

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL STAMINA IN YOUNG ADULT
GRADUATES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

By
Violet E. Long
Liberty University

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

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to investigate the personal development of spiritual stamina in graduates of Christian high schools who attend secular universities or colleges. Participants are comprised of a theoretical sampling of 16 young adult graduates of one of four Christian schools in Southeastern United States. Data collected through document review and personal interviews trace the process of spiritual formation and explain the constructs attributed to spiritual stamina. Spiritual growth and stamina are assessed using the Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI) created by Dr. Todd Hall, which addresses 31 indicators of spirituality and the effectiveness of Christian school distinctives. Data were analyzed using grounded theory methodology to uncover meaning that participants assign to this process. Findings from this study support prior research on the important role of the Christian home, church and school in the development of a biblical worldview and connect those roles to the process of personal spiritual identity. The Spiritual Identity Formation Theory (SIFT) extends identity development research and describes the process of exploration to solidify commitment and produce spiritual stamina. Implications have emerged for Christian school mission and curricular planning.

Descriptors: spiritual formation, Christian education, young adults, spirituality

Dedication

I dedicate this study to God, my Heavenly Father, without whom I could do nothing. He is my daily source of strength and inspiration. Psalm 61:2-3 has been on my mind since the beginning of this journey and best describes my dependence upon God. “When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For you have been a shelter for me.”

I would also like to dedicate this work to two very influential women in my life, my mother and my mother-in-law. I praise God for the foundation of truth they have built in my life.

My mother, Inez Davenport Human, has lovingly pushed me throughout my life to be my best for our Lord Jesus, whom she loves and follows. Through the years, she has shown support in my endeavors, inspired creativity and expressed her faith in me. Her strong prayer life and consistent teaching laid for me a foundation of faith in Christ that has deepened my commitments and given me spiritual stamina in challenging times.

Alice Howland Long, my mother-in-law, has inspired me both academically and spiritually to search out truth. She exemplified the true life-long learner as she went back to school after raising her family and earned a nursing degree in her 50s. Mom Long’s love for learning and fervent prayer life have spurred me on to complete this milestone.

I dedicate this study to the young adult graduates of Christian schools. The 16 who gave of their time and provided valuable insight have brought a new understanding to the research. I pray God’s blessing over these who are standing firm and leading the next generation to strong foundations of truth.

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Sincere gratitude must be expressed to my wonderful husband, Jim, for the gift of encouragement and time. He removed obstacles, made financial sacrifices, and lovingly stood with me through this journey. Jim listened endlessly, shared insight, enriched my spirit and made it possible for me to accomplish this goal. His timely words, “You can do this, you’re almost there!” have pushed me past the fear and put me back on task. My husband is the stabilizing force in my life and godly example of turning to God in prayer.

I would like to thank my dear friend, Rosie Parker, for being my sounding board and talking things through with me. Throughout the doctoral program, she read my papers, helped me clarify my thoughts and assisted in test preparation. Her extra time and encouragement have been true blessings from God.

Many, many hours with my committee chair Dr. Gail Collins, have taught me persistence and alertness to detail. Her prayers have helped me overcome the spiritual attacks of discouragement in troubling circumstances. I am extremely grateful for the ways Dr. Collins has been used by God to advance this study as she encouraged and challenged my thinking.

I want to thank the professors of Liberty University who have stretched my understanding and deepened my Christian worldview. Dr. Lucinda Spaulding built my confidence and inspired me to press on. My committee, Dr. Cherie Brickhill and Dr. Karen Schmalz have given time and valuable critique. I praise God for His provision and guiding hand in every phase.

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List of Abbreviations

Alpha Christian School (ACS)

Association of Christian School International (ACSI)

Bethany Christian Academy (BCA)

Calvary Christian School (CCS)

Computer Assisted Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQAS)

Damascus Christian Academy (DCA)

Southern Association of College and Schools (SACS)

Spiritual Identity Formation Theory (SIFT)

Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The transitional years between adolescence and adulthood are critical turning points (Kohlberg, 2008; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). The overwhelming trends show that a vast number of young people reared in evangelical Christian homes and churches are rejecting the faith as young adults (Smithwick, 2008; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Yet some young adults exhibit strong faith and commitment to Christ (Black, 2006) showing evidence of generativity and Christ-like lifestyles of service (Bradley & Hapenny, 2010). Research shows the influence of family background and structure, church attendance, and religious activity in the life of a young person greatly influence their continuance in the faith (Black, 2006; Uecker et al., 2007). However, could the Christian school serve to strengthen those positive influences? What is the role of the Christian school? Does Christian education make a difference? These questions call for a closer look at the success stories and the worldview of the resilient young people, their spiritual journey and the implications for future catalytic and educative authenticity of Christian education for the millennial generation and beyond.

Background

Research exists concerning the many variables of spiritual formation and the current spiritual lives of emerging adults (Cardus, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009). Historically, these types of studies involve Christian college students and assess spiritual training and the effects of specific areas of college culture. For example, The National Spiritual Assessment Project co-sponsored by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and Alidade Research focuses on the spiritual formation of high school students in ACSI schools across the United States (Marrah, 2009). No other studies specifically target the Christian school graduate who attends a secular university or college. How are these young people showing spiritual courage

and stamina in the face of conflicting worldviews at secular universities? Many do not successfully stand up to the clash of faith with the secular culture (Smithwick, 2008; Uecker et al., 2007). Marrah (2009) described the tendency for this age group to leave the church. He provided one possible explanation for this falling away phenomenon as he described its connection to spiritual relationships:

Students who are highly spiritually relational within the Christian school are not involved in the same highly spiritual relationship with God, especially as practiced through prayer and the disciplines. This finding may supply insight into the phenomena of Christian school students who fall away from God when they leave the Christian school. A student's spiritual focus is turned more toward other Christians and less toward intimate time with God. If their foundation is a Christian school community and not the Lord then students' spiritual lives will undergo a profound shaking when the foundation is removed. (p. 149)

Have Christian schools prepared students to face these crises of faith that they may encounter in the secular culture? The setting for such preparation in the Christian school environment is vital to the transference of faith and spiritual stamina of the students. To understand the type of environment necessary for spiritual preparation, one must understand how individuals relate to the environment, in this case, the school environment.

Gibson introduced the term "affordances" (1979) which he described as the reciprocal relationship that a person has with the environment. Gibson purported that there is a direct relationship between the goals held by an individual and what is personally extracted from the environment around them. For example, an individual strongly committed to the cause of Christ and striving to have a positive influence on the world may see an adverse environment as a

mission field and gain spiritual fortitude. Conversely, a Christian young person void of a self-identified purpose may struggle in relationship to their conflicting environment.

Typically, those who graduate from Christian high schools and go directly to secular universities have faced a great deal of dissonance and spiritual conflict in the clash of worldviews (Sowell, 1993; Trelstad, 2008). Current conflicting belief systems found in literature on diversity and moral reasoning (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009), religious liberalization among young adults (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011), and college students' perceptions on the theory of evolution (Hokayem & BouJaoude, 2008) are some examples.

One paramount hurdle for Christian students is often the spiritual dissonance experienced between the belief system presented by their parents and the Christian school they attended from kindergarten through 12th grade and the worldview of secular professors. Trelstad (2008) explained the conflict of Christian conservatives who learn to trust professors and who are highly influenced by the belief system of those professors. Many, he described, cannot “go home” (p. 192) emotionally because of changes that have taken place in their religious views and personal identity. This supports the earlier findings of Sowell (1993) in which he describes the agenda of secular universities from the 1980s and 90s to separate students from the belief systems of their parents and promote alternative values. In a review of philosophy, religion, and education in America, Lawrence (2007) concluded that college students “lack the intellectual armor to deal with the naturalism and postmodernism they encounter in textbooks or in conversations with other students” (p. 265). That trend however may be changing and other factors may outweigh the influence of the secular university in the spiritual lives of young adults. The college student of the 21st Century may be facing myriad challenges of faith that differ from those of only a decade ago (Kinnaman, 2011; Mayrl & Uecker, 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009). In

comparing research reported by Sowell (1993) to the more recent works, it is evident that the immediate dissonance or clash of worldview is buffered by the overall liberalization of the American society and the differences are not as pronounced as they have appeared in past decades. Navigating these murky waters of spiritual commitment may prove to have a new set of challenges for students currently attending secular universities.

Are Christian schools producing graduates who place high priority on living out God's call on their lives and setting goals toward that end? As these young adults approach spiritually adverse circumstances, will their personal and spiritual goals provide courage to stand for Christ or will adverse circumstances lead to negative compromise and spiritual weakness? This study attempts to provide evidences as to the extent of affordances in the spiritual formation of Christian school students and the degree of influence the school environment had on the graduate. In the investigation of the school influence on the graduates, it is imperative to include other aspects of growth and development.

Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura & Walter, 1963), which is discussed in a later chapter, supports the belief that behavior is determined by one's experiences in life and his or her responses to the influence of one's environment. There are multiple positive and negative influences in the life of a young person, but three play the greatest role in formative influence: (a) the home, (b) the church, and (c) the school (Black, 2006, Uecker et al., 2007). The Bible says that the "threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12 NKJV). When the three major influences in a young person's life agree, the student has a more cohesive foundation. The training of young people must be consistent in these three areas (Schultz, 2006).

Of all the environmental influences, the home is the single most important influence on the religious outcomes of young adults (Bertram-Troost, de Roos, & Miedema, 2007; Smith &

Snell, 2009). Spiritual conversations and quality time spent with parents have a lasting effect. “Teenagers who regularly ate meals with their families and talked about spiritual matters with their families had different (church) attendance patterns during the young adult years from those who did not” (Black, 2008, p. 41). In research conducted by Smith and Snell (2009), the social causal mechanisms are discussed in relation to young adult spirituality. They found that young “adults who grew up with seriously religious parents are, through socialization, more likely to have internalized their parents’ religious worldview” (p. 232). Religious socialization is acquired much the same as ethnic, gender, social class, and political socialization. Those raised by highly religious parents are more likely to acquire the practical religious tools necessary to live more highly religious lives. They embrace the identity orientation and behavioral tendencies of the parents and therefore are more likely to continue to practice the religious exercises they were taught (Marcia, 1966; Smith & Snell, 2009). Some have remained religiously active in young adulthood simply to avoid the breakdown of the relationship with parents. A foreclosure status of identity development may be the result in which an individual commits to parental ideas and beliefs without question or self- integration of those beliefs (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). This negative social causal mechanism is also evident among those who reject the faith of the parents or choose a negative identity (Rahgozar, Yousefi, Mohammadi, & Piran, 2012) and admittedly carry a great deal of guilt for their choices (Kinnaman, 2011). Parents hold the responsibility and significant influence on the spiritual development of their children and therefore must choose carefully the church and school environments to best support that development.

According to Smith & Snell (2009), churches that include and ultimately promote relationship building between young people and religiously strong adults and peers have a positive impact on spiritual development. The presence of adults in a religious congregation with

whom the young person can turn for support and advice strengthens relationships and heightens the enjoyment of church attendance. This refers to the social causal mechanism of connectivity and promotes long-term participation. Teens experiencing positive connection with non-parental adults in a church congregation are more likely to continue attending religious services and maintaining personal habits of Bible reading and prayer. Teens who define and establish religious identity early will most likely maintain higher levels of religious practice as young adults. This may be due to the drive for identity continuity or the desire to be known as a religious individual (Smith & Snell, 2009). When factors such as adult attachments, connectivity and personal religious identity are low or nonexistent the results vary. Teen participation in a youth group alone does not predict a high level of religiosity as an adult (Smith & Snell, 2009). Consistent church attendance during high school may therefore indicate the religious commitment of the parents and not necessarily the young person (Fledderjohann, 2010). Young people may experience identity foreclosure by committing to the values and goals of the strong influencers around them, either positive or negative, without personal exploration or internalization (Luyckx et al., 2008).

Parental influence extends into the chosen school environment for support in spiritual development and religious training. The literature on religious practices of school students and graduates may provide insight into the spiritual influence and role of the Christian school setting. Cardus (2011) reported that Christian school students have a greater frequency of religious practices such as prayer, church attendance, and Bible reading when compared to peers in public schools. Christian school graduates have reported that they received tools for sharing and defending their faith as well as insights for honestly examining their own doubts and beliefs (LeBlanc & Slaughter, 2012). The specific features of the Christian school that bring about these

results are not clearly defined. It is salient to ask then, if the social causal mechanism of connectivity that promotes long-term participation in religious activities also holds true for the solid spiritual formation and stamina of Christian school graduates. Parents must be cognizant of the influence of the school environment and strive to maximize the positive effects of foundational training in which the home, church, and school agree. Parents who desire to see their children maintain spiritual stamina may look toward the graduate outcomes to discover the best school for their children. The overall mission and philosophy of the school is one important consideration as parents in making this decision. An examination of the mission statement and philosophy in the process of choosing a school may help to determine the ability of the institution to address biblical worldview development and spiritual stamina.

School leadership must understand that setting the stage for the best possible environment for academic, emotional, and spiritual development is paramount in the process of establishing a Christian school. The formation of such an institution demands a conversation and decision concerning the school's philosophy. Core values and a clearly articulated mission are essential to provide directional focus and educative authenticity. Through the process of defining spiritual goals, institutions must examine their purpose statement to assure alignment of goals and stated purpose.

It is clear that Christian schools hold philosophical differences concerning the profession of faith made by their student body (Cardus, 2010; Latts, 2010). Many Christian schools hold to strict covenants and require middle and high school students to sign a statement of faith upon enrollment. However, other schools with an evangelical approach deliberately avoid signed statements of faith and allow open enrollment. Both types of Christian schools clearly hold to religious foundations but strategically commit to a different purpose (Cardus, 2010; Latts, 2010).

The extent to which these foundational documents steer the actual daily experiences and academic substance of the institution is unclear. This study will investigate the environmental differences evidenced in the two mission distinctives. The question also surfaces as to the extent of impact the school's mission and philosophy has on its graduates. Do these schools with different goals and admission policies produce distinctively different outcomes?

This study extends the research on Christian school outcomes to include those graduates who show spiritual stamina void of the influence of a Christian university. Findings may benefit Christian schools seeking to have a greater impact on the spiritual stamina of their graduates and to strengthen the integrity of mission and practice.

Situation to Self

As the researcher, I am an evangelical Christian and approach this study from a biblical worldview. I contend that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that the Christian life is evidenced by Christ-like attitudes and behaviors as supported by Scripture. Taking a pragmatic approach, I have investigated the practices of Christian schools that are successful in producing spiritual stamina. I define spiritual stamina as the ability to face adverse circumstances, social, or personal pressures and remain true to godly standards of living and attitudes.

The personal and spiritual dissonance I experienced in my own educational pursuits came late in high school when a public school teacher ridiculed my opinion paper on my philosophy of life. The history teacher referred to my Christian beliefs as simplistic and naïve stating that I would “get over it when I grew up.” Then again, in graduate school, at a state university, the professor publicly deemed me as the Christian in the class and sarcastically asked God's opinion on various political subjects. Although embarrassed by my lack of preparation

and weak retorts, I was not detoured in my faith stance. These experiences have heightened my interest in the stories of young adults in today's secular universities.

My background of extensive teaching and administrative experience in Christian education provides a passion for promoting sound teaching and integrity in Christian schools. Having served on numerous committees challenged with the task of writing purpose and mission statements for Christian schools, I have experienced the philosophical tension present in this foundational process.

As a trained child evangelist through Child Evangelism Fellowship and certified trainer of Evangelism Explosion International, I have a strong propensity toward a Christian school ministry that is open to those students who have little or no Christian training. Throughout my career, I have supported the evangelistic approach of educating to insulate not isolate our young people from the world. Through training in a solid biblical worldview, a student can be insulated against many negative influences and be prepared to face opposing views. Isolation may protect young people from secular worldviews for a period of time without providing discernment for future encounters. However, from a strictly discipleship approach, I firmly believe that we are shaped by our environmental influences and can be negatively impacted by a peer group that is not committed to Christian principles. The Bible states in I Corinthians 15:33, "Evil company corrupts good habits." Thus the two missional approaches: evangelistic and discipleship have emerged with sound arguments for both (Latts, 2010).

My academic background in elementary education and graduate degree in curriculum and administration have afforded me the opportunity to examine curriculum standards and approaches used by a variety of Christian schools. The curriculum and pedagogy are often very similar from one school to another regardless of the stated mission. Intentional selection and

implementation of curriculum and pedagogy should demonstrate the chosen mission statement of the school. The desire to see schools remain true to their mission and produce graduates with spiritual stamina provides the impetus for this investigative study.

Problem Statement

The biblical mandate for Christians is to spread the Gospel and train the future generations to love and serve God (Matthew 28:19-20). Christian homes, churches, and schools strive to follow this directive from God but often encounter puzzling roadblocks. Strong and active participation in church and spiritual growth activities as a teen does not necessarily assure spiritual stamina as young people mature into adulthood (Uecker et al., 2007). Six out of 10 young people who were involved in a church and spiritual growth activities during their teens failed to carry that practice into their twenties (Uecker et al., 2007). Therefore, we understand that a Christian school education does not always assure long-term spiritual stamina.

One of the overall goals of Christian school education is to produce graduates who are prepared academically and spiritually to enter adulthood. Graduate outcomes are not always reflective of that goal. This is especially true when students attend secular colleges or universities. Graduates of Christian schools face a great deal of spiritual dissonance when faced with a clash of worldviews, and many do not remain strong in the faith. Some are able to maintain spiritual stamina into adulthood. Research on spiritual stamina has followed those students who attend Christian universities (Marrah, 2009) however; additional study is needed to explain the role of the Christian school for graduates who attend secular colleges or universities. Christian schools may be able to fulfill their purpose more successfully when they can better understand the role the school has in the development and maintenance of spiritual stamina for all of their students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to explain how Christian high school graduates maintain spiritual stamina as they go on to pursue an education in secular colleges or universities. For this study, I define spiritual stamina as the ability to face adverse circumstances, social or personal pressures and remain true to godly standards of living and attitudes.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the literature for Christian school education in that it addresses the spiritual stamina of an overlooked population. Students who graduate from Christian high schools and attend secular universities face a great deal of dissonance and spiritual conflict in the clash of worldviews. Epistemological changes and challenges of faith may occur as they encounter naturalism and postmodernism expression (Lawrence, 2007; Sowell, 1993; Trelstad, 2008). Giving a voice to these individuals and describing the constructs of their spiritual stamina provides valuable information to Christian schools desiring to improve graduate outcomes. The sites chosen for the study are member schools of the ACSI. These findings have implications for other ACSI schools of similar size and mission.

A study on spiritual outcomes of students from various types of schools performed by the Cardus Institute (2010), revealed the need to understand the impact of the mission statement of the institution and the consistency with which that mission was functioning. This study sought to address the impact of the mission statement in regards to the graduates' ability to maintain spiritual stamina. Outcomes of students who attended schools with a discipleship mission versus those with an evangelistic mission are considered. A school with a discipleship mission is defined as one that requires a signed statement of faith upon enrollment. An evangelistic mission

is defined as one that does not require signed statements of faith from students or families upon enrollment. As Christian schools gain a better understanding of the impact of their mission, awareness of the need for missional integrity will increase.

The use of a grounded theory approach opens avenues for unexpected themes to emerge that extend understanding of known theories. Theoretical implications for identity development may be revealed through rich narrative and the descriptive voice of participants as they reflect personal experiences. This investigation of the social context and environmental influences of the Christian school may further the understanding of the distinctively Christian application of the Social Cognitive Theory.

Research Questions

The following questions guide this study and explain the role of the Christian school in the development of spiritual stamina in Christian school graduates who further their education in secular universities or colleges:

1. To what do Christian school graduates attribute their spiritual stamina?

Answers to this question come from the young adult co-researchers themselves and provide categories and emerging themes for analysis. Providing an opportunity for reflection serves to establish indicators of the significant faith building events, explorations, commitments, and people. Co-researchers were also encouraged to make connections between the faith building experiences and the challenges they experience as young adults (Kinnaman, 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009; Uecker et al., 2007).

2. What was the role of Christian school education in the graduates' spiritual growth and resilience?

A spiritual formation time-line and reflection on the part of the co-researchers served to

bring about a better understanding of those constructs gained through Christian education. This aspect of the research helped to establish a differentiation between the faith building influences of the school versus those gained elsewhere (Cardus, 2010; Cooper, 2010; Uecker et al., 2007).

3. What is the relationship between the mission of the school (evangelistic or discipleship) and the graduates' ability to maintain spiritual stamina?

As themes emerged concerning school culture and the perception the graduates have of the school mission, a better understanding of its impact developed. The impressions the co-researchers have of their over-all school experiences were reviewed in light of the adopted mission statement of the Christian school they attended (Hull, 2009; Latts, 2010).

Research Plan

This research study is qualitative in nature and employs a grounded theory design. I chose this method in order to generate a theory to explain the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in Christian school graduates and their relation to the mission philosophy of the school. Following the approval of the proposed study from the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University (see Appendix A); an initial overview of school websites and phone contact allowed me to determine the evangelical or discipleship stance of four schools and secure consent for the study from administrators (see Appendix B and Table 1). Data collection began with document review, site visits, and administrative interviews. Documents from each participating school site were retrieved from the school website or from administrative staff. I reviewed the schools' adopted Bible curriculum, scope and sequence for spiritual formation, and any evidences of student involvement in the spiritual growth process (see Appendix C for Document Review Checklist). I visited each of the school sites and interviewed the four administrators utilizing a set of standardized open-ended questions (see Appendix D for

Interview Questions). I asked administrators to submit a list of recommendations for participants or co-researchers from among their graduates (see Appendix E). Co-researchers were to meet the following criteria: (a) they must be from 21-30 years of age (b) attended a Christian school for 12 years of elementary and secondary school (c) attended secular colleges or universities and (d) be considered to have maintained spiritual stamina. Administrators were asked to complete a Spiritual Evidences Checklist (see Appendix F) with a Likert scale to assist them in their assessment of students who have maintained spiritual stamina.

The term co-researchers was chosen to reference the participants of this study in keeping with a constructivist paradigm that fosters a relationship of shared data creation and analysis (Charmaz, 2010). Further explanation is included in Chapter Three.

Of the recommended graduates for this study, 17 responded positively from the four selected Christian schools. It was eventually determined that one male co-researcher was unable to complete the study, reducing the number of co-researchers to 16. The recommended co-researchers, who met the criteria, received a letter describing the study and requesting participation (see Appendix G). Those who agreed to participate received a Letter of Consent (see Appendix H) and instructions for completing the Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI) (see Appendix I) through an online source within five days. Co-researchers were asked to complete the Spiritual Journey Timeline Guide (see Appendix J) received via email for use during the interview session. Personal interviews, using a standardized open-ended set of interview questions, (see Appendix K) were scheduled and conducted at a time and place convenient for each individual. These interviews were face to face, by Skype, Google talk, or recorded phone call sessions. Data collected from interviewing the graduates were used to implement the constant comparison method creating categories for analysis (Glaser & Strauss,

2008). The constant comparison method allowed the researcher to identify incidents, events, and activities and constantly compare them to an emerging category for saturation of that category or theme (Creswell, 2007).

Following the document review, survey questionnaires, interviews, transcription and initial analysis, co-researchers were asked to participate in a discussion focus group with the others from their high school. I selected representatives from one of the four school sites based on the degree of clarification needed or intensity of findings. They were contacted via email and a date and time established for a meeting. The focus group was informed of the lack of privacy that a group discussion provides, and they verbally agreed to participate in a sound recorded session. I prepared a discussion guide with an open-ended set of focus questions to help elaborate on the findings of the study and clarify the emerging theory (see Appendix M). This discussion group made up of graduates from the same high school served to enrich the narrative and add consensus to the document. Data collection continued to the point of theoretical saturation when no relevant new data were emerging (Corbin & Strauss, 2009).

An analysis of the data followed the constant comparison method and began with a thorough examination of the text (e.g., documents, transcripts, field notes) to define major categories (Cresswell, 2007). These categories emerged through the interview process as co-researchers revealed common experiences, attitudes or instances. The core phenomenon were identified through this open coding process

The data was considered a second time in the process of axle coding to gain insight into specifics relating to and explaining the core phenomenon. The focus group served to provide additional information and explanation in the process of axle coding. The causal conditions and

intervening conditions identified in selective coding lead to the proposition or theory. A model to explain the interrelationship of the constructs and interpretation concludes the analysis.

Delimitations

Delimitations are not considered weaknesses or flaws in the study, rather the parameter set by the researcher to make the study manageable (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). In this study in particular, the scope of participants has been limited to include participants from 21-30 years of age who attended a Christian school for 12 years of elementary and secondary school and who attended secular colleges or universities. A purposeful delimitation of this study is that it does not include those who did not graduate from a Christian school or those who attended Christian universities. In grounded theory research, it is important to select individuals fitting the theoretical purpose making data relevant to the problem statement (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, only individuals from Christian schools who attended secular universities and are currently displaying spiritual stamina were selected for this study. Since this population is not addressed in current literature, this study provides valuable insights into the constructs of spiritual stamina.

Limitations refer to those aspects of the study having the potential to confine generalizeability or present unavoidable weaknesses inherent to the chosen research method (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). The nature of a study on spiritual stamina necessitates a degree of subjectivity on the part of the participants and those who recommend the qualified participants. Since one of the delimitations for this study is that the young adult participants must show spiritual stamina (as defined by a consistent lifestyle of Christian faith and godly attitudes and actions) to be included in the study, this necessitates the subjective judging of one's spiritual condition. The recommendations from school leadership assessed using the Spiritual Evidences

Checklist (see Appendix E), constitute a personal opinion of the young person's lifestyle. This may have produced a wide spectrum of participants from a variety of backgrounds and religious affiliations.

Generalizeability of the findings and newly developed theory is limited to graduates of Christian schools and cannot be directly applied to those who show spiritual stamina with a different background or influences.

Other limitations inherent in qualitative research methods such as personal interviews may cause data to be difficult to substantiate. Self-reporting must depend on the honesty and integrity of participants and willingness to be transparent. The retrospective nature of the study also requires participants to recall experiences from their past which may be unclear and subject to impressions or feelings. Personal impressions and opinions, however, bring richness to the narrative and "emphasize the phenomenological view in which reality inheres in the perception of the individual" (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005, p. 40).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

An individual's frame of reference for life determines a great deal of their response to God, others, and to the experiences in daily living. Those responses make up life and determine destiny. The practical and purposeful training of young people to think with a biblical worldview is paramount in sustaining the Christian culture and preparing for eternity. Success in the area of worldview development for the Christian school includes graduates who maintain spiritual stamina in the face of multiple conflicting voices. As high school students emerge into adulthood, attend secular universities, seek employment or enlist in the military they may find it difficult to remain true to their faith (Uecker et al., 2007). Studies have been completed that reveal the growth and development patterns of human beings and moral attitudes acquired during these transitional years (Baek, 2002; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Kohlberg, 2008; Reed, 2008; Watson, 2006). This chapter discusses the role of the Christian school in the process of developing spiritual stamina, a biblical worldview and critical thinking among their graduates. The theoretical framework is presented followed by a discussion of curriculum, critical thinking and pedagogy, the values of teachers, school mission statements, and the young people as they emerge into adulthood.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to guide the study and provide a basis for the empirical review that follows (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). In grounded theory research, the investigator works on the assumption that a viable theory may not have been developed which addresses the sample population of this study. The theories discussed here, therefore, are general models to provide a framework (Cresswell, 2007). I will discuss the biblical background for the study based on traditional Christian interpretation. Additional theoretical discussion is based on

identity theory and social cognitive theory as associated with worldview development. A brief description of the locus of control theory as it relates to spiritual stamina is also included. My personal worldview is biblical, and therefore the epistemological assumption deems this study value-laden and a Christian bias will be evident throughout.

Biblical Worldview

A worldview is described as the way in which one views the world and their place in it (Brickhill, 2010). Olthuis (1989) contended that all individuals formulate questions such as; Who am I? Where am I going? What's it all about? Is there a god? How can I live and die happily? These are the "framework of fundamental consideration which give context, direction, and meaning to our lives" (p. 27). Finding answers and making a personal commitment to those answers will determine how we think. "How we think governs how we live" (Olthuis, 1989, p. 27). To hold a worldview that is biblical, one must answer life's questions based on the Bible.

The Bible contains the nature, source, and validity of knowledge. Hence, the Bible answers the three salient questions to describe one's worldview: (a) what exists, (b) how should humans live and (c) how do human beings know (Brickhill, 2010; Nash, 1992). Reality for the Christian is based on the knowledge of God, the truth of the Word of God and the desire to follow Christ's example for living. Therefore, the framework of this worldview is constructed on the Word of God, the Bible. Myriad biblical passages reference these ideas. For example, Colossians 1:16 states, "For by Him (God) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities, or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." Adherence to the belief that God created all that exists provides the basis for how humans should live and know.

Concerning how one should live, the Gospels show the lifestyle of Jesus Christ, our example, and the remainder of the New Testament gives directives for Christian living. Mark 12:30 states in Christ's own words "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." When Christ made the distinction of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, He showed us the importance of complete human development. The development of the Christian mind is imperative, in conjunction with the physical and spiritual aspects of man, in order to produce students who are mighty in spirit and intellectually able to combat the secularization of Christian thinking (Bonifas, 2009; Smitherman, 2009).

Faith and a worldview must empower the individual to make sense of life and carry them successfully through sorrow and distress. Olthuis (1989) described this deep and pervasive emotional attachment to faith and worldview as the bond that brings commitment providing satisfaction, joy, and peace. On the other hand, when there is very little or no emotional attachment to the worldview one has confessed, individuals are "divided against themselves" and act contrary to their true belief system. This often results in low self-esteem and guilt. Olthuis (1989) described the need for commitment to the life vision and to those with a shared faith.

No matter how sound the vision, if its adherents are not emotionally committed to it and to others who share it, they cannot live out the vision in a way of life. On the other hand, deep emotional commitment and long-term community support of a worldview give health and power to individual and communal life. (p. 36)

In addition to the biblical basis for this study, I have investigated identity theory, social cognitive theory and provided a brief explanation of locus of control to broaden understanding and provide foundational direction.

Identity Theory

Identity theory most generally centers on the process of identity development described by Marcia (1966), which holds exploration and commitment as key elements. Exploration is defined as actively questioning and evaluating beliefs, values, goals or social roles. Commitment is clearly dedicating oneself to a set of beliefs, values, goals or social roles and actively engaging in activities for maintaining those commitments (La Guardia, 2009). Marcia outlines four identity statuses that may determine the level of commitment and healthy identity development. They are identity achievement, foreclosure, moratorium and diffusion. Achievement is attained after substantial exploration leads to making a commitment. Foreclosure comes when a commitment is made without exploration. Moratorium is the status of no commitment even after active exploration of viable alternatives has taken place. Diffusion is the outcome when neither exploration nor commitment has occurred (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; La Guardia, 2009; Marcia, 1966; Meeus et al., 2012; Rahgozaar et al., 2012; Schwartz, 2011).

A closer look at the identity status of the young adults in the current study may provide evidence to substantiate the root causes of their achieved spiritual stamina. A study of the impact of family cohesion and flexibility (Rahgozar et al., 2012) describes a young person who accepts the foreclosure status by committing to parental ideas and beliefs without question. Kroger and Marcia (2011) contend that the foreclosure status may reveal the “importance of the social environment in the process of making of identity-related choices” (p. 1235). Foreclosed individuals will internalize the beliefs, values and goals of the significant people around them instead of pursuing personal exploration. Commitments made by foreclosure are not then integrated into self. Healthy personal identity is not achieved without individual exploration and commitment (Luyckx et al., 2008). Therefore, those who have wrestled with the questions of

salvation and made personal commitments to Christ will be more likely to show spiritual stamina into adulthood due to a healthy personal identity.

Biblical teachings support the fact that each individual is responsible for his or her own salvation and personal commitment to follow Christ (Romans 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Colossians 3:23-25). Correlations have been found between the identity status of an individual and social behaviors, future plans, and life paths (Luyckx et al., 2008). As previously stated commitment is clearly dedicating oneself to a set of beliefs, values, goals, or social roles and actively engaging in activities for maintaining those commitments (La Guardia, 2009). Maintenance of spiritual commitment is the basis of spiritual stamina that I define as the ability to face adverse circumstances, social or personal pressures and remain true to godly standards of living and attitudes.

Identity achievement is the goal that often follows a crisis experience, exploration, and a commitment. This achievement of identity can be seen in those who have developed an internal locus of control, rather than an external locus of control (Marcia, 1973). Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their actions have an effect on the outcomes. An external locus of control is evident in individuals that believe they have no control over situations or outcomes but are instead under the will of fate or some powerful other. This leads us to consider the effects of the social environment on one's behavioral choices, belief systems, and identity development.

Social Cognitive Theory

The second theoretical backdrop for this study involves the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura (1977). This theory supports the belief that behavior is learned through observation. Children observe the people around them and model behaviors that bring approval

or reinforcement. Repeating behaviors, positive or negative, may be the result of external or internal reinforcement. External reinforcement comes from the approval of others and internal reinforcement is described as the good feeling or satisfaction one gains from a particular behavior. Bandura also explained that a behavior is reinforced through observation of what happens to others who behave in a particular way. This is termed vicarious reinforcement. Behaviors are modeled and reinforced by influential people such as parents, peers and teachers (Bandura, 1977).

Christian schools that consistently provide a positive environment and life experiences that uphold a biblical worldview have a greater opportunity to assure stability and spiritual stamina in young people. The principles of behavior modeling and the reinforcement of peers are supported in Scripture. “Do not be deceived, evil company corrupts good habits” (I Corinthians 15:33). “When a student is fully taught, he shall be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

Another aspect of the social cognitive theory is that of human agency. The three features of agency are intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness. An individual has the power to originate actions, make future-directed plans, and self-regulate responses. The actions of an individual cause an evaluation and comparison of the action with personal goals and values. Bandura (2001) explained self-reactiveness as follows:

Actions give rise to self-reactive influence through performance comparison with personal goals and standards. Goals, rooted in a value system and a sense of personal identity, invest activities with meaning and purpose. . . By making self-evaluation conditional on matching personal standards, people give direction to their pursuits and create self-incentives to sustain their efforts for goal attainment.

(pg. 8)

People, therefore, are able to self-direct and do things that bring about satisfaction and avoid those things that bring self-dissatisfaction or self-censure.

Bandura described moral agency as paramount in self-directedness. Moral agency connects moral knowledge and reasoning to moral conduct. The moral judgment of right and wrong and the alignment of personal conduct to those judgments come through the exercise of moral agency. This comes in two forms, inhibitive and proactive. Inhibitive moral agency provides the power to refrain from wrong behaviors. Proactive moral agency provides the power and desire to perform righteously (Bandura, 1999).

Christian young people would most likely place a high value on the spiritual benefits of a lifestyle founded on biblical standards and principles. They would then believe that certain behaviors would produce positive outcomes and avoid negative results. Believing in and looking toward the future eternal rewards promised to Christ followers may have an immense bearing on their present choices and behaviors. One such example in Scripture is Colossians 1:10-12.

That you may walk worthy of the Lord fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

The ideas of human agency are expanded in the locus of control concept (Bandura, 1977). This refers to the individual's belief about what determines the positive or negative reinforcement in life. People are classified on a continuum from internal to external locus of control. Internals see themselves as having a personal impact on their own success or failure. Externals see the reinforcers as being controlled by circumstances or powerful others. These individuals believe

that their behaviors or efforts have little impact on the outcomes in life. Christian young people who possess a biblical view of God and are secure in their place in the plans of the Creator should have a balanced locus of control based on God's omnipotence and their own free will.

Review of the Literature

A review of literature provides background information, support for research questions and possible avenues of investigation in grounded theory research. This review looks at the literature concerning teacher values and worldview, curriculum and pedagogy, critical thinking, Christian school mission statements, and young people as emerging adults.

Teacher Values and Worldview

The role of the classroom teacher is paramount to the transference of value systems and moral judgments. Successful identity formation in the student requires the assimilation or accommodation of new information and experiences (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). Teachers hold tremendous influence over the ways in which this process takes place. Teachers serve as role models to set expectations, stimulate discussion and provide support in exploration for identity development. In Marcia's Identity Theory discussion (1966), he stressed that openness in exploration should be kept in balanced by forces that serve to maintain commitments. Teachers provide that balance in the process of assimilation and accommodation. True commitment to a worldview comes with an emotional attachment gained over time as one experiences the sustaining power of his or her faith through difficulty or distress. A faith and worldview that works to bring peace and contentment will produce a deep emotional commitment to not only the view of life but to those who share such beliefs (Olthuis, 1989). The Christian teacher can be the instrument to guide this process with balance.

Christian schools who desire to produce graduates strong in commitment to a biblical worldview must be intentional in securing teachers in agreement with that goal and able to support students in spiritual identity development. Brickhill (2010) found that many Christian students lack the ability to form a biblical worldview due to the Christian educators' lack of a Christian worldview. Faculty members must be unified in their worldview and striving to communicate clearly to students. The carefully planned interview, hiring, and orientation process can aid in strengthening faculty understanding and commitment to a Christian worldview.

However, strategic planning and administrative oversight is not sufficient in and of itself. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to solidify the individual's commitment to be a teacher of excellence. II Timothy 2:14-15 says this in regards to approved and disapproved workers, "Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (NIV). Teachers are admonished to be workers that God approves which demands personal commitment and integrity.

The paramount influence that teachers and schools have on young people must not be understated. Pike (2010) referred to teachers as indoctrinators. He stated: "All teachers are indoctrinators...for a 'doctrine' is a 'teaching' and an occupational hazard of teaching is that one usually leads learners into particular 'teachings'" (p. 312). He added the belief that even without the value-laden approach to lessons within the curriculum powerful messages are communicated to students through school procedures and daily interactions of the people involved. Those messages relate what is valuable and worth worshipping and what is worthless. Pike (2010)

contended, “The question is not *whether* we teach children how to live but *how* we will do so and *what* values they will learn” (p. 312).

The development of a biblical worldview is set within the context of the overall spiritual formation of a child. Spiritual formation is defined as “the process used by the Spirit of God to form the inner human character into a likeness of the being of Jesus” (Marrah, 2009, p. iii). The process of spiritual formation or biblical worldview development takes place in relationships. Hall (2010) coined the term “relational spirituality,” which encapsulated the idea that our spiritual growth depends on our relationship with God and with those whom God chooses to work through in our lives. The Christian schoolteacher is given the weighty responsibility to provide avenues for building relational spirituality. The ways in which that is accomplished vary greatly within the context of Christian education and success stories may prove salient in the current investigation.

In the search for best practices in Christian education, it is important to look at research in other settings. Cooper’s (2010) study on the quality of empathy on moral development has application for the Christian school setting. This study compared the effects of moral modeling in various contexts. It was found that the quality and success of moral modeling relies heavily on the level of communication experienced and the number of people involved. For example, large groups may be able to learn good manners, common respect, and caring used in all settings but personal relationships and discussions may be shallow. The most benefit for moral modeling was noted when teachers were able to develop relationships through close and frequent interaction with small class sizes. This finding supports the findings of Cooper (2010) on relational spirituality. More personalized interaction also had the desired effect of positive learning relationships and achievement. The impact of large class sizes, often embedded in the

economic structures of both the state education systems and in Christian schools, may be seen in the lack of true moral modeling. Large group encounters often restrict the flourishing of character development. Large group assemblies alone, therefore, are insufficient for substantial growth in moral or character training (Cooper, 2010).

If moral modeling relies heavily on context and large groups are not believed to be the best setting for the transference of moral training, Christian schools may need to rethink the emphasis on large chapel assemblies. There is a tendency to place high expectations on the large chapel meetings and Bible classes to train young people in the biblical worldview. School administration may give little or no attention to the importance of close and frequent interaction between students and teachers. Myers (2010) suggested that Jesus set the example for small group learning in His dealings with the twelve disciples. The act of cultivating the individual through mentoring and practical example was the pattern for Christ and a directive for educators.

It is a recipe for failure to embrace Jesus' message and simultaneously abandon his method of delivering it. Human plans do not improve on God's plans when it comes to achieving God's results. Bigger is not better; more personal is better – especially when it comes to the emerging generation's spiritual growth. Cultivation, not mass production, is what every generation needs (Myers, 2010, pp. 32-33).

In following the example of Christ, the Master Teacher, the Christian school should utilize both large and small group learning experiences. Large group sessions may promote body life and community within the school, train students in corporate worship, and give opportunity for exposure to a variety of preaching and teaching, but perhaps the greater good is accomplished through close relationships and moral modeling of the teacher.

Cooper (2010) found that the importance of context and relationship in moral modeling were supported in The Child Development Project, an earlier longitudinal study completed by Watson (2006). This study concerned a mixed class of second and third graders with a substantial number of behavioral challenges assigned to the same teacher for two years. The teacher worked to build a relationship of trust with the children and developed moral and personal values in the students. The effects of the mutually caring relationship with the teacher carried over into high school and several students showed positive results in behavior and character. Results of the data argued that in order to develop the long-term positive results, students should remain with the same teacher for longer than one school year (Watson, 2006). There are Christian schools that purposefully allow for the long-term teacher-to-student relationship to deepen the influence and positive mentoring benefits.

The impact of the teacher on a student/teacher mentor relationship can result in increased altruism, which is the selfless helping of others or the highest form of caring (Robinson & Curry, 2006). The opposite of greed, altruism is a character trait shown in Scriptures by the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33), which expresses the worldview question, “How should humans live?” Promoting altruism or other positive character traits in the classroom depends heavily on multiple social interactions, adult role-modeling, dialectic conversations, and role-playing (Robinson & Curry, 2006). Students respond more positively to teachers who behave altruistically in their day-to-day interactions versus adults who just talk about it. Teachers can have a strong effect on training children to see the needs of others and respond appropriately.

This same concept applies to the biblical worldview and moral modeling for students of any age. Schools can be intentional in the choice of the values that they desire to pass on to the students (Robinson & Curry, 2006). Educators at every level must conclude that often there is a

hidden curriculum based on student experience that plays a role in the overall training outcome. Trelstad (2008) stated, “No part of education, including its disciplinary methods, is value-free or neutral. All education and curriculum serve interests visibly and invisibly” (p. 194). As discussed in the next section, the explicit moral training must coincide with the implicit values shown in the lives of the faculty (Cooper, 2010; Shultz, 2006). Building student trust, for example, is vital to the transfer of values and worldview therefore the Christian teacher must be trustworthy. Hall (2010) held the belief that a biblical worldview, morality, and character become authentic in one’s life through close relationships with God and human authority figures. Authorities, such as a teacher, can model a truly biblical worldview before the students and share the experience of Truth transcending head knowledge and permeating the soul. “Relational spirituality” (Hall, 2010, p. 17) is vital in solidifying a biblical worldview. School leaders must realize that the culture of the classroom helps to develop worldview and take steps to assure that faculty and staff are having a positive, biblically sound influence. This has many implications for teacher in-service, orientation, and hiring practices within the Christian school.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

The planning, development, and implementation of curriculum have a great deal to do with the value system of the leaders and educators of the school or system. A Christian school that desires to train young people in a biblical worldview and produce graduates with spiritual stamina must make careful assessment of curriculum, both visible and invisible. Cooper (2010) warned that people and institutions could send messages through their day-to-day behaviors and systems that differ greatly from the message they attempt to articulate. High standards and values are vital in both the micro and macro curriculum in that one level impinges on the other.

Bandura supported these concepts in the social cognitive theory of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Looking at the development of the Christian mind and worldview through this lens, it is understood that the school culture can influence spiritual growth with implicit curriculum. Bandura introduced this theory to explain the depth of learning that takes place in everyday experiences through observation of the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and peers.

In addition to the written curriculum, there are both positive and negative influences in the school environment that can influence the cognitive and spiritual growth of an individual. Gibson (1979) expanded the understanding of the reciprocal relationship that a person has with their environment through the term “affordances.” He purported that there is a direct relationship between the established goals of an individual and what is personally extracted from the environment. A young person possessing a strong commitment to follow Christ and His direction in life will be less apt to be detoured by negative surroundings. However, nominal commitment to a godly life or lack of direction may afford opportunity for negative influences. The Christian school that desires to produce graduates who set goals with God-given direction and inspiration must regularly assess their own school environment and strengthen the elements attributing to the goal.

In Scripture, Paul gives instruction to his students with the words, “Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9). Educators must be aware of the micro and macro curriculum they are portraying through content, communication and their personal conduct (Shultz, 2006). In his research regarding the effects of empathy Cooper (2010) concluded, “A more flexible, less pressurized curriculum, with less emphasis on normative assessment would release teachers and

pupils to engage more effectively in learning” (p. 96). Paul’s admonition to train by modeling requires time invested in the life of a student with one-on-one interaction (Philippians 4:9) and practical application.

The transference of a biblical worldview can emerge in such practical applications connecting the school culture and curriculum to the moral development of children. For example, the biblical teaching that our bodies are to be a temple of the Holy Spirit and that we are to glorify God in our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19-20) is an avenue to teach an abhorrence to substance abuse. In a comparative study of social and religious factors in adolescent drug use it was found that “attending a school that has a strong moral prohibition on substance use—reinforced by peers, families, and church—acts as a protective factor in preventing substance use” (Jones & Rossiter, 2009, p. 84). If that is true, the Christian community as a unit must work toward instituting a similar “protective factor” in our explicit and implicit curriculum and thereby affecting the culture for Christ regarding many social issues.

Varieties of techniques and materials have been implemented into classroom pedagogy for the purpose of teaching character, moral behaviors, and biblical values. For example, literature provides a platform to increase empathic orientation and to raise the level of awareness of the difference between altruism and greed. Books such as *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, *Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White, or *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee contain altruistic acts as examples to students (Robinson & Curry, 2006).

Live narrative is a useful teaching technique to introduce students to ideas and life situations that broaden understanding. The use of live narrative was a part of a study done by Conle & Boone (2008) involving people considered local heroes. Those who performed a particularly brave act or contributed to the community spoke to a group of students. The

strength of moral modeling was evident in that it engaged the imaginations of the students and made referential connections with lasting impressions. The study showed that the personal impact of a story in literature or a live oration varies according to what a particular student brings to the experience. One's socio-cultural context can determine their inclination to behave in certain ways and can impact the experiences. In their study of live narrative, Conle and Boone suggested that "values and ideals, as well as perceptions of everyday reality, are shaped as much by people's experience of a world, actual or virtual, as by moral exhortation, explicit rules and principles, or didactic tales purposefully told" (p. 8). The researchers concluded that a curricular unit of study should be designed which allows students to be brought into contact with people who show altruism and be exposed to stories of good moral choices to provide a vision of what could be for their future. Applications for the Christian school could include opportunities for students to hear of the life experiences of Christian missionaries and heroes of the faith both contemporary and historical.

Integration of biblical and/or moral education is most effective when it flows from the character of the teacher supported by the subject matter. Misco (2005) conducted an observational study done with a pre-service elementary education social studies class in which he observed character education coming through inadvertently in social studies lessons. Misco believed the very nature of civic education in elementary school to be moral in that it contributes to moral education. Social studies curricula abound with discussions and skill-building activities that teach responsible behaviors in relation to others with whom we coexist. Moral education can play a deliberate role in the goals and objectives for the social studies curriculum planning. Misco (2005) purported that the teaching of moral behaviors need not be *ad hoc* or added as a separate curriculum matter but moral values can readily be addressed in the social studies and

civic education. This is particularly true in Christian settings where the purposeful selection of teachers, curriculum standards, and textbooks promote godly character through biblical integration. The daily practice of the Christian school is deliberately structured in the framework of a Christian worldview.

The work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) focused on the ways in which practice in the social world derive structure from cultural assumptions or worldview. In a study based on Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Green (2012) related the function and impact of Christian Education to what Bourdieu labeled the cultural capital and habitus surrounding the institution of a Christian school. For example, the habitus is defined as the belief system or Christian worldview of the administration and staff. Individual adherence to this belief system or habitus, such as the authority of the Bible, and desired behaviors such as reading the Bible or gaining Bible knowledge would serve to gain cultural capital within that organization. Those faculty members who demonstrated the strongest connection to the habitus held positions of spiritual authority in Bible class and teaching in Bible assemblies or chapels and were, therefore, influential with students. Green (2012) found that students are swayed by cultural capital and adopt the belief that Bible teaching is valuable in order to live as well-informed persons even if they do not profess to be Christians. Some students may assign value to biblical literacy and not necessarily be convinced of biblical truth. A structural practice in the area of curriculum may show causal effects on this lack of commitment to the Christian faith. In the schools researched by Green (2012), it was found that although Bible teaching was a "symbolically powerful practice" and biblical literacy gained cultural capital, the Bible was not integrated into other subject areas. Bible was relegated to Bible classes and chapel services. The implied message to the students was that the Bible held no relevance to the wider subject

curriculum and therefore had little or no impact on their own cultural practice. This outcome falls short of the desired goals of the Christian schools of this current study and yet the pedagogy and curricular structures of those institutions could help to determine spiritual commitment and stamina in graduates.

The ACSI (2012) sees the component of biblical integration as imperative in the pedagogy and operation of member schools. Christian school educators are, therefore, admonished to integrate biblical principles into all disciplines of instruction. Such integration is often difficult and many teachers confuse application with integration. Clawson (2009) of Lancaster Bible College designed a biblical truths pyramid to indicate the levels of thinking as they relate to reading literature that can produce foundations for a biblical worldview. The top of the pyramid is the “Do” level of application where a teacher might help the students to find direction for a preferred response to the story. The second level of “Value” provides the reason for the applied response. The third level of “Believe” directs the student to see God and His character, which relates faith and learning (Clawson, 2009, p. 2).

In the example, *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare (1983) these applications were applied:

Do: Trust God when you are all alone, for God will take care of you.

Value: God has made people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, and they all need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19).

Believe: God’s plan is perfect for each one, and He will use a person’s particular circumstances to draw the person to Himself (Jeremiah 29:10-11, Romans 8:28).

Teachers must utilize advance planning and be intentional in order to integrate faith with learning. Training children to think biblically requires focused effort. Children who observe a

teacher who manifests an integrated life will learn to make the same integration (Clawson, 2009). The three levels described by Clawson can direct a student from an initial response, through application and into relating to the truth on a personal level.

Students should be aware of the intentional teaching of biblical integration and worldview. Essenburg (2006) gave several examples of ways to help students internalize a biblical perspective. Suggestions for the classroom teacher include: (a) regularly discussing ways in which your faith informs your selection of content, assessment, and instruction; (b) assigning journals about connecting faith to what students are studying; (c) using biblical perspectives on assessments, case studies, projects, and presentations; and (d) teaching key vocabulary such as biblical perspective, integration of faith and learning, image bearer, and worldview. As students are actively involved in the process of integration and worldview formation, the understanding will deepen.

One such practice of biblical integration is the “Get Real” process introduced by Brickhill (2010) as an instructional strategy to assist teachers in focusing and involving students in worldview development. The acronym REAL is utilized to encourage students to think biblically during any course of study. REAL stands for: Relate it to Scripture, Explain what it means, Apply it to yourself and your faith, and Live it by thinking about what your personal response or role should be in the future. Journals, minute papers, and class discussions are useful for the implementation of “Get Real” time and expand understanding. Personal application of biblical truth is the point in the process that makes it real in the life of the student and makes a disciple.

Enhanced personal application of biblical truths comes through careful planning and implementation of learning objects such as the “Get REAL” exercise. A learning object is

defined as a resource that can be used and reused to mediate learning. Three descriptors of learning objects often used in distance education can be applied to the ways in which learning takes place in worldview development. For example, Wiley (2007) described learning objects as “LEGOs” where chunks of content adhere to standards in a straightforward fashion. Another type of learning object is the “molecular” in which chunks of content “bind to learning objects for which they have an affinity.” They create a strong bond to some and weaker bond to others. Not every content chunk is fruitfully bonded. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth...and because they had no root they withered away” (Matthew 13:5-6). Often, content chunks come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are difficult to assemble meaningfully. Wiley (2007) represented the “brick and mortar” learning objects as those which provide a context as glue for this non-uniform content. As digital learning objects are useful in the assimilation of cognitive content, the proper teaching techniques can help to provide the avenues to reach the heart with biblical content. For example, the use of picture images or maps can often emphasize the reality of biblical history. Some simply fit like a “LEGO”. Others must find a proper place to adhere as in molecular fusion. I compare this to those truths in scripture that must be revealed by the Holy Spirit to each individual. Still other truths seem to be random and disorganized and must be placed in context for the learner with “brick and mortar” teaching. For example, making the connections between Old Testament history and prophecy and the New Testament fulfillment in Christ can create scaffolding for faith building. Christian educators must take the time and effort to bring proper pedagogy and curriculum into the classroom to cause real learning to take place. Teaching the Word of God in

context and building a proper foundation is a critical aspect of the internalization of a biblical worldview.

Once the spiritual truths are beginning to take root in the hearts and minds of our students, we must follow through with faith development. Bonifas (2009) implored Christian school educators to provide young people with spiritual responsibility, exercise, expression and challenge. Spiritual food without spiritual exercise is not adequate. The Christian school must provide regular opportunities for students to give of their means, share their faith, help and, in some way, positively affect their world for Christ. Bonifas calls it the “two-handed gospel” of word and deed. This happens when schools understand the type of education that makes disciples.

Hull (2009) discussed the difference between a biblically informed curriculum model and an education that makes disciples. Curriculum that is biblically informed uses the Scripture to support ideas, requires Bible memorization, and teaches Bible history and doctrine. This cognitive approach to a Bible curriculum provides Bible knowledge without intentional application. Education that aids in the internalization of biblical truth will be conducive to making disciples. Much of the life of a disciple is learned through the example of mature believers. A Christ-like role model is a vital part of training a young person to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. To internalize the biblical worldview one must see how the life of discipleship is lived by the learning community. The school community as a whole shapes the curricular experiences of the student. Hull (2009) concluded that the Christian school should not be as concerned with the skills learned or how students are mentored to construct their own meaning but rather, the focus should be on a Christian curriculum that guides the learning community into a life that seeks to follow Christ as a true disciple.

Critical Thinking

The mission and goals of the Christian School may be outlined in the biblical admonition from I Peter 3:15. "...Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you." To sanctify means to entitle, to reverence, to respect (Webster, 1997). Internalization of the commitment to a biblical worldview begins when one truly gives reverence to God and sets Him on the throne of the heart. Then the mind must be trained in preparation to defend the faith (Furgason, 2009; Smitherman, 2009). Thus, the development of critical thinkers with a biblical worldview begins with a commitment to Christ followed by an active pursuit of truth. This pursuit includes the growth in moral reason and behavior.

Kohlberg (2008) described the reasoning process for differentiating between right and wrong in three steps: (a) pre-conventional level where right is based on personal need and rules of others; (b) conventional level where moral decisions reflect a desire for the approval of others and willingness to conform to family, community, and national expectations; (c) post-conventional level where decisions are based on rational, personal choices that can be separated from conventional values. Kohlberg (2008) based his ideas on Dewey's and Piaget's definitions of moral development however, Kohlberg differentiated between moral judgment and moral behavior. Moral judgments are internalized belief systems or convictions that remain stable in a changing environment; however, moral behaviors are often situational and can be lost in new circumstances.

For example, young people are prone to make moral behavior decisions based on the current peer group. Many emerging adults in their move toward independence believe it to be a rite of passage to "devote themselves to hanging-out, partying, perhaps drinking, doing drugs,

and hooking up” without considering their religious heritage or tradition (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 280). Helping students progressively mature through the levels of understanding of right and wrong under the care of a teacher steeped in a firm biblical worldview is paramount to long-term internalization of biblical values. Internalized values become the foundation for moral reasoning which can have a positive influence on moral behaviors.

Turiel (2008) argued that children have the moral capacity to develop their own sense of right and wrong beyond adult control. This reasoning is often immature and skewed, however, and may lead to disaster. Giving biblical guidance to moral development is essential. In an extensive study of emerging adults, Smith and Snell (2009) found that a great majority of young adults are “moral intuitionists” (p. 46). That is that they know right from wrong by what they intuitively sense. Smith and Snell believed that these intuitions are from early training.

Those subjective moral intuitions are themselves reported to be the product of right moral principles implanted deeply within their consciences when they were children by their parents, teachers, pastors, and other adult authorities. Early moral socialization is ineradicable and reliable. (p. 46)

The developmental approach to moral training utilizes Kohlberg’s (2008) reasoning process in the case of character education in schools. Values clarification has been purported to support critical thinking growth however, this approach provides no absolute answers. All values are in question. As a result, students become relativists: believing there is no right moral answer. Teaching students to think critically on the issue of right and wrong can be approached from the standpoint of what is right for justice and upholding the rights of others according to our Constitution in the public forum (Kohlberg, 2008). This is a move in the right direction; however, it places the Constitution of the United States as the standard versus the Bible. This

shift in the standard for truth may cause a blurred relationship between moral virtue and moral response.

In a study to determine the relationship between moral comprehension (moral virtue) and prudential comprehension (moral response), Narvaez, Gleason, and Mitchell (2010) used story narratives to test levels of understanding in third graders, fifth graders, and college students. Moral virtue is the ability to realize right from wrong, whereas moral response is the ability to make the moral or right choice. Findings revealed that the two develop separately and that moral comprehension precedes prudential comprehension. Therefore, “children may have the moral virtue to recognize a situation that requires a moral response, but not the practical wisdom to respond appropriately” (Narvaez et al., 2010, p. 377). This study also showed that there are strong possibilities that children deal with moral choices more comfortably than the prudential aspects of a decision. The application of prudence or practical wisdom to a situation is developed over time through experience. The difference in moral reasoning ability between third and fifth grade students was quite evident and showed that substantial growth takes place in the middle elementary grades. “Comparisons within story type revealed that on moral stories, third-grade students differed significantly from both fifth-grade students and adults ($p < .001$), whereas fifth-grade students and adults did not differ” (p. 375). The evidence of growth between third and fifth grades may support the need to target this age group for purposeful worldview development. Maximizing this window of opportunity in the early stages of development may lead to setting life-long biblical patterns of thought.

It is paramount that value dilemmas, ethical debates, and moral choices are viewed through the lens of biblical truth. Guiding class discussions toward biblical investigation and application of godly principles will provide direction and foundation. When the Christian school

classroom faces an issue pertaining to values clarification, the teacher should encourage open or Socratic peer discussion in order to strengthen skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and debate. Vail (2001) defended critical thinking and the Socratic approach,

When we encourage our children to reject the life of the mind, we leave them vulnerable to exploitation and control. Without the ability to think critically, to defend their ideas and understand the ideas of others, they cannot fully participate in our democracy. (p. 333)

The responsibility given to Christian educators to develop a biblical mind set in their students is a daunting task. Furgason (2009) provided four guidelines for implementation in the classroom to aid in the process of equipping our students for the “marketplace of ideas” (p. 4). Educators should make provision for training to (a) promote critical thinking, (b) cultivate a hunger for truth, (c) demolish fortresses of relativism and naturalism, and (d) teach a comprehensive biblical worldview. Furgason called for the use of scientific method in teaching the importance of reasoning in Christian settings. The difficult questions of chemistry, physics, economics, law, and politics should be pondered and explained within the context of a comprehensive biblical worldview. Developing the Christian mind in godly thinking is paramount to preparing our students to face the challenges of today’s academic and spiritual assaults. It is possible to view all truth as the truth of God through the lens of the Word.

Christian high school graduates may experience dissonance in the clash of worldviews when they attend secular universities as they encounter myriad belief systems and cultural trends (Trelstad, 2008). The college student of the 21st Century may be facing challenges of faith, which differ from those of only a decade ago (Kinnaman, 2011). In discussing ideological agendas in colleges and universities of the 1990s Thomas Sowell (1993) wrote,

Today not only the classroom but also the dormitories, administrative committees, and the platform for invited speakers are all used to express the prevailing ideologies and to stifle opposing views...Often the ideological agenda includes not only propaganda barrages but also double standards when dealing with those who agree and those who disagree. (p. 188)

Current conflicting belief systems found in literature on diversity and moral reasoning (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009) and religious liberalization among young adults (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011), confirm the challenges faced by contemporary young adult Christians still exist. Trelstad (2008) explained the conflict of Christian conservatives who, learning to trust professors, are highly influenced by the belief system of the professors. Many, he described, cannot “go home” (p. 192) emotionally because of the changes that have taken place in their religious views and personal identity. In a review of philosophy, religion, and education in America, Lawrence (2007) concluded that college students “lack the intellectual armor to deal with the naturalism and postmodernism they encounter in textbooks or in conversations with other students” (p. 265). Thus, it is of utmost importance that Christian school graduates possess both cognitive and spiritual tools to discuss epistemological issues, to confront when necessary and to impact the culture.

Hokayem and BouJaoude (2008) discussed the perceived plight of secular college professors in overcoming epistemological issues when attempting to teach evolution. They found that student positions on the subject of evolution ranged from complete acceptance to complete rejection and professors should not dismiss or underestimate these personal beliefs. Christian students must be cognitively prepared to defend their beliefs. Moral reasoning and critical questioning skills are paramount to a successful defense system.

Mayhew and Engberg (2010) described the process of moral reasoning as the call to question and “critically engage the world around them” (p. 461). Individuals who engage a critical worldview must develop mechanisms to “critically question the sources of an argument, negotiate how the source and the argument align with their personal values, histories and experiences, and use these criteria to make judgments” (p. 461). Unfamiliar environments and negative diverse peer interactions in conflict with earlier conceptions can induce “cognitive disequilibrium” (p. 462) which causes a change in ones thinking. Those who learn to confront the unfamiliar and resolve the cognitive disequilibrium are able to develop perspective-taking skills and acquire greater moral reasoning potential (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). For example, scientific evolutionists found it difficult to deconstruct a strong religious or spiritual commitment to the God of creation in the classroom setting. Belief systems based on religious foundations are resistant to change (Hokayem & BouJaoude, 2008); however, students must possess an arsenal of critical debate and reasoning techniques, such as questioning strategies.

Questioning strategies are a vital component in the training of the Christian mind. Killen (2010) stated, “Questions give us purchase on material and on our own thinking process. Questions ground and guide us in the process of comprehending, analyzing, criticizing, and creating arguments” (p. 251). When questioning strategies are carefully designed to align with learning goals they will attend to varied levels of difficulty, specific sequencing, and incisive engagement (Killen, 2010). In other words, the type and level of questioning will progress as in Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) from general knowledge to comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. These coincide with specific learning goals for the group of students. King (1997) introduced a questioning strategy called the “Ask To Think Tel-Why” model in which students are taught to use and apply skills of predicting, questioning, summarizing, and

clarifying before publicly presenting the findings and receiving feedback from peers. King developed question stems to formulate reasoning questions, such as “What is a new example of...?” or “What do you think causes...?” Critically considering these questions in a group or individually can enhance understanding (Roscoe & Chi, 2007) and develop skills to apply to new circumstances.

Well planned questioning used in peer tutoring is one avenue to help both the tutor and tutee to “meta-cognitively reflect upon their own expertise and comprehension, and constructively build upon their prior knowledge by generating inferences, integrating ideas across topics and domains and repairing errors” (Roscoe & Chi, 2007, p. 541). The reflective knowledge-building process involves questioning that requires the student to integrate prior knowledge with new information and can aid critical thinking.

One practical tool that incorporates the acronym F.A.C.T is used for critical analysis in reading (Evans, 2013). Incorporating elements from Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956), this model provides a series of questions to deepen understanding and analysis (p. 1).

Foundation (Basics, structure) knowledge, comprehension (What?)

Analysis (Details, relevance) analysis (So what?)

Connections (Relationship) application, synthesis (Now what?)

Thesis (Reader’s argument) evaluation (Say what?)

Whatever the strategy used to engage students in critical thinking, the student is equipped with stronger arguments, justifications, rationale, and explanations in defense of their faith.

The teacher must skillfully engage the students in critical thinking and development of the mind of Christ and “give a reason for the hope that is in them” (I Peter 3:15). When actions and reasoning are based on a belief system void of a biblical standard, young people are left to

“be tossed about by every wind of doctrine” as described by Paul in Ephesians 4:14. Biblically based development of the mind influences moral reasoning and behavior.

Many teachers aspire to train students to become life-long learners as they grow to be good citizens and contribute to society. The classroom atmosphere encourages socialization and provides opportunity to model moral behavior (Robinson & Curry, 2006). One core principle of moral behavior found in young adults is that it is imperative not to hurt others. Smith and Snell (2009) referred to this mindset as “ethical consequentialists” (p. 47). This is the belief that if an action does not hurt someone else and it is not illegal, then it becomes acceptable. Many young adults do not justify their adherence to this principle in terms of God’s will, natural law, utilitarian principles, or the Bible. The moral opinion that one should not hurt others seems based on intuition (Smith & Snell, 2009). Moral intuition is not sufficient to deter immorality under pressure. The mind must be developed to think biblically to equip young people to make proper moral decisions.

In some Christian circles, critical thinking is misunderstood and considered a negative avenue, suspect of opening up doubt and cynicism, and dampening spiritual growth. Often educators rely heavily on lecture and the pouring in of information instead of pulling out responses. This teaching style may provide a safe atmosphere free from debate. However, instead of being concerned with creating for our students a “refuge from a rapidly changing and scary world” Christian schooling should be working to create an environment to “develop men and women who are a resource for a rapidly changing and scary world” (Smitherman, 2009, p. 1). Men and women able to defend the faith in culturally relevant avenues and maintain spiritual stamina are a resource of godly influence.

The individual must examine their own beliefs as they develop self-identity. Often that includes questioning familiar symbols, creeds, beliefs, traditions, religion and worldview. Fowler and Dell (2006) suggest that this type of questioning does not demand that familiar and traditional beliefs be rejected in the end. Instead he states, "...if they are retained, they are held with more self-aware clarity and intentional choice" (p. 41). For commitments to be truly integrated in the self, one must pursue an active approach to daily challenges in which viable solutions and alternatives can be considered (Luyekx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwarts, & Vanhalst, 2012).

A strong biblical worldview and the ability to defend one's beliefs prove salient when engaged in a thought experiment or argument set out to discredit a former belief system, thesis, or assumption. The Christian young person may face numerous counter opinions to consider in college classrooms as well as in casual conversation. Confirmation of faith is difficult and may draw intense epistemic debate. Reciting Bible stories or quoting scripture out of context would not always produce a strong argument. Haggovist (2009) stated, "A thought experiment showing only that some theory would give the right result in a certain merely possible situation wouldn't pack much epistemic punch" (p. 64). Christian young people with a biblically sound worldview will go beyond quoting Bible verses to develop reasoning skills and schema for defending their faith in the face of conflicting opinion.

Christian School Mission Statement

A mission statement is generally constructed to provide a view of the goals and outcomes desired by an institution, group, family, or an individual. The wording of such a statement defines the priorities, focus and philosophical leanings of the entity (Firman & Gilson, 2010). The member schools of The ACSI are required to establish and publicize a mission statement

among other pertinent documentation for accreditation (ACSI, 2012). This is viewed as a preliminary step to establishing the direction and goals for the organization. In the self-assessment portion of the accreditation process, the question is asked, “How does your institution inform constituents of the mission and what evidences do you have to the degree that your mission statement reflects daily practice and outcomes?” (ACSI, 2012). The emphasis placed on this statement shows the saliency of this investigation for member schools of ACSI.

The study on spiritual outcomes of students from various types of schools performed by the Cardus Institute (2010), revealed the need to understand the impact of the mission statement on the institution and the consistency with which that mission was functioning. A similar question was raised in a word study on the mission statements of religious institutions of higher learning by Firman and Gilson (2010) when they asked, “How do the mission statements reflect what actually occurs on a daily basis?” (p. 67). When questions are raised concerning the consistency of mission and practice, we must also look at the stated mission philosophy, type of school, and consistency in carrying out that philosophy in practice. One question for this study deals with the difference in the graduates’ ability to maintain spiritual stamina after having graduated from an evangelistic or a discipleship school.

A school with a discipleship mission is defined as one that requires a signed statement of faith upon enrollment. An evangelistic mission is defined as one that does not require signed statements of faith from students or families upon enrollment. A review of literature on the topic will aid the reader in understanding the two schools of thought. Historically, Christian schools were established as discipleship schools to support the family in the training of Christian young people (Lowrie, 1984; Latts, 2010). There are however, those who endorse open enrollment to non-Christian families who are willing to cooperate with the biblical purposes of the school. In

the 1970s two major publishers of Christian school curriculum found themselves in this very debate. The Hortons of Pensacola Christian College and owners of ABeka Books felt that the job of the Christian school was to evangelize the lost. They contended that Christian Schools had the unique opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission and that to refuse the tuition dollars of the non-fundamentalist would be financial suicide. Walter Fredmont of Bob Jones University and BJU Press believed that evangelical Christian schools should maintain student populations of evangelical Christians. Fredmont viewed the inclusion of non-fundamentalists in the Christian school as a compromise that “fills the schools with ungodly kids” (Latts, 2010, p. 69). To the BJU faculty, the edification approach was a philosophical imperative.

Carl D. Herbster, the president of the American Association of Christian Schools and a proponent of the edification approach said, “The influence of just a few unregenerate young people in the midst of many saved students can cause evil to spread throughout the entire school” (Latts, 2010, p. 69). In a study on moral reasoning and diverse negative peer interactions, Mayhew and Engberg (2010) appeared to be in philosophical agreement. They stated, “Educators interested in intentionally creating contexts that facilitate growth in moral reasoning need to understand not only how students develop their capacities for moral reasoning from a theoretical perspective, but also how the contextual features of learning environments influence those capacities” (p. 260).

Vryhof (2005) shines an equalizing light on this topic in his study on the Measure of Christian School Effectiveness. He views Christian schools and their missional goals flawed in at least one area of thought as expressed here.

Some Christian schools focus on the personal salvation of students as something

to be attained, forgetting that salvation is entirely God's initiative, that Christ has already redeemed, and that there is nothing we do to add to or subtract from what He has done.

Some schools isolate and protect students from what is perceived as an essentially evil culture, forgetting that culture is still the arena of God's goodness and that ships in a harbor are safe, but that is not what ships are for. (p. 8)

The debate continues and in recent years it has become evident that Christian schools hold philosophical differences in regards to the profession of faith made by their student body (Cardus, 2010). Many Christian schools hold to strict covenants and require middle and high school students to sign a statement of faith upon enrollment. There are, however, other schools with a missional approach, deliberately avoiding signed statements of faith and allowing open enrollment. Both types of Christian schools clearly hold to religious foundations but strategically commit to a different purpose (Cardus, 2010). The extent to which these foundational documents steer the actual daily experiences and academic substance of the institution is unclear. The question also surfaces as to the extent of impact the school's mission and philosophy has on its graduates. The school's mission statement should dictate the direction of school policy on admissions, curriculum, staffing, and classroom pedagogy; however, the extent of its effect is unknown and will be addressed in research question three.

Emerging Adults

The National Study of Youth and Religion (2010) conducted research over a five-year period on the religious and spiritual lives of young adults or emerging adults, published in the book, *Souls in Transition* by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, (2009). One significant finding is summarized in the words "the past continues to shape the future" (p. 256). The moral choices and actions of young adults most often reflect the spiritual level at which they left high school.

Smith and Snell (2009) purported religious practices, commitments, and spiritual influences and investments made during childhood and the teen years matter. The implications for Christian schools lie in the need for deliberate commitment to spiritual growth and biblical worldview development before these young people graduate from high school. This supports an earlier comparative study entitled *Losing my religion: The social sources of religious decline in early adulthood* (Uecker et al., 2007) in which a decline in participation in religious activities was compared to an increase in suspect behaviors. The study concluded that religious decline in early adulthood could be attributed to “processes set in motion during adolescence such as weak religious socialization” (p. 1686). Parents and teachers who actively affirm and teach the language of the faith transmit traditions of religious belief. If this transmission is unsuccessful, the young person is at a high risk to shed the religious value system when they leave the Christian home or school (Uecker et al., 2007).

In a study on identity process and coping strategies of college students, Luyckx et al. (2012) determined that it is getting progressively more difficult for young adults to make commitments. Contemporary society has become more individualistic, offering less support and yet more demanding on young adults to create their own identity. This high-pressured atmosphere has made establishing a stable identity a challenge for many young adults. Marcia’s (1966) identity status explains that the goal is to achieve identity through exploration and commitments. Exploration is believed to be productive and helpful to the individual in the formation of identity. There are, however, two types of exploration with differing effects. Exploration in breadth is described as a wide search for identity alternatives that precedes a new commitment. Exploration in depth is a conscious evaluation of an existing commitment. Extensive exploration in breadth has been linked to depression, low self-esteem, and general

distress. Looking too broadly and feeling the societal pressure has caused some individuals to become “stuck” in the process. Luyckx et al. (2012) has raised the concept of ruminative exploration or the act of “delaying or inhibiting progress in identity development. Troubled by what they perceive as inadequate progress towards personally important identity goals, they keep asking themselves the same question, resulting in feelings of uncertainty and incompetence” (p. 1127). The devastating effects of ruminative exploration are evident and a greater understanding of this phenomenon will help to bring solutions.

According to a causal comparative analysis study of the influences that keep young adults active in church after high school, the major factor is the deep spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ made earlier in adolescence (Black, 2006). This clashes with the prevalent philosophy among emerging adults that the “absolute authority for every person’s beliefs or actions is his or her own sovereign self” (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 49). A strong commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will combat the opinion of autonomy and provide young adults with the impetus for adherence to absolute Truth. In a study conducted by the Barna Group of 1,296 young people between the ages of 18-29, it was found that 19% reported to have made an emotional decision to be a Christian early in life that didn’t last past high school (Kinnaman, 2011). The transmission of the faith during adolescence and a solid personal commitment is paramount in the spiritual stamina of young adults.

Relationships formed with those with whom one attends church become strong influences in the life of a young person (Black, 2006; Hall, 2010). The peer group in which students experience their education also has a strong influence on future stamina. The top three spiritual growth facilitators are peer relationships, working through suffering, and Bible classes (Hall, 2010). As this study sought to investigate, the implied curriculum expressed in the discipleship

or evangelistic stance of the school may have a bearing on the make-up of the peer group and thus, their influence. Young adults often understand that they are shaped by personal subjective experiences but give little credence to objective truths outside of themselves. They limit themselves to their own interpretations and are skeptical of truths that apply to all people. Smith and Snell (2009) concluded, “They are de facto doubtful that an identifiable, objective, shared reality might exist across and around all people that can serve as a reliable reference point for rational deliberation and argument” (p. 45). In other words, young adults rarely believe that there are absolute truths that apply to all humanity. This leaves the individual without a trustworthy reference point for life. To combat this prevailing attitude, the process of being shaped and bound by our experiences and peers must also include the exposure to and application of the universal Truths of God’s Word. Providing consistent application of these objective Truths, no matter what the peer make-up, will aid in the development of a proper perspective on relationships and influences.

In a longitudinal study of the spiritual growth of college students at a Christian university, Hall (2010) sought to better address the needs of the students by gaining insight into the process and trends of spiritual development. Hall concluded that students feel “relationally connected to God, experiencing a strong sense of meaning and are developing a Christian perspective on life, and yet they are low on practicing spiritual disciplines” (p. 17). The study showed a gradual decline in the practice of spiritual disciplines from the freshman to senior year of college. The top three difficult spiritual struggles listed by the students were relational conflict, lust/sex/pornography, and busyness. Emerging adults struggle with identities in love, work, and faith and may require time and freedom to tear down and reconstruct their own worldview (Hall, 2010).

Summary

This review of literature, while providing background and theoretical basis for the study, points toward the need of Christian educators to be deliberate in training young people in the rudiments of a biblical worldview. Several avenues of influence have been reviewed including teachers, pedagogy, curriculum, school environmental effects, and school mission statements. The emphasis on critical thinking deals directly with the development of the mind and the ability to articulate and defend the faith. A clear understanding of the principles of God's Word, a well-developed biblical worldview and a strong personal commitment to Christ are foundational in producing young adults with spiritual stamina. Therefore, the theoretical framework for identity development, exploration, and commitment provide a foundation for the qualitative research and analysis to be gained from the young adult co-researchers. The goal of this study was to investigate the role of the Christian school in helping their graduates to maintain their faith and show spiritual stamina as they attend secular universities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study is to investigate the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in Christian high school graduates who attend secular universities or colleges. The focus of inquiry is to determine the impact of the Christian school in the lives of graduates and to generate a construct-oriented theory grounded in the data. In this chapter, I discuss the research design, role as the researcher, participants, sites, data collection and analysis procedures, and conclude with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Design

I chose a qualitative grounded theory design for this study. In desiring to establish some basis and guiding principles for developing spiritual stamina in Christian school graduates, it is important to look at the graduates, their spiritual journeys, and the meaning they attach to the process. Grounded theory is suited for uncovering the experiences and understanding of those experiences through the narrative of the participant rather than imposing predetermined themes (Morrow & Smith, 2007). Employing a systematic grounded theory approach, I sought to develop a set of well-integrated concepts that explain and describe the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2009). Theoretical sampling at the site level, the process level, and the participant level builds a solid qualitative study (Creswell, 2007). The school sites, the process of spiritual development, and the co-researchers meet the criteria for sampling.

Theoretically, grounded theory derives from Pragmatism (Dewey, 1925) and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1931; Hughes, 1971). Pragmatism focuses on the process that brings about the solutions, finding what works, and answering the research question. In conducting a study to investigate the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina, the

pragmatic stance will reveal successful approaches for Christian schools. Symbolic Interactionism contends that people assign meaning to words, actions, beliefs, roles, and feelings through social interaction. The influence of the Christian school environment and its mission may be discovered through this investigation in light of symbolic interactionism. As the students interact with teachers and peers, they assign meaning to the things they see, hear, and feel. Adopting or rejecting the words and beliefs can help define who they become. Interviews, as part of the qualitative research, also lend themselves to symbolic interactionism as the interviewer responds to the researcher. In seeking to hear the voice of the participants, it was necessary that I be cognizant of clear communication so as not to interject my personal bias. These orientations provide two salient principles to apply to grounded theory research. The idea of change and determinism are built into the process (Corbin & Strauss, 2009). Phenomena are not static and therefore, require investigation in response to the changing conditions of the participant. As the researcher, I was alerted to the interplay of the relevant conditions and the response of the participant to the consequences of their actions and took an interactive approach to research.

Research Questions

The following research questions emerged from a desire to understand the development process of spiritual stamina and the role of the Christian school within that process. The questions are:

Research Question 1. To what do Christian school graduates attribute their spiritual stamina?

Research Question 2. What was the role of Christian school education in the graduates' spiritual growth and resilience?

Research Question 3. What is the relationship between the mission of the school

(evangelistic or discipleship) and the graduates' ability to maintain spiritual stamina?

Sites

Four sites, purposefully selected, represent the two most common foundational philosophies of Christian Education. Two sites are evangelistic and two sites are discipleship in nature. This classification is based on their published mission statements and enrollment policies. "Evangelistic" is being defined as the mission to evangelize through the educational process and open enrollment policies. "Discipleship" is defined as the mission to disciple believers and the enforcement of enrollment policies requiring a signed statement of faith.

Four school sites selected for this study met the following criteria: (a) ACSI member school, (b) offering grades K-12, and (c) in existence long enough to have graduates attending all 12 grades in the school. One school site is a convenience choice and one was secured through former association. The selection process for the final two sites began with a search of the ACSI member listing on their website, with a focus on the 237 schools in Southeastern United States. A thorough search of school websites narrowed the search to 10 schools that met the criterion. I made the initial contacts via email with follow-up phone calls to secure the four schools agreeing to participate in the study. I then obtained consent forms from the administrators of the site schools (see Appendix B).

Identified using pseudonyms, the following sites are the focus for data collection: Alpha Christian School (ACS), Bethany Christian Academy (BCA), Calvary Christian School (CCS), and Damascus Christian Academy (DCA). This grounded theory study focuses on explaining the role of Christian education in the spiritual formation and stamina in Christian school graduates who attend secular universities. The philosophy and mission of each site are evidenced in curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, and student outcomes. These and additional

evidences of the process of spiritual formation were investigated as categories emerged. The following school descriptors are provided with pseudonyms (see Table 1).

Alpha Christian School, established in 1969 is an evangelistic institution with a current average enrollment of 282 in grades Preschool-12. ACS is located in the southeastern part of the United States and holds accreditation through the ACSI.

Bethany Christian Academy was established in 1973 with a discipleship model. BCA is located in the southeastern part of the United States with enrollment averages of 426 in grades Pre-school-12. BCA holds accreditation through the ACSI and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Calvary Christian School is a Preschool-12 school established in 1972 with a current enrollment of 1,300. CCS, a school with an evangelistic orientation, located in Southeastern United States, holds accreditation with SACS and the ACSI. CCS holds memberships in the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals, North Carolina Association of Independent Schools and North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association.

DCA, established as a discipleship Preschool-12 institution in 1977 has a current average enrollment of 426. Located in the southeastern area of the United States, DCA holds membership and accreditation with The ACSI, Virginia Council for Private Education, and AdvancED with the SACS.

Table 1

Descriptive Data for Participating School Sites

School	Grades	Est.	Enrollment	Mission
Alpha Christian School	PreK-12	1969	282	Evangelistic
Bethany Christian Academy	Prek-12	1973	426	Discipleship
Calvary Christian School	PreK-12	1972	1300	Evangelistic
Damascus Christian Academy	PreK-12	1977	398	Discipleship

Participants

Participants or co-researchers for this study included sixteen (Charmaz, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 2008) young adults, 6 male and 10 female, age 21-30 who attended a private Christian school for all 12 years of school from elementary through high school and then went to a secular college or university. The given age parameters increase the probability that co-researchers will be able to recall pertinent details from their school experience and be old enough to show evidence of spiritual stamina.

The term co-researchers was chosen to reference the participants of this study in keeping with a constructivist paradigm. The nature of a study of spiritual development and stamina necessitates an interpretive stance from the researcher rather than positivism. The relationship with participants in the shared experience of data creation and analysis fosters reflexivity in all interpretations. Individual commitments and the complexities of worldviews involved in this study are best served through the constructivist approach that asks how and why participants construct meaning. My desire was to get close to the inside of the graduates' experience and

develop an understanding of the larger implications for the Christian school community (Charmaz, 2010).

High school administrators from the four school sites were asked to recommend former students who fit the theoretical sampling (Appendix E). A Likert scale checklist was provided to assist the administrator in their assessment of students who have maintained spiritual evidences (Appendix F). Young adults were purposefully recruited for participation based on these recommendations. In this theoretical sampling, the participants must show the characteristics of strong Christian faith and spiritual stamina such as consistent church attendance, commitment to spiritual disciplines, Bible reading, prayer, and a wholesome lifestyle. A strong theoretical sampling is crucial to the development of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I gathered demographic information in an attempt to show maximum variation of the sample. The inclusion of both male and female young adult participants from a variety of career choices, academic preparation, and church affiliation adds to the transferability of the study. Table 2 reflects school, gender, and age.

Table 2

Co-Researcher Descriptors

Name	School	Age	Name	School	Age
Female			Male		
Renee	ACS	22	Rodney	ACS	26
Brooke	ACS	22	Hayden	BCA	23
Stacie	ACS	23	Heath	CCS	34
Becca	BCA	27	David	DCA	22
Cassie	BCA	27	Eli	DCA	21
Abby	CCS	29	Luke	DCA	23
Sara	CCS	23			
Desiree	DCA	27			
Beth	DCA	26			
Whitney	DCA	23			

Note. All participants are Caucasian

Procedures

Prior to data collection, I made application and secured approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (Appendix A). The four Christian schools sites were purposefully selected based on their philosophy, K-12 program offerings, and longevity. I secured signed agreement letters from school officials at each of the school sites with permission to include their school in the study and for data collection (Appendix B). Following approval

from the IRB, I, began document review (Appendix C), emailed the school administrators (Appendix D) and requested recommendations for participants from among their graduates (Appendix E). Potential participants received a request letter by mail or email with an informed consent form (Appendix F & G). Follow up contact was made through email, phone call or second request letter after two weeks.

Once consent was established (Appendix H), I asked co-researchers to (a) complete the STI on-line, (b) complete the Spiritual Journey Timeline (Appendix I) attached to an email, and (c) schedule a live or Skype interview (Appendix J). After all co-researchers completed the STI, results were obtained from the administrative assistant for Dr. Todd Hall with STI. Co-researchers were asked to have the Spiritual Journey Timeline completed at the time of the interview to aid the discussion of question one. (Describe your spiritual journey). I personally recorded and transcribed interviews (Appendix K). Data analysis began with a constant comparative method and theoretical memoing. Open coding procedures lead to prominent themes used to generate a theory to address the research questions. A focus group representing one of the participating schools met to clarify or elaborate on any information needing further explanation (Appendix L). The focus group also served to provide member checks for accuracy of the analysis. The generated theory was then put into a visual model to express the analysis (Appendix M).

Researcher's Role

My role as the primary human instrument in this study is for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). I personally visited the school sites, reviewed documents, interviewed co-researchers, gathered data and conducted data analysis. The study required that I approach data collection and analysis with reflexivity and to understand the values and bias I bring to the study

(Charmaz, 2010; Merriam, 2009). As personal bias emerged, I bracketed out my opinions and interpretations and allowed the data to speak through the voice of the participants. As the researcher, I worked toward understanding, which calls for interpretive insight, adaptivity, and responsiveness to data as it is collected. I must be cognizant of connections between the data and the theoretical assumptions in the Identity Theory (Marcia, 1966) and the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) and possess spiritual discernment in order to interpret and explore new avenues of inquiry as they emerge.

As an advocate for Christian Education with over thirty years in the field as an educator and administrator, I have a great interest in the student outcomes as related to spiritual stamina. I believe that Christian education can help to build a strong foundation of faith when properly balanced with the belief system of the home and the church. This research is based on the assumption that Christian schools desire to strengthen the graduate outcomes. Therefore, schools would benefit from a closer investigation of that process.

The mission philosophy of the individual Christian school typically aligns with one of two approaches openly evangelistic or discipleship. I found that the differences in the two approaches are evidenced in enrollment policy but often make little difference in the operational, academic, or curricular standards. My role in this grounded theory research was to collect data and through constant comparative methods, uncover relevant categories for analysis. Grounded theory research must allow the voice of the co-researchers to be heard while a theoretical basis for the data was developed. Qualitative research is inductive and data builds concepts or theories (Merriam, 2009). Intuitive understanding is gained through time in the field, personal interviews, focus group conversations, and a study of pertinent documents, such as school

mission statements. As themes emerged, I attempted to deepen the understanding of the process of acquiring spiritual stamina and its relationship to Christian education.

Data Collection

Following IRB approval, I began data collection that includes document review from each of the school sites, STI and Spiritual Journey Timeline data, and interviews with each of the 16 co-researchers. The description, the plan, and the rationale for each form of data collection are included in this section.

Document Review

As a portion of the site descriptions, I reviewed pertinent school documents (see Appendix C). Mission statements and philosophy helped to establish the evangelistic or discipleship institutional stance. An overview of the curriculum used for spiritual formation and biblical integration provided background information and confirmation of co-researcher experience and training. Teacher credentials, biographical data, and the institutional hiring criteria were examined to add to the rich site descriptions and support teacher influence literature or new findings. Data regarding alumni relations and second-generation enrollment were obtained from one participating school site. This information speaks to the degree of relationship building and general attitude toward co-researcher experience.

I also asked co-researchers to voluntarily permit me to review any personal school memorabilia, journals, or documentation pertinent to the study as a means of confirmation and personalization of the narrative. The incorporation of personal quotes and inferences drawn from journal entries provided perspective from the young adult co-researchers (Creswell, 2007). Data was recorded in narrative form to enhance the rich description of the site and participants. Interpretations and analysis were subjected to member checks for clarity and accuracy.

Surveys/Questionnaires

To add quantitative data to enhance the understanding of the spiritual formation process I chose to implement the STI created by Dr. Todd Hall (see Appendix I). This on-line inventory administered to the young adult graduates uses Likert scale scores to collect data on 31 indicators of spiritual growth and constructs (Hall, 2006). The 31 indicator scales are based on the concept of relational spirituality (Hall, 2012) and categorized into five domains of spiritual connection; connecting to God, connecting through spiritual practices, connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, and connecting to God's Kingdom. This instrument has been used and cited in recent studies on spiritual formation (Hall, 2006; Marrah, 2009). A detailed factor analysis of the inventory and a discussion of the development are published in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* and the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Hall & Edwards, 1996, 2002) showing its construct validity.

The STI is a relationally based measure designed to assess two dimensions of spiritual development: Awareness of God and Quality of Relationship with God. The present article reports the results of two studies: exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of a revised STI, which replicated five factors, and a factor analysis of a revised STI with a new Impression Management (IM) subscale. Results supported the factor structure of the SAI and the homogeneity of the IM scale. Correlations of the STI subscales with the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, the Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised, the Bell Object Relations Inventory, the Defense Styles Questionnaire, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory also supported the construct validity of the STI. Two-step multiple regressions supported the incremental validity of the STI. (Hall & Edwards, 1996, p. 341)

This quantitative instrument is widely used in Christian high schools and colleges to assess spiritual strength of students and programs. The STI was administered to the co-researchers electronically through the Spiritual Transformation website, <http://drtoddhall.com>. A group report classified by school sites was generated comparing the scores to national norms. Such a comparative analysis is useful on a factual level to gather evidences to compare against new data as a check for accuracy and to determine the generality of those facts (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). I utilized the STI assessment tool to gain insight into the spiritual well-being of the young adult co-researchers, make comparisons and add to the rich description of the narrative.

Spiritual Journey Timeline

A secondary form of data collection is the Spiritual Journey Timeline (see Appendix J) was used as a tool for young adult co-researchers to plot significant events that have had a positive or negative effect on their spiritual growth and development. The self-designed timeline also made use of a line graph to indicate levels of commitment throughout the formative years. Co-researchers completed the time-line prior to interviews to benefit as a focus and discussion aid. I piloted this data-gathering tool before full implementation and found it to be useful.

Interviews

The interview process used in qualitative research involves collecting information by talking with people face-to-face and observing behaviors within their context or natural setting (Creswell, 2007). I interviewed the young adult co-researchers individually in a face-to-face meeting ($n = 5$), by Skype ($n=7$), Google chat ($n=1$), or by telephone ($n=3$). Interviews were audio recorded for accuracy in transcription. I attempted to conduct interviews in settings that

allowed the most freedom of expression and comfort for the co-researchers and accommodated their suggested sites.

Interview questions (see Table 3) were reviewed by two field experts and checked for content validity. The questions are standardized with some flexibility for emerging topics built into open-ended questions. A pilot interview was conducted with a young adult not in the participant pool to assure face validity. This pilot produced no changes to the original set of questions. Initial interview questions are listed followed by a discussion of their relevance to the study.

Table 3

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for Young Adult Participants

Questions
1. Please describe your spiritual journey.
2. Do you feel that your commitment to Christ came naturally, as you followed your parents or did commitment come with exploration of other faith options?
3. To what do you attribute your current spiritual strength?
4. Why did you choose to attend a secular versus a Christian institution of higher education?
5. What challenges have you faced to test your spiritual commitments?
6. What strategies did you use to face those challenges?
7. What about your Christian education made a positive or negative impact on your spiritual walk?
8. What do you perceive as the impact of your school's mission (evangelistic or discipleship) on your personal spiritual growth?

Questions 1, 2, and 3 were designed to get a general picture and time-line of the participant's spiritual journey and to gain insight into the people or things that played an influential role. These constructs can be compared to the literature on moral development (Baek, 2002; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Cooper, 2010; Kohlberg, 2008; Reed, 2008; Robinson & Curry, 2006; Watson, 2006), Identity Theory (Marcia, 1966), spiritual formation (Hall, 2006; Marrah, 2009) and biblical worldview development (Brickhill, 2010; Furgason, 2009; Hull, 2009; Marrah, 2009). In the Bible in Joshua chapter four, the children of Israel were instructed to build an altar in remembrance of God's deliverance. Maxwell (2007) described this altar as a "handle

for faith” (p. 248). Young people need to establish handles for their faith or rocks of remembrance to gain stability and integrity. This question seeks to bring to the surface any “handles” that these successful young adults may have established.

Questions 4, 5 and 6 seek to bring out a personal description of spiritual conflict in the workplace or in the secular institution. Literature on diversity and moral reasoning (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009), religious liberalization among young adults (Mayrl & Uecker, 2011), and college students’ perceptions on the theory of evolution (Hokayem & BouJaoude, 2008) grounds this question in current conflicting belief systems.

Questions 7 and 8 are in relation to the participants experience with Christian education and their personal views and attached meanings to those experiences. Literature that discusses moral learning environments (Cooper, 2010), Identity Theory (Marcia, 1966), and the impact of the teacher’s worldview on students (Fyock, 2008; Watson, 2006) supports this question.

I personally transcribed all interviews (Appendix K). Follow-up interviews and emails were conducted as needed for clarification of emerging information or categories. Transcripts were emailed to co-researchers for member checks or approval to assure accuracy.

Focus Groups

One form of member checking comes through the process of interaction with focus groups. Following the document review, survey questionnaires, interviews, transcription, and initial analysis, co-researchers were asked to participate in a discussion focus group with the others from their high school. I selected representatives from one of the four school sites based on the degree of clarification needed or intensity of findings and availability. They were contacted via email and a date and time established for a face-to-face discussion. The session was recorded audibly and transcribed. Focus group input served to clarify or elaborate on any

information that needed further explanation and provide member checks for accuracy of the analysis. It is necessary that my interpretation of the data be confirmed in the context of the group (Charmaz, 2006). To engage the group, our discussion began with an overview of the data associated with their school site, my initial analysis and assumptions. I solicited verbal feedback and clarification (see Appendix M) from some of the co-researchers encouraging full participation, monitoring individuals who wish to dominate the conversation (Creswell, 2007). The group collaborated on the preliminary sketch of the theoretical model I presented, asked questions for clarification, and gave feedback to facilitate necessary changes in the model, which are discussed in Chapter Four.

Additional information gathered through collaboration and discussion served to bring greater understanding to the analysis, aid in the development of theory (Creswell, 2007), and add depth and credibility to the narrative. An agenda for the focus group meeting is found in Appendix M. Findings are discussed in chapter 4.

Data Analysis

The initial task in data analysis for qualitative research is a verbatim transcription of each interview based on the voice recordings. Transcriptions produced after the actual interview were emailed to the individual co-researcher for member checks to assure accuracy. I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants and anonymity of school sites. I conducted the interview transcription process and analysis without the use of computer assisted qualitative analysis software (CAQAS). According to Corbin and Strauss (2009), the data collection and analysis are interrelated processes and are best conducted through immersion in the data versus the separation that CAQAS can create. The constant comparison method of analysis is the process of taking information from the data as it is collected and comparing it to the

categories as they emerge (Creswell, 2007). This begins with the first piece of data collected because it is used to direct the on-going collection process. The researcher is guided toward all possible salient paths of understanding by the research process itself (Corbin & Strauss, 2009).

Data analysis occurred in stages including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the initial step, I read each interview transcription several times and color-coded key words and phrases. Using the colors as codes, the information from the data was segmented to determine the categories most often mentioned. Coding line by line or event by event helped to clarify the fit and relevance of the data to the study. Coding helps to define what is happening in the data and make sense of it (Charmaz, 2010). Nine general data categories emerged in the open coding. Within those categories, I identified subcategories and examined for further information to show any extreme properties. The *in vivo code*, “make it my own” was identified from the data and classified as a theme. In vivo codes are specific words used by the co-researcher that serve to clarify the responses of others and categorize themes (Strauss, 1987).

A visual, grounded theory workflow model (see Appendix M) used in the axial coding stage demonstrates the coding of the central phenomenon and causal conditions. During this stage I sorted, synthesized, and organized data into categories. When a phenomenon emerged as a pattern of representation of the same or similar constructs from several participants, I identified that construct as a category (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This stage of data analysis identified the conditions that influence the strategies and the consequences. Conceptual linkages and density are established and identified systematically via coding and categorizing (Corbin & Strauss, 2009). The grounded theory workflow model used to categorize themes from the data remained fluid throughout the coding process. Fluidity is necessary in grounded theory

research, in order to accommodate emergent themes until a theoretical saturation is acquired (Glaser & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical memos accompany each stage of the data collection and analysis as a means to record researcher thoughts and assumptions. I tested the thoughts and assumptions against the data and clarified as theories emerge. In the selective coding stage, two core categories emerged, personal identity and commitment. These became the basis for theoretical application and presenting the essence of the research in a rich narrative and the visual model of the Spiritual Identity Formation Theory (SIFT). The narrative connects the data from the categories and synthesizes the qualitative and quantitative findings (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness

The methods of grounded theory are often judged by the quality and usefulness of the final product (Charmaz, 2010). Subsequently, to arrive at the desired product, Charmaz (2010) suggests the following criteria: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Credibility involves the researcher in intimate familiarity with the topic and setting, gathering sufficient data through added depth and scope of interviews and observations, systematic comparisons, a wide range of empirical data, and a strong, defensible link between the argument and the analysis. The originality of a study is gauged by the fresh approach and significance as it challenges or extends current concepts and practices. Resonance and usefulness show the degree of connectivity found between the findings and the audience. “A strong combination of originality and credibility increase resonance, usefulness, and the subsequent value of the contribution” (p. 183). I trust that this study will resonate with Christian school educators and leaders as we together strive to understand the role of the school in the spiritual stamina of our graduates.

In addition to the criteria mentioned above which discuss specific grounded theory methods, I addressed the qualities assigned to qualitative research in general. These are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

The internal validity or credibility of my research is confirmed through prolonged engagement with the co-researchers, participants, and the data. As the researcher, I must personally be convinced of the evidences found in the data to develop a credible theory grounded in that data (Glasser & Strauss, 2008).

The triangulation of data, which gave credibility to the study, is found in data obtained from interviews with multiple comparison groups from the four schools, corroborated evidences from the focus group, and document review. I used a system of member checks to increase credibility by obtaining participant signatures on all interview transcriptions. Member checking with a focus group made up of the young adult participants or co-researchers was employed in the analysis stage to assure accuracy and clarity of participant voice. The focus group was asked to review the analysis of the study and confirm the findings to be accurate. An outside committee performed an expert review of the study. Committee members were representative of varying opinions regarding Christian education helping to minimize bias.

Dependability

An audit trail of detailed journal entries for all data collection processes showing the timeline provides accountability and a means for replication of the study showing dependability. In observations and interviews, I implemented a system of reflexivity or memoing and recorded personal notes, thoughts, and opinions independent of the data, bracketing personal bias. This

system of recording rich detail of the setting and context distinguishes fact from opinion and add dependability to the study.

Transferability

The use of rich description increases the trustworthiness and transferability of the study by allowing the reader to experience the participant voice and bring greater understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). When data is presented with narrative about the context, the reader may connect to its meaning and make application to other settings within their own realm of influence. This aspect of the research carries external validity and generalizeability.

Confirmability

To address the issue of confirmability, I again sought neutrality and objectivity through member checks. An accurate audit trail assures that the proper procedures laid out in the methodology section have been followed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a high priority and I took all precautions to prevent a breach in confidentiality. In the negotiation for entry into the school sites, I carefully adhered to school policy of visitation and scheduled appointments, and attempted to show thoughtfulness for the time constraints of administration, teachers, and co-researchers. I obtained all necessary permission and agreement documents prior to data collection, and addressed deliberate means of reciprocity for all participants (Creswell, 2007).

During the implementation of data collection and analysis, all data was stored in locked filing cabinets or password protected electronic storage for security. I reported personal bias with careful documentation of memos made during data collection to ensure truthful reporting of the findings.

In some cases, schools or school personnel may have been discussed unfavorably or shown poorly in the area of missionality or spiritual development. Therefore, to avoid possible injury or embarrassment, pseudonyms were used for all participants and school names.

The curriculum textbook choices of a school or schools have emerged as a category for positive or negative effects on graduates, therefore, I have take extra precautions to avoid damages to the particular curriculum series. In order to avoid the inadvertent promotion or condemnation of curriculum companies or writers I have used a chart depicting the general types of curriculum used (see Table 5). The use of descriptive terms will relay the textbook philosophy and approach rather than title or publishers.

Clear communication with school site administration and co-researchers at the conclusion of the study is necessary for closure and satisfactory departure. I have offered all participants access to findings and full disclosure.

It is not the purpose of this study to promote a particular plan for schools to implement in their missional pursuit but to serve as a means for a self-check and formative assessment on the path to excellence in Christian education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study investigated the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in young adult graduates of Christian schools who attended secular colleges or universities. A qualitative grounded theory design was utilized in order to gain understanding based on the experiences and opinions of the graduates themselves.

Sites

Four sites, purposefully selected, represent the two most common foundational philosophies of Christian education. Two sites are evangelistic and two sites are discipleship in nature. This classification is based on their published mission statements and enrollment policies. “Evangelistic” is defined as the mission to evangelize through the educational process and open enrollment policies. “Discipleship” is defined as the mission to disciple believers and the enforcement of enrollment policies requiring a signed statement of faith.

Four school sites were chosen for this study meeting the following criterion: (a) ACSI member school, (b) offering grades K-12, and (c) in existence long enough to have graduates attending all 12 grades in the school. The selection process for the sites began with a search of the ACSI member listing on their website, with a focus on the 237 schools in the Southeastern Region. A thorough search of school websites narrowed the search to 10 schools that met the criterion. I made the initial contacts via email with follow-up phone calls to secure the four schools agreeing to participate in the study. One school site is a convenience choice and one was secured through former association. I obtained letters of agreement from the administrators of the site schools.

Identified using pseudonyms, the following sites are the focus for data collection: Alpha Christian School (ACS), Bethany Christian Academy (BCA), Calvary Christian School (CCS),

and Damascus Christian Academy (DCA). For clarification, I used Academy in the pseudonym for discipleship schools and School in the pseudonym to indicate an evangelistic school. This grounded theory study focuses on explaining the role of Christian education in the spiritual formation and stamina in Christian school graduates who attend secular universities. The philosophy and mission of each site are evidenced in curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, and student outcomes. These fundamental evidences in the process of spiritual formation were investigated in this study. The following school descriptors are provided with pseudonyms. An overview of the interviews held with school administrators is included in the descriptors to provide background or foundational evidences to support data gleaned from graduates.

Alpha Christian School

Alpha Christian School, established in 1969, is an evangelistic institution with a current average enrollment of 282 in grades Preschool-12. ACS is located in the southeastern part of the United States and holds accreditation through the ACSI. Although closely affiliated with a local Baptist church ACS has a number of students from Presbyterian churches as well as a variety of other denominations represented in the student body.

As I visited ACS one Friday in April, the school was buzzing with activity. It was time for the Friday High School chapel, so I took a seat in the back of the sanctuary and watched preparations underway for the student-led worship with five vocalists, keyboard, guitar, and drums. There was a box of Bibles on the floor in the center of the aisle and all but a few students picked one up on the way into the chapel. A one-minute video clip called the chapel to order with fast-paced scenes and announcements from around the campus. The music was contemporary and the student body stood as many joined in the singing. A few raised their hands in worship. A male student gave the chapel message encouraging the students to allow God to

change them and really run with the change. In a heart-felt description of his former nonchalant attitude toward spiritual issues, he said, “It was so bad for me to feel okay and not seek a change!” A clip from the movie, “Forrest Gump” incorporated into his message a comparison between walking with braces and the change that comes in being able to run without them. The speaker admonished the students to avoid using their salvation in Christ as braces to improve their walk but to run sincerely with all that Christ offers. Chapel was closed with an invitation to a deeper commitment, and a teacher dismissed chapel with the prompt, “Seniors, lead the way!”

As I toured the school and met teachers and students, I could sense the small school, Christian family atmosphere. The logo “Shaping hearts...shaping minds,” boldly stated on the school website, is supported and elaborated upon within the school purpose, mission, and vision statements. They are included here with the name changed.

Purpose statement. The purpose of ACS is to assist the family in fulfilling their God-given responsibility for training their child. We do this by providing an education marked by a biblical worldview, curricular excellence, extra-curricular excellence, and the affordability – ensuring students will be equipped to impact their world for the glory of God.

Mission statement. The mission of ACS is to EDUCATE the mind, NURTURE the soul, and SHAPE the character of each student in a Christ-centered environment, based on the Truth of God’s Word.

Vision statement. The vision of ACS is to develop students who will ENGAGE God’s Truth, EXAMINE all things in light of God’s Truth, and EMBRACE what is consistent with God’s Truth.

An interview with the school administrator revealed a variety of ways in which ACS seeks to fulfill their mission. He emphasized the desire to see the graduates of ACS “make a

difference in the world for good.” The process, beginning with the stated mission goals and vision, carries through in securing staff in agreement with those goals. The school is a ministry of a Baptist church, and all faculty and staff are required to accept the doctrinal statement of the sponsoring church body. Throughout the application and interview process, each prospective employee is presented with the importance of biblical teaching and the big picture view of what the school is doing. The administrator said when speaking to prospective teachers, “We’re going to pay attention to what they believe and talk to them about that.” The importance of selective hiring and proper placement of teachers in the Christian school is supported in the literature that speaks to the profound influence teachers have on their students.

Another aspect of assuring that faculty and staff are in agreement with the stated mission and vision is the area of on-going training and staff development. As members of ACSI and of another local association of Christian schools, ACS is involved in yearly conferences and in-service training opportunities. Recently the faculty and staff studied materials on mentoring and Kingdom education that have resulted in a marked growth in the number of teacher-to-student mentoring relationships and intentionality in developing the individual students. ACS also has in place a student-to-student prayer partner program in which each elementary student connects with a middle school or high school student once each month to meet and pray together. They have arranged for fifth grade students to partner with seniors, fourth with juniors, third with sophomores, and so on. The purpose is to focus on prayer and teach older students to be good examples as mentors.

Formal spiritual formation and worldview training takes place in the classroom from grade one to twelve through the utilization of an adopted Bible curriculum from one of the major publishers of Christian textbooks. The truths of the Bible presented systematically focus on

personal application for living. A high school faculty member of ACS stated, “. . . my one main goal for Bible class this year is that they would fall in love with Jesus and be serious about it . . . and that they have a good time while they are falling in love and being serious.”

In eleventh and twelfth grades, the focus moves toward Christian apologetics and the study of other religions. The administrator describes the goal of this course as a way to look at what the Bible says, what we believe as Christians, and why we think the way we do. He believes this prepares students to take action in sharing their beliefs with others with a deeper understanding of what non-Christians believe. He stated, “It’s not just about learning, it’s about making a difference.”

The action side of spiritual formation evidenced at ACS is in the area of giving and serving the community. They have an established “Joy Club” in the school with the goal to serve others while serving Christ. The “Joy Club” offers a variety of avenues of service including age-appropriate activities and outreach opportunities.

Bethany Christian Academy

BCA was established in 1973 as a discipleship school under the leadership of a Baptist church in a large metropolitan area in the Southeast. BCA has 426 students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade and has 1052 graduate alumni. BCA holds accreditation with the ACSI and by SACS.

As I visited BCA, I was aware of the friendly, family atmosphere with students who were extremely courteous to visitors. A class change was in progress, and students laden with books and bags followed the sidewalks between buildings. Engaged in friendly chatter, the students appeared to be peaceful and well mannered. The campus consists of several buildings, including the church, which houses several classes as well as facilitates chapel services. BCA publicizes

the mission and focus of the school on their website, promotional literature, and in student and faculty handbooks. The school “seeks to develop students who imitate the heart and mind of Christ as they subject all areas of life to the authority of God’s Word and are fully prepared to confront their culture from a biblical worldview.”

An interview with the administrator confirmed the goals and attitude toward a strong biblical worldview. He explained his vision is for “a graduate of BCA to have a biblical worldview in such a way that whether they go to a Christian college or a public university...work force or military that they would have that foundation where they would be able to view any aspect of life through that biblical worldview sieve.”

As a discipleship school, BCA requires that at least one parent be active in a local church with similar faith and practice. The exception here is the occasional foreign exchange student that may attend. There are currently 30-40 second generation students, or children of BCA alumni who attend the school, and approximately 33%-40% of the student body attend the church associated with BCA.

BCA provides worldview development and spiritual formation beginning with the overall focus on a biblically driven curriculum in all content areas. The administrator explained that the view that “all Truth is God’s Truth permeates everything that they do in the classroom.” They teach Bible classes daily at all age levels, and weekly chapels emphasize corporate worship and teaching. A special time of devotions and prayer begins each day and is frequently experienced throughout the day. Additional times for spiritual growth come from student led Bible studies, prayer groups, and a special week is set aside each semester as Spiritual Emphasis Week. Christian groups or speakers visit the campus and hold special assemblies or services to inspire and challenge the student body during this time.

The formal Bible teaching at BCA takes place in the individual classrooms from preschool through grade twelve using teacher-generated curriculum. At the high school level, the emphasis is placed on knowing what you believe and why you believe it. In tenth grade the majority of the year is devoted to understanding biblical doctrines as a foundational step for the senior requirement of writing a personal philosophy of life. The English and Bible departments team up to facilitate this project that expands to over half of the senior year. The administrator told of an international exchange student beginning his senior year claiming to be an Atheist and not believing anything about the Bible, yet he experienced a total change through the writing of the philosophy paper. This young man was saved through the critical questioning and reasoning process of this assignment.

As a school, they put forth a focused effort within the last year to provide support for students through a mentoring program. The faculty and staff participated in a nine-month series of training sessions on mentoring and individual teachers have now accepted the role of mentor to one or two students. The administrator acknowledged, “They have invested more personal time in the lives of students and are experiencing the out-working of the mentoring study.”

Understanding that the teachers have a profound effect on the students, the school leadership seeks to assure that faculty and staff are suited to the ministry of BCA and able to enhance the mission. A comprehensive application process is in place. Each prospective employee is first asked to browse the website to find what the school is about in order to determine if it is a good fit for them. Those who move forward into the interview process are asked a standard set of questions to reveal worldview and perspective on Christian education. The administrator stated that he looks for teachable spirit and potential in those individuals to become a strong spiritual asset to the student body.

BCA seeks to involve their students to a variety of service, mission, and outreach opportunities each year. Weekly chapels have student-led worship, and often the older students minister to younger students by speaking in elementary chapels. Even the very youngest students learn to verbalize their faith and to lead in prayer through chapel experiences. Each fall the school holds a mission's conference with twenty or more missionaries from around the world that expose students to individuals who have made life-long commitments to serve God. At the end of the mission's conference, the students in grade 7-12 go out into the community and serve in rescue missions, nursing homes, senior citizen homes, and other areas of need. In the spring, the middle school and high school students again serve in a single focused ministry to the community (cleaning city parks, roads, etc.). The students often initiate projects and actively serve in their churches, throughout the community as well as on foreign mission trips.

Calvary Christian School

The largest of the four southeastern schools involved in this research is CCS located in a large metropolitan area in the Southeast. CCS is an evangelistic school founded in 1972 and currently serves 1,300 students from early childhood through twelfth grade. CCS is associated with a local church but is an independent operation. The school holds accreditation with SACS and the ACSI. CCS holds memberships in the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals, North Carolina Association of Independent Schools, and North Carolina Independent Schools Athletic Association. All teachers are licensed by the state of North Carolina and ACSI.

The slogan adopted as a vision statement, "To Know and Live the Truth," is publicized on the school website under a tab for mission and vision, found in print on promotional pieces and handbooks and on display in the school facilities. As stated on the website and confirmed

by the chaplain, CCS encourages students to “take ownership of their faith and to be able to successfully defend the tenants of the gospel.”

During my visit to the 26-acre campus of CCS, I was introduced to several of the administrative staff, including the head of school and elementary principal and experienced a warm and friendly welcome. The vision statement, “To Know and Live the Truth,” was displayed on the wall in the school lobby near the administrative offices, and the Scripture from Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God” was posted in the restroom area. I was invited into the office of the school chaplain who discussed the many ways that CCS invests in the fulfillment of its mission. Several high school students were working around the office complex and four or five book bags were stashed in various places near the chaplain’s desk. As the bell rang for a class change, students stopped by to gather their things and extend warm greetings to their chaplain. As they were dashing in and out, he spoke to each one and extended encouragement for the upcoming game or reminded them of an appointment over lunch the next day. He thanked some for taking time to help in chapel or reminded them to come see him in the morning. I could sense the mentoring atmosphere established in and around that office. As an outside observer, I noted that personal mentoring is one aspect of the fulfillment the school’s mission.

CCS provides their mission statement, vision, and philosophy on their website, and it is given below with the name changed.

Mission. To partner with families by providing a biblically-based, college-preparatory education so that students will be equipped to serve Christ and influence the world.

Vision. To Know and Live the Truth

Philosophy. For education to be meaningful, it must be based upon truth. CCS believes that all truth is God's Truth, and His Truth is revealed through the Bible, which is infallible and is the standard for living a successful life. Only by recognizing God as the Creator, Designer, and Organizer of the universe can a proper understanding and mastery of facts and knowledge be possible.

CCS believes that Christian education is a process in which teaching and learning are accomplished through developmentally appropriate activities by Christian teachers who encourage a high standard of academic excellence. We believe God's Word is the highest authority and strive to bring all knowledge into a living relationship with His Truth.

CCS functions in a complementary role with the Christian home to provide, within a traditional, educational setting, opportunities that integrate and nurture each student's spiritual, academic, social, physical, and emotional development.

CCS desires to produce individuals who will be productive and contributing members both in society and within the body of Christ, emanating a Christian worldview.

The school also posts spiritual development goals and provides resource links for parents in a link titled, "To Know and Live the Truth Resources."

The school chaplain was very adept at quoting the goals and vision of CCS and provided an overview during our interview. He was extremely pleased that CCS saw the need to include the chaplain on the administrative team. He discussed the fact that the school has an incredible academic program with an academic dean, a highly competitive athletic department with an athletic director and an accomplished fine arts department with a fine arts director. CCS had the foresight to provide the leadership and resources focused on the spiritual training of young people as well as the other areas of student growth and development. He said,

Why wouldn't you have a spiritual life director if you really do put an emphasis on the spiritual life of a school? . . . they have invested heavily into the chaplaincy or spiritual life director . . . That, to me, is what makes us unique is because we are in way down into our core values our mission statement "To Know and Live the Truth. I appreciate a school that's well balanced . . . it's well rounded and I think that it has its priorities straight. We are very evangelistic . . . very evangelical. That goes down to our core values. I have never seen an organization, even as a youth pastor, that lives out their mission more than this school. I mean, you can see it, feel it, and touch it when it does that.

CCS is "unashamedly evangelistic" according to the chaplain. "We give the Gospel," he explained further. The school has certain expectations of each of the graduates who walk across their stage and that includes a set of things they wish for them to have experienced throughout their years with CCS. They provide growth and development experiences planned for each level from first grade through graduation. Although the school has open enrollment, students are not permitted to opt out of chapel or Bible requirements. The formal Bible classes use a traditional curriculum sequence, and outreach projects are selected to align with age appropriate activities. Students are involved in local service projects with organizations such as the homeless shelter, Special Populations, the Pregnancy Care Center, Special Olympics, and the local Community Against Violence, among others. Foreign mission projects and personal commitments to serve are also promoted through a yearly missions conference. CCS has student groups who have been part of mission teams all across the world in places such as Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Russia, and Europe.

To assure that the faculty and staff are trained and exude a biblical worldview, there are carefully monitored hiring practices in place and multiple training opportunities provided for enhancement. ACSI certification standards include Christian worldview development and Christian school philosophy studies that are required for all teachers at CCS.

The chaplain was strong in his message that CCS is out in the community and into the world. He said that the head administrator is “okay with benevolence, that’s bringing a canned good and giving it to the homeless, but he would rather it would be service oriented, getting out into it, getting your feet wet, getting your hands dirty, that sort of thing.” The chaplain went on to say that the head administrator is a “stickler on gleaning the things that are out there to be involved in as a school...and sharing Christ.” Each project presented is evaluated according to the level of opportunity to share Christ. He said, “That’s our purpose, that’s our reason. That’s why we go and if we can’t tell them about Jesus and give them a coat, we may not give them a coat.” He stressed the age appropriate aspects of each outreach project and the long-term positive impact that this attitude of service has had on the student body.

Damascus Christian Academy

The fourth school site included in this research is DCA, located on the outskirts of a mid-sized city in the southeastern part of the United States. Established in 1977 with a discipleship mission, DCA currently enrolls 398 students in preschool through twelfth grade.

DCA holds membership and accreditation with ACSI, Virginia Council for Private Education, AdvancED, and SACS. DCA is owned and operated by a local Baptist church but remains interdenominational in the student body as well as faculty and staff.

The vision, mission, and core values of the school are stated on the school website, brochures, other promotional materials, student and faculty handbooks, and the weekly parent

newsletter. Although very quickly noticed on publications, the website does not give immediate access to this information. Information regarding the vision, mission, and core values is found listed under a tab for Prospective Families with another tab for Who We Are. They are included below as seen on the website.

Vision. Young people with the spiritual and academic foundation to obey God’s will for their lives and to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

Mission. To serve families with a Christ-centered educational environment that encourages each student to grow spiritually, academically, physically, and socially.

Core Values.

Encouragement of Christian Families

Pursuit of Academic Excellence

Enablement of Qualified Teachers

Development of Spiritual Vitality

Management of Available Resources

Commitment to a Nurturing Environment

As I visited DCA after school one day in the spring, I observed the Core Values printed and framed on a wall in the office area. There were encouraging signs and banners for sports teams in the hallways and bulletin boards that were distinctly Christian. I also noticed the words “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding . . .” from Proverbs 3:5-6 painted above the doorway at one of the entrances. The building was under one roof and connected to the church facilities with separate hallways for elementary and high school classrooms. Students in baseball uniforms were heading out to the field for a game, and the hallways were clearing. The atmosphere seemed peaceful and friendly.

In my conversation with the school administrator of DCA, he confirmed his vision for the graduates. He said, “We want our graduates all to have a thorough spiritual and academic foundation in preparation to be able to respond to God’s calling in life, whatever that calling may be and to be able to walk worthy of that calling throughout life and down the road.” He explained that partnering with parents is an important aspect of the school’s discipleship mission. The parents are asked to sign a statement of faith, and the student at the middle school and high school level is asked to give a profession of faith and affirm their desire to attend DCA. One of the requirements for middle and high school students is a pastor’s reference, and it is the expectation that students are involved in a local church. The administrator admitted that all students are not always in compliance. The goal, however, is for the parents and the church to work in harmony with the school to help the student respond to God’s call. There is also a strong element of evangelism in that the school programs offer a variety of opportunities for salvation commitments, and several students are saved each year in elementary and high school.

Spiritual formation and worldview development takes place at DCA in formal Bible training at every grade level with a prescribed curriculum and scope and sequence. The administrator stated, “We want our teachers to be a living curriculum with biblical integration and living so that they can get the biblical worldview and biblical teaching throughout the year and throughout the curriculum on an on-going basis.” To assure that the teachers have a solid foundation in biblical teaching and a Christian worldview, the administrator cited the interview, employment, and teacher training processes. All prospective teachers complete the application that asks for their personal testimony of salvation and current walk with God. The administrator described it in these words, “In the interview process we flesh that out to find out if they have the spiritual qualifications that the job description requires . . . we want them to see the value and

importance of biblical integration and our role model in all those areas.” The final step in the interview is a meeting with the senior pastor and president of the school to determine a good fit for the philosophy and mission of the school. Faculty members are required to hold or seek certification with the ACSI that involves preparatory study in Christian School Philosophy and a biblical worldview. Additional staff training from year to year involves character studies, Bible study, and worldview development. Recently, the DCA staff completed studies on mentoring and critically assessing worldview.

In working toward fulfilling the vision to prepare young people to go where God calls them, DCA helps to provide opportunities for community outreach. The administrator emphasized the fact that he desires to see students not only participate in the opportunities provided through the on-going school outreach projects but to be personally involved with their local churches and families in strong meaningful ways.

Spiritual Transformation Inventory

To add quantitative data to enhance the understanding of the spiritual formation process I chose to implement the Spiritual Transformation Inventory created by Dr. Todd Hall. The online inventory at <http://drtoddhall.com> (Hall, 2012) was individually administered to the young adult graduates using a personally assigned log-in code to indicate the school site from which they graduated. Likert scale scores were used to collect data on 31 indicators of spiritual growth and constructs (Hall, 2006). The 31 indicator scales are based on the concept of relational spirituality (Hall, 2012) and categorized into five domains of spiritual connection; connecting to God, connecting through spiritual practices, connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, and connecting to God’s Kingdom. The details of the inventory and construct validity are discussed in Chapter 3. A group report classified by school sites was generated by

Dr. Todd Hall of STI, which compared the scores to national norms. Such a comparative analysis is useful on a factual level to gather evidences to compare against other data as a check for accuracy and to determine the generality of those facts (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). I utilized the STI assessment tool to gain insight into the spiritual well-being of the young adult co-researchers, make comparisons, and add to the rich description of the narrative. Names and identifiers were removed from the data to assure confidentiality of the co-researchers. Table 4 indicates the scores for 31 indicators of spiritual well-being. The small number of participants may not give an accurate picture, however, and the spiritual outcomes of the over-all school population may vary greatly. However, this chart does depict the spiritual state of the 16 participants and indicate the school showing the most positive scores.

Table 4

Spiritual Transformation Inventory Mean Scores

Main STI Scales: Mean Scores	Alpha	Bethany	Calvary	Damascus	Range
Awareness of God	3.70	5.33	5.50 *	4.60	1-6
Intimacy with God	3.73	5.53	5.90 *	4.66	1-6
Experience God/Spiritual Practices	3.06	3.53	3.75 *	2.90	1-4
Experiencing God in Prayer	3.06	3.60	4.00 *	3.25	1-4
Gratitude	4.65	5.73	6.00 *	5.31	1-6
Secure Connection to God	4.60	5.73	6.00 *	4.94	1-6
Anxious Connection to God	2.35	1.13 *	1.50	2.37	1-6 neg
Distant Connection to God	2.15	1.06	1.00 *	1.94	1-6 neg
Forgiveness	5.05	4.86	5.60 *	4.62	1-6
Agape Love	4.70	5.20	5.90 *	4.88	1-6
Spiritual Self-Awareness	3.35	5.00	5.80 *	4.77	1-6
Secure Connection to Others	3.70	5.53	5.70 *	4.94	1-6
Anxious Connection to Others	3.10	1.66 *	1.80	3.02	1-6 neg
Distant Connection to Others	4.00	1.33 *	2.40	2.68	1-6 neg
Spiritual Friendship	4.10	5.33	6.00 *	5.10	1-6
Involvement	4.23	5.33	5.87 *	4.93	1-6
Secure Community Connection	4.13	5.33	5.90 *	4.60	1-6
Anxious Community Connection	3.00	1.40	1.20 *	2.43	1-6 neg
Distant Community Connection	3.13	1.60	1.40 *	2.93	1-6 neg

Table 4 *continued*

Main STI Scales: Mean Scores	Alpha	Bethany	Calvary	Damascus	Range
Christ-Centeredness	4.60	5.80	6.00 *	4.97	1-6
Spiritual Practices Frequency	4.10	4.86	6.40 *	4.74	1-7
Prayer Frequency	5.05	6.46	7.00 *	5.97	1-7
Transformation Suffering	4.75	5.73	5.87 *	5.13	1-6
Positive Spiritual Coping	4.55	5.60	5.90 *	5.06	1-6
Negative Spiritual Coping	1.55	1.20 *	1.40	1.93	1-6 neg
Spiritual Openness	4.20	4.73	5.90 *	4.57	1-6
Spiritual Perspective	4.40	5.40	5.80 *	5.10	1-6
Spiritual Meaning	4.95	5.93 *	5.30	5.51	1-6
Service to the Local Church	4.20	5.20	5.80 *	5.08	1-6
Service outside the Local Church	4.55	5.33	5.80 *	4.68	1-6
Evangelism & World Missions	3.40	4.66	5.60 *	4.02	1-6
Connection to God	4.13	5.15	5.58 *	4.45	1-6
Connection to Self & Others	3.95	5.26	5.46 *	4.58	1-6
Connecting to Community	4.10	5.40	5.83 *	4.65	1-6
Connecting w/ Spiritual Practices	4.75	5.72	5.96 *	5.12	1-6
Connecting to God's Kingdom	4.30	5.30	5.47 *	4.86	1-6

*Highest score for that spiritual indicator neg = lower score is preferred

Results of the Spiritual Transformation Inventory indicate the strength of the co-researchers in their personal commitment and identification with the five areas of spiritual connectivity. The average of all school scores were as follows: Connecting to God: 4.83, Connecting to Self & Others: 4.81, Connecting to Community: 5.00, Connecting through

Spiritual Practices: 5.4, and Connecting to God's Kingdom: 5:00 (range 1-6). Calvary Christian School, an evangelistic school, had the overall highest scores. A notable strength emerged in the quantitative data conferring qualitative narrative in the area of spiritual coping skills and transformational suffering. The average score was 5.2 (range 1-6) in both positive spiritual coping and transformational suffering. Interview data revealed a high frequency of crisis, conflict, and challenge in the personal lives of the young adults resulting in periods of exploration. Co-researchers attest to the fact that these challenges and exploration served to deepen their personal commitment to faith.

Participants

Participants or co-researchers for this study included sixteen young adults age 21-30 who attended a private Christian school for 12 years of school from elementary through high school and then went to a secular college or university and who show evidence of spiritual stamina.

High school administrators from the four school sites provided a list of twenty-four recommendations from among their graduates based on the requested criteria. Young adults were purposefully recruited for participation based on these recommendations (Appendix E) through email and telephone contact. Over the course of five months, I had seventeen young adults respond positively to their involvement in the study. This number included 10 females and 7 males, all Caucasian. One young adult male was unable to complete the study, reducing the number to 16. Table 5 shows the representation from the four schools.

Table 5

Co-Researcher Representation

School Name	Male Participants	Female Participants	Totals
Alpha Christian School	1	3	4
Bethany Christian Academy	1	2	3
Calvary Christian School	1	2	3
Damascus Christian Academy	3	3	6
Totals	6	10	16

Each of the co-researchers signed the consent form (Appendix H), participated in a personal, recorded interview, and completed the on-line assessment STI. I transcribed each interview and sent an email copy to the co-researcher for a member check. The co-researcher then sent back to me an initialed copy to confirm agreement with the transcription. An introduction to the co-researchers follows in the order of their high school affiliation.

Pseudonyms are used to protect individual privacy.

Rodney: Alpha Christian School

Rodney is a 26-year-old male graduate of ACS. He attended ACS from kindergarten through twelfth grade and then went to a state university where he earned a degree in electrical engineering. Rodney is married, an active member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and is currently working in the field of engineering.

I met Rodney through a Skype interview, and he appeared to be somewhat shy or uncomfortable with the interview process until he began talking about his faith in Jesus Christ. He testifies to having been saved or making a commitment to Christ as a child and always being involved in the church. Christian influences from those in school and church helped him to see

what being a Christian is all about. He feels that the anti-Christian atmosphere in the engineering department at the state university challenged him to seek for answers and grow stronger. He said, “Christianity is looked down on in the field (of engineering) so I tend to want to, not necessarily hide it, but I’m not as open about my Christianity as I would like to be, as I know I should be. So, that’s one thing that’s been a challenge to my spiritual growth.” Rodney has faced, and continues to experience, the spiritual dissonance caused by a clash of belief systems as described by Trelstad (2008). The challenge to dig deeper to seek for answers provided the opportunity for Rodney to make a conscious evaluation of his existing commitment and become even more committed to his Christian faith. This process is an important element in identity achievement in which exploration of faith in depth brings a greater commitment (Marcia, 1966).

Renee: Alpha Christian School

A 22 year old registered nurse and a graduate of a state university, Renee was recently married to her best friend, Joe. I was able to email Renee several times and arrange an interview via Skype. She was openly enthusiastic in her faith and easily expressed her feelings during the interview. Her salvation experience came at the age of five when her older sister convinced her that she was on her way to hell. Renee laughed at this early form of faith and admitted, “My faith started to become my own in middle school.” She attended ACS from kindergarten through grade twelve, but it was in the eighth grade that she, encouraged by her sister, started reading through the Bible for herself for the first time. She says, “That was pretty pivotal as far as just defining what my time with the Lord would look like.” Christian parents and Bible classes at school all helped to teach her about the Lord, but she did not remember ever really talking about what it actually means to follow Christ. She believes the teaching was “rule-based and not

necessarily a heart thing.” It could be argued that early in life Renee had spiritually settled for a “foreclosure” status of identity development in that she accepted the faith of her parents and school without question or making a personal commitment to follow Christ (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Many young adults remain in foreclosure. Renee’s Bible reading and exploration of the Word, however, prepared her for deeper understanding.

Renee feels that her sincere commitment to Christ came late in her senior year of high school when she considered the weighty reality of going to a secular university. She described the decision process in this way:

I knew that my life could go in two different trajectories...I live for the Lord or...I don’t live for the Lord. And, I just had this mental picture of myself like one day being married and having kids and they wouldn’t know the Lord because of my decision in college not to know the Lord. And so I kinda made this very conscious decision that I was gonna follow after Christ.

Renee went to a state university and immediately connected with a Christian fellowship group. She said being around those who are passionate for the Lord was her top priority in plugging in to college life. Attending a secular university did not detour Renee from the spiritual goals she had set. Gibson (1979) coined the term “affordances” which claims that what an individual extracts from their environment depends highly on their personal goals. Renee’s goal to follow after Christ drove her to seek out and place high priority on Christian fellowship.

Brooke: Alpha Christian School

Brooke is a 22-year-old, female who attends graduate school at a state university and spends her summers working at a Christian camp for children. She grew up in a Christian home, attended a Presbyterian church, and went to ACS from kindergarten through twelfth grade. A

traumatic surgery in fourth grade increased her understanding of God's love and care for her, which began a more personal exploration of faith. As Brooke entered her teens, she went through a rebellious period that brought her to a point of spiritual crisis. The Christian high school was going through a period of change at that point that Brooke described as "a redemption thing where they brought in kids that got kicked out of public schools...to witness to them and give them opportunity." She explained that they brought in a large number of these students all at once and it changed the dynamics of her class and had a very negative impact. She felt that the teachers became more concerned with behavior modification than the heart change of the students. "It really did not go well for my class and just really brought me down," Brooke lamented. Her feelings may in part be explained with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which states that behaviors are learned through observation and that a behavior is reinforced through observation of what happens to others who behave in a particular way. This is termed vicarious reinforcement. Behaviors are modeled and reinforced by influential people such as parents, peers, and teachers (Bandura, 1977). Brooke experienced the good kids vs. bad kids phenomena in which the "bad kids" get the attention and things get "flipped around" as she described it.

It was late in her teens that Brooke understood her need for a personal relationship with Christ. She faced her rebellion and sin and explained it in these words, "I got a really good picture of myself... My sinful self without Jesus and that was really shocking and kind of brought me to a low point." Following her commitment to Christ, Brooke was concerned about the difficulty of attending a secular university and continuing to live for the Lord. She got involved with a Christian fellowship connected to the university early on in her college career and found it to be a great help to her. She expressed gratitude for her Christian parents and the Bible teaching she had received however, she acknowledged, "There's nothing they could have

done that would have made it personal to me. That was definitely a work of God and the Holy Spirit...it had to become my own at some point.”

Stacie: Alpha Christian School

I found Stacie in a Fellows program where she was working in digital marketing and taking seminary classes for the summer. Stacie is a 23-year-old graduate of ACS and attends a Presbyterian church. She earned a degree in American Studies from a state university. Stacie grew up with Christian parents, and the family attended a Southern Baptist Church. At the age of five, Stacie prayed to receive Jesus into her life. She recounts the experience in this way, “I think it had more to do with going to hell than anything, but I remember making a choice and praying one night. After that, I just gradually learned what it really meant to be a follower of Jesus.”

Stacie attended ACS from kindergarten through twelfth grade and feels that being surrounded by Christian people at school, home, and church helped her learn from their example in following Christ. Stacie’s identity came from following her parents and those around her but she admitted the struggle she faced in high school and in college was that of a “standards based mentality” of life. She consistently maintained high grades and stayed active in sports and school activities but feels that she may have performed well due to the fear of others not liking her. In college, she faced academic pressure and relationship tension. She said, “I ...really had a hard time...always feeling like I wasn’t doing a good enough job in school.” According to Marcia (1966), individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their actions have an effect on the outcomes. An external locus of control is evident in individuals that believe they have no control over situations or outcomes but are instead under the will or fate or some powerful other. In the spiritual realm, there must be balance. While we acknowledge the need

for holy and righteous living, the sense of self-worth, and accomplishment, we must understand and bow to the sovereignty of God. An over abundance of reliance on self can cause insecurities and fear. In Stacie's senior year of college, through the council of her campus minister, she came to realize that God's love for her was enough to cover all of her mistakes and this led to a relinquishment of her own personal image. She said, "God is sovereign...I remember being so overwhelmed by God's goodness in that moment, I felt like I really understood what my response to that should be...I needed to just rest in God's grace."

Stacie expressed satisfaction with the Fellows program in the transition year after college. She is taking theology classes while working in her trade and actively participating in volunteer work around the city. Stacie describes this time as "formative" and explains that the people in the program have engaged in many enlightening discussions about "work and the importance of vocations and the way that we do work." Research shows that outreach ministries and putting feet to our faith is a spiritually strengthening exercise as Stacie has experienced. Taking Christ into the culture of one's vocation has added a new dimension to her faith as a young adult.

Becca: Bethany Christian Academy

Becca invited me into her home in a neighboring city and as we sat and talked in her living room, I could sense her strength of character and faith throughout the conversation. Becca is a 27 year old, female graduate of BCA. She attended BCA from kindergarten through twelfth grade and considered it to be "a great experience...a solid background...that probably led me to not needing to question things as much." She was raised in a Christian family who faithfully attended the Baptist church affiliated with the school. After high school, Becca completed a degree at a secular liberal arts college and currently works as a recruiting coordinator with a healthcare documentation center. She is married and has two small children who attend a

neighborhood public school. Her youngest daughter has special physical needs and is enrolled in a public school preschool program offering the necessary services. Becca expressed her initial desire to send her daughters to BCA but realizes that the school does not offer the programs needed for special needs children.

Becca was saved in the fourth grade at the age of ten, although admits that her faith became “real” when she got older. A series of crisis points in her life have challenged her faith and deepened her commitment. Her parents were divorced during her senior year of high school, and of that time she says, “I had to decide at that point what I believed instead of what your parents have taught or the school. It was a low point,” she explained, “That’s when I really decided that I believed what I believed, God is faithful, and people make mistakes.” As described in the Theory of Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966), this crisis point in her life gave her the impetus for even deeper exploration of her faith and a conscious evaluation of her existing commitment. She continues to face the challenges with a strong faith in God.

Hayden: Bethany Christian Academy

At the age of 23, Hayden, a male graduate from BCA, recently married a young woman who also graduated from BCA. When I spoke with Hayden in a small office at the high school, his focus was on foreign missions. He seemed to beam with excitement when describing trips to Mexico and to Nicaragua that were a big part of his life toward the end of college. “A lot of fun and growth!” he explained. Taking an active part in fulfilling the Great Commission to “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark16:15), has proven to be a growth point for many believers and deepens spiritual commitments.

Hayden prayed to receive Christ at the age of four at church and prayed for assurance in early elementary school. At the age of ten, he was baptized and at a mission’s conference a few

years later, Hayden dedicated his life to Christ. He describes his commitment with these words, “I dedicated my life to Christ. Whatever He wanted me to do, I would do.” He talked about one thing that solidified his faith was writing a philosophy paper as a senior in high school. “Digging out those scriptures” about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the church was “helpful in going away to college.” He explained that he understood his personal belief system more completely after this deep investigation during his senior year. Exploration in depth, as explained in the Identity Achievement Theory (Marcia, 1966) served to solidify Hayden’s faith and commitment.

Hayden chose to attend a local secular college to play baseball and pursue a degree in development and advancement. He lived at home during his four years of college and found close Christian friends that played ball on his team. Hayden described this experience in these words, “I was very blessed to find those few friends to kind of hold on to and go forward with.” He remains active in his local church and serves in outreach ministries such as a Christian camp for children and teens and various mission related trips. The social causal mechanism of connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009) may be a strong factor in Hayden’s current spiritual stamina. He made early commitments to God and strong connections with the community of believers.

Cassie: Bethany Christian Academy

Cassie is a sixth grade teacher in a public school close to where she grew up. She is a 27-year-old graduate of BCA and cherishes her friendship with Becca, another of the co-researchers, from her class. Cassie attended BCA from preschool through the twelfth grade and was very active in a small Grace Brethren Church with her parents and grandparents. She accepted Christ as her Savior at the age of four at a Vacation Bible School and remembers making the decision at that point to follow Jesus. Cassie was baptized while in the second grade and became involved in community service projects in her early teens. She said, “We really started to get our hands

into service projects and community and I decided at that point that somehow in some way that with my life I wanted to be in service to the Lord.” Cassie experienced identity achievement early in life and made strong commitments to follow Jesus and serve Him. These points of commitment: salvation, baptism, and dedication to service all serve as “handles for faith” for Cassie. In the Bible in Joshua Chapter 4, the children of Israel were instructed to build an altar in remembrance of God’s deliverance. Maxwell (2007) described this altar as a “handle for faith” (p. 248). Young people need to establish handles for their faith or rocks of remembrance to gain stability and integrity. The stones are physical markers of God’s help and our commitments. Faith building experiences are marked as points to remember, celebrate, and provide spiritual stamina when facing adversity.

Cassie attended a secular college in her hometown and lived with her parents and grandparents. Her passion for inner city children grew throughout college and she felt a call from God to teach in a public school. Her science and math background has been the focus of challenging conversations with non-believers in college and in her current workplace. She is comfortable in such debates and attributes that comfort to the scriptural knowledge and introduction to other world religions she experienced in her Christian school education. The challenge to think critically and learn to debate issues has been a real asset in demonstrating spiritual stamina before friends and co-workers.

Cassie’s own physical challenges in her 20’s with cancer, chemo and the birth of a baby boy facing several months of hospitalization have been a reminder of God’s faithfulness and the power of a praying family. As with any crisis event, there comes a time of conscious evaluation of one’s existing commitment (Marcia, 1966). Cassie faced the challenge and expressed gratitude for a “good support system.” She said, “I’ve always been very open, and my family

has been very open and nurturing. I don't know what I would have done without them because they do draw me back to Christ and that support."

Heath: Calvary Christian School

Heath attended CCS from preschool through twelfth grade, but his true commitment to Christ did not come until his first year in college. He explained his spiritual journey to me in passionate tones over a phone conversation, and I could sense that he wanted his story to be told. He said that he heard a lot of the Gospel and teaching and that his "heart at an early age was bent towards God and desired the things of the Lord." Beginning in about middle school, however, he felt he was doing religious things to try to get closer to God but was not satisfied with the results. This sent him into a series of rebellious years of which he says, "My heart started drifting away around seventh grade and then by ninth, tenth, eleventh grade I was just fully turned from God and just pursued darkness." Heath's mother was a Christian and took him to church consistently but his father was not a believer and did not participate in spiritual activities with the family. He said, "I was just hearing a lot of mixed messages at home...so, I'm sure that was a lot of the reason that I decided to get into the rebellion stuff." During his senior year in college, he felt the Lord calling him back and he points to that as the time he truly became a Christian. Heath attributes his return to Christ to the foundational teachings that he received in his early years. The strongest spiritual influence, however, was the faithfulness of a Christian classmate from high school who, while at the same college, drew him into Inter-Varsity and Campus Crusade. Connecting to someone from CCS and other believers helped him renew his faith in Jesus. Heath said, "I wanted to get away from going to a Christian school...a lot of rules were really emphasized... ironically, I went to this public, secular school and that's where I met all these Christians and became one!"

Heath attended a state university where he studied construction management and currently works as a commercial flooring contractor. He is married with two children, serves the Lord as the lead teacher for a New Believers class, and leads a small group in his local church.

I discovered late in our conversation that Heath is 34 years old and outside the parameters of this study. I felt, however, that his input was valuable and his unique experience would add depth to the data, therefore decided to include him. He concluded our interview with contemplation. Looking back on his years at CCS he admits, “Even though I kind of ignored my teachers at the time, on the surface, they were still penetrating my heart.”

Abby: Calvary Christian School

Abby is a 29-year-old graduate of CCS. She came highly recommended by her administrator and her story adds a unique perspective. She and I were acquainted through email correspondence initially and able to talk face-to-face via Google-chat approximately two months later. Abby is a nurse practitioner who is plagued with physical challenges that have altered her lifestyle and yet have brought much spiritual depth. In just a few short conversations, I could sense her strong faith even in her physical weakness.

Raised in a Christian home with both a mother and father who attended church regularly, Abby testifies to accepting Christ as her Savior at the age of seven. She began attending CCS in the eighth grade and completed high school. Although Abby did not attend CCS all twelve years, she adds value to the study, particularly in the challenges of faith she encountered.

Being a part of a Christian school, experiencing chapels and having prayer every day were strong points for her. She said, “It was just a really good place for me to grow even from a young age.” Abby was an athlete at CCS playing both basketball and softball until her senior year when she was diagnosed with a blood disorder. Her physical health from the age of

seventeen became the trial that tested her faith many times over. She chose to attend a secular university's nursing program in her community in order to live at home and remain under consistent doctor's care. She had her spleen removed at the age of twenty and recounts the experience, "It was so scary at that time...I was always in church and involved in church and my friends that I had were Christians and so we were all uplifting to each other."

Abby is married to a Christian man who is also a Christian school graduate. The birth of her daughter brought on severe lupus and eventually stage four-kidney failure. She remains strong and has confidence that God is with her. Abby explains it in these words, "All of that was definitely a journey and everyone in my family had to put their faith in God...it was definitely a reality check because I could have died." She is improving now, able to take care of her daughter with help from her parents, and working part-time as a nurse practitioner.

Looking back at her experience at CCS, Abby considered it to be a time of building a great support system. In softball and basketball, Abby saw that praying together and having devotions was a "very big aspect of the sport" and helped to influence her faith and strengthen her relationship with Christ. She said, "There were just a good bunch of really good people...you could really talk with them if you needed to." Abby also mentioned the influence of a required course on world religions in high school that helped her to understand why she was a Christian and not another type of religion. It dealt with how to handle spiritual situations with those who are not Christians and made her feel more prepared. She said, "When I went off to college...I already had that foundation and it didn't make me want to do something else...I just have a very strong faith in God." Early identification with Christ and other believers provided the foundation for an even deeper exploration of faith during her crisis points. Abby was able to consciously evaluate her commitment to Christ and come out strong.

Sara: Calvary Christian School

Sara is 23 years old and a graduate of CCS. She earned a degree in social work from a state university. She is single and currently employed as a full-time nanny. In a Skype interview with Sara, she appeared to be strong and very articulate about her feelings and beliefs.

She was raised in a Christian home and a Christian school family. She attended CCS from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Her mother is a teacher at CCS, her father is on the school board, and her older sister is a CCS alumnus. With this background, she felt that she experienced the phenomena of “riding on her parents’ coattails” spiritually. Sara professed to faith in Christ and was baptized at the age of nine, but it was in middle school that she made the decision that she wanted her faith to “be her own”. She rededicated her life to Christ and desired to live as a Christian. Sara described high school as a time of growth and showed great appreciation for the Bible knowledge and training she received at CCS. She did not, however, feel prepared for entering the world after graduation. The Christian school atmosphere was like “living in a bubble” and she explained “I didn’t know what the world was gonna throw at me or how vulnerable I was.”

College life proved to be a struggle for Sara spiritually and she describes this time in her life as a period of “some pretty bad choices.” She lived at home and tried to stay connected to her church but she lacked the Christian fellowship and community among her college peers. “It was a compartmentalized thing,” she said. “I never doubted it or turned away...I was just kind of living selfishly and didn’t really care.” Marrah (2009) provided one possible explanation for this falling away or drifting phenomenon. He stated, “If their foundation is a Christian school community and not the Lord then students’ spiritual lives will undergo a profound shaking when the foundation is removed” (p. 149).

Sara praised Christian teachers and family for the foundation and love they showed her, but she explained that they “didn’t make me fall in love with Jesus. You have to do that by yourself.” She gives glory to God for His grace that brought her back to a place of complete surrender and service.

Serving God in her local church is important to Sara and she currently serves on the worship team and leads a small group with high school students. She finds that being in a place of service to others in ministry keeps her spiritually growing and Sara continues to express the message of God’s grace.

Desiree: Damascus Christian Academy

I was invited to visit in Desiree’s home where we sat in her living room as she recounted her spiritual and educational journey. Desiree is 27 years old, married without children. She graduated from DCA where she and her younger sister attended from kindergarten through grade twelve. After graduation, she attended the community college for one year and then transferred to a medical school to study occupational therapy. Desiree is currently employed with the county public schools as a therapist.

Desiree was first saved at the age of four while watching a Christian television show for children and vividly remembers the experience. In the eighth grade, however, she made a deeper commitment to the Lord after a teacher shared her impactful testimony with the class. Desiree’s family was not attending church at the time due to her mother’s illness; therefore, she considered the school chapels and Bible classes to be her source of spiritual food and influence during high school. Desiree sees much of her spiritual growth coming from relationships at DCA. Hall (2010) coined the term “relational spirituality,” which encapsulates the idea that our spiritual growth depends on our relationship with God and with those whom God chooses to work

through in our lives. The teachers and staff at DCA have provided avenues for faith building in Desiree's life.

The struggle came when she went away from home to attend college. Desiree explained that she was on her own for the first time and her spiritual life "plummeted at that point for a while." She described the disconnect she experienced between what she believed and knowing why she believed. She said, "I guess there's just no roots there as to why you actually have those beliefs," and therefore they tend to get pushed aside under peer pressure. Her early twenties was a time of fluctuation in spiritual devotion, and Desiree described her realization in these words, "I can't stand on my parents anymore. I have to have my own two legs to stand on...and know why I believe...in order to really make it." The crisis of faith came when she realized that she was heading in the wrong direction and wanted desperately to find her way again. Here again, a crisis period led her to a place where she could evaluate her commitment to Christ and explore the reasons behind her faith.

In the last year and a half, Desiree feels that she has found those legs of faith and is digging into the Word of God more. She expressed her gratitude for her Christian education in this way, "I've been very fortunate to have that foundation ...when things unravel I know where to go and where to find that help."

Whitney: Damascus Christian Academy

Whitney and I sat across from each other in a conference room at her former high school where she proudly shared pictures with me of her four-year-old son. Whitney is a 23-year-old graduate of DCA and a single mother with an exuberant countenance. She attended DCA from kindergarten through grade twelve and has a strong faith in Jesus Christ. Whitney was saved in kindergarten following an invitation given in chapel and is convinced that even at that young age

she knew what she believed. She and her family are involved in a large non-denominational church where she has a growing relationship with the church community. Whitney spoke fondly of her pastor and mentioned his support for her several times in the interview.

Whitney lived at home while she attended the local community college and received a degree in legal specialization in hopes of becoming a paralegal. She described college as a “culture shock” after being raised in the Christian school community. During that time, she dated a young man for about six months. Of that experience she said:

I look back now and think, how was I so stupid? He was the worse choice ever ...there were gut feelings...I tried to say they were not that bad...like I felt a wrench in my stomach. I had just turned 18 and you think you know everything and you know what’s best. But it’s like I knew nothing! It turned out my parents knew a whole lot more than I thought they did.

An unplanned pregnancy was the result of this relationship and Whitney faced a difficult time without the baby’s father. The premature birth of a baby boy with mild cerebral palsy and other health issues grew into many months of hospitalization and therapy.

Whitney looks back on the experience with a smile as she accounts the miracles that God allowed for her and her son. The constant support of her family and church community remains as the biggest factor in her current spiritual strength. Her faith in God is strong and she said, “That’s what I love...if you take a detour and go with what I call the stupid side of your brain...He’ll always bring you back around.” Connectivity, one of the social causal mechanisms, has given Whitney the strong family and church support necessary during these difficult circumstances to show spiritual and emotional stamina.

Beth: Damascus Christian Academy

Beth sat across the desk from me in her classroom where she now teaches at DCA and shared her unique journey. This soft-spoken 26-year-old English teacher told of her experiences in three very different Christian schools where she attended from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Beth started kindergarten in a small Baptist school, transferred in ninth grade to an even smaller school and then in tenth grade to DCA which she described as “kind of daunting” due to its size. Her experience with three very different Christian schools added an element of comparison, unique to this interview.

Growing up in a Christian home and very involved in the church, Beth has a memory of a salvation experience at the age of four. She pondered, “You wonder how much is your memory, or how much is your parent’s memory that they’ve told you so you’ve just adopted that memory.” It was during her ninth grade year in high school that she had a very growing year spiritually. Beth attributes that growth largely to the church music minister and his wife who fostered a relationship with their family. She also remembers teachers who impacted her life with love and godly influence. Making connections with spiritual leaders in the church and school had a great impact on Beth’s spiritually formative years. The year of growth was followed by a change in churches and schools. Therefore her last three years of high school turned out to be a spiritual low point for Beth. She explains that she had a “blah spell” for several years. Kroger & Marcia (2011) discuss the importance of social environment in making identity-related choices. The major changes in Beth’s social environment both at church and at school caused a critical setback and perhaps stunted her spiritual growth for a time. Her former foundational commitments and quiet demeanor, however, helped her to avoid poor choices.

Beth graduated from DCA, married a young man, also from DCA, and attended a community college for a year. After one year, she transferred to a larger secular university close to home and completed her degree in English. Challenges to her faith came in the college classroom from a philosophy professor who had a very negative view of Christianity and attempted to antagonize her. She felt defeated by her inadequate ability to answer his verbal assaults but she found that “venting” to her family helped to clarify Truth. Spiritual dissonance in the college classroom compelled Beth to search for answers and gain support from family. This response is an avenue of exploration that helped to confirm her commitment to Christ and the Truth of the Word.

In her mid 20s, Beth and her husband read the book *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan (2008) and felt called by God to open their home for Bible studies. Beth recalls the feelings she experienced this way, “That was really scary to me because we had never done stuff like that before. I felt very uncomfortable.” The Bible studies grew each week and now happen regularly. This group of people has become the community of believers for Beth and her husband. She testifies, “The last part of her twenties has been a time of revival of seeing God move in my life and other’s lives.”

Beth attributes her spiritual strength to action and being involved in ministry. She described their current work with the homeless and needy in the community, and she gets “strength through...being involved and seeing things happen.” Here is an example of how putting feet to our faith brings spiritual stamina.

David: Damascus Christian Academy

David is a 22-year-old male graduate of DCA and a graduate student at a secular liberal arts college. He is single and lives with his parents when he is not away at the college. David

and I talked via Skype, and he appeared to be comfortable and eager to converse. He was raised in a Christian home, heavily involved in his local church, and attended DCA from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Born with diabetes, David found it difficult to reconcile his physical condition with God's love for him. He explained, "It kind of brought a lot of questions as far as me and my walk with God. I was kind of bitter for a long time, and I think that drove a lot of introspection and looking inward...I felt ostracized...segregated from the students." At the age of 12, David was able to reconcile with the issues and made the decision to become a Christian. He compared his feelings with the book of Job, "You have this very dark story and yet out of it you find reconciliation...seeing God as being a light of hope and progressing forward." Throughout middle and high school, his faith and security grew through the mentorship of two very special teachers with whom he maintains contact. Social causal mechanisms such as connectivity with teachers of godly influence have given David a foundation of faith.

David has always found the Scripture fascinating and desired to study other religions of the world in order to compare to the Truth of the Word and find answers for others. He graduated from a secular college with a Bachelor's Degree in Religious Studies and is currently in their graduate program. Connecting with Christian friends at the college has been a challenge, but he found Inter-Varsity and the Baptist Collegiate Ministry to be a source of encouragement. He especially enjoys the deep conversations and debates among fellow students concerning religious matters and desires to be able to help resolve troubling questions for others.

Mayhew and Engberg (2010) described the process of moral reasoning as the call to question and "critically engage the world around them" (p. 461). Individuals, such as David, have developed mechanisms to "critically question the sources of an argument, negotiate how the

source and the argument align with their personal values, histories and experiences, and use these criteria to make judgments” (p. 461). Cognitive disequilibrium induced from unfamiliar environments and negative diverse peer interactions may cause a change in ones thinking. Those who learn to confront the unfamiliar and resolve the cognitive disequilibrium are able to develop perspective-taking skills and acquire greater moral reasoning potential (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). David is showing spiritual stamina in the face of diverse opinions and continues to seek advice from former teachers at DCA.

Eli: Damascus Christian Academy

Eli is a newlywed at the age of 21. He married a young Christian woman from his church who is a graduate of a Christian university. They live in the town where he grew up. As we spoke, I could sense the deep commitment Eli holds toward the things of God, morality, and family. Eli is a graduate of DCA where he attended from kindergarten through twelfth grade. He recalls being saved around the age of six or seven and his family always being very active members of their church.

A heavy issue that helped to shape his life and focus was his father’s battle with leukemia for several years during his early childhood. This crisis and challenge in his life brought him to a place of evaluating his faith and commitment to God. He determined that his faith remains intact and the lessons have expanded his vision for ministry. As a cancer survivor, his father and the entire family became champions for the cause to provide hope for others. They speak often of the power of prayer and learning to trust in God’s will. Eli feels that the trials they faced as a family have strengthen the bond between them causing him to be unusually close to his parents. “More close to my parents...than other people my age,” Eli admits.

Going away to college was a challenge for him, and he found that he did not fit in well with his roommates. He recalls, “They were very worldly as far as the typical partying college group. I realized that was not the place for me.” The spiritual and social dissonance he felt drove Eli to transfer to the local community college and return home after one year. He remained at home and graduated from a four-year university nearby with a degree in Bio-medical Sciences. Eli explained that he was challenged with finding Christian friends at the secular school, and he therefore set his mind and heart to the Scripture, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). He wanted his life to be a witness but found it difficult to befriend non-Christians. He is currently in the graduate program and has remained close to his family and church community. He gains strength spiritually from being with those he refers to as “like minded.” Eli credits his years in the Christian school environment for keeping him spiritually and morally strong. “I don’t have to do those kinds of things or live that type of lifestyle to have fun in life. I get enjoyment and fulfillment through church activities and family time.” He is grateful for the moral modeling of his parents and schoolteachers that made an impact on his personal choices.

Luke: Damascus Christian Academy

Luke is a 23-year-old male graduate from DCA. His wife also graduated from DCA and together they attended a state university. Luke earned a degree in Computer Engineering and works as a software consultant.

Luke was raised in a Christian home with both parents being believers and active in a Baptist church during his younger years. He was saved at the age of five and attended DCA from kindergarten through grade twelve. He admits that his relationship with God was not strong during those early years. “I was saved but I wouldn’t say that I was actively seeking God

or trying to strengthen my relationship.” In the eighth or ninth grade, things began to change. A different church, the influence of a youth pastor, youth activities, and leading worship at DCA chapels all brought Luke to a place of “actively pursuing” God. His parents both faced extreme physical illness related to cancer during his high school years and their involvement in church lessened. This was a crisis of faith for him. He pondered, “Why those things happen to the people you love when you know that they love God.” Luke seemed to reconcile himself to the fact that they made it through that trial, and moved forward.

By Luke’s junior year of high school, he was “super active” in the church where his wife’s father is the pastor. He credits the influence of his wife and her pastoral family for much of his spiritual growth, stamina, and ministry involvement with music and kid’s church.

In college, Luke was grateful for the Christian campus organization where he and his wife were able to “hook up” with other Christians. He said, “If I had to spend a lot of time in the college scene, like a lot of partying and what-not, I think it would have been a lot more difficult.” Some of his Christian friends from DCA were also at the university and involved in the campus organization that he agreed made it easier. Social connectivity played a vital role in keeping Luke spiritually strong. His connection with Christian friends from high school and his deeply devoted Christian wife helped to chart the course for his commitment to Christ.

Luke and his wife moved to another part of the state for their jobs and are active in a local church where they serve with the children’s ministries, praise and worship music, and teach a second grade Sunday school class. He continues to give much credit to his wife for his current spiritual strength. He said, “I think one thing that kept me straight was my wife’s (spiritual strength)...like, that’s the biggest thing in life.”

Research Questions

The following three research questions emerged from a desire to understand the development process of spiritual stamina and the role of the Christian school within that process.

The questions are:

Research Question 1. To what do Christian school graduates attribute their spiritual stamina?

Research Question 2. What was the role of Christian school education in the graduates' spiritual growth and resilience?

Research Question 3. What is the relationship between the mission of the school (evangelistic or discipleship) and the graduates' ability to maintain spiritual stamina?

I will address each of these questions with a synthesis of data from all sources to triangulate the findings.

Research Question 1

To what do Christian school graduates attribute their spiritual stamina?

Answers to this question came from the young adult co-researchers themselves and provided seven categories and emerging themes for analysis. Providing an opportunity for reflection established indicators of the significant faith building events, decisions, and people. Co-researchers were encouraged to make connections between the faith building experiences and the challenges they experience as young adults (Kinnaman, 2011; Smith & Snell, 2009; Uecker et al., 2007). The following discussion of the seven categories most mentioned by the co-researchers includes (a) family and childhood foundations, (b) local church, (c) crisis and extreme challenge, (d) faith challenges in college, (e) campus groups and college peers, (f) ministry and service, and (g) making it my own.

Family and childhood foundations. The co-researchers traced their spiritual journeys recounting their salvation experiences and other faith markers that played a role in spiritual development. Twelve of the 16 young adults in this study were saved before the age of 10. That is that they had prayed to receive Christ into their lives. Two made this first step in faith commitment at the age of 12 and 13 while in junior high school. Only Heath and Brooke claim that their first salvation experience was at the end of high school and going into college. These early commitments to Christ appear to have established a foundation for faith and, for some, were followed with baptism and commitment to a life of service.

Fifteen were raised in a home with two Christian parents, attended Christian schools, and testify to fairly consistent church attendance. Heath was raised with a Christian mother although his father was not a believer. He did, however, have consistent church attendance and Christian school training.

Family has had a tremendous impact on these Christian young adults and they were generous in their praise and gratitude for these loved ones. Hayden and Cassie particularly mentioned prayer and the family support system. Heath, Cassie, and David all mentioned a very strong and nurturing influence from Christian grandparents as well. Abby mentioned that her Christian husband is a great support in her spiritual walk and Luke claims that his wife's commitment to the Lord is "the biggest thing in life...kept me straight!"

The Christian school experience was mentioned twice concerning this question. Whitney, from a discipleship school, said that she was saved after hearing a chapel message in kindergarten and even as an adult she still appreciates the Bible teaching she received in her 13 years at the school. Heath, who was not saved until college, was also greatly impacted by Christian education at CCS, an evangelistic school, and he admits that he "heard a lot of Gospel

at school and had a lot of teaching...my heart at an early age was bent towards God and desired the things of the Lord.”

The local church. Each of the young adults in this study has been involved in a local church in varying degrees. Most attest to having an extremely active church family and attending several times each week for all of their lives. Stacie, Hayden, and Cassie made first time commitments to Christ while at a church activity. Cassie said, “I have always been very involved with the church and have a really good foundation... I’m very thankful for my experiences at the church and the school preparing me with Scriptural knowledge and fostering the relationship I have with Jesus.”

The relationships fostered within the church family have been a source of encouragement and prayer support as well. Sara mentioned the fellowship and influence of a consistent small group community. The importance of being surrounded by solid Christian examples is clear to Stacie and she expressed gratitude for her church youth and Sunday school leaders. David admires his pastor and youth pastor and said of them, “They’ve really given me insight on certain things...pushed me...identified flaws...to help me grow in certain areas.” Luke recalled a renewed interest in church and began actively pursuing God in early high school because of vibrant youth activities. The personal and long-lasting impact of a pastor, youth pastor, music minister and church family are difficult to measure, however, Beth recalls these as “good growing years.”

Crisis and extreme challenge. The overwhelming number one response pointed to personal commitments made during or after facing a crisis or extreme challenge. Four of the sixteen co-researchers described personal illness and physical challenges as the catalyst for a deeper prayer life and dependence on God. For example, after describing her on-going severe

physical challenges, Abby explained, “I have a very strong faith in God that everything will be okay. He’s worked wonderful miracles in my life ...I do know that God is watching over me...He’s with me at all times.”

Seven relayed stories of the unexpected death of a loved one or close friend that drew them to God. Critical periods of change and instability such as parents’ divorce; their own marriage or relationship problems; an unplanned pregnancy; and school, church, or job changes were cited as points of sincere introspection and an evaluation of spiritual commitment.

When asked to what she would attribute her current spiritual strength Becca said, “Probably the tough times that we’ve been through and just seeing the way God’s worked in even the little details that I never could have worked out on my own...so there’s never been any question for me. I never considered that God wasn’t faithful. I think tough times really bring out His faithfulness more than anything if you choose to believe that.”

Sara attributes her current spiritual strength to a crisis of faith that she experienced after a time of “selfish living.” Rejecting her sinful condition, Sara said,

Recognizing that when you’re living for yourself and you stop caring about something bigger than you and something you’ve always believed in, there is just a sense of just emptiness and depression. I don’t want to go back there! I just know that is not the life I want and not the life Jesus wants for me...I can’t deny...He’s real and true!

Faith challenges in college. Becca, Desiree, David, Rodney, Heath, and Sara spoke of the growth they experienced following faith challenges in college including the prevalence of secular thought, persecution, aversion to Christ, and spiritual battles.

Becca recollects, “Coming from being in a (discipleship) Christian school and coming to a secular school...I just couldn’t believe all the things I saw.” She found that it was difficult to

fit in and still maintain her conservative standards. “But, it worked out...it gave me another opportunity to decide what I wanted to do and where my faith was...I knew what I wanted.”

“I was on my own for the first time...my spiritual life sort of plummeted at that point,” Desiree, who graduated from a discipleship school, explained. “After about six months, I just had to get some things right!” She described her personal determination. “Wait, a minute! I can’t stand on my parents anymore. I had to have my own two legs to stand on... know why I believe what I believe in order to really make it.” Desiree felt that the struggles in college and early on in her marriage “knocked the rough edges off” and made her more committed to Christ and a Christian lifestyle.

While David, a graduate of a discipleship school, was in college in religious studies, he was confronted with the Hindi faith, which places high value on enlightenment. They view enlightenment as the most precious of possessions. This led him down the path that actually strengthened his desire to hold his salvation as the most precious thing of all and to nourish it.

“College was a challenging time,” Rodney, a graduate of an evangelistic school, explained. “I think it actually strengthened me a little bit more because there was so much aversion to Christianity...you had to be prepared. I think that actually made me stronger and made me tighter to my Christian friends as well.”

Heath said, “...just being in class and having your opinion on things...like in a history setting or like a biology class, where you disagreed with the teacher on certain issues. If you wanted to state your opinion sometimes they would just try to belittle you.” Heath, who graduated from an evangelistic high school, went on to describe the feeling he had when someone actually physically laughed at him because of his recommitment to faith in college. “Man, I’ve never had anyone really laugh at me over something like this! Okay, I had to get a

new set of friends. A lot of the guys I ran around with just thought I was stupid...so that was a challenge.”

Sara, also a graduate of an evangelistic school, faced a sort of spiritual and cognitive dissonance while in college and claimed to gain strength through the challenge. She said it in these words.

Secular colleges teach secular lifestyle and secular ideas. So, they are very good at presenting it in a way this is very convincing. So...my biggest struggle in just staying firm and knowing that I’m okay in what I believe. I have never been in the minority...I grew up around people that were like me. So, going there and realizing not everyone is like me was tough. I went through a lot of things that were good for me because I realized what I DO know and believe. But there were times when I thought, ‘Should I be following what they’re saying...or the Bible?’ I really had to search for answers in the Word and pray about it.

Campus groups and college peers. Early in the interview process, the saliency of Christian fellowship organizations on college campuses came to the forefront. Half of the co-researchers (8/16) credited campus ministries with providing spiritual support and training during the difficult college years. After making a conscious decision to follow the Lord, Renee made it a top priority to be “plugged into” this Christian fellowship. She recalls the excitement and growth this way, “Just seeing people passionate for the Lord, not because they were raised in the church, not because they were going to a Christian school but because Jesus died for them...and so moved to faith because of love...the Lord...has...grown me in claiming my faith as my own.”

Brooke became involved with a campus fellowship early on in her college career and

found it easier to live for Christ on the secular campus than she had first imagined. Inter-Varsity and the Baptist Collegiate Ministry helped David to keep his focus while away at college and two of the Presbyterian students, Brooke and Stacie found the Reformed University Fellowship to be a strong arm for them. Stacie recalled a particular need that was met by her campus minister during her senior year as he helped her understand God's grace.

Heath gave a clear testimony of his salvation and credited the ministry of Inter-Varsity, Campus Crusade. As mentioned earlier in his description, Heath's high school classmate would not let him "go it alone." He and a group of Christians befriended Heath and helped to bring him to Christ.

Renee and Brooke expressed gratitude for Christian roommates and friends they found in college. However, it was not only females who depended on their friends. Luke was relieved that some friends from his Christian high school joined him at the same college. He also joined a campus group called PROVE which he described as similar to Campus Crusade and met several new friends. This group of people, he claims, helped him avoid the party life. Hayden, who stayed at home, as he attended the local college, was grateful for two or three close Christian friends to "hold on to and move forward with."

Ministry and service. It was evident in the lives of several of the young adults in this study that giving of themselves to ministry and service to others has strengthened their spiritual commitments. Hayden, for example, dedicated his life to missions at the age of 13 and has served on several foreign mission teams. He continues at the age of 23 to serve in his church and summer camp programs and is open to follow God's direction in ministry. Rodney also served on several mission teams while in high school and counted it as "extremely helpful...to see other cultures and the needs around the world...really helped my spiritual growth."

Stacie worked with a fellows program, an internship that focuses on leadership training and volunteer ministries for nine months, as she took a class in theology. She said, “This time has been very formative for me...and given me time to get into the academic side of Christianity.” Brooke, another example of ministry growth, has worked at a Christian children’s camp for the past four summers and expressed that it has “really strengthen my faith and made it really necessary for me to be able to verbalize it....and share the Gospel with kids.” Cassie attributes her current interest in ministry and service to the variety of opportunities and exposure she experienced in school and church. Beginning in the sixth grade, she says, “We really started to get our hands into service projects and community and I decided at that point that somehow in some way that with my life I wanted to be in service to the Lord.”

As mentioned earlier, Beth and her husband felt led to step out in faith and begin a ministry in their home for the unchurched and many times the homeless. The community of believers has grown and they are now seeing God move in their own lives as they disciple others. Witnessing the faithfulness of God in this work has given Beth spiritual stamina that is evident in her daily life and teaching.

Luke also had much to say about the impact of being involved in ministry. He saw early on in high school that serving the Lord in the school praise band and playing the guitar for his church, and working with the kids in Sunday school kept him spiritually connected to the people of God. He continues to serve and show growth.

“Making it my own.” A phrase used by Sara and echoed throughout this study by several of the co-researchers was that they had to “make it my own”. Each of these young adults show spiritual stamina long past high school graduation, and the personal commitment to their faith in Jesus Christ is evident. The early childhood salvations were followed up with deeper

commitments to prayer and living by the Word of God.

Renee, who was saved around the age of six, claims that her faith started to become her own in middle school when she says, “Scripture became more personal.” As stated earlier, Becca recounted that at a low point in her life as she experienced the divorce of her parents, her faith became real. Hayden contended that even with the Christian influences around, “You still have to make it your own. That’s why, still, a lot of people fail once they get out of this (Christian school) atmosphere. They don’t make it their own.” Heath echoed this sentiment when he explained,

One thing I liked about going to a secular university was that...I realized quickly...that not everybody just went through the motions of standing up in chapel and saying, ‘Yes, I believe’...or raising their hand. It was like this is real life...I feel like it pushed me a lot toward making a decision for my own faith instead of just going along with...everybody...It was just yours or it wasn’t.

When Brooke considered all she had seen and heard about faith from her parents she said, “There’s nothing they could have done that would have made it personal to me. That was definitely a work of God and of the Holy Spirit...it had to become my own at some point.”

The transmission of the Christian faith during adolescence and a solid personal commitment is paramount in maintaining spiritual stamina. “Making it my own” refers to that personal exploration into the depth of one’s belief system and making a commitment that solidifies identity. This concept is carried into the development of the Spiritual Identity Formation Theory (see Figure 1).

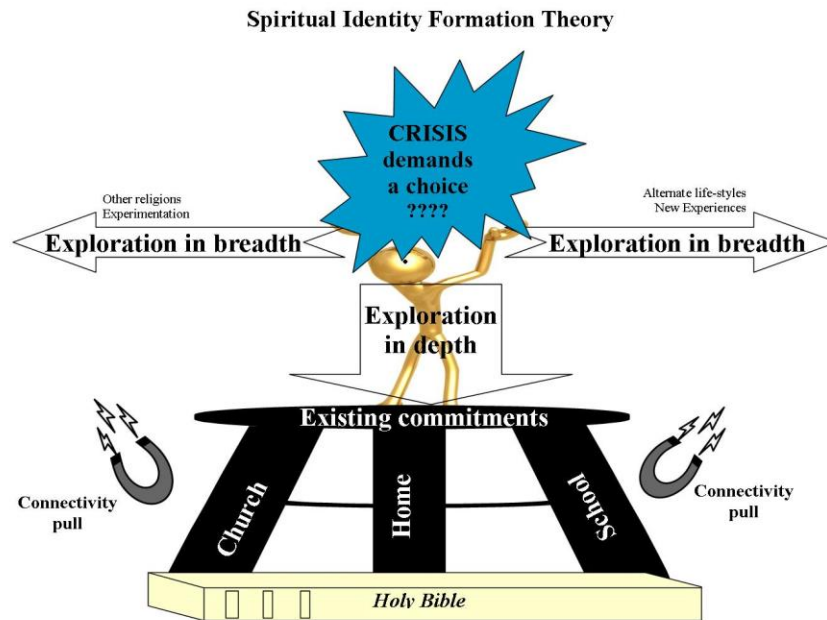


Figure 1. Spiritual Identity Formation Theory

Spiritual Identity Formation Theory

This model depicts the SIFT in which I have expanded the Identity Achievement Theory (Marcia, 1966) and the social causal mechanism of connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009). The person in the diagram shows an individual who is standing on the existing commitment based on the foundational truths of the Word of God learned in the Christian home, school, and church. When the individual experiences a challenge of faith or a life crisis, they are faced with a choice. They may question their foundations and explore other avenues for answers. Perhaps they look to other religious belief systems, new experiences, alternative lifestyles, or new relationships. This is labeled “Exploration in Breadth.” Following this wide exploration, they may make a new commitment to an alternate belief system or identity. This type of wide exploration often leads to depression, confusion, guilt and hopelessness.

“Exploration in Depth” draws the individual in crisis to evaluate their existing commitment to Christ and strengthen that commitment based on the foundational truths. These individuals look back to their roots or back to the people with whom they have connection. The pattern for identity formation is (a) crisis, (b) exploration, and (c) commitment.

The magnetic pull depicts the social causal mechanism of connectivity that helps to draw the individual away from the negative results of exploration in breadth back to making the connection to faith-based foundations. These are the connections made with the people and belief system of the home, church, and school.

Research Question 2

What was the role of Christian school education in the graduates’ spiritual growth and resilience?

A spiritual journey timeline (see Appendix I) and reflection on the part of the co-researchers in preparation for the interviews helped to bring about a better understanding of those constructs gained through Christian education. This aspect of the research was designed to establish a differentiation between the faith building influences of the school versus those gained elsewhere (Cardus, 2010; Cooper, 2010; Uecker et al., 2007). The categories of Christian school influence are (a) teachers and staff, (b) peer groups, (c) ministry opportunities, (d) Bible classes/teaching, (e) worldview development, and (f) positive life style. The responses of the young adults are compiled here to give an account of their personal experiences, feelings, and attitudes concerning each of the six aspects of their Christian school experience.

Teachers and staff. The young adult co-researchers who graduated from BCA and DCA conveyed admiration for many of their teachers. Hayden expressed that he was given support and encouragement toward his life goals by the faculty and staff at Bethany. Beth felt that the

teachers loved their students at Damascus, which made a big impact on her. When David was at Damascus, he became especially close to two teachers in particular with whom he found common interests. One teacher, who had Type 1 Diabetes, as David does, was listed among those to whom he attributes his current spiritual stamina. He recalls, “Talking with her and relaying all those issues with our health and with our faith...was always really big. I’ve always found her as a very strong Christian and I always go back and talk to her on a few things.” David also spoke highly of his Bible teacher who challenged him to look at religion in a different way. “He really made me fascinated with it! He challenged me to take it to the next level.” He stays in contact with these two influential teachers and commented, “To have those people who influenced you back when you were going to DCA and still being able to go back to them...that’s something that keeps...it’s recycled...still very useful. They are great resources!”

Desiree also attended DCA and said that she was spiritually “changed” after one special teacher shared her personal testimony with her high school class. Desiree also has fond memories of teachers who showed concern for her spiritual and emotional growth and taught her to have a regular time alone with God in daily devotions.

Another of the young adults from Damascus, Luke, had a reserved attitude toward some teachers who he felt “were pushing things that I didn’t necessarily believe and so they had the wrong type of attitude about it...that was turning me off.” He described the situation in these words.

I guess they just believed certain things and when they taught it, they didn’t necessarily act like there was a possibility of other things being true. Like they were just saying that these were the only truths and if you didn’t believe it then you were wrong. And if I didn’t necessarily believe what they were saying I was a liar and that the way I answered

something was not the right way to interpret it.

Graduates from ACS and CCS discussed the influence Christian coaches had on their own spiritual growth. Stacie played sports for ACS and had this to say about her coaches.

I think having Christian coaches was really important for me...they were able to encourage me...the kind of relationship that you develop with a coach is pretty unique. I feel like everybody ends up going to your coach for about anything, not just sports related. I think that was one positive influence that was really important to me developmentally.

Heath from Calvary Christian also commented that his high school soccer coach was a very strong influence on his life. These comments give evidence to the fact that the bonding that takes place in the athletic setting can have a tremendous impact on a young person.

Stacie, from ACS, commented on the influence of Christian teachers when she included them in the group of people from whom she learned. She said, “There were a lot of people who I kind of learned from their example and the way that they lived about what it really meant to be a Christian.” Although she had little to no experience with non-Christian teachers, Stacie expressed her opinion with these words, “I think having teachers that are believers is helpful...because I feel like they...probably have a tendency to be less harsh, maybe, in the learning environment. Maybe they’re more nurturing.”

Heath who went to CCS commented, “A few teachers had a strong impact. If I was at another school, I probably wouldn’t have teachers like that. Definitely, I would not have heard the same things. So, even if I kind of ignored them at the time, on the surface, they were still penetrating my heart.”

Bible teaching and worldview development. The foundational “roots” that were

established in the young adult graduates during their Christian school experience was evident in our discussion as they mentioned myriad times the classes and teaching related to scriptural principles and worldview development. Students from BCA and DCA confer that the school played a major role in the large amount of Bible knowledge they gained.

Becca stated that she felt she had a “more solid background from all the years of Bible classes and Scripture memory. Probably that led to me not needed to question things as much because it was so solid. It wasn’t like I was just learning and figuring it out in college.” She refers to the combination of formal Bible teaching and informal friendship interaction as two of the positive spiritual influences in her life.

Hayden acknowledged that from a young age he learned about the Bible, learned the stories and memorized verses that prepared him for life. He said these things were “setting the foundation as I grew and setting that knowledge base to apply.” One particular experience that he claims helped to solidify his faith was the process of writing a Christian philosophy paper during his senior year in high school. The assignment, from Bible class, involved searching the Scriptures and writing a personal philosophy about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, The Church, and other topics of the Christian faith. Hayden credits this time of “digging for answers” as very helpful in preparation for going away to college.

As a public school teacher, Cassie also expressed her appreciation for the Bible classes and the emphasis on the Word at BCA. She said it was “very impactful” for her and she wishes for her own child is to have that “additional education to extend into the classroom as well.” Cassie went on to say, “The knowledge of the Scriptures helps me to be more comfortable in my conversation with unbelievers...even the whole creation versus evolution thing...it provides that support, plus my math and science background.” She noted that her peers from church with very

similar backgrounds and families, but who attended public schools, “just didn’t have the same Bible knowledge.” She said, “I think it’s so important...memorizing Scripture and hiding it in your heart because you just never know when you’re going to need to recall that in conversation.” Cassie remembered having a world religion study in high school that provided basic knowledge of Islam and other belief systems and commented, “By having that knowledge...it allows you to have an intelligent conversation with someone else.”

The integration of Scripture into all subjects made an impression on Desiree from DCA. She recalls, “Whether it be history class or science class you came at it from that biblical standpoint. Now, I work in public schools and I can see a huge gap between the two different worldviews...colliding together.” Desiree is grateful for her Christian school background and the scriptural foundation she received. She commented, “I’ve been very fortunate to have that foundation so when things...unravel, I know where to go and where to find that help.” Desiree’s desire to go deeper in the things of God when she faces a challenge can be described as “exploration in depth” where one evaluates an existing commitment (Marcia, 1966).

David attributes much of the way he looks at life today to two Bible classes in high school that made a great impact on him. In 10th grade, he was required to write a paper on the process of Christian maturity. He said, “It forced everybody in the classroom to really look within themselves and reflect on their growth with God and their walk with Jesus. It really helped to sober me up spiritually and really pointed me in the direction I know I needed to go...that mindset has been consistent ever since.” He commented that he still has the book from that course on Bible doctrines and continues to discuss issues with his teacher from DCA. David also had a class on Christian apologetics or how to defend your faith of which he said, “That was something every young student...needs to have. Not everybody is gonna go to a Christian

college and so they need to know how to defend their faith the best they know how.”

Eli, another graduate from DCA, expresses his Christian worldview in these terms as it relates to his current life choices.

I just kind of look at myself at where I am in my life and then I look at the people, some that I graduated with, some that went to a non-Christian high school and I’m able to see...the process of maturity. They’re still into the partying and drinking and the things of the world. It makes me feel good about myself knowing that I don’t have to do those kinds of things or live that type of lifestyle to have fun in life. I get enjoyment and fulfillment through church activities and family time. I’m very, very thankful for my Christian education.

Eli’s expression of faith shows his strong connection to the Word and his foundational training. The Social Causal Mechanism of Connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009) has helped him to remain true to his convictions and spiritual identity.

ACS and CCS (evangelistic schools) have graduates who had a variety of responses concerning the Bible teaching and worldview training. Rodney commented that having Bible class and “making Scripture reading and prayer a daily routine part of your life just from going to school is a big positive.” Brooke also definitely claims to have gained Bible knowledge during her years at ACS that she could not have received in college.

Renee felt that in eighth grade when she was reading through the Bible and learning to structure her quiet time with the Lord, she was “learning more about Scripture, not just being taught about it in school but by seeking it out on her own.” Renee admits that she was “kind of going through the motions.” She commented, “I think that was very common in my small little Christian school. We had Bible class and most of us had been raised in the church but we never

really talked about what it actually meant to follow Christ. I think it was very rule-based and not necessarily a heart thing.”

The fundamental teaching and the Gospel message at CCS was good for Abby and she called it “a good place for me to grow even from a young age.” She enjoyed weekly chapels and daily prayer time. The teaching was also instrumental in helping Heath get back on the right track following a time of spiritual drift. He recalls, “They taught a lot of classes on why Christianity is the Way and so I thought all those other religions were not true.” CCS offered a Bible class in high school that discussed religions and worldviews. Heath explained, “Having classes like that...they shot down socialism, Marxism, all the things like Buddhism, Hinduism, and anything that any type of religion...that pretty much shot down and showed Christianity as the way.” Even during Heath’s rebellious years, and mixed messages at home, he confirmed that Christianity was the true religion and was drawn back to Christ. These roots were important to Heath and established a biblical foundation.

Abby concurs that the Bible class that “would go through the different religions and what people would believe... helped me even more to realize that I was a Christian and not another type of religion.” Sara, another graduate of CCS recalls taking the class on other religions and social issues during her senior year. Her thoughts were, “It’s probably something that should have been taught all through high school because it’s almost too late when you’re 18 and your mind is on one track.”

Table 6 gives a broad overview of the types of curriculum used by each of the four schools during the general time period of the co-researchers attendance.

Table 6

Bible Curriculum

School/Academy	General Description	Grades	Type of Publisher
Alpha Christian	Bible Truths	K-6	CSC
ACS	Life of Christ	7-8	CSC
	Characters of the OT		
	Christian Living	9-10	CSC
	Apologetics	11-12	Christian Publisher
	World Religion		
Bethany Christian	Elementary Bible Series	K-6	Teacher Generated
BCA	Psalms, Proverbs	7-9	CSC
	Life Skills		
	Apologetics, Doctrine	10-12	CSC
	World Religions		
Calvary Christian	Elementary Bible Series	K-6	CSC
CCS	Teen Series	7-9	CSC
	How to Study the Bible		Teacher Generated
	Apologetics, Doctrine	10-12	CSC
	Comparative Religions		
Damascus Christian	Elementary Bible Series	K-6	CSC
DCA	Psalms, Proverbs	7-9	CSC
	How to Study the Bible		Teacher Generated
	Bible Doctrines	10-12	CSC
	Comparative Religion		

Note. CSC = Christian School Curriculum

Peer groups. Four of the co-researchers from discipleship schools commented on the part that peers played in their spiritual growth and resilience. Becca, a graduate of BCA, expressed that she was grateful for good friends in school that encouraged and supported her

during her parents' divorce with phone calls and loving actions. Having a peer group that upheld a solid Christian lifestyle gave Becca the influence she needed to have "fun without the temptation to sin." After the culture shock of a secular college, Becca realized it was a "blessing to grow up without hearing all the cussing. BCA students were respected (in the community)...they dressed nice and behaved."

Whitney bonded with several friends at Damascus Christian School. Many who were her classmates since the first grade and she continues to hold them in high regard. She noted that these close friends helped to keep her spiritually strong when she was going through difficult times with the birth of her son, his physical issues, and relationship problems. Desiree, also from DCS, has fond memories of school peers. She confirmed that the school was her church for a few years while her mother was ill. The importance of that relationship was evident in Desiree's countenance as she spoke.

The ultimate peer influence came when Luke married his former classmate. He admitted that she was a strong influence in his pull toward ministry in the church. Luke became active in youth group and church during high school and this strong commitment remains paramount in the life of this couple.

Rodney from Alpha Christian Academy spoke of the strong consistent friendships he made in school. He said that he basically, grew up with these friends and "that was a big positive." Abby, from Calvary Christian Academy, spoke of the strong support systems that she felt were in place when she was going through serious health issues late in high school. Her friends and athletic teammates surrounded her with prayer and emotional support.

There were negative reactions from Heath and Brooke about the peers who influenced them in high school. These will be discussed in Research Question 3 concerning their

impression of the evangelistic mission of the Christian school.

The social causal mechanism of connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009) is certainly evident in the peer relationships within the Christian school. Positive spiritual and emotional connections to others can draw young people back to foundational roots of faith.

Ministry opportunities. Hayden from BCA dedicated his life to serve Christ at a mission's conference at age 13 and has since had opportunity to minister in a variety of venues. In middle school, he was already working at a summer camp operated by his church and school. As mentioned earlier, this foundation led Hayden to be involved in other ministries in college to which he attributes "a lot of growth."

Two graduates from DCA served on ministry teams during high school. Whitney participated in the praise band and drama team for her junior and senior years and expressed her love for the drama and artistic demonstrations that spoke to her heart. Luke started ministering with the worship music in school chapels in the 9th grade and continued throughout high school. He recalls that this area of service stirred his interest and he became more involved in a youth group and started "to actively try to strengthen my relationship with God." This has become a regular part of his adult life as he serves in his church.

One student told of the impact of mission trips; however, these experiences were not organized by the school. "I went on a few mission trips in high school through my church and those were extremely helpful," expressed Rodney from ACA. "Just to see other cultures and the needs around the world and things like that. That really helped in my spiritual growth." The involvement and impact of ministry opportunities was not as evident in the evangelistic school graduates although the administrators reported the events and programs in which the schools were participating.

Research Question 2 investigates the role of Christian education in the graduates' spiritual resilience. In the SIFT (Figure 1), one leg of the stool represents the school as a part of the foundational training in the life of the co-researchers. The stool rests firmly on the Word of God and provides a platform for individual spiritual commitments. It is common to assume that the home, church and school work together to provide this stable foundation (Shultz, 2009). Table 7 shows the contributions of the three foundational intuitions most noted by the co-researchers. The role of the school in providing positive peer influence, worldview development, and Bible teaching were mentioned most during data collection although the other aspects listed here were considered important scaffolding for building spiritual stamina.

Table 7
Contributions to Spiritual Stamina

Church	Home	School
Training in Truth	Faith transfer from parents	Mentoring by teachers
Godly examples	Example in lifestyle	Peer groups
Supporting adults	Practice in Christian disciplines	Ministry opportunities
Connectivity with community	Family connectivity/belonging	Bible classes and teaching
Identity with denomination	Family identity	Worldview development
Ministry opportunities	Prayer support	Positive life-style
		Challenging/critical thinking

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between the mission of the school (evangelistic or discipleship) and the graduates' ability to maintain spiritual stamina?

As themes emerged concerning school culture and the perception the graduates have of school mission a better understanding of its impact is developed. I reviewed the impressions the

co-researchers have of their over-all school experiences in light of the stated mission of the Christian school they attended (Hull, 2009; Latts, 2010). A school with a discipleship mission is one in which a statement of faith is required for enrollment and the focus is to support Christian families and disciple Christian young people. The evangelistic missional approach does not require a statement of faith for enrollment and deliberately focuses on evangelizing non-believers and making disciples of Christ. Many of the young adult co-researchers were not completely aware of the mission of the school nor were they familiar with the terms in this context. After describing the two philosophies, these responses were garnered.

Discipleship schools. The graduates from BCA appeared to have an understanding of the discipleship mission of their alma mater. Hayden made these comments.

Their mission statement is discipleship where they are partnering with the parents as Christians bring in Christians rather than evangelistic and bringing in everybody. I think that's important. I don't really think that's the only way to do it but it was neat. It's kind of one thing they hang their hat on in 'Partner with the Parents'. I think they do a good job of creating an atmosphere of support and encouragement. Everybody's working toward the same thing. Everybody has pretty much the same goals and purpose of living for Christ. All your teachers and everything...so, the atmosphere they create through all that is very beneficial going out to the secular university and then to the world.

Becca considered BCA to be more discipleship but "not exclusive by any means." She recalled a student who came to the school after being taken in by one of the families and "didn't necessarily believe what we believed." Becca didn't think the school would turn anyone away. When asked about the impact of the discipleship atmosphere, she replied, "I do think it made a difference because we all kind of believed the same thing and were on the same level. I think it

kind of solidified the growth and you're trusting each other in what you believe."

As an educator, Cassie understands the importance of the parents' role in the academic, emotional, and spiritual development of the child. She appreciates the fact that BCA, as a discipleship school, allows for the family to follow Proverbs 22:6 that states, "Bring up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he shall not depart from it."

Cassie knew that a parent or guardian of each student had to sign a statement of faith because "I imagine they are not assuming the student is saved." However, she recalled a time when one particular friend's parents went through a divorce and he did not return the next year. It was not clearly understood if he was not permitted to return or if it was the choice of the parents, but they wondered if there might be a way to "do this better?" Cassie and her classmates were concerned that a strict discipleship stance may have caused this young man, and possibly others, to miss out on a Christian education.

Cassie expressed strong feelings about the sheltering aspects of a discipleship school and her gratitude for that part of her life in these words.

I remember hearing people at church talking...going to a smaller church, I was the only person going to a Christian school; you know they'd say, 'She's being sheltered!' or 'She's not really prepared for the real world.' And I think about looking back on my church peers...they came from very similar backgrounds that I did but there were still people making choices that weren't okay! I mean...not really where they need to be. You know, you raise your child the best you can, pray for them...but we're all born with a sin nature and each person has a unique testimony. Mine's probably the way it is because God knew that I couldn't handle walking away and coming back. He blessed me that way.

Damascus Christian School graduate, Desiree expressed that she felt most of her peers in the younger grades came from Christian homes but that it seemed later on in high school there seemed to be a greater number of non-Christian students. She stated, “It almost seemed some parents sent their kids there to fix them and that doesn’t work. You still have to have the home life to match the school life. With DCS being more of a discipleship environment, the chapels and the lessons were more focused on (those who) are already a Christian and this is how to live out that Christian life.”

Whitney seemed to appreciate the discipleship atmosphere and had this to say, “It is positive...because you didn’t have some people come in and try to tell you, ‘You shouldn’t believe this or they’re wrong!’ They just try to help you with it and help you grow instead of knock you down.” In other words, the outside influences were minimal and it was easy to grow.

Signing a statement of faith and compliance with the school policies meant something to Beth, who attended various Christian schools but spent her high school years at Damascus. She said, “I felt it was always nice to sort of be held accountable. You know, you have signed something! You’re not signing it in blood and I think the school knows that not everybody is truthful, but I think it’s nice to sort of have that reminder...you have stated this so the idea is that you should be living up to that.” Beth admitted that as a high school student she did not particularly think it meant anything because so many would be able to simply just “put something down” to be accepted. She felt like there were many people in high school who “didn’t act like Christ whether they signed a paper or not.” However, Beth did think that it could have been much worse had they not had some sort of commitment to sign. She expressed that the school mission did not really affect her that much nor the peers with whom she chose to associate. It is evident that choosing a positive peer group, even in a discipleship school, is vital

to spiritual stamina.

David agreed that it is a good idea to have a pastoral reference as a mandatory requirement to attend school but admits that not all of those who enroll really attend church. He called it a “leap of faith...to assume that they do go to church.” David thought it would be a good idea to require a weekly pastor’s report to assure consistency. He considered this policy, however, to be of little impact on his personal commitment. David and his family were faithful in church attendance and Christian ministries outside of school life and he felt that would have been the case even without required signed agreement. He was saddened when he spoke of his peer group whom he felt did not go to church consistently. “I always talk with them about it,” David confided, “but they always kind of wanted to slough it off and change the topic real quickly. I hate to say but it really concerns me. It has for a very long time...there’s only so much you can do. They’ve got to make the decision themselves.”

Luke, who met his wife while attending DCA and was very much influenced by her strong faith in Christ, said when he was at Damascus he “didn’t feel like you had to be a Christian there.” He expressed his opinion on the subject with these words, “Sometimes you might have been weird if you weren’t a Christian but there was never anything they (the school) did that required you to be a Christian. They never said if you’re not a Christian you have to leave. I think if they had, I would have been upset about that.” Luke did not feel that the actual mission of the school impacted him personally but he did express gratitude for the overall school experience with these words:

I think there are times that being the high school age, I just didn’t appreciate the things that they had to offer. I just wasn’t open to those types of things. I was definitely appreciative of the fact that it was a Christian environment and I wasn’t having to worry

about secular things or any type of stuff where my faith might be tested. It was a very easy environment for me to be in.

Eli also attended DCA and agrees that it was prevalent to see students sign a statement of faith or submit a pastoral reference who did not live a Christian lifestyle. He questioned, “What pastor could have possibly signed off ...to let them even attend DCA?” However, with further consideration, Eli acknowledged this belief,

What better school for someone of that lifestyle to be in other than a Christian school where they can be fed the Word of God? Whether they are attentive to it or not, they can be...they do know that the things of God and the things of the world are two totally different things. It’s very good that these...were able to attend Damascus.

The sentiment of both Luke and Eli lead me to believe that a discipleship school does not necessarily promote exclusion nor ignore the Great Commission to share the Gospel. These discipleship schools do, however support the work of the family and the church in the training of young people.

Evangelistic schools. Alpha Christian School is an evangelistic school in its mission and the graduates expressed an understanding of the open enrollment policy. Renee reported, “My Christian school was one of the only ones in the area that would let non-believers come to the school.” When asked if this impacted her spiritual growth in any way she responded, “Potentially, but I feel like most of the kids in my graduating class were professing believers, and so, I don’t know that it came out that much in school.” Stacie was not sure what the mission was labeled but she characterized ACS as a place that was “not very strict about who they let in.” Her sentiment was that it was “awesome” because she feels it is good to be open.

Rodney felt that ACS did not emphasize a Christian testimony for enrollment and they

would accept anyone. This seemed to be in direct conflict with the statement he made about his experience there. “The only negative I can think of is not having that exposure to some other non-Christians. Everybody of course professed to be a Christian so we didn’t have the evangelism aspect of it. We had a whole group of people who were all Christians and didn’t have many non-Christian friends.” Later in our conversation Rodney explained, “I don’t think everybody there was Christian but a lot of people just professed to kind of fit in.” This dynamic within his class made Christianity a non-issue therefore; he admitted that he did not even notice the difference.

Brooke, as mentioned in her introduction, had a very different experience at ACS and feels that the evangelistic mission of the school held negative repercussions for her spiritual growth in high school and sent her into a period of teen rebellion. I will include more of the story here.

At the time I was going into my freshman year, the school decided to do this “redemption thing” where they took the kids that got kicked out of the public schools in the area and...bring them in and witness to them and give them the opportunity to be in the school. But, they brought a lot of them in all at once, right at the beginning of high school...a crucial time! Those people are really strong personalities to begin with...so it really did not go well for my class and just really brought me down and ...a lot of other people down at the same time. So, everything just got flipped around.

Brooke concludes that ACS was attempting to be more evangelistic but did not approach it in the best way. She feels that currently the school is back on track and doing a better job with better things in place for a different outcome.

Calvary Christian School also has an evangelistic mission with very different

interpretations from its graduates. Affordances may have influenced the positive or negative impact the school's mission had on individuals. Affordances speak to the background and goals that one brings into a situation that may help determine what they take away from the experience (Gibson, 1979).

Heath expressed strong opinions about the evangelistic mission at CCS and claimed that part of his "downfall" was due to the open enrollment and recruitment of non-Christians to play ball. He explained it in these words:

Our soccer team was very competitive and ...our coach was very good and a lot of these players came from public school district and they didn't come until high school. A lot of their parents didn't care about their kids walking with the Lord; they wanted them there to play soccer. So, those became my friends... and for all the wrong reasons, I think the parents were happy. They brought with them a lot of influence that was not Christian and so that changed the culture of things. They also brought in a whole different crowd (spectators). It changed the dynamic of the school.

Heath admitted that he faced rebellion during high school and he and his friends explored things like alcohol and drugs "just trying to be popular." He expressed his belief that having a discipleship mission would benefit the student and address the character you want them to have and the Christian environment. Heath feels that in an openly evangelistic school "you might get a lot of kids ...that you wouldn't want your kids around or the household. Because that's the reason you're sending them to a Christian school because you're getting something you're paying for."

He compared this concept to his church mission to reach the lost. The church people know they will be expecting to be with the unsaved people in order to reach them. On the other

hand, those who send their children to a Christian school “do not have that kind of thinking...they pretty much want all Christians!” Heath believes that most children are not ready to evangelize while they are still trying to build their foundation. He said, “I don’t know how much you can ask a fourteen year old to have a firm foundation and also witness. It’s a pretty tough challenge.” He expressed concern that his school may be continuing to bring in athletes to enhance the sports program to the detriment of the spiritual growth of the student body.

Abby, a graduate of CCS and a high school athlete voiced a different opinion. She realized the school had an open policy on enrollment and believes it to be beneficial in several ways. Abby recalls that students must sign a commitment to keep the school rules and not drink or smoke and that sort of thing but many did not claim to be Christians. She mentioned also that foreign exchange students were a part of the student body and held other religious beliefs. Abby expressed that she felt the school was trying to make your faith stronger while also spreading the Word to non-Christians. She explains the positive outreach in this way:

In baseball, some people who were not Christians coming into the Calvary setting saw how close-knit and supportive we all were with each other and how God was moving in our lives. They were certainly getting educated in God and learning more about our faith and about our journey. There were people that were not Christians who came to be Christians through the doctrine and rules that CCS had set up. I see a lot of my friends from high school on Facebook. There were a few people that were sort of wild in high school and now they are very strong Christians. I think a big part of that is based upon their education, background and foundation they were getting from CCS.

Sara admitted that her perception of Calvary Christian School was that it was discipleship in mission although CCS is evangelistic. She felt surrounded by people with like-minded values

and morals, beliefs and goals even though she said, “There are kids in there that aren’t Christians or following the school rules and things.” CCS has a commitment statement and she recalled that it was more of a “lifestyle thing” than a commitment to Christianity. Yet still, Sara felt that she was in a “Christian bubble” and not ready for the world. She regrets that she left high school thinking she was “fine and invincible.” Sara admits, “I wasn’t!”

Discipleship school graduates often experienced a mixed peer group with a somewhat confusing standard of enrollment policy. Evangelistic school graduates showed a higher percentage of concern over the ill effects of open enrollment and negative peer pressure. Six of the sixteen young adult graduates of Christian schools admitted that they experienced a mild to severe spiritual drift with poor choices and rebellion during high school or in their first year of college. Four of these were graduates of evangelistic schools and two were from discipleship schools. All were able to find grace and forgiveness and attribute their current spiritual strength to foundational truths upon which they had built their faith.

Focus Group

A focus group from DCA met together over pizza one evening in Beth’s school classroom. Some of the co-researchers had not officially met because of they had not attended DCA during the same time. It was a casual and comfortable meeting and the conversation was open. I recorded the session for documentation. Following a brief description of the study and results, we used an open-ended set of questions to guide the discussion (Appendix L).

We discussed the impact of biblical integration in school and they expressed the differences they saw in teachers. Some would just have prayer to begin class and others would add devotionals or biblical lessons in class. The value of biblical literacy with high school

students was stronger on the side of academic gain rather than spiritual gain and they could see that many students did not always buy in to the teaching.

A discussion developed around the issue of preparation for entering the world. It was mentioned that the school could help with that area by providing opportunities to serve in the community or mission trips. Making students aware of what is happening in the world around them was brought up as extremely important. A list of ten recommendations for administrators grew from this discussion. These DCA graduates felt that added attention needed to be given to training students to debate the creation versus evolution issues. Some felt that there was a gap in teaching for understanding in this area of science and in training kids to think through ways to stand up for your faith when the clash of faith comes in secular thought.

I described the new grounded theory of Spiritual Identity Formation based on the Identity Achievement Theory (Marcia, 1966) which follows the steps (a) crisis, (b) exploration, and (c) commitment. The co-researchers affirmed the concepts of exploration in breadth and in depth and affirmed the beginning stages of the model. Desiree admitted, “I’ve been there, I’ve done both.” She could personally identify with the negative results of exploration in breadth. After facing a crisis of faith in her early 20s she turned to exploration in depth and renewed her former commitment to Christ.

This discussion brought to mind the need to show the connective pull of the positive influences of the past. Thus, the magnets were added to the model. This led to the creation of Table 7, Contributions to Spiritual Stamina, to clarify the positive contributions of the home, church, and school as gleaned from interview data.

Beth suggested that encouraging mentoring relationships might make a difference in the responses to crisis and help kids make deeper commitments to Christ. She also expressed her

feelings that Bible classes in high school so often deal with doctrine but she prefers a balance of practical teaching on Christian living. Desiree added that the school could not really add to the foundation until the personal relationship with Jesus was in place. She was affirming the idea that we have to “make it our own.”

Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed the three research questions through a synthesis of the responses from the 16 co-researchers. The questions emerged from a desire to understand the development process of spiritual stamina and the role of the Christian school within that process. Question one (To what do Christian school graduates attribute their spiritual stamina?) was answered through the development of the SIFT (see Figure 1) grounded in the data collected and viewed through the theory of Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966). Spiritual Identity Formation incorporates the foundational support and training of the home, church, and Christian school with the approach a young person takes in dealing with crisis and challenge. This grounded theory supports and extends the concepts of Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966). In the process of identity achievement, the need for exploration is fundamental. The direction that exploration takes is the major determiner of the outcome. When faced with a personal crisis or challenge of faith an individual may be forced to search for answers or evaluate their belief system.

Exploration in breadth is a wide search for identity alternatives that precedes a new commitment, (i.e., counter belief systems and worldviews, experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and sexual encounters) has been linked to confusion, low self-esteem, depression, guilt, and hopelessness. Exploration in depth is a period of conscious evaluation of existing commitments (Marcia, 1966). When a Christian young person faces a crisis and is drawn to evaluate the situation in light of their existing faith in Christ and the foundational Truths they have been

taught, the results are a deeper commitment to Christ. Spiritual stamina grows through this process. The social causal mechanism of connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009) built within the family, church, and school serves as a drawing force for an individual suffering the consequences of exploration in breadth.

Sara is an example of this pattern. She attributes her current spiritual strength to a crisis of faith that she experienced after a time of “selfish living.” She explored other options in her life and came to a point of crisis. She was drawn to a state of guilt and repentance. Rejecting her sinful condition Sara said, “Recognizing that when you’re living for yourself and you stop caring about something bigger than you and something you’ve always believed in, there is just a sense of just emptiness and depression. I don’t want to go back there! I just know that is not the life I want and not the life Jesus wants for me...I can’t deny...He’s real and true!”

Research Question 3 opened a discussion of the discipleship or evangelistic mission of the participating Christian school sites. The majority of the co-researchers were unsure of the mission stance taken by their high school but expressed strong opinions about their personal feelings and experience. Comments ranged from criticizing the “Christian bubble” affect to condemning the open door to a “redemption thing.” Consensus was that schools needed clarity of mission and a deliberate plan of implementation. There appeared to be little or no difference in faculty, curriculum, training, or activities offered in the four schools. However, peer influence and interaction played a distinct role in the high school experience of the co-researchers.

The concept of affordances may come into play in the impact of the school mission statement and the implementation in the daily school experience. Gibson introduced the term “affordances” (1979) which he described as the reciprocal relationship that a person has with their environment. Gibson purported that there is a direct relationship between the goals held by

an individual and what is personally extracted from their environment. For example, an individual strongly committed to the cause of Christ and striving to have a positive influence on the world may see an adverse environment as a mission field and gain spiritual fortitude. Conversely, a Christian young person void of a self-identified purpose may struggle in relationship to their conflicting environment.

The Spiritual Identity Formation Theory (Figure 1) may help to increase understanding as to the varied reaction of these young people to the challenges of high school. Some made deeper commitments while in high school while others struggled.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This final chapter provides an overview of the study by restating the purpose, design, and methodology employed within the research and a discussion of the findings as they relate to the theoretical framework and literature. An explanation of the SIFT and implications for Christian educators and future investigation are also included.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explain how Christian high school graduates maintain spiritual stamina as they go on to pursue an education in secular colleges or universities. For this study, I defined spiritual stamina as the ability to face adverse circumstances, social, or personal pressures and remain true to godly standards of living and attitudes.

Summary of Design and Methodology

A qualitative grounded theory design was utilized in order to gain understanding based on the experiences and opinions of 16 graduates from four Christian school sites. To answer the research questions I developed a model to show the SIFT grounded in the data from Research Questions 1 and 2. Data was gained from personal interviews with administrators, document review from the four schools, interviews with the 16 co-researchers, scores from the STI, and one focus group session. The SIFT model expands the Identity Achievement Theory (Marcia, 1966) to include biblical foundations; the tri-pod influence of home, church, and school; and the Social Causal Mechanism of Connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009).

Data analysis occurred in stages beginning with open coding to determine the major categories (Charmaz, 2010; Gall et al., 2007). Nine categories emerged in the open coding. The *in vivo code*, “make it my own” was identified from the data and classified as a theme (Strauss, 1987). In the axial coding stage, the comments and experiences of the co-researchers

were applied to the three research questions as a means to determine central phenomenon and causal conditions. The Grounded Theory Coding Chart was used to organize categories (see Appendix M).

A group report (Table 4, Spiritual Transformation Inventory Mean Scores) was generated from statistical data from the STI scores of each of the participants to compare 31 indicators of spiritual growth and constructs (Hall, 2006). The 31 indicator scales are based on the concept of relational spirituality (Hall, 2012) and categorized into five domains of spiritual connection: connecting to God, connecting through spiritual practices, connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, and connecting to God's Kingdom.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The findings add support to the literature calling for the home, church, and school to work together in the spiritual formation process of our children and young people (Black, 2006; Shultz, 2006; Uecker et al., 2007). The young adults in the study attest to the fact that each of these institutions played significant roles in their development. However, the greatest influence on spiritual stamina was the depth of personal commitment to Christ and identity in Christ which came through a crisis or point of challenge. The *in vivo code* "make it my own" was used by co-researchers to describe this point of realization.

The testimonies of these young adults concur with the findings in a study conducted by the Barna Group of 1,296 young people between the ages of 18-29 it was found that 19% reported to have made an emotional decision to be a Christian early in life that didn't last past high school (Kinnaman, 2011). Marrah (2009) contended that the falling away might be due to the fact that "Their focus may be turned toward other Christians and less toward intimate time

with God” (p. 149). Students may be highly spiritually relational with the people in the Christian school setting but lack that same relationship with God.

Early commitments made in childhood or adolescence are often tested with a life crisis or faith challenge fording opportunities for extended periods of growth and exploration. The young adult graduates noted myriad experiences constituting life crisis or conflicts that opened them up to intense soul searching and questioning. They gave testimony to the support they received from family and friends, making the connection with both church and school. The co-researchers expressed gratitude for the foundational Truths they learned as children and the influence of the godly adults in their lives. Opportunities for ministry and connections with a community of believers in college, such as Campus Crusade or Inter-Varsity proved to be valuable as well. However, personal commitment and identity in Christ had the greatest influence on spiritual stamina.

Research Question 3 asked, “What is the relationship between the mission of the school and the graduates’ ability to maintain spiritual stamina?” Answers gleaned from the co-researchers confirmed the suggestions in literature that the lines between evangelistic schools and discipleship schools are not clearly marked and often one cannot distinguish the mission in the day-to-day activities of the school (Cardus, 2010; Firman & Gilson, 2010). The influence of peers was noted as the most prevalent difference in the two mission distinctives, but there was not full agreement on which was positive and which was negative. The Theory of Affordances (Gibson, 1979) may be applied here. Gibson saw a direct relationship between the goals held by an individual and what is personally extracted from their environment. For example, an individual strongly committed to the cause of Christ and striving to have a positive influence on the world may see an adverse environment as a mission field and gain spiritual fortitude.

Conversely, a Christian young person devoid of a self-identified purpose may struggle in relationship to their conflicting environment. The co-researchers in this study were those who show spiritual stamina now, in their 20s. However, in high school, four of these young adults saw the evangelistic approach as detrimental to their spiritual growth. Some enjoyed the outreach opportunities of evangelistic schools, some condemned the exclusivity of discipleship schools, and others did not make a distinction. Clarity of mission and a purposeful plan for implementation is needed.

Relating Findings to Theoretical Framework

The purpose of grounded theory research is to generate a new theory or to extend an existing theory. This research expands the existing Theory of Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966) by relating it to spiritual identity and the Christian school.

Attainment of spiritual identity through exploration can parallel the process described by Marcia (1966) in the Identity Achievement Theory. I extended Marcia's theory with the SIFT (Figure 1) which sets the ideal foundation as a home, church, and school based on biblical beliefs. Early commitments to Christ help to establish a strong faith base and secure ones identity in Christ.

The Spiritual Identity Formation follows the pattern of (a) crisis, (b) exploration, and (c) commitment. When an individual is faced with a conflict of faith or crisis in life, they may begin to actively question and evaluate their beliefs, values, goals, or social roles. This exploration may take them in one of two directions. They may choose a wide search for identity alternatives, new experiences, or exploration of other belief systems. They may experiment with drugs, alcohol, or alternative lifestyles. Marcia (1966) called this wide search "exploration in breadth." This type of exploration may result in a new commitment that is contrary to their former commitment to

biblical foundations. This may bring negative consequences such as confusion, depression, guilt, condemnation, or hopelessness.

Some choose instead to evaluate their existing commitments. Marcia (1966) labels this as exploration in depth. These individuals choose to look deeper into the foundational belief systems of their past and reaffirm that commitment. Those who follow this path return to their roots and to the people who connected them to Truth. These individuals establish a greater sense of their spiritual and personal identity and experience contentment and stamina.

The theoretical framework for this study also includes the Social Causal Mechanism of Connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009). Data supplied in personal interviews with the co-researchers confirmed the belief that connectivity promotes long-term participation in religious activities. Those who have made a solid faith connection with family, influential adults, and peers will have a greater likelihood to continue faith-building activities such as church attendance and prayer. This holds true for the solid spiritual formation and stamina of Christian school graduates. Co-researchers in this study attest to the fact that when they strayed from the faith or explored other options, they were drawn back to their foundations through a connection with the influential people in their past. In the SIFT, the concept of connectivity can be shown as the magnetic force that draws an individual back to the roots of the belief system taught at home, at church, or at school.

Implications for Practice

Christian school graduates who have achieved identity in Christ find it easier to stand firm in the face of conflicting worldviews and adverse circumstances. The role of the Christian school in this process, as described in Chapter Four, is to provide many opportunities for exploration in depth and a safe place for critical questioning. As students face daily challenges

and times of extreme crisis, there must be in place support systems and avenues for exploring the Truth of the Word of God.

Looking at the topic of exploration through the theoretical lens of Identity Achievement (Marcia, 1966), Bible classes, and worldview development activities aid in the process of an individual's exploration. Twelve of the sixteen co-researchers commented on the apologetic and biblical training aspect of their Christian school experience. Several mentioned the confirmation of their faith in Christ following the study of other world religions. This type of brief exploration in breadth, with the guidance of a godly teacher, can serve to strengthen understanding and commitment rather than destroy it.

A school environment which maintains teachers who are alert to mentoring opportunities, access to crisis counseling and peer groups with positive impact can bring about the Social Causal Mechanism of Connectivity (Smith & Snell, 2009) and make a great deal of difference in the direction a young person takes. Training young people to explore their belief system in depth when faced with a challenging situation can carry over into adulthood and set a pattern for asking the relevant questions, seeking proper advice, and deepening their commitment to Christ.

Solid Bible teaching, worldview development, and critical thinking skills are monumental in the life of a student as they are confronted with contrasting ideas and challenges to their faith. Several ideas were mentioned by the graduates that brought positive results such as: writing a philosophy paper during Senior Bible class, introduction to world religions, ministry involvement, moral reasoning exercises, and relationship building with Christian mentors. The focus group discussion centered primarily around the idea of preparing students to face the adverse opinions they are sure to encounter in college as well as in the workplace.

Co-researchers in the focus group setting offered ten additional suggestions:

- Include practical Christian living/ life lessons throughout high school Bible classes. Balance doctrine/worldview studies/life lessons.
- Be aware of those that have the attitude that learning the Bible will benefit me academically and help them focus on the personal benefits.
- Community mission opportunities, job skill training, and learning to share their faith may help to prepare students to be a resource for the world.
- High school history classes could daily show a clip from world news and discuss the historical and future ramifications. (Training for awareness and discernment).
- Conduct routine debates on topics pertinent to upholding a Christian worldview and biblical values (stress critical thinking and self-expression).
- Make connections with the local and regional campus ministries (i.e. Campus Crusade, Inter-Varsity, Fellowship of Christian Athletes) to help with the college transition.
- Emphasize the creation vs. evolution debate and prepare students to defend with reason and clarity.
- Organize mentoring teams between classes with younger students assigned to older students for support.
- Clarify the evangelistic or discipleship mission of the school with the administration and faculty and be intentional in the planning and implementation of the program.
- Clarify the evangelistic or discipleship mission of the school for the students and define their role in the implementation.

Trustworthiness

The methods of grounded theory are often judged by the quality and usefulness of the final product (Charmaz, 2010). The qualities assigned to qualitative research in general are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As these were discussed in Chapter 1 and procedures were followed in the methodology, I would like to focus on credibility of the current research.

The internal validity or credibility of my research is confirmed through prolonged engagement with the co-researchers and the data. Glaser & Strauss (2008) purport that in grounded theory research, it is vital that the researcher be personally convinced that the evidences in the data lead to the theory. In the process of data collection, extended time with co-researchers and analysis, I have developed a theory grounded in that data and believe it to be a credible outcome of analysis.

The triangulation of data is represented in data obtained from interviews with 16 co-researchers from the four schools, corroborated evidences from the focus group, and document review. I used a system of member checks to increase credibility by obtaining administrator sign-off on data from school documents and participant signatures on all interview transcriptions. The focus group was asked to review the analysis of the study and confirm the preliminary findings to be accurate. The focus group was also engaged in helping to review and finalize the model for the SIFT.

Resonance and usefulness show the degree of connectivity found between the findings and the audience. “A strong combination of originality and credibility increase resonance, usefulness, and the subsequent value of the contribution” (Glaser & Strauss, 2008, p. 183). I

trust that this study will resonate with Christian school educators and leaders as we together strive to understand the role of the school in the spiritual stamina of our graduates.

Limitations

Limitations of this study involved the number of participants or co-researchers enlisted. The 16 participants represented four schools which did not produce adequate data points from the STI for an accurate analysis of some aspects of the test. I have included only the data that was conclusive in order to avoid misrepresentation of the results.

Another point of limitation comes from the fact that the young adult graduates were asked to reflect on their experiences at their Christian school that occurred between three and 10 years ago. The administrators, however, were speaking in present tense. There may be discrepancies in the opinion of the school based on any number of changes that may have taken place in the mean time. Therefore, I did not directly compare the administrator interviews to the voice of the graduates; I simply gave a synopsis of the discussion.

Recommendations for Future Study

One concept discussed in the literature on Emerging Adults is that of ruminative exploration which is described as the act of “delaying or inhibiting progress in identity development” (Luyckx et al., 2012, p. 1127). “Troubled by what they perceive as inadequate progress towards personally important identity goals, they keep asking themselves the same question, resulting in feelings of uncertainty and incompetence” (p. 1127). What is the connection between ruminative exploration and weak religious socialization and the transmission of the language of faith? The Christian school plays a role in religious socialization and biblical worldview development. A study of those graduates who do not succeed in the formation of a

spiritual identity, or those who are caught in ruminative exploration, may help to build understanding of the gaps that exist in Christian education and help to bring solutions.

Another aspect of the identity theory is that of foreclosure. A foreclosure status of identity development may be the result in which an individual commits to parental (or school) ideas and beliefs without question or self- integration of those beliefs (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Based on the results of this study, it is paramount that an individual develop a spiritual identity and integrate the belief system or “make it their own” in order to maintain spiritual stamina. A study to investigate a possible negative result of a Christian school education may be revealing. Does the Christian school atmosphere produce foreclosure? If so, how can this be avoided or minimized?

Additional studies incorporating The STI (Hall, 2010) could be used to produce data on an entire student body to indicate the effects of worldview training. This may have implications for mission distinctives and curriculum planning.

Tracking second-generation enrollment in the Christian school could reveal the depth of connectivity and school impact on the graduates. A follow-up study could look into the topic of Christian school graduates who enroll their own children in a Christian school, those who choose public versus Christian schools and the role their Christian education played in the decision. This investigation may produce evidences for determining best practices for improving school loyalty.

Conclusion

This grounded theory investigation began with a general understanding of spiritual formation but with no hypothesis to prove, I allowed the data to lead and the results were surprising. The surprise did not come in the tri-pod foundation of home, church, and school or in

the personal commitment aspects of spiritual stamina. The most enlightening truth was found in identity. Once an individual personally achieves identity in Christ, they can be sure of who they are and what they stand for or against. Knowing that the attainment of that identity comes through exploration and commitment inspires the Christian educator to be intentional in helping students along the journey.

The SIFT combines the scriptural truths of Ecclesiastes 4:12, “A threefold cord is not easily broken” with that of Psalm 25: 4-5, “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

Sentiments from the young adults such as “knowing who I am in Christ”, “making it my own”, and “falling in love with Jesus”, cannot be manufactured or produced by the Christian school. However, deepening our understanding of how those identities are formed may increase awareness and draw out creative ideas for strengthening the process over time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



The Graduate School at Liberty University

April 8, 2013

Violet E. Long

IRB Approval 1574.040813: The Role of Christian Education in the Development of Spiritual Stamina in Young Adult Graduates of Christian Schools

Dear Violet,

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

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

Sincerely,



Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054



Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix B: Consent Form for School Site

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL STAMINA IN YOUNG ADULT GRADUATES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Violet Long
Liberty University
Department of Education

I request permission to include your school in this study for the purpose of investigating the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in the graduates from your Christian school.

This study is being conducted by: Violet E. Long, Liberty University, Department of Education

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in Christian high school graduates who go on to secular universities or colleges.

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your school to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Submit a formal letter of agreement letter on school letterhead.

Participate in a maximum of two interview sessions and allow access to pertinent documents concerning mission statement, philosophy, spiritual formation, and faculty requirements.

In addition, I request that you recommend five or six graduates, who have attended a Christian school all 12 years, attended a secular college or university and are currently showing spiritual stamina (ages 21-30).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks are no more than would be encountered in everyday life. The proposed benefits to teachers and administrators of Christian Schools will be a greater understanding of the spiritual formation of students and the implications to the school programs and mission.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. A pseudonym will be used for the school and participants. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Violet Long. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me at: E-mail: velong@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact Dr. Gail Collins at gcollins2@liberty.edu or the Human Subject Office, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Document Review Checklist

ID	1	2	3	4
Pseudonym	ACS	BCA	CCS	DCA
School	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]
	School	School		
Enrollment approach	Evangelistic	Discipleship	Discipleship Evang.	Evangelistic Discipleship
Administrator	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]
Consent signed	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interview	4-18-13 ✓	4-19-13 ✓	4-16-13 ✓	4-15-13 ✓
Recommended Participants	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transcription completed	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mission Statement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Curriculum indicators	✓	✓	Verbal	✓
Alumni Info For 2nd generation	—	✓	—	—
Student evidences				
Follow-up debrief				
	4-18-13	4-19-13	4-16-13	4-15-13

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Administrators

Table 8

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for School Administrator Participants

1. How would you describe your vision for the graduates of your school?
2. Would you consider your school to have a discipleship or an evangelistic focus? How does that affect enrollment policies?
3. What programs or activities does your school have in place that particularly target spiritual formation or worldview development?
4. Are there aspects of teacher or staff recruitment, hiring, or training that deal with spiritual formation or worldview?
5. What do you perceive as the impact of your school's mission (evangelistic or discipleship) on student spiritual formation and stamina?
6. Could you share a success story?

Appendix E: Request for Recommendations for Co-Researchers

(Sent via e-mail to Administrators)

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study on the Role of Christian Education in the development of spiritual stamina in young adult graduates of Christian schools. I have received approval from the Internal Review Board of Liberty University to pursue my study; therefore, I request your assistance in the next steps for data collection.

I am seeking to find young adults interested in being co-researchers for this study. Please send contact information for 5-10 graduates who meet the following criteria, and whom you feel would possibly be good candidates for the study.

1. Age 21-30
2. Attended a Christian school for all 12 years of school from elementary through high school (not necessarily the same one)
3. Attend a secular college or university (one that does not claim religious affiliation or membership in Council for Christian Colleges & Universities)
4. Displays a strong Christian faith and spiritual stamina (please complete and attach the confidential spiritual evidences checklist for each graduate)

Please forward names, contact information, and spiritual evidences checklist to me as soon as possible and I will contact them personally to enlist participants.

Also, I would like to visit your school, take a look at your Bible curriculum, and meet a few people to get an overall feel for your school prior to interviewing your graduates. Would it be possible for me to stop in on (insert date)?

Thank you, again for your willingness to pursue this study. May God continue to bless your ministry and strengthen the spiritual depth of your students.

Sincerely,

Violet Long

Liberty University

276-732-9168

Appendix F: Spiritual Evidences Checklist

Name of Graduate _____ School _____

Please rate graduates individually in the following areas of spiritual evidences (five =highest).
These scores will remain CONFIDENTIAL.

Consistent church attendance	1	2	3	4	5	unknown
------------------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---------

Christian testimony	1	2	3	4	5	unknown
---------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---------

Wholesome lifestyle	1	2	3	4	5	unknown
---------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---------

Christian service	1	2	3	4	5	unknown
-------------------	---	---	---	---	---	---------

Note: I understand that these do not always indicate spiritual strength (only God can see the heart) but this will provide a starting point for selection of participants for the study. Thank you.

Please identify any other evidences of spiritual strength for this individual.

Appendix G: Initial Request for Co-researcher Participation

(Send via e-mail)

Dear _____,

As a graduate of (school name here), you were suggested to me as a possible co-researcher on a project to study some aspects of your Christian education. I would love to have your unique perspective on school life and especially the spiritual foundations. Sound interesting?

Let me explain. I am Violet Long, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am conducting a study concerning the role of the Christian school in the spiritual stamina of graduates who attend non-Christian colleges.

(School name) has agreed to join me in this investigative study and submitted your name along with four other graduates who may be interested in helping as co-researchers.

This would involve:

1. Taking an on-line spiritual assessment inventory (results are private)
2. Completing a short spiritual journey timeline to refresh your memory
3. Some face-to-face time discussing your special insights and spiritual journey
4. And possibly collaborating with friends to give feedback to your school.

I would like to complete the project this spring and let you and (school name) know the results. Please contact me via return e-mail, call or text 276-732-9168 to let me know of your interest and I will forward the full details. Are you in?

More questions? Please contact me. I am anxious to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Violet Long

Liberty University

Appendix H: Consent Form for Co-Researchers

THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL STAMINA IN YOUNG ADULT GRADUATES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Violet E. Long
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in young adult graduates of Christian schools. You have been purposefully selected to participant because you are a graduate from a Christian school who did not attend a Christian college or university. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Violet E. Long, Liberty University, Department of Education

Background Information:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate role of Christian education in the development of spiritual stamina in Christian high school graduates who go on to secular universities or colleges.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Take an on-line STI, (results are private), complete a spiritual journey timeline and participate in one interview session. Focus groups may be formed to allow collaboration with graduates from your school involving one extra interview session.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks are no more than would be encountered in everyday life. The proposed benefits to teachers and administrators of Christian Schools will be a greater understanding of the spiritual formation of students and the implications to the school programs and mission.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. A pseudonym will be used for the school and participants. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Violet Long. You may ask any questions you have now.

If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me via:

e-mail: velong@liberty.edu or Cell # 276-731-9168 call or text

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Human Subject Office, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

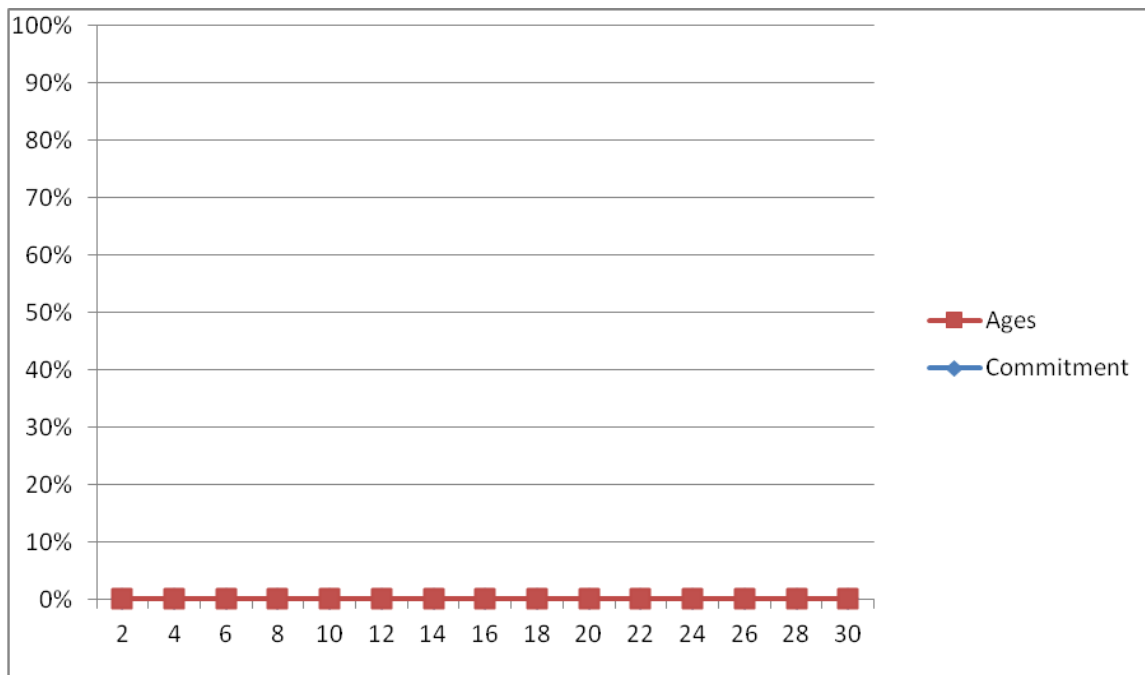
Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix I: Spiritual Journey Timeline Guide

Instructions: Please plot and label on the timeline the age at which you experienced any significant event (positive or negative) that had an effect on your spiritual formation. (i.e. Salvation, youth activity, camps, chapel, mission trips, point of new commitment, mentoring, relationship, crisis points, etc.)

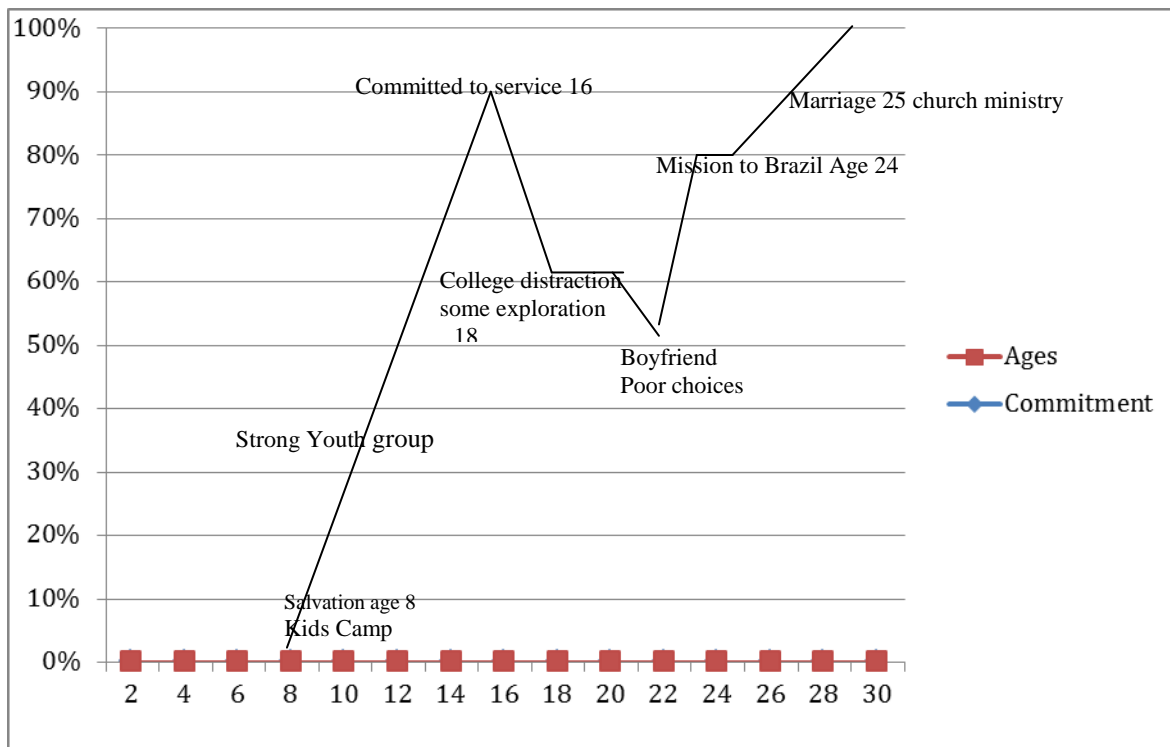
Indicate how you would rate (0 to 10) your strength of commitment and relationship to God at each age by drawing a line graph. 0%= no knowledge of God 100%= extremely close to God.

(See sample below)



Please bring this with you during our interview time to aid discussion.

Sample: Spiritual Journey Timeline



Appendix J: Interview Questions

Table 8

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions for young adult participants

Questions

1. Please describe your spiritual journey.
2. Do you feel that your commitment to Christ came naturally as you followed your parents or did commitment come with exploration of other faith options?
3. To what do you attribute your current spiritual strength?
4. Why did you choose to attend a secular versus a Christian institution of higher education?
5. What challenges have you faced to test your spiritual commitments?
6. What strategies did you use to face those challenges?
7. What was it about your Christian Education made a positive or negative impact on your spiritual walk?
8. What do you perceive as the impact of your school's mission (evangelistic or discipleship) on your personal spiritual growth?

Appendix K: Sample Interview Transcription

Sara

Calvary Christian Academy

July 10, 2013

V: Could you describe for me your spiritual journey?

S: I became a Christian when I was nine. I grew up in a Christian family so it's always been something that was taught to me. I also went to a Christian school K-12 so it's always been around (did you go to Calvary from K-12?) Yes, I was saved at nine and baptized in the same year. So, you kind of go through riding the coattails of your parents in a way. So I did that. Then in middle school or eighth grade, I rededicated my life and decided I wanted to be my own faith. I wanted to live that way. So, then high school was a period of growth for me, just figuring out who I was and what I wanted to stand for and live for and good things like that. Then I went off to college. My first semester, it was kind of one of those things I describe to people where you grow up and you're taught the right things to do but Christian school and church and family it doesn't go with you. And I entered a period of like, from the second semester of my freshmen year until about a probably year and half ago where I just struggled with it and made some pretty bad choices. I just kind of existed in my faith. I never doubted it or turned away from it but I was just kind of living selfishly and didn't really care about all of it. It was a compartmentalized thing. Then about a year and half ago, God really got a hold of my life and I just completely gave it up to Him. I have experienced so much growth since then and community, and just wanting to do the things Jesus wants me to do. I've explained it to people recently that grace was something that was taught to me and I never experienced it. But, now I'm in a place where I lived the way that I shouldn't so I recognize it even more. I recognize grace and His love and things like that. So, that's the basic highlights of it. Up until college things were pretty good, I lost it for a bit, and now I'm back and serving Him.

V: Wow, great testimony! Do you feel that your commitment to Christ came naturally, as you followed your parents?

S: Yes, when you're raised that way, it's all you know. So, I could specifically... I guess people could challenge my testimony and say, "You weren't really saved until a year and a half ago". But, I specifically remember lying in bed and like feeling the tug, "I need to do this now!" I remember it was after my bedtime and I called my dad in there and said, "Dad, I have to do this now!" I remember that, so there's no doubt in my mind that was when I was first became saved. But it was normal. My whole family is a Christian so it's not something...so at nine, I went to a Christian school, I go to Church, this is something God wants me to do so, I'm gonna do that.

V: So you never had any exploration of other faiths?

S: Nope, never.

V: So to what do you attribute your current spiritual strength?

S: I would attribute it to living a different way and recognizing how empty that is. ... Recognizing that when you're live for yourself and you stop caring about something bigger than you and something you've always believed in, there is just a sense of just emptiness and depression and just... so, I would say it is definitely knowing that I don't want to go back there. It's not like an obligation type thing, I just know that is not the life I want and not the life Jesus wants for me. So, I would say it is just from all the years of growing and growing up and realizing "this is true!" So many times, He's been faithful. So, I can't deny that He's been good to me. He's real and true. I just say it's from the years of college and being a little bit doubtful and things like that.

V: Why did you choose to go to a secular school rather than a Christian school?

S: Actually, I did go to Liberty my first semester. So, I did choose to go Christian and then it just wasn't for me. It was just one of those things where, if you fit, you fit. If you don't, you don't and I think that initially ... I went to Liberty, and I came home and I went to a local university, which was a secular college. I don't think it was a decision of I don't want to go to a Christian school anymore. That was just what was available to me. So, I don't know that there was a definite line of why I chose Christian or chose secular. They both have played a huge roll in who I am now. I initially ended up at a state school for financial reasons. It's cheaper than Christian education. And I'd also been in Christian education for 13 or 14 years, so it was just something different too.

V: What challenges have you faced that tested your spiritual commitment?

S: I would say the state university would be the one thing that recently, past the troublesome years, because it is a very liberal school. And that's what they do. Secular colleges teach secular lifestyle and secular ideas. So, they are very good at presenting it in a way that is very convincing. So, I'd say that's been my biggest struggle in just staying firm and knowing that I'm okay in what I believe. Because you're in the minority and I have never been in the minority before. I grew up around people that were like me. So, going there and realizing not everyone is like me, was really tough. I went through a lot of things that were good for me because I realized what I DO know and believe. But, there were times when I thought, "should I be following what they're saying or should I be following what the Bible says? Is that really true? There's a period of time when I really had to search for answers in the Word and pray about it. Especially in social work, there are a lot of controversial issues that you'll come up on. So, I'd say that was my biggest challenge.

V: What kind of strategies did you use to face those challenges?

S: I sometimes would talk to my parents a lot. I was pretty open with them about the issues I was struggling with. I would look up in the Bible what it said about certain things and I would challenge myself. If I'm a Christian and if I believed the Bible to be true in its entirety, then these things still apply. People used the argument that culture is changing so we should be changing too. But then, I came to the conclusion that God knew that culture was gonna change when the Bible was written and it still was written the way it was written. That was my ultimate... like okay, This is right and it is still right, it's right today and it will be right 1000 years from now. That was really just prayer and seeking that out and just talking it out in what I thought. Even if I was wrong, I talked to my grandpa and my dad and people that are older, and even if I was wrong they can tell me what they think and I can look it up.

V: What about your Christian education at Calvary, made a positive or negative impact on your spiritual walk?

S: I would say it's mostly positive. I was actually talking to my dad about this earlier tonight about what I was going to talk about and...my mom's a teacher there, my dad's on the board and my sister went there. So, we're very much in to Christian education. I definitely support Christian education but I think that the only negative thing is that you're kind of in a bubble. ...recognize reality is actually going to face you. That's like what I said, when I left Christian education I didn't know what the world was gonna throw at me or how vulnerable I would be because you get in this place of, "I'm invincible" like I grew up this way, and you're not. Positively, I was taught a lot about the Bible and taught the right things to do. I went through senior year; we did a class called *Understanding the Times* where we learned about different religions and social issues which was really good. But, I think it's probably something that should have been taught all through high school because it's almost too late when you're 18 and your mind is one track, "I know what I'm talking about". But I think over-all it was very positive to grow up in that environment and that culture but I also think the negative part was just being in that bubble of all Christian people. Because that's not reality. It is as you live as Christians because you want to live in community with other people but in terms of going to a secular college, that's not reality. You have to find those people. You have to seek them out and really get into community. So, I would say that's the only negative part.

V: Did you find a community at the school that you hung with?

S: No, I was close so I had community at church in terms of small group and being a leader in the youth group. I would say that the downfall of my college experience was the lack of community for a while. I transferred so many times so I was constantly losing how I had already been stable. That was a challenge for me to find that community. And I never found it at the state university, it just didn't happen.

V: What do you perceive as the impact of your school's mission statement? (Explained evangelistic or discipleship)

S: It's discipleship.

V: What do you think the impact was on you? Or did it make any difference?

S: I think it is. After I left, they came up with this condensed mission statement. I think it's like *To Know and Live the Truth* or something like that. They make it a big deal now. They didn't really do that when I was there. I think we had a mission statement but it wasn't something that was said all the time or talked about. As far as discipleship goes...I don't know. If we're talking in high school...I don't really know that I grasped what discipleship was

because you're surrounded by peers. I don't think you can be disciple by peers... you can but to me discipleship is more mentoring...I guess, pouring into others. There were definitely teachers there that I could not be more thankful for. If I had to mention one of the positive things about Christian education, that would be it. Because they...there are teachers that I would still be okay with going to talk to because they care. They care about you as a person. They care about grades but that's not why they're here. They're there to be an influence on you in any way that they can. Like my dad was diagnosed with cancer my senior year of high school and so, to see teachers really disciple me and be there for me in that aspect was...you can't find that anywhere else. And that's something I missed in college, were teachers that really care about my personal life and what's going on outside of school. So, I'd say that's how discipleship really affected me but I don't know that there was... There were some male teachers that were big into discipleship and they would do it one on one... guys that wanted to. So, it's available and it's there. But, I wouldn't say it's a very evangelistic school.

V: Okay, Did their enrollment policy have much to do with your peer group that you ended up with? Were most of your peers Christians? (yeah, I would say so) That sometimes changes the face of the school if they allow in more people that they wish to evangelize rather than a discipleship focus.

S: Yeah, I would say it definitely impacted my friend group. I am actually still best friends with the girls I was best friends with in high school. So that's a definite positive thing that came out of it too. Because I wouldn't have been surrounded by people with like-minded values and morals, beliefs and goals. Obviously, that's the thing...people think that Christian school kids are all like, "Oh, you're a Christian school kid so you're obviously perfect." But there are kids in there that aren't Christians or following the school rules and things like that. You do have to sign a statement when you go in that you're gonna follow this and this and that. I don't think you have to say that you're a Christian. I think it's more of a lifestyle thing. I don't think you have to profess to be a Christian. I don't really remember because, kindergarten (you really didn't have to do it)...yeah. But it really impacted who I was friends with.

V: That's all the questions I have unless you can think of something else you'd like to tell me about school or any advice for administrators.

S: I think the only thing I would pick out. I was discussing with my dad. I don't know that Christian education got me to where I am today because Christian education didn't make me fall in love with Jesus. You have to do that by yourself. But, I would say it's a great foundation. But, I also came from a Christian family. So, it's a two-folded thing where I might have had it with or without. I don't know and I'm not going to know. But, I think for administration...to recognize reality and that their kids are gonna leave. I know they do and they talk about it but I don't know that they really prepare you for it early enough. Especially going into high school, you're so vulnerable and you're coming up with things that you believe and you think. So, doing that stuff and just keep having Bible classes and learning about the Bible...that's not the same as learning about Jesus and how that is going to go with you in the real world. So, there is that big difference that needs to be recognized there and if you want your kids to really live out the Truth. There is that reality that's gonna hit you right in the face. I think that's the only advice I can give as someone who faced reality in a negative way. I don't know if they could have stopped that from happening but I left thinking I was fine and invincible...and I wasn't! That's the big thing, just not assuming that everybody is ready to go just because you taught them some Bible stories and stuff like that. That's about it.

Please type your initials and the date below if you approve this transcription of our interview session. If there are any items you would like to strike or change, please indicate with highlight or make note of it here.

Thank you,

Violet Long

Approval: XXX Date: 7/26/13

Appendix L: Focus Group Questions

Introductions and Welcome (serve food and drinks)

Overview of study results: explain the research questions, process of data collection, STI feedback, and the categories gleaned thus far from data analysis

Discussion topics:

1. Agree or disagree? Moral choices and actions most often reflect the spiritual level at which an individual left high school. (Point: does exploration take place?)
2. Do you feel that biblical integration really happens or is it relegated to Bible class and chapel? (Point: how are the schools doing in the area of biblical worldview training?)
3. How could the school create an environment to “develop men and women who are a resource for a rapidly changing and scary world” (Smitherman, ‘09)? (Point: ideas for strengthening preparation)

***Introduce the model for The Spiritual Identity Formation Theory**

4. How could the school have provided more “exploration in depth” for your spiritual growth? (Point: glean ideas about crisis and challenge exploration for students)
5. How could we build on the natural “crisis and challenge” that young people face?
6. How could we (or should we) try to work with campus ministries to provide connection?
7. Any advice for school administration to encourage spiritual growth and stamina?

Appendix M: Grounded Theory Coding Form

Code 1:Salvation and Commitment	Personal Commitments	Personal Identity	Spiritual Identity Attainment
Code 2: Home and Family			
Code 3: Church			
Code 4: Church Peers	Home/ Church		
Code 5: Missions and service	Crisis/Challenge	Spiritual Commitments	
Code 6: Crisis/ Challenge			
Code 7: School	School		
Code 8: School Peers			

Figure 2. Grounded Theory Methodology Workflow Chart