

EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS DURING THEIR MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL YEARS THAT INFLUENCED THEM TO
STAY INVOLVED IN GEORGIA EVANGELICAL
CHURCHES

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty
of the
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Division of Church Ministry

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MA, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
MACE, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
ThM, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
May 2026

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DEDICATION

To God—the One who called me, sustained me, and carried me through every chapter of this journey. May this work bring glory to Your name and serve Your kingdom purposes.

To the love of my life, Olugbenga—whose steadfast love, encouragement, and partnership have been a constant source of strength. Thank you for believing in this calling and walking beside me with patience and joy.

To my resilient children, Anu, Gbemi, and Tomi—my daily reminders of God’s goodness. Your laughter, prayers, and resilience inspired me more than you know. May you always pursue God’s truth with courage and delight.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give all glory and honor to God Almighty for the privilege of embarking on this arduous journey and for granting me the grace to see it through to completion. Without God's strength, wisdom, and divine favor, this work would not have been possible.

I am profoundly grateful to my husband, Olugbenga, for his unwavering love, patience, encouragement, and countless sacrifices throughout this process. Your steadfast support and prayers sustained me and gave me the strength to persevere. To my beloved children, Anu, Gbemi, and Tomi, thank you for your understanding, patience, prayers, and for the joy and light you brought into my life, even during the most challenging moments. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband and children, to whom I owe so much.

I extend my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Donna Peavey, whose guidance, mentorship, and constructive feedback were invaluable to the successful completion of this dissertation. I am also deeply thankful to the professors who taught and guided me throughout my academic program, whose knowledge, encouragement, and dedication significantly contributed to my academic and professional growth.

Finally, I express my gratitude to all those who contributed directly or indirectly to this work. Your support and encouragement are truly appreciated.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DA—Discipleship Activities

EA—Emerging Adult

IMR—Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

LFS—Lasting Faith Scale

NAE—National Association of Evangelicals

NOBTS—New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

PI—Parental Involvement

RBS—Religious Behavior Scale

ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS DURING THEIR MIDDLE
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STAY INVOLVED IN GEORGIA EVANGELICAL
CHURCHES

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New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2026
Faculty Supervisor: Donna Peavey, Professor of Christian Education

The purpose of this dissertation was to utilize a mixed-methods study to examine the experiences of emerging adults aged 18–25 who were active in Georgia Evangelical churches during their middle and high school years and how these experiences influenced their continuous church involvement post-graduation. Using Wesley Black’s Lasting Faith Scale and the Fuller Youth Institute Behavior Scale, the study examined how discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships during formative years impacted emerging adults’ current faith behaviors. This study elicited the emerging adults’ accounts of these factors by answering two open-ended questions. Discipleship activities and parental involvement statistically predicted the Religious Behavior Scores, while intergenerational mentoring relationships did not. Although intergenerational mentoring relationships did not statistically predict the Religious Behavior Scores, emerging adults reported meaningful intergenerational mentoring experiences in the open-ended responses. Ultimately, this research

addresses a vital gap in understanding the middle and high school influences that enhance continued church involvement after graduation among emerging adults and advocates for strategic approaches to nurture their spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The church is in a predicament as the number of young adults attending church is declining.¹ This downward trend has raised significant concern among ministry leaders and researchers alike. The number of youths leaving the church after graduation from high school is still on the rise.² This pattern has prompted increased attention to the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood. Several studies have examined the attendance of emerging adults in churches to determine factors impacting the decline.³ The studies have shed light on factors that may be influential in the decision of emerging adults to either stay active in church or stop being

¹ Scott W. Frisbie, “A Study of Church Attendance among Young Adults” (DMin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

² Aaron Earls, “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church When They Become Young Adults,” *Lifeway Research* (blog), January 15, 2019, <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/>.

³ Baylor Clark Whitney, “Factors Leading to Student Ministry Retention in Mid and Large Sized Southern Baptist Churches: A Phenomenological Study” (EdD diss., Liberty University, 2022), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Whitney sought to discover “some factors which led to post-student ministry retention among young adults who participated in student ministry at a Southern Baptist church with an average attendance of 200 or greater.” Brian Glenn Doig, “Factors Influencing Church Involvement of Youth: A Case Study” (PhD diss., Sam Houston State University, 2012), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Doig conducted a qualitative study investigating the protective factors involved in the lives of youth that contributed to their decisions to stay in church and continue practicing the faith and values

involved in the church.⁴ Collectively, these findings underscore a growing concern about long-term congregational sustainability and generational faith retention. Research confirms that the challenge of retaining emerging adults in the church does not weigh on them alone. Past studies explored specific and general solutions and concluded that church leaders and parents need guidance on reaching the current emerging adults and keeping them engaged and active in the church.⁵ For adults ages 18–29, Jeffery Jensen Arnett defined this life stage as “emerging adulthood.”⁶ Scott Frisbie studied people ages 18–29 and referred to them as “young adults.”⁷

learned from their parents and church as they grew up. He also discovered the risk factors that contributed to their giving up and forsaking the values and beliefs with which they grew up and discontinuing church involvement, thereby diminishing the value and positive impact of religion in their lives.

⁴ Aaron Earls, “8 Reasons Young Adults Leave Your Church (and 8 Reasons They Stay),” *Lifeway Research* (blog), January 23, 2019, <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/01/23/8-reasons-https://research.lifeway.com/2019/01/23/8-reasons-young-adults-leave-your-church-and-8-reasons-they-stay/>. Doig, “Factors Influencing Church Involvement.”

⁵ Steve R. Parr and Tom Crites, *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow, 2015), 52; Len Kageler, *Youth Ministry in a Multifaith Society: Forming Christian Identity among Skeptics, Syncretists and Sincere Believers of Other Faiths* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 52.

⁶ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (January 2000): 469–79. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

⁷ Frisbie, “Study of Church Attendance.”

Additionally, current research has focused primarily on young adults up to about age 35 in certain states and the entire nation.⁸ A research gap exists regarding contemporary emerging adults ages 18–25, born between 2000 and 2007, who currently attend church and were active in student ministry during their middle and high school years in a Georgia Evangelical church. This study will examine the factors during middle and high school years that impact emerging adults' decisions about church involvement after high school graduation.

Research Question

A need exists to study the middle and high school factors that encourage emerging adults to stay involved in a Georgia Evangelical church. As such, the following research question will guide this study: What experiences during middle and high school years in youth ministry influence the church engagement of emerging adults ages 18–25 in Georgia Evangelical churches?

Thesis Statement

The purpose of this research is to examine the middle and high school factors that impact emerging adults' decisions to stay involved in church after high school graduation. This research will expand the knowledge of pastors, youth ministry leaders, and parents on the factors experienced during youth ministry that impact their decision to stay involved in a Georgia

⁸ Megan Grey Brown, "A Qualitative Study of Factors Contributing to Emerging Adult Church-Based Retention" (PhD diss., Biola University, 2013), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Her study focused on emerging adults residing in North and South Carolina. Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, conducted a nationwide study. Frisbie, "Study of Church Attendance," conducted this study in Florida.

Evangelical church. The thesis for this study is as follows: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years, parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years, and intergenerational mentoring relationships during middle and high school years influence the church involvement of emerging adults ages 18–25.

Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses for this research:

1. Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years influence emerging adults ages 18–25 to stay involved in the church after graduating from high school.
2. Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years influences emerging adults ages 18–25 to stay involved in the church after graduating from high school.
3. Intergenerational mentoring relationships during middle and high school years influence emerging adults ages 18–25 to stay involved in the church after leaving or graduating from college.

Null Hypotheses

The following are the null hypotheses:

1. Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years have no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.
2. Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

3. Intergenerational mentoring relationship during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Alternate Hypotheses

The following are the alternate hypotheses:

1. A positive relationship exists between discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.
2. A positive relationship exists between parental involvement in their spiritual development while in middle and high school and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.
3. A positive relationship exists between intergenerational mentoring relationships during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Assumptions

The assumptions for the study are stated below:

1. The research participants will respond honestly about their experiences in student ministry during their middle and high school years.
2. Emerging adults' experiences of their middle and high school years accurately describe their own experiences and are not influenced by other people's experiences.

Delimitations

1. Jeffrey Arnett coined the term "emerging adults," spanning ages 18 to 29. However, only emerging adults ages 18–25 will be included in the survey for this research, as the core period of emerging adulthood involves significant transitions, such as exploring identity,

autonomy, and relationships. During this stage, they also adjust to college or early career decisions. As such, the study will not include emerging adults aged 26–29.

2. The study will include emerging adults who attend Evangelical churches in Georgia.
3. The study will focus on emerging adults who participated in the student ministry of an Evangelical church in Georgia.
4. This study will not be conducted nationwide
5. This study will focus on spiritual factors and church activities during middle and high school that influenced their retention after high school: parental involvement, discipleship activities, and intergenerational mentoring relationships.

Definitions of Terms

Adolescence—the period of life when a child develops into an adult.⁹ For this paper, adolescence refers to the period from 12 to 17 years. The children are called *adolescents*.

Discipleship activities—Intentional activities, such as prayer, service, worship, and small—group attendance, in which Christians engage to help them trust and follow Jesus.¹⁰

Emerging adults—Emerging adulthood is considered the period from the late teens to the mid- to late twenties. At this stage, individuals are neither adolescents nor young adults. They are in a transition state and a separate developmental period. These individuals are referred to as

⁹ “Adolescence,” June 20, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adolescence>.

¹⁰ Alex Absalom and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 19.

emerging adults.¹¹ Five prominent characteristics of emerging adults are identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibilities or optimism.¹² The terms *young adults* and *emerging adults* will be used interchangeably, as some literature uses the term *young adults* to refer to adults aged 18–25.

Evangelicals—They believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Evangelicals are identified by four primary characteristics: “Conversionism—the belief that lives need to be transformed through a born-again experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus; Biblicism—a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority; Activism—the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts; and Crucicentrism—a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.”¹³

Intergenerational relationship—For this study, *intergenerational relationships* will refer to the relationships between individuals of different generations, between children (12–18 years) and adults. Intergenerational learning refers to “bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other, build community, share faith, pray, celebrate, and practice the Christian faith.”¹⁴

¹¹ Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 13; Kail Robert and John Cavanaugh, *Human Development: A Lifespan View*, 9th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2022), 318.

¹² Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 318–19.

¹³ “What Is an Evangelical?,” National Association of Evangelicals, 2025, <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/>.

¹⁴ John Roberto et al., *Faith Formation with the New Generation* (Cheshire: LifeLong Faith Associates, 2018), 23.

Local church—A local church is a branch of local ministries that set out to fulfill the Great Commission, as stated in Matt. 28:19–20: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹⁵ In addition, it is a place where members can utilize their God-given gifts to build up the body of Christ.¹⁶

Mentoring—Mentoring is the relationship that enhances the development of the mentee’s spiritual life, development of transformative character qualities, and enhancement of the tools needed to disciple others.¹⁷ Throughout this paper, mentoring will refer to the relationship that results in the development of another, in which the mentor serves as a role model and support system.

Parental Involvement—Parental involvement can play out in a variety of ways. For this research, parental involvement will be considered as parents upholding their Christian beliefs and practicing them; a close and warm parent-child relationship; parents modeling and teaching the faith; parents being involved in church life; and parents having family religious practices such as praying, reading the Bible, and serving others.¹⁸

¹⁵ All Scripture references will be from the 2020 New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ Eph. 4:12.

¹⁷ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 142.

¹⁸ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 25.

Young adults—Young adults will be used interchangeably with emerging adults, as most churches still use the term *young adults* for their adult population ages 18–25.

Youth ministry/Group—A youth ministry “exists to establish meaningful relationships between mature adult believers and students for the purpose of helping the student grow in their relationship with the Lord.”¹⁹ In addition, youth ministry “is about loving young people into a personal relationship with Christ, walking with them as they learn to live it out in community, and helping them learn to share their faith with others.”²⁰ *Youth ministry* and *student ministry* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

The Importance of the Study

This study will focus on emerging adults ages 18–25. During this period, emerging adults are transitioning from high school to adulthood. They either have entered college or currently are training in their chosen career path. Typically, emerging adults use the period between 18 and 25 years as formative years to make life-altering decisions, including deciding whether they will stay connected to the church. Also, parents are least likely to be involved in the spiritual development of their children during this period, as they are considered adults and should be able to care for themselves in all areas.²¹ Research reveals that emerging adults differ in their

¹⁹ Doug Franklin, “What Is Youth Ministry?,” LeaderTreks Youth Ministry, July 19, 2021, <https://www.leadertreks.org/what-is-youth-ministry/>.

²⁰ Kageler, *Youth Ministry*, 96.

²¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

preferences for parental involvement—some seek increased autonomy while others continue to value substantial parental support.²²

As generations keep changing, so do the characteristics that define each generation, including the current 18–25-year-olds. Also, the values this generation holds dear differ from those of previous generations, potentially leading to differences in the factors that may encourage them to remain involved in the church.²³ As such, a need exists to identify the unique factors impacting this generation of 18–25-year-olds. Possibly, their perspectives and reasons for staying in the church may differ. Some factors experienced during middle and high school years, such as discipleship activities, parental involvement, and mentoring through intergenerational relationships, can impact their involvement in the church as emerging adults. A need arises to study this age group and discover the factors from childhood that influence their decision to stay involved in a Georgia Evangelical church. The study will benefit parents, pastors, and youth leaders by providing insights into variables that affect emerging adults' involvement in the church after high school. The insights also will deepen the understanding of pastors, parents, and youth leaders about the long-term impact of their devotion to youth or children. Perhaps this study may enlighten loopholes in the ministry of youth leaders and pastors to the youths,

²² Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood,” 471.

²³ Aaron Summers, “Recognizing Generational Values That Could Divide Your Church,” Lifeway Research, March 11, 2024, <https://research.lifeway.com/2024/03/11/recognizing-generational-values-that-could-divide-your-church/>; and Allma Johnson, “7 Powerful Ways Churches Can Bridge the Generation Gap,” Christianity.com, January 20, 2025, <https://www.christianity.com/church/7-powerful-ways-churches-can-bridge-the-generation-gap.html>.

enhancing their ability to minister effectively and to learn strategies that will make them relevant to this age group and the upcoming age groups.

Summary and Overview

This chapter introduced the significance of examining the middle and high school factors that influence emerging adults' current church involvement. Emerging adults, ages 18–25, were the subjects of this study. Chapter 2 examines the theological foundation and reviews scholarly related literature, including the life experiences of emerging adults and the factors during the middle and high school years that enhance their continued participation in church during emerging adulthood.

Chapter 3 addresses the research design and methodology, including the validity and reliability of the survey instruments—the Lasting Faith and the Fuller Youth Institute's Religious Behavior Scale. This chapter also highlights the survey distribution, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 details the research analysis and findings, including the trends and correlations observed in the study. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion, including recommendations for the church, youth ministry leaders, and parents, as well as directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Scriptures provide a basis for understanding the heart of God for emerging adults. Second Timothy 3:16–17 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.” The Word of God provides the ultimate authority for interpreting and applying Scripture to individual lives. Likewise, Ps. 119:130 says, “The unfolding of your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” The Word of God serves as a guide, providing clarity and insight into how to live.

The first section of this chapter divulges some biblical examples and instructions for discipling middle and high school students. Discipleship can be fostered through discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships to ensure that emerging adults continue in the faith and remain connected to the church. The second section of this chapter explores emerging adulthood, its identifying characteristics, and the developmental theories that impact this stage of life. The third section of this chapter highlights factors that influence church involvement.

Biblical Foundations

Children need to be discipled from an early age to increase their likelihood of remaining engaged in the Christian faith when they grow up. Therefore, discipleship is essential during the

middle and high school years. The Scriptures support the need to disciple them, ensuring they develop in their faith. Proverbs 22:6 states, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he grows older, he will not abandon it.” This verse emphasizes the importance of early spiritual formation, which includes the middle and high school years, and affirms its long-term impact on their spiritual lives. In addition, Ps. 78:4–7 states,

We will not conceal them from their children, but we will tell the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his power and his wondrous works that he has done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they were to teach them to their children. So that the generation to come would know, the children yet to be born, that they would arise and tell them to their children, so that they would put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but comply with His commandments.

The writer of this Psalm emphasized the importance of discipling the next generation intentionally, even while they are still children. The parents, the church, and the community are called to pass their faith to children intentionally to enhance their spiritual formation. The following are factors that can influence lasting faith in emerging adults, with biblical examples and instructions for discipling middle and high school students

Discipleship Activities

Discipleship plays an essential role in the lives of all believers. Salvation is a free gift that requires only belief and obedience on the part of the individual.¹ The goal of salvation is to be conformed into the image of Christ. However, to be formed into the likeness of Jesus, as stated in Rom. 8:29, the individual requires some intentionality; one way is through discipleship. The

¹ Eph. 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Scriptures are clear about the importance of discipleship for long-lasting faith and provide examples to emulate. Matthew 28:19–20 encompasses the Great Commission given to the church, and it is for people of all ages. Matthew 28:20 admonishes teaching new converts to obey the Lord’s commands, which entails intentional, ongoing teaching and mentorship that does not stop at conversion. Leaders must guide new believers or youths intentionally for them to understand and apply biblical principles in their lives and continue to do so as they mature as Christ’s disciples. Additionally, they must provide discipleship opportunities purposefully for children to participate in while attending youth ministry and create a supportive environment in which they can ask questions and grow in their faith. The church can focus on providing discipleship opportunities by employing appropriate and applicable methodologies for diverse age groups.

Furthermore, Acts 2:42–47 elaborates on the event that occurred after the Pentecost encounter, and about three thousand souls were won to the kingdom of God. Verse 42 states, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The early church members committed themselves to community and spiritual growth through teaching and being taught the Word of God. Engaging in activities such as group studies, communal meals, and prayer sessions can foster a sense of belonging and encourage spiritual discussions. When children are provided with opportunities for fellowship, studying, and collaboration, they can cultivate deep relationships. Such opportunities also boost a supportive church environment where they feel valued and connected. Opportunities in this manner also will enhance their longevity in the faith and continual church attendance.

Parental Involvement

Several Scriptures emphasize the importance of parental involvement in their children's spiritual growth, as their impact on their children's lives is crucial. Parents can learn from Prov. 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he grows older he will not abandon it." Teaching children moral and spiritual matters lays a foundation for lifelong faith and values.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is called the *Shema* often, a foundational passage that emphasizes wholehearted devotion to God and the transmission of faith across generations. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up." These verses emphasize the need to integrate spiritual teaching into children's everyday lives. As such, parents must teach their children diligently about faith to enhance their spiritual development. They are to discuss and teach their children God's Word in everyday situations without any formality.² In essence, parents must weave faith into ordinary rhythms of everyday life. Also, the spiritual growth of their children should not be confined to formal settings such as a church or a school but should be a continuous process in all aspects of their lives. The *Shema* is a biblical blueprint for the transmission of faith from parents to their children.

As Paul continued his admonition to Timothy, he stated in 2 Tim. 3:15, "And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Paul alluded to the efficacy of the faith Timothy acquired from childhood through the teaching of his grandmother and mother, which

² Deut. 11:19–20.

enhanced his faith even while he was a young man. Parents must expose and teach their children the Word of God intentionally, as the outcome could be lasting faith.

Furthermore, Paul called the attention of fathers to how they ought to train their children spiritually. Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” He admonished fathers to concentrate on training and instructing their children in the way of the Lord. Fathers are to provide guidance that will foster spiritual development and avoid causing frustration and resentment to their children, that is live out the gospel they proclaim.³

In addition to teaching them, parents are to set an example of godly living for their children to emulate. As a parent to multiple churches he established, Paul wrote to them repeatedly to warn them about specific behaviors and actions. He often used himself as an example for them to follow. One such Scripture is 1 Cor. 4:16, where he informed them to imitate him. In the previous verse, he called himself their father through the gospel, giving him a solid ground to use himself as an example to copy. Parents greatly influence the lives of their children because children observe what they do.⁴ As such, parents must teach and live Christlike lives daily for their children to emulate. However, parents can teach and live out only what they know. Hence, they must have personal relationships with Christ and intentionally study and practice the Word of God.

³ “Ephesians 6 Barnes’ Notes,” accessed January 4, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/ephesians/6.htm>.

⁴ Larry J. Nelson. “The Role of Parents in the Religious and Spiritual Development of Emerging Adults,” in *Emerging Adults’ Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*, ed. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 61. Kindle.

Parental influence in the lives of children is essential in promoting their spiritual development and establishing a good foundation. Parents are to nurture, discipline, and instruct their children in ways that reflect God's love and wisdom. They are to teach their children and intentionally exemplify godly living for them.

Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Intergenerational relationships play a significant role in the spiritual growth of emerging adults. The influence of older generations on the younger ones through mentoring has been considered essential in passing on values and faith. The Bible provides several examples and admonitions that support mentoring and sharing faith across generations.

Familial Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Familial intergenerational mentoring relationships refer to the intergenerational relationships that occur within the family, such as between parents and children and grandparents and children. In 2 Tim. 1:5, Paul said concerning Timothy: "For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelled in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well." Paul acknowledged the faith passed down to Timothy from his grandmother to his mother and then to him when he was a child. Likewise, the Scripture records that the daughters of Philip were prophetesses.⁵ Philip, their father, was one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6. Philip's life affected his daughters. He must have taught them the way of the Lord. His four daughters eventually became prophetesses, serving God and using their gifts to

⁵ Acts 21:8–9.

build up the body of Christ.⁶ These examples highlight the power of intergenerational relationships in nurturing faith and the family serving as a strong foundation for spiritual growth.

Psalms 145:4 says, “One generation will praise your works to another, and will declare your mighty acts.” This Scripture verse buttresses the profound impact one generation can have on the other. Recounting the goodness of God by sharing experiences and testimonies of God’s goodness to the next generation can enhance and nurture the spiritual growth of younger generations. The benefit children receive from learning about the goodness of God in the lives of older generations within their families is strengthened and longlasting faith. Children understand the tangible presence of God in their lives when they hear the stories of how God moved in the lives of their parents and grandparents.

Nonfamilial Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Nonfamilial intergenerational mentoring relationships refer to intergenerational relations that occur outside of the family setting, such as a child or teenager and an adult church member. As the Scriptures provide examples of familial intergenerational mentoring relationships, so also do the Old and New Testaments provide some examples of nonfamilial intergenerational mentoring relationships. These biblical narratives offer foundational frameworks for establishing intentional, cross-generational connections within contemporary faith communities.

Old Testament examples

The Old Testament provides several examples of intergenerational mentorship relationships, such as Eli and Samuel and Moses and Joshua. Eli mentored Samuel from

⁶ Ibid.

childhood by providing him with spiritual guidance and instruction. Eli taught Samuel to recognize God's voice, which played an essential role in Samuel's spiritual development.⁷ Eli also mentored Samuel by teaching him about God's laws and the duties of the priesthood. The Scripture records that Samuel "ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest."⁸ Despite Eli's shortcomings, his mentorship of Samuel was crucial for Samuel's spiritual development and future leadership role.⁹ As a result of the mentorship he received, Samuel was elected as a judge in Israel and was the last judge the Israelites had. Samuel led the Israelites in various ways.¹⁰ He led them in prayer to God against the Philistines, and they were victorious.¹¹ He anointed Saul as king when they requested a king to lead them.¹² Samuel was dedicated to the Lord as a child and served Israel in the leading of the Lord for about sixty years.¹³

The mentoring relationship between Moses and Joshua provides a formative example of an intergenerational mentoring relationship, which prepared Joshua for a future leadership role. Joshua was introduced as a "young man" who remained in the tent of meeting, signaling his

⁷ 1 Samuel 2–3.

⁸ 1 Sam. 2:11.

⁹ 1 Sam. 3:19–21.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. 7:6, 15–17.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 7.

¹² 1 Samuel 8–9.

¹³ Samuel's tenure began before the death of Eli in 1 Sam. 3:20–4:1 and Samuel died shortly before Saul died (1 Sam. 8:5; 25:1). Saul's monarchy lasted for forty years, and for that reason, Samuel must have been the judge of Israel for about sixty years.

early proximity to sacred spaces and spiritual responsibility.¹⁴ Moses intentionally brought Joshua into key leadership contexts, such as military engagement, by delegating tasks such as leading Israel into battle against the Amalekites and communal governance, allowing him to observe, learn, and gradually assume greater responsibility.¹⁵ This long-term relational apprenticeship culminated in Moses publicly commissioning Joshua as his successor at the Lord's command.¹⁶ Through this sustained investment, Joshua developed the courage, obedience, and spiritual maturity necessary to lead Israel faithfully into the promised land. In addition, the Hebrew youth saw Moses endure certain challenges, such as leading them through the Red Sea and listening to their complaints in the wilderness. These experiences exposed Joshua to God and taught him about God's provision and faithfulness.¹⁷

New Testament examples

The relationships between Paul and Timothy and Barnabas and John Mark are prime New Testament biblical examples that provide a model for engaging and mentoring adolescents to keep them involved in the church beyond high school. In Acts 16:3, the Scripture informs the readers about the beginning of the mentoring relationship that occurred between Paul and Timothy. Also, in 1 Tim. 1:2, Paul called Timothy his "true son in the faith." Further down in the second book of Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy to continue with what he had learned from

¹⁴ Exod. 33:11.

¹⁵ Exod. 17:8–13; Num. 11:28.

¹⁶ Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 31:7–8.

¹⁷ Exod. 14:21–31.

him.¹⁸ Paul had taken the time to invest in Timothy's spiritual life as they journeyed together, and now Timothy had to do the same for other people coming behind him.

Not only did Paul mentor Timothy and encourage him to mentor others, but he also admonished intergenerational mentorship relationships in Titus 2:1–8. Paul emphasized the need for older women to mentor younger women. Titus 2:3–5 states,

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

These verses highlight the mentorship role of older women to younger women. They are to teach younger women about living a life of faith. Also, they are to share their wisdom and experience in practical areas of life, which impacts the spiritual growth of the younger generation profoundly. In like manner, youth leaders have to pair students with adults intentionally in order to provide the students with the opportunity to learn practical life and spiritual lessons that will enhance their spiritual growth and personal faith journey.¹⁹

The relationship between Barnabas and John Mark exemplifies an encouraging and restorative model of intergenerational mentoring that strengthened Mark's long-term faith and ministry effectiveness. John Mark, a young ministry companion, experienced early failure when he withdrew from Paul and Barnabas during a missionary journey.²⁰ Although Paul hesitated to

¹⁸ 2 Tim. 3:14.

¹⁹ Megan G. Brown, "Relationships Matter: The Impact of Relationships upon Emerging Adult Retention," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (2016): 15–17.

²⁰ Acts 13:13.

continue collaborating, Barnabas advocated for Mark and offered him a renewed opportunity for growth.²¹ This commitment to restoration and patient guidance played a significant role in John Mark's spiritual development, enabling him to mature into a dependable and faithful ministry partner. Paul's later commendations, referring to Mark as "helpful to me in ministry" and acknowledging him as a valued coworker, demonstrate the enduring fruit of Barnabas's investment.²² Ultimately, their relationship highlights the impact intergenerational mentoring can have in nurturing resilient faith and sustaining lifelong commitment to the Lord.

Emerging Adulthood

Jeffery Jensen Arnett coined the term "emerging adulthood," and he proposed that it is considered the period from the late teens to the mid-to-late twenties (18–29).²³ This developmental stage is characterized by a transitional phase between adolescence and young adulthood, during which individuals are neither adolescents nor young adults.²⁴ According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is characterized by distinct features, including identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibilities or optimism.²⁵

Emerging adulthood is a period during which individuals experience biological and physiological development that peaks, and brain development continues to progress in diverse

²¹ Acts 15:37–39.

²² 2 Tim. 4:11; Col. 4:10.

²³ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

ways.²⁶ Research indicates that the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for tasks such as reasoning, decision making, and impulse control, continues to mature.²⁷ Furthermore, emerging adults often navigate a landscape of greater independence, characterized by reduced parental control and critical opportunities for self-exploration across personal identity and career paths.²⁸

Arnett argued that emerging adulthood is distinct from a mere extension of adolescence. He emphasized that emerging adults enjoy greater autonomy, reflecting developmental changes that enable more independent decision making.²⁹ Simultaneously, these individuals have not yet transitioned fully into young adulthood, as they are exploring identities and options without the established commitments typical of that life stage.³⁰ This period often involves navigating new freedoms while still lacking long-term stability. Instead, they are in a transition state and a separate developmental period.³¹ The concept of emerging adulthood highlights that this is a transitional stage with unique characteristics. Researchers have increasingly recognized that this stage carries its own developmental tasks and challenges. This stage warrants distinct classification from adolescence or young adulthood. Discussed further are some of the identifying characteristics of emerging adulthood.

²⁶ Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 318.

²⁷ B. J. Casey et al., "Imaging Brain Development: What Have We Learned about Cognitive Development?," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 9, no. 3 (March 2005): 130.

²⁸ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

²⁹ Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood," 469. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

³⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2.

³¹ Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 319.

Emerging Adults and Identifying Characteristics

The individuals in the emerging adulthood life stage are referred to as *emerging adults*.³² As previously noted, based on his research with individuals aged 18–29, Arnett proposed five prominent characteristics of emerging adults.³³ Arnett added that those characteristics do not necessarily develop in the emerging adulthood stage as they developed before that stage and will continue to develop past that stage. However, they are more prominent in emerging adulthood than in other life stages.³⁴

Emerging adults struggle with finding their identity during these years, making emerging adulthood a significant period of identity exploration.³⁵ They face several challenges, such as exploring various life options in the areas of life, work, and worldview while seeking to answer the question “Who am I?”³⁶ This exploration often brings both uncertainty and opportunity as they navigate new responsibilities and freedoms. They become more independent, and most leave home having not yet reached a stable life stage.³⁷ In Erik Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development, he proposed that adolescents (12–18) deal with the crisis of identity

³² Ibid., 318; and Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 13.

³³ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9; and Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 318–19.

³⁴ Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 16.

³⁵ David Wood et al., “Emerging Adulthood as a Critical Stage in the Life Course,” in *Handbook of Life Course Health Development*, ed. Neal Halfon et al. (Cham: Springer International, 2018), 129, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47143-3_7.

³⁶ Ibid., 129–30; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9.

³⁷ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9.

versus role confusion, and adults ages 18–40 are faced with the crisis of intimacy versus isolation.³⁸ His theory posits that the issue of identity arises before age 18. Some theorists, including Jeffrey Arnett, Sage Rose, and Cecil Robinson, argued that the difficulties emerging adults face pose challenges for Erikson’s model, which was developed based on role expectations from a different historical context.³⁹ Arnett critiqued Erikson’s model and promoted narrative methods for studying identity in emerging adulthood.⁴⁰ Arnett stated that Erikson’s observation applies to many emerging adults today, as most identity exploration occurs during emerging adulthood rather than adolescence.⁴¹ Hence, Erikson’s postulation about identity formation during ages 12–18 is not applicable in current contexts. In addition, Rose and Robinson critiqued Erikson’s essentialist framing and argued for the inclusion of sociocultural factors in identity formation.⁴²

Another characteristic of emerging adulthood is instability, which is a stressor for emerging adults in college, in relationships, and in the workplace.⁴³ Emerging adults encounter

³⁸ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 128–36.

³⁹ Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 324.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “Identity Development from Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood: What We Know and (Especially) Don’t Know,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199936564.013.009>.

⁴¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 10.

⁴² Sage Rose and Cecil Robinson, “Beyond Essentialist Critiques: The Co-Development of Individual and Society within Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory of Identity Development,” *ICLS ‘06, Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Learning Sciences*, Bloomington, IN, June 27, 2006, 623–25.

⁴³ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 11–12.

shifts in academic environments, such as the need to change majors or transfer to another school. They also experience changes in their personal relationships, including meeting new people and reassessing their social circles. Likewise, their work environment may pose as an area of instability with job changes or working multiple jobs. According to Arnett, the changes occurring during this stage also reflect the identity exploration they are engaged in experiencing.⁴⁴ However, having a strong spiritual foundation during middle and high school can empower emerging adults to navigate this stage effectively. In the study by James L. Furrow, Pamela Ebstye King, and Krystal White, they found that when youth endorse self-descriptors indicative of a religious identity, they are “more likely to report that they have a meaning framework that offers direction and fulfillment in life.”⁴⁵

Carolyn McNamara Barry and Larry J. Nelson’s study on religiosity and spirituality during the transition to adulthood provides a foundational framework for understanding how faith commitments formed during adolescence continue to shape emerging adults’ identity.⁴⁶ Through their research, they demonstrated that emerging adults aged 18–25 have a heightened exploration of beliefs and values.⁴⁷ A close parent-child relationship can influence the child’s

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁵ James L. Furrow, Pamela Ebstye King, and Krystal White, “Religion and Positive Youth Development: Identity, Meaning, and Prosocial Concerns,” *Applied Developmental Science* 8, no. 1 (2004): 23, https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0801_3.

⁴⁶ Carolyn McNamara Barry and Larry J. Nelson, “The Role of Religion in the Transition to Adulthood for Young Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34, no. 3 (June 2005): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-005-4308-1>.

⁴⁷ Carolyn Barry et al., “Religiosity and Spirituality during the Transition to Adulthood,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 34, no. 4 (June 2010): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025409350964>.

religiosity and spirituality. In a close relationship, adolescents are more likely to adopt their parents' religious beliefs.⁴⁸ They tend to exhibit more positive outcomes and fewer risky behaviors.⁴⁹ In addition to parents' role modeling religiosity to their children, adult mentors and the faith community exert more immediate influence on emerging adults.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Michael Mason's qualitative study found that intergenerational ministry strengthened discipleship outcomes among high school students, as some remained engaged in youth ministry because their relationships with older adults enhanced their spiritual growth.⁵¹ These findings reveal that discipleship programs, parental influence, and intergenerational mentoring during middle and high school years are pathways to influencing church involvement in emerging adulthood.

Emerging adults are at a complex life stage, navigating transitions from high school to adulthood. To manage these challenges effectively, equipping them with appropriate life skills during middle and high school years is essential. As emerging adults navigate their identities, the recent Barna research highlights an increase in belief in Jesus, reflecting the vital role that faith plays in shaping their self-concept and worldview.⁵² Key influences during middle and high school years significantly impact the formative groundwork that shapes their identity and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 315.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 314.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 315–18.

⁵¹ Michael Victor Mason, "A Qualitative Study Exploring the Implementation and Effects of Intergenerational Youth Ministry" (PhD diss., Biola University, 2020), 175–84.

⁵² "New Research: Belief in Jesus Rises, Fueled by Younger Adults," Barna Group, accessed January 4, 2026, <https://www.barna.com/research/belief-in-jesus-rises/>.

spiritual growth. The next section will elaborate on the key influences during the middle and high school years that can enhance their spiritual growth and long-lasting faith.

Essential Influences

Although Arnett identified characteristics of emerging adulthood that are distinct to this stage, they did not begin to develop during this life stage.⁵³ These characteristics are highly impactful for individuals in this life stage, shaping their life choices. Hence, the characteristics must be nurtured in earlier developmental years. How can these characteristics be nurtured during the developmental stage, before the adolescents reach emerging adulthood, such that the choices made in this life stage are life-giving? In addition, what essential influences during middle and high school years could have been beneficial for the emerging adults in this current stage, based on the identifying characteristics of this life stage?

Parents, church leaders, and influential adults are responsible for nurturing children's spiritual development, with the primary responsibility being on the parents. According to George Barna, studies show that parents relinquish their responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of their children to their church.⁵⁴ The spiritual development of children and adolescence is not a simple task.⁵⁵ However, parents, children's leaders, youth leaders, and

⁵³ Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood*, 16.

⁵⁴ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003), 77–78.

⁵⁵ Scott Floyd, "The Family's Role in Teaching," in *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, 2nd ed., ed. William R. Yount (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 148.

influential adults must strive to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for the children to grow spiritually and thrive because the future of children depends on it.

Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May explained that discipling children and investing in their spiritual formation should begin at an early age, as they have the capability to experience God.⁵⁶ Children and teenagers are spiritual beings, so their spiritual lives need to be nurtured. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, in a National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), found that about 60 percent of teenagers committed to living for God before they were fourteen.⁵⁷ The possibility of having a salvation experience during middle and high school years speaks about the need to equip their spiritual lives before they finish high school so they can stay committed to attending church afterward.

This study will provide an understanding of the experiences during middle and high school years that influence emerging adults to stay in the church. Therefore, a need exists to understand the developmental theories that impact their growth in various aspects. The understanding will shed light on the long-lasting impact, or lack thereof, that experiences during middle and high school years have on the spiritual lives of children and teenagers as they grow into emerging adults and their retention in church.

Developmental Theories

Numerous developmental theorists have explored the various developmental stages individuals experience between the ages of 12 and 18 years. Their theories offer insights into

⁵⁶ Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 41.

⁵⁷ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 247.

various aspects of development, including social, emotional, and cognitive growth.⁵⁸ Adults can utilize this knowledge to support and nurture the development of 12 to 18-year-olds, achieving specific goals while understanding that growth and development are not always linear, as many theories suggest.

Erikson postulated the theory of psychosocial development. The eight-stage theory focuses on social interaction and conflicts encountered at various stages of development while describing growth and change throughout life.⁵⁹ Erikson theorized that adolescents aged 12 to 18 are in the fifth stage, identity versus role confusion. At this stage, individuals experiment to develop their identity, and when productive, they emerge with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Otherwise, they may experience role confusion.⁶⁰ Individuals in this stage can learn about their identity in Christ. However, as stated above, identity formation is not completely achieved in this stage of life but continues into emerging adulthood. Supporting adolescents with identity formation should not stop at this stage.

Jean Piaget, another theorist, postulated a theory on children's cognitive development. He proposed that children progress through four stages of learning—sensorimotor, preoperational,

⁵⁸ Kendra Cherry, "Influential Theories about How Children Grow and Develop," Verywell Mind, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.verywellmind.com/child-development-theories-2795068>.

⁵⁹ Erikson, *Identity*, 29–30.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 128–30. Saul McLeod, "Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development," January 31, 2025, 14–18. Kendra Cherry, "Understanding Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development," Verywell Mind, accessed November 18, 2023, <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740>.

concrete operational, and formal operational.⁶¹ According to Piaget, the concrete operational stage, from ages 7 to 11, is when children begin to think logically, not hypothetically or abstractly.⁶² Children in this stage may struggle to grasp the abstract concept of God. However, parents, teachers, and influential adults can use logical explanations to help them understand. As children enter the formal operational stage (ages 12 and up), they develop the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically.⁶³ Therefore, parents, teachers, and influential adults can employ abstract or hypothetical illustrations when teaching about God to individuals ages 12 and up. Throughout the history of religious education, developmental theories have played a significant role in shaping faith development.⁶⁴

In addition to the theories of Erikson and Piaget, Albert Bandura's social learning theory maintains that modeling is vital for learning. Bandura proposed that people can learn behaviors in two ways: directly through social interactions or indirectly by observing others' behavior through the media.⁶⁵ In his theory, he advocated that children learn by observing, imitating, and

⁶¹ Jean Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence* (London: Routledge, 1950), 78–175. Jean Piaget, *The Language and the Thought of the Child*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 56–73

⁶² Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence*, 153–61. Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 192.

⁶³ Piaget, *The Psychology of Intelligence*, 162–75. Robert and Cavanaugh, *Human Development*, 193.

⁶⁴ R. R. Osmer, "Faith Development," in *Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education*, ed. Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 249.

⁶⁵ Albert Bandura, "Social Learning Theory," Stanford University, 1971, 7, https://dn790002.ca.archive.org/0/items/BanduraSocialLearningTheory/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory_text.pdf.

modeling the actions of others.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he proposed that for learning to occur, individuals must meet four mental mediational processes: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation.⁶⁷ They acquire information and develop new skills in the process. He claimed that “research conducted within the framework of social learning theory demonstrates that virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other persons’ behavior and its consequences for them.”⁶⁸ Based on this theory, children and teenagers learn from the behaviors adults exemplify to them. When permitted to use the mental mediational processes by providing the opportunities to observe and practice, the children and teenagers will retain the things learned when they become emerging adults. Smith and Snell posited that “who people are is very much a product of where they were socially located, of what social and relational forces have formed their lives.”⁶⁹ As such, modelling is a very important factor that affects children’s and teenagers’ learning, which is ingrained in their memories and translates into their actions.

Paul’s admonition to the Philippians in Phil. 4:9 says, “As for the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with

⁶⁶ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, IN: Prentice Hall, 1977), 27; Jeremy Sutton, “What Is Bandura’s Social Learning Theory? 3 Examples,” PositivePsychology.com, May 17, 2021, <https://positivepsychology.com/social-learning-theory-bandura/>; and Kendra Cherry, “How Social Learning Theory Works,” Verywell Mind, accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.verywellmind.com/social-learning-theory-2795074>.

⁶⁷ Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 25.

⁶⁸ Albert Bandura, *Principles of Behavior Modification* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 118.

⁶⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 256.

you.” The Philippians learned from Paul by observing him as he confidently modeled Christ, and Paul encouraged them to practice what they had learned from him. Bandura’s observation model is not limited to observing a live model but also involves listening to verbal instructions.⁷⁰ Therefore, parents, teachers, and other influential adults must maintain high standards of accountability to ensure that they consistently teach and model Jesus Christ to children and adolescents. Adults are the Bible that the children and teenagers read in addition to what the teachers teach them.

Additionally, children and teenagers should have the chance to practice what they have observed, learned, or heard from adults, rather than being pushed to the background, to prevent them from losing interest later and abandoning their faith. They will be motivated to practice what they learned as children and teenagers. Not knowing what to do can lead to frustration and discouragement. In Lev. 23:42–43, God commanded the Israelites to build booths and dwell in them so that their descendants would understand their history and the miraculous way in which God brought them out of Egypt. According to the Scriptures, parents are to instruct and encourage their children; involving children at an early age and across the spectrum of life is essential. Involving them in the things of God at every stage helps them develop their knowledge of God so they can utilize what they learn as they grow older.

Factors Influencing Church Involvement

The decline in emerging adults’ church attendance has long been identified as a problem plaguing the church. In 2019, Lifeway Research found that 66 percent of church-attending

⁷⁰ Bandura, “Social Learning Theory,” 1971, 7.

teenagers drop out as adults for at least one year.⁷¹ They further stated that young adults, ages 18–29, drop out because of faith development or disciple-making issues, such as spiritual needs not met and negative experiences in the church.⁷² Past studies have shown that emerging adults have given various reasons for either continuing to be involved at the local church or ceasing to be involved.⁷³ Five of the reasons cited for dropping out of the church, as stated by Earls, are, “moving to college and no longer attending,” “church members seeming judgmental or hypocritical,” “no longer feeling connected to people in their church,” “disagreeing with the church’s stance on political, or social issues,” and “work responsibilities.”⁷⁴ In contrast, some of the reasons stated for staying are, “Church was a vital part of my relationship with God”; “I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life”; “I wanted to follow a parent or family member’s example”; “church activities were a big part of my life”; “I felt that church was helping me become a better person”; and “I was committed to the purpose and work of the church.”⁷⁵ Brian Doig likewise discovered the three most vital factors influencing the decision of young adults ages 20 to 33 to stay active in the church or leave: relationships, education, and activities.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Earls, “8 Reasons Young Adults.”

⁷² David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 59–89.

⁷³ Earls, “Most Teenagers Drop Out.”

⁷⁴ Earls, “8 Reasons Young Adults.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Doig, “Factors Influencing Church Involvement.”

Based on the research conducted by Springtide Research Institute in 2023, 68 percent of young people say they are at least slightly religious, 78 percent say they are at least slightly spiritual, and 28 percent say they have become more religious or spiritual in the past years.⁷⁷ While being somewhat hopeful about what research reveals, the majority of the emerging adults who leave the church seem not to be returning. Aaron Earls divided the contributing factors young adults stopped attending church into four main categories: life changes or situations; church or pastor-related reasons; religious, ethical, or political beliefs; and student or youth ministry reasons.⁷⁸ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins categorized young adults dropping out of the church into nomads, prodigals, and exiles.⁷⁹ They explained that nomads “walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians. Prodigals lose their faith, describing themselves as ‘no longer Christian.’ Exiles are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the church.”⁸⁰ While hopeful that some of them return to the church, not all do, which is still a loss for the church and the kingdom of God. When emerging adults leave the church, they are lost to other religions, agnosticism, and atheism.⁸¹ In *Youth*

⁷⁷ Springtide Research Institute, “The State of Religion & Young People 2023,” November 6, 2023, <https://springtideresearch.org/research/the-state-of-religion-young-people-2023>. Springtide Research Institute engages the power of social science to learn from and about young people ages 13 to 25, their core age group focus. While this research conducted through Springtide Research Institute covers ages 13 to 25, it is inclusive of ages 18–25 being considered for this study.

⁷⁸ Earls, “8 Reasons Young Adults.”

⁷⁹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 25.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 9–10.

Ministry in a Multifaith Society, Len Kageler discussed the rise in youth ministries in multiple religions, such as Islam and Buddhism. The United States and some other countries are experiencing a rise in these non-Christian religious youth ministries, and some Christian emerging adults are converting to these religions.⁸² This paper will focus on the importance of discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships as factors during middle and high school years that influence the decisions of emerging adults to be engaged in the church.

Discipleship Activities

Kinnaman discussed the findings of research conducted by Barna Group from 2007 to 2011, which showed how the church failed to equip young adults ages 18 to 29. He expressed that individuals and institutions, such as education, marriage, and the church, are to be held responsible for the problem. He admonished that the church must rethink discipleship by addressing the gaps in relationship, vocation, and wisdom.⁸³

In *Together We Equip*, the writers sought to assist the readers with the important task of discipleship, which is a continuous process. They elaborated on essential topics such as spiritual formation, evangelism, mentoring, and small-group discipleship. Their goal was to provide practical guidance that churches and leaders could apply in real ministry contexts. They also provided some biblical foundation for equipping others, which is needed to explain why the

⁸² Len Kageler, *Youth Ministry in a Multifaith Society: Forming Christian Identity among Skeptics, Syncretists and Sincere Believers of Other Faiths* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 18. Kindle.

⁸³ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 13–14.

church disciples others.⁸⁴ According to Jonathan Denton, one of the contributors in the book, discipling students involves creating a place where they hear about the glory of God, come to know him, and learn about God's character and work. He further alluded that "one of our major goals in student ministry is to lay the groundwork of discipleship three generations later."⁸⁵ The years spent in student ministry are very essential in establishing lasting faith in the lives of emerging adults.

Discipleship activities can enhance emerging adults' spiritual formation and growth during middle and high school years. In 2020, Barbara Jean Wilson sought to examine whether and how churches have retained youths ages 18–29 successfully and what factors influenced the retention or departure of young adults. Wilson identified that the emerging adults still involved in the church or left and returned were engaged in discipleship activities such as serving, involving in small groups, conversing about the Christian faith with others, being mentored, and being discipled during their middle and high school years. A Christian community is a factor in young adults' lives that helps keep them plugged into the church after youth ministry.⁸⁶

LaKeisha Williams studied the factors influencing church engagement among young adults in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. She conducted qualitative research using the interview method to survey twenty three actively participating young adults, ages 22–35, from

⁸⁴ Jody Dean and Hal Stewart, eds., *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow, 2018). Kindle.

⁸⁵ Jonathan Denton, "Ministry Leadership with Students," in Dean and Stewart, 128–29.

⁸⁶ Barbara Jean Wilson, "The Church and the Retention of Young Adults" (PhD diss., Trevecca Nazarene University, 2020), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

three churches in 2020. Williams discovered that relationships, affirmation, opportunities for service, and a sense of spiritual responsibility influenced the engagement of young adults in the church after youth ministry.⁸⁷ Most churches may fare well in keeping emerging adults active in the church by encouraging and engaging them in various discipleship activities during middle and high school years.

As Pauline Chang stated, around 64 percent of born-again Christians made a commitment to faith before turning 18. Another 13 percent professed their faith between ages 18 and 21, while 23 percent embraced Christ after age 21.⁸⁸ In essence, the years before turning 18 are prime for evangelizing and discipling children to gain their commitment to Christ. People who became Christians before adulthood are more likely to remain committed to Christ than those who came to faith as adults.⁸⁹

Parental Involvement

The influence of parents on their children's church involvement is far reaching as this guidance often shapes early spiritual habits and long-term attitudes toward faith. Many emerging adults continue to draw on these early patterns when making decisions about their spiritual lives. Studies show that family traditions or parental influence encourage the decision of young adults

⁸⁷ LaKeisha Williams, "Make Me Stay: A Multiple Case Study on Church Engagement among Young Adults in the United States" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2020), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 79.

⁸⁸ Pauline J. Chang, "Barna Survey: Evangelism Most Effective to Youth," October 13, 2004, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/barna-survey-evangelism-most-effective-to-youth.html>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

to attend church.⁹⁰ However, the influence should start while they are still young. Chip Ingram expressed that parents are to bring up their children by continuously nurturing them toward maturity and employing Christian teaching and discipline principles.⁹¹ Occasionally, they tend to lack the ability to fulfill this primary role. According to a study conducted by Barna Group, only 34 percent of United States adults read their Bibles once a week or more.⁹² Parents cannot give their children what they do not have.

Barna Group's findings buttress Ingram's point that many parents lack training and nurturing for their children. Perhaps the bone of contention is that parents are not grounded in the Word of God, creating difficulty for them to teach or model godly living to their children. Hence, the responsibility lies with the children's leaders at the church to help develop their spiritual lives. Ingram further stated that continuously nurturing children toward maturity is "a grace-filled process designed to instill faith in the next generation—and to shape the world and the eternal kingdom of God."⁹³ Parents can raise children who thrive spiritually by applying God-centered parenting principles. Moreover, most parents either do not know what to do or are not equipped to fulfill that role. A need exists to engage parents in nurturing the spiritual lives of

⁹⁰ Jovita Allane Lee, "Young Adults and the Black Church: Exploring the Relationship between Young Adults and Their Desire to Engage in Church" (EdD diss., Gardner-Webb University, 2024), 91.

⁹¹ Chip Ingram, *Effective Parenting in a Defective World: How to Raise Kids Who Stand Out from the Crowd* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2006), 8.

⁹² Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2021: Five Key Findings," accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/sotb-2021/>.

⁹³ Ingram, *Effective Parenting*, 8.

their children by ensuring they are involved in the process of being rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

Parents ought to build relationships with their children that bond and foster an environment to nurture them spiritually. Ingram stated that parents must cultivate an environment filled with shared experiences, evident care and compassion, and significant displays of love in which the hearts of the parents and children bond together; the stronger the bond of the relationship, the more likely the children will embrace the parents' values and beliefs.⁹⁴ Ingram proposed eight keys for building relationships that bond: unconditional love, scheduled time, focused attention, eye contact, ongoing communication, meaningful touch, fun, and prayer.⁹⁵ In addition, Leif Kehrwald et al., in *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*, stated five key actions that enhance relationship development from the perspective of a young person: express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities.⁹⁶ The role of parents in establishing an environment to enhance the spiritual formation and passing on of faith to their children is essential.

According to the Barna Group's research, among adults who were spiritually active during their teen years, only one-third of parents in their 20s attended church regularly with their children, compared with two-fifths of parents in their 30s and one-half of parents aged 40 and

⁹⁴ Ibid., 22, 24.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 28–38.

⁹⁶ Leif Kehrwald et al., *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016), 197–98.

above.⁹⁷ The result of this study reveals that most of the emerging adults (those in their twenties) did not return to church. God's instruction to the Israelites is for them to pass on their faith to their children, as seen in Deut. 6:7. If the trend continues in this manner, a tendency toward a continuous decline in the number of emerging adults who return to the church from one generation to the next is likely. This trajectory underscores the urgent need for intentional strategies that strengthen faith transmission within families and congregations.

Justus Bartkus and Christian Smith studied Catholic parents and found that parents play three primary roles in transmitting religion: they are the sponsors of the faith, gatekeepers of the faith, and interpreters of the faith.⁹⁸ These findings demonstrate how deeply parental involvement shapes the spiritual direction of the next generation. According to Lifeway research, 43 percent of the respondents stated that they continued to attend church as young adults because they wanted to follow a parent or family member's example.⁹⁹ In *Why They Stay*, Parr and Crites reported that one of the factors they discovered in their national survey was the influence of the relationship between students and their parents for those who grew up attending church.

⁹⁷ Barna Group, "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf following Spiritually Active Teen Years," accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>.

⁹⁸ Justin Bartkus and Christian Smith, *A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting*, 15, accessed January 8, 2025, https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/catholic-parenting-report_-_smith.pdf.

⁹⁹ Earls, "8 Reasons Young Adults."

According to the respondents, a good relationship between them and their parents while in youth ministry strongly correlated to their continuous involvement in the church.¹⁰⁰

On the flip side, they discovered that those with no relationship with their mothers and fathers were 65 percent and 50 percent, respectively, more likely to stray away from the church.¹⁰¹ Additionally, in a study conducted by Doig, participants reported that the relationship quality between them and their parents was an important factor that influenced them to remain active in the church, as those who stayed in the church reported having very positive memories and relationships with their parents, while those who left the church had fewer perceptions of positive communication, warmth, and affection from their parents.¹⁰² As such, activities that promote close, strong relationships among students and their parents are encouraged and viewed as protective factors for internalizing values and remaining active in the church.¹⁰³

Furthermore, parental involvement in church life or activities also influenced the decision or likelihood of emerging adults to stay involved in the church after graduating from high school. According to a study done by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), “young people turn out a lot like their parents in many ways, including faith or lack thereof.”¹⁰⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean encouraged churches to help parents get involved and serious about their faith, as they are

¹⁰⁰ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, 53. They conducted a study in 2013 to discover why young adults stay active in the church. The survey included young adults ages 26–39 who grew up in church and still were serving to discover why they were still active in church.

¹⁰¹ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, 53.

¹⁰² Doig, “Factors Influencing Church Involvement,” 101–2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 93–94.

¹⁰⁴ Kageler, *Youth Ministry*, 52.

the primary influencers and predictors of teenagers' spiritual lives.¹⁰⁵ Parents can influence their children's faith formation and church involvement directly or indirectly, even past high school, and their involvement in the church will encourage their children to do the same when they become adults. Emerging adults raised by very committed parents are more likely to internalize their parents' religious worldview through socialization.¹⁰⁶ They are also more inclined to adopt practical religious practices and embody the identity orientations and behavioral tendencies essential to continue practicing what they have been taught religiously.¹⁰⁷

The goal of developing the spiritual lives of children and teenagers is lifelong faith. Parents can influence this aspect by being involved in spiritual activities at home and at the church. Children's and teenagers' spiritual formation is based mainly on their parents' faith.¹⁰⁸ However, some parents lack the resources needed to support their children's spiritual growth and are ill equipped as a result. As such, they relinquish the duty to the children and youth ministry leaders. The Barna Group writers highlighted a possible disconnect between church and home relationships and call for collaboration to enhance children's and teenagers' spiritual formation in their contexts by providing church-based training for parents.¹⁰⁹ The church can empower

¹⁰⁵ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

¹⁰⁶ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 256.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Barna Group, "Who Is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?," accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

parents to be the faith formers of their children in three interrelated ways, according to Kehrwald et al.: promote their growth in faith, teach the parenting skills that foster faith growth, and develop their competence and confidence as parents.¹¹⁰ Ingram likewise reiterated the need for the church to equip parents to discipleship of their children intentional.¹¹¹

While parental involvement is essential to the faith formation of their children, their involvement is also far reaching in shaping the commitment of emerging adults as they navigate the complexities of identity exploration. Ingram underscored that parents are the primary spiritual models of Christlike behaviors, not merely behavioral control.¹¹² He also emphasized discernment and discipline rooted in love, which aligns with Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena's views that parental influence continues to shape religious identity during emerging adulthood, even if indirectly.¹¹³

Aleicia Roberts-Caulfield expanded this framework through her study, demonstrating that belonging and trust are critical relational variables in sustaining emerging adults' church involvement.¹¹⁴ Roberts-Caulfield's study echoes Ingram's insistence that strong parent-child

¹¹⁰ Kehrwald et al., *Families at the Center*, 202.

¹¹¹ Ingram, *Effective Parenting*, 150–55.

¹¹² Ibid., 23–28.

¹¹³ Ibid., 65–90; and Barry and Abo-Zena, *Emerging Adults' Religiousness*, 64.

¹¹⁴ Aleicia Roberts-Caulfield, "A Study of Emerging Adults Who Remain Committed and Active in Their Local Church" (EdD diss., Grand Canyon University, 2024), 117–24. Her qualitative descriptive study examined how Christian emerging adults in the Houston, Texas, area described how their sense of belonging and trust contributed to their ongoing involvement in church life. She discovered that positive relationships and social networks enhanced personal development and commitment.

relationships that are built on trust and belonging foster long-term faith commitment.¹¹⁵

Modeling spiritual practices at home emphasizes Robert-Caulfield's relational and communal structures, which are essential to the sustained engagement of emerging adults with the church.¹¹⁶ Essentially, parents must cultivate Christlike character and spiritual practices within the home for their children to emulate, and the church should help support parents in fulfilling their role in their children's spiritual growth and development.

Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

The authors of *Faith Formation with the New Generation* proposed intergenerational faith-forming experiences within the church and provided five benefits that can be derived from them. Such experiences create meaningful connections across age groups, allowing younger participants to witness and internalize lived expressions of faith from mature believers. One of the benefits is that they help to “form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and lead the Christian tradition and way of life.”¹¹⁷ Another benefit is that they strengthen relationships,

¹¹⁵ Ingram, *Effective Parenting*, 110–15.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 130–35; and Roberts-Caulfield, “Study of Emerging Adults,” 112–16.

¹¹⁷ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 43. Kindle. The author stated several benefits of bringing generations together in the church. Some of the other benefits are providing a curriculum for the whole community, supporting families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in a variety of faith-forming experiences together, and strengthening the ability of parents and grandparents to promote religious socialization at home. When children and adolescents are immersed in an environment that empowers their faith and provides regular resources to support it, their faith will be on sounder footing, resulting in a long-lasting faith.

connections, and community across generations, boosting senses of belonging within the faith community and offering respected adult role models for children and adolescents.¹¹⁸

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross explained that the unique benefits of intergenerational faith formation for children are that older adults can accompany them and listen to their stories, validate their search for identity, and join them as they journey toward God and mature into adulthood, thus enhancing their faith formation process.¹¹⁹ In a qualitative study of emerging adults aged 18–29 conducted by Megan Brown, one of the factors that influenced them to remain actively involved in the church life after youth ministry was intergenerational relationships.¹²⁰ Some participants used the term “mentor” to refer to mentor-like relationships with older adults in their lives during their formative years.¹²¹ Brown’s research underscores the need to encourage intergenerational relationships in the church intentionally. Doing so not only serves a current purpose but also builds a relationship that influences lasting faith in the teenagers as an adult.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 43.

¹¹⁹ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, “The Benefits of Intergenerality,” *Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 3, no. 2 (2013): 19.

¹²⁰ Brown, “Relationships Matter,” 15–17. In this qualitative survey, Brown explored the experiences of emerging adults and provided evidence of the importance of relationships for their retention. One of the influential factors mentioned by the participants is intergenerational relationships. Other factors include pastoral, peer, and parental impacts.

¹²¹ Brown, “Relationships Matter,” 15.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 19.

Relationship, as discovered by Lifeway research, “is the glue that keeps people in church or serves as the attraction to begin attending again after absenteeism.”¹²³ Roberto et al. expressed that participation in all-church (intergenerational) worship during high school is more unswervingly associated with mature faith during high school and college days than any other form of church participation.¹²⁴ Robert Keeley also alluded that young people need to be immersed in a multigenerational community of relationships informed by faith in Jesus Christ so that they will know Jesus through the witness of believers and the life of the church.¹²⁵ This emphasis on relational depth highlights the formative power of consistent intergenerational connections within the faith community. Likewise, research by the Barna Group revealed that about three in ten active millennials (twentysomethings) stayed engaged in church because they had intentional relationships, such as mentoring, with people other than their pastor during high school.¹²⁶ Furthermore, Smith and Snell maintained that the faith of emerging adults is stronger when they have adults in a religious congregation to whom they can turn for support, help, and advice during their teenage years.¹²⁷ Intentional adult relationships within the student ministry

¹²³ Lifeway Research, “Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church,” August 7, 2007, <https://research.lifeway.com/2007/08/07/reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church/>.

¹²⁴ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 24.

¹²⁵ John Roberto. “Faith-Forming Environments for Children,” in *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children’s Spirituality: New Directions for Education, Ministry, and Discipleship*, ed. Mimi L. Larson and Robert J. Keeley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 89. Kindle.

¹²⁶ Barna Group, “5 Ways to Connect with Millennials,” accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.barna.com/research/5-ways-to-connect-with-millennials/>.

¹²⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 233.

during the middle and high school years are essential to establishing a long-lasting spiritual health of emerging adults.

Additionally, Roberts-Caulfield affirmed, in the study of Christian emerging adults ages 18–29 who remained committed and active in their local church in Houston, Texas, that the reasons they stayed involved in the church were because they were welcomed and supported by their church community, which gave them a sense of belonging; trusted their church leaders and mentors who built reliable and caring relationships with them; and were provided opportunities for spiritual growth and personal development to include Bible study, service, and leadership roles.¹²⁸ Larry G. Linderman also found in a study examining the relationship between intergenerational ministry practices and church health that churches with intentional intergenerational practices that encourage mutual mentoring created richer networks, stronger discipleship outcomes, and greater identity formation.¹²⁹ Trustworthy relationships and supportive structures encouraged the emerging adults to stay involved.

As noted earlier, research reveals that emerging adults continue to leave the church and their faith.¹³⁰ However, research indicates that students with multiple adult mentors who are

¹²⁸ Roberts-Caulfield, “A Study of Emerging Adults,” 112–24.

¹²⁹ Larry G. Linderman, “The Relationship between Intergenerational Ministry Practices and Church Health” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 13, 100–105. In his quest to identify the relationship between intergenerational ministry characteristics and church health, Linderman discovered that churches that intentionally integrated intergenerational ministry practices by bringing multiple generations together in worship, service, and discipleship demonstrated stronger overall church health. He defined church health using William Day’s definition as “the process in a local congregation of obeying the Great Commission and Great Commandments in a unique setting through being biblically based, spiritually dynamic, mission-focused, servant-led, and characterized by excellence in all that it does as a local body of believers.”

involved in their lives are more likely to remain connected to the church and thrive in their faith, even after graduation.¹³¹ In a study of 18 to 22-year-olds conducted by Baylor Whitney, one of the respondents indicated that his relationship with adults was one of three factors that kept him engaged in the church.¹³²

Linderman's research revealed that churches intentionally practicing intergenerational ministry by bringing generations together in worship, service, and discipleship scored higher in overall vitality, with generational diversity positively correlated to spiritual growth and relational connectedness.¹³³ Mason found that mentoring relationships with older adults and integration into broader congregational life fostered resilience and identity formation.¹³⁴ Mason's qualitative study complements Linderman's findings by showing that intergenerational youth ministry enhances Christian maturity and church engagement among high school students.¹³⁵ These studies reveal that intergenerational mentoring is not an optional strategy but an essential component of sustaining faith commitment.

¹³⁰ Earls, "Most Teenagers Drop Out."

¹³¹ Franklin, "What Is Youth Ministry?"

¹³² Whitney, "Factors Leading to Student Ministry," 102. Whitney conducted a phenomenological study to identify factors that contributed to post-student-ministry retention among young adults who participated in student ministry at a Southern Baptist church with an average attendance of two hundred or more. Whitney found that multigenerational relationships, intentional discipleship, and service opportunities were strongly associated with post-student-ministry retention.

¹³³ Linderman, "Intergenerational Ministry Practices," 204–11.

¹³⁴ Mason, "A Qualitative Study," 190–92.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85–90.

Emerging adults want to be heard. They seek a place where they feel connected and where space is provided for them. The church should incorporate an intergenerational mentoring model intentionally so that continuity can occur and emerging adults can be equipped with tools to use in their faith formation journey, which might influence their decision to stay engaged in the church after high school.

Conclusion

Emerging adulthood encompasses a period during which emerging adults must overcome various hurdles. Emerging adulthood is also a time when emerging adults must make essential decisions, such as being engaged in the church. However, the foundation laid during their middle and high school years, through student ministries, can either make or mar their decisions to remain engaged with the church. This chapter explored the biblical foundations that support factors essential during the middle and high school years that will influence student' decisions to remain engaged with the church. The factors are discipleship activities, parental engagement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships during middle and high school within the youth ministry.

This chapter illustrates that developing the spiritual lives of children and adolescents is a multifaceted endeavor that requires the involvement of the parents, the church, and influential adults. Therefore, emerging adults' decisions to remain engaged with the church are shaped by the experiences they encounter during the middle and high school years. Parents, pastors, and youth leaders can provide them with those experiences.

The next chapter will examine the research design and methodology. It will describe the participants involved in the study and outline the survey instruments used to gather data. In addition, the chapter will detail the procedures for data collection. Finally, it will explain the methods used to analyze the data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors during middle and high school years that influence emerging adults' decisions to remain involved in church after high school graduation. This study is structured to identify and analyze specific elements, such as discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships that contribute to continual church involvement among emerging adults. By focusing on the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, the scope of this study is to understand how the experiences shaped during their formative years significantly impact their long-term church involvement.

This research acknowledges that emerging adults face challenges in navigating important life decisions, including their connection to the church. However, this research emphasizes the critical role that churches, parents, and adults in positions of influence play in fostering spiritual growth and supportive environments for emerging adults during their middle and high school years. Ultimately, this research will highlight the importance of implementing the factors identified in this study that churches and parents can implement to provide a good foundation and support for the faith-forming journeys of emerging adults and encourage ongoing participation in the church after high school.

Hence, this chapter provides the research methodology used to identify these factors. The research process, including participants, survey instruments, data collection, and analysis, is described below.

Participants

According to the 2023–2024 data obtained by the Pew Research Center, of all the 67 percent of Christians in Georgia, 33 percent are Evangelical Protestants.¹ According to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), the following statements identify research participants as evangelical as defined by NAE and LifeWay research:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.²

Because Evangelical churches must hold these beliefs to be classified as evangelical, participants for this study were recruited from denominational and nondenominational evangelical churches

¹ “Religious Landscape Study | People in Georgia,” Pew Research Center, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/state/georgia/>.

² National Association of Evangelicals, “What Is an Evangelical?” “NAE LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition,” LifeWay Research Biblical Solutions for Life, 1, accessed December 19, 2025, <https://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NAE-LifeWay-Research-Evangelical-Beliefs-Research-Definition-Methodology-and-Use.pdf>.

in Georgia. These congregations represent a range of evangelical traditions that affirm the core doctrinal commitments required for inclusion in the study. Their shared theological foundations ensured that the participant pool aligned with the study's criteria.

In addition to being current members of Georgia Evangelical churches, the participants must have attended a Georgia Evangelical church during middle and high school as members of a youth group. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the factors from middle and high school that influenced their continued involvement in church during emerging adulthood in a Georgia Evangelical church. As such, participants must meet the criteria for membership in a Georgia Evangelical church during emerging adulthood and prior to it.

Survey Instruments

This survey utilized two instruments, which are the Fuller Youth Institute's Religious Behavior Scale (RBS) and the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS), to assess the frequency of engagement in a variety of corporate and individual behaviors and identify some reasons that emerging adults continue in church attendance after high school, respectively.³ In addition to these standardized measures, the survey included items designed to capture participants' reflections in their own words. The respondents also answered two open-ended questions added to the survey.⁴

³ Kara Eckmann Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 205–6; and Wesley Black, "The Search for Lasting Faith: Development of a Scale to Predict Continued Faithfulness in Church Attendance Following High School Graduation," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 53–68. Appendix A; and appendix B.

⁴ Appendix C.

Fuller Youth Institute Religious Behavior Scale

The Fuller Youth Institute's Religious Behavior Scale was developed by the Fuller Youth Institute, then known as the Center for Youth and Family Ministry, as part of a pilot research study, the College Transition Project (CTP).⁵ In 2004, they initiated the CTP which is comprised of four separate initiatives: They surveyed 69 college students who were alumni of a single youth group in the Northwest; they performed two three-year longitudinal studies of high school seniors during their first three years in college, involving 162 and 227 students; and they interviewed 45 former youth group graduates between two and four years beyond high school graduation.⁶ Based on the initial CTP, the Fuller Youth Institute has completed two additional nationwide studies.⁷ The Religious Behavior scale includes items assessing the regularity of engagement in various corporate and individual behaviors, such as "pray alone," "participate in a small group of your peers for religious or spiritual purposes," "attend a worship service or church-related event," and "read your Bible by yourself."⁸ Respondents were to select from a six-point scale ranging from less than once a month (1) to once a day or more (6).⁹ These response options provided a consistent framework for quantifying participants' patterns of spiritual practice.

⁵ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 199.

⁶ Ibid.; and "Sticky Faith Research," Fuller Youth Institute, accessed December 19, 2025, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith/research>.

⁷ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 199.

⁸ Ibid.; and appendix A.

⁹ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 202.

Lasting Faith Scale

The Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) was developed from a 2004 study on the faith journey of young adults. To validate the survey, they surveyed 1,362 young adults ages 18–30 in a qualitative and quantitative study, analyzed the results, performed pilot tests using 121 teenagers, obtained feedback from a panel of experts, and then conducted reliability testing.¹⁰ To determine the reliability of the instrument, the internal consistency reliability was measured using item-total analysis, correlating every item with the total score. The alpha for the Lasting Scale across two testing periods with 30 items was .869 and .867 for sample sizes of 481 and 463, respectively.¹¹ The Lasting Faith Scale comprises a thirty-item scale measured with a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (NO!) (1) to strongly agree (YES!) (6).¹² Items 4, 5, and 6 will be reverse scored. The theoretical framework for the LFS is

- Discipleship and spiritual depth (code D), items 1–8
- Family influence (code F), items 9–16
- Mentoring and intergenerational influences (code M), items 17–22
- Relationships influence (code R), items 23–30¹³

For this research, questions 1–22 were used. Questions 23–30 examined the relationship influences of friends. However, the influence of friends is not studied here.¹⁴

¹⁰ Black, “Search for Lasting Faith,” 55–56; and appendix B.

¹¹ Black, “Search for Lasting Faith,” 59.

¹² Ibid., 56–58.

¹³ Ibid., 63–65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 63.

Wesley Allen Sirles used the Lasting Faith Scale to compare the lasting faith tendency of youth (reflected by their LFS scores) with what their youth ministers believed would be their groups' LFS scores.¹⁵ Sirles's study highlighted that discipleship and spiritual depth, family influence, mentoring and intergenerational relationships, and peer connections were influential in enhancing lasting faith. However, the study found discrepancies between the perceptions of youth ministers and the actual patterns of youth church involvement after high school.¹⁶

The Religious Behavior Scale and the Lasting Faith Scale are valuable tools for this study. The Religious Behavior Scale is comprised of items assessing the frequency of engagement in specific behaviors among emerging adults and provides information about their current spiritual well-being. The Lasting Faith Scale comprises items designed to assess factors contributing to long-term commitment to the faith. This instrument helped determine whether any of those factors were influential in the emerging adults' continued involvement in the church.

Prior to utilizing the survey instruments, permission was obtained from the author. Wesley Black provided permission to use the Lasting Faith Scale and to modify it as needed.¹⁷ The modification to the LFS was to remove questions 23–30 from the survey administered to research participants, as those questions are not required for the completion of this study. In

¹⁵ Wesley Allen Sirles, "The Accuracy of Youth Ministers' Conception of the Lasting Faith Tendency of Youth" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁶ Ibid., 121–27.

¹⁷ Appendix D; and appendix E.

addition, the Fuller Youth Institute granted permission to use the Religious Behavior Scale for this study.¹⁸

Open-Ended Questions

The participants were given two optional open-ended questions to provide, in their own words, information about the factors they believed were influential in their retention at a Georgia Evangelical church. The questions are,

1. What are some experiences, relationships, or church activities in middle and high school that have helped you remain involved in church life?
2. How have discipleship, mentoring relationships, or church activities in high school carried over to your present day? Please be specific about the factors.

Upon completing the anonymous survey, respondents were directed to provide their contact information if they wished to participate in a drawing for one of three \$75 Amazon gift cards.¹⁹

The research was conducted entirely using Google Forms.

Data Collection Procedure

To recruit respondents for the research survey, a member of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board was contacted, who then forwarded the email to several young adult pastors of Southern Baptist churches in Georgia. The contact information of the pastors was not shared with the researcher for privacy reasons. Other evangelical Baptist churches that are not affiliated with the Georgia mission board received emails to recruit their emerging adults to participate in the study.

¹⁸ Appendix F.

¹⁹ Appendix G.

To reach pastors in the North and South Georgia Conferences of the Methodist churches, an online database was used to obtain their contact information and then sent emails to them.²⁰ In addition, an online database was used to obtain the names and contact information of pastors of churches within the Presbyterian Church in America division and sent emails to them.²¹ Additionally, the lead pastors and/or young adult pastors of both denominational and nondenominational Evangelical churches were contacted. Emails were sent to 352 Georgia Evangelical churches, including Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and other denominational and nondenominational Evangelical churches.

The survey was sent to the lead pastor and/or the young adult ministry pastors of the Georgia Evangelical churches.²² The pastors assisted in disseminating the survey to emerging adults in their respective ministries who met the study criteria. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study is that participants must be between the ages of 18 and 25, have regularly attended youth ministry at an evangelical church during middle and high school, and currently attend church.

The cover letter introducing the research project and detailing what the research study entailed was sent to the pastors. Attached to the letter sent to the pastors was the consent form for participation in the study. The link to complete the research survey via Google Forms was

²⁰ “UMData | Churches,” accessed December 19, 2025, <https://www.umdataby.org/churches?churchName=&gcfaNumber=&city=&state=51&zip=&conf=all&dist=allð=all&status=false>.

²¹ “Presbyteryportal.Pcanet.Org/Ac/Directory,” accessed August 18, 2025, <https://presbyteryportal.pcanet.org/ac/directory>.

²² Appendix H.

embedded in the consent form, which the emerging adults clicked on to begin the study. Clicking the link indicated that the emerging adult consented to participate in the study.²³ Participants completed a demographic survey to determine their eligibility to participate.²⁴ Participants who met the inclusion criteria proceeded to complete the study. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were directed to exit the survey. The study employed a mixed-methods design, including quantitative items and two open-ended free text questions.

Approximately one month later, after a few responses had been received, the pastors of the previously contacted evangelical churches received another email reminding them to recruit their emerging adults to participate in the study.²⁵ All correspondence reminded pastors that, if their emerging adults provided their email address in a separate Google Form, they would be eligible to win a \$75 Amazon gift card. The researcher personally made several phone calls to pastors and young adult pastors to solicit participation from their emerging adults in the study.

The statistical and contextual sample size for this study is a minimum of 90 responses. The proposed sample was methodologically appropriate for the scope and aims of this study, thereby ensuring the possibility of obtaining statistically significant results. Following the guidance of Booth et al., the sample size for the study was justified by its capacity to provide sufficient, relevant evidence to support the claims of the study.²⁶

²³ Appendix I.

²⁴ Appendix J.

²⁵ Appendix K.

²⁶ Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed., Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 139.

All the data collected via Google Forms was downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. All survey entries were reviewed and entered into the statistical software for analysis. Also, incomplete surveys were entered, but were excluded by the statistical analysis tool, subsequently.

The research study process adhered to the governing principle that provides direction for the research, including approval by the NOBTS Institutional Review Board.²⁷ Confidentiality was maintained by not obtaining participants' identities. The email addresses obtained for the drawing were not linked to the survey responses.

Data Analysis Procedure

This section describes the data analysis procedure. A mixed-methods approach was used in this study. This section describes the procedures for both quantitative and qualitative analyses. It also outlines how the two strands were integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Quantitative Analysis

The analysis procedure for the survey instruments is based on the Likert-style survey model. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The IBM SPSS Statistics version 29.0.2.0 software was used.²⁸ Data analysis included descriptive statistics to include the mean, standard deviation, range of scores, skewness, and kurtosis to

²⁷ Booth et al., 82; and appendix L: IRB Approval Letter.

²⁸ IBM Group, *IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows*, v. 29.0.2.0, Armonk: IBM Corp., released 2023.

describe the characteristics of the sample that participated in the study and detect any errors in the data—and discover any scores that are out of range.²⁹

The research hypotheses that guided this research are as follows. Together, these hypotheses provided a structured framework for examining the factors that contribute to emerging adults' ongoing faith engagement. They also ensured alignment between the study's research questions, methodological approach, and analytical strategy.

H₁: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₁: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years have no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{1a}: A positive relationship exists between discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H₂: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₂: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{2a}: A positive relationship exists between parental involvement in their spiritual development while in middle and high school and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

²⁹ Julie Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step-by-Step Guide to Data Analysis Using IBM SPSS*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 43, 53.

H₃: Intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₃: Intergenerational mentoring relationship during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{3a}: A positive relationship exists between the intergenerational mentoring relationship during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Before testing the hypotheses, the flowchart developed by Neil J. Salkind and Bruce B. Frey was followed to identify the appropriate statistical test for the quantitative data.³⁰ This process ensured that each hypothesis was matched with the most rigorous and methodologically sound analytic procedure.

The study showed that discipleship activities experienced during middle and high school would significantly and positively predict current Religious Behavior Scale scores among emerging adults. Parental involvement in the participant's spiritual development during middle and high school would significantly and positively predict their current Religious Behavior Scale scores. Intergenerational mentoring relationships established during middle and high school will significantly and positively predict current Religious Behavior Scale scores. The corresponding null hypotheses (H₀₁, H₀₂, H₀₃) state that no statistically significant relationships are significant and are positive.

³⁰ Neil J. Salkind and Bruce B. Frey, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2020), 177–78.

The qualitative component of this mixed-methods study was exploratory. Therefore, no hypotheses were developed for the open-ended questions. Instead, qualitative research questions guided the thematic analysis.

Hypothesis 1

The purpose of Hypothesis 1 was to determine whether a relationship existed between the RBS and LFS questions 1–8. This hypothesis required a statistical test to assess the relationship between the Religious Behavior Scale and discipleship activities engaged in during the middle and high school years, as measured by questions 1–8 of the LFS.

Hypothesis 2

The purpose of Hypothesis 2 was to determine whether a relationship existed between the RBS and LFS questions 9–16. This hypothesis required a statistical test to assess the relationship between the Religious Behavior Scale and parental involvement in their spiritual development during the middle and high school years, as measured by questions 9–16 of the LFS.

Hypothesis 3

The purpose of Hypothesis 3 was to determine whether a relationship existed between the RBS and LFS questions 17–22. This hypothesis required a statistical test to assess the relationship between the Religious Behavior Scale and intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during the middle and high school years, as measured by questions 17–22 of the LFS.

The study design required assessing relationships among variables through multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression “is a family of techniques that can be used to explore the

relationship between one continuous, dependent variable and a set of independent variables.”³¹

The assumptions required for the multiple regression test are, (1) the data have one dependent continuous variable, (2) the data have at least two independent variables, (3) the residuals should be normally distributed about the predicted dependent variable scores, (4) the residuals should have a straight line relationship with predicted dependent variable scores, and (5) the variance of the residuals around predicted dependent variables scores should be the same for all predicted scores.³²

This study had one dependent variable—RBS—and three independent variables: discipleship activities, parental involvement, and an intergenerational mentoring relationship. The multiple regression “can tell how well a set of variables is able to predict a particular outcome.”³³ The standard multiple regression analysis requires checking for multicollinearity and singularity among the independent variables. “Multicollinearity exists when the independent variables are highly correlated ($r = .7$ and above). Singularity occurs when one independent variable is a combination of other independent variables.”³⁴

The data were assessed for normality by examining whether the model was normally distributed. The data was also checked for linearity—the relationship between the dependent and independent variables should be linear. To ensure that the observations are independent of one

³¹ Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual*, 153.

³² Ibid., 119, 156.

³³ Ibid., 153.

³⁴ Ibid., 155.

another, the independence of residuals was assessed. Additionally, homoscedasticity was assessed to ensure that the variance of the residuals is consistent across all levels of the independent variables.³⁵ The multiple regression analysis then was performed.

Multiple regression is used to assess the predictive ability of a set of independent variables for a single continuous dependent variable.³⁶ After conducting a multiple regression analysis in SPSS, the coefficients for each independent variable were examined to assess their influence on the dependent variable and determine whether the relationships were positive or negative. In addition, the *p* values were assessed for statistical significance and the R^2 value to observe how much variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.³⁷ An independent sample *t* test was performed to examine differences between males and females.³⁸

For this study, the dependent variable is retention among emerging adults in the church, measured by the RBS. The independent variables are discipleship activities (LFS 1–8), parental involvement (LFS 9–16), and intergenerational mentoring relationships (LFS 17–22).

Multiple Regression Formula

$$Y\phi = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3$$

³⁵ Ibid., 156.

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 147, 163.

³⁸ Ibid., 110.

Religious Behavior Scale score = $b_0 + b_1(\text{Discipleship activities}) + b_2(\text{Parental involvement}) + b_3(\text{Intergenerational mentoring relationships})$

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research utilizes coding to make meaning of data. The participants were asked two open-ended questions at the end of the quantitative section of the survey. Their responses to the two open-ended questions were analyzed using ATLAS.ti Web to transcribe and generate initial codes.³⁹ The participants' responses were entered into two separate Word documents. The Word documents then were imported separately into ATLAS.ti (Version 25), organizing, coding, and interpreting the responses. Each document was assigned to a document group based on responses to the two open-ended questions for comparative analysis.

All transcripts in ATLAS.ti were reviewed to identify patterns. Analytic memos were created to capture emerging insights. Open coding was conducted inductively in ATLAS.ti afterward to highlight meaningful text segments and assign descriptive codes that reflected participants' statements. As coding progressed, the code list was reviewed and refined by merging overlapping codes, splitting broad codes, and renaming categories for clarity. ATLAS.ti's coding tools supported organizing related codes into hierarchical categories and exploring relationships among them. Themes were developed through iterative comparison of coded segments, examination of themes occurring together, and continued memo writing to document analytic decisions. Throughout the process, the ATLAS.ti platform was used to

³⁹ *ATLAS.Ti Scientific Software Development GmbH*, v. 25, ATLAS.Ti, Berlin, released 2025, computer program, <https://atlasti.com/>.

maintain an audit trail, organize the data, and generate a thematic structure that informed the findings from the study.

Integration

Integration in this mixed-methods study occurred at both the methodological and interpretive levels to connect quantitative hypotheses with qualitative research questions and to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.⁴⁰ The quantitative portion tested the hypotheses for this study using survey data analyzed in SPSS. The qualitative portion examined participants' open-ended responses through thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti. An analysis of each component separately led to a synthesis of the results through a side-by-side comparison to assess how the qualitative themes supported, explained, or expanded the quantitative findings. Consistent with the mixed-methods approach described by Darshini Ayton, Tess Tsindos, and Danielle Berkovic, this integrative process at both the methodological and interpretive levels enabled the qualitative themes to contextualize and explain the statistical patterns identified in the quantitative results. The final integration occurred in the discussion chapter. The intersections, discrepancies, and complementary insights were synthesized to ensure that the strengths of each method contributed to a fuller, more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

⁴⁰ Darshini Ayton, Tess Tsindos, and Danielle Berkovic, *Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Health and Social Care Researchers and Practitioners* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Library, 2023), 46.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to examine how emerging adults' reported youth ministry experiences, as measured by the Lasting Faith Scale during their middle and high school years, compare with their current faith practices reflected in the Religious Behavior Scale scores. The LFS scale was evaluated on three domains of influence: discipleship practices, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships. The participants were emerging adults ages 18–25 who had attended a Georgia Evangelical church while in middle or high school and who were current members of a Georgia Evangelical church.

Compilation Protocol

The data for this study were collected virtually using Google Forms. This method was chosen because of its efficiency in reaching participants and facilitating responses. The data collection process took approximately three months, allowing for ample time to engage with participants and encourage responses. The target population for this research consisted of emerging adults ages 18–25 who had attended a Georgia Evangelical church during their middle or high school years and were currently members of a Georgia Evangelical church.

A structured survey was developed, incorporating Likert-type scale questions to assess responses related to the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) and the Religious Behavior Scale (RBS). The survey also included two open-ended questions to gather qualitative insights. Upon completion

of the survey period, all data collected via Google Forms were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Each survey entry was reviewed for completeness and accuracy before entering it into the statistical analysis software. Incomplete survey submissions were included initially in the dataset but were excluded subsequently during the analysis using SPSS. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity in their responses. No identifying information was collected in the survey to protect the privacy of participants. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, ensuring that all research activities conformed to ethical standards.

The emails were sent to pastors and young adult pastors of churches of varying sizes. Three hundred and fifty-two emails were sent; seven bounced and were not delivered. The email generated 106 responses from the emerging adults. Fourteen respondents did not meet the eligibility criteria for the study and were prompted to exit the survey. Ninety-two valid responses were used for the analysis. The sample size met the requirement of thirty responses per variable, given that this study used three variables.

Participant Demographics

A total of 92 emerging adults completed the survey, although 106 EAs started the study. The first question asked whether they were current members of a Georgia Evangelical church. One hundred respondents stated “yes,” and six stated “no.” The six participants were ineligible to continue completing the survey.

Are you currently attending a Georgia Evangelical Church?

106 responses



Figure 1. Current Georgia Evangelical church attendance

Respondents who answered “yes” to the above question were asked to indicate which Georgia Evangelical church they currently attended. Forty-six indicated they currently attended a nondenominational evangelical church, thirty-eight indicated they currently attended a Baptist church. Eighteen indicated that they currently attended a denominational Evangelical church. One indicated current attendance at a Methodist church, and another indicated attendance at a Presbyterian church. Two respondents answered “no” to the question above.

If yes, select which one

106 responses

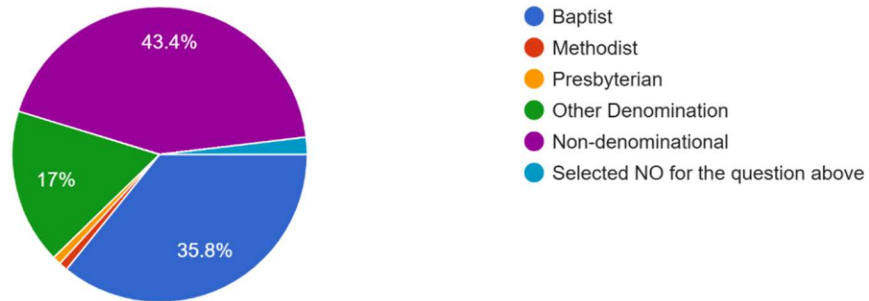


Figure 2. Current Evangelical Church

The next question asked whether they attended a Georgia Evangelical church during middle and high school. This item helped establish whether participants had continuous exposure to an evangelical environment during their formative years.

Did you attend a Georgia Evangelical Church during middle and/or high school?

100 responses

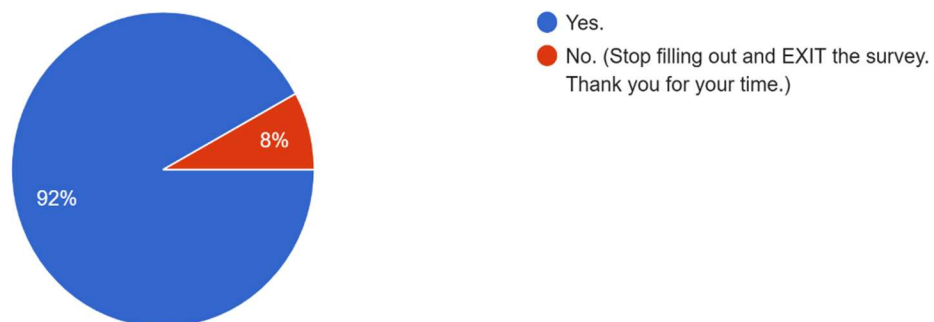


Figure 3. Middle/high school Evangelical church attendance

Respondents who answered yes to the above question were asked to indicate which Georgia Evangelical church they attended during middle and high school. Forty-one indicated they attended a Baptist church. Thirty indicated that they attended a nondenominational Evangelical church. Nineteen indicated that they attended a denominational Evangelical church. Two indicated that they attended a Methodist church, and another indicated that they attended a Presbyterian church. Seven respondents answered “no” to the question above and therefore could not continue with the study. One respondent selected a denominational Evangelical church but did not complete the study. Ninety-two EAs were able to complete the study.

If yes, select which one
100 responses

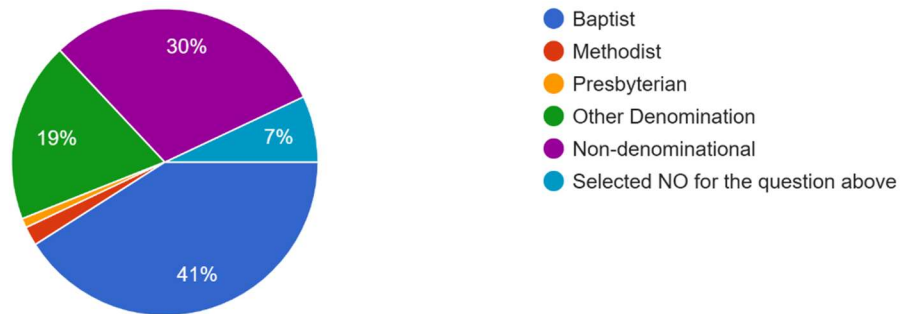


Figure 4. Evangelical church attended in middle and high school

The demographic questions for the survey included gender, participants' age, living arrangements, the parent most closely identified with, the most respected parent for spiritual matters, and views about Jesus Christ. Of the ninety-two eligible respondents, fifty-eight (63%) were female, and thirty-four (37%) were male.

Check your gender
92 responses

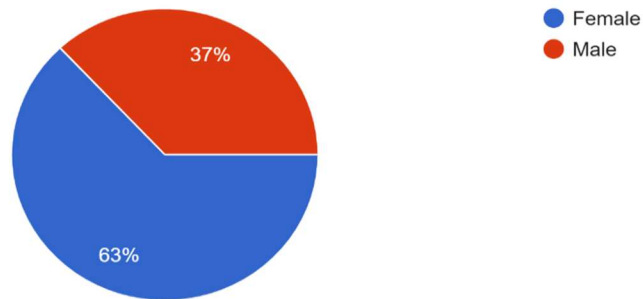


Figure 5. Gender

Eligibility for participation in the study was 18–25 years, and respondents were required to self-report their age. Ten were 18 years old. Nine were 19 years old. Twenty-nine were 20 years old. Eight were 21 years old. Nine were 22 years old. Thirteen were 23 years old. Five were 24 years old. Nine were 25 years old.

Table 1. Participants' Ages

Age	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
18	10	10.9	10.9
19	9	9.8	20.7
20	29	31.5	52.2
21	8	8.7	60.9
22	9	9.8	70.7
23	13	14.1	84.8

Age	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
24	5	5.4	90.2
25	9	9.8	100.0
Total	92	86.8	

Lasting Faith Scale—About Me

The following four demographic questions are part of the Lasting Faith Scale. The respondents were asked to indicate which parent they lived with most of the time while in middle and high school. Sixty-seven indicated living with both mother and father. Thirteen indicated living with their mother only. Nine respondents indicated living with both mother and stepfather. Two indicated living with their Grandparent(s), Foster parent(s), etc., while one indicated living with their father only. No one indicated living with their father and stepmother.

Table 2. Living Arrangement

With whom did you live most of the time while in middle/high school?	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Both mother and father	67	72.8	72.8
Mother only	13	14.1	87.0
Father only	1	1.1	88.0
Mother and stepfather	9	9.8	97.8
Other (grandparent(s), foster parent(s), etc.	2	2.2	100.0
Total	92	100.0	

The next question asked the respondents which parent they most closely identified with in middle and high school. Forty indicated their mother. Thirty-four indicated that both parents were equally involved. Eleven of the respondents indicated their father, while seven indicated neither parent.

Table 3. Parent Most Closely Identified With

Which parent did you most closely identify with?	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Both parents equally	34	37.0	37.0
Mother	40	43.5	80.4
Father	11	12.0	92.4
Neither parent	7	7.6	100.0
Total	92	100.0	

Respondents then were asked to indicate the parent whom they most respected regarding spiritual matters during middle and high school. Thirty-five indicated that they respected both parents equally regarding spiritual matters. Thirty-four indicated their mother. Fourteen of the respondents indicated their father, while nine indicated neither parent.

Table 4. Parent Most Respected Regarding Spiritual Matters

Which parent did you most respect regarding spiritual matters?	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
Both parents equally	35	38.0	38.0
Mother	34	37.0	75.0
Father	14	15.0	90.2
Neither parent	9	9.8	100.0
Total	92	100.0	

In addition, respondents were asked about their views on Jesus Christ. Forty indicated that Jesus is their personal savior. Thirty-seven indicated that Jesus is the Son of God. Eleven indicated that Jesus is an example to follow. Four indicated that they had no meaningful relationship with Jesus.

Table 5. View on Jesus

When you thought about Jesus Christ, you identified him primarily as?	Frequency	Valid %	Cumulative %
An example to be followed	11	12.0	12.0
The Son of God	37	40.2	52.2
My personal savior	40	43.5	95.7
No meaningful relationship	4	4.3	100.0
Total	92	100.0	

Religious Behavior Scale

The dependent variable is emerging adults' church involvement measured by the Religious Behavior Scale (RBS). The questions assessed the religious behaviors of the EAs. The Fuller Institute originally used the religious behavior items for congregational assessment. The Fuller Institute RBS consisted of eleven Likert-type questions (0 = *less than once a month*, 1 = *about once a month*, 2 = *about 2–3 times a month*, 3 = *about once a week*, 4 = *2–3 times a week*, and 5 = *Daily*). Using SPSS, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the engagement of emerging adults in these practices. The RBS consists of the following questions.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Frequency of Religious Practices

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How often did you talk with another person about your faith, outside of a church related context?	2.88	1.474
How often did you participate in an on-campus Christian fellowship?	2.62	2.064
How often did you pray alone?	4.39	1.157
How often did you attend a worship service or other event at a church off campus?	2.47	1.558
How often did you speak or try to speak with a non-Christian about your faith?	2.00	1.651
How often did you volunteer your time to serve others?	2.50	1.757
How often did you participate in a small group of your peers for religious or spiritual purposes?	2.68	1.735

Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How often did you read your Bible by yourself?	3.75	1.752
How often did you attend a school-sponsored chapel?	3.14	2.691
How often did you meet with an older Christian for spiritual growth, mentoring, or discipleship?	2.21	1.936
How often did you participate in service or justice work that helps people in need?	2.01	1.924

Note: $N = 92$.

As shown in table 6, emerging adults reported the highest frequency for private prayer ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.157$) and personal devotion ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.752$). The least frequently practiced activities were sharing their faith ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.651$) and service to others ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.924$). Overall, the results suggest that the emerging adults in this study engaged more consistently in private, individualized expressions of faith than in sharing their faith and serving others.

Internal Consistency Reliability

A Cronbach's Alpha test for the RBS demonstrated that the eleven frequency items have acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.849$). According to Julie Pallant, Cronbach's Alpha values above .7 are considered acceptable and .8 are preferable.¹ This level of reliability indicates that the items consistently measure the same underlying construct. As a result, the RBS frequency scale can be interpreted with confidence in subsequent analyses.

¹ Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual*, 105.

Table 7. RBS Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Religious Behavior Scale	.849	11

Note: $N = 92$.

Item-total statistics were examined to evaluate the internal consistency of the Religious Behavior Scale. The overall reliability of the scale was strong ($\alpha = 0.849$). Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.403 to 0.722, indicating that most items demonstrated moderate to strong relationships with the total scale score. The lower end of this range (0.403) still reflects a moderate and acceptable contribution to the construct, while the higher correlations suggest particularly strong alignment with the overall scale. Examination of the “Cronbach’s alpha if item deleted” values showed no meaningful improvement in reliability if any item were removed. Therefore, all items were retained for subsequent analyses.

Table 8. Item-Total Statistics

Question	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
How often did you talk with another person about your faith, outside of a church related context	27.77	137.629	.628	.832
How often did you participate in an on-campus Christian fellowship?	28.03	130.406	.569	.834

Question	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
How often did you pray alone?	26.26	145.404	.529	.840
How often did you attend a worship service or other event at a church off campus?	28.18	143.075	.429	.844
How often did you speak or try to speak with a non-Christian about your faith?	28.65	136.295	.583	.833
How often did you volunteer your time to serve others?	28.15	134.526	.586	.833
How often did you participate in a small group of your peers for religious or spiritual purposes?	27.97	129.944	.722	.822
How often did you read your Bible by yourself?	26.90	135.716	.557	.835
How often did you attend a school-sponsored chapel?	27.51	122.099	.541	.842
How often did you meet with an older Christian for spiritual growth, mentoring, or discipleship?	28.45	135.766	.487	.841
How often did you participate in service or justice work that helps people in need?	28.64	139.463	.403	.848

Note: $N = 92$.

The frequencies and skewness of the RBS were assessed. The RBS demonstrated a minimal skewness (skewness = -0.219, $SE = 0.251$). Because the absolute skewness value was less than twice its standard error, the distribution was considered approximately normal and showed no significant deviation from symmetry.

Table 9. RBS Descriptive Statistics

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	<i>SES</i>
RBS	30.65	12.708	-.219	.251

Note: $N = 92$.

Figure 6 below shows the distribution of the Religious Behavior Scale.

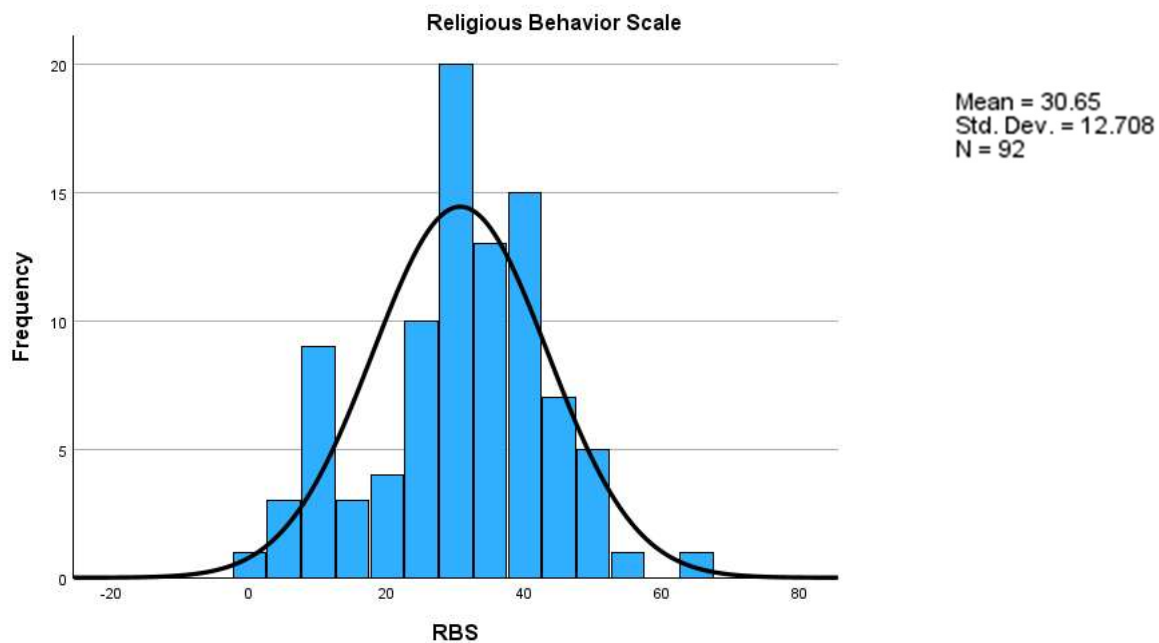


Figure 6. Religious Behavior Scale (RBS).

Lasting Faith Scale

As noted earlier, the Lasting Faith Scale was modified to meet the purposes of this research, with permission from Wesley Black.² The Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) was the primary instrument used to assess participants' long-term faith commitment. The instrument assessed three subscales that served as the independent variables in this study: discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships. Responses were measured using a Likert-type format, allowing for the correlation with the Religious Behavior Scale. The results of these analyses are presented below.

The descriptive statistics for the three Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) subscales, Discipleship Activity, Parental Involvement, and Intergenerational Mentoring, indicate generally high levels of engagement among participants, with distributions that approximate normality.

Table 10. LFS Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness
Discipleship Activity	20.20	3.943	-.378
Parental Involvement	25.91	9.500	-.245
Intergenerational Mentoring	23.38	4.523	-.519

Note: $N = 92$. $SES = .251$.

² Appendix E.

Discipleship Activity

Participants reported a relatively high level of personal discipleship behaviors ($M = 20.20$, $SD = 3.94$). The skewness value ($-.378$) was less than twice its standard error ($.251$), indicating no significant deviation from normality. Most respondents engaged consistently in discipleship practices such as prayer, Bible reading, and worship attendance, as suggested by these findings. Only a slight clustering toward higher scores occurred. The distribution, as shown in figure 7, is approximately normal and exhibits no significant deviation from symmetry.

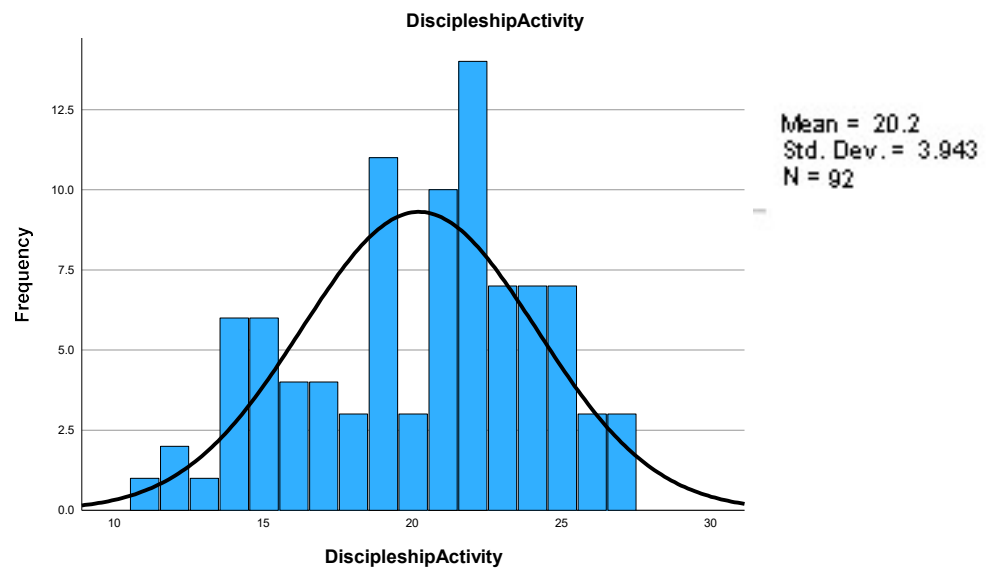


Figure 7. Discipleship activity

Parental Involvement

Scores for parental influence were also high ($M = 25.91$, $SD = 9.50$), although they showed greater variability than the other subscales. The skewness value (-0.245) fell well within

the acceptable limits relative to its standard error (0.251), indicating an approximately normal distribution. These results suggest that many participants experienced strong parental support for their faith. The distribution, as shown in figure 8, is approximately normal and exhibits no significant deviation from symmetry.

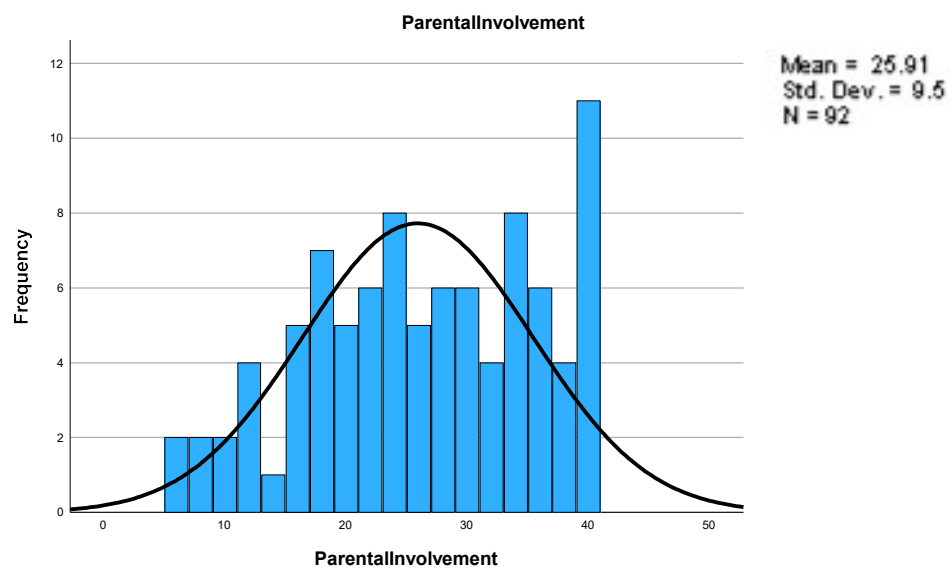


Figure 8. Parental involvement

Intergenerational Mentoring Relationship

Intergenerational mentoring also showed a strong mean score ($M = 23.38$, $SD = 4.52$). The skewness value (-0.519), although slightly more pronounced, remained below twice the standard error (0.251), indicating no significant skew. Most participants reported positive relationships with non-parental adults in the church who contributed to their spiritual

development, as suggested by these findings. The distribution, as shown in figure 9, is approximately normal and exhibits no significant deviation from symmetry.

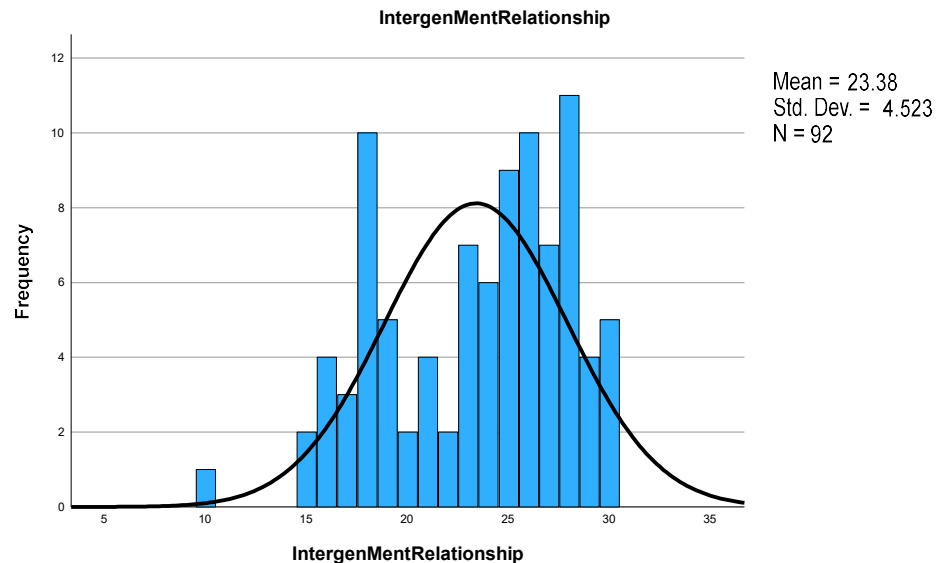


Figure 9. Intergenerational mentoring relationship

Across all three LFS subscales, participants showed high engagement in discipleship practices, parental faith involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships. All skewness values fell within acceptable limits relative to their standard errors, indicating that each subscale has an approximately normal distribution. These results support the suitability of the LFS subscales for subsequent parametric analyses and suggest that the sample generally reported strong indicators of lasting faith.

Following a review of the descriptive statistics for the LFS subscales, the next step was to evaluate the properties of the independent variables and their relationships. Reliability testing

was conducted first to confirm the internal consistency of the subscales in the current sample. Once reliability was established, correlation analyses were performed to examine the associations among discipleship activity, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships. The associations were interrelated, offering insight into broader patterns of influence that contribute to lasting faith and continued church involvement. In addition, the correlation analyses assessed the strength and direction of associations between the LFS subscales and the RBS.

Internal Consistency Reliability

Discipleship Activities

Upon assessment of the initial internal consistency reliability for the discipleship activities, a Cronbach's alpha of .380 was obtained, as shown in table 11. Such a low value reveals poor internal consistency in the scale used to measure discipleship activities. Three reverse-coded items demonstrated low means and were different from the other items, potentially introducing measurement error.

Table 11. Cronbach's Alpha for Discipleship Activities

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's standardized alpha	Number of items
Discipleship activities	.380	.326	8

Item-total statistics confirmed that these items had correlations with overall scale. The item-total statistics table. The item-total statistics table below shows the extent to which each

item contributed to the overall scale. Five items demonstrated acceptable positive correlations with the overall scale ($r = .299-.543$), indicating that they contributed meaningfully to the measurement of discipleship activities. However, three reverse-coded items—“I don’t think about God much outside of church or youth group,” “If it were completely up to me... I would attend church or youth group activities LESS often,” and “The people at my church do not allow me to think for myself”—showed negative corrected item-total correlations ($-.161$, $-.301$, and $-.185$, respectively), suggesting that these items did not align with the underlying construct and were functioning inconsistently within the scale.

Table 12. Item-Total Statistics for Discipleship Activities

Question	Scale Mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach’s alpha if item deleted
I often had the opportunity to use my skills and talents to help out in my church or youth group.	16.67	11.299	.299	.267
Most of my decisions are based on what I believe God wants me to do with my life.	16.40	10.946	.543	.168
I enjoy reading the Bible outside of church.	16.60	10.507	.478	.169
I don’t think about God much outside of church or youth group.	19.63	15.862	-.161	.469

Question	Scale Mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
If it were completely up to me and my parents did not care, I would attend church or youth group activities LESS often than I do now.	19.58	17.038	-.301	.527
The people at my church do not allow me to think for myself.	19.47	15.966	-.185	.495
I often talk to a Christian friend about my faith.	16.66	10.951	.308	.257
The sermons in our church and or youth group mean a lot to me.	16.36	11.068	.393	.220

The “Cronbach’s alpha if item deleted” values further confirmed that removing any of these reverse-coded items increased the overall reliability of the subscale, whereas removing positively worded items decreased reliability. These findings indicate that the reverse-coded items weakened internal consistency and, therefore, were removed from the final analysis. Table 13 presents the Cronbach’s alpha for the adjusted scale, and table 14 presents the correlations after removing the reverse-coded items.

Table 13. *Adjusted Cronbach's Alpha for Discipleship Activities*

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's standardized alpha	Number of items
Discipleship Activities	.807	.819	5

These items were conceptually distinct and may have introduced confusion or defensiveness among participants. After the removal of these items, Cronbach's alpha increased to .807, suggesting improved internal consistency. Therefore, the revised subscale was used in subsequent analyses.

Table 14. *Adjusted Item-Total Statistics for Discipleship Activities*

Question	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
I often had the opportunity to use my skills and talents to help out in my church or youth group.	14.76	14.492	.447	.817
Most of my decisions are based on what I believe God wants me to do with my life.	14.49	13.989	.741	.736
I enjoy reading the Bible outside of church.	14.68	13.053	.717	.732
I often talk to a Christian friend about my faith.	14.75	13.838	.483	.810

Question	Scale mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
The sermons in our church and or youth group mean a lot to me.	14.45	13.503	.651	.753

Parental Involvement

Internal consistency reliability for the parental involvement subscale was assessed, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .870 as seen in table 15. The alpha score indicates a strong internal consistency among the items. These results suggest that the subscale reliably measures parental involvement.

Table 15. Cronbach's Alpha for Parental Involvement

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's standardized alpha	Number of items
Parental involvement	.870	.867	8

Item-total statistics further supported the scale's reliability. All eight items had positive corrected item-total correlations, ranging from .447 to .796, suggesting that they contributed meaningfully to the measurement of parental involvement. Items with correlations above .30 were considered acceptable indicators of the construct.³ The "Cronbach's alpha if item deleted" values indicated that removing any of the items would not substantially improve reliability, as

³ Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual*, 105.

alpha values remained at or below the original .870 when items were excluded. This confirms that the retention of the full item set functions cohesively and that no item detracted from the scale's internal consistency. Overall, the subscale functioned adequately for assessing parental influence on emerging adults' church retention.

Table 16. Item-Total Statistics for Parental Involvement

Question	Scale Mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
If you do not live with your birth mother, consider the female parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: My MOTHER attends church two or more times a month.	21.98	71.274	.587	.858
If you do not live with your birth mother, consider the female parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: I would describe the spiritual life of my MOTHER as a sincere Christian faith.	21.93	75.600	.593	.858
If you do not live with your birth mother, consider the female parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: People consider my MOTHER as an active leader in our church.	23.09	69.113	.624	.854

Question	Scale Mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
If you do not live with your birth father, consider the male parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: My FATHER attends church two or more times a month.	22.96	61.185	.790	.833
If you do not live with your birth father, consider the male parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: I would describe the spiritual life of my FATHER as a sincere Christian faith.	22.80	69.610	.629	.853
If you do not live with your birth father, consider the male parent you lived with the most of the following three questions: People consider my FATHER as an active leader in our community.	23.33	62.310	.796	.832
In my home, we often have discussions involving me and either or both of my parents about our faith.	22.95	75.437	.532	.863
My parents spend time helping me know how to make the right decisions.	22.36	78.584	.447	.870

Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

The Intergenerational Mentoring Relationship subscale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .773. The standardized alpha was slightly higher at .780, indicating that the scale remained reliable even when item variances were equalized. The subscale consisted of six items, all of which contributed to a cohesive measure of intergenerational mentoring relationships in the continuous church involvement of emerging adults. These reliability values support the use of the subscale in subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 17. Cronbach's Alpha for Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's standardized alpha	Number of items
Intergenerational mentoring relationships	.773	.780	6

The intergenerational mentoring relationship subscale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .773. All six items showed positive corrected item-total correlations ranging from .468 to .656, indicating that each item contributed meaningfully to the overall construct. The item with the strongest correlation was "I know two or more adult Christians (other than my parents) who know my name," reflecting the importance of relational connection in mentoring influence. The values of "Cronbach's alpha if item deleted" showed that deleting any item would lower reliability, which supports keeping the full set of items. These

findings indicate that the subscale is reliable and suitable for future analyses exploring how adult Christian influence affects adolescent faith development and ongoing church involvement.

Table 18. Item-Total Statistics for Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

Question	Scale Mean if item deleted	Scale variance if item deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
When I think of current adults (whether Christian or non-Christian) whom I respect and look up to (teacher, coach, employer, neighbor, etc.), in general, I would describe their spiritual life as a sincere Christian faith.	19.63	14.741	.537	.75
I know two or more adult Christians (other than my parents) who know my name.	18.89	15.021	.656	.713
Adults in our church are spiritually mature.	19.63	15.466	.468	.752
Most of my adult relatives (other than my parents) encourage my Christian beliefs.	19.57	14.490	.481	.751
I look up to the leadership of our main youth leader.	19.59	15.168	.480	.749
I often pay attention to the advice I get from adults other than my parents.	19.60	14.221	.528	.738

Once the reliability of each subscale was verified, the next phase of analysis examined the relationships between the dependent and independent variables to assess their predictive value for lasting faith outcomes. This step allowed for a clearer understanding of how each construct functioned within the broader model. By integrating these variables into correlational and regression analyses, the study identified the relative contribution of each factor to emerging adults' sustained faith engagement.

Religious Behavior Scale and the Domains of Influence

Hypotheses 1–3 deal with the relationship of the three domains of influence from the LFS, discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationship, to the RBS as illustrated in table 19. The domains of influence are not independent; significant correlations indicate considerable overlap. In addition, the relationships between the domains of influence and the RBS are significant, as all p values are below 0.05.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between the Religious Behavior Scale and all three predictor variables. Discipleship activity demonstrated the strongest correlation with the Religious Behavior Scale ($r = .455, p < .001$), indicating that students who engage more deeply in discipleship activities are more likely to remain involved in the church after high school. Additionally, parental involvement was significantly correlated with the Religious Behavior Scale ($r = .331, p = .001$), suggesting that parental faith and guidance contribute meaningfully to adolescent spiritual development and to continued church involvement as an emerging adult. Likewise, intergenerational mentoring showed a smaller but statistically significant correlation with the Religious Behavior Scale ($r = .192, p = .033$),

reflecting a small influence of adult Christian relationships outside the family on the Religious Behavior Scale scores. These findings support the inclusion of all three predictors in subsequent regression analysis.

Table 19. Pearson Correlations

		Religious Behavior Scale	Discipleship activities	Parental involvement	Intergenerational mentoring relationships
Pearson Correlation	Religious Behavior Scale	1.000	.455	.331	.192
	Discipleship Activities	.455	1.000	.301	.610
	Parental Involvement	.331	.301	1.000	.369
	Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships	.192	.610	.369	1.000
Sig. (1- tailed)	Religious Behavior Scale		<.001	<.001	.033
	Discipleship Activities	.000		.002	.000
	Parental Involvement	.001	.002		.000
	Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships	.033	.000	.000	

Note: $N = 92$.

The regression model examining the effects of discipleship activity, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships on the Religious Behavior Scale

scores yielded an R of .524, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the predictors and the outcome. The model accounted for 27.5% of the variance in the Religious Behavior Scale ($R^2 = .275$), with an adjusted R^2 of .250, suggesting that approximately 25% of the variance remained after adjusting for the number of predictors. The standard error of the estimate (11.003) indicates moderate prediction accuracy. Overall, the model indicates that the three predictors collectively explain differences in the Religious Behavior Scores among the emerging adults.

Table 20. Model Summary of the Dependent Variable – Religious Behavior Scale

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SES
1	.524 ^a	.275	.250	11.003

^a Independent variables – adjusted discipleship activities, parental involvement, intergenerational mentoring relationships

A one-way ANOVA at the .05 level was used to test the significance of each independent variable. The overall regression model predicting Religious Behavior Scale from discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships was statistically significant, $F(3, 88) = 11.130, p < .001$. The model explained about 27.5% of the variance in the Religious Behavior Scale, showing that the three predictors together played a significant role in predicting ongoing church involvement among emerging adults. These results support the inclusion of individual predictor coefficients in the next stage of analysis.

Table 21. ANOVA for the Dependent Variable: Religious Behavior Scale

	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Regression	4042.667	3	1347.556	11.130	<.001 ^a
Residual	10651.202	88	121.070		
Total	14696.870	91			

^a Predictors: discipleship activities, parental involvement, intergenerational mentoring relationships

Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive value of discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships for the Religious Behavior Scale. Discipleship activities emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor ($B = 1.421$, $\beta = .507$, $p < .001$), indicating that engagement in discipleship activities while in middle and high school contributed substantially to emerging adults' continued church involvement. Parental involvement also demonstrated a significant positive effect ($B = .344$, $\beta = .257$, $p = .010$), suggesting that parental faith and guidance play a meaningful role. Intergenerational mentoring relationships did not reach statistical significance ($B = -.594$, $\beta = -.211$, $p = .077$). Collinearity diagnostics indicated that all predictors were sufficiently independent ($VIF < 2$), supporting the validity of the model.

Table 22. Regression Coefficients Table

	Unstandardized B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.	95% CI		VIF
						LL	UL	
Constant	9.647	6.270		1.539	.127	-2.813	22.107	
Discipleship activities	1.421	.323	.507	4.402	<.001	.780	2.063	1.609
Parental involvement	.344	.131	.257	2.617	.010	.083	.605	1.170
Intergenerational mentoring relationship	-.594	.332	-.211	-1.789	.077	-1.253	.066	1.694

Assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated using a normal P–P plot and a scatterplot of standardized residuals. Visual inspection indicated that the assumptions were adequately met. The scatterplot of standardized residuals versus standardized predicted values is shown in Figure 10 below. The other diagnostic plots are provided in appendices M, N, O, P, and Q.

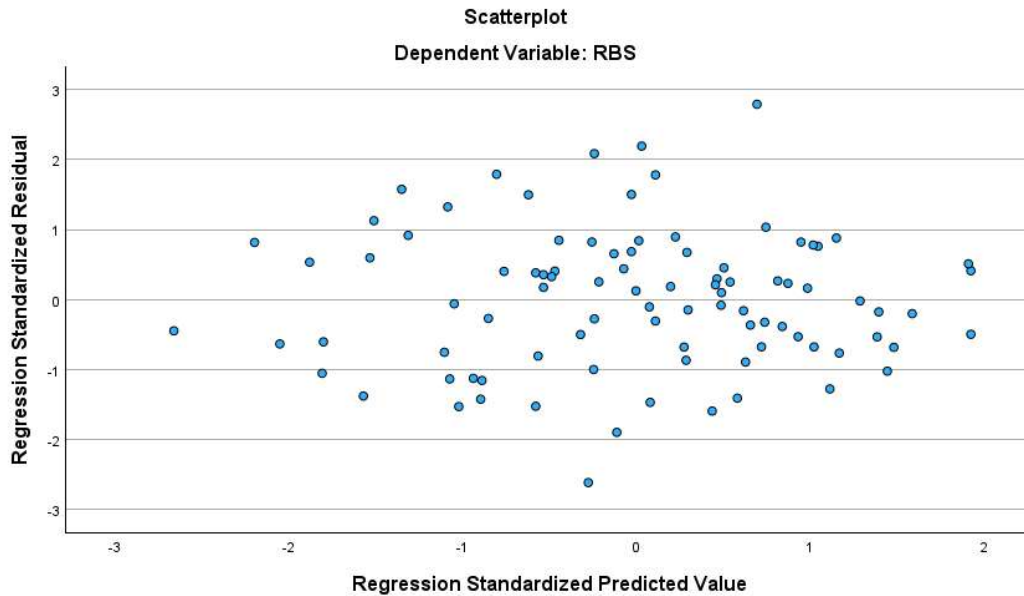


Figure 10. Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals versus Standardized Predicted values

T Test

An independent *t* test was conducted to compare the Religious Behavior Scores between the male and female respondents. Levene's test indicated unequal variances, $F(1, 90) = 4.212$, $p = .043$. Hence, the "equal variances not assumed" results were used. No significant difference in Religious Behavior Scores exists between males ($M = 29.91$, $SD = 15.35$) and females ($M = 31.09$, $SD = 11.00$), $t(53.085) = 0.391$, $p = .697$, 95% *CI* $[-4.85, 7.20]$.

Table 23. Descriptive Statistics for RBS by Gender

Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Female	58	31.09	11.00	1.44
Male	34	39.91	15.35	2.63

Table 24. Independent Samples t test Comparing RBS by Gender

	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	P(2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Equal variances assumed	4.212	.043	.426	90	.671	1.174	-4.304	6.652
Equal variances not assumed			.391	53.085	.697	1.174	-4.847	7.195

Hypothesis 1 Findings

Hypothesis 1: Discipleship Activities

The hypotheses for the first independent variable are as follows:

H₁: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₁: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years have no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{1a}: A positive relationship exists between discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Multiple regression analysis revealed that discipleship activities were a significant predictor of the Religious Behavior Scale scores. The unstandardized coefficient was $B = 1.421$ with a standard error of .323, and the standardized beta coefficient was $\beta = .507$. This predictor yielded a t value of 4.402 and was statistically significant ($p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval for the effect ranged from .780 to 2.063, indicating a precise estimate. Among all predictors tested, discipleship activities made the greatest contribution to the Religious Behavior Scale, as evidenced by the highest beta coefficient and partial correlation. Hypothesis 1 was supported. Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years significantly and positively predicted the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

Hypothesis 2 Findings

Hypothesis 2: Parental Involvement

The hypotheses for the second independent variable are as follows:

H₂: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₂: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{2a}: A positive relationship exists between Parental involvement in their spiritual development while in middle and high school and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Parental Involvement was also a statistically significant predictor of the Religious Behavior Scale. The unstandardized coefficient was $B = .344$ with a standard error of .131, and the standardized beta coefficient was $\beta = .257$. This predictor yielded a t value of 2.617 and was statistically significant at $p = .010$. The 95% confidence interval for B ranged from .083 to .605, indicating that the effect was both reliable and meaningful. Although smaller in magnitude than discipleship activities, parental involvement contributed uniquely to the model and remained significant after controlling for the other predictors. Hypothesis 2 was supported. Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years significantly and positively predicted the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

Hypothesis 3 Findings

Hypothesis 3: Intergenerational Mentoring Relationships

The hypotheses for the third independent variable are as follows:

H₃: Intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₀₃: Intergenerational mentoring relationship during middle and high school years has no relationship with the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

H_{3a}: A positive relationship exists between the intergenerational mentoring relationship during middle and high school years and the Religious Behavior Scale scores.

Intergenerational mentoring relationships did not significantly predict the Religious Behavior Scale scores in the regression model. The unstandardized coefficient was

$B = -.594$ with a standard error of .332, and the standardized beta coefficient was $\beta = -.211$. The predictor produced a t value of -1.789 , which did not reach statistical significance ($p = .077$). The 95% confidence interval for B ranged from -1.253 to 0.066 , indicating uncertainty about the direction and magnitude of the effect. Although this variable showed a slight positive zero-order correlation with the Religious Behavior Scale, this association was not significant after controlling for discipleship activities and parental involvement. Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school did not significantly predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

Taken together, the hypothesis testing revealed that two of the three predictors, discipleship activities and parental involvement, significantly predicted the Religious Behavior Scale scores of the emerging adults, while intergenerational mentoring relationships did not. Discipleship activities emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by parental involvement. These findings indicate that discipleship activities and parental influence play central roles in shaping adolescents' faith and church engagement as they enter adulthood. In contrast, mentoring relationships outside the family did not demonstrate a significant direct effect within the regression model.

Findings from Open-Ended Responses

In addition to the quantitative items, the survey included two open-ended questions designed to capture personal reflections and experiences related to the faith development of the emerging adults. These qualitative responses provided descriptive insights that extended beyond

numerical patterns and offered a deeper understanding of how emerging adults perceive discipleship, parental influence, and relationships with adult Christians. The questions are,

- 1) What are some experiences, relationships, or church activities in middle and high school that have helped you remain involved in church life?
- 2) How have discipleship, mentoring relationships, or church activities in high school carried over to your present day? Please be specific about the factors.

The open-ended items were analyzed using an inductive coding approach, allowing themes to emerge directly from the participants' words. Their responses were entered into a coding software, Atlas.ti, to generate themes. The following section presents the major themes identified from these responses, supported by representative statements that illustrate the lived experiences behind the quantitative findings.

Emergent Themes

Question 1: What are some experiences, relationships, or church activities in middle and high school that have helped you remain involved in church life?

Theme 1: Community and friendships

Participants indicated that establishing connections with peers and forming friendships within the church community provided motivation and accountability. These connections included youth groups, small gatherings, and relationships formed through various church activities. A participant stated, "Only the people my age that I have connected with in the church growing up have helped me remain in the faith."

Theme 2: Youth meetings and events

Regular involvement in youth meetings, such as monthly girls' meetings or youth services, and in events like lock-ins, summer camps, and church field trips fostered a sense of belonging and engagement. The participants alluded to attending monthly girls' youth meetings, conferences, youth Sundays, youth church camps, youth lock-ins, and summer youth camps.

Theme 3: Serving in the church

Respondents reported that volunteering in roles such as greeting, ushering, or serving on worship teams fostered a deeper connection to the church community and nurtured consistent attendance. A participant stated, "Honestly, I think I would attribute my involvement in church life to serving in the church. I think having a sense of responsibility to the church, whether serving on the media team, instrumentalists, or with the kids, made me more inclined to stay in church." One participant referenced the connections he made through service: "Serving in the church I attended helped me build relationships with other church members."

Theme 4: Mentorship and guidance

Some of the respondents stated that having mentors, such as older church members or youth leaders, who provided guidance and support, encouraged personal growth and spiritual development. A respondent stated, "The bond I've built with older people from ages 35–50 who encouraged me when times are hard." Another one said, "In middle school, we had older college-age girls who were our mentors who gave us advice throughout middle and high school. We also met with them and did Bible studies with them."

Theme 5: Family influence

Many individuals cited their parents' involvement and encouragement as pivotal in maintaining their church attendance and fostering a faith-based lifestyle. A respondent stated, "My parents are the head leaders of my church, so I was very active during middle school and high school." One participant said, "My parents made me go to church." Additionally, a respondent stated, "The most instrumental figures that helped me remain in church life were my parents."

Theme 6: Bible studies and devotions

Engaging in personal Bible study, participating in group discussions, and using resources such as the YouVersion Bible app helped individuals deepen their understanding of Scripture and their relationship with Christ. Respondents had the following responses: "In middle school, we had older college-age girls who were our mentors who gave us advice throughout middle and high school. We also met with them and did Bible studies with them." "Weekly small group gatherings that involved games, discussions about the Bible, and just life in general." "Weekly small group gatherings that involved games, discussions about the Bible, and just life in general."

Question 2: How have discipleship, mentoring relationships, or church activities in high school carried over to your present day? Please be specific about the factors.

Theme 1: Mentorship and guidance

The mentorship received during high school has had a lasting impact. Many respondents noted that the lessons learned from mentors helped shape their character, decision making, and spiritual habits. They often reflect on the advice they have received and apply it to their current lives. Some of the responses are, “I have lessons that I learned during mentorship that has helped me in my adult life”; “In the decision I make, I often look back on the knowledge that was given to me by mentors and youth leaders from high school”; and “Today, those same habits and values still guide me. I seek community, stay connected to mentors, and approach leadership and everyday life with the same purpose and intentionality I learned back then.”

Theme 2: Continued commitment to church life

Many individuals have maintained a commitment to church activities, such as attending Sunday services and Bible studies, which were integral parts of their high school experience. This ongoing involvement has become a significant aspect of their lifestyle. Representative statements from the participants include the following: “I still have a lot of those same mentors today, and back then I would be in and out of church, although I loved being there. Fast forward to currently, I am a leader in the church; I volunteer for every event we have; I am in multiple ministries; I work in our church office; I run our social media; and I have leadership that trusts me.” “I see the growth, and had it not been for all the things they poured into me when I was younger, I would not still be in the church consistently.” “Going to church weekly has been ingrained into my lifestyle.” It makes me more involved in church.”

Theme 3: Spiritual growth and accountability

The discipleship experiences provided a foundation for personal faith development. Participants learned to pray, read the Bible, and maintain accountability, which continues to guide their actions and decisions today. Two of the participants stated, “They helped me first establish my own personal relationship with Christ and learn what it means to build a new Christ-centered life after being saved. They also provide me with community and help me continuously grow in my faith!” and “The activities and involvement in high school is honestly what built me closer to God. It has made me want to help others be involved and become closer to Him as well. Working VBS and helping children have fun while learning about Jesus also just lifts my spirit and makes me so happy that I want to continue to live this life praising Him!”

Theme 4: Community and support

The relationships formed during high school, whether through youth groups or church activities, have fostered a sense of community that persists into adulthood. Many individuals still connect with their peers and mentors, creating a supportive network that encourages spiritual growth. Some responses are, “I am still close with the people I volunteered with in the church and they still make it a point to give me advice for my life and pray for me”; “Still talk to most of my mentors weekly”; and “They have carried over by helping me understand the importance of having good solid, true followers of Jesus around me to help encourage, remind, call me out, and love on me.”

Theme 5: Practical application of faith

The teachings and experiences from high school have equipped individuals to navigate life's challenges with a Christ-centered perspective. They emphasize the importance of relying on God and applying biblical principles in everyday situations. Some responses are, "Having leaders and mentors in youth groups gave me someone to talk to and learn from in a personal sense. This helped me answer extra questions I had about my faith, and helped me understand the world from a perspective aligned with the Bible"; and "It helped me pray better, and just have great conversations with strangers and friends about Jesus."

Theme 6: Desire to serve and lead

Many respondents expressed a desire to give back and serve others, inspired by their experiences in youth ministry and the church activities in which they were involved. They are motivated to engage in various ministries and leadership roles within their current church communities. Some responses are, "It's helped me have a passion for teen ministry for this generation"; and "Discipleship really helped me understand the Word as well as the Christian walk. It gave me a deeper level of reverence for God as I continue to understand more of his character through discipleship. I also learned how to become an active Christian in the faith through discipleship and to lead as a believer. This also helped me become a leader on my campus."

Overall, the respondents consistently identified multiple factors as influencing their faith development during middle and high school. In addition, they expressed the impact of these factors on their current faith. Some of the factors identified align with the predictors identified in the regression model.

Integration of Quantitative Hypotheses and Qualitative Themes

The qualitative themes enrich the quantitative hypotheses for this study. Table 25 highlights the integration of the quantitative hypotheses and the qualitative themes identified in this study.

Table 25. Integration of Quantitative Hypotheses and Qualitative Themes

Hypothesis	Quantitative result	Qualitative themes	Integrated interpretation
H1: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.	Supported. Discipleship activities were the strongest predictor ($\beta = .507, p < .001$).	Theme 2: Youth meetings and events Theme 3: Serving in the church Theme 6: Bible studies and devotions	Students consistently described personal spiritual habits and church involvement as central to their growth, reinforcing the strong quantitative effect of discipleship activities. Qualitative data deepen understanding by showing why discipleship matters: it provides structure, identity, and spiritual grounding.
H2: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.	Supported. Parental Involvement significantly predicted faith activity ($\beta = .257, p = .010$).	Theme 5: Family influence	Students frequently credited parents with shaping their faith through encouragement, modeling, and spiritual guidance. These themes align directly with the significant quantitative effect, showing that parental influence remains a meaningful factor in adolescent faith formation.

Hypothesis	Quantitative result	Qualitative themes	Integrated interpretation
H3: Intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.	Not supported. Mentoring was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -.211, p = .077$).	Theme 1: Community and friendships Theme 4: Mentorship and guidance	Although mentoring did not significantly predict the Religious Behavior Scale scores in the regression model, qualitative responses indicate that when mentoring occurs through adult mentors, leaders, and the church community relationships, adolescents experience encouragement, guidance, and examples of Christian living. These themes suggest that mentoring may function as a supportive relational context rather than a direct predictor, helping explain the small but positive zero-order correlation.

The findings show a strong relationship between the quantitative predictors and the qualitative themes. Discipleship activities and parental involvement were supported both statistically and through students' descriptions of spiritual practices and family influence. Although intergenerational mentoring did not emerge as a significant predictor in the quantitative portion, qualitative themes indicated that intergenerational mentorship relationships continue to play a meaningful role in adolescents' faith development and continued church attendance, even though it may be less direct.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses examining the factors that predict the Religious Behavior Scale scores among emerging adults. The independent variables, Discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring, accounted for variance in the Religious Behavior Scale scores, as evidenced by the statistically significant multiple regression model. Among these predictors, discipleship activities emerged as the strongest contributor after adjusting the subscale items, demonstrating a large and statistically significant effect. Parental involvement also significantly predicted the Religious Behavior Scale scores, confirming that parental influence continues to play an important role in shaping adolescents' spiritual engagement. Intergenerational mentoring relationships, however, did not reach statistical significance in the model, suggesting that they may not function as a direct predictor of the Religious Behavior Scale scores when other variables are considered.

Assessing the assumptions, including the P-P plot and scatterplot of standardized residuals, the assumptions of linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were met. These results support the validity of the regression findings and confirm that the model was appropriate for addressing the hypotheses for this study.

The qualitative analysis of open-ended responses provided additional insight into emerging adults' lived experiences and enriched the interpretation of the quantitative results. Six main themes emerged from the data on the first question: community and friendships, youth meetings and events, serving in the church, mentorship and guidance, family influence, and Bible studies and devotions. These themes aligned closely with the significant quantitative predictors. Students frequently described attending Bible studies, youth gatherings, and service

opportunities as central to their spiritual growth, underscoring the strong impact of discipleship activities. Family Influence also appeared prominently in the emerging adults' responses, supporting the significant role of parental involvement. Although intergenerational mentoring did not statistically predict the Religious Behavior Scale scores, emerging adults who reported meaningful intergenerational mentoring experiences described it as a source of encouragement, guidance, and relational support, suggesting that mentoring may contribute indirectly to faith development.

Furthermore, six main themes emerged from the data on the second question: mentorship and guidance, continued commitment to church life, spiritual growth and accountability, community and support, practical application of faith, and desire to serve and lead. These themes reveal how the influential factors impact their current faith behaviors. Emerging adults affirmed that these influences continue to guide their actions and decisions today, keeping them involved in the church.

The findings demonstrated strong correlations between the quantitative and qualitative components for discipleship activities and parental involvement while offering a nuanced understanding of the more variable role of intergenerational mentoring relationships. For the interpretive discussion presented in chapter 5, these results provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that shape the religious behavior among emerging adults.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine factors predicting the continuous involvement in church among emerging adults by assessing their Religious Behavior Scale scores. The purpose was also to explore how the emerging adults described the influences that shaped their spiritual development. The study utilized a mixed-methods design by integrating quantitative predictors using the Lasting Faith Scale, which are discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships, combined with qualitative themes derived from the open-ended survey questions.

Chapter 1 introduced the purpose of this research, which is to examine the middle and high school factors that influence emerging adults' current church involvement. Chapter 2 examined the theological foundation and reviewed related scholarly literature, including the life experiences of emerging adults and the factors during the middle and high school years that enhance their continued participation in church during emerging adulthood. Chapter 3 addressed the research design and methodology and highlighted the survey distribution, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 presented the research findings for the study, trends, and correlations about the middle and high school factors that influence emerging adults' current church involvement. Chapter 5 will present a summary of the results and implications for the church, youth ministry leaders, parents, and other influential adults and offer recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The study addressed the concern that emerging adults disengage from the church after graduating from high school. To identify influential factors from middle and/or high school that may help maintain engagement with the church during the transition to adulthood, this study employed a mixed-methods design. Multiple regression was used to examine whether discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships, subscales from the modified Lasting Faith Scale, predicted participants' Religious Behavior Scale scores. For the qualitative component, Atlas.ti was used to analyze the emerging adults' open-ended responses to identify themes that reveal their lived experiences of faith formation and the impact on their current faith journey.

The regression model was statistically significant. Discipleship activities emerged as the strongest predictor of the emerging adults' Religious Behavior Scale scores, followed by parental involvement. Intergenerational mentoring relationships did not significantly predict the Religious Behavior Scale scores of the emerging adults. The qualitative analysis generated six main themes for each open-ended response. The six main themes from the first open-ended question are community and friendships, youth meetings and events, serving in the church, mentorship and guidance, family influence, and Bible studies and devotions. The six main themes from the second open-ended question are mentorship and guidance, continued commitment to church life, spiritual growth and accountability, community and support, practical application of faith, and desire to serve and lead. The themes aligned closely with the independent variables and provided insight into the intergenerational mentoring relationships factor, which was not significant in the quantitative analysis.

The integrated findings revealed a strong interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands in the context of discipleship activities and parental involvement. However, regarding intergenerational mentoring relationships, the qualitative survey findings explained their impact on emerging adults' spiritual developmental stage.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Hypothesis 1

Research hypothesis 1 posited that discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years would positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults. This hypothesis was supported with $R^2=.207$, indicating discipleship activities engaged in during adolescence account for approximately 20.7% of the variance in current religious behavior.

The study employed multiple regression analysis to examine how the various factors predicted the Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults. The regression model produced a significant R^2 of .275, indicating that approximately 27.5% of the variance in the Religious Behavior Scale scores is explained by the independent variables, with discipleship activities among them. Discipleship activities emerged as the strongest predictor of the Religious Behavior Scale scores in the regression model ($R^2=.207$). This finding is important because it suggests that the involvement of emerging adults in structured spiritual practices during middle and high school has a lasting impact on their continued faith involvement.

The quantitative findings regarding discipleship activities highlight their significant role in shaping adolescents' religious engagement and spiritual growth. Participation in structured

discipleship activities such as Bible studies, youth meetings, devotionals, serving opportunities, and church services were pivotal in strengthening the faith commitment of emerging adults during middle and high school years. The data indicate a strong relationship between engagement in these activities and the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults, indicating that regular involvement in discipleship activities not only reinforces existing beliefs about God but also facilitates deeper spiritual formation and understanding. Participation in such structured experiences provides participants with opportunities to explore their faith, ask questions, and develop a personal relationship with God based on their beliefs. The consistency and quality of participation in discipleship activities likely affect individuals on their spiritual journeys. Emerging adults who actively engage in these activities are better equipped to navigate their faith amid life challenges, as indicated by qualitative insights, suggesting that formative experiences gained through discipleship contribute to their overall spiritual resilience.

The qualitative themes reinforced the finding, as emerging adults consistently described Bible studies, devotions, youth meetings and events, and serving in the church as central to their spiritual growth. Being involved in these activities provided an environment in which they could learn, grow, and develop a solid understanding of God. In addition, participation in those activities provided structure for emerging adults during middle and high school years, fostering a sense of community in which they could be held accountable and provided with opportunities for spiritual engagement. The alignment between the quantitatively significant strength and the buoyant qualitative themes in the findings underscores the importance of incorporating discipleship activities during the middle and high school years to shape faith outcomes among emerging adults as they navigate adulthood.

The faith development of adolescents is anchored on several factors. The adolescent years are prime for establishing a solid foundation that will endure for years to come. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development comprise eight stages, each characterized by a personal conflict that influences personal growth. Two of the relevant stages for this research are identity versus role confusion, which occurs between ages 12 and 18, and intimacy versus isolation, which occurs between ages 18 and 40.¹ The identity versus role confusion stage focuses on adolescents as they pursue personal identity formation.² Active participation in structured religious activities provides opportunities to explore and affirm their beliefs during this stage as they begin to develop a clearer sense of identity and faith.

In the intimacy versus isolation stage, emerging adults strive to form meaningful relationships.³ At this stage, emerging adults are developing only on the foundation already laid in the stage Erikson considered as the identity formation stage. Their established identity formation and continuous engagement in structured religious activities are vital for providing support and a sense of belonging that enable the development of life-changing intimate relationships.

James Fowler's model of faith development outlines several stages of faith development that evolve over time in their complexity, particularly during adolescence. He proposed several stages, with mythic-literal being the second. He posited that the mythic-literal stage aligns with Erikson's identity exploration period, during which participation in community rituals provides

¹ Erikson, *Identity*, 94.

² Ibid., 128.

³ Ibid., 135.

meaning and solidifies faith development. This engagement is crucial for identity formation and understanding of the things of faith.⁴

Community service also has been found to impact church engagement within a religious framework. Smith and Denton emphasized how religious involvement correlates positively with youth development and identity formation. Engaging in structured activities such as church services creates opportunities for adolescents to build meaningful connections. Also, such experiences contribute to their social skills development and reinforce a sense of purpose and belonging.

The theoretical framework, centered on faith development models, highlights the crucial role of structured religious activities during the formative years. Erikson's psychosocial stages alongside Fowler's stages of faith and community engagement theories provide an interplay between participation in faith-based communities and the enhancement of identity formation and spiritual growth. Emerging adults can cultivate meaningful experiences that shape their beliefs through participation in these activities.

Research Hypothesis 2

Research hypothesis 2 posits that parental involvement in their spiritual development during the middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults. This hypothesis was also supported with $R^2 = .109$, indicating parental involvement during adolescence accounts for approximately 10.9% of the variance in current religious behavior.

⁴ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 148.

Parental involvement was the next strongest predictor of the Religious Behavior Scale scores in the regression model. The theme of family influence appeared prominently in the emerging adults' responses. Many of them described their parents as models of faith, sources of encouragement, and guides in their spiritual decision making. The intersection of quantitative and qualitative findings affirms the lasting role of parents and families in adolescents' faith formation. The spiritual climate of the home and the parental involvement in the church continue to exert a meaningful and lasting impact on their faith activity.

Several scholars have emphasized the vital role that parents play in their children's spiritual lives. Chip Ingram emphasized the need for parents to continue nurturing their children toward maturity by applying the principles of Christian teaching and discipline.⁵ In a study by Smith and Barkus, parents' role in transmitting religion to their children is threefold: they are the sponsors of the faith, the gatekeepers of the faith, and the interpreters of the faith.⁶ Although parents are tasked with transmitting their faith to the next generation, the ease of this process is shaped by several external and internal factors. Because relational warmth often determines how receptive adolescents are to parental guidance, the quality of the parent-child relationship becomes a crucial foundation for effective faith transmission. Parents must have a good relationship with their children, cultivating an environment of trust, openness, and emotional connection that enables meaningful guidance and spiritual influence. The study by Parr and Crites highlighted that a good relationship between parents and emerging adults during youth

⁵ Ingram, *Effective Parenting*, 8.

⁶ Bartkus and Smith, *Report on American Catholic*.

ministry strongly correlated with continued church involvement among emerging adults.⁷ In addition, parents must be involved in church activities. The NSYR study showed that young people resembled their parents, including in their religious beliefs.⁸ Additionally, Smith and Snell reported that emerging adults raised by committed parents are more likely to internalize their parents' worldview through socialization.⁹

The quantitative findings highlighted the roles of parents in their children's spiritual development during the formative years. The data showed that parental involvement during the middle and high school years predicted the adolescents' current religious behavior and their continued church involvement. The R^2 of 0.109 indicates a noteworthy correlation between parental engagement and the religious behaviors exhibited by emerging adults. In the regression model, parental involvement emerged as one of the strongest predictors of emerging adults' Religious Behavior Scale scores, underscoring the lasting impact of parents on their children's faith formation. This pattern suggests that the relational and spiritual investments parents make during adolescence create enduring pathways that shape faith trajectories well into adulthood. Hence, as adolescents transition into adulthood, the religious practices and beliefs instilled by parents during formative years continue to influence their spiritual lives. Furthermore, the quantitative data underscore the theme of family influence, highlighting the importance of the spiritual climate of the home.

⁷ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, 53.

⁸ Kageler, *Youth Ministry*, 52.

⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 256.

The qualitative data provided a robust picture of the role parents played in their children's spiritual formation during their formative years and continued involvement in the church. One respondent stated, "My parents made me go to church. It helped that I had friends at church that I wanted to see." Some other respondents said, "My parents are the head leaders of my church, so I was very active during middle school/high school"; "The most instrumental figures that helped me remain in church life were my parents"; and "Continually initiating discussions and showing interest in my life helped me to understand the why behind Christian life. I thank them for it all." These comments allude to the vital role their parents played in their lives. The respondents further stated that their parents influence their current faith journey. Some respondents said, "They helped shape my perspective on life. Teaching me to lean on God when things are hard and even when things are good"; "Through family members, very significantly, possibly a defining characteristic of my faith, through mentoring and teaching of the Scriptures, experiences, and discussions"; and "It has helped me keep and maintain my walk with the Lord." These responses attest to the impact of parental influence on the spiritual development of emerging adults during the middle and high school years. The alignment between quantitative findings and qualitative insights reinforces the notion that a supportive and involved parental role contributes immensely to the ongoing religious engagement of emerging adults.

Parents have an immense influence on their children, a fact often overlooked, and this influence shapes their children's spiritual formation. Parents spend more time with their children than do others. The time spent with them, when utilized effectively, can shape their children's spiritual formation. The first thing children observe in their parents that enhances their faith is the faith their parents model for them. Children tend to emulate what they see influential adults

in their lives do. Parents have to live out the Christian faith for their children to see and emulate. Additionally, when parents serve in the church, their service leaves an indelible mark on their children, who may wish to do the same as they grow older or when afforded the opportunity.

In addition, parents have to be intentional about teaching their children about the ways of the Lord. Such intentionality ensures that faith instruction is not left to chance but becomes a consistent, formative part of the child's spiritual development. Teaching is a means of imparting valuable lessons to others. Open communication about faith must be happening in the home. When they teach their children, the information, if not all of it, is retained in memory for later use. In doing so, adolescents receive emotional support from their parents. This intentional engagement strengthens the relational bond, making faith conversations more meaningful and effective. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up.” The key to teaching children to love God is to make God a part of everyday experiences and teach them to see God in all aspects of life.¹⁰ “The Hebrew word for ‘teach diligently’ implies a sharpening or engraving, suggesting that these teachings should be deeply impressed upon the children.”¹¹ The instruction of God to the Israelites in Deut. 6:6–7 reflects the heart of God in this situation: that parents should teach their children the ways of God consistently and pass down God's commandments to the next generation.

¹⁰ *Life Application Study Bible, HCSB* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 265.

¹¹ “Deuteronomy 6:7,” Bible Hub, accessed January 23, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/study/deuteronomy/6-7.htm>.

Research Hypothesis 3

Research hypothesis 3 posits that intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults. The hypothesis was not statistically supported with $R^2 = .037$, indicating intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during adolescence account for approximately 3.7% of the variance in current religious behavior. Although the hypothesis did not achieve statistical significance, qualitative data revealed insightful themes regarding the importance of mentorship, guidance, and community support in shaping faith-related behaviors.

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of intergenerational mentoring relationships. The authors of *Faith Formation with the New Generation* posited five benefits of intergenerational faith-forming experiences within the church. One benefit is that it helps to “form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and lead the Christian tradition and way of life.”¹² Another benefit is its impact on strengthening relationships, connections, and community across generations, thereby boosting a sense of belonging within the faith community.¹³ Additionally, Megan Brown’s research found that one factor influencing sustained involvement in the church after youth ministry is intergenerational relationships.¹⁴

¹² Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 43.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Brown, “Relationships Matter,” 15–17.

Intergenerational mentoring relationships can facilitate faith development in a multi-dimensional manner. As the mentors impart knowledge, they also exemplify faith in action. Mentors serve as role models to adolescents, demonstrating how to navigate challenges through a spiritual lens. One of the respondents stated that “in the decision I make, I often look back on the knowledge that was given to me by mentors and youth leaders from high school.” Furthermore, mentors provide social support that fosters meaningful discussions and reflections, and can increase engagement in faith-related activities, encouraging emerging adults to explore their spirituality more deeply. For instance, a respondent stated,

My high-school discipleship and mentoring taught me consistent spiritual habits, accountability, and how to serve others with humility. Those relationships helped shape my character and gave me a foundation for staying rooted in my faith. Today, those same habits and values still guide me. I seek community, stay connected to mentors, and approach leadership and everyday life with the same purpose and intentionality I learned back then.

Emerging adults expressed appreciation for the relationships they cultivated with adult Christians during their formative years. Many respondents indicated that these relationships offered encouragement, accountability, and spiritual support, which were crucial during their middle and high school experiences. These themes suggest that intergenerational mentoring during middle and high school influences the continued church involvement of emerging adults. Also, the themes could suggest that intergenerational mentoring may function more as a relational context that nurtures emotional support rather than as a direct predictor of their religious behavior. For instance, remarks such as “Having mentors made me feel more connected and supported in my faith” and “I have lessons that I learned during mentorship have helped me in my adult life” highlight the emotional and spiritual safety net that adult guidance can provide during transitional life stages.

The qualitative responses suggest that mentoring does more than merely pass on faith values; it helps emerging adults thrive socially, mentally, and relationally across their various settings, even after leaving their prior environment for a new location. One common trait of a mentor-mentee relationship is ongoing dialogue and correspondence between them, as evidenced by Paul's continued communication with Timothy and Titus to foster ongoing guidance, not only in matters of faith but across all spheres of life.

While the quantitative data suggested that intergenerational mentoring may not have had a direct, measurable impact on the Religious Behavior Scale scores, the qualitative responses indicate that emerging adults highly valued these relationships. The Youth Pulse Insight Report, which drew on nearly 4,600 young people aged 18–30 in 144 countries and territories, found that emerging adults value mentoring as a critical developmental mechanism, even though not explicitly stated.¹⁵ They rely on supportive relationships, intergenerational collaboration, and community-based guidance.¹⁶ The differences observed between the quantitative and qualitative sections may indicate that the effects of mentoring relationships are more nuanced and complex than initially considered. Mentorship's influence may operate through pathways not fully captured by standardized measures, such as fostering a sense of community and enhancing personal spirituality, even when these outcomes do not directly correlate with behavioral metrics. Although the quantitative data were not statistically significant, the qualitative data indicated that

¹⁵ World Economic Forum, "Youth Pulse 2026: Insights from the Next Generation for a Changing World," World Economic Forum, 2026, https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Youth_Pulse_2026.pdf.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15–17.

intergenerational mentoring relationships were meaningful but may have varied in depth, consistency, or accessibility across participants.

In conclusion, although hypothesis 3 lacked a strong statistical foundation, the qualitative findings underscore the significance of intergenerational mentoring relationships in shaping religious behavior among emerging adults. This result suggests that fostering such relationships could be pivotal for encouraging sustained spiritual engagement during the critical transitional years of adolescence.

Conclusions from the Lasting Faith Demographics Findings

As discussed in chapter 4, the four LFS significant demographic items provide important insights into emerging adults' survey scores. The questions asked about their living arrangement, the parent they most closely identified with, the parent they most closely respected in spiritual matters, and their personal view on Jesus.

Living arrangements provide insight into the relational and structural contexts in which emerging adults lived during middle and high school and into which they experienced their faith formation. The participants in this study reported a wide range of living arrangements, reflecting the diversity of family structures in the environment in which they grew up; the majority of respondents indicated that they lived with both parents during middle and high school. Including this question underscores the importance of considering the broader home environment when examining adolescents' spiritual development.

The parent most closely identified with during middle and high school indicates the relational bond present during their years of spiritual formation. The mother ranked highest,

followed by both parents. Likewise, the parent most respected in spiritual matters was ranked highly by both parents and the mother. These relationships may explain the impact of parental influence on the respondents during those years.

Participants' personal views of Jesus provide insight into their spiritual identity and theological orientation. The highest-ranking response was "Jesus is my personal Savior," followed by "Jesus is the Son of God." Approximately 4 percent of respondents reported having no meaningful relationship with Jesus. Although the percentage may be low, it still represents a substantial number of adolescents who did not experience spiritual transformation during middle and high school. The diversity of participants' views underscores the individualized nature of spiritual formation in adolescents.

Implications for Georgia Evangelical Churches

The research findings of this study focus on church leaders, parents, and other influential adults to be intentional in implementing specific strategies for discipling adolescents to address the issue of emerging adults leaving the church after high school completion. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting a positive association between discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships, and emerging adults' continued church involvement. Research on "Sticky Faith" confirms that long-term faith is more likely when churches and parents collaborate to sustain ongoing spiritual practices, with parents serving as a primary influence on a child's faith development.¹⁷ In addition, the literature on intergenerational ministry emphasizes that when generations worship, serve, and invest in one

¹⁷ Powell, Griffin, and Crawford, *Sticky Faith*, 76.

another, both younger and older members grow in discipleship and a sense of belonging.¹⁸ These findings call for intentionality in discipleship methods, that is, relationship centered, engaging the home and church as a unified ecosystem. The implications of the findings for youth ministry, parents and families, and churches are discussed next.

Implications for Youth Ministry

The fact that discipleship activities are statistically significant should not be surprising. Discipleship is very important in the life of the church and across all age groups. Youth ministry leaders ought to tailor the discipleship model for the youth, as it is essential for the church's mission and long-term health. Discipleship is the backbone of every church ministry, including youth ministry; as such, youth ministry leaders must ensure that programs are structured to enhance the spiritual growth of youth. Youth ministry leaders should incorporate small-groups and one-on-one discipleship opportunities to engage adolescents in discussions of faith, life challenges, and personal growth.¹⁹

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) found that about 60 percent of teenagers were committed to living for God before they were fourteen.²⁰ Richard Dun and Jana Sundene argued that young people need spiritually mature guides who will walk with them in prayerful and intentional ways to help them grow in Christ and to prevent them from navigating

¹⁸ Assemblies of God, *A Leader and Layperson's Guide to Intergenerational Discipleship* (Springfield, MO: The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2024).

¹⁹ Jonathan Denton, "Ministry Leadership with Students," in Dean and Stewart, 128–29.

²⁰ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 247.

their formative years solely through their own experiences or personal truth.²¹ Wilson identified discipleship activities, such as involvement in small groups, conversing about faith with others, serving, and being discipled, as vital factors influencing young adults to remain active in the church.²²

Youth leaders must teach and model core discipleship habits such as Scripture engagement, corporate worship, prayer, and service so that adolescents will develop simple, repeatable rhythms they can sustain beyond high school. Moreover, youth leaders should include regular guided prayers and communal Scripture reading rather than merely discussing prayers or Scripture in gatherings. To help build a structure to guide adolescents, leaders can invite students to design a personal discipleship plan that should be reviewed and revised periodically. The structure can include details such as when and where they can pray, read, and connect with like-minded believers.

Furthermore, youth leaders need to provide service opportunities for adolescents. Williams found that opportunities for service influence young adults' church engagement after youth ministry.²³ Serving others encourages youth to live out their faith and practice what they learn in public settings. Serving affords adolescents opportunities to form connections with older church members who can offer mentorship. Providing service opportunities for youth not only

²¹ Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 41.

²² Wilson, "The Church and Retention," 86.

²³ Williams, "Make Me Stay," 79.

gives them an advantage in developing their faith but also immerses them in an environment that encourages intergenerational mentoring relationships, reinforcing the church's mission.

Youth ministry ought not to be managed as a silo ministry. Youth ministry should provide opportunities for the adolescents to connect to the larger congregation. Research indicates that many young people do not meaningfully engage with older generations in their churches.²⁴ Youth leaders can connect adolescents with intergenerational small groups, Sunday worship, and service teams intentionally to ensure their church experience is not limited to youth groups.

One area in which many churches are lacking is a transition process for high school graduates. Emerging adults, in most cases, are left to navigate the next stages of life on their own, without guidance. The church needs to care enough about the new emerging adults to create a space for them to transition into adulthood. When trying to figure things out alone, many of them make mistakes they are ashamed of, which prevents them from returning to the church because they do not want to be ridiculed. One of the reasons young adults stated for not returning to church is that church members were judgmental or hypocritical.²⁵ Churches need to help emerging adults prepare for transition by providing guidance through seminars; college and young-adult mentoring; connection to a church near campus; and a simple, safe space to express themselves. The church's prioritization of discipleship activities for children not only nurtures

²⁴ Ed Springer, "An Introduction to Intergenerational Ministry," Youthworks, accessed January 3, 2026, <https://www.youthworks.net/articles/an-introduction-to-intergenerational-ministry>.

²⁵ Earls, "8 Reasons Young Adults."

children's faith but also invigorates the church's witness, ensuring that the gospel is carried into future generations.

Furthermore, some parents are not equipped to provide the spiritual guidance needed to enhance their children's spiritual development. Some parents may lack strong biblical knowledge, spiritual practices, or confidence in discussing faith matters. The Barna Group's study revealed that only 34 percent of adults in the United States read their Bibles once a week or more.²⁶ This staggering result creates a generational gap in spiritual formation, whereby parents desire spiritual development for their children but lack the preparation to facilitate it. Without church leaders intentionally supporting them, parents may default to youth leaders or church programs to provide spiritual guidance for their children.

Therefore, youth leaders need to help bridge the gap between parents and guide the spiritual development of their children by partnering and equipping parents to provide spiritual guidance for their children rather than acting as the primary spiritual experts. Youth leaders can shift the mindset from program-centered to a holistic, family-centered approach by cultivating a ministry culture that affirms parents as the primary disciplers of children. Youth leaders can bridge the gap by offering encouragement, clarity, and practical tools that empower parents to fulfill their God-given role. Youth leaders can provide parents with conversation guide resources, such as prayer prompts and family faith activities. Also, youth leaders can provide families with training on engaging in spiritual practices together. The training can include guidance on holding family devotion times, praying, or attending church services as a family unit. Regular family

²⁶ Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2021."

spiritual activities foster discussions about faith and encourage youth to explore and express their beliefs in a safe environment.

Implications for Parents and Families

Parents are among the most influential individuals in their children's lives and their faith formation. Early scriptural teaching plays a foundational role in shaping the child's spiritual identity and long-term engagement with the church. When introduced to biblical truth at a young age through memory verses, storytelling, prayer routines, informal faith conversations during car rides, and family devotions, they begin to internalize the teachings. As they grow older, their learning can serve as a moral compass guiding their decisions and actions. By incorporating regular Scripture teaching into their children's daily activities, parents can ensure the transmission of faith. This action is consistent with the Scriptures.

Proverbs 22:6 (ESV) says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it." This promise points to a lifelong commitment to the guidance and values instilled during childhood, reflecting the enduring power of godly instruction and the sustaining activity of the Holy Spirit in guiding the individual's continued faithfulness.²⁷ Second Timothy 3:14–15 echoes the concept, where Paul reminded Timothy of the sacred writings he knew since childhood, which gave him wisdom that led to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. While most people categorize this instruction as moral training, it goes beyond that. The Scripture encompasses training and discipling children in all facets of life to help them remain grounded, even as they grow older. Training entails an intentional, deliberate process of

²⁷ "Proverbs 22:6," accessed January 24, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/proverbs/22-6.htm#study>.

imparting instruction and education, whether formal or nonformal, from one person to another.

In this case, the instructions are from the parent to the child.

Also, parents can model authentic faith to their children. Children do learn from what they see their parents do. According to Albert Bandura, children learn by observing, imitating, and modeling the actions of others.²⁸ Deuteronomy 4:9 states, “Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.” This verse illustrates the importance of generational faith transmission in which family is seen as the primary context for spiritual education.²⁹ The writer of the *Life Application Bible* stated that Moses wanted to ensure the people did not forget all they had seen God do, so he urged parents to teach their children about God’s great miracles. This helped parents remember God’s faithfulness and provided a means for professing, from one generation to the next, the stories recounting God’s great acts.³⁰

Parents must have a solid understanding of God and his ways in order to live out the faith. When parents model their faith walk to their children daily, their children will learn and do the same. Parents can share their own walk with God, including how they make decisions, handle conflicts, depend on grace, and repent, showing authenticity in their faith walk to their children.

²⁸ Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 27.

²⁹ “Deuteronomy 4:9,” Bible Hub, accessed January 24, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/deuteronomy/4-9.htm>.

³⁰ *Life Application Study Bible, HCSB*, 261.

Present-day emerging adults value authenticity, and exposure to an authentic faith walk will shape their faith journey during emerging adulthood.

In addition, parents can model faith practices alongside their children in church activities. By engaging together in worship, small groups, service projects, other church activities, parents exemplify communal faithfulness and spiritual disciplines to their children. Doing so not only reinforces the practices that parents are teaching their children at home but also provides a broader context where they observe faith lived out across generations. The modeling can create a family culture that prioritizes faith and enables children to replicate what they learned from their parents, underscoring the importance of maintaining faith practices that strengthen their faith. Lifeway research found that 43 percent of respondents reported continuing to attend church as young adults because they wanted to follow a parent or family member's example.³¹ Parental involvement in the Christian faith through modeling enhances long-lasting faith as the children grow into emerging adults.

In a study by Doig, participants reported that relationship quality with their parents was an important factor influencing their continued involvement in the church; those who remained active in the church reported having very positive memories and relationships with their parents.³² Parents must create an atmosphere in the home that enhances faith development and assume their God-given role to develop the spiritual lives of their children. They can assume their role by modeling the Christian faith to their children. They can incorporate spiritual

³¹ Earls, "8 Reasons Young Adults."

³² Doig, "Factors Influencing Church Involvement," 101–2.

activities in their homes. Youth leaders can help bridge the gap for parents who do not know how by training and equipping them with resources.

Implications for Churches and Intergenerational Ministries

Intergenerational ministries should be the standard for all churches today, even though the approach is not a new concept. Studies reviewed in existing research reveal that intergenerational connection is a crucial ministry area for all churches.³³ According to Lifeway Research, relationships serve as the glue that retains people in church or motivates them to start attending again after a break from attendance.³⁴ Allen and Ross explained that the unique benefits of intergenerational faith formation for children include older adults accompanying them, listening to their stories, validating their search for identity, and joining them on their journey toward God and adulthood, thereby enhancing their faith formation.³⁵

Ministries that do not implement the intergenerational ministry model are missing out on God's plan for the church. God intends faith to be transmitted through generations. Scripture verses such as Deut. 6:6–7 command parents and elders to teach God's ways to the next generations; Psalm 78:4–7 encourages one generation to tell the next of God's work so that they set their hope in God; and Joel 1:3 admonishes parents to tell it to their children, and the children to tell it to their children. These verses reveal the need for intentionality in teaching and sharing

³³ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 43. Allen and Ross, "The Benefits of Intergenerality," 19. Research, "Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church."

³⁴ Research, "Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out."

³⁵ Allen and Ross, "The Benefits of Intergenerality," 19.

faith with the next generation. They reveal that God’s plan is generational continuity, not merely individual discipleship, through the relational transmission of faith. The verses emphasize the multigenerational aspect of faith transmission and the responsibility of each generation to pass the knowledge and experiences of God’s dealings with his people.³⁶

Furthermore, God designed the church as a multigenerational unit that ought to function intergenerationally. First Corinthians 12 describes the church as being a body; Ephesians 2:19 describes the church as a household; and Galatians 6:10 calls the church a family of faith. God’s plan is not for segregated silos, but a community where children can learn from elders and elders are renewed by the young. The church matures whenever every part does its work, including older saints pouring into younger ones.

In a qualitative study of emerging adults ages 18–29 conducted by Megan Brown, one of the factors that influenced them to remain actively involved in the church life after youth ministry is intergenerational relationships.³⁷ Larry G. Linderman, in a study examining the relationship between intergenerational ministry practices and church health, found that churches with intentional intergenerational practices that encourage mutual mentoring created richer networks, stronger discipleship outcomes, and greater identity formation.³⁸

One way the church can enhance intergenerational ministry is by implementing mentoring relationships through designed mentoring structures. Churches can create formal

³⁶ “Psalm 78:4,” Bible Hub, accessed January 24, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/psalms/78-4.htm>; “Joel 1:3,” Bible Hub, accessed January 24, 2026, <https://biblehub.com/joel/1-3.htm>; and Bible Hub, “Deuteronomy 6:7.”

³⁷ Brown, “Relationships Matter,” 15–17.

³⁸ Linderman, “The Relationship between Intergenerational,” 100–105.

mentoring programs that connect adults with adolescents for consistent mentoring relationships. The pairing can be structured based on shared interests or life experiences.³⁹ Structured intergenerational mentoring pathways that connect people with similar interests or experiences can lead to meaningful interactions that foster shared spiritual experiences and learning. These learning opportunities enhance spiritual development and continued church attendance after high school graduation.

Churches may increase the efficacy of structured intergenerational mentoring pathways by implementing training programs that equip mentors with specific skills for engaging youth. Instruction in effective communication strategies and relational techniques ensures that these mentoring interactions remain productive and impactful. Such training also helps mentors understand developmental differences, enabling them to tailor their guidance to the unique needs of emerging generations. Additionally, establishing clear expectations and ongoing support structures strengthens mentor confidence and ensures long-term program sustainability.

Furthermore, churches can enhance intergenerational ministry by organizing events that foster connection across all age groups, allowing participants to develop deeper social bonds and a sense of belonging. These communal gatherings serve as the foundation for intentional, one-on-one interactions across generations that can boost spiritual growth. Intergenerational mentoring within church ministry requires a consistent relational context for long-term sustainability. Many of the emerging adults in this study alluded to the continuity of the intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school years and to how these relationships remain beneficial to them today. Intergenerational mentoring

³⁹ Roberto et al., *Faith Formation*, 48.

relationships help combat the isolation and fragmentation that emerging adults encounter. Hence, placing children in such environments will increase the likelihood that they will continue with the mentoring relationship when they become emerging adults, providing strong support during a stage of life marked by identity exploration and instability.

Churches need to prioritize relationship-based discipleship as a core component of their ministry strategy. Building intergenerational relationships fosters a dynamic faith community in which individuals learn from one another. As such, the relationships can be strengthened through events such as retreats, conferences, vacation Bible schools, and regular gatherings that foster spiritual conversations.⁴⁰ These intentional efforts help cultivate a culture of connection that supports long-term spiritual growth across generations.

Adolescents are already under the influence of coaches, teachers, and bosses who may or may not positively impact their spiritual lives. Due to the wide variety of influences in their lives, churches, youth ministries in particular, must be intentional to orchestrate and integrate intergenerational ministry opportunities that enhance the relationships of children and youth with spiritually mature adults who can help enhance the development of a lasting faith and continued involvement in the church as emerging adults.

In conclusion, the strong impact of discipleship activities and parental involvement, as evidenced by quantitative and qualitative data, indicates that church and youth ministry leaders should prioritize expanding opportunities for young adults to participate in these practices. Parents should be actively involved and provided with clear guidance on how to support their children's spiritual growth. Implementing programs that promote parental participation in church

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53–54.

events can be advantageous. Strong insights from qualitative data on intergenerational mentoring relationships indicate the need to curate these relationships for adolescents intentionally through intergenerational ministry. These factors have proven influential in keeping emerging adults engaged with the church.

Contribution to Existing Literature

This study contributes to the literature by providing evidence about Georgia Evangelical churches on the impact of youth ministry on the lasting faith of emerging adults and their continued church involvement during transition years. By analyzing the roles of discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships, the study highlights key factors that influence emerging adults' engagement with the church after high school graduation.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a comprehensive understanding of how intentional discipleship activities and parental involvement affect spiritual development and church attendance. In addition, the qualitative insights underscore the need for intergenerational ministries, reinforcing the importance of cross-generational relationships for faith development and retention. This study aligns with and extends literature on faith transmission, relational discipleship, the role of adult mentors, and the impact of family and community structures.

Furthermore, most existing studies have examined adolescents or broad adult religiosity, but few focus on emerging adults aged 18–25 and the factors that shape their current faith practices. The 18–25 age range is a period when emerging adults navigate various transitions,

and researchers must understand the middle and high school factors that help maintain EA resilience in faith during these years.

Faith engagement among emerging adults has shifted dramatically in the last decade, and many studies are now aging. Barna's study on the reasons millennials stay connected to church was released in 2013, and Parr and Crites's study on the factors that keep young adults involved in church was conducted in 2015.⁴¹ The present study offers current context-specific data to help ministry leaders and scholars understand how contemporary emerging adults differ from previous cohorts. Identifying these shifts is important because generational patterns of church involvement and spiritual practice continue to evolve.

Limitations

This study was limited to members of a Georgia Evangelical church. Most emerging adult participants are members of Evangelical denominational or nondenominational churches, as well as Baptist churches. The study did not generate good representation from Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Therefore, the limited denominational diversity within the Evangelical sample reduces the representativeness of the study, as it excludes Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Likewise, the churches included are Georgia Evangelical churches.

Also, a limitation of the study involved the internal consistency of the discipleship activity subscale. Initial reliability testing yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .380, indicating poor internal consistency. Three reverse-coded items exhibited negative item-total correlations and

⁴¹ "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church," Barna Group, September 17, 2013, <https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church/>; and Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*.

required removal from the final analysis. Reliability improved to .807 following item deletion; this value exceeds the accepted threshold of .70. Subscale internal consistency reliability increased following the removal of these items.

Additionally, a limitation of the study is the small sample size. While these findings offer meaningful insights into the experiences of the emerging adults, the small sample narrows the breadth of the perspectives represented. However, these data provides valuable evidence that contributes to the growing conversation on emerging adults and their faith engagement.

For Further Research

Some limitations necessitate further research to elucidate the reasons for certain occurrences.

1. Future research should consider revising or expanding the item pool to improve the measurement of discipleship activity and to ensure greater alignment with emerging adults' experiences of faith engagement. The discipleship activities scale was revised for this study. A revision for future use may strengthen the scale's reliability.
2. Future researchers may assess additional variables for inclusion in the model to account for greater variance in Religious Behavior Scale scores, including the role of church leadership during formative years.
3. Future research could provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between discipleship activities and Religious Behavior Scale scores, which can be done as a longitudinal study or by comparing different contexts (urban versus rural churches).

4. Future research is warranted to examine the lack of statistical support for intergenerational mentoring relationships, given the heavy emphasis on such relationships obtained with the qualitative insights. Examining the nature of relationships and how they vary across demographic groups may yield valuable insights. Also, future research could explore the specific characteristics of effective mentoring relationships that resonate with adolescents.
5. Future researchers may identify the factors that influence emerging adults currently involved in church to remain involved, regardless of their prior church attendance background.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors during the middle and high school years that influence emerging adults' decisions to remain involved in church after high school graduation, using a mixed-methods approach. The present study identified and analyzed three domains of influence within the LFS: discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships, and how they contributed to continual church involvement among emerging adults, which was assessed using the Fuller Institute's Religious Behavior Scale.

The study had three research hypotheses:

H₁: Discipleship activities engaged in during middle and high school years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₂: Parental involvement in their spiritual development during middle and high school

years will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

H₃: Intergenerational mentoring relationships formed during middle and high school will positively predict the current Religious Behavior Scale scores of emerging adults.

The findings for research hypotheses 1 and 2 were statistically significant and supported. The findings for research hypothesis 3 were not significantly supported. Respondents provided qualitative insights from the open-ended questions that allude to its influence on the continued church involvement of emerging adults. The findings indicated the need for youth leaders to incorporate discipleship activities into adolescent programming intentionally . Parents must be proactive in discipling their children, with youth leaders providing training and resources to support them in this role. Although not statistically significant, intergenerational mentoring relationships are strongly supported by respondents and should be incorporated into youth ministry operations to support adolescents' faith formation.

Final Reflections on Sustaining Emerging Adults' Faith

The study emphasizes the roles of discipleship activities, parental involvement, and intergenerational mentoring relationships in sustaining the long-lasting faith of emerging adults, thereby sustaining their involvement in church. However, no single factor can function independently. The factors work in concert to provide a holistic approach to the spiritual formation of adolescents, thereby enhancing long-lasting faith. While some churches may emphasize one factor or another, well-rounded spiritual development occurs when multiple

factors are integrated into the spiritual formation process and when youth ministries partner with parents in this endeavor for their children.

APPENDIX A

FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE BEHAVIOR SCALE

The Fuller Youth Institute's Religious Behavior Scale. This scale assesses your frequency of engagement in a variety of corporate and individual behaviors.

22. How often did you...							
Previous attachment	Less than once a month	About once a month	2-3 times a month	About once a week	2-3 times a week	Daily	No answer
...talk with another Christian about your faith, outside of a church-related context ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...participate in an on-campus Christian fellowship?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...pray alone ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...attend a worship service or other event at a church off-campus?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...speak or try to speak with a non-Christian about your faith?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...volunteer your time to serve others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...participate in a small group of your peers for religious or spiritual purposes?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...read your Bible by yourself ?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...attend a school-sponsored chapel?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...meet with an older christian for spiritual growth, mentoring, or discipleship?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...participate in service or justice work that helps people in need?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX B

LASTING FAITH SCALE

Please answer the following questions based on your experiences in middle and/or high school.

Please answer the following questions using this as a guide:

NO! = I strongly disagree, or this is not true for me at all

No = I disagree, or this is not true for me most of the time

no = I slightly disagree, or this is not true for me just over half the time

yes = I slightly agree, or this is true for me just over half the time

Yes = I agree, or this is true for me most of the time

YES! = I strongly agree, or this is true for me all the time

Please select only ONE answer for each of the questions below:

- | | NO! | No | no | yes | Yes | YES! |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I often have the opportunity to use my skills and talents to help out in my church or youth group | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. Most of my decisions are based on what I believe God wants me to do with my life. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. I enjoy reading the Bible outside of church | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. I don't think about God much outside of church or youth group | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. If it were completely up to me and my parents did not care, I would attend church or youth group activities LESS often than I do now. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6. The people at my church do not allow me to think for myself | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. I often talk to a Christian friend about my faith | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. The sermons in our church and/or youth group mean a lot to me. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| <i>If you do not live with your birth mother, consider the <u>female parent</u> you live with the most for the following <u>three questions</u>:</i> | | | | | | |
| 9. My MOTHER attends church two or more times a month. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10. I would describe the spiritual life of my MOTHER as a sincere Christian faith. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 11. People consider my MOTHER as an active leader in our church | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| <i>If you do not live with your birth father, consider the <u>male parent</u> you live with the most for the following <u>three questions</u>:</i> | | | | | | |
| 12. My FATHER attends church two or more times a month. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 13. I would describe the spiritual life of my FATHER as a sincere Christian faith. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 14. People consider my FATHER as an active leader in our church. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 15. In my home, we often have discussions, involving me and either or both of my parents, about our faith. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 16. My parents spend time helping me know how to make right decisions. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Please select only ONE answer for each of the questions below:

- | | NO! | No | no | yes | Yes | YES! |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 17. When I think of current adults (whether Christian or non-Christian) whom I respect and look up to (teacher, coach, employer, neighbor, etc.), in general I would describe their spiritual life as a sincere Christian faith. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 18. I know two or more adult Christians (other than my parents) who know my name. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 19. Adults in our church are spiritually mature. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 20. Most of my adult relatives (other than my parents) encourage my Christian beliefs. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 21. I look up to the leadership of our main youth leader. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 22. I often pay attention to the advice I get from adults other than my parents. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

APPENDIX C

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

These two questions were asked at the end of the survey.

1. What are some experiences, relationships, or church activities in middle and high school that have helped you remain involved in church life?
2. How have discipleship, mentoring relationships, or church activities in high school carried over to your present day? Please be specific about the factors.

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION REQUEST TO USE THE LASTING FAITH SCALE

From Temitayo Olusanya <temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu>

Date Mon 12/23/2024 8:02 PM

To wes.black@travis.org <wes.black@travis.org>

Cc Peavey, Donna <dpeavey@nobts.edu>; catria2000@yahoo.com <catria2000@yahoo.com>

Dear Dr. Wesley Black,

My name is Temi Olusanya. I am a doctoral student at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I am working on my dissertation research, which will investigate the reflective perspectives and factors that impact emerging adults' decisions about church involvement.

I am requesting a copy of The Lasting Faith in the most recent version and permission to use this instrument for my research study. The participants will answer the questions based on their recollections of experiences before turning 18 years old.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

In Christ,

Temitayo Olusanya, ThM, MACE, MADi

From Wes Black <wes.black@travis.org>

Date Tue 12/24/2024 3:19 PM

To Temitayo Olusanya <temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu>

 1 attachment (202 KB)

Lasting Faith Scale v6 Oct 2007.doc;

Dear Temitayo,

You have permission to use the Lasting Faith Scale in your dissertation research.

Attached is the most recent version of the scale. Best wishes and blessings on your research.

Wes Black

Wes Black
Minister with Legacy/Senior Adults
Travis Avenue Baptist Church
Fort Worth, TX 76110
www.travis.org
wes.black@travis.org
(O) 817.924.4266
(M) 817.235.2937

APPENDIX E

PERMISSION GRANTED TO MODIFY AND PRINT THE LASTING FAITH SCALE

Temitayo Olusanya
To: Wes Black <wes.black@travis.org>



Thu 4/24/2025 10:11 PM

Dr. Black,

Thank you very much for permitting me to use your instrument.

As I am conducting the research with current emerging adults and obtaining their recollection of experiences in middle and/or high school, I would like to ask your permission to modify the survey questions for use in this context.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Temi Olusanya

...

Wes Black<wes.black@travis.org>
To:  Temitayo Olusanya



Sun 4/27/2025 8:34 PM

Temitayo,

I am sorry for taking so long to reply to your email. I have been tied up with some busy responsibilities.

You have permission to modify the survey with the condition that you explain in detail and justify the modifications made to the survey in your research project. This can be done in either the body of the work or in an appendix.

Wesley Black

Wes Black
Minister with Legacy/Senior Adults
Travis Avenue Baptist Church
Fort Worth, TX 76110
www.travis.org
wes.black@travis.org
(O) 817.924.4266
(M) 817.235.2937

...



Temitayo Olusanya

To: Wes Black <wes.black@travis.org>



Thu 4/2/2026 5:44 AM

Good morning, Dr. Black!

I would like to extend my gratitude for the opportunity to use your survey instrument for my dissertation research. However, I need one more permission from you. May I be granted permission to print the survey instrument in my dissertation as well?

Thank you,
Temi.



Wes Black <wes.black@travis.org>

To: ○ Temitayo Olusanya



Thu 4/2/2026 9:34 AM

i You replied on Thu 4/2/2026 9:50 AM

Yes you have permission to print the survey instrument in your dissertation.

Wesley Black

Wes Black
wesleyblack.com
wesleyblack@gmail.com
(M) 817.235.2937



APPENDIX F

PERMISSION REQUEST TO USE THE RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR SCALE

From Fuller Youth Institute <fyi@fuller.edu>

Date Mon 1/13/2025 11:47 AM

To Temitayo Olusanya <temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu>

Cc Peavey, Donna <dpeavey@nobts.edu>; catria2000@yahoo.com <catria2000@yahoo.com>

Hi Temitayo,

Thank you for reaching out! Due to the current emergency situation in California, we are delayed in processing your request. A team member will reach out when we are able. We appreciate your patience!



Fuller Youth Institute

fyi@fuller.edu

Fuller Youth Institute

135 North Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91182

T. 6265845580



On Mon, Dec 23, 2024 at 5:16 PM Temitayo Olusanya <temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu> wrote:

Dear Mr. Brad Griffin,

My name is Temi Olusanya. I am a doctoral student at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. I am working on my dissertation research, which will investigate the reflective perspectives and factors that impact emerging adults' decisions about church involvement.

I am requesting a copy of the Fuller Youth Institute's Religious Behavior Scale in the most recent version and permission to use this instrument for my research study. I will use the *College version of the Religious Behavior Scale*. How often did you..."

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

In Christ,

Temitayo Olusanya, ThM, MACE, MADi

From Brad Griffin <bgriffin@fuller.edu>

Date Thu 1/30/2025 7:00 PM

To Temitayo Olusanya <temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu>

Cc LaTasha Nesbitt <latashanesbitt@fuller.edu>; Fuller Youth Institute <fyi@fuller.edu>

Hi Temi,

Thanks for your patience during a difficult time. Below is a screenshot of the final scale as it was used in actual surveys for the College Transition Project. The revised scale was not published academically, so the citation can be: Cameron Lee, Kara Powell, and Brad M. Griffin, "Religious Behavior Scale" (Fuller Youth Institute, unpublished), 2010.

Feel free to reference this email as permission to reuse the scale. Thanks.

22. How often did you...	Less than once a month	About once a month	2-3 times a month	About once a week	2-3 times a week	Daily	No answer
...talk with another Christian about your faith, outside of a church-related context?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...participate in an on-campus Christian fellowship?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...pray alone?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...attend a worship service or other event at a church off-campus?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...speak or try to speak with a non-Christian about your faith?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...volunteer your time to serve others?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...participate in a small group of your peers for religious or spiritual purposes?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...read your Bible by yourself?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...attend a school-sponsored chapel?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...meet with an older christian for spiritual growth, mentoring, or discipleship?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
...participate in service or justice work that helps people in need?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x



Brad Griffin

Senior Director of Content & Research

Fuller Youth Institute

Pasadena CA



Fuller Youth Institute

APPENDIX G

AMAZON GIFT CARD DRAWING

Thank you for completing the survey! If you would like to be entered to win one of three \$75 Amazon gift cards, [click here](#) to provide your contact information. Winners will be notified at the email address provided by Oct. 20. Thank you!

1. Please provide your email address to be entered in the Amazon gift card drawing.

Email Address _____

Appendix H

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Temitayo Olusanya
PhD Candidate, NOBTS
6786657887
Temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu

Donna Peavey, PhD
Professor of Christian Education
Supervisor, NOBTS
(504) 816-8300
Dpeavey@nobts.edu

Dear Pastor/Young Adult Pastor,

As a Doctoral candidate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Leadership degree. The purpose of my research is to discover the factors during middle and high school years that kept emerging adults ages 18–25 (probably addressed as young adults in your ministry) engaged in the church after high school graduation. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

I need your assistance in disseminating the survey to the emerging adults in your young adults' ministry. Participants must be ages 18–25, previously involved in a student ministry, and currently involved in a local church as an emerging adult. As an incentive, participants in the survey will be entered into a drawing and have a chance to win one of three \$75 gift cards, upon providing their information after completing the survey.

A consent form is provided prior to filling out the survey. The consent document contains additional information about the research I am conducting. Completing the consent form indicates your emerging adult's desire to participate in the study.

Thank you very much for your assistance in getting your emerging adults to complete the survey. I have attached the consent form containing the survey link for you to give to your students. May God bless you!

In His Service,
Temitayo Olusanya

APPENDIX I

SURVEY CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study of emerging adults and church participation while in middle and high school.

What is the study about? The research will identify experiences related to attending church during middle and high school years.

I am a PhD candidate interested in researching the experiences of emerging adults during their middle and high school years that impact their current stay in a Georgia Evangelical church. The results of this study are useful in helping youth ministry leaders, pastors, and parents better understand the areas of ministry to focus on, which will enhance the decision of current youth ministry students to stay involved in church after graduating from high school.

If you agree to participate, you will complete two surveys, the Lasting Faith and the Religious Behavior Scale, and a couple of short-answer questions. The Lasting Faith Scale consists of thirty items, while the Religious Behavior Scale consists of 11 items. You would also answer two questions by typing your responses.

Although all studies have some degree of risk, the potential in this investigation is relatively minimal. All activities are similar to routine survey procedures, and all performance is anonymous. You will not incur any costs due to your participation in this study.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your participation in this study at any time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions before participating or during the study.

I will be giving away three \$75 Amazon gift cards as an incentive for completing the survey. If you want to be entered into the drawing for the gift cards, you will be allowed to provide your email address. Your email address will only be used for the gift card drawing and will not be connected to your survey answers in any way.

In His Service,
Temi Olusanya, PhD Candidate

*1. AUTHORIZATION: I have read the above and understand the nature of this study. By agreeing to participate in this study, I understand that I have not waived any legal or human rights and may contact the researcher at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Temi Olusanya, 678 665 7887, anytime. Therefore, I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, I know that if

I have any concerns about my treatment during the study, I can contact the chair at (504) 816-8300 or the Internal Review Board Committee at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, irbcommittee@nobts.edu, at any time.

By [clicking this link](#), you are giving your consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX J

DEMOGRAPHICS

For this survey, an Evangelical church emphasizes the importance of the Bible, the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the mission of sharing the gospel. Examples of Evangelical churches include Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and nondenominational congregations that adhere to these principles.

1. Are you currently attending a Georgia Evangelical church?
____ Yes. Select which one ____ Baptist ____ Methodist ____ Pentecostal ____ non-denominational ____ Other
____ No. (Stop filling out the survey. Thank you for your time.)
2. Did you attend a Georgia Evangelical church during middle and/or high school?
____ Yes. Select which one ____ Baptist ____ Methodist ____ Pentecostal ____ non-denominational ____ Other
____ No. (Stop filling out the survey. Thank you for your time.)
3. Check your age.
__18 __19 __20 __21 __22 __23 __24 __25
4. Check your gender
____ Male
____ Female

Lasting Faith Scale

About Me

The following Lasting Faith Scale survey questions were modified to align with the context of this research study.

5. With whom did you live most of the time while you were in middle and/or high school?
(Please select only ONE BEST answer.)
 - ☐ Both mother and father
 - ☐ Mother only
 - ☐ Father only
 - ☐ Mother and step-father
 - ☐ Father and step-mother
 - ☐ Other (Grandparent(s), Foster parent(s), etc.)
6. Which parent did you most closely identify with during middle and/or high school?
(Please select only ONE BEST answer.)
 - ☐ Both parents equally
 - ☐ Mother
 - ☐ Father
 - ☐ Neither parent
7. Which parent did you respect the most regarding spiritual matters during middle and/or high school? (Please select ONE BEST answer.)
 - ☐ Both parents equally
 - ☐ Mother
 - ☐ Father
 - ☐ Neither parent
8. When you thought about Jesus Christ during middle and/or high school, you identified with him primarily as (select ONLY ONE of the following):
 - ☐ An example to be followed.
 - ☐ The Son of God.
 - ☐ My personal savior.
 - ☐ No meaningful relationship.

APPENDIX K

SECOND EMAIL TO THE PASTORS

Dear Pastor/Young Adult Pastor,

I hope this message finds you well! I am writing to follow up on my recent invitation to participate in a research study examining the factors that keep emerging adults engaged in the church after high school graduation.

As a reminder, I am looking for participants aged 18–25 who have been involved in a student ministry and are currently active in a local church. A survey link was shared earlier, and participants will have the chance to win one of three \$75 gift cards as an incentive for their involvement.

Your assistance in sharing this with your young adults' ministry would be invaluable, and I appreciate your support in helping me reach this important demographic. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to reach out. I have the consent form, which includes the link to the survey, attached to this email. I'm looking forward to your help!

Thank you once again for your partnership in this research effort. May God bless you and your ministry.

In His Service,
Temitayo Olusanya
PhD Candidate, NOBTS
678-665-7887
temitayo.olusanya@students.nobts.edu

APPENDIX L

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



September 16, 2025

Temitayo Olusanya,

The Research Doctoral Institutional Review Board of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has reviewed your proposed research project, "EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS DURING THEIR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL YEARS THAT INFLUENCED THEM TO STAY INVOLVED IN GEORGIA EVANGELICAL CHURCHES." The IRB has given final approval of your research protocol.

According to Section III.I.3b of the Manual for Research Doctoral Programs,

Any changes in the project after approval by the IRB must be resubmitted for review by the IRB before approval is granted. IRB approval is granted for a maximum of two years and may be subject to review at any time during that period.

Therefore, your protocol approval expires on September 16, 2027. If your research has not been completed by that date you will need to resubmit a request for IRB review along with an update regarding the research you have completed. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office.

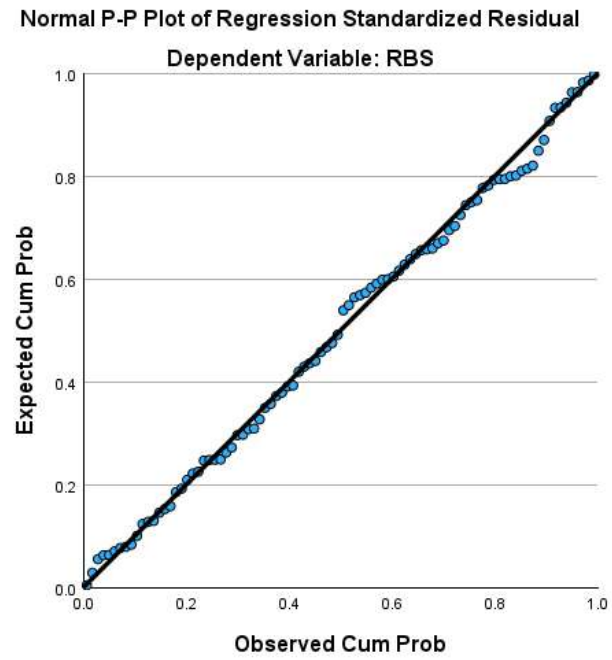
Sincerely,



Dr. Terry Iles
PhD Director

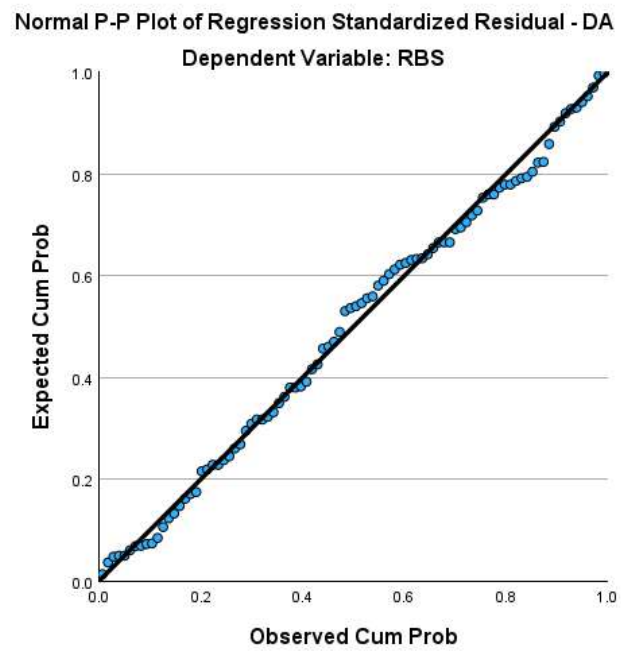
APPENDIX M

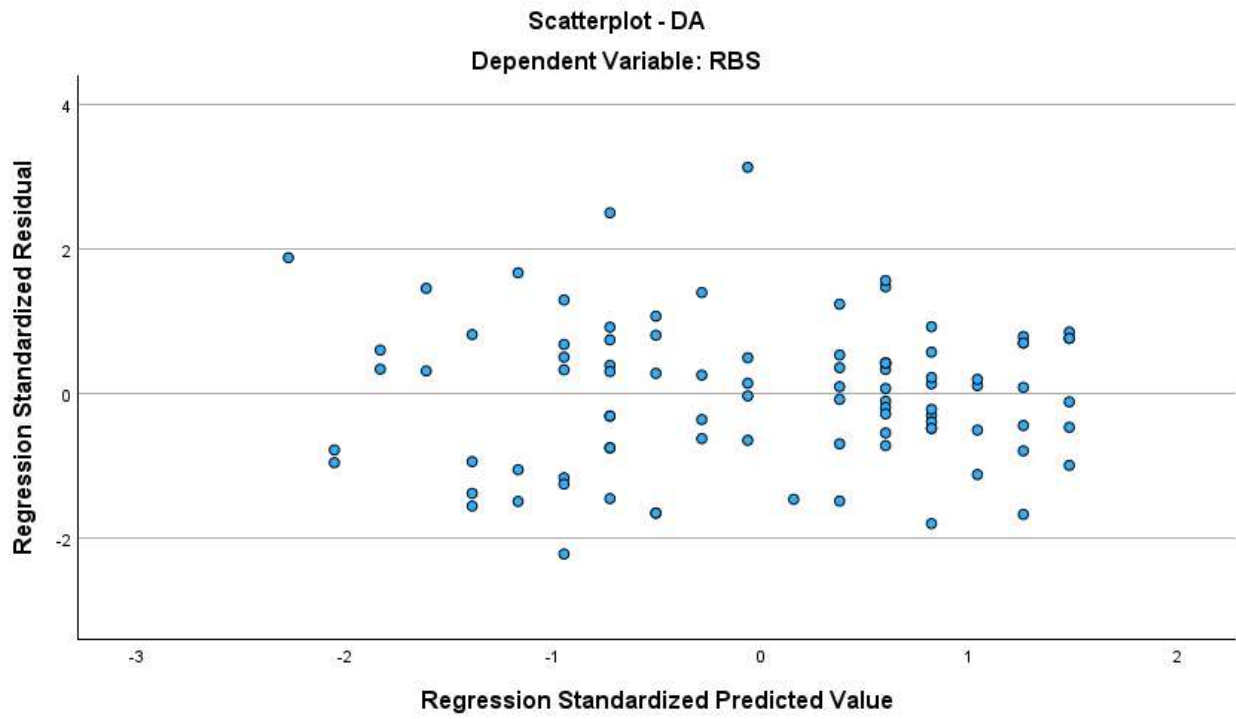
P-P PLOT FOR PREDICTED VARIABLES



APPENDIX N

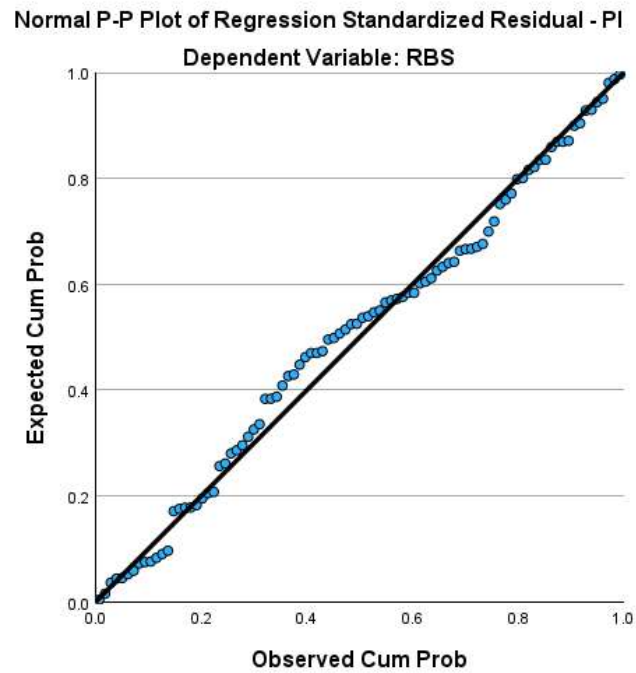
P-P PLOT AND SCATTERPLOT FOR DISCIPLESHIP ACTIVITIES

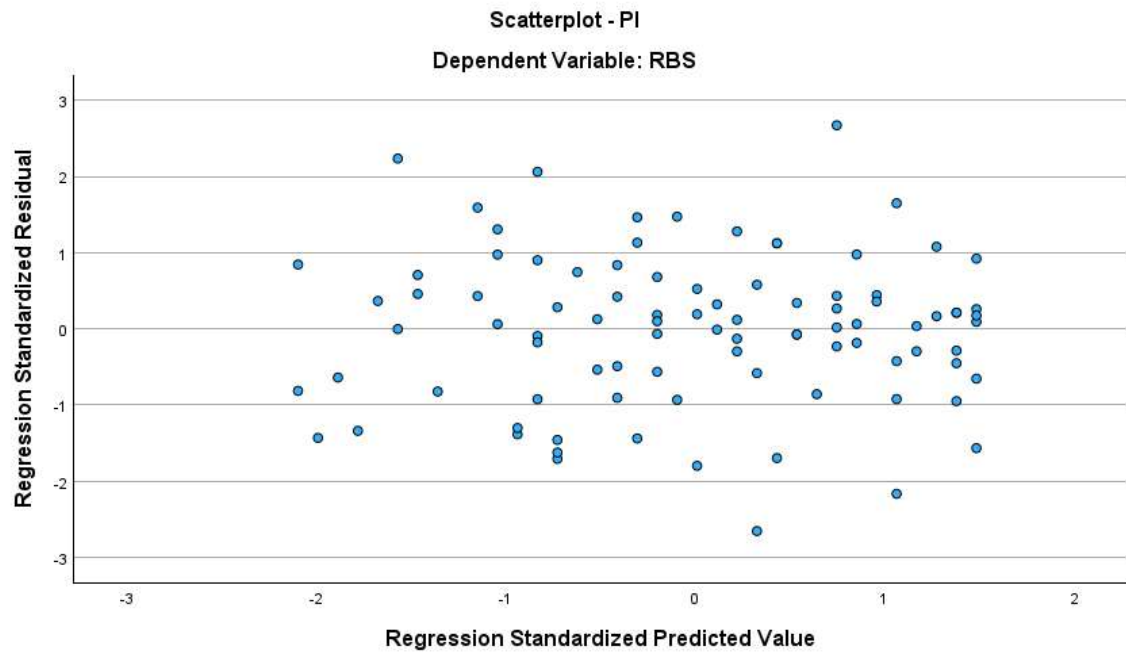




APPENDIX O

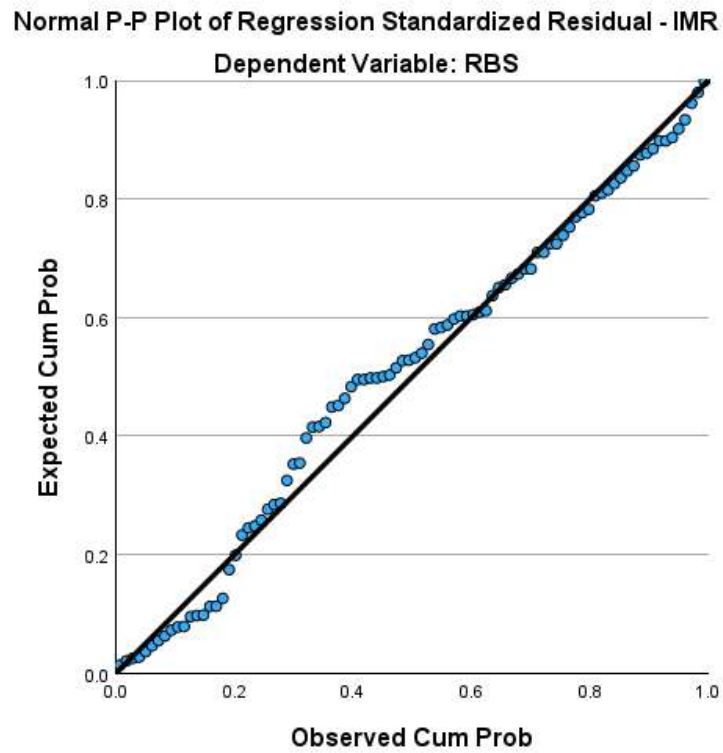
P-P PLOT AND SCATTERPLOT FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

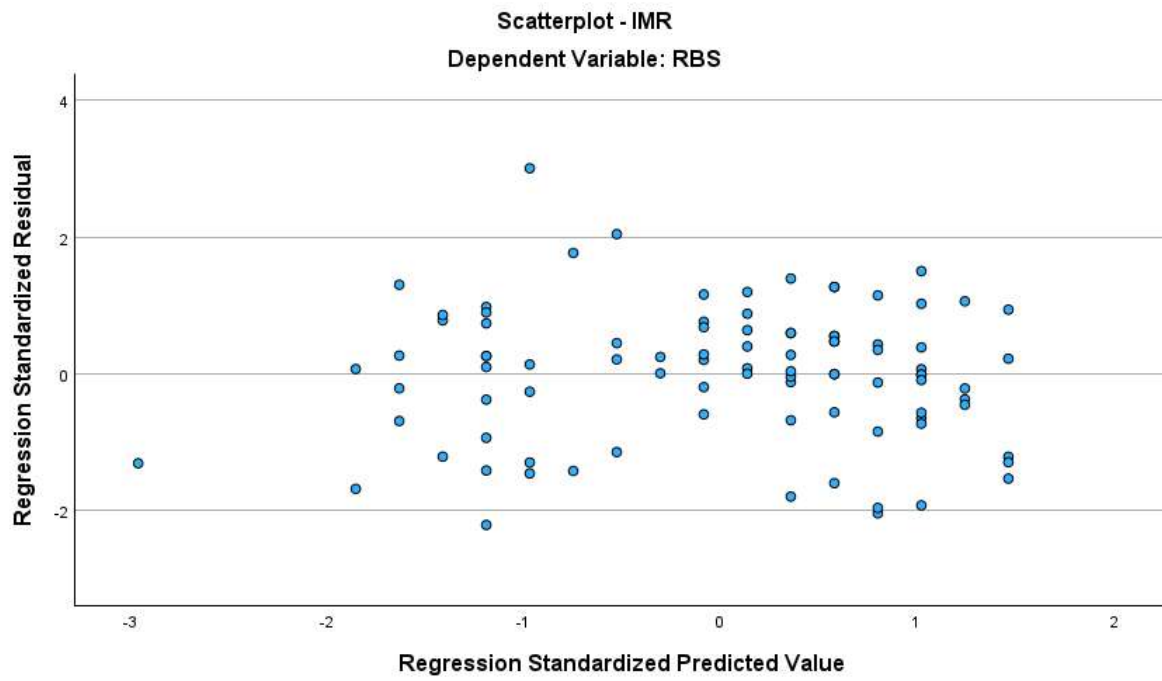




APPENDIX P

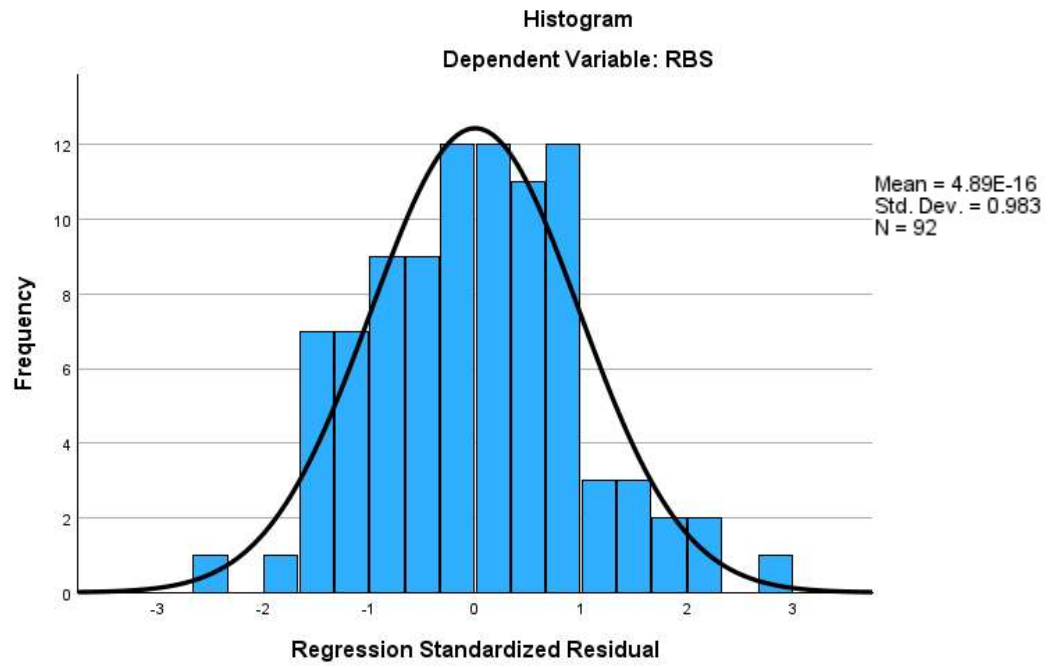
P-P PLOT AND SCATTERPLOT FOR INTERGENERATIONAL MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS





APPENDIX Q

HISTOGRAM OF RESIDUALS



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EDUCATIONAL

BS, Georgia State University, 2011
MA, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020
MACE, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
ThM, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
PhD, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2026

MINISTERIAL

Children's Teacher, Christ Apostolic Church, Lagos, Nigeria, 1995 – 2001
Assistant Youth Ministry Leader, Christ Apostolic Church, Lagos, Nigeria, 1998 – 2001
Women's Ministry Leader, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Jonesboro, Georgia, 2006 – 2010
Children's Ministry Volunteer, Eagles Landing First Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia, 2012 – 2018
Women's Bible Study Teacher, Eagles Landing First Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia, 2015 – 2018
Executive Ministry Coordinator, Enriched Hope Ministry, McDonough, Georgia 2021 – Present

PROFESSIONAL

Pediatric Respiratory Care Professional, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
Basic Life Support Instructor

ORGANIZATIONAL

Member, Women in Scholarship Society, 2022 – present
Member, Disciples Leaders Network, 2022 – present

CERTIFICATIONS

American Heart Association Basic Life Support Instructor
Pediatric Advanced Life Support Provider

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION PRESENTATIONS

“Biographies of Soren Kierkegaard and LeRoy Ford.” Disciple Leaders Network Annual Meeting (2023)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Bethel Fellowship Women's Convention, July 2025
Walking in Confidence: Breaking Free from Fear and Insecurity

Rooted and Radiant Girls Conference, August 2025
Rooted in Prayer: Staying Connected to God
Panel Discussion Participant, “Living Out Your Radiance”

RESEARCH FOCUS

Emerging adults
Youth Ministry
Young Adult Ministry
Church Retention

BOOK REVIEWS

Holy Grit: The Will to Persevere, by M. Dean Register. *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2025).

Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide, by Sam Storms. *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2026).