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## Spiritual Formation in the Home: An Analysis of Family Devotions and Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

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Parents play an important role in shaping the faith of their children. Prior research demonstrates that the quality of parent-child relationships and the incorporation of spiritual disciplines into the home matter to faith formation. However, the association between spiritual disciplines and the quality of parent-child relationships has not previously been explored. We consider a particular spiritual discipline—family devotions—which we define as the regular and intentional spiritual discipline practiced in the home that incorporates Bible reading, prayer, and other devotional materials. We analyze a sample of 2,397 parents of children enrolled in private Christian schools for their family devotions practices and self-reported quality of parent-child relationships. We find that parents who report consistently engaging in family devotions are more likely to report willingness to talk with their child about faith (15 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), spending quality time as a family (20 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), and openness to other conversations with their child (12 points,  $p < 0.001$ ). Daily family prayer appears to matter most, though daily Bible reading matters more to fathers and daily use of other devotional materials matters more to mothers.

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### **Abstract**

Parents play an important role in shaping the faith of their children. Prior research demonstrates that the quality of parent-child relationships and the incorporation of spiritual disciplines into the home matter to faith formation. However, the association between spiritual disciplines and the quality of parent-child relationships has not previously been explored. We consider a particular spiritual discipline—family devotions—which we define as the regular and intentional spiritual discipline practiced in the home that incorporates Bible reading, prayer, and other devotional materials. We analyze a sample of 2,397 parents of children enrolled in private Christian schools for their family devotions practices and self-reported quality of parent-child relationships. We find that parents who report consistently engaging in family devotions are more likely to report willingness to talk with their child about faith (15 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), spending quality time as a family (20 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), and openness to other conversations with their child (12 points,  $p < 0.001$ ). Daily family prayer appears to matter most, though daily Bible reading matters more to fathers and daily use of other devotional materials matters more to mothers.

*Keywords:* spiritual formation, private Christian schools, family devotions, parent-child relationships

## **Spiritual Formation in the Home**

### **An Analysis of Family Devotions and Quality of Parent-Child Relationships**

I did not get my knowledge of the Bible from Sunday School or from any other school, but I got it on Sunday afternoons with my mother at home.

—J. Gresham Machen, “Faith and Knowledge” (1925)

Parents’ influence on their children’s faith is well documented by empirical research, involving both relationships and incorporation of spiritual disciplines in the home (Leonard et al., 2013; Patacchini & Zenou, 2011; King et al., 2002; Kelley & Graaf, 1997; Dudley & Dudley, 1986). Faith formation is a highly relational process, affecting and affected by relationships between parent and parent, parent and child, as well as others around the family. Homogamous parents (that is, parents who are similar in reported denomination, religious service attendance, and religious salience) report higher levels of parental satisfaction (Henderson et al., 2016; Nelson & Uecker, 2018) while religious discord (when parents have different views on religion) yields lower quality intergenerational relationships (Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Homogamy is also linked to pro-social behavior in children (Bartkowski et al., 2008) and adult emerging religiosity (Leonard et al., 2013). The community around the family matters as well. Religious parents with a greater proportion of religious peers exert greater effort in transmitting their faith to their children (Patacchini & Zenou, 2011).

Among these relationships, however, the relationship between parent and child appears to matter most. Quality of parent-child relationships is a significant factor that may moderate intergenerational transmission of faith (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012). Relationship-based efforts may include conversation (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001) and intentional

discipleship (Perkins, 2007). Parents encouraging their children to “become involved in religious life” was predictive of church attendance and prayer in adult life (Krause & Ellison, 2007, p. 109). The presence of religion in a family is positively correlated with higher quality relationships (Mahoney et al., 2003), perhaps because religiosity in parents is found to be positively associated with higher levels of parenting satisfaction (Henderson et al., 2016; Krok, 2018), lower levels of parenting stress (Henderson et al., 2016), and higher levels of child mental health (Yeung & Chan, 2014, 2016).

Mothers in particular play a salient role as the primary influencers of children’s faith (Francis et al., 2018, 2020; Francis & Craig, 2006; Francis & Gibson, 1993). Petts (2012), for example, examines a sample of children raised by single mothers and finds that children raised by religious mothers are less likely to display problem behaviors such as boasting, arguing, and bullying. Goeke-Morey et al. (2013) find that mothers’ religiosity (measured by importance of religion, frequency of church attendance, and attitude toward Christianity) was associated with better family functioning and greater parent-child attachment security. Religion in turn may support the quality of mother-child relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). However, paternal religiosity matters as well and can play an augmenting role (Fawcett et al., 2021).

Spiritual disciplines exercised within the family context matter as well. Family religious habits may play a prominent role in faith formation (Erickson, 1992). As previously mentioned, parental conversations about faith can help nurture faith (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Perkins, 2007). Other meaningful family habits and spiritual practices include religious service attendance (Petts, 2011; Smith, 2021) and intentional family discipleship (Perkins, 2007).

One spiritual discipline that has not been widely studied is the practice of family worship or family devotions. One empirical study of family worship practices found that students in families who engage in family worship scored higher on the Active Faith scale (J. W. Lee et al., 1997). While it is clear that both parent-child relationships and family spiritual disciplines matter to nurturing children's faith, the association between such practices and the quality of parent-child relationships has not been studied. We aim to help close this gap in the literature with an investigation into family devotions, which we define as the regular and intentional spiritual discipline practiced in the home that incorporates Bible reading, prayer, and other devotional materials. We find that parents who report consistently engaging in family devotions are more likely to report higher quality relationships with their children.

### **Methodology**

#### **Data**

Data come from a pilot study of the Association of Christian Schools International's (ACSI) Flourishing Faith Index (FFI), fielded in the fall of 2022 (M. H. Lee et al., 2023). The pilot study included 33 schools broadly representative of ACSI, the largest Protestant private school organization in the United States (Broughman et al., 2021).

#### **Sample**

Importantly for our analysis, the pilot study included 2,397 parents who responded to questions about their spiritual health, engagement with spiritual disciplines, and perspectives on Christian education (see Table 1). On average, these parents had 1.71 children currently enrolled in a private Christian school and have had at least one child enrolled for at least 5 years. The sample is highly educated, with 44 percent reporting a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education and 32 percent reporting some education beyond a bachelor's. The average respondent

is a married (93 percent) female (75 percent) born around 1978. With respect to the respondent's personal faith, 95 percent of all respondents reported being "a Christian for many years" and 69 percent reported being in a homogamous marriage in which "My spouse and I are both strong Christians." Finally, with respect to the respondent's spiritual disciplines, the vast majority of respondents report attending religious services at least weekly (77 percent) and praying daily (87 percent). Daily Bible reading (37 percent) and devotional reading (13 percent) are less common.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Instrumentation**

Several items probed respondents about family devotions and perceived quality of parent-child relationship (see Table 2). Respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale how strongly they agreed with these items (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree). Three items capture family devotions:

1. My family reads from the Bible together almost every day. ( $f^1$ )
2. My family reads from a devotional together almost every day. ( $f^2$ )
3. My family prays together almost every day. ( $f^3$ )

Among these, prayer appears to be the most common practice, with 70 percent of the sample agreeing or strongly agreeing that family prayer is their daily practice (mean = 3.87). Daily family Bible reading was the next most common practice, with 25 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing (mean = 2.77), followed by devotional reading (22 percent, mean = 2.70). As a construct ( $f$ ), the three items demonstrate strong internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) with a mean of 3.11. Importantly for our main analysis, we consider respondents with a mean construct score of 4 or greater ( $f \geq 4$ ) as consistently engaging in family devotions. In our analytic sample, 22 percent consistently engaged in family devotions by this definition.

Three additional items capture respondent's perceived quality of parent-child relationship:

4. My child knows they can always talk to me about faith. ( $q^1$ )
5. My family spends quality time together. ( $q^2$ )
6. I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything. ( $q^3$ )

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed with each of these items. Nearly all respondents agreed with Item 4 (99 percent, mean = 4.72), Item 6 (98 percent, mean = 4.72), and Item 5 (97 percent, mean = 4.59). Given strong agreement with these items, we focus on respondents who strongly agreed with these items in our main analysis.

[Table 2 about here]

In Table 3, we present descriptive statistics for mothers and fathers separately, reproducing overall descriptive statistics from Table 2 in column 1. Fathers tended to report higher levels of educational attainment and were more likely than mothers to report being in a homogamous marriage. They were more likely to report attending religious services weekly or more frequently and reading the Bible daily, as well as more likely to agree that their family reads the Bible together almost every day. Mothers were more likely to report praying daily as well as to agree that their family spends quality time together and that they are willing to talk to their child about just about anything.

[Table 3 about here]

### **Empirical Strategy**

We seek to answer four questions in our analysis. First, who practices family devotions? Second, what is the association between family devotions and the quality of parent-child relationships? Third, which aspects of family devotions contribute most meaningfully to the



quality of parent-child relationships? Finally, does the association between family devotions and the quality of parent-child relationships differ for mothers and fathers?

***Who practices family devotions?***

To assess who practices family devotions, we use the following empirical model:

$$f_i = \beta_0 + \boldsymbol{\chi}'\beta + \boldsymbol{\alpha}'\beta + \boldsymbol{\delta}'\beta + \boldsymbol{\phi}'\beta + \boldsymbol{\sigma}'\beta + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Here,  $f_i$  is an indicator variable which takes a value of 1 if respondent  $i$ 's family devotions construct score had a value of 4 or greater, that is to say, the respondent on average agreed or strongly agreed with the three items composing the family devotions construct, and 0 otherwise.

We regress  $f_i$  on a series of respondent covariates.

In the first regression, we include  $\boldsymbol{\chi}$ , a vector of two covariates that capture the number of children the respondent currently has enrolled in a private Christian school and the number of years for which the respondent had at least one child enrolled.

In the second regression, we include  $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ , a vector of two indicator variables that correspond with the respondent's highest level of educational attainment, either less than a bachelor's or postbaccalaureate, with a bachelor's degree serving as the omitted category.

In the third regression, we include  $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ , a vector of five demographic covariates, including male, birth year, currently married, and ethnicity.

In the fourth regression, we include  $\boldsymbol{\phi}$ , a vector of two indicator variables for the respondent's personal faith, whether the respondent self-identified as a "Christian for many years" and strongly agreed that "My spouse and I are both strong Christians."

In the fifth regression, we include  $\boldsymbol{\sigma}$ , a vector of five indicator variables for the respondent's engagement with spiritual disciplines, including religious service attendance, prayer, Bible reading, and devotional reading.

Finally, in the sixth regression, we include all of the covariates  $\chi$ ,  $\alpha$ ,  $\delta$ ,  $\phi$ , and  $\sigma$  from the previous five regressions.

***What is the association between family devotions and quality of parent-child relationship?***

To evaluate the association between family devotions and quality of parent-child relationship, we estimate the following model:

$$q_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 f_i + \chi' \beta + \alpha' \beta + \delta' \beta + \phi' \beta + \sigma' \beta + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Here,  $q_i$  represents one of three indicator variables that takes a value of 1 if the respondent strongly agreed with the three parent-child relationship variables  $q^1$ ,  $q^2$ , and  $q^3$ . Following our strategy for model (1), we add in covariates  $\chi$ ,  $\alpha$ ,  $\delta$ ,  $\phi$ , and  $\sigma$  in separate regressions, including all covariates in the sixth and final regression.

***Which aspects of family devotions contribute most meaningfully to the quality of parent-child relationships?***

Thirdly, to study which aspects of family devotions contribute most meaningfully to the quality of parent-child relationships, we estimate the following model:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 f_i^1 + \beta_2 f_i^2 + \beta_3 f_i^3 + \chi' \beta + \alpha' \beta + \delta' \beta + \phi' \beta + \sigma' \beta + \epsilon_i \quad (3)$$

Here, rather than considering family devotions as one construct  $f_i$ , we regress each outcome  $y_i$  on  $f_i^1$ ,  $f_i^2$ , and  $f_i^3$ , the three items composing  $f_i$ .

***Does the association between family devotions and parent-child relationships differ for mothers and fathers?***

Finally, to consider whether the association between family devotions and parent-child relationships differs for mothers and fathers, we introduce an interaction term in the following model:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \Sigma(\beta_{n1} f_i^n + \beta_{n2} f_i^n * father_i) + \chi' \beta + \alpha' \beta + \delta' \beta + \phi' \beta + \sigma' \beta + \epsilon_i \quad (4)$$

where  $f_i^n * father_i$  is the interaction of  $f_i^1$ ,  $f_i^2$ , and  $f_i^3$  and a dummy variable indicating if the respondent is the father. Thus, the coefficient  $\beta_{n2}$  provides a statistical test for whether the relationship between  $f_i^n$  and  $y_i$  was different for mothers and fathers.

In all models, we estimate heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors to account for our dichotomous outcome variables.

### Results

We present our findings on who practices family devotions in Table 4. In our analytic sample, 22 percent of respondents reported regularly practicing family devotions, as indicated by a family devotions construct score greater than or equal to 4 (see Table 1). Generally speaking, most parent characteristics do not meaningfully predict the regular practice of family devotions. Family devotions appears to be more common among younger parents (3 percentage points more likely per 7 years above mean birth year,  $p < 0.001$ ) and for parents in a homogamous marriage (4 points,  $p < 0.05$ ). Statistically speaking, family devotions is rightly classified as a spiritual discipline, as evidenced by the adjusted  $R$ -squared for models controlling for spiritual disciplines relative to models without those controls. Daily prayer (7 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), Bible reading (7 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), and devotional reading (22 points,  $p < 0.001$ ) were all positively associated with greater likelihood of the regular practice of family devotions in the home.

[Table 4 about here]

We present our main results for the association between family devotions and the quality of parent-child relationships in Table 5. First, it is worth noting that a high percentage of parents report having a high-quality relationship with their child, as indicated by the respondent strongly agreeing that they are willing talk to their child about faith (Panel A), that their family spends quality time together (Panel B), and that they are open to other conversations with their child

(Panel C). In our fully specified models, 27 percent of parents at baseline strongly agreed that “My child knows they can always talk to me about faith,” 43 percent of parents strongly agreed that “My family spends quality time together,” and 56 percent of parents strongly agreed that “I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything.” Despite these high proportions at baseline, we estimate an economically meaningful, statistically significant, and robust relationship between family devotions and quality of parent-child relationships. Using a Family Devotions construct score  $f \geq 4$  as an indicator for the regular practice of family devotions in the home, we estimate that family devotions is associated with an additional 15 percentage points likelihood that the respondent would strongly agree that “My child knows they can always talk to me about faith,” 20 points the respondent would strongly agree that “My family spends quality time together,” and 12 points the respondent would strongly agree that “I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything” (all estimates  $p < 0.001$ ).

[Table 5 about here]

Which elements of family devotions explain this association? We present analysis of mechanisms for the statement “My child knows they can always talk to me about faith” in Table 6, column 1, “My family spends quality time together” in column 2, and “I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything” in column 3. With respect to conversations about faith, prayer and Bible reading rather than devotional materials explain the association. At baseline, 25 percent of respondents strongly agreed that “My child knows they can always talk to me about faith.” Respondents who reported daily family prayer were 10 percentage points more likely to agree with the statement and respondents who reported daily family Bible reading were 12 points more likely to agree (both  $p < 0.001$ ). These estimates were robust to the inclusion or exclusion of other covariates.

[Table 6 about here]

With respect to quality time, prayer matters most, but use of other devotional materials also contributes to quality time. At baseline, 41 percent of parents strongly agreed that “My family spends quality time together.” Parents who reported daily family prayer were 14 percentage points more likely to agree with the statement ( $p < 0.001$ ). Parents who reported daily family use of other devotional materials were 8 points more likely to agree with the statement ( $p < 0.05$ ). Parents who reported daily Bible reading were 6 points more likely to agree, but the relationship was not significant in our fully specified model. Altogether, these results suggest that daily family prayer matters most to the quality of parent-child relationships.

Finally, with respect to openness to other conversations, prayer matters more than Bible reading or devotional materials. Fifty-five percent of parents at baseline strongly agreed that “I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything.” Parents who reported daily family prayer were 6 points more likely to agree with the statement ( $p < 0.01$ ), an association that was robust to the inclusion or exclusion of other covariates. Daily family Bible reading or use of other devotional materials were not consistently significant across models.

Was the association between family devotions and the quality of parent-child relationships different for mothers and fathers? We present the results of our moderator analysis in Table 7. Similar to our main findings, daily family prayer and Bible reading matter most to conversations about faith, but this association was not significantly different for mothers and fathers (column 1). Again, similar to our main findings, daily family prayer and use of other devotional materials matter most to quality time, but this association was not significantly different for mothers and fathers (column 2).

With respect to openness to other conversations, we detect differences by parental role. At baseline, 54 percent of parents strongly agreed that “I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything.” Parents who reported daily family use of devotional materials were 10 percentage points more likely to agree ( $p < 0.01$ ) and parents who reported daily prayer were 6 points more likely to agree ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, the association between devotional materials and openness to conversation appears to matter more for mothers, who were an additional 20 points more likely to agree if they reported daily family use of other devotional materials ( $p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, the association between daily family Bible reading and openness to conversation appears to matter more for fathers, who were an additional 16 points more likely to agree ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results provide some evidence of differences of the salience of Bible reading and devotional materials in moderating the quality of parent-child relationships for mothers and fathers.

[Table 7 about here]

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study seeks to bridge the gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between family devotions as spiritual discipline practices such as Bible and devotional reading and prayer and the quality of the parent-child relationship. From our analyses, we found several vital findings worth discussing and we offer some potential explanations for the statistical associations we observe.

First, we found that parents who reported consistently engaging in their family devotions are consistently associated with a higher likelihood of being willing to discuss faith with their children (15 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), spending quality time with family members (20 points,  $p < 0.001$ ), and being more inclined to have a conversation about anything with their children (12

points,  $p < 0.001$ ) than parents who reported not consistently to engage in family devotions. While extant literature might have signaled the importance of family devotions, parent-child relationships, and spiritual formation, our analysis begins to unpack some of the inner linkages by showing evidence of an association between family devotions and parent-child relationships. Spiritual practices such as family devotions (reading the Bible, devotional materials, or family prayer) are shared activities that may provide dedicated time and space for family members to have not only a close fellowship with one another but also an opportunity for parents and children to foster in-depth connection. These types of family devotion practices open up opportunities for parents to have meaningful conversations with their children about faith, perhaps by asking and answering questions (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001). These findings are consistent with many established studies from the field of psychology also have shown how consistent quality time and shared activity between parents and children where both parties learn and share from each other can be a crucial element in building a solid parent-child relationship (e.g., Bugental & Grusec, 2007; Maccoby, 1994).

Studies have mentioned this concept of religious socialization (e.g., Smith, 2021). In his study, Smith argued that parents hold the most significant role as primary faith transmitters in the lives of children, even more so than religious institutions, including Christian schools and churches. He argued that for this faith transition process to be successful, this religious socialization process should involve authentic and more profound faith commitment and open communication between parents and their children. Smith (2021) asserted that family devotions through the reading of the bible, devotional materials, or family prayer time could be some of the avenues through which families can effectively engage in this religious socialization to cultivate spiritual formation and deeper relationships among family members.

Another possible explanation as to why we observed a statistically significant relationship between family devotions and parent-child relationship is also attributed to the fact that these practices of family devotion provide an opportunity for parents to model their faith commitment and nurture their children's faith (Henderson et al., 2016). This modeling from the parents' side not only enables parents to have more positive influences on their parenting but also builds trust, which is critical to a parent-child quality relationship (Perkins, 2007). Henderson et al. (2016) also found that spiritual engagement done collectively in the family unit, such as family devotions, might also lead to greater parental satisfaction and lower stress levels among parents, which is another critical dimension of cultivating deeper bonds among parents and children. In addition, engaging in regular family devotions can also create shared values and rituals that may reinforce family beliefs and values, which are also crucial to a deeper relationship among family members (Mahoney et al., 2003).

Of the three daily family devotion components that we focused on—family prayer, Bible reading, and use of other devotional materials—we found that prayer is the most consistent mechanism of family devotion practices that explain the quality of the parent-child relationship (see Table 6). There are some possible explanations for these results based on the literature. For instance, prayer is a form of communication and openness with God that involves genuine and vulnerable conversation among family members. Family prayer time is a space for everyone in the family to come together to express their gratitude and make a petition about their hopes and problems that potentially foster the importance of faith conversation among family members. This resonates with many past studies that have emphasized the importance of constant faith conversation through prayer for nurturing children's faith (e.g., Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001). The vulnerability of prayer time among family members would bring everyone



closer to one another, which also impacts the quality of the parent-child relationship because praying together may create a deep sense of emotional connection, which is essential for close family relationships (Pearce & Axinn, 1998).

While we generally did not find significant results for Bible and devotional readings as the mechanism for a close parent-child quality relationship, we observed that there were heterogeneous effects between parents in which daily Bible reading matters more to fathers and daily use of other devotional materials matters more to mothers which align with some studies in the past that there are existing gender roles between fathers and mothers in cultivating their children's faith (e.g., Francis et al., 2018, 2020). One possible explanation for these heterogeneous differences between fathers and mothers might be related to the content or format of the family devotion and activity preferences. For instance, mothers are more likely to use devotional materials for their family devotion because they often include personal stories, reflective questions, and prompts that may enable mothers and their children to have open-ended discussions and build emotional connections (Pearce & Axinn, 1998). On the contrary, the Bible focuses on the scripture and doctrinal teachings that might resonate more with fathers who prefer more structured ways of cultivating their children's faith and spirituality.

However, it is still important to note that our data does not provide any information about specific devotional material used by the family that might influence choices between fathers and mothers. We rely on stated rather than observed practices, which may be biased by respondents' own self-perceptions. For example, while parents may report a willingness on their part to have conversations about faith with their children, their children may not report the same willingness, either on their part or their parents' part. Future studies should explore several uncharted vital topics of family devotions. First, future studies should investigate how prayer as an open

communication form of family devotion might bridge the gap between gender roles and preferences that we observe between mothers and fathers. Second, future studies should also ask similar questions about the role of family devotions and parent-child quality relationships from the children's perspective. Finally, given that data were collected in a private Christian school setting, future research may consider the role that a private Christian school may play in facilitating or promoting these practices among their families.

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## Tables

Table 1. Analytic sample descriptive statistics

|  | n     | Mean    | SD   | Min  | Max  |
|--|-------|---------|------|------|------|
|  | (1)   | (2)     | (3)  | (4)  | (5)  |
| <i>Children enrolled in a Christian school</i> |       |         |      |      |      |
| # children currently enrolled                  | 2,395 | 1.71    | 0.86 | 0    | 8    |
| # years with at least one child enrolled       | 2,392 | 5.12    | 4.01 | 1    | 24   |
| <i>Educational attainment</i>                  |       |         |      |      |      |
| Less than bachelor's                           | 2,397 | 0.24    | 0.43 | 0    | 1    |
| Bachelor's                                     | 2,397 | 0.44    | 0.50 | 0    | 1    |
| Postbaccalaureate                              | 2,397 | 0.32    | 0.47 | 0    | 1    |
| <i>Demographics</i>                            |       |         |      |      |      |
| Father   | 2,322 | 0.25    | 0.43 | 0    | 1    |
| Birth year                                     | 2,378 | 1978.20 | 7.16 | 1944 | 1996 |
| Currently married                              | 2,351 | 0.93    | 0.26 | 0    | 1    |
| Ethnicity White                                | 2,265 | 0.89    | 0.31 | 0    | 1    |
| Ethnicity Nonwhite                             | 2,265 | 0.13    | 0.33 | 0    | 1    |
| <i>Personal Faith</i>                          |       |         |      |      |      |
| I have been a Christian for many years         | 2,361 | 0.95    | 0.21 | 0    | 1    |
| My spouse and I are both strong Christians     | 2,397 | 0.69    | 0.46 | 0    | 1    |
| <i>Spiritual Disciplines</i>                   |       |         |      |      |      |
| Attend religious services several times a week | 2,397 | 0.15    | 0.36 | 0    | 1    |
| Attend religious services weekly or more       | 2,397 | 0.77    | 0.42 | 0    | 1    |
| Pray daily                                     | 2,397 | 0.87    | 0.33 | 0    | 1    |
| Read Bible daily                               | 2,397 | 0.37    | 0.48 | 0    | 1    |
| Read from a devotional daily                   | 2,397 | 0.13    | 0.34 | 0    | 1    |
| Read from a devotional several times a week    | 2,397 | 0.25    | 0.44 | 0    | 1    |



Table 2. Instrumentation

|  | Mean | SD   | $\alpha$ | % A  | % SA |
|--|------|------|----------|------|------|
|  | (1)  | (2)  | (3)      | (4)  | (5)  |
| <i>Family Devotions (construct)</i>                          | 3.11 | 0.90 | 0.77     | 0.18 | 0.04 |
| My family reads the Bible together almost every day.         | 2.77 | 1.06 |          | 0.18 | 0.07 |
| My family reads from a devotional together almost every day. | 2.70 | 1.07 |          | 0.14 | 0.08 |
| My family prays together almost every day.                   | 3.87 | 1.13 |          | 0.33 | 0.37 |
| Family Devotions $\geq 4$                                    | 0.22 | 0.42 |          |      |      |
| My child knows they can always talk to me about faith.       | 4.72 | 0.47 |          | 0.26 | 0.73 |
| My family spends quality time together.                      | 4.59 | 0.58 |          | 0.34 | 0.63 |
| I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything.  | 4.72 | 0.54 |          | 0.23 | 0.75 |

*Notes.* “% S” refers to the proportion of the sample that agreed with each statement. “% SA” refers to the proportion of the sample that strongly agreed with each statement.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics by parental role

|   | Overall | Mothers | Fathers    |
|---|---------|---------|------------|
|   | (1)     | (2)     | (3)        |
| <i>Children enrolled in a private Christian school</i>      |         |         |            |
| # of children currently enrolled                            | 1.71    | 1.69    | 1.76       |
| # years with at least one child enrolled                    | 5.12    | 4.98    | 5.40*      |
| <i>Educational attainment</i>                               |         |         |            |
| Less than bachelor's  | 0.24    | 0.26    | 0.21*      |
| Bachelor's  | 0.44    | 0.45    | 0.41       |
| Postbaccalaureate   | 0.32    | 0.30    | 0.38***    |
| <i>Demographics</i>   |         |         |            |
| Birth year  | 1978.20 | 1978.88 | 1976.29*** |
| Currently Married   | 0.93    | 0.92    | 0.96**     |
| Ethnicity White   | 0.89    | 0.89    | 0.88       |
| Ethnicity Nonwhite  | 0.13    | 0.12    | 0.15       |
| <i>Personal Faith</i>                                       |         |         |            |
| I have been a Christian for many years                      | 0.95    | 0.96    | 0.94       |
| My spouse and I are both strong Christians                  | 0.69    | 0.68    | 0.78***    |
| <i>Spiritual Disciplines</i>                                |         |         |            |
| Attend religious services several times a week              | 0.15    | 0.15    | 0.17       |
| Attend religious services weekly or more                    | 0.77    | 0.76    | 0.83***    |
| Pray daily  | 0.87    | 0.89    | 0.83***    |
| Read Bible daily  | 0.37    | 0.36    | 0.42**     |
| Read from a devotional daily                                | 0.13    | 0.13    | 0.14       |
| Read from a devotional several times a week                 | 0.25    | 0.25    | 0.27       |
| <i>Instruments</i>  |         |         |            |
| Family devotions (construct)                                | 3.11    | 3.10    | 3.17       |
| My family reads the Bible together almost every day         | 2.77    | 2.74    | 2.87*      |
| My family reads from a devotional together almost every day | 2.70    | 2.69    | 2.73       |
| My family prays together almost every day                   | 3.87    | 3.86    | 3.91       |
| Family Devotions $\geq 4$                                   | 0.22    | 0.22    | 0.23       |
| My child knows they can always talk to me about faith       | 4.72    | 4.74    | 4.71       |
| My family spends quality time together                      | 4.59    | 4.61    | 4.54*      |
| I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything  | 4.72    | 4.73    | 4.67*      |
| <i>n</i>  | 2,397   | 1,742   | 580        |

Notes. Asterisks indicate statistically significant difference between mothers and fathers in *t*-tests, \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 4. Who practices family devotions?

|  | (1)                | (2)             | (3)               | (4)               | (5) | (6)               |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----|-------------------|
| <i>Children Enrolled</i>                           |                    |                 |                   |                   |     |                   |
| # currently enrolled                               | 0.03**<br>(0.01)   |                 |                   |                   |     | 0.00<br>(0.01)    |
| Years any enrolled                                 | -0.01***<br>(0.00) |                 |                   |                   |     | 0.00<br>(0.00)    |
| <i>Educational Attainment (bachelor's omitted)</i> |                    |                 |                   |                   |     |                   |
| Less than bachelor's                               |                    | -0.02<br>(0.02) |                   |                   |     | 0.00<br>(0.02)    |
| Postbaccalaureate                                  |                    | 0.02<br>(0.02)  |                   |                   |     | -0.01<br>(0.02)   |
| <i>Demographics</i>                                |                    |                 |                   |                   |     |                   |
| Male   |                    |                 | 0.03<br>(0.02)    |                   |     | 0.01<br>(0.02)    |
| Birth year (standardized)                          |                    |                 | 0.04***<br>(0.01) |                   |     | 0.03***<br>(0.01) |
| Married  |                    |                 | 0.01<br>(0.03)    |                   |     | -0.06*<br>(0.03)  |
| Ethnicity White                                    |                    |                 | -0.11<br>(0.08)   |                   |     | -0.01<br>(0.06)   |
| Ethnicity Nonwhite                                 |                    |                 | 0.02<br>(0.07)    |                   |     | 0.01<br>(0.05)    |
| <i>Personal Faith</i>                              |                    |                 |                   |                   |     |                   |
| Mature Christian                                   |                    |                 |                   | 0.04<br>(0.03)    |     | 0.00<br>(0.03)    |
| Homogamous   |                    |                 |                   | 0.11***<br>(0.02) |     | 0.04*<br>(0.02)   |

Table 4. Who practices family devotions? (*continued*)

|   | (1)     | (2)     | (3)     | (4)     | (5)     | (6)     |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>Spiritual Disciplines</i>                      |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Religious service attendance several times a week |         |         |         |         | 0.05*   | 0.04    |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.02)  | (0.02)  |
| Religious service attendance weekly or more       |         |         |         |         | 0.03*   | 0.02    |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.01)  | (0.02)  |
| Pray daily  |         |         |         |         | 0.07*** | 0.07*** |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.01)  | (0.01)  |
| Read Bible daily                                  |         |         |         |         | 0.07*** | 0.07*** |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.02)  | (0.02)  |
| Read devotions daily                              |         |         |         |         | 0.23*** | 0.22*** |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.04)  | (0.04)  |
| Read devotions several times a week or more       |         |         |         |         | 0.43*** | 0.42*** |
|   |         |         |         |         | (0.03)  | (0.03)  |
| Constant  | 0.22*** | 0.22*** | 0.30*** | 0.11*** | -0.03** | 0.02    |
|   | (0.02)  | (0.01)  | (0.08)  | (0.03)  | (0.01)  | (0.07)  |
| <i>n</i>  | 2,390   | 2,397   | 2,217   | 2,361   | 2,397   | 2,190   |
| <i>F</i> -statistic                               | 15.16   | 1.96    | 8.09    | 22.57   | 215.67  | 76.01   |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared                        | 0.01    | 0.00    | 0.02    | 0.01    | 0.40    | 0.41    |

*Notes.* Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks indicate level of statistical significance, \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 5. Main results

|   | (1)               | (2)               | (3)               | (4)               | (5)               | (6)               |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>PANEL A. My child knows they can always talk to me about faith (Strongly agree)</b>      |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Family Devotions $\geq 4$   | 0.16***<br>(0.02) | 0.16***<br>(0.02) | 0.16***<br>(0.02) | 0.14***<br>(0.02) | 0.16***<br>(0.02) | 0.15***<br>(0.03) |
| Constant  | 0.64***<br>(0.02) | 0.70***<br>(0.01) | 0.47***<br>(0.07) | 0.52***<br>(0.05) | 0.55***<br>(0.03) | 0.27**<br>(0.09)  |
| <i>n</i>  | 2,390             | 2,397             | 2,217             | 2,361             | 2,397             | 2,190             |
| <i>F</i> -statistic   | 30.26             | 26.06             | 15.37             | 33.77             | 17.08             | 7.43              |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared  | 0.03              | 0.02              | 0.03              | 0.04              | 0.04              | 0.04              |
| <b>PANEL B. My family spends quality time together (Strongly agree)</b>                     |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Family Devotions $\geq 4$   | 0.22***<br>(0.02) | 0.23***<br>(0.02) | 0.22***<br>(0.02) | 0.22***<br>(0.02) | 0.23***<br>(0.03) | 0.20***<br>(0.03) |
| Constant  | 0.56***<br>(0.02) | 0.58***<br>(0.02) | 0.41***<br>(0.09) | 0.59***<br>(0.05) | 0.54***<br>(0.03) | 0.43***<br>(0.11) |
| <i>n</i>  | 2,390             | 2,397             | 2,217             | 2,361             | 2,397             | 2,190             |
| <i>F</i> -statistic   | 52.50             | 46.12             | 35.99             | 44.96             | 19.81             | 15.83             |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared  | 0.05              | 0.04              | 0.07              | 0.04              | 0.04              | 0.08              |
| <b>PANEL C. I am willing to talk to my child about just about anything (Strongly agree)</b> |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Family Devotions $\geq 4$   | 0.10***<br>(0.02) | 0.10***<br>(0.02) | 0.10***<br>(0.02) | 0.09***<br>(0.02) | 0.13***<br>(0.03) | 0.12***<br>(0.03) |
| Constant  | 0.70***<br>(0.02) | 0.73***<br>(0.01) | 0.62***<br>(0.09) | 0.67***<br>(0.04) | 0.69***<br>(0.03) | 0.56***<br>(0.10) |
| <i>n</i>  | 2,390             | 2,397             | 2,217             | 2,361             | 2,397             | 2,190             |
| <i>F</i> -statistic   | 9.41              | 9.26              | 6.86              | 9.48              | 5.93              | 3.35              |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared  | 0.01              | 0.01              | 0.01              | 0.01              | 0.01              | 0.02              |
| <i>Controls</i>   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Children  | X                 |                   |                   |                   |                   | X                 |
| Education   |                   | X                 |                   |                   |                   | X                 |
| Demographics  |                   |                   | X                 |                   |                   | X                 |
| Personal Faith  |                   |                   |                   | X                 |                   | X                 |
| Spiritual Disciplines   |                   |                   |                   |                   | X                 | X                 |

*Notes.* Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks indicate level of statistical significance, \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 6. Mechanisms explaining parent-child relationships

|  | Talk about<br>faith ( $q^1$ ) | Quality<br>time ( $q^2$ ) | Talk about<br>anything ( $q^3$ ) |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
|  | (1)                           | (2)                       | (3)                              |
| My family prays together almost every day.                   | 0.10***<br>(0.02)             | 0.14***<br>(0.03)         | 0.06**<br>(0.02)                 |
| My family reads the Bible together almost every day.         | 0.12***<br>(0.03)             | 0.06<br>(0.03)            | 0.03<br>(0.03)                   |
| My family reads from a devotional together almost every day. | -0.01<br>(0.03)               | 0.08*<br>(0.03)           | 0.05<br>(0.03)                   |
| Constant   | 0.25**<br>(0.09)              | 0.41***<br>(0.11)         | 0.55***<br>(0.10)                |
| $n$  | 2,190                         | 2,190                     | 2,190                            |
| $F$ -statistic   | 7.53                          | 13.75                     | 2.83                             |
| Adjusted $R$ -squared  | 0.05                          | 0.09                      | 0.02                             |
| <i>Controls</i>  |                               |                           |                                  |
| Children   | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Education  | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Demographics   | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Personal Faith   | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Spiritual Disciplines  | X                             | X                         | X                                |

*Notes.* The dependent variable was a dichotomous indicator variable for whether the respondent strongly agreed with each statement  $q^1$ ,  $q^2$ , and  $q^3$ . Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks indicate level of statistical significance, \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 7. Moderator analysis by parental role

|                       | Talk about faith<br>( $f^1$ ) | Quality<br>time ( $f^2$ ) | Talk about<br>anything ( $f^3$ ) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                       | (1)                           | (2)                       | (3)                              |
| Pray                  | 0.09***<br>(0.03)             | 0.13***<br>(0.03)         | 0.06*<br>(0.03)                  |
| Pray*Father           | 0.03<br>(0.05)                | 0.07<br>(0.06)            | 0.01<br>(0.05)                   |
| Bible                 | 0.12***<br>(0.03)             | 0.05<br>(0.03)            | -0.01<br>(0.03)                  |
| Bible*Father          | 0.02<br>(0.05)                | 0.02<br>(0.06)            | 0.16**<br>(0.06)                 |
| Devotional            | 0.03<br>(0.03)                | 0.10**<br>(0.04)          | 0.10**<br>(0.03)                 |
| Devotional*Father     | -0.15*<br>(0.06)              | -0.10<br>(0.07)           | -0.20**<br>(0.06)                |
| Constant              | 0.23*<br>(0.09)               | 0.41***<br>(0.11)         | 0.54***<br>(0.10)                |
| <i>Controls</i>       |                               |                           |                                  |
| Children              | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Education             | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Demographics          | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Personal Faith        | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| Spiritual Disciplines | X                             | X                         | X                                |
| <i>n</i>              | 2,190                         | 2,190                     | 2,190                            |

*Notes.* Asterisks indicate level of statistical significance, \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .