060515

Consent Form

Parental Involvement in Elementary Children’s Religious Education:
A Phenomenological Approach
Peter Bunnell
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of parental involvement in your children’s religious education. You were selected as a possible participant because the leaders at your church view you as a parent who is involved in your children’s religious education. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Peter Bunnell, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to describe evangelical Christian parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education.

Procedures:

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

1. You will participate in an interview pertaining to your involvement in your child(ren)’s religious education. The interview will take approximately 25 minutes to complete. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. I would like for you to read the transcript of the interview to insure it accurately reflects your concepts and practices.
2. Please bring any resources that you use for religious education to the interview. If possible, I would like to borrow or photograph these resources. These may include Bibles, books, CD, DVDs, curriculum, church papers, etc.
3. You may be asked to participate in a focus group with other parents. During this focus group, you and other parents from the study will collectively discuss the research topic. The focus group will take approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks of participation in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct personal benefits from participation in this research. The benefits to society may include improvements in the religious education of children. This study may be used by pastors, educators, and other parents to better serve the children in their care.
Compensation:

No compensation will be given to participants for the interview or for loaning religious education resources. You will receive reimbursement for miles driven to the focus group location if you are asked to participate. Reimbursement will be at $0.55 per mile driven.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All interview recordings, notes, and transcripts will be kept in locked files at the researcher’s office or on password protected computers and audio recording devices. This data will be kept for a period of three years. Paper items will be shredded and disposed of, electronic data will be deleted.

You will receive a pseudonym in all writings of this research. This will help to protect your anonymity. However, since you were one of many recommended for participation by your church leadership, it may be possible for them to guess your part in the study. If you participate in the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants will maintain your confidentiality and privacy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw from participation, please notify the researcher of your desire to withdraw. The researcher will then destroy the data collected from you and will not include it in the final report of the research.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Peter Bunnell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 712-299-1161 or pwbunnell@liberty.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Russ Yocum, at ryocum@liberty.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)
The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: _____________

Signature of Investigator: _____________________________ Date: _____________
June 5, 2015

Peter Bunnell
IRB Approval 2233.060515: Parental Involvement in Elementary Children’s Religious Education: A Phenomenological Approach

Dear Peter,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garcia, Ph.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University - Training Champions for Christ since 1971
APPENDIX C

Initial Conversation with Potential Participants

Researcher: Hello, This is Peter Bunnell. I am an acquaintance of your pastor, Rev. <insert name>. He said that you would be a good person for me to talk with regarding some research I am doing about Christian parenting. Do you have a few moments now so I can describe this study?

If participant answers negatively I will see if I can contact them again at a later time.

If participant answers affirmatively: Thank you. I am doing this research in partial fulfillment of my doctoral program at Liberty University. Your involvement would consist of an interview, approximately 30 minutes in length, showing me some of the religious materials you use with your children, and possibly involvement in a focus group if your schedule permits. Does this sound like something you might be interested in participating?

If participant answers affirmatively

Researcher: Thank you for your willingness to participate. I would like to send some information about the research to you. Could I have your email or mailing address?
APPENDIX D

Interview # ___ Date:________

**Standardized open-ended guided interview**

1. Thank you for participating in this interview. Please tell me about your family.
   - What are the ages of your children?
   - What activities do you enjoy together?
   - What does a typical day or week look like?

2. Please tell me as much as you can about your family’s religious activities.
   - What kinds of religious or church activities do you and your family do?
   - Why do you do these things?
     a. What are the religious activities in which your children are involved?
   - Why do you consider them important?
   - What is your role in these activities?

3. What is the religious content you want your children to grasp?
   a. What are the truths about God that your children need to know?
   b. What doctrines and Bible passages are most important?
   c. What religious practices are central to their growth?
4. What are the things you do in your child(ren)’s religious education?
   - What things do you do at home? At church? At school?
   - Can you tell me about a recent or memorable religious activity you did with your children?
   - How do you know if they are effective?

5. How do you feel about your participation in your child(ren)’s religious education?
   - What are some of the challenges you have had? Examples?
   - What are some of the success you have had? Examples?

6. What supports you in your involvement in your child(ren)’s religious education?
   - How have peers, your church, God, or the scripture supported you?
   - What supports for your involvement do you wish you had?
   - If no supports, what do you think would be helpful supports in your involvement in your child(ren)’s religious education?

7. What else would you like to tell me about your involvement in your children’s religious education?
APPENDIX E

Focus Group Formation

Question Development

After the first two data sources had been analyzed the focus group questions were developed. This allowed me to delve into areas that needed further development. Each question had a specific purpose. Question 1 is an ice breaker question that gives participants a chance to open up on a positive experience. It also relates to the next questions. It is relevant to research question 1. Question 2 & 3 relate to an under explored theme from the interviews. Several parents indicated the importance of fun and enjoyment in religious education. Many resources also reflect this value. However, the importance and place of enjoyment within the phenomenon is still unknown. It relates to research question 1, 2, and 4. Question 4 seeks to understand how highly involved parents would help parents who are not involved. This relates to research question 2. Questions 5 & 6 provide parents a chance to explain how a specific resource supports them in their involvement. The Awana resources are used by all but one of the parents in the study. This closely ties with research question 2, 3, and 5. Question 7 is a catch all question to ensure the topic has been covered to the satisfaction of the participants.

Procedural Rationale

I decided it was necessary to conduct this focus group on a computer based online platform. The participants all have busy family lives, and they live about 190 miles apart from each other. Even meeting halfway would have required all participants to drive about 1.5 hours one way. This would have made participation in the focus group about a 4.5 hour commitment. Doing two focus groups at different locations would have made it nearly impossible to reach the suggested number of 6-10 participants (Patton, 2002). Therefore it was believed that an online
meeting would provide for the most participation. Participants were able to connect to the focus group via telephone as well.

I contacted the participants via email, since all the participants had previously requested information be shared with them over email. The email invited them to participate in the focus group. I used an online meeting survey tool called, Doodle (doodle.com), to determine the time when the most participants would be available. I gave the participants 10 days to respond to the invitation. If they did not respond to the invitation, I called them to discuss their involvement.

Each focus group question was displayed on the screen so participants using an online device were able to see and consider the question throughout the discussion. However, the technology failed at some point and did not display all the slides. In order to keep within the time frame, each question was given approximately 7 minutes.

Sample email:

Dear (Participant’s name),

Thank you so much for your participation in the first portion of my research on parental involvement in your elementary child’s religious education. I would like to invite you to participate in an online focus group meeting this January, 2016. In order to find the best time for this meeting please visit this link (https://peterbunnellresearch.doodle.com/poll/wwdwbz36ebz83yhh) and select all the times you are available to meet. We will meet on the date when the most participants are available.

This focus group will take approximately one hour and will require you to have a web enabled computer, tablet, or a phone(cell or landline) to connect to the meeting. If you choose to participate in the focus group, a link will be sent to you with simple instructions and a brief
download to connect to the meeting. If you prefer non-participation in the focus group, please reply to this email.

Your participation in this group will add a great deal to the value of the research and potential to influence others in the area of involvement in their children’s religious education. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at pwbunnell@liberty.edu or 712-299-1161.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Bunnell
APPENDIX F

Audit Trail

7/16/15 - 2:26 p.m.

I placed a phone call to pastor 1 at a suburban church. He’s an acquaintance and was more than willing to take my call. He was not hesitant at all to agree to suggest participants. I briefly explained what was needed. He requested that I send him an email with specifics on what I needed. I think he’ll get back to me soon.

8/5/2015

I have not heard back from pastor 1. I phoned him on July 30 to follow up. I have contacted two Urban churches. One church did not actually have family of elementary children who lived in the city. They would all be suburban families who come in to the downtown area for church. The second urban church was contacted via email on August 3, 2015. I haven’t heard back.

I contacted two rural churches, Maplewood and Countryside. The ties to these churches are stronger due to relational contacts with the pastors. They were quick to give me names. Currently I have 6 names and will be contacting these parents soon.

Countryside also forwarded several more names to me within the week. This gave me a total of 12 potential rural parents. I contacted them via phone over the next month. Eventually, I had 5 participants from these settings. In Mid-August I contacted a third urban church. They never returned my call or email

Early September

I contacted my Suburban church again via email. A week later I received a reply that they were unable to help due to busyness. I contacted one of the urban churches again to see if I
could interview their family even though they would really live in suburban settings. They never called me back.

Finally, I contacted a acquaintance who is a children’s and family pastor at Lighthouse a church of about 800 in a suburban setting. He said he was willing to suggest names, but he wanted to contact these parents first to receive their permission to give out their info. He supplied 10 more names within a week. All of these individuals had communicated their willingness to be interviewed.

I was able to contact all but one of these families. One family was too busy to participate within the time frame of the research. One family had to decline an interview due to health concerns. So from this suburban church I had a total of 7 potential participants.

I offered these participants 3 different dates to meet, at a time and location of their choosing. I was having to travel over 100 miles for these interviews and wanted the interviews to be clustered.

In September, 2015 while scheduling interviews I started transcribing the earlier interviews. I transcribed my first four interviews. I decided the time commitment was too great. It took me about 4-5 hours to transcribe an interview. I found a transcriptionist and had the other interview professionally transcribed. In order to honor the privacy of the participants I scrubbed their names and identifying information from the audio file using Audacity, a computer program. I compared and corrected the transcripts using the audio files to ensure accuracy of transcription.

Also during the wait times between contacting participants, I started writing memos to describe the site documents. Some parents failed to bring documents to the interview. I was left to track down copies of the material.
While transcribing, listening to interviews, and checking transcripts I began creating a list of recurring themes in the data. I also memoed some of my reflections and thoughts. I noticed about 20 themes from these initial interactions with the data. I began coding my first interviews in early October. By the time the first 5 interviews had been coded I had a list of nearly 70 codes. I continued to memo my thoughts and reflections seeking a natural attitude of inquiry, avoiding my own points of view as much as possible.

10/30/2015 02:16:07 p.m.

The month of October was spent coding documents and writing up descriptions of site documents or sources used by the family. Between 10/19-23/2015 I took a 7.5 hour course on proper use of ATLAS.ti. Thus today I transferred my Word Doc: “Field Notes” to memo within ATLAS.ti and titled it “Research Diary.” I will seek to be more detailed and specific in recording my processes through this Memo. Today, I coded all available site docs. I am waiting for two more resources: Hero Tales and an early level Sparks Awana book. Today, I wrote up two more site documents and coded them. I also organized my document families. I created memos for each of my research questions. I also reviewed my proposal on creating textural and structural descriptions on each family.

10/31/2015 05:42:46 p.m.

Today, I worked on organizing my codes. My codes were too saturated. I had 71 codes and most of them had 30 or more quotes. I cleaned up these codes. This is really my second pass through the data. I have 107 codes now and more even distribution of quotes. They are also being grouped into similar codes. For example I expanded the coding of “Bible Knowledge” to now include nearly 15 other codes. This helps the codes to have more specificity. What specific part of Bible knowledge is a participant referring to? Today, I worked
on codes and sub codes for Bible Knowledge, Bible reading, Church involvement, School, and support.

11/03/2015 06:43:53 a.m.

This morning I worked on further organizing my codes. I worked through the codes on prayer. Also, working through the different comments on salvation, child's faith, relationship with Jesus, etc. These are complicated because sometimes it is a goal, sometimes content. I also worked on 11/1/2015 with the codes and reviewing the data. As of this morning I have a total of 137 codes.

11/07/2015 08:17:10 p.m.

Yesterday, I worked on reviewing my codes, code connections, and quotations. I got through all my codes. This was the second time going through the data. I also added a description of Gabe's site doc-Hero Tales.

Today, I started going through the data again. I decided to code the interviews in large sections indicating what research question the interview question was designed to address. This is helpful in quickly discerning which codes get the most attention in different interview sections. This will not negate careful reading of the data, because participants often refer to various themes in their own narrative. Today, I also reread four transcripts. I added the following themes Successful, Practices::Modeling, and Church involvement::SS.

11/09/2015 05:57:51 p.m.

Today I went through Jacob’s transcripts, coding and re-coding sections of his interview.

11/14/2015 10:40:30 p.m.

Today I did Megan's transcript review. Yesterday, I did Linda and Ken. Today's work was partially lost. I will need to review Megan’s again.
11/20/2015 12:16:19 p.m.

Today, I finished my third pass through the transcripts by reading through the Beth's, David's, and Ed's transcripts.

11/20/2015 06:50:01 p.m.

I also revisited my code families and created some co-occurrence tables in excel showing what codes occur within specific RQ Interview Questions. I also created documents showing how many of each code family occurred in each participant interview.

11/27/2015 06:46:14 p.m.

Today, I used the word count tool to create a spread sheet with the most common important words from the two data sets: interviews and site docs. This was a kind of check to see if the codes and themes I found held true just with numerical count of the numbers. Just another way to look at the data. I also wrote up my last site Doc- a description of the current AWANA sparks book. Then I coded the book and continued checking the code groupings under PI Motivators.

12/11/2015 03:17:20 p.m.

Today, I wrote my focus group questions and rationale for them. I feel like I have sufficient data for each research question. I want to explore the element of enjoyment in PIRE. I also want to see if parents agree with my classifications of the phenomenon and themes. I may need to explore conversations about sin and how personal faith plays into the phenomenon. I also added comments on several codes in order to better describe them.

12/12/2015 06:00:05 p.m.

Today, I continued sorting through the codes and taking notes on various codes and quotations. I am still focusing primarily on RQ 1. Today, I went through my codes on
conversations and home involvement and PI practices. I also revamped some of my motivation/foundation thoughts on PI based on my drawing of the relationships. Last week, I had drawn out my thoughts on the relationships within my codes and themes. Perhaps a tree captures the idea of the organic interrelatedness of all the themes. Also, today, I realized that when parents are talking about child initiated conversations they are often talking about the results of PIRE. It's a way parents evaluate if what they are doing is effective.

12/18/2015 02:51:37 p.m.

Yesterday, I reworked a few focus group questions. Today, I continued through codes on PI practices. I continued to take notes and seek to understand the phenomena. Another AHA-The way kids prayed was also a part of the effectiveness evaluation for parents.

12/19/2015 04:58:29 p.m.

Today, I continued to check quotes for my Functions family group. Started on Foundations family group. I continued note taking in RQ1 Memo and RQ 4 Memo. I renamed two groups PI Practices became Functions and PI Motivators became Foundations.

12/23/2015 04:25:19 p.m.

On 12/21/15, I went through more codes. Especially focusing on Supports or forms for PIRE. I also finalized and submitted my Focus Group questions to the IRB. Today, I spent several hours reviewing my codes for Forms and for Foci. I combined some codes in Foci code family. There were too many redundant ideas represented in the Bible knowledge and Content codes. I also worked on a document listing all the resources mentioned by participants. Perhaps this will become a chart in the Appendix.

12/26/2015 04:30:32 p.m.
Today I finished reviewing all my coding and code families. I have settled (as much as possible on “Foundations, Forms, Functions, Facilities, Foci, Fruit, Fights and Feelings. I am considering this being pictured well by a tree. I went through and made sure each of my codes were in a code family. I combined a few codes. I moved around some of my codes within the families. I have a couple of codes that are represented in two families. I need to figure this out. Support from others for the child is currently in functions and forms. However, this really can't be a support for PI it is more a support for children. So this is a function that parents seek out for their child. I will move it to Functions. I also have the “really important to me” in both the foundations and feelings. I probably could split these up a little bit but might lean more toward feeling. I continued taking notes and isolating valuable quotes.

01/02/2016 01:23:21 p.m.

This past week, I created a thematic structure for my research. I settled on a tree structure using the “F” themes from above. This is my first attempt at graphically representing my findings. I also worked on my first individual textural and structural description. This is a step suggested by Moustakas in phenomenological studies. While I wait for feedback from the IRB I will start changing verb tense on my paper for all sections except focus group.

01/11/2016 10:58:40 a.m.

This past week, I've worked on updating the tense of my paper. I received word back from IRB with focus group approval. I have contacted the participants and waiting for them to select time for focus group via doodle.com. I have submitted my initial themes and my first individual description to chair/research consultant to get back any suggested revisions.

Today, I also explored more about the co-occurrences of codes and themes with “really important to me” code.
01/16/2016 05:51:03 p.m.

Today, I contacted potential focus group participants via phone. I have 7 that have agreed to participate. I have a feeling a few of them may end up being unavailable. I have two phone messages out, waiting for a reply. I have been busy in the last few days creating individual textural and structural descriptions. I have written the descriptions for Abby, Beth, David, Ed, Frank, Gabe and Hank.

01/22/2016 08:16:21 p.m.

Today, I wrote Jacob’s and Ken’s description. I wrote Ian earlier in the week. During these reviews of themes I realized that there was a common theme of greater challenges in PI during the teen years. These are circumstantial, growing pains, and learning independence. There seems to be this underlying expectation for parents of younger kids that harder times are coming.

01/29/2016 04:21:49 p.m.

This week, I conducted the focus group, then sent it to get transcribed. I also worked on a debriefing/member check form. I have sent the form away to be approved by IRB. I also received the focus group transcript. I checked the transcription against the recording and have coded the transcript of the focus. I found definite similarities between all sources of data.

2/2/2016

I sent out the debriefing form after editing and creating a new consent for this part of the research. I emailed all participants with link to the survey and their transcripts for review. After a week, I had received only two responses. I emailed again and received 7 more responses.

2/4/2016
As the results from member-check started coming in with general agreement I started the interpretation phase with the writing of chapter 4 and 5.
APPENDIX G

Survey Monkey Member-Check Form

| Parental Involvement in Children's Religious Education Debriefing |

Thank you for having participated in my study regarding evangelical parent's involvement in their elementary children's religious education. This debriefing serves to share with you the results of my study. Additionally, this debriefing serves to increase the trustworthiness of my research by allowing you the opportunity to review transcripts of your participation in our interview and to indicate your level of agreement with my conclusions based on the research.

Please review the Consent Form below, type in your name and date, then click next. Take a few minutes to offer your feedback on the research themes.
Consent Form
Parental Involvement in Elementary Children’s Religious Education:
A Phenomenological Approach
Peter Bunnell
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of parental involvement in your children’s religious education. You were selected as a possible participant because the leaders at your church view you as a parent who is involved in your children’s religious education. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Peter Bunnell, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to describe evangelical Christian parents’ concepts and practices of involvement in their children’s religious education.

Procedures:
If you agree to offer your feedback on the themes of this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Review your personal interview transcript, which was emailed to you with the link to this study.
2. Then take 10 – 15 minutes to indicate your level of agreement and any notes you may have on the research theme. These themes appear on the next page of this survey.
3. Be sure to indicate your consent to participate in this final phase of the research by typing your name and the date at the bottom of this page.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The risks of participation in this study are no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct personal benefits from participation in this research. The benefits to society may include improvements in the religious education of children. This study may be used by pastors, educators, and other parents to better serve the children in their care.

Compensation:
No compensation will be given to participants for the completion of this survey.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All interview recordings, notes, and transcripts will be kept in locked files at the researcher’s office or on password protected computers and audio recording devices. This data will be kept for a period of three years. Paper items will be shredded and disposed of; electronic data will be deleted.

You will receive a pseudonym in all writings of this research. This will help to protect your anonymity. However, since you were one of many recommended for participation by your church leadership, it may be possible for them to guess your part in the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
How to Withdraw from the Study:
If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw from participation, please notify the researcher of your desire to withdraw. The researcher will then destroy the data collected from you and will not include it in the final report of the research.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Peter Bunnell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 712-299-1161 or pwobunnell@liberty.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Russ Yocum, at rycum@liberty.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

* Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

1.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)

Type Name: ________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________________

Signature of Researcher: Peter Bunnell Date: February 2, 2016
Parental Involvement in Children’s Religious Education Debriefing

* 2. A transcription of your interview was provided in the email. Please take a moment to review the transcript. You can make a note of any corrections you feel necessary on the margins of the transcript. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.

The transcript accurately reflects my interview with the researcher.

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

My Notes:

The next several statements will summarize the themes I identified during my data analysis. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement with the validity of the identified theme. You may also use the text box below to make any notes about each theme.

* 3. Foundations of Involvement. Parents are motivated toward involvement by intrinsic motivations, circumstances, and their children’s needs. Intrinsic motivations include their Christian identity, parental responsibility, and the importance of parental involvement in religious education. Circumstances like hardships and the parent’s own childhood also informed their involvement. Finally, the needs of their children for salvation and countering the world’s influence motivated parental involvement.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:
* 4. **Forms for Involvement:** This theme refers to the supports that parents value in their involvement in their children's religious education; these may include church, family members, friends, resources, and their own personal faith.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree  
- [ ] Agree  
- [ ] Disagree  
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:

---

* 5. **Facilities of Involvement:** Parental involvement in their children’s religious education primarily takes place at home or church and often incorporates schooling choices.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree  
- [ ] Agree  
- [ ] Disagree  
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:

---

* 6. **Functions of Involvement:** Parental involvement activities include (but are not limited to): Bible reading, conversations, scripture memory, prayer, teaching, modeling, serving, and listening to Christian music with their children.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree  
- [ ] Agree  
- [ ] Disagree  
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:

---

* 7. **Foci of Religious Education:** The religious content for children that is important to parents includes (but is not limited to): Bible content and doctrine, prayer, salvation, Jesus, God’s love, and love for others.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree  
- [ ] Agree  
- [ ] Disagree  
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:
8. **Fruit of Religious Education.** The goals parents have in their involvement include: salvation of children, loving the Lord/glorifying God, loving others and serving them, living out faith from the heart, obedience, and holding a biblical worldview.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:

---

9. **Fights in Involvement.** The biggest challenges for parental involvement are time, inconsistency, questioning their parental role, and unmet ideals.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:

---

10. **Feelings of Involvement.** Parents generally enjoy their involvement feeling supported and successful, and loving their children.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

- [ ] Strongly Agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly Disagree

My notes on this theme:
## APPENDIX H

### Code Definitions

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<th>Bible knowledge</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Definition:</td>
<td>For many parents the idea of Bible knowledge may include doctrine, catechism, etc. Bible knowledge is taught to kids through many means.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents desire kids to apply their Bible knowledge. This is seen also in the site documents.</td>
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<th>Bible knowledge: Creation</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>One aspect of Bible knowledge is understanding biblical accounts of creation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents concern that children can defend the Bible. It is related to apologetics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Bible knowledge includes specific and important doctrines.</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Bible knowledge also includes knowing about the Bible, its parts, structure, and history.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Bible knowledge: God</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>The single biggest topic in the parents’ perception for biblical knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible knowledge: Lacking</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Concern expressed that Bible knowledge is lacking in society or in the church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible knowledge: Literal &amp; true</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Bible knowledge includes the idea that the Bible is literal and true.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible knowledge: Narratives</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents concern that the narratives of the Bible are taught to their children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible knowledge: Parent</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents mention specifically needing to stay fresh in their own knowledge of the Bible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible knowledge: Resource</td>
<td>Foci of Religious Education</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Resources that teach the Bible knowledge in understandable ways are important to parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible knowledge: Virtue</td>
<td>Foci of Religious Education</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Bible knowledge also includes knowing and exhibiting biblical virtues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLE READING</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: This code indicates not only Bible reading, but reading devotional books etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Child</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Child participates in Bible reading on their own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Devotions</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Bible reading is used interchangeably with reading a devotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: experience</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Experience of Bible reading as a family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Family</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The family reads the Bible together.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Important Practice</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents felt like Bible and devotional reading was an important part of religious education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Resource</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Resources that focus on Bible reading or offer Bible reading directives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Stories</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Kids and/or parents reading the narratives of the Bible.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reading: Time</td>
<td>Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Times when the family or kids read the Bible.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge: inconsistency</td>
<td>Fights in Involvement</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Feeling that parents don't always live up their role in PI.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge: Older kids</td>
<td>All Family Descriptors</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Definition: Parents indicated that their teens, or potential teens, present more challenges in parenting.

Challenge: Questioning Parental Role Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 11
Definition: Parents questioning whether they have done all they should do.

Challenge: Right Church Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 14
Definition: Parents feel compelled to find the right church for their kids.

Challenge: Time challenge Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 38
Definition: Nearly universal view that lack of time is the biggest challenge to PIRE

Challenge: Training needed Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 2
Definition: Training would help in PIRE

Challenge: unmet ideal Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 14
Definition: There are ideal ways parents should fulfill their role but don't measure up to them.

CHALLENGES Theme: Fights in Involvement Quotations: 4
Definition: Challenges to PI in religious education. Conflict with a child is occasionally a challenge for PI, especially with older children.

Church Home Partnership Theme: Facilities of Involvement Quotations: 9
Definition: Mentions of the church and home partnership.

Church involvement: Awana Theme: Facilities of Involvement Quotations: 21
Definition: Awana is a church program that all but one of the churches used in this research hosts a midweek Awana program. Most families indicated that their children were involved in the program or had been.

Church involvement: Communion Theme: Facilities of Involvement Quotations: 3
Definition: A religious practice where the individual takes bread and juice to indicate faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins.

Church involvement: Family Theme: Facilities of Involvement Quotations: 59
Definition: These are the things families do together at church.

Church involvement: kids Theme: Facilities of Involvement Quotations: 30
Definition: These are primarily church activities the kids are involved in.
Church involvement: parents  Theme: Facilities of Involvement  Quotations: 58
Definition: These are church and ministries that parents are involved in.

Church involvement: SS  Theme: Facilities of Involvement  Quotations: 14
Definition: Kids involvement in Sunday school at church.

Content: Awana doctrine  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 3
Definition: Content in the Awana ministry.

Content: Jesus  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 34
Definition: Key figure in the religious education. Perhaps this is uniquely evangelical. Part of biblical knowledge is also knowledge of Jesus.

Content: Jesus relationship  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 11
Definition: Parents want kids to have a personal relationship with Jesus

Content: Jesus sacrifice  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 5
Definition: References children knowing about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

Content: Love the Lord  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 5
Definition: References to the love of the Lord.

Content: Salvation  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 40
Definition: This is the end goal of religious education for many parents. A relationship with Jesus includes the promise of heaven and avoiding punishment. Bible knowledge includes at least understanding the doctrine of salvation and hopefully experiencing salvation. It includes parents’ desire that kids know about forgiveness.

Content: Foundation  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 11
Definition: Parental concern that children are being grounded in the Word.

Content: Need Redemption  Theme: Foci of Religious Education  Quotations: 20
Definition: A part of evangelical theology implied by many parents

Conversation: Baptism  Theme: Functions of Involvement  Quotations: 9
Definition: Baptism is a religious practice, which publicly communicates that one has been saved, placed their faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. At the elementary level parents have mostly discussed Baptism with kids.

Conversation: Bible Verses  Theme: Functions of Involvement  Quotations: 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Conversation: Child initiated</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents indicate that children also initiate conversations about religious topics.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition: A part of religious education conversations maintain a personal connection with one's child.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition: Listening to children is important during religious conversations.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition: Negative responses to religious conversations are expected in the teen years.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents initiate religious conversations with their children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: During conversations parents share their personal stories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention positive responses of their children to various religious conversations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents have conversations as a major part of their religious education of children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents have conversations about salvation with their kids. Parents’ comments about the personal faith of a child usually directed at belief or trust in Jesus Christ.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents will talk about sin with their children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Various topics seem to spark conversations in children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment, Fun, Exciting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents have conversations as a major part of their religious education of children.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definition: Parent's concern that there be enjoyment in the religious experience of their children. It was reflected in many of the resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyment: Kids</th>
<th>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents are concerned that religious education is enjoyable to their children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyment: Missing</th>
<th>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Mentions that enjoyment could be missing in religious education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyment: parents</th>
<th>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Parents derive enjoyment from their involvement and desire their involvement to be enjoyable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyment: Resources</th>
<th>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 36</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Many resources seem to have an emphasis on being enjoyable to children. Bright colors, fun stories and interesting facts all contribute to this endeavor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Life</th>
<th>Theme: z All Family Descriptors</th>
<th>Quotations: 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>The general activities, schedule, and make-up of the participants’ families.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Giving God the glory.</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>This is a major aim in life for many participants. These are the words of the participants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Heart Attitude</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>Striving for a deeper level of religious education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Living out Faith</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>That faith is something lived in one's life - not just a Sunday thing or a set of intellectual beliefs. Parents aim for kids to live out genuine faith and strive to live out genuine faith in front of their children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Love the Lord</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>References to loving the Lord as a goal in religious education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Obedience</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition:</td>
<td>A desired outcome of PIRE and also of discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Salvation</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Definition: Parents have the goal for their children to experience salvation.

Goal: Salvation Child's Decision
Theme: Fruit of Involvement
Quotations: 9
Definition: Ultimately the faith and religious practices of a child rest in that child alone. It is not controlled by the parent.

Goal: Salvation experienced
Theme: Fruit of Involvement
Quotations: 13
Definition: Some parents have seen the goal of their child's salvation accomplished.

Goal: Trust God for effect
Theme: Fruit of Involvement
Quotations: 8
Definition: In the final analysis God must bring forth the fruit of PIRE

Goal: Worldview: Biblical
Theme: Fruit of Involvement
Quotations: 9
Definition: The content or outcome of PIRE is that the children understand the world from the perspective of the Bible.

GOD LOVES YOU
Theme: Foci of Religious Education
Quotations: 15
Definition: A very important part of the religious education involving content, effect, Bible knowledge. Love is one of many attributes of God, it is one that is primarily highlighted by the data.

God Loves you: Content
Theme: Foci of Religious Education
Quotations: 18
Definition: This is a theological fact that parents seek to communicate to their children.

God Loves you: Effect
Theme: Foci of Religious Education
Quotations: 8
Definition: The effect of God's love for people, both in his actions toward them and their response to him and others.

Home involvement
Theme: Facilities of Involvement
Quotations: 57
Definition: PI at home in the religious education of children.

Home involvement: Awana
Theme: Facilities of Involvement
Quotations: 13
Definition: Part of the Awana ministry that most of the participants were involved in required home involvement.

Love others: content
Theme: Foci of Religious Education
Quotations: 15
Definition: Parents want their children to understand the biblical directives to love and serve others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Love others: Effect</th>
<th>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Desired effect of PIRE would be love for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love others: help &amp; serve</td>
<td>Theme: Fruit of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Kids and parents show love for others by helping and serving them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love others: my kids</td>
<td>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: “Love my kids” was phrase that was very spoken and indicated by the parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Blessed</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The feeling or perspective parents have on being given their children and also material possessions. This motivates parents toward religious involvement with kids.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Counter Doctrine</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: One concern in religious education is to counter wrong doctrine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Counter World</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: PI is geared toward counteracting the influence of the world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Hardship</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Many families report hardships as being a catalyst to their more serious involvement in their children's religious education, or desiring that kids have God in the midst of hardship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Identity</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The idea that PI is necessary because this is the family’s identity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Kids Need Salivation</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: A major motivation for parental involvement is their children's need for salvation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Parental Responsibility</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: View that PIRE is a God given responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: really important to me</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Statements that the role of parent and RE is very important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivators: Starting Family</td>
<td>Theme: Foundations of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention that their marriage or the birth of the children increases their commitment to their faith.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others influence child</td>
<td>Theme: Functions of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definition: Usually the benefit of others influencing one's child.

Parent's childhood: Better for my kids  
Theme: Foundations of Involvement  
Quotations: 7

Definition: Parents want a better experience for their kids than they had growing up.

Parent's childhood: negative  
Theme: Foundations of Involvement  
Quotations: 18

Definition: Parents occasionally view what happened in their childhood as negative.

Parent's childhood: positive  
Theme: Foundations of Involvement  
Quotations: 17

Definition: Parents occasionally view their own parents as setting a good example for their PIRE.

PI takes Effort  
Theme: Fights in Involvement  
Quotations: 3

Definition: Parents mention that PIRE takes work and planning.

Practices: Age differentiation  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 26

Definition: Parents seem to practice age differentiation in their religious education of children. Younger kids are given one expectation and older another.

Practices: Discipline  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 10

Definition: Some parents viewed how they disciplined their kids as connecting with religious education.

Practices: Help child along  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 8

Definition: Perhaps a type of teaching style or concept.

Practices: Modeling  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 40

Definition: PI is modeling the religious life.

Practices: Music  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 10

Definition: One element of religious instruction typically involving contemporary music.

Practices: Scripture memory  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 45

Definition: One of the practices of PIRE especially connected with Awana.

Practices: Service  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 31

Definition: Doing good for others, serving at church, Missions

Practices: Special Events  
Theme: Functions of Involvement  
Quotations: 20

Definition: Special events play an important role in PIRE for example camp, missions, and choir.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices: Teaching</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents have various means of teaching Bible knowledge. One of the activities or ways to view PIRE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: by kids</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention that their kids also pray.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Content</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations: 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: What things are included in a prayer life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Doctrine</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention the doctrine of prayer.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: For kids</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention the practice of praying for their children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Important</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents express that prayer is important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Thanks</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: One important aspect of prayer is offering thanks to God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Times</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The most common prayer times for families appears to be during meals and bedtime.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: With family</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Many times parents mention praying as a family.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Works</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents mention that prayer is effective in their families.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer: Defined</th>
<th>Theme: Functions of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Describes biblical prayer.</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Theme: Facilities of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Schooling choice is relevant to parental involvement in religious education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School: Private</th>
<th>Theme: Facilities of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents choice to enroll children in Christian School.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School: Home</td>
<td>Theme: Facilities of Involvement</td>
<td>Quotations: 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parent's choice to homeschool.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School: public</th>
<th>Theme: Facilities of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents choice to put child in public school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spousal Unity</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The importance of spousal support and agreement in PIRE.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Theme: Feelings of Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents have a general feeling of success at their involvement, even though there are challenging times.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: feel very supported</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Parents indicating they felt very supported.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: of Church</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Support given by church to the PI role.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: of family</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Support of family members in the PI.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: of friends</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Support of friends, usually from church or small group for the PI role.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: Pastoral influence</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The influence of a pastor on the spiritual life of a parent or role in PI.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support: Personal Faith</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Personal faith is often seen as a support. It provides motivation for PIRE. It is the content for conversation and it is the thing that is modeled to children in the home.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supports: Resources</th>
<th>Theme: Forms for Involvement</th>
<th>Quotations: 74</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Resources used by the parents or available to parents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse reference</th>
<th>Theme: Foci of Religious Education</th>
<th>Quotations: 41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: Participants direct or indirect reference to a specific Bible Verse.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

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