

CHRISTIAN MUSIC EXPERIENCES IN THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF  
ADOLESCENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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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, phenomenology study was to discover how Christian music experiences affect the faith development of adolescents. The lived experiences are the on-going process in which adolescents develop through the stages of faith and how Christian music fits into that process. The participants were adolescents who participated in a youth group with an active music experience on a weekly basis. I used the transcendental phenomenology model which included the *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of texture and structure to collect, gather, and analyze the data. Data were collected from 11 adolescents utilizing observations, Fowler's Life Tapestry Journal, Fowler's Faith Development Instrument, and Christian music experiences interview questions. I analyzed the data using systematic phenomenology procedures by developing individual textural and structural descriptions, compositing textural and structural descriptions, and synthesizing textural and structural meanings and essences of the Christian music experience in the faith development of adolescents. This study resulted in compelling and insightful phenomenological descriptions about the faith development of adolescents and how Christian music affects their development.

*Keywords:* music, faith development, Christianity, youth, singing, phenomenology

## **Dedication Page**

I dedicate this paper to Jesus Christ. I am thankful that He called me to get this degree, provided a way financially for my tuition, and gave me a family that supported me each step of the way. I owe my husband the most gratitude. He has provided me an office in our home, taken care of children at night in order for me to work, and coached me to work past my bedtime to “get it done.” Without his sacrifices, I would never have gotten this far. I want to thank my three children, Emma, Sarah, and Jake, for allowing me quiet time to work. They have sacrificed also so that I could get this degree. I also want to acknowledge my parents’ role in my dissertation process. They have provided moral support and also financial support. Without them, this would have been a lot more stressful. I want to thank Dr. Lucinda Spaulding for her guidance in EDUC 919, and Dr. James Swezey for his encouraging emails and expert attention to details in my work. Last but not least, I want to thank my principal, Joy McDowell. She has been incredibly supportive during these four years I have been working diligently on this degree. She has understood on the days I have run out of the school building right after the last bell. I am thankful for her support and listening ear.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Faith shapes our life purposes, meanings, trusts, loyalties, character, worldview, value, and power. Faith determines our ultimate condition of existence (Fowler, 1981, 1991). Whether or not one belongs to a particular religious group, each person is engaged in forming relationships with others based on trust and loyalty. Each person's commitments reflect what one chooses as his or her causes or centers of value (Fowler, 1991). The center of value refers to where people place their hearts, focus their lives in persons, causes, ideals, or even institutions that mean so much to humans. The center of value gives meaning to our lives (Fowler, 1991). This dissertation is interested in the role music plays as a center of value for adolescents and how it influences their faith.

Music plays an important role in all cultures (Allsup, 2003; Hallam, 2010; Shore, 2010). According to The Henry J. Kaiser Family Report (2010), children aged 8-18 average listening to 2 hours 31 minutes of music per day. Eighty-six percent of children from the ages of 8-18 have access to CD or MP3 players in their bedrooms (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009). Music is widely accessible. Further, it has been used for years to enhance play (Griffin, 2010), demonstrate patriotism (Cleveland, 1994; Wickstrom & Steinholt, 2009), express love (Watson, 2012), deal with pain (Franck, Sheikh, & Oulton, 2008), and help calm anxieties (Chang, Chung-Hey, & Huang, 2008; Labbe, Schmidt, Babin, & Pharr, 2007).

Music expresses faith (Hartje, 2009; Johnstone, 2010; Tucker, 2009; Wickstrom & Steinholt, 2009), affects the mind (Chang, Chung-Hey, & Huang, 2008; Griffin, 2010; Pereira et al., 2011; Petrini, Crabbe, Sheridan, & Pollick, 2011; Schubert, 2007; ), and touches emotions (Pereira et al., 2011; Petrini et al., 2011; Schubert, 2007). Bosacki, Elliot, Akseer, and Bajovic (2010) showed there was a connection to children's faith development and the child's personal

music listening preferences, and the parents' listening preferences. Children who listened to Christian music and other religious media (reading, movies, TV) were more apt to speak of religious references than children who did not. Bosacki et al. (2010) encouraged further study of music listening habits and the connection to children's understanding of religiosity and spirituality. Since music uniquely connects with faith, the brain, and emotions, Christian educators, church leaders, and families should look carefully at the role music has in the worship experience and in the personal music decisions of adolescents.

## **Background**

### **Historical**

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, music has played a role in faith from Old Testament times all the way through to the New Testament church. References for music can be found from Genesis through Revelation (Tucker, 2009). Some of the Old Testament references for music and faith include when Miriam sang to the Lord once the Israelites crossed over the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), the Israelites sang to God when He provided them water in the desert (Numbers 21:27), Israelite judges, Deborah and Barak, sang to celebrate a victory in battle (Judges 5:1-3), the women sang in the street to celebrate David killing Goliath (I Samuel 18:6), and the Levites sang when the Temple was dedicated (II Chronicles 29:25-29).

The Psalms are full of commandments to sing (Psalm 9:11; Psalm 30:4; Psalm 33:2-3; Psalm 47:6-7; Psalm 66:2; Psalm 68:4; Psalm 81:1; Psalm 98:4-5; Psalm 100:2; Psalm 101:1; Psalm 105:2; Psalm 135:3; Psalm 147:1; Psalm 149:3, 5). There are also scriptures in Psalm that instruct to not only sing but also sing a new song (Psalm 33:3; Psalm 96:1-2; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 149:1). Brink (2012) said that Psalm is "the gift of God that gives the people a language to improve their relationship with each other and with God" (p. 48). Psalm has the unique ability to

mold and transform Christian believers (Morgan, 2012).

The New Testament also references singing and music multiple times. Jesus sang with his disciples at the Last Supper (Mark 14:26; Matthew 26:30). Paul and Silas sang while they were imprisoned (Acts 16:25), and Paul encouraged other Christians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).

Just like the leaders of the New Testament church encouraged Christians to sing, the church leaders of the early Protestant church encouraged Christians to sing also. There are three leaders in the early years of the Protestant movement that especially impacted music in the church. Martin Luther, in Germany, loved music and wrote music for the church. To him, music was a gift from God and needed to be used in worship (Morgan, 2012). Zwingli, in Zurich, appreciated music, understood its power to transform, but also feared its power. He limited the use of music in his ministry. John Calvin, in Geneva, was a balance between Martin and Zwingli. He allowed only metrical psalms to be sung during worship services. He did recognize that music was a gift of God and could be given back to God through congregational singing (Morgan, 2012).

## **Social**

Relationships are at the core of humanity and also in adolescents' musical preferences (Hargreaves, Marshall, & North, 2003; Hodder, 2009; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989; Leung & Kier, 2008; McPherson, 2006; Wills, 2011). Children and adolescents develop musical tastes from what they hear at home, at school, church, and with peers (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009; Serbun & DeBono, 2010; Tshabalala & Patel, 2010). Relationships also play an important role in children and adolescents' faith development (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2007; Bosacki et al., 2010; Csordas, 2009; Hodder, 2009). Since they do develop musical tastes

and faith from those with whom they have strong relationships, this connection needs to be closely studied in order to understand the role Christian music plays in an adolescent's faith development.

The relationship between music and children has been researched from the educational, cultural, and physical aspects. Many studies have examined how music helps children learn to talk (Miranda, 2011), play (Griffin, 2010), connect with others (Allsup, 2003; Hallam, 2010; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989), and relax (Chang et al., 2008; Labbe et al., 2007; Leung & Kier, 2008; Serbun & DeBono, 2010). In 2009, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement of just how important music, music lyrics, and music videos were to children and adolescents. AAP (2009) stated, "Listening to popular music is considered by society to be a part of growing up" (p. 1488). Their research concluded that popular music played an important role in the socialization of children and adolescents. Children are able to access music easily through the radio, various recordings, the internet, and new technologies. They are able to hear music in a variety of situations, alone, or shared with friends (AAP, 2009).

Some studies have shown that adolescents use popular music to deal with their loneliness or moods (AAP, 2009; Seyedfatemi, Tafreshi, & Hagani, 2007). They even use music to help with their identity formation (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Delsing, Bogt, Engels, & Meeus, 2008). Music preference helps adolescents achieve group identity and integrate into the youth culture. Research also has shown a connection between music preference and adolescents' abilities to resolve unconscious conflicts related to their particular developmental stage (AAP, 2009). The AAP's (2009) concern was that popular music over the years was increasing in the number of references to drugs, sex, and violence. Due to easy access of this music and the ability for children and adolescents to listen to it privately through iPods, MP3 players, and

headsets, parents can be unaware of the lyrics that are helping children form their behaviors and attitudes from this type of music exposure (AAP, 2009).

## **Physical**

When children are actively involved in music, there can be positive or negative effects on their intellectual, social, and personal development (AAP, 2009; Becknell et al., 2008; Hallam, 2010; Mast & McAndrew, 2011; Mulder, Bogt, Raaijmakers, & Vollebergh, 2007; Mulder et al., 2009; Shore, 2010). Brain technologies and qualitative and quantitative psychological and educational research explain how musical skills may transfer to other activities if the processes involved are similar (Hallam, 2010). Music also influences language development, literacy, numeracy, measures of intelligence, general attainment, creativity, fine motor co-ordination, concentration, self-confidence, emotional sensitivity, social skills, team work, self-discipline, and relaxation (Chang et al., 2008; Hallam, 2010; Labbe et al., 2007; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Tang, & Vezeau, 2010). Knowing that musical skills may transfer to other activities opens the door for implications that faith development could be enhanced with musical activities. This is a crucial part in understanding the role of music in faith development.

Music and emotions work together. Emotions elicit changes in cognition, judgment, experiences, behavior, and physiology (Epstein, 1994; Scherer & Zentner, 2008). Researchers (Pereira et al., 2011) have found through functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRIs) of the brain that emotions trigger certain parts of the brain. The brain is able to function at higher levels when someone is happy, relaxed, or satisfied. When music is familiar to the listener, it has a higher connection to the limbic and reward centers of the brain. When the music is preferred, the trigger is even greater (Pereira et al., 2011). The field of neuroscience has found connections among emotions, social functioning, and decision making. Neurobiology has shown that

learning, attention, memory, decision making, and social functioning are profoundly affected by and incorporated within the emotions (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Emotions and music are closely related and must be considered when discovering the role music plays in faith development.

### **Fowler's Stages of Faith**

Fowler (2004) defined faith as “broadly recognizable patterns of development that are characterized in terms of developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses” (p. 405). His work on faith development was based at Harvard University in 1981 where he and his graduate students developed six stages of faith development. He based his theory mainly on the works of Piaget (1969), Erikson (1963), and Kohlberg (1975).

In some of Fowler's research, primal faith is listed as the first stage of faith (Fowler, 1981, 2004). That stage is during infancy. The majority of texts refer to just six stages of faith, and begin with the intuitive-projective faith during early childhood (ages 6 and under) as stage one. The second stage is the mythic-literal faith (loosely 7-12 years old). This stage is oriented to reward and punishment. The third stage is synthetic-conventional faith and is characterized by individuals being oriented to one's own group and implicit reasoning. Mostly adolescents and adulthood fall in this stage. The fourth stage is individuative-reflective faith. During this stage, young adults and beyond are able to move past the implicit reasoning found in stage three and develop an explicit system of reasoning. The fifth stage is conjunctive faith and is found in early midlife and beyond. Conjunctive faith is categorized by a second naiveté that recognizes the suggestive power inherent in symbols. The last stage and least acquired stage is universalizing faith. This is found in midlife and beyond (Astley, 2000; Fowler, 1981; Keller & Streib, 2013). This faith has been “described as loyalty to being and purged of ego striving” (Keller & Streib,

2013, p. 2).

Within each of the stages of faith, Fowler described how it would like using seven different aspects. Keller and Streib (2013) list those aspects as “logic (Piaget), perspective taking (Selman), moral judgment (Kohlberg), bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, forms of world coherence, and symbolic functioning” (p. 2). Fowler (1981) described these aspects in detail in his book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. These stages are even more defined in the *Manual for Faith Development Research* which was edited in 2004 by James Fowler, Heinz Streib, and Barbara Keller. This manual gives examples of what to look for during the faith interview in determining how to analyze stages. The aspects of Fowler’s stages play a crucial role in the data analysis (Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004).

### **Situation to Self**

The topic of music and faith development for adolescents is of personal and professional interest to me because I am situated between both disciplines as a Christian school teacher and a minister. I have been teaching music in a Christian school for five years. I have had my minister’s certification with the International Pentecostal Holiness Church for about six years. I also believe that the scriptures have revealed His truth to me concerning how Christians are to educate children. On a personal note, I have three children who are not yet into adolescence. I see how important music has been in their personal development thus far. I want to know more about the role music will play in their adolescent years.

### **Philosophical Assumptions and Paradigm**

The qualitative research design begins with philosophical assumptions that I make in determining to undertake a study. I bring in my worldviews, paradigms, or set of beliefs into the



qualitative study. Those philosophical assumptions and paradigms must be “explicit in the writing of a study, and at minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15).

**Ontological.** The ontological assumption of this study infers that multiple perceptions of reality exist in youth services. Youth ministers, youth leaders, peers, and families contribute to each other’s perceptions of faith development. To help interpret the realities of the adolescents, I will observe their verbal and non-verbal behaviors during music experiences. I will also use interviews as a primary source of data to interpret their realities.

**Epistemological.** In understanding my epistemological assumption, Creswell (2007) instructs me to ask, “What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?” (p. 17). This is where I work to lessen the distance between myself and the adolescents in their youth worship services. In order to lessen the distance, I attended their worship services, went on a spiritual retreat with them, talked with them, and hopefully became an “insider” (Creswell, 2007). I also learned the songs that they sang, stood in the worship services with them, and sang with them.

**Rhetorical.** I wrote the narrative from my own perspective and narrated it from my point of view (first person). Since I am using a qualitative, phenomenological design, a priori hypothesis was not presented. This design established a phenomenon from context of the natural setting, and then results in the development of a hypothesis, and finally a rich description of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

**Axiological.** I came into this study as a local church minister. I already value the role of Christian music because I believe it is a mandate from the Word of God to worship Him through music (Exodus 15:21; Psalm 66:1-2; Psalm 96:1; Isaiah 42:10). I also believe the music lyrics

play a significant role in faith development. I have years of experience in Christian education promoting this very concept. I clearly defined my presence and perspective in my research (Creswell, 2007).

**Methodological.** Since I sought understanding of the world in which I live and work, a social constructivist view fit best with this study. My desire was to develop subjective meanings of adolescents' music experiences. The goal of my research was to rely as much as possible on the participants' points of view (Creswell, 2007).

Social constructivism traditionally was developed from sociologists who were "seeking to understand how knowledge is created in society" (Archer, 1998, para. 7). In this paradigm, knowledge is developed not from the individual but from the group. This knowledge is not independent nor does it pre-exist from the group. Instead, the group constructed the knowledge. It is the group's agreed story on how the facts are "connected and construed" (Archer, 1998, para. 8). These principles present some challenges for the Christian. There is a "denial of objective truth" (Archer, 1998, para. 38).

A Christian approach to social constructivism asserts that there are some basic absolute truths upon which knowledge is built. God did create this world (Genesis 1:1). Mankind is born into sin and therefore cannot see things clearly (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12). Each person is unique with different perspectives and different experiences (Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:14). People see things differently because they have an incomplete and distorted perspective due to our sinful nature (I Corinthians 13:12). Even though people are imperfect here on this earth, they do have moments of perfect knowledge that come from the scripture (Archer, 1998). As a Christian researcher and educator, I cannot accept all of the assumptions of the social constructivist framework; however, the questioning method and group knowledge building of

this framework is in agreement with good Christian teaching. Even Jesus Christ used this method when He was on the earth. Archer (1998) pointed out, “Christ’s method often involved questioning rather than telling, the cognitive apprenticeship, of learning by doing the activity, learning by discovery, and an adaptability to the uniqueness of the student” (para. 41). A pragmatic approach works best in this situation. As a Christian researcher, I can use whatever methods I find which enhance the learning situation as long as the “principles of justice and fairness are maintained” (Archer, 1998, para. 45).

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the wealth of research on adolescents’ music experiences and how music affects cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Allsup, 2003; AAP, 2009; Becknell et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2008; Labbe et al., 2007; Mast & McAndrew, 2011; Vist, 2011), little research has been done on the effect music has on an adolescent’s faith development from the adolescent’s perspective. Knowing that music plays such an important role in the cultural and cognitive development of the adolescent, the role of music in faith development needed to be investigated in order to understand how adolescents further develop perceptions of God and their relationships with Him through the medium of music (Bosacki et al., 2010; Tshabalala & Patel, 2010). The problem was that the voice of the adolescent had not been heard in regards to the role music plays in his or her faith development. Since music has been shown to be of great significance in an adolescent’s cognitive, emotional, and social development, music could also play that much more of an important role in faith development.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the role Christian music plays in faith development for adolescents. Faith development was generally defined as a

“broadly recognizable pattern of development characterized in terms of developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses” (Fowler, 2004, p. 405). Christian music was defined as “lyrical content, not musical style.” Therefore, Christian music can use country, rock, metal, screamo, hip-hop, worship, and many more styles (Price, 2007).

### **Significance of the Study**

Adolescents are interested in religion and spirituality (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). It is important to understand why this “dimension of life is important to many young people and how it shapes their sense of identity are vital issues in understanding its role in human development” (Benson et al., 2003, p. 208). This study benefits families, youth groups, and Christian schools that are developing programs that will help adolescents in their faith, moral, and cognitive development. Since there is limited research on this topic, it may open the door for more quantitative and qualitative studies to be done in order to find more data about the effects music has on adolescents. This study also benefits the participants in that they will give deep descriptions of their experiences with Christian music.

Researchers need to continue to explore issues of faith in adolescents. In particular, future studies are needed on related issues of morality and emotional development (Bosacki et al., 2010). Research is also needed in cultural and spiritual meanings of worship (Tshabalala & Patel, 2010). Religious values and experiences for adolescents across all nations have been classified as a gap in the literature also (Benson et al., 2003). This study adds to each of these gaps in research.

### **Research Questions**

Phenomenological researchers form questions and problems that “reflect their own interests, involvement, and personal commitment” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). My research began

when I discovered a topic and question that was rooted in my personal meanings and values, as well as benefited social meanings and significances (Moustakas, 1994). That question was: What role do Christian music experiences play in faith development of adolescents in youth ministries? Since research has shown that music plays such an important role in children's cognitive development, emotional development, and physical development (Chang et al., 2008; Griffin, 2010; Pereira et al., 2011; Petrini et al., 2011; Schubert, 2007), music could play just as an important role in their faith development.

Through my comprehensive review of professional and research literature, I formed my sub-questions: (a) How do adolescents at various stages of faith perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services? (b) What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God? (c) How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents' emotions? (d) What influence does Christian music have on adolescents' different stages of Fowler's faith development? Music experiences are important to understand when it comes to faith development. Vist (2011) called music a mediating tool. Music plays an important role in the Christian faith because it connects the individual with worship through not only the instrumentation, singing, or dancing, but more specifically the lyrics (Francis, Wilcox, & Astley, 1992). These types of worship experiences help adolescents come to a personal place, psychologically and epistemologically, where they can experience God (Francis, Wilcox, & Astley, 1992).

### **Research Plan**

Since I was interested in the relationship between Christian music and an adolescent's personal faith development, a construct that is not easily measured with quantitative instruments, I used the transcendental phenomenology model which included *epoche*, phenomenological

reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of texture and structure to collect, gather and analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). Data were collected from 11 adolescents utilizing observations, the Life Tapestry Journal, Faith Development Instrument, and interview questions concerning the music experience.

I analyzed the data using systematic phenomenology procedures by developing individual textural and structural descriptions, compositing textural and structural descriptions, and synthesizing textural and structural meanings and essences of the Christian music experience in the faith development of adolescents. For my transcendental phenomenological approach, I chose the systematic procedures of von Eckartsberg (1986).

### **Delimitations**

Youth ministries begin in the nursery and go all the way to college-aged students. In this study, I only included adolescents ages 14-18. The Faith Development Instrument (FDI) found in the *Manual for Faith Development* (2004) is the most widely used instrument for measuring faith development. The manual states that the FDI is to be used on adolescents and up (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). Since research has shown this to be a crucial stage in developing music tastes, worldview, and social connections through music (Adderley et al., 2003; Hargreaves et al., 2003; McPherson, 2006), I believed this was the best group for me to research the role Christian music plays in faith development because they are cognitively moving into the ability to reason and think about thinking (Piaget, 1969). This was all important to the interview process.

I limited my study to youth group members who have been a part of the youth group for at least a year. The more experience they had in the worship services, the more they were able to answer the questions about experiences with Christian music. I also limited the study to youth

members who attend three out of four services each month. Since I focused on participants' experiences with Christian music in the worship service, I needed to ensure that they actually attended worship services on a regular basis.

I also limited my study to Christian worship music instead of including all types of Christian music. The worship youth services in this setting used contemporary worship music. Since there are no known qualitative studies on the effects music has on faith development using Fowler's theoretical framework, I believed researching Christian music experiences only was a great place to start in this area of study. I know there are many types of music and all types of music could affect faith development in different ways, but since this was my first research I believed I should keep it narrow. Effects of other types of music could be a further study opportunity.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation to my study was the fact that I pulled all of my participants from one youth group. Other large mainline denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, or the Episcopal Church do not have representation in this study. This limits the ability to generalize to other populations of faith. This study also included the Christian faith only. James Fowler's stages of faith are able to cross the faith traditions (Fowler, 1981, 2004). Not including other faith traditions also limits the ability to generalize to other populations of faith.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review is an important part of the phenomenological research study (Moustakas, 1994). This literature review involves a review of the professional and research literature that is connected with the experience of faith and music. Over this past year, I have been researching prior relevant studies on topics of faith, music, emotions, and adolescence. I looked carefully at the research designs that are connected with faith studies. Through reading previous studies on faith, I found that phenomenological research would be a good fit for this faith research topic. I found that faith research using the Faith Development Instrument (FDI) is done mainly with adolescent and adult participants. I also found that there was a gap in the literature on faith and music in adolescent populations. This literature review provides a synthesis of the literature that I have read over the past year.

Faith development theory and research has “focused on a generic understanding of faith that sees it as foundational to social relations, personal identity, and the making of personal and cultural meanings” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17). Faith is more than Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Judaism. Faith in this context goes beyond religions. Fowler’s research in faith was to understand the process that humanity goes through in order to form their beliefs, values, and meanings. This type of faith:

(1) gives coherence and direction to persons’ lives; (2) links them in shared trusts and loyalties with others; (3) grounds their personal stances and communal loyalties in a sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference; and (4) enables them to face and deal with the challenges of human life and death, relying on that which has the quality of ultimacy in their lives. (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17)

Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and



with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37, NIV). This verse is important to the framework of this study. The Jewish translation of the word *heart* refers to a person’s physical heart, emotional, and intellectual life and will (Heart, 2012). In order to teach adolescents to love the Lord their God this way, it is important to understand what connects with an adolescent’s heart, faith, and mind. There is research that shows just how powerful music can be in a child’s life cognitively, emotionally, and physically. This literature review examines the effects of music on the mind and body of children, adolescents, and adults. The literature review connects music to faith and also to worldview. James Fowler refers to this as part of an individual’s cumulative traditions and center of value (Fowler, 1981).

### **Theoretical Framework**

It is important to understand that Fowler’s faith development theory is controversial. There are several reasons why. The first reason is that it broadens one’s usual idea of faith. Fowler viewed faith as universal. He argued that faith is not just for the religious, but that faith is for everyone because people all believe in, trust, find and make meaning in things or other people (Astley, 2000). Also, Fowler’s theory is “contentious in concentrating on the form, rather than the content of faith” (Astley, 2000, p. 2). This idea bothers both religious and non-religious people. Most people are more interested in what people believe or what they believe in. This is content-based faith. Fowler is different in that he focused his research in the ways in which people have faith, “the how of faith” (Astley, 2000, p. 2). Another reason that Fowler’s faith development theory is so controversial is because he claimed that the form of faith develops. He used cognitive development theory as a foundation and that is what he built his six stages of faith development upon (Astley, 2000).

James Fowler’s stages of faith were developed not for theology purposes, but more for

the human side of faith (Fowler, 1981). Faith is a “person’s or group’s way of moving into the force field of life” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Faith is what gives people coherence in and meaning to the many forces and relationships that make up life. Faith is how people see themselves in relation to others “against a background of shared meaning and purpose” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4). Fowler (1981) credits this as serious business. It is what gives shape to what people love and how people determine their loyalties. These shared visions and values are what hold people groups together. Humans look for things to love, value, and honor to sustain them. Fowler (1981) believed that faith asks, “On what or whom do you set your heart? To what vision of right-relatedness between humans, nature and the transcendent are you loyal?” (Fowler, 1981, p. 14).

Faith is being treated as a verb in this context. It gives movement and shape to the experiences in life. It also shows just how relational life is because there is always another in faith (Fowler, 1981). Astley (2000) called it “faithing” because it is an activity that people do. He described faithing as a way people move from one stage to another that “we often suffer the trauma of losing a familiar way of being in faith before we can take up a new way of composing meaning and enter into a new balanced relationship (‘equilibrium’) between our patterns of thinking, relating and valuing, and the world of our experience” (Astley, 2000, p. 3). Fowler believed that humans commit themselves to persons, causes, institutions, and gods, because that is what humans put their hearts upon. Faith is more than doing something because people “ought to” (Fowler, 1981, p. 18). This commitment is driven from an intrinsic desire because it promises to bring value to people’s lives. These commitments and trusts that faith brings to humanity are actually what shape life. They determine who people join within a community. People become part of what they love and value. Fowler (1981) used Jesus’s words in

describing this concept, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21, NIV).

Fowler was clear that faith and religion are not the same things. Religion is “constituted by the forms faith shapes for expressing, celebrating and living in relation to the ultimate environment as faith has imaged it in the past and images it now” (Fowler, 1981, p. 27). The stages of faith that he developed can be used across varying religions.

Fowler’s stages of faith draw from various positions in faith such as Niebuhr, Erikson, Bellah, Jung, and Kohlberg. He also studied Piaget’s rigorous research on cognitive development. The stages of faith are his approach to a systematic developmental psychology of human development (Fowler, 1981). The main three psychologists that Fowler depended on for his stages were Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg.

Fowler developed the concept of the formation of “triadic or covenantal patterns” (Fowler, 1981, p. 92) in human development. This concept addressed Fowler’s understanding of the interaction among and between different aspects of human life in the development of faith. Faith as “social and relational is at the center of the construction of these triadic or covenantal patterns” (Fowler, 1981, p. 92). Individuals do not necessarily go through all the stages of faith. They are not automatic or certain. The stages provide “generalizable, formal descriptions of integrated sets of operations of knowing and valuing. These stages like positions are related in a sequence we believe to be invariant. Each new stage integrates and carries forward the operations of all the previous stages” (Fowler, 1981, pp. 99-100). In Fowler’s book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, he listed six stages (Fowler, 1981). The stages are also hierarchical. They build on the stage before it (Astley, 2000). Each stage is described in detail below.

In some of Fowler's writings, he begins with primal faith. In his later writings, it is more of a pre-stage than classified as stage one. It is from infancy to two years old. This pre-stage composes first experiences of mutuality where humans form the awareness of self as separate from and dependent upon those around them. It is the first consciousness. This is where parent and child connect. There is a danger in this stage if a child is the center of everything and dominates the mutuality. There is also a danger if the child is neglected and is not able to form mutuality with a parent or caregiver (Fowler, 1981). This stage is not always listed as one of the stages of faith.

The first stage is the intuitive-projective faith which covers toddlerhood and early childhood. This stage begins with the union of thought and language and then opens up the use of symbols in speech and ritual play (Fowler, 1981). During this stage, there is a possibility that children will be able to "align powerful religious symbols and images with deep feelings of terror and guilt, as well as love and companionship" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 20). They are not able to "step back from the flow of stories to formulate reflective, conceptual meanings" (Fowler, 1981, p. 149).

The second stage is mythic-literal. Stories play an important role in this stage. They help give unity and value to the child's experiences. This is the faith stage of school aged children and beyond. Their thinking is more logical. Some adults never move out of this category (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Stage three is synthetic-conventional faith. Adolescents and beyond fall into this stage. At this stage, people are able to use and appreciate abstract concepts. They start to think about their own thinking. They look back on their own personal stories. They start to name and synthesize the meanings of their stories. Many adults stay in this category. The limit to this

category is that people are not able to take on third-person perspective. They still need others to confirm and clarify for them about their own identity and meaning. They are not able to have a transcendental perspective from which they can see and evaluate themselves with relationships to others from a perspective outside of their own. They become trapped in the “Tyranny of They” (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Stages four, five, and six are all categorized as later stages of faith. Stage four is the individuating-reflective faith. At this stage, a person is able to reflect critically on what he or she believes, values, and commits to as part of the previous stage. This can actually be a painful process. The person struggles with developing a “self-identity and self-worth capable of independent judgment in relation to the individuals, institutions, and worldview that anchored his or her sense of being up until that time” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 24). A person may begin to question who he or she is outside of being a spouse, parent, professional, friend, or community member. It may cause an individual to have to reject or discard traditions. This requires a new clarity and intentionality of personal choices (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Usually this stage is for the 30-40 age group. This is when people are more humble and realistic in their understandings and affections than compared to previous stages. Their perspective at this stage is able to recognize meaning and truth in many places and sometimes unexpected places (Astley, 2000).

Stage five is conjunctive faith. This is a truly reflective adult thinker. This person recognizes that truth can be approached from multiple perspectives and that faith must “balance and maintain the tensions between those multiple perspectives” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 24). A person is able to make sense out of paradoxes at this stage. In Christianity, this plays out in the fact that God is all-powerful yet He limited His own expression of power when He came to earth

as a baby in human form where He allowed Himself to be brought up by humans and to be killed by humans. This person is not intimidated by other faiths and religions and is comfortable having open dialogs with differing traditions and beliefs. This leads to a deepened understanding of his or her own traditions and beliefs. This brings a desire to relate to God, others, and self in new ways (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). According to Fowler (1991), in Biblical terms, this is acted out when Paul said, “The good I would do I do not do; the evil I would do I find myself doing. Who will save me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:18-20).

The last stage is the universalizing faith. Few people reach this level of faith. This person is more concerned with others regardless of nationality, social class, economic status, gender, age, politics, or religious traditions. This person is more concerned about others than self. This person is “drawn out of its own self-limits into a total groundedness and participation in the one’s understanding of God” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 25). Fowler listed Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his final days as people who have reached this stage in faith development (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Persons in this stage often do not die natural deaths because they get involved in dangerous work of challenging people with their own involvement in and connections to dehumanizing structures of hostility to the commonwealth of love and justice (Fowler, 1991). The later stages in faith development theory include growth “toward wider and more accurate response to God, and toward more consistently humane care for other human beings” (Fowler, 1980, pp. 82-83).

Inside of each stage is a list of aspects which describes people’s reasoning or the way they think (Astley, 2000). When the aspects are compositely taken, they essentially are the “cognitive and emotional operations that give pattern to the creative and interpretative composing of persons’ account of their faith” (Fowler et al., 2004, p. 3) (See Table 1). Aspect A

is form of logic. This is how the person views his or her life chapters, breakthrough experiences, family, and decision making skills. Aspect B is perspective-taking. This is being able to adopt another person's perspective. Aspect C is how people make moral judgments about moral situations. Aspect D is social awareness. This deals with the where and how people choose limits to their community of faith. Aspect E has to do with authority and how people relate and rely on them. Aspect F concerns with worldview formation. This is how people see things and put them together. It is their own personal spin on things. Aspect G is about their relation to symbols. It is how they understand and respond to symbols (Astley, 2000; Fowler, 1981; Fowler et al., 2004). Each of Fowler's six faith stages is analyzed through these aspects (Fowler, 1981; Fowler et al., 2004). When someone is in one stage, the aspects look a certain way. As the person transitions into different aspects that resemble a different stage, they move more out of one stage and into the next stage. When all of the aspects change, that is when the person has fully transitioned to the next stage of faith (Astley, 2000).

Fowler stressed that his faith development theory is not to be used to measure how good a Christian, Jew, or Muslim a person is. When I introduced the Faith Development Instrument to my participants, I actually used a sentence very close to this to start the interview. I wanted to stress that important point. I said to my participants, "First, let me explain that this interview will not measure how good of a Christian you are." This theory is not meant to put a value on the contents of a person's faith. Fowler (1980) made it clear that faith is appropriate for the person whatever stage he or she may be in. It is meant to describe patterns of knowing. Each stage comes with a series of "qualitatively distinguishable patterns of thoughts, realizations, and behaviors" (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 23). These patterns describe relationships people have with themselves, God, and other humans inside and outside of their faith communities (Fowler, 1981;

Fowler & Dell, 2004). Religious educators, counselors, and ministers use faith development theory as a lens for understanding the patterns and subtleties of faith knowing and valuing (Fowler, 1991).

It is important to include a few other criticisms of Fowler's faith development theory at this time. Numerous proposals can show that developmental theories like faith development may not always advance in a clear and invariant series of stages like Fowler proposes (Cartwright, 2001). Some researchers have shown that there can be regression in stages (Nelson, 2002), replication of earlier stages (Streib, 2001a, 2001b), or multiple paths in faith development (Streib, 2003). For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers in faith or spirituality have accepted the stage theory or accepted an opposite viewpoint of a non-developmental approach. Some critics of faith development research believe that people put too much reliance on the stage theories (Benson et al., 2003). It is important to take into account these ideas because they would increase awareness of just how diverse faith development could be (Streib, 2005).

### **Review of the Literature**

Faith and music are extremely broad topics and include many subtopics. This review of literature looks at many aspects of faith and music in order to fully comprehend my research questions. I value how Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) describe spiritual development: "It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices" (p. 206). Spiritual and faith development are used interchangeably in many academic journals. For the sake of this review though, I use the term faith development because that is the term James Fowler uses. Faith development is unique in that it does not fit neatly into one particular domain of social science. Faith development involves "developmental,



social-psychological phenomena, cognitive phenomena, affective and emotional phenomena, and personality” (Benson et al., 2003). That is what makes this study so complex. This review investigates first what faith is and then what music is, and how they intertwine within several different domains. I also look closely at youth ministry in churches and adolescent development since they too are important to my research questions.

## **Faith**

The Bible described faith as “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). Later in that same chapter, the Hebrew writer said that it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said that people are to have faith in God (Mark 11:22). The disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). Faith is a central part of the Christian religion. The central research question is centered on faith development. It is important to understand exactly what faith is in the context of this study.

Faith is defined as a “generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning and that it may or may not find religious expression” (Fowler, 1981, p. 91). It is an important part of a person’s character or personality. Faith is different from religion. Religions are how people express their faith. Fowler (1981) referred to religions as cumulative traditions. These cumulative traditions may include:

Texts of scripture or law, including narratives, myths, prophecies, accounts of revelations, and so forth; it may include visual and other kinds of symbols, oral traditions, music, dance, ethical teachings, theologies, creeds, rites, liturgies, architecture and a host of other elements. (Fowler, 1981, p. 9)

Faith and religion can also be viewed as reciprocal. As individuals and groups respond to their transcendent value and power through their cumulative traditions, both the faith and the

cumulative tradition grows or is renewed from the interaction with each other (Fowler, 1981). The cumulative tradition can awaken and nurture faith.

The words *religions* and *religious* are western words. Outside of western civilization there are few languages that even have a translation for these two words (Fowler, 1981). The word *faith* was introduced as a new concept by the early Christians. The early church Christians also used the term *religio* and quickly made it become more multi-faceted than ever taking on new depths. The word *religion* continues now to be used when referring to rites and observations (Smith, 1962). Pargament (1997) defined religion as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 34). Others have defined religion more specifically as an organized system of “beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one’s relationship and responsibility to others in living together in community (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001, p. 18). Christian writers such as Jerome, Augustine, and Martin Luther used the word *religio* but were referring to a personal belief transcendental orientation (Smith, 1962). The word religion now is confused with faith, but they have two separate meanings.

Cumulative traditions or religions persist as long as they are refreshed from one generation to the next. Over the generations, aspects of the cumulative tradition may change according to the participants and their decisions. Roles and responsibilities, art and music, prestige and majesty will look different as the generations pass. The cumulative tradition may look different from the beginning of a Christian’s life to the end of his or her life. This has been true for Christians all through the ages. The cumulative tradition is what is observable. The actual mind that affirms the faith cannot be precisely defined or verbalized. The observer cannot

see a person's faith but only see the expressions of it. Humanity's faith has been expressed in many forms over many centuries.

Cumulative traditions have included music as an important part of expressing their faith (Fowler, 1981). The instruments and structural patterns of the time help provide a way for the group to express its faith. These expressions of faith then become an important foundation for those persons who come after (Smith, 1962).

## **Youth Ministries**

Cumulative traditions are only around as long as one generation passes them down to the next generation (Fowler, 1981). Churches are especially concerned about reaching their youth for the Gospel's sake. Psalm 145:4 (ESV) reads, "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." When churches use the term youth ministry, they are talking about programs developed for adolescents and young adults. Nearly 90% of churches offer youth ministries for their constituents (Dudley & Roozen, 2001). A national survey in 2003 showed that 50% of teenagers attend religious services regularly (Wallace, Forman, Caldwell, & Willis, 2003). There has been a noticeable decline in church attendance from youth over the past decades (Smith, Dentón, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). To work against the decline, some churches use paid youth pastors to head up all of these programs. This is a major financial and resource commitment that the congregation makes to its youth ministry (Goreham, 2004; Kageler, 2004). Leaders in churches across America are looking for ways to help youth get involved in church ministries, stay in church, and continue being engaged in church.

Once teenagers have been involved in a youth group ministry, the chances of them staying in church are higher. The application of social learning theory has been used to explain this retention (O'Connor, Hoge, & Alexander, 2002). Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory

stated that people learn from each other by observing, modeling, and imitating each other. That is what happens in church youth settings. Adolescents are looking at what others are doing, imitating those they connect with, whether older youth members, peers, or youth leaders, and modeling for new comers what to do. The experiences that the teen has in church and how involved his or her peers are will determine how he or she will get involved and stay involved. Religious learning can change from one denomination to another. It all depends on what kind of religious modeling is being shown to the teens and which practices are most prevalent (O'Connor et al., 2002).

Youth ministry focuses on several aspects of spiritual growth. One youth ministry model by Canales (2006) has eight focus areas: models of friendship, spiritual awareness, servant leadership, liberation, biblical hermeneutic, liturgical-initiation, social justice, and Christian discipleship (Ji & Tameifuna, 2011). The central concern of the friendship model is to help create and sustain relationships in the church. The spiritual awareness is to help adolescents grow deeper in their spiritual lives and help them develop a sense of holiness as they learn more about who they really are. Teaching servant leadership helps youth members live their lives with honesty and humility just like Jesus did. The liberation focus teaches youth to be compassionate, just, and peaceful. The hermeneutic focus is a call to study the Bible and know what the scriptures teach. Liturgical-initiation teaches youth about how the church experiences God through their rituals and liturgy. Social justice encourages adolescents to care about those in need and to serve in order to meet those needs. The last focus is in Christian discipleship. This is about empowering youth to experience God personally and grow spiritually towards a holy lifestyle pleasing to God (Ji & Tameifuna, 2011).

Even with these strong cumulative traditions being passed down from one generation to

the next, it is still important to look at the role the individuals have in shaping their own spiritual growth or faith development. Even with strong, centralized cumulative traditions, there are “wide individual differences among adherents in how they select, integrate, and attend to a tradition’s messages” (Benson & Spilka, 1973). Some researchers in youth studies make it clear that it is a combination of the ecological influences and personal agency that work together to co-author an adolescent’s life story (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000). That is why it was important for my study that I actually understood the period in life called adolescence.

### **Adolescence**

Adolescence has been described as a period of storm and distress (Hall, 1904). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), there is currently no standard definition of “adolescent.” Most of the time, when the term adolescent is used, it is referring to an age range (10-18). That is only one way of defining adolescence. It can also be defined in terms using factors such as physical, social, and cognitive development (APA, 2002). It is the physiological transformation that gives boys and girls adult bodies. It changes how they are perceived and how they are treated by others. It also changes how they see themselves. It is a time for first experiences. Experiences like being out of direct control of parents or guardians at all times, transitioning from all school to school and work, and at times no longer being cared for but at times having to care for others (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Smith & Rutter, 1995). This is also a time when they take on some adult roles and responsibilities (Eccles, Lord, Roeser, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1997). These changes may look differently across societies and in some contexts differently for boys and girls (Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002). Generally speaking, this time of life is when people experience more independence, expanded world experiences, and new contexts of interactions. At this stage in life, children are starting to look

more outside of the home for influences (World Health Organization / United Nations Population Fund / United Nations Children's Fund Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health, 1999). Adolescence is an interesting period of life to study meaning, purpose, vocation, relationships, and identity issues. Many observers will even go so far to say that the major identity transformations actually occur during this development period (Gorsuch, 1988; Paloutzian, 1996).

Adolescence is an important developmental part of people's lives. This period is critical to long-term development and affects health and well-being (Call et al., 2002). When people look at adolescence on the surface, it seems to be a time when humanity is at its best. At this age, people have survived childhood diseases, and their bodies are strong and not yet at the point of decline that people see later in adulthood (Ozer, Brindis, Millstein, Knopf, & Irwin, 1998). It is important to think about the definition of health and perspective. A narrow perspective would define health as morbidity and mortality and ignore the underlying impact that behavior and experiences have on the health of adolescents. Behavior and experiences impact the life of adolescents far into their adult years. Adolescents can create lifestyles that are positive or negative. These lifestyles can present a burden of problems for years or help them become resilient adults (Call et al., 2002).

Health and well-being is multi-faceted in the lives of adolescents. One area of well-being for adults is their faith development. Family members, neighbors, teachers, employers, religious communities, youth groups, and elders all play an important role in the healthy upbringing and socialization of adolescents (Cauce, Felner, & Primavera, 1982).

There has been a lot of research in the faith development of adolescents. Some of this research has helped adults understand why they struggle so much with getting through to

adolescents. They seem to be in a different world from their adult counterparts. Understanding their faith development is an important part of being able to understand and relate to them. It is important to understand that they believe in different things (Astley, 2000). The way adolescents believe is different from the way adults believe. Even though most adolescents are able to think logically and abstractly, they are not able to think for themselves yet and therefore to reflect on their own worldviews (Astley, 2000). This makes it difficult to talk with them when they are not even sure “why they are there, or even that they are there” (Astley, 2000, p. 3). This is stage three in Fowler’s faith stages. Most adolescents and many adults are in this stage (Astley, 2000; Fowler, 1981). They have not figured out how or that they are in faith or even where their faith comes from. Astley (2000) compared this type of faith to the “implicit knowledge we have that enables us to recognise other people’s faces or to ride a bicycle, while being quite unable to explain how we are doing it” (p. 4). This is important to understand for parents, teachers and youth leaders. This helps them understand that many of their charges cannot even recognize “where their values and beliefs come from, or how they have created their world-views” (p.4). He even goes farther with the bicycle analogy to explain that at this stage in faith asking adolescents to understand beyond their capabilities is the same as asking someone while they are riding a bike to concentrate on how they are actually doing the riding while they are riding. This could actually cause them to fall off of their bikes (Astley, 2000). John Hull (1985) described Fowler’s stage three as a time when ideologies can only function “not in front of our eyes but from behind our backs” (p. 67).

Faith development researchers have found that the majority of adolescents (teenagers) are at stage 3. About 12% of teenagers are in stage 2 but transitioning into stage 3. There is a small portion, about 4%, of teenagers that are still in stage 2. Stage 3 is unique for teenagers because it

marks their ability to think abstractly and also their ability for mutual, interpersonal perspective-taking (Astley, 2000). The move from stage 3 to stage 4 is usually marked by a literal moving out or leaving home. It is the time when humans are autonomous and able to make their own decisions. They are not just part of the faith current or the faith crowd. This is when they choose their own worldview according to what they think fits them best (Astley, 2000).

## **Music**

Music is found to be beneficial in a variety of ways. There are faith benefits, cognitive benefits, worldview benefits, emotional benefits, and even physical benefits of music for cultures all over the world. This section of the literature review looks at each of these benefits and also takes a look at a few learning music theories.

**Faith benefits.** Worship expressed through music and singing is the dominant form of worship in many churches (Johnstone, 2010). Johnstone (2010) stated, “Worship is often regarded as being central to the life of a Christian and therefore plays a significant role in a person’s faith journey.” People experience worship differently depending on what stage of life they are in, what lived experiences they have had, and their spiritual investment (Johnstone, 2010). Worship through singing is a significant portion of the church service. When a faith community comes together and sings, that provides a different auditory environment than when individuals listen to the radio, worship CD in the car or home, or even create a worship play-list on their portable listening devices (Johnstone, 2010). Rosing (1984) called this type of singing “social-interaction music.” The social structure of the local church body imposes itself upon musical meaning: “the arrangement of the seating, the style of the building, the direction of the worship leader and worship band are constitutive elements in both the environment and the guiding of the participants and regulating the practice of worship” (Johnstone, 2010, p. 13). This



is all important to forming a faith community. Durkheim (2001) called this collective effervescence. Collective effervescence states that the precise act of gathering together as a group is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. This gathering is not just a get together, but more specifically it involves intention, volition, and symbolic function (Durkheim, 2001). This is what makes corporate worship such a powerful entity for faith communities.

Worship through music also can be extremely controversial in the church world today (Hartje, 2009; Tucker, 2009). The battle between singing hymns or praise and worship, using an organ or piano, acoustic or electric, choir or praise team, has been around for many centuries in the church (Tucker, 2009). The question of whether to sing or not sing has never been a battle though. As referenced in the introduction section above, there are many Biblical references concerning singing and instruments. These musical worship differences are important to investigate since they play such an important role in my main research question: What role do Christian music experiences play in faith development of adolescents in youth ministries?

Worship experiences through praise and worship music is one of the most defining elements of the evangelical culture here in America (Hartje, 2009). Music can be described in the church as traditional, contemporary, or even blended. Traditional is the use of hymns and liturgy, and contemporary is the use of praise and worship music with little liturgy. A blended service mixes hymns, liturgy, and praise and worship music. In traditional music services, the emphasis has been on the hymnbook. In contemporary music services, the words are mostly displayed on a screen. The hymnbook includes the musical notes, but the screen only includes the title, lyrics, and at times the author and copyright information. Whether a song has been sung for years or is new, the music lyrics are only displayed in contemporary or blended services. Over 100 years ago, music hymnbooks might not have had musical notations in them. During

those times, the hymns were sung to familiar tunes so only the lyrics would be written down with notation about what tune with which to sing it (Hartje, 2009). That is similar to today's worship music where lead sheets or chord charts are used to learn new music. Very much like a couple of centuries ago, most music is learned in congregations through oral participation through music worship experiences (Hartje, 2009).

Contemporary praise and worship is known for its simplicity. When looking at the tunes of a great number of famous hymns from the musical perspective, they too can be described as simple, utilizing anywhere from five to eight pitches. The rhythmic patterns in traditional hymns are also simple. The main reason for this simplicity for both contemporary and traditional hymns is so that the laity in the church can master them and not just trained musicians (Best, 2004).

Singing hymns and praise and worship music is not only for church worship, but it is also for worship outside of the church. For years in Western civilization, people have sung church music at home with families around the piano, and more currently even in cars with the availability of radios, CDs, and portable music players. Similar in concept, before all of this technology was available, hymnbooks were made small enough so that church members could carry them around in their pockets for quick reference (Hartje, 2009). The history of the transformation of music experiences in the church is long and controversial (Tucker, 2009).

There are some key points that need to be pointed out, though, that have sung true throughout the beginning of church music history: (a) congregational singing cannot be silenced, (b) no matter how it is sung, the music lyrics have to be an accurate expression of the faith that Christians profess, (c) the text sung has to be sung in the language of the singers and not in other languages as done in some of church history, and (d) the church has always used tunes that come from a variety of sources (Tucker, 2009). Socially speaking, over the church's history worship music

has shown itself to be a lifelong devotional tool and has helped to form many communities through song (Hartje, 2009).

**Cognitive benefits.** Music is incredibly beneficial in the cognitive realm. Music helps improve children's listening skills, enhances cognitive processing, and even helps students learn to talk (Hallam, 2010; Miranda, 2011; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Researchers have learned that speech and music have some of the same shared processing systems. Musical skills are able to enhance processing, which therefore impacts language, and in turn improves reading skills. The more active engagement younger children have with music, the more their phonological awareness and reading skills increase. Overall, the evidence suggests that the more experiences young children have with music, the more their perceptual processing systems develop, which aids with encoding and identification of speech sounds and patterns. These skills improve language development and literacy (Hallam, 2010). As for children who speak English as a second language, music also helps build their language development and literacy skills. Literacy-based music experiences provide a risk-free environment where English language learners (ELL) have opportunities to practice their English, improve their social skills, which in turn builds their self-confidence (Miranda, 2011; Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

Something as simple as listening to music while studying has been an interesting area of research as to the effects of music on cognitive processing. Researchers want to understand how children, adolescents, and young adults study, learn, and take tests more effectively. For over 60 years, researchers have been studying the effect of music in the background while students study, learn different subjects, and take tests. The results have been mixed (Fogelson, 1973; Hall, 1952; Hallam, Price, & Katsarou, 2002; Henderson, Crews, & Barlow, 1945; Jones, Bacon, & Williams-Schultz, 2010; Kiger, 1989; Mitchell, 1949; Mowsesian & Heyer, 1973). The mixed

results include some students need quiet music in the background, other students need only preferred music in the background for it to be beneficial, and other students no music in the background depending on what level of information was being studied (Kotsopoulou & Hallam, 2010). The results are varied from one study to the next. The common thread through these studies is the effects of music on learning tend to be related to the mood or arousal of the learner (Kotsopoulou & Hallam, 2010). The Yerkes-Dodson law has been used to explain why arousal levels increase or decrease student performances. This law states that the “arousal level of the individual increases performance up to an optimal level beyond which over-arousal leads to a deterioration in performance” (Kotsopoulou & Hallam, 2010, p. 432). This law also states that music can stimulate arousal and improve simple tasks, but if the task is too complex and the arousal is too high it could cause the student to actually do worse (Kotsopoulou & Hallam, 2010).

**Physical benefits.** Physical and cognitive benefits of music are closely intertwined and at times difficult to separate. In the world of education, music has been used for many years to help young children physically develop their large and fine motor skills through the use of singing, handclapping, and dancing to music (Brodsky & Sulkin, 2011; Humphries, Bidner, & Edwards, 2011). Many students learn best when they use their bodies. Research has shown that even young students who spontaneously engage in handclapping songs perform better in the classroom (Brodsky & Sulkin, 2011). Many children learn best when they are able to connect music and their bodies (Humphries, Bidner, & Edwards, 2011). The music stimulates functions in the brain, transfers signals to different areas, and expands neuroanatomical structures and functions (Brodsky & Sulkin, 2011). This occurs mostly for children who are in between the ages of 3-11 because of the adaptive flexibility of their brains.

Active engagement with music over time can induce cortical reorganization. This improves the way the brain processes information, which therefore improves the cognitive process of individuals. If this occurs early enough in a child's development, these changes can become permanent (Hallam, 2010). Research fields of biology, genetics, developmental and comparative research, neurosciences, and musicology are all interested in the physical effects that music has on the body (Peretz, 2006). How the body handles stress, anxiety, and anger are just a few areas of research interests. For example, research has shown that listening to classical and self-selected relaxing music actually helps individuals reduce stress. Music also reduces anxiety, anger, and sympathetic nervous systems arousal. Music can increase relaxation (Becknell et al., 2008). This type of research is of great importance for physical bodies because if stress and anxiety are not dealt with properly, "feelings of loneliness, nervousness, sleeplessness, and worrying may result" (Seyedfatemi et al., 2007, p. 11).

Benefits to the body are of great importance in the field of medicine. Doctors, nurses, and therapists are all interested in how music can benefit their patients. Patients with cancer and family caregivers often use music therapy in end of life care to help "experience reduced perception of pain and decreased anxiety, feelings of empowerment, a sense of feeling more 'alive', and enhanced communication with others" (Young, 2009, p. 13). There are potential health benefits for community members diagnosed with cancer who sing together in a choir. Music therapists encourage their patients to get involved with singing with others and listening to music (Young, 2009). Music also helps terminally ill patients to weep, which helps improve physical suffering for a time (Norton, 2011). Music helps terminally ill patients to engage with the world. Familiar music helps the patients get back to a world that they could no longer be a part of. When the time came for a patient to leave this world, research showed that unfamiliar,

relaxing music was helpful at this time (Norton, 2011).

**Worldview.** Music not only has effects on the cognitive and physical realms, but it also shapes worldview. Teenagers spend just as much time listening to music as they spend time in school (Leung & Kier, 2008). Ross (1994) stated, “The level of attention and meaning invested in music by youth is still unmatched by almost any other organized activity in society, including religion” (p. 3). Their listening habits effect their “spending habits, their moods, their friendships, their notion of who and what is admirable, and their hopes for what they might become” (Arnett) 1991, p. 92). Youth today give just as much attention and meaning to music as they do almost any other organized activity in society. The types of music they listen to help to form their identity (Leung & Kier, 2008; North & Hargreaves, 2007). They listen to music for a variety of reasons. It helps to relieve their tension, provide escape from their problems, help with loneliness, fill in the quiet when there is nothing else to do, help with mundane tasks, provide topics of conversations, liven up parties, teach new vocabulary, and even articulate their political interests (Roberts & Christenson, 2001, p. 398).

Knowing that music plays such an important part of adolescents’ lives, it is not a big leap to see the connection from music to lifestyle choices. On the adverse side of lifestyle choices, several studies suggest that fans of heavy metal music are more prone to partake in smoking and drinking activities (Mulder et al., 2007; Mulder et al., 2009; North & Hargreaves, 2007). Antisocial music videos increased participants’ tolerance of antisocial behaviors such as obscene hand gestures. Also, participants who liked defiant music were found to be more prone to rebelliousness (North & Hargreaves, 2007). There also has been a link to show correlation between participants and their exposure to music videos and permissive/promiscuous sexual attitudes (North & Hargreaves, 2007).

Adolescents (ages 13-14) indicated that the majority of their role models were famous musicians. They believed that the famous musicians were dedicated musicians, showed popular images, and had ability. It did not matter if the musicians could actually play an instrument. Young girls viewed the famous musicians' looks, perceived fame and popularity as reasons why they looked up to these individuals. These media figures have taken over as the main source of ideals for children, more so than real-life acquaintances. About 70% of adolescents identified their role models as being popular singers while only 8.3% were non-famous role models (Ivaldi & O'Neill, 2008).

On the other side of the worldview, some research suggests that people use music like a "badge" to help communicate their values, attitudes, and self-views (North & Hargreaves, 1999). North and Hargreaves (1999) found that the way people view themselves and their self-esteem influences the type of music they prefer. North and Hargreaves were mentioned in many of the articles that I read. They have done a lot of research on music preferences, but that research is limited to certain music genres. Other researchers, including North and Hargreaves, have researched music preferences in genres such as classical, jazz, heavy metal, country, pop, rap, and sensation seeking. Christian music genre has not been a focus on any of the articles I found concerning music and worldview. This seems to be a real gap in the literature.

**Emotions.** Music plays such an important role in a child's cognitive development, physical development, and worldview formation. Another important role that music plays is in a child's emotional development. Emotion has been defined as "a relatively brief and intense state in reaction to a specific experience or event that lasts a few seconds to several minutes" (Lench, Flores, & Bench, 2011, p. 838). Emotion has long played a significant role in human psychology, but it is now becoming a topic of empirical psychological investigation. Emotion

has been studied to understand its role in everything from reaction time to pro-social behaviors. Medical research has shown that familiar and unfamiliar music is able to “induce strong emotions with positive and negative valences” (Petrini et al., 2011). This is why music has become such a popular tool in studying emotions and the effects emotions have on the brain (Petrini et al., 2011).

The brain has an estimated 100 billion neurons. The neurons each have 10,000 connections that link to themselves and other neurons. This makes about one million billion connections in the brain. These connections are called synapses (Reimer, 2004). In music experiences, the brain responds to the musical sounds and secondly responds to the symbol systems such as words and notations. The most important part of musical experiences for children is that both sides of the brain are activated, which increases brain activity. In these instances, brains go through changes. When the brain changes, the person changes. All music experiences affect the brain, which in turn affects the emotions or feelings of the person experiencing the music (Reimer, 2004).

Music has the ability to evoke and express emotion. The more enjoyable a music selection is to a listener, the more emotions are affected (Schubert, 2007). Nielsen (1994) claims that music “may strengthen both the possibilities for having differentiated emotions and the ability to express them” (p. 69). The power in music and emotions is that it allows for greater learning environments. Recent advances in neuroscience show a connection among emotions, social functioning, and decision-making. Learning, socialization, attention, memory, and decision making are profoundly affected and incorporated within the process of emotion (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). In brain research, emotions have even been found to help brain damaged patients make real-world decisions by guiding their judgments and actions



(Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). This research about emotions plays an important role in my research question: How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents' emotions? As adolescents sing in their youth services and get emotionally involved with that worship music, there should be some brain activity that is tied with learning, socialization, attention, memory, and decision making. This brain activity would affect their social and cognitive development, which in turn would impact their faith development.

**Musical development.** Research has shown that music connects people spiritually, cognitively, physically, through worldviews, and even emotionally. Music is versatile. There are several music theories that help explain why music is so powerful. Surprisingly, few people are born with a high aptitude for musical abilities. The same goes for people with low aptitude for music. The majority of people have an average aptitude for learning music and are able to achieve in music (Gordon, 2007). Musical development begins in the uterus and continues through adulthood. Skills like being able to carry a tune, move with music, and even being able to respond emotionally to music is part of the cognitive development process. Musical abilities are both innate and learned over time. Research on the musical development process is built on the stages of development of Piaget (Campbell, 1991). As children grow, their musical abilities grow (Campbell, 1991; Gardner, 1973, 1982, 1983; Serafine, 1983a, 1983b, 1988; Zimmerman, 1982, 1986). Musical development includes many aspects of music: (a) responses to sound and auditory learning characteristics, (b) responses to music (nonmusical, preference, etc.), (c) pitch/tonality ability, (d) rhythm ability, (e) movement ability, (f) singing ability, (g) instrument performance and (h) responses to other musical elements (timbre, dynamics, etc.) (Gooding & Standley, 2011). For the purpose of this literature review, I am going to focus on the musical development of only the adolescent years (11-20).

Most music development occurs through infancy, early childhood, and middle childhood. After this time, adolescents' bodies begin to change through growth spurts, affecting their coordination skills and even their voice apparatus, which causes their voices to change (Killian, 1997, 1999; Ruffin, 2009). Music development continued through adolescence is strongly attached to their involvement in music activities. Research even shows that if music development is to continue, then adolescents have to be involved in musical activities (Gembris, 2006; McPherson, 2006). Adolescents need to be challenged whether through group ensembles, band, or private music lessons (McPherson, 2006). At this stage in their development, they have the ability to think critically about music, analyze music, and articulate musical viewpoints. These cognitive abilities can be improved through discussing and analyzing music (Frostik et al., n.d.; Swanick & Tillman, 1986).

Perhaps the most important aspect of musical development for adolescence is the social aspects of music (Hargreaves et al., 2003; McPherson, 2006). The social aspects of music help to motivate adolescents to continue on with their music development. At this stage, the enjoyment of making music with groups, meeting new friends through musical experiences, and spending time with old friends is of utmost importance (Adderley et al., 2003). Adolescents also increase their music listening time and therefore become more attached to a particular genre (Gembris, 2006; McPherson, 2006). At this stage of development, musical preference becomes more stable and more important (Gembris, 2006). It is important to mention here that environmental influences and social influences play major roles in adolescent development (McPherson, 2006).

**Music and neuroscience.** With or without research backing it, many cultures believe that music affects the mind, body, and relationships with other human beings. Music plays an

important role in the social world. The contemporary science world has struggled with this common belief until recently. Neuroscience is now able to show that music is “rich, whole-brain, whole-body information that is highly accountable” (Altenmüller et al., 2012). Studying the brain has become so much easier now that researchers and doctors have access to noninvasive technical advances in imaging techniques such as event related potential (ERP), functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), and magnetoencephalography (MEG). These advances have taken the field of music neuroscience to a new level (Altenmüller et al., 2012).

Through fMRI studies, music neuroscientists have found there is a difference in musicians and nonmusicians in speech. Musicians have a slight advantage in speech patterns over nonmusicians. Generally speaking, developing musical patterns and linguistic patterns are closely related (Altenmüller et al., 2012).

One new area of neuroscience is called cultural neuroscience. The goal of cultural neuroscience is to be able to explain how “brain structure and function interact with and shape musical thought and behavior” (Altenmüller et al., 2012, p. 6). Western thought has dominated this area of research. The imbedded learning of one’s culture or enculturation seems to affect every area of human thought. This understanding has opened up this new field of cultural neuroscience that documents the important influence that culture plays in brain functions. Music has been found to play an important role in cultural transmission; therefore, certain aspects of musical thinking are mediated by culture. Cultural neuroscience is now rich with studies on how to better understand the role of culture in musical development, cognition, and learning. Some of the central issues in cultural neuroscience include the interaction of enculturation, formal training, and development (Altenmüller et al., 2012).

Cultural neuroscientists are now working on a new theory of tonality by studying ERPs and fMRIs. The fMRIs look at how a person's brain responds to violations in culturally familiar and unfamiliar music. They found that peoples' brains are quicker to respond to violations in music that they are culturally familiar with when compared to a different culture's music. This may mean that there is a general cultural sensitivity to statistical properties of tonal sequences (Altenmüller et al., 2012). This is significant in that music is really part of who people are and reinforces the power of music's influence on every aspect of their lives.

Music neuroscience has made head way in several other fields of study: music and autism, learning and memory in musical disorders, music in stroke rehabilitation, and music-induced adaptive and maladaptive brain plasticity in health. Much of the work in music neuroscience is "interdisciplinary in nature, including strong links with psychology, neurology, and clinical practice, and growing links with music performance, education, and therapy" (Altenmüller et al., 2012, p. 13). This interdisciplinary connection is significant for the role of music neuroscience and faith. The links with psychology and education provide a foundation for understanding what is going on in adolescents' brains while they sing.

### **Summary**

In my understanding of faith and being able to use Fowler's (1981) stages as a framework for this research, my desire was to answer the question, "What role do Christian music experiences play in the faith development of adolescents?" The first step to understanding this question was to know what faith development is and how adolescents fall on to the spectrum. Some adolescents fall into the second stage of faith, which is the mythic-literal stage. Stories play an important role in this stage. They help give unity and value to the adolescents' experiences. Their thinking is more logical (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Most

adolescents fall into stage three, which is synthetic-conventional faith. At this stage, people are able to use and appreciate abstract concepts. They start to think about their own thinking. They look back on their own personal stories. They start to name and synthesize the meanings of their stories. The limit to this category is that people are not able to take on third-person perspective. They still need others to confirm and clarify for them about their own identity and meaning. They become trapped in the “Tyranny of They” (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004).

Another part of this question required understanding the role of music in an adolescent’s life. Music can connect to the adolescent’s faith needs through worship, cognitively, and emotionally. The youth group setting is ideal for reaching the faith and musical needs of adolescents. The literature shows that adolescents crave music and listen to it often (AAP, 2009). It also shows that adolescents gravitate to the music to which they are exposed (AAP, 2009; Hodder, 2009; Holbrook & Schindler, 1989; Leung & Kier, 2008; Serbun & DeBono, 2010; Tshabala & Patel, 2010; Wills, 2011). If adolescents acquire a taste for Christian music during these formative years, they could continue listening to Christian music for years to come, possibly develop a long term taste for Christian music, and thus pass their faith along to their own children. The music lyrics could be the stories that some adolescents need in order to understand who God is, what they are created for, and how they can grow in that understanding in order to progress in their faith development.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

Human science is the systematic study of the human experience (Van Manen, 1990). The human science approach is phenomenological. Human science and phenomenology are often interchangeable. Human science is interested in people who think and act purposefully in order to create meaning. This meaning is how people exist in this world (Van Manen, 1990). Human science is interested in understanding human life (Dilthy, 1976). Phenomenology is the “systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experiences” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Hegel described phenomenology as “a well-defined technical meaning constructed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). He referred to it as the knowledge as it appears to consciousness. It is the science of “describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Qualitative researchers are interested in descriptions, interpretations, and self-reflective or critical analysis. The focus is on the whole of the experience rather than looking at just one participant’s experiences or part of multiple participants’ experiences. Meanings and essences are more important than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological researchers use skillful methods of questioning, reflecting, focusing, and intuiting (Van Manen, 1990). Through these first-person accounts, phenomenological researchers are able to obtain descriptions of experiences whether in formal or informal conversations and interviews (Moustakas, 1994). It is the “attentive practice of thoughtfulness” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

As a phenomenological researcher, I am interested in the way humans experience the world. I want to know this world (Van Manen, 1990). Goethe (1963) said, “One learns to know only what one loves, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love, indeed the passion” (p. 83). I chose a topic that I find exceedingly

interesting and am especially passionate about. I enjoy Christian music. I want to know more about it. I want to understand exactly how it affects adolescents in their faith development. Phenomenological research is just right for that type of human science, passionate study. I seek to make explicit and universal meanings and then “to transform the lived experience into a textural expression of the essence” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 36).

It is not enough to just recall experiences that I or my participants may have had with respect to the phenomenon of faith development. Instead, they must recall the experience in such a way that the “essential aspects, the meaning structures of this experience has lived through” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 41). Writing up the experiences forced me into a reflective attitude more so than the face-to-face conversations (Van Manen, 1990). The end result of this study is compelling and insightful phenomenological descriptions about the faith development of adolescence and how Christian music affects that development (Van Manen, 1990). This is not to give explanations and control of the faith development of adolescents and their Christian music experiences, but rather to offer the “possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Transcendental phenomenology also includes the concept of intuition (Moustakas, 1994). Descartes (1977) taught that intuition was primary. It was an inborn talent that helped humans judge everything around them. He believed it was the starting place in developing knowledge of the human experience (Descartes, 1977). Things can become clear through the intuitive-reflective process. Intuition sees it first in the manner in which something is presented; and then through the reflective process, it can be seen in clarity and in its fullness (Moustakas, 1994).

This chapter lays the groundwork for how I chose my participants, collected my data, and then analyzed the data in order to deeper understand the phenomenon of the role of Christian

music in the faith development of adolescents. At the end of this chapter, I discuss ways that I established trustworthiness and address ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study seeks to understand the role Christian music plays in adolescents' faith development in the youth ministry worship setting. The challenge of transcendental phenomenology is not to explain a phenomenon but to understand the essences of the experience. This understanding comes from first-person reports of people's lived experiences. The methodology of the transcendental phenomenology approach includes core processes that enabled me to advance the source of knowledge: *epoche*, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994).

The Greek word *epoche* means "refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). Phenomenological researcher Husserl described this as the "freedom from suppositions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). It required me to look at things in a new way. I had to be able to distinguish and describe and stay away from the "everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). It is not the everyday understanding that is sought after. The phenomenon is revisited with a fresh or naivety that helps me approach it with a wide open sense from the "vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The *epoche* is not about doubting everything, but more about going against the natural attitude that brings biases to the understanding of the phenomenon that I seek. It is to prepare me for receptiveness. This helped me to be ready to listen and hear what is really being presented without my own habits of seeing, hearing or feeling clouding the phenomenon from its appearance and presence (Moustakas, 1994). Perfection is rarely actually achieved in the *epoche*, but when the researcher puts energy,



attention, and work into the reflection process, his or her personal thoughts, judgments and biases are reduced significantly, which honors the intent of the *epoche*. The more I practice this type of reflection and thought, the more I will be able to be “open to receive whatever appears in consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). Moustakas (1994) pointed out that not everything is “bracketable” (p. 90). The *epoche* challenged me as a researcher to shut out all voices that may cause biases other than my own consciousness (See Appendix B). This is what pointed me to “knowledge, meaning and truth” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 88).

The next step is transcendental-phenomenological reduction. It is called transcendental because it helps me, the researcher, move past the everyday in to the pure ego which helps to see things freshly, “as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). It is called phenomenological because it “transforms the world into more phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The reduction part leads me back to the source of the meaning and existence of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). This step produces a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The focus is on the experience’s qualities. As the researcher, I then have to look and describe, look again and describe, and look again and describe. The textural qualities have to be the focus. The textural description includes my “thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, situations that portray what comprises an experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47). This process is never really complete, but when I become satisfied with the evidence collected, that is when I have adequate evidence regarding the phenomenon’s existence (Miller, 1984).

An important part of transcendental phenomenological reduction is the ability to bracket out my “preconceived biases and judgments, setting aside voices, sounds and silences that so readily tell us what something is” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). This is where the fresh look is so

important. I have to be able to look at the phenomenon as if seeing it for the first time. This was a challenge for me because I came to the study with a passion for music and for children. I also am concerned with their faith development. I was willing, though, to bracket out my preconceived notions, and greatly desired to see things anew in this research (See Appendix B).

Horizontalizing also plays a role in transcendental phenomenological reduction. This is when I first look at every statement and treat it as having equal value. Later, I was able to look for statements that are irrelevant or repetitive or even overlapping and delete those statements. This leaves only the horizons. The horizons are the “textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). It is through this process that I was able to cluster the horizons into themes and organize the horizons and themes into coherent textural descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The third step is imaginative variation. When I felt that I had the picture of the conditions that cause an experience and connect with it, I then was able to produce the structural description of the essences of the experience. This created meaning for the phenomenon and is the heart of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This stage required “imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from different perspectives, different positions, roles or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97-98). During this step, I was able to develop structural themes from the textural descriptions that were obtained from the previous step, phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994).

The final step is the synthesis of meanings and essences. This is the blending of the textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement that represents the essences of the experience of the phenomenon. *Epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and

synthesis are necessary parts of understanding how to do transcendental phenomenological research. Through these steps, I could see naively and freshly again the phenomenon of the role Christian music plays in the faith development of adolescents.

### **Research Questions**

Phenomenological researchers form questions and problems that “reflect their own interests, involvement, and personal commitment” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). My research began when I discovered a topic and question that was rooted in my personal meanings and values, as well as benefited social meanings and significances (Moustakas, 1994). That question was: What role do Christian music experiences play in faith development of adolescents in youth ministries? Since I know that music plays such an important role in adolescents’ cognitive development, emotional development, and physical development (Chang, Chung-Hey, & Huang, 2008; Griffin, 2010; Pereira et al., 2011; Petrini, Crabbe, & Schubert, 2007; Petrini et al., 2011; Sheridan, & Pollick, 2011), I believed music could play just as important a role in their faith development. Through my comprehensive review of professional and research literature, I was able to form my sub-questions: (a) How do adolescents at various stages of faith perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services? (b) What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God? (c) How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents’ emotions? (d) What influence does Christian music have on adolescents’ different stages of Fowler’s faith development?

Music experience is important to understand when it comes to faith development. Vist (2011) called music a mediating tool. Music plays an important role in the Christian faith because it connects the individual with worship through not only the instrumentation, singing, or dancing, but more specifically the lyrics (Francis, Wilcox, & Astley, 1992). These types of

worship experiences help adolescents come to a personal place, psychologically and epistemologically, where they can experience God (Francis, Wilcox, & Astley, 1992).

### **Participants**

Participants in transcendental phenomenological research are called usually called co-researchers because they partner with the researcher to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As I applied for research with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), they requested that I call the adolescents participants due to their age. Therefore, in my research, I called them participants. The adolescents still played an active role in this research though. I first had to set my criteria in order to locate appropriate participants (Moustakas, 1994). Since it was essential to my study that every participant has experiences with Christian music in a youth service, criterion sampling worked best for this design. I needed participants who would help me capture the experiences and understand the connection between Christian music and faith development (Moustakas, 1994). The youth pastor from the site I chose suggested participants that he felt would be able to “provide comprehensive description of their experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 115) with music and faith. These participants were actively involved in the youth ministry and regularly attended each month. I considered regular attendance to mean that the participants were present three out of the four services on Sunday evenings. I needed at least 10 participants but was able to secure 11 total (Moustakas, 1994).

Once I located my participants, I provided them with instructions on the nature and purpose of my study. I emailed some, sent private messages through Facebook, and sent text messages to the rest. The youth pastor helped me connect with each person. We agreed upon a date and time to meet. With the help of the IRB, I developed an agreement that included informed consent from their parents, and since my participants were under-aged, I also got them

to sign an informed assent agreement. I shared with them the responsibilities of myself as the primary researcher and also their responsibilities as the participants. I discussed with them ethical principles of research (Moustakas, 1994). I have included the informed consent and assent letters in Appendix A. I attempted to help each participant understand that they were joining with me as a “truthful seeker of knowledge and understanding” (Fraelich, 1989, p. 68) with regards to the phenomenon of faith and music.

At the end of this study, I sent a letter to each of my participants letting them know just how much I appreciated their contribution to the “nature, quality, meaning and essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109) of the experience of music and faith. I also sent each participant a complete transcript of all the data and requested that they check for accuracy. Since they were not in the co-researcher’s role due to their age limits, I did not ask them to check my analysis and make any changes that they felt would present the essence of faith and music more clearly or fully (Moustakas, 1994). No participants requested any clarification or changes to their transcripts.

### **Setting**

I chose Community Christian Church (pseudonym) in eastern North Carolina as the setting for my research because it was the biggest church in my area with the most active youth and music program. This church has a youth group of over 50 adolescents in middle and high school. They meet every Sunday night and Wednesday night. On Sunday nights, they have a music worship service before the youth pastor preaches a sermon. The paid staff music minister of the church meets with about 15 youth members to teach them music and how to lead in worship. She meets with them every Sunday afternoon for about an hour and a half. The band members are also middle school, high school, and young adult aged. They play a variety of

instruments and also sing. The song services last about 25 minutes.

The youth in this church have a room all to themselves for their own worship services. It is in the upstairs of the church. The youth room is large, painted dark colors, stage in the front for the band, posters all over the wall of various Christian musicians, and sound proofed to provide a better sound quality. They also have a projection system to show music videos and words to the songs.

This is a unique youth group in that there are many different nationalities in the youth group. There are a mix of Caucasian, African-American, Asian American, and also Latino-American in the church and in the youth group. There is a balance of male and female. The church has been in this rural town for 100 years. The senior pastor has been with the church for about seven years. The youth and music pastors have been there for about five years.

The church averages about 350 on Sunday mornings. They have two services in the mornings, an active Sunday school program at 10:00 in between the two services, and youth service at night on Sundays. At the time of this research, for the adults and children on Sunday evenings, they have a rotating schedule for men's ministries, women's ministries, small home groups, leadership meetings, and everyone comes together on the fourth Sunday evening for youth service in the sanctuary. This is where the youth band leads in worship and the youth pastor preaches the message. Since this research has ended, they have made changes to their Sunday night schedule.

### **Procedures**

Phenomenological research gives us "tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depth full understanding" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 156). Before I dove into this process though, I first obtained IRB approval, secured permission from the senior pastor, youth

pastor, participants' parents, and assent from the participants themselves. After these steps were taken, I was able to begin data collection.

I used the von Eckartsberg's (1986) steps for phenomenology research. The first step I did was to decide what phenomenon I was interested in. I was really interested in faith development and how music affected faith development. Through my reading and personal interests, I felt that adolescence was the right group for me to study. I formed my questions at that point, but the more I read, I had to refine those questions. I also wanted to make sure my questions were understandable to others. By request of my committee, I contacted a music professional and shared the music interview questions with her. She approved them as written.

The second step was to gather data. This is where my reading and participants are so important. My literature review gave me a lot of information about faith development, music, and adolescence. The participants answered questions and dialogued with me.

The last step was the data analysis. In this step, I was concerned with explication and interpretation. I had to read and scrutinize the data in order to reveal their "structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering" (von Eckartsberg, 1986, p. 27). The emphasis at this step was the configuration of the meaning. This involved both the structure of the meaning and how it was created (von Eckartsberg, 1986).

### **Researcher's Role**

I want to fully grasp the meaning of faith development in adolescence and how music affects this area of adolescents' lives. Faith and music have always been a part of my life. I was brought up in a Christian home where music was always cherished and protected. I was not allowed to listen to certain types of music because my mother did not feel it was good for my mind or my emotions. Everyone in my family is a musician. We all sing and play multiple

instruments for ministry purposes. This is what I bring to the research.

I have a lot of questions about music and faith. I enjoy thinking about it, talking with others about it, and reading about it. Sometimes, I get frustrated when I see young people and adults listening to music that has curse words in it or praises immorality. This frustration has drawn me to want to study it. The thought of listening to others talk about their experiences excited me at the beginning of the study and still continues to excite me. I want to expand my understanding of music and faith, broaden my prospective and, as a benefit, actually enhance my relationship with music and faith. Finding the delicate balance between music and faith has been a real challenge for me as a parent and educator. The perspectives of my participants provided valuable information on the relationship between faith and music (LaCourse, 1991).

As the “human instrument” in this research, I have to be honest about my point of view (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I believe that children should be exposed to all types of Christian music. I want them to fall in love with Christian music and to listen to it daily. I do not want them to be tempted with popular music of this day. The scripture is clear about what should go in the mind. Philippians 4:8 (NIV) says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” I believe that whatever God puts in His Word will be backed up in this physical realm through empirical research.

### **Data Collection**

After getting permission from the IRB and collecting all of my consents and assents, I began data collection. I chose observations, Life Tapestry Journals, and individual interviews for this investigation. This allowed for triangulation during data analysis.

### **Observations**



Observations allowed me to see the participants in their natural setting.

Phenomenological research refers to this as the lived space (Van Manen, 1990). This helped me inquire into the ways that the participants experience the affairs of their music experiences (Van Manen, 1990). It helped to address the potential for a participant to say one thing but do another (Creswell, 2007). This is another way of collecting experiential material. Close observation is able to “break through the distance often created by observational methods” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 68). Since the participants meet every week for worship, there were many opportunities to observe them. I was also able to go on a spiritual retreat with them and observe during those special services. The best way to enter the participants’ world is to become a participant in it and observe at the same time (Van Manen, 1990). During observations during the normal worship services, I sat in the back of the room so I would not be so noticeable while taking notes. They dim the lights once services begin and shine lights on to the stage. That helped me to fade away into the background. I observed my 11 participants and made notes about what they were doing during the music experiences. Since I had 11 different participants to observe, I observed three or four with each visit during that month. The music experiences lasted about 25 minutes for each service and over an hour each during the retreat services. I observed during that whole period. My observation protocol included descriptive notes about both what I saw in the services and what my participants were doing. It also included reflective notes about my own ideas, thoughts, and hunches. I wanted to see if they were actually participating either through playing instruments or singing. I also wanted to see if the participants seemed engaged or if they showed outward signs that they are moved by the music. I also made notes of the physical settings, the music played, and my own reactions (Creswell, 2007). The observation protocol can be seen in Appendix C.

## **Life Tapestry Journals**

Autobiographies are potential sources for experiential material. Writing forces the participants into a more reflective attitude (Van Manen, 1990). The participants' histories and experiences are dependent on "historical groundings and own descriptions in order to form a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 8). The *Manual for Faith Development* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004) highly suggested the use of the Life Tapestry Journal exercise in order to get the most out of the interview. The *Manual for Faith Development* includes the questions to ask for the Life Tapestry Journal and gives free access to everyone to use the instrument. The Life Tapestry Journal was a way for my participants to reflect back on their personal histories before I interviewed them. This is an engaging and meaningful experience in itself. It can also become the basis for their own personal journals if they choose to continue on this reflective path. If students prefer to type their answers, I offered to provide them with a digital copy of the journal. See Appendix D for a copy of the Life Tapestry Journal questions found in the *Manual for Faith Development* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). The manual does state that the Life Tapestry Journal is optional, but it highly recommends it because of how much it adds to the interview process.

## **Interviews**

The individual interviews are the most important part of this qualitative study. Ninety percent of research conducted in the social sciences uses interviews (Briggs, 1986). The language in the interviews provide researchers observable datum. This is what the interviewer or coder bases the inferences about the participants' mental and emotional processes on (Streib, 2005). Interviews are two-fold in their purpose. First, they are used to explore and gather information that can serve as a resource for developing the rich, deeper understanding of the

human phenomenon. Secondly, interviews can be used to develop a conversational relation with the participants about the meaning of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). Sometimes it is easier to talk about an experience than to write about it. It is easier to stay close to the experience as lived (Van Manen, 1990). If I truly wanted to become acquainted with the world of my participants, I needed to listen to the “language spoken by the things in their world, to what things mean in this world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 112).

There have been several different instruments developed for faith development research. Green and Hoffman (1989) developed an instrument that is no longer used in faith development research because it was closed to Christianity only. The Fowler Scale was developed by Barnes, Doyle, and Johnson (1989). This instrument has been used in faith research. It is a short, nine question instrument that was designed for Fowler’s stages two through five. The Stages of Faith Scale developed by Swenson, Fuller, and Clements (1993) was an instrument to measure the impact that cancer has on someone’s faith. It is considered too short (five questions) and has not been used in research again and not tested for validity. A 48-item scale that is significantly more comprehensive than the earlier scales (Hiebert, 1993) was developed as a mail-in survey for freshmen and senior students. It too has not been tested for validity. The Faith Development Scale is a short eight-item scale developed by Leak and his group (1999, 2003). It is the most recent development of a brief instrument for quantitative research in faith development. Other instruments have been developed to measure certain aspects of the stages of faith development (Streib, 2005).

Usually in phenomenological research, I would develop my own set of questions or topics to guide the interview process and may or may not use them all once the participant “shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question” (Moustakas, 1994, p.

114). Through my comprehensive literature review, I learned that the Faith Development Instrument (FDI) is the most accepted instrument used in faith development research (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). This is where I got the bulk of my data on the faith part of my research. This is an interview instrument that is used to determine what faith stage the adolescent falls in. The FDI is a free resource that many researchers use when using Fowler's stages of faith theoretical framework. The *Manual for Faith Development* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004) is a free download and includes the Faith Development Instrument and directions on how to give the instrument and score the instrument. These questions can be viewed in Appendix E. The FDI covers basically four dimensions: life review, relationships, values and commitments, and religion (Streib, 2005) (See Table 1). The interview can last up to two hours long and could result in 30 to 50 pages of text full of belief statements and personal narratives (Streib, 2005). I brought another copy of the questions for my participants to look at as I asked the questions. Fowler, Streib, and Keller (2004) said they have found this to be a help for the participants to see the written words as they are being asked the questions. I believe using the FDI along with my own personal questions about music experiences helped validate my research and added to the body of research already using Fowler's theoretical framework on faith development. I also developed five additional questions that related to each of my research questions. These questions were geared solely towards the music experience to help tap into the experiences qualitatively and provide sufficient meaning and depth (Moustakas, 1994). These five additional music experience questions can be found in Appendix F.

Before I began interviewing each of the 11 participants, I did two pilot interviews with two adolescents from my school who used to be part of this same youth group. I know them personally and felt comfortable working through the interview and procedures with them. This

helped me with my confidence before working with the participants that the youth pastor had suggested I interview.

This interview process needed to be done in three different sessions. I audio recorded the two pilot interviews and the 11 main interviews for transcript purposes. I first met with all of the 11 participants in a whole group meeting where I provided drinks and cookies. At this time, I collected all of their contact information. I explained the Life Tapestry Journal and gave them a copy of it. We then met for the second session at the agreed upon time and went over the Life Tapestry Journal questions first. This helped me get the conversation flowing right from the very start. I had to be careful about the time I used at the beginning of the interview so that I did not use up too much time before getting to the rest of the FDI questions. The third session was specifically for the music experiences interview questions found in Appendix F.

I was able to transcribe the interviews myself using Dragon Naturally Speaking software and a transcription pedal and software. After doing a few transcriptions, I then hired a professional service to help me finish them more quickly. I used the transcription template found in the *Faith Development Manual* (2004). The template gave word processing guidelines to help record all of the interviews in the same way. This helped expedite data analysis. The manual says that a one hour interview may take up to five hours of transcription work. I found this to be true. The transcripts included the pseudonym of the participant, the gender and age, and the date of interview. I had a running header on each page to identify the participant by his or her pseudonym (Participant #1, Participant #2, etc.) and the page number. The manual suggested numbering the comments and also numbering each line of the transcript to provide a way of referring to passages precisely on the scoring sheet. These guidelines helped me create a transcript that my second rater was quickly able to maneuver and score. I also highlighted the

questions on the transcript to easily tell where one question stopped and one began. I liked the FDI transcription template so much that I decided to use it also for the music interview transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

A phenomenological description of a particular phenomenon is constructed from “examples composed of examples” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 122). It is through the data analysis that the phenomenological description can be composed. In human sciences, writing is closely blended into the research activity and reflection itself. The goal of data analysis through the writing process is to seek “to make external what is somehow internal” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 127). The responsive-reflective writing is the nature of phenomenology. The writing and rewriting is the data analysis. Van Manen (1990) described this writing process vividly, “One must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it” (p. 153).

This writing process included organizing and analyzing the data in order to facilitate the development of “individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). This provided a systematic way of accomplishing my research in an organized and disciplined manner, including care and rigor (Moustakas, 1994). These procedures and techniques guided me, provided direction, and helped me take the steps necessary to move my study into action.

Organization of the data began when I carefully looked at the transcribed interviews and studied them using the phenomenological methods of analysis. These methods included horizontalizing the data and taking every horizon or statement that was relevant to my topic of

music and faith and question it as having equal value. After this process, the meaning or meaning units were listed. These were then clustered into categories or themes after I removed all of the overlapping and repetitive statements. These clustered themes and meanings were then used to develop the textural descriptions of the faith and music experience. The meanings and essences of the phenomenon of music and faith were then constructed “from the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118-119). I used the modified method of analysis of phenomenological data from Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975).

### **Faith Development Instrument**

The Faith Development Instrument (FDI) helps participants to reflect on their lives, their relationships, their values and commitments, and their religiosity (Keller & Streib, 2013). The interviewees respond to questions by “presenting, explaining or justifying their lives and opinions” (Keller & Streib, 2013, p. 2). The questions spur the participants to share events, stories, and autobiographic narratives (Keller & Streib, 2013). The answers to the questions are identified by the aspects and calculated into one score which is accepted to identify the faith stage of that participant. The aspect specific evaluation really shows just how multidimensional that faith development really is (Keller & Streib, 2013). Aspects include: form of logic, social perspective-taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004; Streib, 2005) (See Table 1).

FDI elicits content-specific data about the participant’s faith that can be organized in computer-assisted content analysis. The codings can easily be computed using the Excel spreadsheet provided to me through email by Dr. Streib and also in the *Faith Development*

*Manual* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). The spreadsheet allows me to visualize and plot the stage assignments. This helps to make inter-rater comparisons more comfortable. Through Dr. Streib's suggestion, I made contact with a FDI rater in Tennessee who agreed to be my second scorer. Since this was my first time with this instrument, I wanted a second scorer to independently score each participant so that we could compare results. This stage in analysis provided me with what faith stage the adolescent falls in (See Table 2). The FDI and the scoring sheet are all free for anyone to use. In Appendix G, I included a sample of what the scoring sheet looks like.

### **Horizontalization**

The important part of horizontalization is that each statement at this step has equal value. Each statement contributes to the understanding of the nature and meaning of the participants' experiences with faith and music. The template I used for the FDI and music interview made it simple to distinguish between what I said and what the participant said. It also made for quick copying and pasting the significant statements into an Excel spreadsheet.

### **Clustering**

After horizontalization was complete, I then looked for unique qualities of the experience by considering each statement with respect to the experience of faith and music. I was looking for statements that stood out. I deleted all statements that overlapped or repeated. The invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience are the non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Moustakas, 1994). This is an important step because it helped me to "determine the significant, relevant, and invariant meanings that provide living descriptions or highlights of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 130). This took the form of an outline with the main points being the themes that I found and the sub-points being the invariant constituents that fall under each of



them. Using these invariant constituents, I used phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation to construct thematic portraits of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Textural and Structural Descriptions**

After the themes were identified and the horizons were delimited for each participant's description of their experience of faith and music, the individual textural descriptions were constructed from the verbatim transcribed interviews. This individual textural description is to help evoke clear images, thoughts, feelings, and struggles of what happens (Moustakas, 1994) during the faith and music experience for adolescents. Copen (1992) emphasized that "the structures are brought into the awareness through imaginative variation, reflection and analysis, beyond the experience and into the real meanings of essences of the experience" (p. 65). After each participant has an individualized textural and structural description, imaginative variation is used to put together a composite textural and structural description. This composite blends together all of the individual descriptions and forms the "meanings and essences of the experience into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). This is a way of understanding how the participants as a group experience the faith and music experience. This report portrays the themes and essences in living descriptions that enable one to know the meaning of faith and music from the "internal perceptions and images" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142) of the adolescent. The composite description should be "alive, vivid, and clear in bringing to light the universal character and dynamics of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.143).

### **Synthesis**

Synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences is where I summarize the entire study. I related my study to the literature review findings and also discussed any

differentiation from the literature review. I discussed possible future research that could be done with my topic. This section is also the place where I related the study to personal and professional outcomes. The connection to social meanings and relevance of the study is an important part of the synthesis. In the closing comments of the synthesis, I gave my future direction and goals for this topic.

### **Trustworthiness**

As the researcher, I cautiously examined data and used these credibility checks: (a) member checks and feedback, (b) triangulation and (c) thick descriptions. This is a vital part of qualitative research and will help build credibility and transferability.

### **Member Checks and Feedback**

Member checks will allow the participants to check the data that was collected for accuracy. I shared with the participants the specific material from their interviews and how I planned to use it. I reminded them that I had removed all identifying data in order to protect their privacy. This member check is important to the credibility of my research and the essence of the phenomenon of faith and music that I developed. I also reminded them at the very beginning that they had the option to withdraw at any time during the research and their data would be removed. No one requested to withdraw, and no one disputed any of their personal data that I collected through both the faith development interview and the music interview.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation is the process of obtaining various types of data on the same problem for the purpose of verifying or corroborating evidence. This study used observations, Life Tapestry Journal, and two different individual interviews to “shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

## **Thick Descriptions**

The rich, thick descriptions allow readers to decide if the data is transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I described in detail the participants and the settings. This will allow the reader the opportunity to look for “shared characteristics” (Creswell, 2007, p. 209).

## **Ethical Considerations**

As a human science researcher, I am guided by the ethical principles on research with human participants (Moustakas, 1994). The first step in ethical consideration was to obtain IRB approval to assure that the rights and confidentiality of my participants are secure. I gained informed consent from their guardians before I interviewed any participants. Once I had consent from their guardians, I then secured assent from the participants to participate in this study.

I used pseudonyms through the entire course of duration (Creswell, 2007). I assigned the participants generic names like Participant #1. I recorded those pseudonyms on their assent forms so that I could keep up with the correct participant and his or her pseudonym. Only pseudonyms were recorded on the transcripts. Participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time (Moustakas, 1994). All research documents are password protected on my computer. Written documents are stored in a locked filing cabinet for extra protection for up to three years after this study is completed. After three years, I will shred the written documents and permanently delete the digital records (Creswell, 2007).

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the role Christian music plays in faith development for adolescents. Phenomenological researchers form questions and problems that “reflect their own interests, involvement, and personal commitment” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). My research began when I discovered a topic and question that was rooted in my personal meanings and values, as well as benefited social meanings and significances (Moustakas, 1994). That question was: What role do Christian music experiences play in faith development of adolescents in youth ministries? Since research has shown that music plays such an important role in cognitive development, emotional development, and physical development (Chang, Chung-Hey, & Huang, 2008; Griffin, 2010; Pereira et al., 2011; Petrini, Crabbe, & Schubert, 2007; Petrini et al., 2011; Sheridan, & Pollick, 2011), I believed music could play just as important a role in their faith development. Through my comprehensive review of professional and research literature, I formed my sub-questions: (a) How do adolescents at various stages of faith perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services? (b) What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God? (c) How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents’ emotions? (d) What influence does Christian music have on adolescents’ different stages of Fowler’s faith development?

I collected data from 11 participants who have had experiences in Christian music through their youth services. I have presented the findings from the observations, Fowler’s Faith Development Instrument, and also music interviews.

### **Data Collection**

Since it is essential to my study that every participant has experiences with Christian

music in a youth service, criterion sampling worked best for this design. I needed participants who would help me capture the experiences and understand the connection between Christian music and faith development (Moustakas, 1994). The youth pastor at my chosen site for research suggested participants that he felt would be able to “provide comprehensive description of their experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 115) with music and faith. These participants were actively involved in the youth ministry and regularly attended each month. I considered regular attendance to be present at three out of the four services on Sunday evenings. I needed at least 10 participants (Moustakas, 1994) but was able to secure a total of 11 who followed through with each step of the data collection. Before I started the Faith Development Instrument interviews and the music interviews, I did two pilot studies with two adolescent boys ages 13 and 14. Those pilot studies allowed me to learn how to give and score the Faith Development Instrument as well as the music interview questions.

### **Observations**

I believed it was important to actually see the adolescents during their Christian music experiences in their youth group services. My initial plan was to observe them during their youth services on Sunday nights. I planned for four separate observations. Students came in at 5:30 PM and went to the coffee shop to sit around and talk. There was loud Christian video music playing with a time ticker being projected to show just how long it was before services started. The sound and visuals were run by the youth pastor’s wife and a young adult who is very experienced with sound and lighting equipment. The adolescents seemed very respectful. They also appeared to be having fun talking and laughing together in the adjoining coffee room and the main youth room. The youth room was in the upstairs of the church. It was a large, dark room that was decorated with posters on the walls of different Christian music artists. There was

an open sound booth in the back of the room. One portion of a wall was painted in neon glowing orange. Another portion of the wall was white bulletin board paper taped onto the wall. The adolescents had an opportunity to sign it and put a message on it. On stage there were two flat screens hanging from the ceiling with the youth group's graphic projected on them. The stage housed all of the instruments and music stands and microphones. There were screens on stage that were covering lighting shining up from the stage. There were speakers in front of the black curtains on the stage. For the audience chairs, they were black leather and in the center of the room. There were about 65 chairs in two sections with an aisle going down the center. This room was designed with adolescents in mind.

Services started at 6:30 PM. During my first night of observation, I could tell that the youth had a lot of experience with Christian music. As soon as the youth pastor finished with preliminaries, the youth band assembled on the stage to open in worship through music. The audience began to move all over the room. No one gave instructions to do this. It was evident that they had learned to get out of their seats and move to different places where they could worship through music. Each night I focused on four of my participants. Some were in the band singing or playing an instrument, and some were in the audience. At this point, I was still waiting on some consent and assent forms to be returned. I began my first observation by observing four of my participants who had their forms returned. For pseudonyms, I named each participant a number. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4 were observed this first night.

During the first observation, four songs were sung: "Tell the World," "Not Ashamed," "City on a Hill" tag into the song "Cornerstone." Participant 1, 16 year old female, was definitely the lead female singer. She sang at the front of the stage. She sang out strong

throughout the entire evening. She smiled often, called out to the audience to participate, danced, moved with the beat, raised her hands, and tapped her leg. She seemed to really be enjoying herself. When Participant 10 was praying out loud while the band was playing in the background, Participant 1 moved her microphone down and was singing freely making up her own words.

Participant 2, 15 year old female, was in the audience during the music experience. She seemed to enjoy the music but was more reserved in her singing. Her movements with the beat were small. At one point in one of the songs, many of the participants pumped their fists in the air. She participated in that as well. Throughout the 25 minutes, she tapped her foot to the beat, talked with her boyfriend once in a while but mostly sang with the congregation. At one point, there were a few boys beside her who were talking with each other during the song service, but she continued to sing.

Participant 3, 17 year old male, was in the band. He played the lead electric guitar. He was an excellent guitar player. He played every song. He remained very serious looking throughout most of the music experience. He was concentrating on the music. At one point during “Cornerstone,” one of the female singers came in a little too quickly. He looked surprised and smiled a little but quickly adjusted to catch up with them. Once in a while, he would sing while he continued to play, but I could not hear him because he had no microphone. With most of the songs, he would nod his head to the beat.

Participant 4, 15 year old female, was in the praise band and sang soprano. She stood at the front of the stage. She definitely was a leader because she sang loudly, was on key, smiled, and was able to engage the audience at appropriate times. Most of the time she sang lead but during some choruses and bridges of the songs she moved up to the higher harmony. She moved

with the beat of each song. Her leg never seemed to still. She frequently raised her hands and closed her eyes through the entire song service which lasted 25 minutes. I observed her smiling, laughing, dancing up and down, holding hands up in the air, clapping, and looking up to heaven while singing. At one point, Participant 10 prayed in between songs. During prayer time, the music continued to play and she raised both hands and prayed also. When the worship set was over, she sat in the front row and paid attention even when not on stage singing.

After the music experience, participants went back into their seats in the audience and all the audience members moved back from all around the room into their seats. Instead of a sermon, the youth pastor did an anonymous survey to learn more about the students, what they knew, and what they did not understand about Christianity. He sent all of the students into different places in the room. No one could sit by anyone else so that they would be able to concentrate on the task at hand. The youth pastor's wife played all kinds of Christian music in the background while the students were working on the survey. About 10 minutes into the survey, Participant 1 looked up from her survey and said, "Why's he playing all good music? It's hard to concentrate!" It was during this service that I learned of a youth ski retreat that would happen later in the month. I talked with the youth pastor after the service about me being able to go. He agreed to let me attend.

My second observation was a week later in the same place at the same time. This time, I focused my observations on Participants 5-8. The service went about the same at the beginning, but differently towards the end. At the end of this service, the youth pastor's assistant provided the lesson for the night.

During this observation session, I focused on the students that I knew would not be going on the ski retreat next week. The four songs sung during this session were "The Time Has



Come,” “Jesus Son of God,” “How He Loves,” and “Consuming Fire.” I heard three-part harmony during the song “Consuming Fire.” At one point in the song, the band stopped playing and the voices sang a cappella. Then the band came back in to finish strong. The music minister for the church was in the audience during this music experience. She had introduced the new song “Consuming Fire” and wanted to support them during their debut of the song to the rest of the youth. She works with them weekly, teaching them on their instruments and how to sing parts. This was the most vocally challenging song I heard during these two sessions.

I began observing Participant 5, 14 year old, who was the youngest participant in this study, but she was almost the tallest one in the room. She stands out in a crowd. She was in the audience during the music experience. I rarely saw her look around at anyone else. The majority of the time, she was singing with either one hand in the air or both hands in the air. Her hands almost reached the ceiling. She tapped her leg to the beat and clapped when it was appropriate during some of the faster songs. She did not look at the lyrics projected on the wall. She knew each song by heart. She often sang with her eyes shut, her face turned up, and her hands in the air.

Participant 6, 18 year old female, was a member of the band. She sang soprano with Participants 1 and 4 and at times took the higher harmony during choruses and bridges. She smiled the entire service. From the time we walked into the youth room until the end of service, she was smiling. While on stage, she sang the entire time. Even when it was not her time to sing, she would bring the microphone down to her waist and still sing. During the last song, “Consuming Fire,” there was a section where the band played and everyone sang freely. She sang during this time with the microphone at her waist. At the end of worship, the youth pastor came up to pray while the band continued to play. She closed her eyes, held her palms up at her

waist, and moved her lips in a personal prayer time.

Participant 7, 15 year old female, played the rhythm guitar in the band. She was the most reserved on the stage. She did not sing, did not smile, but kept a very solemn look on her face. She stood still while she played all four of the evening's songs.

The next two observations took place at this youth group's annual ski trip. The trip took place from Friday evening until Monday morning. I thought it would be interesting to observe them in a different environment. On our way up to the mountains, it began to snow and the temperature began to drop. We ended up getting snowed into the cabin. There were a total of 40 people in the cabin. We spent the entire time at the house and around the neighborhood. It was not until Monday afternoon that the snow had melted enough to get the bus back up the mountain. The observations from this trip look differently from the traditional youth services.

On Saturday evening the youth had service at 8:00, but music started way before the service. There was music blaring from the sound system they brought with them. One teenager in particular plugged up his iPad to the system and played music from morning until bedtime. I sat in the main room for a lot of the time and observed students going in and out singing with each song. They knew so many songs and lyrics. As they played card games in the living room or charades or the game Ninja, they would sing off and on. It seemed like it was second nature. Most of the time, it was Christian music. There were a few secular songs played too.

Before the service Saturday evening, there were two teenagers who gathered around the piano in the dining room and started playing and singing old church songs. One 15 year old was playing the piano by ear, and the 19 year old was leading singing while others joined in. About 30 minutes into this carefree music time, one of the young adults brought out his violin and started playing and one of the other teens brought out his drum and started playing. Participants

1 and 10 also began to sing. This transitioned into some of their newer songs they sing in youth group. This was a fun time for the small group gathered around the piano. They sang for about an hour before service even started. There was a lot of laughter during this self-directed music experience.

The first service was on the Saturday night of the trip, and it began at 8:00 PM and ended at 10:45 PM. The second service was very similar to the first service. It was the Sunday night of the trip. It began at 8:15 PM and ended at 11:30 PM. The music set-up was the same in both services so I have combined the observations of both services. I thought it would be best to organize the Christian music experience observations by participants.

Most of the youth were already in their pajamas when service began. There were about 30 adolescents on the floor, on couches, in chairs, standing against the walls, and sitting on the fireplace hearth. I sat in the side dining room away from everyone, but in a spot where I was able to see my participants who were a part of this study. Participant 10 picked out the songs, played the acoustic guitar, and led in singing. Another teenager played the cajón which is a six-sided drum that you sit on and hit on the front and back for different sounds. These were the only two instruments during these two music observations. Participant 10 played the guitar during the entire service for both services.

Participants 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, and 11 were at the youth retreat. The remaining two observations revolve around these participants. Participant 1, 16 year old female, was the loudest singer in the room. That goes along with her personality because she is a very outgoing person. I had observed this through the previous observations and over the youth retreat weekend. She sang lead for the majority of the time and would break into a higher harmony during certain choruses and bridges. This is very much like she did during the first two

observations I did in the youth services. Even though she was not in the front leading, she did call out to the youth two times during the singing encouraging them to sing out or pray. At the beginning, she stood up to sing, but during the second song, “God is Able,” she sat down on the floor with her eyes closed as if in prayer while she continued to sing. She called out to the group during the song “Oceans” saying, “Come on guys, don’t hold back. I know you know this song, speak it right where you are.” Through the first service she continued to sing with her eyes closed, cried, and prayed out loud. The second service was a little different. She did not sing as loud, she looked around the room at others, or she closed her eyes in prayer. When the youth pastor opened up the service at the end for anyone to say anything, she opened up about why she was so quiet in the second service. She shared that earlier that day during her personal devotion time, she felt God tell her to be quiet and to observe others. She said it was very difficult for her not to sing out and to not say anything because she felt God had called her to be a leader in worship, but she wanted to be obedient. She shared that she could tell God was working in her friends and was grateful that she remained silent during that time. She said she felt God in her silence.

Participant 3, 17 year old male, had a different outward experience. Over the weekend, I had come to realize that this young man was very well liked but quiet. This young man stood to sing when others stood and sat when others sat. I could tell he was singing by his mouth moving but could not actually hear him. He also would slightly move his body with the beat of the drum and guitar strum. At one point in the music experience, he kneeled down off the couch and put his hand on the young man’s back that was sitting on the floor in front of him. He began to pray for that young man while others were singing around him.

Participant 4, 15 year old female, was very similar to Participant 1 in volume and style.

She sang lead and sang loudly. For most of the services, she moved her whole body back and forth with the music beat, clapped her hands, raised her hands, or closed her eyes as if in prayer while singing. She was sitting on the hearth during the first song. When “Tell It to the World” came on, she was the first person to stand. As she stood, others around her stood. During the last song, “Oceans,” which was the newest song to this set of music, she took her glasses off and bowed her head down in prayer. Throughout the entire two Christian music experiences, she stayed focused on singing or praying. During the second service, the youth pastor paused the music portion to have a short message. He gave a testimony of what God was doing in his life. He opened the floor for others to give a testimony. This participant was one of the first to speak out.

Participant 7, 15 year old female, was much more reserved than the other participants. She sat in the back of the room on the hearth. She stood when other students stood and sat when they sat. She sang very quietly. I could see her mouth moving but could not hear any sound. She wore a solemn look on her face. Many times, I would see her looking out the window. After a couple hours during the first night’s service, she raised her palms up in the air at her waist. During the second night, she got up and left the room. She spoke privately with the youth pastor and then she sat alone in a separate room for about an hour. She then came out and rejoined the group. She remained silent for the rest of the evening.

Participant 9, 15 year old female, looked differently than the other participants mentioned so far. She sang most of the time, but I never heard her. Her mouth was moving, and I could lip read that she was singing the lyrics. She listened to the youth pastor whenever he spoke. She would nod her head and smile at him as if she was actively listening to what he was saying. While others stood, she stood. When those around her began to sit, she still remained standing.

She sang with her eyes closed or looked up to the sky most of the time. She did not seem aware of those around her. I never saw her looking around at other teens. At the beginning of the second service, the youth pastor asked if anyone had anything to share. Participant 9 spoke out and said that God showed her that if her parents will not lead her because they do not really care about spiritual things, then she will have to let God lead her. As the second music experience progressed into the second and third hours, this participant was seen in the middle of the floor sitting with her knees pulled up to her chest, rocking back and forth with the beat, crying, and singing with her eyes closed as if in prayer. Later in the service around 10:15 PM, she spoke out again when the youth pastor opened the floor for more discussion. She said that she wanted to see accountability from each other. She did not want to see the same thing that happened after the last retreat when everyone just went their own ways. She wanted to see the youth united so that they could be the change that they keep talking about. Thirty minutes later she spoke out again. She recalled a time when the youth went from room to room in the church to pray for the church, but she wondered why they never did that in their schools. She challenged the group to not only worship and seek God like they do during retreats or revivals but to do this all the time.

Participant 10, 18 year old male, is the oldest participant in my research group. He played the guitar for the retreat, chose the songs, and led in singing. He sat on a stool in the front of the living room with his back against the wall for extra support when needed. He played for a total of about 10 hours over this weekend. As he played the guitar, he challenged the audience to worship God in their own ways. He faltered a little in playing while he talked, but he tried to play and talk at the same time. He played the guitar and led the music by singing strongly. When the audience sang out strongly, he would back off and concentrate on his playing. When they needed the extra support, he would sing louder. He was able to recognize how much

support he needed to provide. As people spoke, he would back off and softly play the guitar without singing. He is the one who transitioned from song to song. He had a whole stack of chord charts with him for different songs, but he also played some songs by ear. Toward the end of the second service, a little laughter broke out. The audience realized that he was playing everything in the same key, and the songs were starting to sound similar. One of the older teens broke out singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” in that same key and rhythm. Then he started singing “Go, Tell It on the Mountain” in the same key and rhythm. The crowd really broke out laughing at that time. It was a humorous release to a very intense service.

Participant 11, 17 year old male, made an interesting transition through the many hours of these Christian music experiences. When the music began in the first and second youth retreat services, this participant was extremely reserved. He stood still and barely moved his lips. There was not even a smile on his face or movement in his body with the beat. He would also position himself in a way that he was not seen by others. He hid behind people who were standing. About a half an hour into the first service, he closed his eyes as if in prayer. He put his hands over his face for several minutes while others were singing. About an hour into the service after the youth pastor spoke to the teens briefly, Participant 11 opened his eyes and lifted up his head and began singing “Nothing is Impossible.” He put his right hand over his heart and tapped his hand over his heart with the beat. During the last hour of service one, the youth pastor asked everyone to get out their Bibles and notebooks and to write down what God was speaking in their hearts. Participant 11 took out his iPad and wrote notes on that while others in the room continued to pray and sing freely.

The second service began very similarly for this participant. He started off very reserved and actually stood off in the side adjoining room for the first hour. After about an hour of the

youth pastor speaking and Participant 10 leading in singing, Participant 11 walked into the room where everyone else was and went to a 19 year old youth and asked him to pray for him. During this time of prayer between the two boys, Participant 10 led in the song “Consuming Fire.” The teens continued to sing in the background, “Set a fire down in my soul.” Participant 11 began to cry, sank to the floor, and prayed out loud to where I could even hear him. Twenty minutes later, he got up off the floor, walked over to another youth, and prayed with him. He hugged the boy, prayed for him, lifted his hand in the air, and cried with the other boy. As they switched over to “How He Loves Me,” I heard Participant 11 sing loudly enough that I could actually tell that he was truly singing. He stood at the front of the room praying and singing until the youth pastor took over the service at 10:30 PM. As the hours passed, this young man had a visible transformation in how he responded to the music.

### **Faith Development Instrument**

The Faith Development Instrument (FDI) helped the participants to reflect on their lives, their relationships, their values and commitments, and their religiosity (Keller & Streib, 2013). The interviewees responded to questions by “presenting, explaining or justifying their lives and opinions” (Keller & Streib, 2013, p. 2). The questions prompt the participants to share events, stories, and autobiographic narratives (Keller & Streib, 2013). The answers to the questions are categorized by seven different aspects and calculated into one score which is used to identify the faith stage of that participant. The aspect specific evaluation really shows just how multidimensional that faith development really is (Keller & Streib, 2013). Aspects include: form of logic, social perspective-taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004; Streib, 2005) (See Table 1).



The FDI draws out content-specific data about the participant's faith that was then organized in computer-assisted content analysis. The codings were easily computed using the Excel spreadsheet emailed to me by Dr. Streib. The electronic copy was best because it had all of the functions needed to calculate stage score already programmed. The printed copy was also in the *Faith Development Manual* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). The spreadsheet allowed me to visualize and plot the stage assignments. This helped to make inter-rater comparisons more comparable. Through Dr. Streib's suggestion, I made contact with a FDI rater in Tennessee who agreed to be my second scorer. Once I had completed all of my scoring, I then sent him the transcripts and asked him to score them. Since this was my first time with this instrument, I wanted a second scorer to validate my final results. He has had a lot of experience with the FDI. He met with me at the beginning of this process to coach me how to read the Excel spreadsheet, use the FDI manual to understand the codings, and also talk with me specifically about my Pilot 1. I did two pilots before I actually began with my first participant in the study. I needed to understand how to ask the questions, use any approved probing questions, and also score the transcripts. Once he finished all of his independent scoring, I compared his scores to mine. There were no major differences in both of our scoring guides (See Table 2). This part of the analysis provided me with the faith stage of each adolescent. The FDI and the scoring sheet are all free for anyone to use. In Appendix G, I included a sample of what the scoring sheet looks like.

The first six questions are called the Life Tapestry Journal (See Appendix D). I gave these six questions to the participants ahead of time so that they could answer them before meeting with me. It was not mandatory that they answer them or even return the journal. It helped them to think before meeting with me and therefore move things along more quickly.

This interview lasted anywhere from 1 and a half hours to 2 hours. A couple of the participants even went over 2 hours. The words appearing in bold are used as prompts on the scoring sheet. There is a snapshot of the scoring sheet in Appendix G. The scoring guide covers all 25 questions of the Faith Development Instrument (See Appendix E).

The digitalized transcript template provided to me by Dr. Heinz Streib from the Research Center for Biographical Studies in Contemporary Religion in Bielefeld, Germany, numbered every line and broke up the interactions by participant and researcher. The transcript printed template is also found in the manual. On the scoring guide, the interact numbers for each question were identified for easy referral. I found it easiest to score all of Aspect A for all 11 participants at one time before moving to the next aspect. I read the manual's description of each aspect and stages under each aspect first. Table 1 shows the breakdown of each aspect and question number.

Table 1

*Faith Development Instrument Scoring Guide*

Aspect	Category	Questions Included in that Aspect
Aspect A	Form of Logic	5) Breakthrough 6) Crisis 11) Changes in self 15) Decisions
Aspect B	Perspective Taking	8) Current relationships 2) Past

Aspect C	Form of Moral Judgment	7) Parents
		16) Right action
		23) Sin
		24) Evil
		25) Religious conflict
Aspect D	Social Awareness	1) Marker events
		3) Changes
		9) Groups
Aspect E	Locus of Authority	10) Life meaning
		12) Beliefs
		17) Always right
Aspect F	Form of World Coherence	14) Mature faith
		18) Purpose
		19) Death
		20) Religious person
Aspect G	Symbolic Function	4) Image of God
		13) Harmony
		21) Symbols
		22) Spiritual discipline

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This table was key in organizing the data in order to code the interviews. The results of the instrument are found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participants' Faith Stages*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Faith Stage	Faith Stage	Final Faith
			My Score	Second Scorer	Stage
Participant 1	16	Female	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 3
Participant 2	15	Female	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2
Participant 3	17	Male	Stage 4	Stage 4	Stage 4
Participant 4	15	Female	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3
Participant 5	14	Female	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2
Participant 6	18	Female	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 3
Participant 7	15	Female	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 3
Participant 8	16	Female	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2
Participant 9	15	Female	Stage 4	Stage 4	Stage 4
Participant 10	18	Male	Stage 4	Stage 4	Stage 4
Participant 11	17	Male	Stage 4	Stage 4	Stage 4

As the table states, all of my participants fell in the stage 2 – 4 range. The second stage is mythic-literal. Stories play an important role in this stage. They help give unity and value to the child's experiences. This is the faith stage of the school aged child and beyond. Their thinking is more logical. Some adults never move out of this category (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). For stage 3, even though most adolescents are able to think logically and abstractly, they are not all able to think for themselves yet, and therefore they are not able to reflect on their own worldviews (Astley, 2000). This makes it difficult to talk with them when they are not even sure "why they are there, or even that they are there" (Astley, 2000, p. 3). Most adolescents and many adults are in this stage (Astley, 2000; Fowler, 1981). They have not figured out how or

that they are in faith or even where their faith comes from. Stage three is synthetic-conventional faith. Adolescents and beyond fall into this stage. At this stage, people are able to use and appreciate abstract concepts. They start to think about their own thinking. They look back on their own personal stories. They start to name and synthesize the meanings of their stories. Many adults stay in this category. The limit to this category is that people are not able to take on third-person perspective. They still need others to confirm and clarify for them about their own identity and meaning. They are not able to have a transcendental perspective from which they can see and evaluate themselves with relationships to others from a perspective outside of their own. They become trapped in the “Tyranny of They” (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Stage four, a later stage of faith, is the individuative-reflective faith. At this stage, a person is able to reflect critically on what he or she believes, values, and commits to as part of the previous stage. This can actually be a painful process. The person struggles with developing a “self-identity and self-worth capable of independent judgment in relation to the individuals, institutions, and worldview that anchored his or her sense of being up until that time” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 24). A person may begin to question who he or she is outside of being a spouse, parent, professional, friend, or community member. It may cause an individual to have to reject or discard traditions. This requires a new clarity and intentionality of personal choices (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Usually this stage is for the 30-40 age group. This is when people are more humble and realistic in their understandings and affections than compared to previous stages. Their perspective at this stage is able to recognize meaning and truth in many places and sometimes unexpected places (Astley, 2000). Four of my 11 participants are at stage 4. This is not the norm for adolescents.

### **Participants’ Faith Development Narratives**

Participant 1, stage 3, was very difficult to track down because she was involved in many school, sports, home, and church activities. Her family has been members of this church site for decades, but she was new to the youth group. She said that she was too shy to go to the youth group. Her mom had to make her go about three years ago. In time, she opened up and joined the youth band. Participant 1 has a strong, Christian family foundation. She has even had the opportunity to go on several missions trips in her county, outside of state, and even outside of the country. She is very driven in her school work. Since she wants to become an orthodontist, she feels she must push herself hard in school now so that she can get into a good university. She battles worry. She relies on her family, God, and music to help her overcome her stresses in life. She is very concerned about those around her. In question #10 about life meaning, she stated, “I try to be happy for other people because I know they’re struggling, and I know that sometimes it can be hard for them, and it just helps them if you say hey or smile at them...” When discussing her life’s purpose, she answered, “...life definitely has a purpose, and what I think it is, is to honor God with our lives.” Participant 1 averaged at stage 3. I found it interesting that she scored at a stage 5 in marker events and also in changes to self. She was very explicit, inclusive in description, used different perspectives, held dichotomies in tension rather than trying to achieve closure by collapsing a dichotomy, and expressed openness to the depth of dimension in human beings. This showed me that this young lady had a depth to her that time and experience would only enhance.

Participant 2, stage 2, was shy, and I found it a real challenge to get her to answer the questions. She doubted her ability to answer questions. I did not probe much when she gave me an answer that I felt I could score because I did not want her to feel her answer was not good. She needed affirmation that she had answered the questions well throughout the interview. She

comes from a religious family background. Her grandfather was a minister. He passed away a couple of years ago. That made a significant impact in her life. Her father did not follow in his father's footsteps. Her father struggles with depression and is in and out of church regularly. She and her sister come to church without their parents most of the time. Participant 2 said that her grandfather was the only one who said that he loved her and told her she was pretty. She said that she really missed that, and it made an impact on her self-esteem. When asked about her image of God in question #4, she described,

Well, I can't really explain it, but it's like when I'm at church I feel that I get really close to Him, but when I'm at home, it's like church never happened...because my parents don't talk about anything at home, and we don't really talk so I don't really have anyone to talk to about it, and it just goes away sometimes...He created me in His image,...I don't see how that's possible. It's like why am I not perfect, and I mean, yes, I've always had that thought, but I could never get my head around it.

Participant 3, stage 4, was also very difficult to connect with because he was taking college courses, homeschooling, working, and volunteering. I had to break up his interview into two sessions because he could only give me an hour and a half each session. I found him at ease in the interview. He did not mind sharing his thoughts. He was very reflective. His family was also rooted into church. They did not go to this church site though. He came on Sunday and Wednesday nights for youth group. His family's church is a small country church that does not have an active youth ministry. He chose this youth group because of their youth band. He has experienced real tragedy in his life through his health. He has scoliosis which is a genetic, spine disease. His father also has it. Throughout his early teens, he had to wear a brace to straighten and strengthen his spine. He confided that he had a lot of anger during those years because it

kept him from being able to play football and also provided him many painful years. He said, “I guess that messed with my self-image a little bit. That’s when I guess I started being more of the rebellious type.” He was able to talk about his life changes just over his 17 years. He recognized his weaknesses, and also was able to see himself from other people’s perspectives. That was unusual for most of my participants. When asked about his image of God, he answered, “He’s everything really. I developed a really close relationship to God, or I guess that moment where you just kind of break down, and you can’t handle all the stuff you’ve done.” He was honest about that breakthrough. He continued,

People want to say after they have had that really “aha” moment with God, they didn’t ever go back. I would like to say that but, I mean, I wasn’t like I was before, but I still have moments, you still have moments where you fall short.

When asked about groups in question #9, Participant 3 answered, “It’s really given me, I guess, a backbone about my faith and another place with other people who are like this.” His answer to question #11 about changes he would like to make in his life was very insightful to his reflective character,

Well, I’m pretty happy with myself. If I look back at my life over like, over something I may have regretted...I still look at it as kind of like something that I’ve learned from...even my back has helped me connect with different people that have had similar issues.

Participant 4, stage 3, was eager to be a part of the study. She was a cheerful adolescent. She had a lot to say, but she was difficult to pinpoint down to actually answer the questions. It took extra probing to get an answer that I was able to code. This participant’s family background was different from the other participants; neither of her parents went to church, and they were



also hostile to the concept of church. Question #7 asked the participants about their parents. Her response,

They have always been, “I’m not going to, I don’t care, nothing’s right, if it’s not my way, then it’s not right.” ... And my mother, she practices another religion. I don’t know what it is. She calls herself a witch, whatever that means...I’m scared to bring out my Bible in the kitchen. I’m scared to bring out my Bible into the dining room or into the living room. I ’m scared of what people in my household think. I’m the only Christian in my house. I’m the only one.

Her grandmother had taken her to church as a little girl, but she never really connected to the church. She happened to be invited to a youth revival at this church setting three years ago and decided that she wanted to stay. She felt she belonged. She has some confusion in her understanding of Christianity. She contradicted herself several times and was not even aware of it. She really struggled with Aspect C, Form of Moral Judgment. Question #24 asked, “How do you explain the presence of evil in our world?” She did give some significant statements in that section that she was not able to portray in the other questions. She stated,

...people fail all the time. They will think of something like temptation. They will believe that evil and that is Satan. No, that is natural because that is our flesh. That is how I believe it. It is our flesh that is doing that not the devil. I mean he can have some role in it. But our flesh naturally desires... Good people can do bad things every single day, and they do those things because they think it is right. They do not know what is wrong. The majority of times they do not know the Bible. It is our job to help them realize that it is wrong and if they do not acknowledge that it is wrong then they are going to keep on doing it. It is our job, we are placed here as God’s little minions to do the

work.

She is passionate about the Bible, but she is not yet knowledgeable. That is evident in her confusion throughout the interview. She is also harshly judgmental of those who do not believe the way she believes. In question #9 concerning causes, she said, “I hate that people ignore God. People know that He’s there for them. Even my parents. They are the main reason that I hate this.” She also “hates” prostitution.

It’s just like you know they’re on the side of the corner. Why are they on the side of the corner or why are they doing those things? Why? You are selling your body every single day to a man that you don’t even know. You are putting drugs in your body so you can tolerate that. You could have a much better life. You do not need that. I hate it.

Girls at school are provocative. They show everything. God has given them this beautiful masterpiece. Cover it up for your husband. It’s for him not anyone else. You know that God gave you that. Don’t show it to the world to see. I could go on for hours. Even with these harsh words, she has a real tender side. When asked about her beliefs, values, and commitments, she said, “I definitely believe that God has a future for me. Don’t ask me what it is because I have no idea. He will reveal that whenever He wants to, but I definitely believe He has a future for me.”

Participant 5, stage 2, is an introverted young lady. She was the youngest of all the participants. She found the questions difficult to answer. Once I felt she answered enough in order for me to code her answer, I moved on to the next question. I did not want her to be so uncomfortable that she dropped out of the study. She is not a critical thinker at this point in her development. Basically, she is focused on family and friends which is typical of stage 2. She did tell me that she has really struggled with talking to people since she started homeschool a

couple of years ago. Question #11 yielded an insightful answer in trying to understand her struggles:

I wish that I was more social... Yeah, uhm, in this generation everything is about electronics and the internet and all that. Uhm, I find myself that the more I spend time on the internet, the less I talk to people, and I find it hard to talk to people. Like the other time, this is kind of embarrassing for me, like the other time when we went to the library..., but I stayed in the car because I didn't want to talk to anybody. I was a little scared because I didn't know how to talk to anyone anymore.

When asked about what beliefs were important to her life, she said, "My Christianity, is that a belief?" When asked who or what she considered to be mature faith, she mentioned her best friend and the pastors. She focused on their humor. She struggled with Aspect C, Form of Moral Judgment. Unlike other questions from the FDI, her answer to question #15 about decisions was explicitly explained,

Either I would check with friends or I would just sit in my room in God's presence and just start talking to Him. I just let Him hear what I have to say...Usually with just His presence can be something how He talks to me. Like He's just telling me that "I'm here, and I'm listening, and you can say anything to me. I won't judge you or anything like that. I won't judge you." And other times I would start talking to Him and pray and then start reading out of the Bible, and then sometimes the verses that I read just kind of pop out for me like to say, "This is for me. This is what He's saying to me right now."

Participant 5 may be young and struggled with many of these questions, but she expressed her view of God clearly:

...the image of God actually for me changed a lot. I knew that He was the same God

throughout the ages. But, I had a different view of Him. Like I used to think that He was just some...I'm actually ashamed to think this now, but I thought that He was just some wimpy, small God without me even realizing I was actually thinking that... this one guy, Louis Giglio, he's this uhm, worldwide teacher/pastor whatever. And after I watched one of his videos, he was talking about astronomy... And to think that I'm on the earth? I'm small compared to Him. Like my problems and all that, there's nothing compared to Him...my view of Him has changed completely. He's just like, He's awesome. He's huge. Like to think how big our universe is and that He can hold the whole universe in the span of His hand.

Participant 6, stage 3, was not a shy, young lady, but she did doubt her ability to answer the questions. She was my oldest female participant. She was a senior in high school. She takes her school work seriously. She has also joined the local Emergency Medical Services (EMS). She wants to be a doctor someday, but realizes she financially cannot pay for that type of schooling. She does not have the family support to help her pay for school or encourage her in that endeavor. When asked to talk about her parents in question #7, she said, "I don't know, I don't talk about my parents a lot." After some probing, she ended up talking about them for two pages of transcription. Her father is a son of a minister, but he has not chosen the same path that his father chose. From her description, Participant 6's father battles depression. Her mother is not supportive either. She always defers every decision to the father. This participant battles the negative atmosphere in her home often but has learned that if she is positive, it rubs off on her parents. She takes a spiritual leadership position in her home. At school, she is shunned because of her stance on Christianity. She sits at the lunch table by herself often. She said when people have problems, they come to her, but they do not want to sit with her normally because she does

not “talk about people, cuss, or talk about sex.” She wrote in her Tapestry Journal for question #3:

...growing up I was pretty popular, but I was not technically living right. I was not what as many would call, you know, would say bad. I did not curse and all, but my thought process was just not really Christian-like. I did not care about anyone but myself, but now since I’m changed I feel like the unpopular, Jesus freak, but I’m okay with it because I know that I’m doing something right.

Participant 7, stage 3, was only 15 years old. She wore a lot of black, wore a knit hat on her head even inside the building, heavy black eyeliner on the top and bottom of her eyes, and seemed reserved. Once we started talking, she shared some private things with me. Her parents divorced and then moved states away from each other. Her mother lives in New Orleans while her father lives in eastern North Carolina. She lives with her father at the present but wants to move down to New Orleans to live with her mother in a couple of years so she can spend her last two years of high school in a music school near her mom. Through the divorce, she experienced a lot of loneliness and depression. Her father was in the Navy, so she spent a lot of time with her grandmother. They had a good relationship, but when he got out of the Navy and she moved in with him, the changes were too much for her. She struggled with friendships at school, she looked differently from others, she acted differently, her music likes were different than others around her, and she was into vampire and zombie art. She was so depressed that she began cutting in order to relieve the pain and considered suicide.

I was trying to get closer to some people because I really felt like I needed some people to be there. Those people like basically said, “You’re not worth, like you’re not worth anything, you’re ugly, and you’re useless,” and I started to believe that. I fell into the

depression. I started to cut again...I was a paradox. I wanted to be happy, but I thought of things that made me sad. I got lazy but had ambition...I didn't like myself, but I loved who I was. I said I didn't care, but I really did, a lot. I wanted to be noticed, but when it came my way I rejected it. I was a complete contradiction. I thought if I couldn't figure myself out, there's no way anyone else has.

She says she found belonging at the youth group. She fell in love with music there. "I have a creative side, and I have my religious creative side. This is just like my drawing creative side and music, a little bit of music, religious and creative because I'll get creative with like worship." This was the first time in a long time that she could classify herself as happy. She has given her life to God. She describes Him as, "I know Him as my father and a close friend." She has friends at church, and she acknowledges that she really needs them. Joining the youth band was what cinched it for her. After that, she knew she was in the right place.

Participant 8, stage 2, was uncomfortable in the interview. She did not feel confident that she could answer the questions. She made the comments, "I'm hopeless," "I guess that's about it," "I don't really know," "I would probably mess it up," and "I don't really know what else to say." I had to be sensitive to her insecurities during the interview. I did not want to probe too much to keep from pushing her away. She spoke mainly about her family and very few friends. A couple of years ago, her family decided to homeschool. She was bullied in elementary and middle school. She loves her mother but struggles liking her father. There is a lot of tension in the home. When discussing her mother she describes, "I really think she wants to love my dad more, but it seems like he's just pushing her away." This is a source of pain for her. Her social awareness is limited due to her limited exposure. She participates in homeschool, church, and video games. When asked to explain her beliefs, values, and commitments, she tacitly stated,

“Beliefs and my religion and my relationships with God and my family are really big ones. Values, I guess that would be the same as with my beliefs and commitments also...I’m kind of simple.” She did say that she felt most in communion or harmony with God when she was in “quiet time or praying or learning about science or apologetics or digging into the Bible more.”

Participant 9, stage 4, was full of energy and words. At 15, she was one of my younger participants. She was so pleased to be a part of the study and made meeting with me a priority. She was a quick, deep thinker. She was the only one in her family who went to church. Her parents divorced when she was a baby, and both remarried within a few years. She spoke well of both parents and their spouses. Her family supported her by dropping her off at church but expressed no desire to go to church with her. She shared with me that she did not care where they went to church, but she just wanted them to find a place where they were comfortable. She describes her relationship with God in a unique way:

I have a healthy respect of the fact that, you know, He is above me, but also I’ve gotten more of the He’s right here with me as well. I just always imagine, you know, just this greatness like I can’t put it into a physical image but, you know, I always just think of warmth and like just the protection of Him...like a dad, you know, only perfect in every single way.

She describes herself as a positive person like her mom. She finds that life has meaning, but she just does not know what that meaning is yet. Her biggest aspiration is “what makes life meaningful to me is finding my life’s meaning.” When asked about where she finds herself most in harmony with God, she quickly stated her youth group. She confides, “I feel so comfortable here just to sit and meditate and things like that and also to have communion with, you know, fellowship with my friends and things like that, and we have, you know, discussions.” The youth

group is where she learned how to worship and that “holds a lot of significance” in her life. The fact that she scored at a stage 4 is unusual for someone her age. Her reflective nature and ability to see others’ perspectives pushed her from stage 3 to stage 4.

At 18, Participant 10, stage 4, was my oldest participant. He was away at college about two hours from the church. I had a difficult time finding a time when we could meet. I had to wait until he was on spring break. He was an intelligent young man. He was young to go to college because he graduated a year early. He attends a prestigious university in the state and is majoring in chemistry. He has plans to become an orthodontist. He talked with me easily. He was methodical with his answers. Even with the first question about marker events, he was able to go through his life major events starting from the time he was three years old. His family was important to him, but he spent a lot of time talking about his friends and influencers in his life. For his earlier years, he described, “God was always just an abstract Being thing that was just there.” At the age of 12 or 13 when he “confidently knew” what he was doing, he made a personal commitment to God. He has been through some crises in life through being bullied, grandparents passing away, and trying times of difficult decisions. It was in those times he explained, “Just about every time that I’ve been at the lowest points, it’s been followed by... a period of breakthrough where God just shows and says, ‘You may have gone through this period of testing, but I’m still your God.’” He was explicit in describing how much he loved this church, his youth group, and his pastors. The church provides him an outlet for his worship through music. He plays the guitar and sings. I found it interesting when asked what he would like to change about himself, he said, “I wouldn’t want to be as self-centered as I can get sometimes...I can get in these moods where I’m very, you know, self-centered, to use my word again, and just arrogant, I guess, and cocky and sarcastic.” He feels that this side of him gets in



the way of his relationships with others who are important to him. I found his answer to question #14 about mature faith interesting because it lined up nicely with Fowler's stages of faith and illustrates just how explicit he was with his answers, which is typical for stage 4:

Mature is a funny word when you talk about faith because I personally don't think that you ever reach a point to where you can like quantitatively say you have mature faith. It would be different for each person and it would be stages, you know, anybody has their progression of faith, growth stages in their faith. So that kind of suggests that there's different degrees of maturity in faith... different stages would be different, I guess, levels of intimacy with God. That's kind of an abstract thing to quantify but intimacy with God and relationship with God is, I guess, the only way that you can really measure somebody's faith if you were trying to measure faith. If somebody's not taking the time to feed a relationship with God like they would to feed a relationship with a husband-wife, son-daughter, I mean, of that thing, then they really don't believe in that relationship. If you don't believe in a relationship you're not going to feed it and if you do, then you will. So I think that is what I would call mature faith, somebody that believes in their walk with God, and that is willing and does feed that relationship with reading the Word, praying and, you know, worshiping God however that would be for somebody personally.

Participant 11, stage 4, was agreeable. He was pleased to be a part of my study. He talked more than any other participant, but he mostly talked on topic. He gave plenty of information in order to make a strong coding. We had to break his interview up into three sessions. Like other participants in this study, he comes from a tough family background. Neither of his parents regularly goes to church, but his grandparents do go to church. His parents

divorced when he was in elementary school. He has lived with his mother, then his father, and back to his mother. He admits to battling depression for several years. He lost friends because, he humorously explained, “For whatever reason people just don’t want to be around depressed people.” He went to church off and on for several years, but he did not make a personal commitment to God until he was about 14. Once he gave his life to God, he made some drastic changes. He no longer felt he had to be popular. He said, “Not really being afraid to be an outcast by my friends, that was a huge change for me.” He no longer felt he had to have a girlfriend. As he matured in his faith, he found himself doing things like food drives, foreign and local mission trips, telling his friends and strangers about Christ, and working with the spiritual advisor at his Christian school in planning chapel programs and student revivals. As for life’s meaning, he answered, “Meaning to my life at present: the great commission, serving God, glorifying Him...” Question #11 asked about changing one thing about yourself. His answer was very typical of a stage 4 reflective answer,

I would ask God to make me a wiser person, and I have, and every single day I become a wiser person. That change is taking place in me right now. So one thing I could change about myself, I am changing about myself. So it’s not just something I’m wishing for, it’s happening right now. I’m not going to be the same person tomorrow. Every day I grow just a little bit more deeper in faith. Every time I have an encounter with God, I grow a little deeper in my faith.

### **Music Interview**

Once I had met with all of my participants except for Participant #1 and #10 who were more difficult to schedule, I began to schedule a second meeting for the music interview questions. This interview lasted anywhere from 20 – 60 minutes. It depended on how much

information the participants wanted to share. I had to do Participant 1 and Participant 10's faith development interview and music interview on the same day due to their busy schedules.

Through the literature review process, I developed these five open-ended questions to capture the Christian music experiences of adolescents:

1. Will you please describe the music experiences in your youth services?
2. How do the music experiences connect with your understanding of who God is?
3. What emotions do you feel when you are in these music experiences?
4. How does music influence your faith?
5. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the music experiences?

Due to the pilot music interviews, I learned that the participants wanted to see lyrics or have access to them while they answered their questions. I typed up a list of 21 songs I heard them sing during my observations for their reference. I also had my laptop available to look up any song they asked me to find.

### **Horizontalization**

The important part of horizontalization is that each statement at this step has equal value. Each statement contributes to the understanding of the nature and meaning of the participants' experiences with faith and music. This is where I took the verbatim interviews line for line and copied and pasted them into an Excel spreadsheet – one per cell. Each time I copied a significant statement into my spreadsheet, I would code it according to the main idea of that statement. I had one column for the participant's number, one column for the research question number, one column for the interact number off of the transcript where the statement came from for easy reference back to the transcript, one column for the significant statement, and the last column for the main idea of that statement. In 84 pages of single spaced transcripts from the music

interviews only, I was able to pull 322 significant statements.

### **Clustering**

After the horizontalization was complete, I then looked for unique qualities of the experience by considering each statement with respect to the experience of faith and music. I was looking for statements that stood out. I deleted all statements that overlapped or repeated. The invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience are the non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Moustakas, 1994). This is an important step because it helped me to “determine the significant, relevant, and invariant meanings that provide living descriptions or highlights of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 130). This took the form of an outline with the main points being the nine themes that I found and the 33 sub-points being the invariant constituents that fell under each of them. Using these invariant constituents, I used phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation to construct thematic portraits of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Textural and Structural Descriptions**

After the themes were identified and the horizons were delimited for the participants’ descriptions of their experiences of faith and music, the individual textural descriptions were constructed from the verbatim transcribed interviews. This individual textural description helped me to evoke clear images, thoughts, feelings, and struggles of what happens during the faith and music experience for adolescents (Moustakas, 1994). Copen (1992) emphasized that “the structures are brought into the awareness through imaginative variation, reflection and analysis, beyond the experience and into the real meanings of essences of the experience” (p. 65). After each participant had an individualized textural and structural description, imaginative variation was used to put together a composite textural and structural description. This composite blended

together all of the individual descriptions and formed the “meanings and essences of the experience into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). This is a way of understanding how the participants as a group experience the faith and music experience. This report portrays the themes and essences in living descriptions that enable one to know the meaning of faith and music from the “internal perceptions and images” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142) of the adolescent. This composite description is “alive, vivid, and clear in bringing to light the universal character and dynamics of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p.143).

### **Research Question #1**

How do adolescents perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services?

Participants were eager to describe their youth services. Ten out of the 11 described a positive experience where they found belonging and enjoyment. Participant 11 was the only participant who negatively described his experiences with Christian music in the youth services but positively described his experiences with Christian music outside of the services. The participants explained how they all hang out together in the coffee shop, hallway, or youth room before services began. Then once youth services began, they would all file into their seats in the youth room. The music sometimes started with a fast song and sometimes it started with a slow worshipful song, but almost every time the presence of God was felt when the music began. This section describes the two themes that emerged from this research question. All participants felt a sense of belonging to the youth group and to God. Another theme that was repeated throughout every music interview question was the youth band. The youth band played a central role in the Christian music experiences at this site.

**Theme – Belonging.** About 10% of the significant statements revolved around belonging. Belonging could include the participants feeling like they belonged in the youth group or even belonged with God. Every single participant had significant statements in this theme. Participant 1 said multiple times, “It is just like a connection...like a hotline to God.” She felt that music was a connection to life itself. Whether singing or listening to Christian music, she considered it a time when everyone could “open up and be their selves and express that to God.” Several of the participants in both the Faith Development Instrument and the music interview referred to a New Year’s Eve service that they had a couple of years ago where the youth band and other youth members went to play and sing. During this service, they found their way as a group going outside praying and singing a capella. They talked about how this was a real breakthrough experience for them not only as individuals but also as a group. Participant 1 called it a “God moment” or “God experience.” She mentioned the song “You Won’t Relent” and referred to the line that says, “You won’t relent, and waters cannot quench this love.” She was surprised that in that small town 30 miles away from their church, they were able to connect to God through music out in the cold. Reflecting on that night, she realized, “God really does love us, and...He sees each and every one of us in the small town of \_\_\_\_.” Participant 2 also talked about the youth group and how music connects them. As the youngest participant, she expressed, “I feel like I’m not alone because there were other people around me in my age group, and they feel the same way about the music. And also it just makes me, like, I’m in my happy place when I’m singing because I like to sing.”

Participant 2 specified that she realized one can sing and not really get close to God; but on the other hand, one can sing and get closer to Him. She knows what the song means to her, and what God means to her through that song. When she sings, she is able to block out the

things that normally fill her mind and focus on connecting to God. “When I sing my mind is not on schoolwork or anything else, it’s just all on God at that moment.” She described the times when she closes her eyes as “probably the strongest moments...Basically...that’s just the time like when...the Holy Spirit hits me, and I just have to like, you know, give it all up at that moment, and I just let it all go.” During these times, she is able to better understand God and whether or not she truly has a connection to Him.

Participant 3 is unique to this group of participants because this is not his home church. He only comes on Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings for youth services. He believes that this youth group is “very, very different than what you would imagine from a town like this. It’s great, in my opinion.” He has a strong sense of belonging to the youth group. He stated,

It’s like we all want to be there. We’re not really forced to be there. And we, we just like to play music, and we like to do it with God, for God. It just provides a different experience from what you would expect from a town like this. You may, or may not have an all youth band -- like everyone in the band is youth.

Music means a lot to this participant. He used to not be into it, but now since he has belonged to this group, he has actually gotten actively involved in the music program.

Participant 4 describes this belonging probably the best of all:

I’ve been to another church and had a worship service. I don’t know, it’s so weird because my youth group wasn’t at the church that I went to...I didn’t feel as free. I didn’t feel as at home. I don’t know why I felt like that. I guess it was because I was new into where I was...I still sang and stuff of that nature, but it was nothing compared to me being here at my home church, being here and worshiping upstairs with them. Because I know these people, I have a connection with these people, and I feel more free

with these people. And it's just like we all know and love each other, and we just feel more welcome.

Participant 5 feels that sense of belonging while she is singing with the whole group or even singing with just one other person. She seems to believe that it helps her to feel the presence of God.

Participant 6 attributes the power of the group to the church adult leadership. The fact that the leadership at the church actually gives leadership to the teens themselves makes her feel as if they are wanted and valued. The teens are allowed to lead in worship upstairs in their youth services and at times downstairs in the "Big Church." Sometimes the teens are allowed to say a message before a song or even give a message after the worship. That leadership then flows to small groups on Wednesday nights when the older teens can lead other teens and sometimes even adults in Bible study.

Participant 7 has a unique story. She is different from most of the others in the youth group in that she dresses in a gothic style and prefers heavy metal and screamo music. There are a few people in the youth group that do enjoy the same types of music as she does. When I asked her about that difference, she shared,

That makes me feel kind of alone. I know people here...listen to the same music that I do...Honestly I can talk to \_\_\_\_ about it, and it's like, hey, I have a friend who understands. When I go to school, it's like, "Oh, you like your music; I like mine."

Good. They don't have the same taste in music as I have. Their ears are not as blessed as mine. Basically I'm just like, you're missing out.

Participant 7 puts on a good front trying to show that she does not care if people outside of her youth group like her style of music, but in reality, she later opened up and said, "They'll pick



people out and ridiculed them which is one thing that I don't like. You just don't need to do that." She feels she belongs to this group, whereas, she feels isolation outside of it. This is the same participant who shared in her faith interview that she had been so lonely in the past that she chose to cut herself to relieve the pain.

Participant 8 had a different slant on why it is so important to be a part of a group. She said,

The music part kind of prepares me for, kind of helps me start to think more about this because sometimes they relate their music to the sermon. So it helps me think more. I find it hard for me to praise God on a regular basis, so I guess seeing a whole bunch of other people do it helps me, motivates me a little bit.

The oldest of the group, Participant 10 pointed out the importance of the group and the decisions that the youth band makes for the good of the entire youth group for the sake of growing closer to God:

But any song that we sing, we sing it because we collectively believe that it is powerful, and it has meaning, and that it will touch somebody and bring them closer to God. If it didn't, if me personally, if I didn't believe that, I would talk to somebody about switching it for something else. I feel like the songs that we sing are relevant to what people go through because I know that they are relevant for me. Every song that we sing really, really has a meaning to me. It's really important that we convey that meaning and allow people to appreciate and understand that meaning and connect to God through that.

Participant 11 is the only participant who actually struggles worshipping in the youth group through music. He explained,

It's been shown before that a lot of people feel comfortable worshipping around people

they don't know or worshipping alone. There's always that, you know, what is this person going to think of me? Generally, I don't care, I really don't. But at the same time, it is, it's easier for me to get closer to God when I'm by myself or when I'm at a random conference with no one I know. That's usually when my worship comes across to be the best.

He still finds that sense of belonging in Christian music though. He finds that belonging through a closer relationship with God alone while he listens to Christian music a part from the youth group. He states, "Another way Christian music, especially worship music, connects is a lot of times when you come out of a worship service you feel like you're on good terms with God almost." He wants to feel that belonging with the youth group, but he has a hard time getting past all the things he knows about everyone standing on the stage singing or playing an instrument. He realizes that is a problem, but he is not sure he wants to do anything about it. He would prefer to just go into another room and worship privately instead of with the whole group. He actually said his best worship was after youth worship when he got into his truck and turned on his radio to Christian music. He said, "We'll never understand things about God, but every time we have an encounter with Him we get just that much closer to Him." Music is an important part of that encounter for him. He just prefers his time alone with God rather than with the youth group.

Ten out of the 11 participants found that music was part of what helped them belong to the youth group. All of the participants expressed a belief that music helped build a closer relationship with God.

**Theme – Youth band.** The youth band was a common thread throughout the entire interviews. The participants wanted to talk about the youth band whether they were in it or not.

Some of the significant statements were centered on the instruments, the singers, or the leadership of the band during worship services. Participants who were part of the band considered it a main reason they were even in the youth group. Some participants who were not a part of the band desired to be in the band.

Participant 1 has been a part of the youth band as a singer for several years. In her faith interview, she shared that she had struggled with shyness for many years until joining the youth band. She did not even want to go to church before joining the band. Her mother made her go to youth church. When I asked her to explain the music experiences in her youth group, she shared from the perspective of a singer in the youth band:

I think each...member of the praise team has, if they have something that's laid on their hearts, then they'll say it, but a lot of the musicians will express it through their instruments. Where I have the microphone in my hand, so I can express it through my words. I think a lot of times if I feel like this song relates to something God has for us, then I'll say it. Just I try...giving lots of guidance if I can but also stay in the background. That way I'm not seen. That's not what I want. I want God to be seen through it.

Participant 3 also is in the youth band. He has been a part of the youth group for about a year. He plays the electric rhythm guitar. When I asked him about how he felt on stage, he shared a little of his life history with me and how he has played at his home church for about eight years:

I've played there since I was, I probably started when I was about 9 or 10...But basically the reason I started was I came from a practice, and I had the guitar in the car, and they were like, "Bring it in and play something." I started in like the front row to get used to

it. So I've never really been shy of the stage. So it's probably the reason why I'm so comfortable playing here or over there. It just doesn't faze me.

He mostly plays by ear. He wishes he understood the theories in music better, but he likes being a part of this band because the music pastor teaches some theory while she teaches the music to the band. He shared his thoughts on trying to play in the band, lead the other guitar player who plays with him, and worshiping at the same time. Sometimes, he is not able to sing, smile, or worship because he is concentrating so hard on the difficult music or the new music. In reference to worshiping while he plays, he said,

If it's a new one, I don't really want to, and I guess it could be bad to say, but I guess I'm worried I want other people to still be able to, and I don't want to be the cause that they don't or messing up something like that. I don't want to make it...distracted. But I've gotten to where recently I've really tried to like try to let go of the concentration... And really try to like maybe sing along with it or listen to it more. I mean practices are pretty serious, but actual services I've tried to really change that. And some songs I'm just always more comfortable with. And can play a little bit more freely.

He talked about a couple of songs that he is able to play and worship at the same time. I felt it was important to understand how these young musicians can play and worship at the same time:

I guess we can start with "Set a Fire." That's more of a worship song. That's never really been like a song that you have to focus a lot on. It's like 3 chords. I like the sway of it. It's more of a like a worship style song because you can really feel the sway of the music and the rise and fall of the volume the music brings to the table. When you feel the build, I guess, in a song I'm trying to think of a different song that may have a better build..."Oceans." We just started that. Yeah, it starts off really subtle and calm, and

after the chorus, it builds, and it breaks open...The last few words they sing of the chorus, they really, in my opinion, get more power to them or more volume under their meanings...I think it's more of a time when people can kind of, I don't want to say sway, but it's more like get lost in like a good sense. Get lost in the presence or whatever they may be thinking about or dealing.

Participant 4 shared that she wanted to be in the youth band from the first time she heard them. She has now been a part of the band as a singer for about a year. She said that she sometimes feels so moved by the music that she closes her eyes to keep from crying because she does not want to break down crying while she is trying to lead others in worship.

Many of the participants shared how they get frustrated sometimes because others in the youth group do not participate in worship. They act as if they are aloof to the whole worship service. Participant 6, female band vocalist, said that it was very discouraging for those on the stage to have to look out and see people just standing there and acting as if they do not care. She said the band members really have to push it out there by being excited and at the same time not faking it. Sometimes she will just close her eyes so she does not have to see the audience. She believes it is still important to present them with the opportunity. She believes one day, those who do not participate by actively singing and outwardly enjoying the music will wake up, and it will "hit them" just how important worshipping God is. She also loves the fact that the youth have the opportunity to lead in worship on Sunday evenings and sometimes even Sunday mornings for the adult worship services:

You always hear, "Teenagers are good for nothing but trouble," and all that stuff, but here at this church, they let us be the leaders. They give us freedom, I guess you can say, when it comes to music which is a pretty big thing. Sometimes we get to sing on Sunday

mornings, and it's like, "Wow, we get to lead this?"

Participant 7, female rhythm electric guitarist, shared that joining the youth band saved her life. She did not have purpose until she stepped on to that stage. Since she is new in the band, she struggles being able to sing and play at the same time. She said she has to watch her hands and the chord charts carefully. Sometimes she is able to hum while she plays her guitar, but most of the time she is in deep concentration. She recognizes that it takes some of the people in the audience more time than others to gradually get into worship. It frustrates her at times when they stand around with their hands in their pockets, but she just tries "to make the best out of it" and "let them see for themselves."

For Participant 9, she was first taken aback from the music and the youth band. She had never heard of youth actually leading in worship. She has only been a part of this youth group for a couple of years.

It's nice having the band and the singers and stuff that we have. When I first came here, I thought it was kind of like a distraction just compared to what I was used to which was Presbyterian hymnal, stand up, sit down, that kind of thing, and you're done. But now I really like it, and it really adds to like the atmosphere. I've gotten more into band so I kind of get it now...There's a really strong connection, and it's a large part of my walk with God, the music part of it. So like on Sunday nights...I look forward to that part of it, the music, worship and things like that.

Participant 10, lead singer and acoustic guitar player, tries to "beat" into the band that they do not play "for the audience," but instead they play for "an audience of One." At age 18, he is not the oldest in the youth band though. There are two other members who are older, 19 year old drummer and 22 year old bass player. He wanted to make clear the role of the youth

band:

During practice when we are trying to prepare and get ready for service, both physically and actually preparing the music and getting that organized and follow through and worked out, but also mentally and spiritually getting prepared to actually do what we have been called to do and present, to lead in the presence of God in times of worship. The presence of God is here, there, wherever. But we are just like conduits that allow that to flow to the people and back.

As the leader, he has a job to do in helping with transitions from song to song or into different parts of the worship service:

I try not to be predictable and say something every time that we get up and to praise and worship at some point during the set, but whenever I feel something very strongly on my heart, I try to have thought about that, and maybe prepare something or just speak from, as I feel like I am being led to, things to just think about during the praise and worship. A lot of times that does relate to a lyric that really does speak to me.

He realizes that the band cannot control every aspect of the service. He too gets frustrated with audience members. He said, "On stage it is not hard to see somebody that is cutting up over in the corner, or somebody just sitting on their phone the whole time, or something like that."

## **Research Question #2**

What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God?

I knew that I could not ask the participants this question the way that it is written; therefore, I developed a music interview question that is worded to where they could understand the meaning behind the research question. Music interview question #2 asked, "How do the

music experiences connect with your understanding of who God is?” They had so many descriptions of who God is and used many songs to justify how they got those descriptions. The lyrics to Christian songs describe God in a way that they may have known already, or some song lyrics actually described God in a new, fresh way that the participants appreciated.

**Theme – Value of the message.** The common thread throughout most of the interviews was just how important the lyrics were to understanding who God is, growing in that understanding, and allowing it to make a difference in their faith processes. The value of the message section was the second biggest section in all of the horizontalization process. The lyrics provided the message for these participants. I quickly realized the importance of lyrics when Pilot #1 wanted to see some of the music because he wanted to refer to the lyrics of the songs. From that point, I had a copy of the lyrics to all of the songs I heard the youth sing available for the participants to see. I also brought my laptop to the meetings so that we could look up on the internet any other song lyrics they wanted to see. Participants wanted to tell me specific songs that meant something to them and why those songs’ lyrics were so influential.

Participant 1 mentioned the song “Not Ashamed.” She said that this song helped her to be able to express “the beautiful gift of God because you know He is still amazing... You don’t need to be afraid of what’s going on. He is with you no matter what. If you are not ashamed, then He will bless you.” Participant 2 said when she was younger, she did not really understand the music, but now that she is older, she values the message in the songs. In her previous faith interview, she talked about just how shy she was, but the song “Tell the World” makes her feel like she can overcome the shyness and actually do something of value for God. She continued to talk about the value of words like “Lord and Savior” in the songs she sings. She said, “And when I sing those songs, I connect to God, and it makes me feel like I have a better



understanding of who God is and how He is my Lord and Savior.”

Some participants classified the songs according to the lyrics as either worship, praise, challenging, or seeking. Participant 3 spoke towards this last category of seeking when he said,

Well, in the chorus it says, “Consuming fire, fan the flame, a passion for Your name, Spirit of God fall on this place, Lord have Your way, Lord have Your way with us.” I really think that song just speaks more of like the consuming fire that God has... You’ve heard the term “Man on Fire for God” or whatnot. It’s like fire, as in passion, and you want to be consumed by the passion for God. So it’s more of like a seeking kind of song... I always felt like I come away more during a worship service than I do before, if you really get into it and really listen to the lyrics of it.

This theme and the theme about how the participants respond to the music crossed over each other many times. Participant 3’s discussion of the song “Not Ashamed” was a mix between the message and his response:

I’ve always liked “Not Ashamed.” “I’m not ashamed of the one who saved my soul, I’m not ashamed of the One who saved my soul, this fire inside of me is burning for Your name, I’m not ashamed, not ashamed.” To me it’s a faster paced song. It makes me want to like move I guess. And the lyrics really, I guess they make me smile. And they make me want to, I guess, leap in a sense.

Participant 3 had an exceptional perspective on the lyrics of hymns and the importance of valuing the older songs of the church because of the value of the lyrics. This falls in line with his stage 4 in the faith interview which is able to see multiple perspectives:

It’s where certain lyrics don’t die...the same reason the Bible doesn’t die...It has that eternal meaning. And that’s why you get different versions of the Bible, and there are

different versions of “Amazing Grace” if you want to go there too. I’m sure there’s not a version written with all the thy’s and thee’s that it had originally, but the meaning behind it or the lyrics meaning is still there even when it’s remade. And that’s why I think churches have to have diversity because when you’re playing music the style of music and what you play on the instruments behind it really matter, and it can help it mean more to a person, or it might actually make it less and that’s why you have to have diversity.

The themes of growth and lyrics also crossed. Participant 4 and 5 discussed how it is difficult to understand the lyrics when you are young or new to the faith. Participant 4 said in regards to her experience with church music while she was much younger,

If you don’t know who God is or what you want from Him and what He wants from you, then you’re not really going to relate to any of the messages that are being sung... There are young people that know. They have experience with worship songs and understand that stuff, but I guess it was where the point I was in my life. I wasn’t quite ready to understand them.

Participant 4 also expounded on her experiences of the importance of the message while she is singing on stage with the youth band,

While I’m up there singing, it’s a whole different story. Whenever you sing,...it’s just the freedom...whenever I’m singing the words, it helps me to understand them more rather than just hearing someone saying them. I feel like whenever I’m singing it’s almost like God, it’s like I’m singing His words...and the words that we sing (looks through lyrics pages) like here it says, “Come on, come on, I’ll tell the world about you.”

That’s just really inspirational.

She also talked about the categories of Christian music. She classified some as worship and

some as praise.

Like in worship songs a lot, like sometimes they would even be Bible verses in songs, and if you sing them I guess there is something that helps you relate to them more...A lot of times in worship songs, they are repetitive, and I love that honestly, but you know it is really simple words that we know. And I think that is what helps us understand them more, because right here it repeats six times. But the main part of the song is so simple, the words are so powerful that you can't, you don't forget them. It's like most worship songs I can sing once and I just know it because I understand the song. It's just like in "Oceans." I never heard that song before the retreat. I didn't even know what it was, and we heard it in the retreat, and of course we sang it a lot, but it was like I knew it right after that. That is really beneficial because you were going through your day and you hear that song going through your head.

I asked her about what she thought the most powerful part of the songs were. She felt that this was the part where they repeat the same phrases over and over again. A lot of times, she said it was the bridge of the song that had the power.

Participant 5 said she wanted to see the lyrics when she hears a new song. She loves rap music, but she has a difficult time hearing the words. She said that she will go to YouTube and look up the song with the lyrics in the video so that she can read them while she listens to the song. She said that she could listen to just about any style of music as long as the lyrics portray a message that she needs because the lyrics help her to overcome.

If you're listening to lyrics of the song, especially for me, can just help you overcome what you're going through. Depends on what the lyrics are. And it can help you deal with it because most of the songs I listen to are Christian songs, and they are like very

encouraging, and they secretly give you Christ in their words.

Participant 6 clarified that the lyrics of the song can actually change meaning the longer that she listens to the song:

I can remember one time when I would always listen to Christian...radio, and then I sing the same song until one day it hit me to the meaning of one of the songs. And ever since then, the music has spoken to me like when a pastor gets the message, and it speaks to someone because they needed to hear. So I could be driving or something and I could hear the same song like 10,000 times, and I know it by heart, and then I actually listen to it a little more time, and I'm like, "Wow, so that's what that means."

She wondered if God was speaking to her through the music when she would hear something that spoke to a circumstance in her life. One morning going to school, she felt challenged by a song that she heard:

There was one new one that Matthew West had came [sic] up with called "Do Something"...it makes my morning...he was talking about how, I've been through this, how he prayed to God about all this hate and stuff disgusts me. And about how he prayed to God, "Why do you allow this to happen?"...And He said, "I created you."

She could not believe that God would actually want her to be the change, but the words of that song opened her eyes that God wanted her and trusted her with His business. She also talked about the song "You Won't Relent" in this same section:

That's like my favorite song because it pretty much talks about God is not going to stop until He has all of me. I think that is pretty awesome...Because what it's talking about is when Pastor...talked about how Jacob wrestled with the Angel, God, that's what that is talking about. It's pretty much saying, "I'm not going to give you up until you love Me

completely.” And it’s just like, “Wow.”

Participant 8 talked about the lyrics more than any other theme. She said, “The lyrics really – they’re basically just poems sung by other people but thinking of the different words ...can really bring to mind something I wouldn’t have normally thought of.” Just like Participant 5, she goes to YouTube and looks up new songs that have the lyrics with the videos. She watches those videos several times in order to learn the words. When she sings, she said that she tries to think of the words that she is singing and if she really means what she sings. She also clarified that the lyrics do not teach her anything, but that they help remind her of things that she already knows. She said, “Sounds weird but it’s like it’s more powerful when it’s put out in words than it is if you keep it to yourself.” She felt the chorus was the most powerful part of the song. She believed that Christian music has purpose, “To help people’s faith, bring people closer to God...some songs are more like a sermon to me...kind of like either a love note...”

Participant 9 sees the lyrics as a challenge to her also. She wants to “live out the words.” She sees the words as a dialogue between her and God. She does not mind what type of music it is as long as the words are meaningful to her. When she first came to this church, she struggled with the music. She had come from a church background where all they sang were hymns. As she developed a taste for contemporary Christian music, she saw it as a “first step into independence” in her faith. Up to that point, she had only listened to country music just like her parents did. No one else in her family listened to Christian music. In her previous youth group, they looked at Christian music from an analytic point of view. They would analyze the lyrics just like a sermon. At first, she struggled with the faster songs and did not feel she could actually worship with the faster songs, but in time she learned to concentrate on the words and still enjoy the fast paced music:

It just kind of like hit me...I can still, you know, have praise and worship with the faster songs like this. And I was like, but they're so repetitive and kind of like almost cheesy to a certain extent, but it's like the way it's worded. I'm an English dork, but the way it's worded it's saying like we will – like here it says, "Come on, come on, we will tell the world about You." Like yes, we sing it like come on like all fast and happy and stuff, but if you like look at the words, it's like, "We will." Like it's still making that promise, that declaration directly to God. If the song is not worded that way, I like change it in my mind.

She appreciates the poetry of the music. Whether referring to rap songs or great hymns of the faith like "How Great Thou Art," she is drawn to the lyrics. One song the youth sings is called "Cornerstone." It is a remake of the hymn "My Hope is Built." She made that connection:

I love that song. I like that it is a hymn. I actually found it in the Presbyterian hymnal. It's "My Hope Is Built" and some of the words are different, just a few of them, and we don't sing the third verse, but when I found it I was like it does all work together somehow... I'm used to "Cornerstone," and I really like the way it works with this because it's talking about all the great things about God, and how we feel about Him, and then it says, you know, "You are my Cornerstone." Like I think of a corner and ...you're on this journey, and you finally come to like the corner where you are like arriving, and I think of this like massive like monument or something. It's like it's just God, all you have worked for, and it's just like there. Like a stronghold.

She has seen a change in her music choices over the past few years being involved in Christian music in this youth group. In January, as she was preparing for the youth retreat that was mentioned during the observation portion of this chapter, she decided to fast all other types of

music other than Christian music. She said that she listened to a lot of different types of music every day, secular and Christian. She said through this fast, she really concentrated on the different styles of Christian music and focused on what the words meant. The words are what minister to her. In the last part of her interview, she talked about dancing to the meaning of the songs. She has taken dance since she was a toddler. At the time of her music interview, the youth group was beginning a dance team where they take different Christian songs and act out the lyrics through movement. Since she cannot sing well, she feels this is a great way for her to participate in worship and lead others in worship using a talent where she does excel.

Participant 10 focused on the writers of the Christian music that he loved. He felt that the lyrics could easily be anything that he would say to God. He wanted to make sure I was clear that he could not write those lyrics, but that he could definitely relate to them in his walk of faith. In his opinion, the writers of Christian worship music are “anointed” by God to write those lyrics which in turn “have the potential and power to encourage people and to lift them up and to remind them of who God is.” Participant 11 also discussed the writers of Christian music. He described it as each writer having their own “way describing who God is.”

This theme of valuing the message was a common thread throughout every one of the music interview questions. The participants kept coming back to the lyrics. Whether it was hymns, rap, worship music, fast paced songs, or various styles of Christian music, the number one important purpose behind the music was the message and how it drew them closer to God, understanding who He is, and what He wants from them.

### **Research Question #3**

How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents’ emotions?

Hall (1904) said, “Adolescence has been described as a period of storm and distress.”

That was 114 years ago and that statement is still true today. These participants are anxious, stressed, worried, elated, joyous, happy, depressed, and overwhelmed. Their emotions range from one extreme to the other. They told stories of how they may come to church with negative feelings, but when they start to sing, those feelings “melt away.”

**Theme – Emotional responses to Christian music.** There are many emotional responses that the participants shared. This is by far the largest theme. There were 78 significant statements that fell into this category. The emotional responses included frustration, happiness, sadness, enjoyment, fun, overwhelming, relaxing, amazement, and various attitudes. Christian music provokes many emotional responses from these 11 participants.

According to Participant 1, music is “kind of like a medicine.” She struggles in her daily life with stress. School, sports, and family demands are heavy in her life. She wants to do well in school so that she can continue on to dentistry school; therefore, she has chosen a rigorous academic path and many extra-curricular activities in order to be desirable to the university she needs to attend. Singing is that “stress reliever” that she so desperately desires. It is also fun for her. She said she could be completely stressed out prior to going to youth service, but when she gets on that stage and starts singing her “praise and worship,” she said, “I’m not thinking about anything else. My mind is totally on God. I think Christian music definitely helps you focus on what you should be doing, what’s right, what God wants.” Singing at church is also fun for her. She said some praise songs lighten the mood while other worship songs deepen the mood.

Participant 2 made similar statements. She said, “Basically I just feel like I can let it all go and just sing my heart out.” She too said that the music at the youth services help relieve her stress. She also listens to Christian music at home. School is not a pleasant experience for her because she is extremely shy and finds it difficult to talk with others her age. She also feels ugly



because there is no one to tell her otherwise since her grandfather passed away. When she begins to feel this way, she said she will choose a song that will help her overcome these depressing emotions. She said, “When I’m feeling like one way, like if I get home from school and I feel like bad or something, I know which song to look up because like the different songs make me feel different ways.” When she begins to feel ugly, she listens to “How He Loves.” In that song, it says, “And I realize just how beautiful you are.” She told me that hearing that song, “Releases all my bad emotions.” When she is in the youth music services, she said, “I’m just so happy I cannot control my emotions, and they just go all haywire.” That is when she starts to cry, but she says they are “tears of joy.” In the faith interview, she was very sad and quiet. In this interview, her eyes were bright, and she seemed much more vibrant. She talked about music much more freely than she did during the faith interview.

Participant 3 spoke more on the terms of how he feels when he is playing his guitar. He mentioned some songs were simple to play because they only included four chords. He said those songs were fun for the whole band and made him feel happy. He gave the song “Freedom” as an example. That song is fast and “fun to play.” It also inspires movement from him and other teens in the audience. The type of song affects his emotions differently. Fun, fast songs make him happy, while slow songs bring out a sense of amazement, sadness, or thankfulness. He did mention something that no one else mentioned in their answers. Since he does play an instrument, the newer songs do not have as much effect on him as songs that he knows well. He has to concentrate on playing the music so much that he is not able to connect with it emotionally as well. His emotions also depend on if he relates to the song or not, or finds something in the song that he feels speaks to him. In those cases, he feels like God is saying to him, “Hey, look at this.” Music can change his attitude. His example was the fact that he was not a morning

person. If he listens to Christian radio or one of his favorite bands like Switchfoot or Skillet in the morning, his attitude begins to turn to a more positive outlook.

Participant 4 is full of various emotions. She was very passionate about this music interview because she loves music so much. She said, “I think of music, and I just get happy.” She sang for me several times during the interview. When she hears that the group is going to sing a new worship song, she said that she gets “so excited.” Her favorite song is “How He Loves.” She pointed out the first verse in that song, “He is jealous for me.” She said, “It inspires me...and it makes me confident. It is just so many different feelings that I have whenever I hear that that He is jealous for me.” In one song, she can experience several different emotions:

“You Won’t Relent.” That is definitely a sad, sad song. “You won’t relent until you have it all, my heart is yours.” It tells you He won’t stop going until we are His. People deny Him every single day. And even though we deny Him, and we say we don’t want Him, He still wants us... At the same time it is mixed emotions... It makes me furious. It makes me mad. It makes me want to cry because to know that our God, He won’t relent. Some songs bring her peace. Other songs “pump” her up. When I asked her about why she closed her eyes and smiled during the times I observed her, she said,

Honestly, whenever I close my eyes, and I’m smiling, I’m so happy because the words that are in the songs that we are singing are so true. Tell the world that Jesus loves, you know we’re going to tell the world that Jesus loves no matter what’s going on. We are going to tell them, tell everyone. And that’s what we’re meant to do. That’s what we’re going to do no matter what’s going on in our country these days. No matter who thinks they’re going to stop us we are still going to tell the world that Jesus loves. So it just makes me happy that we still have people that want to do that.

Participant 5 also talked about the song “Tell the World.” Normally, this participant is a very quiet person. She said in her faith interview that she finds it difficult to talk with her peers. Whenever she sings “uppity songs” like “Tell the World,” she says she feels “like going out everywhere and saying, ‘Come here! I got to tell you something.’ And other times you just feel this joy inside and this peace along with it. Sometimes it can just fill you all up...completely cover you.”

Participant 6 says that she naturally is someone who smiles a lot. Songs like “How He Loves” really cause her to smile while she sings them. “‘And when my heart turns violently inside of my chest, I don’t have time to maintain these regrets, when I think about the way He loves.’ That part...speaks to me and makes me smile because my worries are like nothing...” Singing also helps her to relax and feel at peace with God like she is there with Him. Sometimes she feels “Fearless, unstoppable, sad, and angry at the same time.”

It depends on the song, and how I feel at the time. Like fearless, like You won’t relent until you have it all. Unstoppable would be “Nothing’s Impossible.” Sad and angry like certain songs that pretty much talks about how bad the world is, like how big of the change, me, one person can do. And then I’m thinking that’s a lot. Can I really do that by myself?

She said sometimes she doubts her ability to really do anything of worth, but songs like “Do Something” challenge her thinking and causes her confidence to gradually grow:

Look at the first stanza it says, “I shook my fist at Heaven, Said, ‘God, why don’t You do something?’ He said, ‘I did, I created you.’” And it’s like, “Oh, snap. Wow, thanks for that.” I’m mad at You, but really He’s like, “Nope, I made you so you can do it.” Oh, I gotta do it? That song right there, that part where he said that, it kind of made like a big

load come on top of me, like I got a lot to do, but at the same time I'm thinking, "Wow, You can give me that much power just to do that?" He believes in me.

Participant 7 talked about her feelings more than any other participant. She even said, "You feel God through your emotions." She shared that she expresses herself through her "emotions" while others "just go straight from the mind." She believes that the emotions are what God puts in her. She said without music, she would basically "be sitting there emotionless." When I asked her question #1 about her music experiences in her youth services, she said, "Music to me in there is hopeful." This is the same young lady who just a year before considered suicide and started cutting herself to relieve her emotional pain. When talking about Christian music, she said, "Well that's what keeps me going. I wouldn't be much of a Christian if it wasn't for music because music really kind of got me through some stuff." At times in the youth services, she feels overwhelmed, but she tries to hide it because "I don't want to cry because of my makeup." She wears a lot of black eyeliner and mascara. She is very self-conscious of how she looks. In her faith interview, she shared how much she struggles with her looks and weight. That was part of her depression in the past. She listens to music all day long. At home, she does the following:

Sometimes when I'm at home laying in bed, and I listen to one of the bands I like, and I'll be like, I'll get overwhelmed, and I'll start like tearing up, and I'm like, "Oh, I love this song." Then after that I start feeling fine, and then I will start praying, and then I'll go back to it and start listening to it and maybe fall asleep.

If a song does not touch her emotions, then she wants nothing to do with it and will go on to the next song. Like other participants, she also refers to the writers of the Christian songs she enjoys. She said the writers themselves use their emotions to write the songs, and it comes out in

their music. She does not want to fake her emotions while she listens or plays her music. She feels that would be a waste of her life. Instead, she strives for happiness through her music. That is what she feels is important. She lives a stressful life with school and problems with her personal life and family life. Music helps to relieve that stress and relax her. It calms her body shakes which are due to anxiety. Every time the stress and depression comes back on her, she said that she returns to the music.

Participant 8 is an extremely shy young lady of 16 years. She struggles with connecting to people and fitting in the youth group, but she loves coming to the youth group. She said that when they sing fast, upbeat songs, it gets her excited and makes her feel like she could do something for God. She said,

“Tell the World or God of This City” kind of makes me wonder if I’m really doing something, or if I can do more...it makes me determined I guess. It just makes me think more during service, and then afterwards I try to build on that and then the rest of the week.

Slower songs inspire her differently. Songs like “You Won’t Relent” and “How He Loves” makes her feel “closer to God even though He’s already here.” She said she is “very bad showing emotions.” Sometimes when the youth group sings songs about sin though, it makes her sad that sin even happened. She was not very descriptive in answering questions. I had to do a lot of prompting to get her to answer the five music interview questions, but at the end of the interview, before she left, she freely gave this intriguing illustration to how she views secular music now that she has had so much exposure to Christian music:

I don’t like listening to non-Christian music because it sounds empty, and you know how maybe you have a, say you’ve got a roll that you eat, and it’s all puffy, but when you take

a bite, it's completely empty. That's kind of how I feel whenever I listen to non-Christian music.

Participant 9 said that music was her “thing.” Music is what she gets “the most out of.” She compared her experiences downstairs in the sanctuary in regular adult services with her experiences upstairs in the youth room during the youth services.

I'm not as expressive downstairs. Like I very rarely, like, raise my hand during our morning service. I don't know why. Like I just don't feel the need to. Like I don't feel that emotional response, but, like, I guess Sunday mornings for me are more reflective, but I feel like it's kind of like the deep psychological rooting back to what I'm used to because Presbyterian services are very reflective and calm, and you hear what he has to say, and you think about it. You don't like make a verbal response to it and things like that.

Singing with the youth is her favorite place to be in the church. During those singing times, she feels “peace, joy like a calming, and then overwhelming.” Sometimes, she does get frustrated because there is a lack of enthusiasm from her fellow youth members. She said it was “like a white elephant in the room.” When things do not go smoothly, the youth band has a bad night, or people just are not into the music, it seems to throw things off. Usually though she is able to get “deep” with the music because that is her favorite part.

I was thinking about it, like all the breakthrough moments we've had that we look back on. Stuff hasn't happened while PD is up there speaking or something like that. It's been while we were singing or praying and things like that. So I thought about it, and I was like, this is like my thing. I cannot sing a note in tune or whatever, but it doesn't matter, like I still love this. This is my thing, it's what I get the most out of.

She loves the freedom that she has upstairs. She said that she is not confined between the pews like she is downstairs on Sunday mornings. She is able to get out and “step back and forth” even though she has “no rhythm.” When she is deeply moved by the music, and she is singing about her relationship to God, she said, “I guess especially when it’s something about connecting with God, it’s like that times ten...I get like that head spin, and it really like messes me up kind of thing in a good way.”

She was extremely open about her Presbyterian background. She loves the Presbyterian church and appreciates all she learned in the church, but she never loved the music there. Now that she has had exposure to the music in this youth group, she said she could never go back to what she had before. When she talked about the hymns of her Presbyterian background, she said,

I’m like rusty with them, and we’re reading them out of the book, you know. There’s not the fancy words on the screen. You’re reading it out of the hymnal, but you don’t repeat verses. You don’t repeat the chorus because you’re feeling it, you know. So it’s kind of like, “Oh you missed it? Too bad.” You learn a lot in a setting like that, but you don’t feel a lot.

Coming from her background of traditional hymns, she said she really struggled with the fast songs that they sang upstairs in her youth services. She could “enjoy” them but not get anything out of them. It took about two years for her to see the fast songs as actually having meaning for her. “I would just like really listen to the words...It’s fast and stuff, but it’s more like a chant or a like statement instead of just like singing like a ballad type connection. It’s like we’re declaring it.” She called it an “epiphany.” Now she is able to sing the fast songs, enjoy them, and go deeper with the meanings.

She also used the term “ironic joy” to describe how she feels sometimes in her music experiences in her youth services. She used the song “Oceans” as an example of this feeling.

She said,

Irony because I’ll be like really challenged by something like in “Oceans.” We’ll be singing it and like parts of it just makes me feel really overwhelmed or something, but then I like can’t help but smile over stuff. Just so many emotions going on, and it’s just like my head gets dizzy in a good way...they’ll say one thing, and I’ll smile and like not even realize it, and I would just get this like sense of joy.

Unlike other participants, she does not express the same frustration when others around her are not participating in the music services. She sees that as a challenge to make sure she is focusing on the music and its meaning. She relayed this story about a new song that the youth had just learned called “Place of Freedom”:

I would sing a line, and there was this voice in my head like, “Oh, are you?” ...So we sang it a lot...As we kept singing it, I was like “Yes,...I am.” It was a challenge to myself, and then when I realized that, you know, like I am going to do this, it was like okay, the conviction is gone kind of from like lying about it in a sense. It was like once I started to really mean it and get to that place like that intimacy level, it was like yes, now this is my place of freedom. It was like now that I’ve made these promises and like I’m going to do this...I’m like really worshiping. It was like we came back and sang...“No one that can bring me peace” and...I felt that like instantly. So then I would just like start smiling, and I would be happy, and then they would sing it again, and I would have to get back to that place.

Participant 10’s response to question #3, what emotions do you feel when you are in



these music experiences, was precise. He said, “Wow. I’m not saying wow, just because wow, that’s a good question, I’m saying wow. That’s my emotion, wow.” He loves being a part of youth group and playing an active role in the Christian music experiences each week. That is why he chooses to drive back and forth each weekend from college to home. He does not want to miss his youth group services. He continued explaining, “It thrills me to do what I have a privilege to do, honestly, to be able to encounter God and to worship Him and to bring other people into times like that, is indescribable. I feel so blessed.” He describes what music does for him and what he thinks it does for others in the youth:

I don’t want to say exposed to, I don’t want to say brought into, but if they experience, or they have that outlet beforehand to just, in whatever form that they want to do, encounter God before, before the pastor brings the Word, that they have a way to just let go of whatever is going on in their life, and say, “Okay, God, I want You to speak to me.”

Then that time transitions into the Word, and I feel like that helps people. It helps me, I know, to be more open and receptive because you just sit somebody down and start preaching, it’s going to be more like a lecture to them.

Participant 11 is the outlier in this group. His responses are much different than everyone else’s because he struggles with what he calls hypocrisy in the youth. He says that he knows everyone on the stage and knows who is true and who is not, therefore, he finds it difficult to feel anything but frustration when he is in the music sessions of the services. He shared with me:

In all honesty...there have been more times that I haven’t enjoyed worship in our youth services than I have. And I don’t feel like it should be that way. And part of that is my fault. Again, it shouldn’t matter who is singing to me, it shouldn’t, you know. I can sing my own song. There’s been plenty of times I’ll miss worship sometimes during youth

services, and I'll just go in the back room and just talk to God. Why sit there and kind of fake my own worship? You know, I don't need to do that. I can, I can just be alone for a little while. Sometimes that's what I do.

I could sense his frustration as he tried to explain his feelings. He does not like to feel like the youth band on stage is "cheerleading" him to the altar or "commanding" him to worship. He said, "I just get a little offended, especially when I know that person is, you know, putting on a show." Outside of the youth services, he is able to emotionally respond to Christian music:

Emotions that I feel like when I'm listening to Jeremy Camp, it's just like I'm ready to go out and just be the man for God..."Restored." I like that song. That makes me happy because God has, "You have restored me from my feeble and broken soul." Cause without God, I'd be exactly that, a feeble and broken soul.

I have listed many emotions that the youth feel during their Christian music experiences. They range from joy to frustration, happiness to sadness, and overwhelming to relaxing. They were quick to open up and discuss their emotions concerning Christian music experiences.

#### **Research Question #4**

What influence does Christian music have on the adolescents' stage of faith?

The participants believed that Christian music has a positive influence on their faith. They said that the reminders of who God is, what they are called to do, and who they are in Him are vital to their faith. They experience growth in their Christian faith through Christian music experiences. I also learned that the participants wanted Christian music often because it helped them with their worship to God. During worship, they felt closer to God. This was one way they experienced His presence.

**Theme – Growth.** This theme shows just how adolescents at stages 2, 3, and 4 are

influenced by Christian music. Growth is represented in so many ways in the significant statements. I saw growth in their understanding of who God is, their communication with God, their relationship with God, and their leadership in the youth group. They also referred to the importance of repetition of the songs and how that helped them grow spiritually. The Christian music did not necessarily teach them new things but reminded them of what they already knew.

Participant 1, stage 3, said, “Music just helps me.” She mentioned a couple of songs that strengthened her faith. While the youth group was singing the song, “I Surrender,” she talked about how they all broke down in tears because they saw how much God loved them through that song. She shared the importance of “I Surrender” to her understanding of who God is, “He takes the time, and He knows how many hairs you have on your head, and He knows all the troubles you are experiencing. The love and stuff that He shows us, the love is indescribable.” This was a breakthrough moment for her and also for her youth group.

Participant 2, stage 2, believed it was three different things that made Christian music so helpful in drawing closer to God. She said, “The lyrics, the emotions, and the beat. All three of those ties in together and creates one big thing that just makes me get closer to God and the Holy Spirit.” Participant 4, stage 3, has a very insightful way of describing this growth process through music,

There is memorization, and then there is understanding something. Memorization - it goes away, but understanding it is almost that little crinkle in your brain. You get that, you understand that...like  $2+2$  equals four. That’s never going to go away from the mind because you understand that.

Participant 4 talked about how she used to sing when she had to learn something at school. It is the same way with her faith:

I know people say all the time...you read the Bible and that's how you understand things. I understand things through music...Whenever I am singing a song that, don't get me wrong the Bible is an awesome source to go to for God, but singing is just another source that you can go to. Just like Google when you were doing a research paper. That's an awesome source, but if you look at the actual text, if you look at the actual videos of the things that people have went through...different things work for different people. Music is one of those for me. Music is my faith. Music is what helps me understand who God is.

This same participant told a story about how the Christian song, "Oceans," helped her grow in her faith and learn to trust God more. She started singing part of the song:

"Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters, wherever You would call me. Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander, and my faith will be made stronger, in the presence of my Savior." (Stopped singing)...Here recently I just turned 16, and I was really worried about getting a job. I knew that I got my license, and I need to pay for my insurance, my gas, and stuff. I didn't even, I know this is bad, but I didn't even ask God for help. I know it was bad to say, but one day I laid in my bed, and I said, "God I put this in Your hands." I finally said after just debating whether to go to and ask everyone but God. And I finally asked Him, and I was like - He is still amazing because even though He is not your first source, and you end up getting hurt, He still listens, and He answers your call. I was doing something for my birthday, and \_\_\_\_\_ texted me. He asked me if I would be interested in helping \_\_\_\_\_ clean \_\_\_\_\_. And I said, "I would be more than happy to do that." It just so happens I did the math the other day - that covers my insurance and my gas. Just little songs like that in your head and reminds

you the different things that God can do. Even though you might be in a tough time, in a tough situation, where you don't know if it is going to be okay, for those songs are there. They will help you understand that it is going to be okay because God says it's going to be okay.

This story shows just how applicable music is to this participant's faith walk. Music was not always that way for her though. She said when she first started coming to youth services, it was different. She stated, "I guess whenever I was getting into my new religion and my new faith, I didn't so much enjoyed the worship part about it because it was so true. It was so, 'Oh, that's right.'" She outwardly groaned and continued, "I didn't want to hear those things."

Participant 5, stage 2, like other participants found the greatest value of singing in the "reminder" that it gives. She said, "Sometimes we just get so caught up in everything in this world. We just forget. We just forget who He is." Her illustration of forgetting is worth repeating:

Like you know Louie Giglio? Whenever I watched one of his videos, like a couple of days afterwards, all I could think about was what he said about who God was and how big He was and how strong He is. Whenever I started to get into stuff that was not very spiritual, like even if it was just playing video games or watching a movie, then I would forget some of the stuff that he said, and sometimes we just need reminders of what we learned that we forgot.

She also specified that music builds relationships with friends and God. "It builds the relationship that I have with Him. Like whenever your best friend is over, and you are pulling up your favorite songs, and you are both singing it at the same time, you guys have a connection, and then it's like a best friend moment."

Participant 6, stage 3, shared in her interview, “It helps me to go deeper. Things speak to me through God like when it comes to music.” This participant grew up in church. Her past church music involvement was mainly hymns. She shared that she struggled understanding those songs either because she was too young to understand the words or too young to understand the spiritual meanings. She said, “Especially if you have grown up in Christianity...Until you get older and actually understand it. It’s like, ‘Oh, that’s for real.’”

Participant 9, stage 4, also came from this same hymnal church background. When discussing songs that they sing in youth services, she also referred specifically to spiritual growth, “When I’m getting that connection with God, I get the motivation to read and pray more. This is expanding my knowledge and understanding.” She gave a specific example of just how it affects her even when she is not thinking about the music:

And you’ll just be riding down the road and having like an intimate session with God, and it was really cool, and you don’t think that it makes that big of a difference but it does. Then those songs stay in your head throughout the day when you aren’t actually listening to them, and it just kind of like is a constant thing, at least for me considering how much I listen to music, and it was like this is cool. Like I didn’t realize how much of an effect it would have.

Participant 10, stage 4, is a singer and also plays the guitar. He has been playing and singing with the youth group for the longest amount of time of all the participants. He shared, “I feel that He allows us, He uses us as, no pun intended, instruments to bring people closer to him. Granted He is present everywhere.” The spiritual growth is less personal preference and more about the power in the words, “I’ve never, never to my knowledge have I heard any praise and worship song and felt further away from God after it ended...Even songs that I don’t like, the

lyrics are generally still very powerful.” He challenged others to give Christian music a try:

...listening to the word of God in song, which is what I believe that most Christian music is, it’s like reading the Bible. You don’t read the Bible and leave worse because of it. I feel like that hearing the Word of God in whatever form, reading, listening to music, is very beneficial. It’s going to, even if you don’t believe what it’s saying, it just has a positive message, it has a positive feel to it in my opinion.

Participant 11, stage 4, also stated that listening to Christian music helps him grow spiritually, “Sometimes, if you listen to the lyrics of Christian music, it will help you understand something.” He too spoke of the importance of Christian music reminding him of how Christians should think, behave, or act. He used an example from the Christian band Building 429 about love being the answer:

It’s kind of in my head. And all the times when somebody does something wrong to me, I kind of want to retaliate. It’s in human nature to do that, I feel, but in a way a song like that influences me into knowing that love is always the answer. It always has, always is, and always will be the answer to everything...It doesn’t necessarily come to my mind.

It’s not like the song taught me that. I’ve always known it. It just goes hand in hand with what I already know. It’s almost like a little reminder...it never hurts to have a reminder every once in a while.

When I further prompted him on this example, he clarified that he does not hear the song come in his mind when he is in the middle of a situation. “It gets into your mind. I’m not going to start hearing ‘Love is the answer.’ It will shape my behavior but not as much as a strong sermon will.” He wanted to be clear that music did not help him to spiritually grow as much as a “strong sermon or just being mentored.” He felt those were the two main ways he grew spiritually, but

he did see value in the way music helps remind him of what he already knows:

Music is more of a reminder to me versus being taught something for the first time...If I'm taught something for the first time, it usually comes from a sermon, some type of leadership training, or some kind of mentoring, or just someone giving me some personal advice. Usually music is a reminder. Every once in a while, you can put something into perspective like "I serve a God of angel armies." I never thought of that. You can certainly learn from music. I'm not saying you can't. But, 99% of what I know didn't come from music.

He did not want to belittle music's place, though, in his spiritual growth. He went on to explain that music helped to build a relationship between him and God.

Having someone talk to me, or a sermon, mentoring, that kind of thing will help me become a better leader. It will teach me right from wrong and what I should do and what I shouldn't do, how I need to minister, how to preach, how to spread the Gospel, the Gospel itself. You can read the Bible all day long and not have a relationship with God. I believe that. It'd be very difficult. You'd have to be very stubborn. But I feel like in music, Christian music is very useful in strengthening your relationship with God.

**Theme – Worshiping through music.** The participants' worship is also impacted by Christian music. Participants spoke of worship, the importance of the atmosphere, and the presence of God in 35 significant statements and how it changed them as a group and individuals. I put all of these topics into one theme with the broad umbrella titled worshiping through music. Nine out of the 11 participants significantly talked about worship.

Participant 1, stage 3, said that Christian music was "like an immediate hotline" to God. This is a way to actually "see" how people connect to God. Participant 4, stage 3, said that she



had “witnessed” other youth worshipping God through music in special services, but she had never experienced that for herself until about a year ago. Live music or video led music would still do the same job to help Participant 5, stage 2, get in “His presence.” She said,

As long as I’m directing my words towards God and not just singing, then I can get the feeling. I can get His presence. When I close my eyes and I just really get into a song, it just feels like it’s just me in that room with the music. Like if I were to close my eyes and envision the room around me, I wouldn’t see anybody. It would just be me in that room.

When I asked her further questions about feeling God’s presence, she clarified that she does not feel His presence in the room when she is just in there talking with her friends, but right before music and immediately at the start of music, she feels God’s presence. She continued, “Just to feel Him there with me while I’m singing to Him. It’s like He’s hugging me, but He’s not, while I’m singing to Him. It’s really cool, it’s just a cool feeling whenever I’m worshipping.” She shared that it was natural for her to raise her hands when she is worshipping during the music experiences.

Christian music helps Participant 6, stage 3, “see and understand” that she can “worship or be with God in more than one way.” She said, “You were always told that the only way you can talk to God is by praying. That’s not true.” She told me they can do the following upstairs in their youth services:

Worship the way you want. How do you worship? Do you worship with your shoes off like Pastor? Or do you worship with your hands up? Or if you just worship by kneeling. Like in worship, you can sing, you can dance, you can - like it says in the Bible - you can do anything and everything. No matter what you do, as long as you do it for God, that’s

all He cares about really.

She admitted that she wished she could do more when it came to music. She would like to be able to play instruments, especially the piano, and also dance:

Actually dancing and not just somewhere jumping around. So I can actually find different ways to worship God, I guess. To be honest, it's kind of boring doing the same things all the time. I can imagine that's not what God wants anyway. Then it just becomes a ritual, so I don't really mean anything.

Participant 9, stage 4, reflected back to the church's Christmas program this past year and how the youth sang and danced for part of the program. She was disappointed at what the youth did. She said,

It wasn't a very good representation of where the youth is as far as their singing and their worship because we have most nights deeper worship than on Sunday morning. I just felt it was like that kind of fell flat for me because I was like, you know what, we have amazing worship services and, you know, we really connect and we don't just sing cutesy little songs and stuff like that.

She also reflected back on the worship atmosphere during their youth services. She said, "When you have that many people, the odds are not everybody is going to get into it and sometimes I have a hard time getting into it...I can still get something."

Participant 9 also spent some time describing exactly why she believes the upstairs youth environment is more conducive for her to worship than downstairs in the sanctuary:

But on Sunday nights, it's a little bit more relaxing as far as like you aren't in dress pants or a dress...I think it's all back to the atmosphere, like that's my comfort zone up there, but also whenever the youth band is performing in the sanctuary some nights, that

atmosphere kind of comes back in. I don't know, I think some of the styles of the songs are a little bit different. Like I can't put my finger on it. I guess it would go back to the atmosphere and, I mean, odds are in a church not everybody is going to respond the same way. I guess you can see more in the sanctuary, all the lights are on, you know. Where I stand in the youth room, it's kind of dark, and it's like my own little personal bubble.

Participant 9 is not a singer. She said if she got up on stage and started singing, people may stone her. She can dance though. She has danced for years and has just joined the church dance team. Some of the young ladies from the youth have decided to get together and put some dances to their worship songs. She wants to "exemplify the words."

Participant 10, stage 4, has been in the youth group the longest of any of the youth. He has also been the most consistent. His experiences are based on five years of being personally involved in Christian music. He started playing the guitar in youth church as soon as he could play well enough. He is passionate about the music experiences upstairs. He said, "I would say that in our youth services the presence of God is encountered...on a very regular basis. I wouldn't say that lightly, and I don't have a problem saying that. I feel very confident in that." He was able to put his Christian music experiences into words differently from all of the other participants:

But at least from me personally I feel that God does not disregard our worship to Him...I know that God hears what we bring to Him...I truly try to take that seriously and as reverently as I possibly can. We are not up there to perform, we are not up there to please people, we are up there to worship God, and lead people into the presence of God. There's been times where if I just stop singing, and just look out... just in the air you can feel it, you can see it, the presence of God is just there, and it is just powerful, and it's

intimate, and it's real. Wow, wow, God. This is going to be what heaven is like some day. I had that honest thought several times, couple times upstairs, maybe a couple times next door, a couple times when we're playing in another location, but that's...just fantastic... I think music does a fantastic job of setting an atmosphere of worship that otherwise would be difficult to bring a group of people into.

I asked him about his worship and how it affected him and he shared,

It's hard to really worship God and then leave angry. So, a lot of times if I had a rough afternoon and I come back and I'm frustrated, I'm probably being excessively hard on the rest of the band members, whenever we hit a time of worship it's just, I don't know, cliché or whatever, but it just melts away stress, anger.

Participant 11, stage 4, has a negative point of view on worship in the youth services, "You know a lot of times we associate worship with music, and it doesn't always have to be that way." As mentioned before in previous themes, this participant really struggles with the music in his youth services and also in regular adult church services.

Personally, I agree 100%, we should be able to drop whatever we are doing and just worship God for who He is. That's...personal opinion, but I can be a little difficult and a little stubborn. Another thing that makes it a little difficult for me during the worship is because I know everyone on stage. Sometimes for me that can be a little scary. I know that some of them may or may not be who they say they are. And that makes it a little bit harder for me to get lost in the worship. You know, if I have the feeling deep down in my heart that somebody is faking something or someone's covering it up, and they're trying to lead me in worship, it begins to become a challenge for me to worship...Some of the best worship I've ever had is after church service in my car on my way home...I

can be a little stubborn.

### **Findings Not Anticipated**

Some of the themes that emerged from my findings were not anticipated. The participants wanted to talk about Christian music outside of the youth services. The youth services were not the only place that the youth accessed Christian music. They sought Christian music out, they paid for it, and they personalized it. They saw their personal listening habits as an extension to their youth service music experiences. Also, throughout the interview they talked often about different styles of music and their personal decisions to listen to Christian music. They wanted to share those stories and other stories that they felt were important for me to hear.

**Accessing Christian music.** I already knew that adolescents had a lot of access to music. That was evident in my literature review. A reoccurring theme in my music interviews was that adolescents access more Christian music outside of their youth ministries than inside their scheduled meetings. This access provides hours of Christian music experiences even before they step into their services. Participant 2 shared that she listens to Christian music on her MP3 player while she is at school, when she does her homework, and as she goes to bed at night. She accesses her music from iTunes, YouTube, or on the radio. Participant 5 also listens to Christian music as she goes to bed at night. She explained how she finds Christian music on YouTube and then converts them into a format that she can put on her Nintendo 3Ds gaming system. She said that her family was tired of the same songs on the radio so they all had their own devices that they listen to their favorite playlists. In the car, she and her two siblings could all have ear buds in listening to different songs. Participant 6 also finds her music on her computer. She mostly uses Pandora and YouTube. She listens to the local contemporary Christian radio station when

she is in the car. She even mentioned that when she is at home, her mom and dad often “play music that’s like ...talking about sex and a bunch of cuss words and I cannot stand it.” She was a little embarrassed to mention that she listens to an MP3 player rather than an iPhone like her friends had. She said, “I know that’s probably a dinosaur now compared to most people’s iPhones and stuff.” Participant 7 goes so far to “always have my ear buds in my pocket, and if I ever need them I’ll just take them out and listen.” She shared that she listens to music in the car going to school, once at school in before school care, and also walking down the halls in between classes. She shared that she always wore her ear buds when she rode the bus because she did not want to hear the offensive conversations that other students were having around her.

Participant 8 looks for new Christian music artists on the posters up in her youth room at church. Then she goes home and searches for those artists on YouTube. She also listens for other youth to talk about different bands they like and then goes home and searches for them on the internet. Participant 10 listens to music constantly when he is driving. He also listens to it when he is in his dorm room unless he is “actively writing a paper.” He listens to music on his radio, computer, and iPad. He said he had “thousands of songs” and the internet has “millions more.” He also purchases songs from iTunes, CDs, or downloads them from the Planning Center at church. The Planning Center is an online scheduling system that the music minister at this site uses. She manages all of the music for the youth and adult ministries on this site. Since Participant 10 is a leader in the youth band, he has access to all the music the church has access to.

**Music preference.** Some participants liked fast songs. Others liked slow, worship songs. Some participants prefer worship music while others prefer Christian rap or metal. There are many different styles of Christian music that the participants discussed throughout all of the

questions. Several of the participants wanted to talk about their favorite styles of Christian music inside of their music services in their youth group and also outside of their experiences.

Participant 2 appreciated the fact that this youth group actually sang “modern” songs that the youth could know the words and sing along. For most of her life, she attended a small, rural church where they sang mostly hymns. She liked the fact that her youth group had a variety of music. She liked how the music was “upbeat” and “loud.” Outside of the youth group, she preferred to listen to Christian rock or hip hop.

Participant 3 also liked the fact that his youth group was up-to-date in their music choices. He too comes from a church with a history of mostly hymns. He is the only one of my participants that actually goes to another church on Sunday mornings. He said,

I guess a lot of churches still try to use like the older, older hymns and stuff like that.

And even the church that I attend on Sunday mornings...started branching out of the hymns stuff, and we’ve probably got to about 90s worship music on regular Sundays. This change in his home church where his parents attend is exciting for him. He said now he is working on learning the piano and organ at his church, and they want him to teach them some newer songs. He still loves his home church. He shared,

It’s exposing them to different kinds of music. Cause I used to kind of dread the older style stuff. Now it’s just I really know, it wasn’t my style of music, and it didn’t really speak to me, lyrics and stuff. I like the different styles of music playing now. I think just like music, preaching, or speaking, everyone has their own style. So it really depends on what group of people you want to speak to.

He struggles with how people respond to music. He wishes that church-goers would learn to appreciate a variety of styles and not demand one thing or another. He would like to see the

generations brought together through music.

When you talk about hymns,...some people, that's what they need. Some people it's what drives them away. That hurts me in a sense to know that certain music can be played that way, but you really have to understand that church is trying to add that diversity to itself to where it can still play around everything. And that's why you hear a lot of these older songs being remade. "Amazing Grace" is probably the most remade song ever.

When asked question #5, have you shared all that is significant with reference to the music experiences, he added one more comment that he felt was important for me to understand:

Some teens I guess relate to music more than others...And it's just where some teens don't listen to music as much or may not be into music as much, and that's just some. I mean I know a lot of kids who are really into music and really like to listen to it. You've also got different styles, and different styles speak to different people. Some people don't really like the fast paced guitar grungy stuff. Some people don't like the contemporary style. Some people don't like the slow style. I think especially with this church it offers a lot of everything when it comes to music. You've got your music style, and you've got a number of years that Pastor will pull music from and will put into a service. You guys got your first service where maybe a little bit further back music, and you've got second service where you've got nearer music, but it spreads across a span that really reaches a depth, like a number of people.

Coming from two different church environments where he is actively involved in the music, this was very insightful for a 17 year old young man to formulate. This analysis is another indication of exactly why he falls into the stage 4 of Fowler's faith development.



Participant 5 described the different styles of music in the youth services the following way:

Some of them are very upbeat and some are like were slow, mellow, more relaxing. Like the more upbeat, it's like, "Come on! Let's get it pumped up for God." And then some other ones are like just to stand there and sing to Him and enjoying His presence.

She likes the youth band, the loudness, the dark room, the variety of music, but she prefers the simple acoustic sessions that they have on special occasions. Those sessions seem "peaceful" to her. For her personal taste, she enjoys rap music. She admits that she cannot really sing, but she enjoys rapping in private. She prefers a wide variety of music. She gets bored when songs are continually repeated. Participant 8 also prefers a variety of music to keep her from getting "bored."

Referring back to Participant 9's church background, for years she only sang hymns and simple choruses out of the hymnbook. Her mother was also brought up in that same church environment too. Now that she comes to this church, she sings a wide variety of songs. She mentioned that once in a while her mom will come to church with her but will not sing unless it is a hymn. If the hymn has any added bridge to it, her mother will stop singing until they get to the original parts of the hymn. Participant 9 said that her mother is not outspoken about the music but just chooses not to participate. When she tried to coax her mother into singing it, she would say, "Mom, the words are on the screen, you know, you can sing along, don't be scared." But her mom would respond, "I don't know it, I don't like it, leave me alone." She continued to discuss her family's perspective on music. She had to work through her family not approving of the music that she now sings in church.

I thought about inviting my grandmother, but I don't think I would ever hear the end of it,

and she's happy where she is, kind of leave it at that. My step-dad goes, "They have drums at the church?" And my mom was like, "It's not like rocking out, but they do have drums there."... They're fine. They're like, "If you like it, like it. But that's not for us..."

She wishes that her family would come to church with her, but she has come to an understanding that they are not comfortable in that type of church setting. She comprehends that her parents and grandma have not been brought up that way and therefore are not going to change. She wishes they were not so stubborn but has grown to have peace concerning this matter.

Participant 9 is only 15 years old, but she scored at a stage 4 in the FDI. Part of Stage 4 is being able to see other's perspectives. It was evident in her discussion of her family's points of view. She still appreciates her traditional church music background and finds value in the old hymns of the church:

I still like almost wish we sang a hymn every once in a while, like...when we sang "It Is Well," it just made my day. I like all of it now. I'm getting a more respect for all of it. And once I got the respect, I was able to go deeper with it. It's kind of like just because you like English so much doesn't mean you shouldn't do math and history, that kind of thing.

**Personal Perspectives.** Music is a personal choice for these adolescents. Some like to sing, some like to play instruments, some like to listen, and some like to dance with their Christian music. They were quick to tell me their perspectives concerning Christian music. Participant 1 said, "It's my praise and worship to God. So even if other people don't enjoy it, it's still my way of connecting." She also felt that it did not matter if she was singing or just listening because "no matter what voice it's coming from, it's all God." She expressed to me

that all teens can relate to music and that is why Christian music was so important. She believed that teens could best connect to God through music.

Participant 2 listens to music every day and prefers to listen to a new song about “3 or 5 times” in order to learn it. She loves to sing, but is too shy to be in the youth band. She says that other people tell her that she sings really well. Her favorite song to sing is “How He Loves” because it has a low range which is perfect for her.

Since Participant 3 is a musician, he says that musicians view music differently than others. He is interested in the actual writers of Christian music. That is why he enjoys going to live Christian concerts so much.

You don’t only have the performance and the lyrics and everything, but you have the actual people who wrote it. And the song’s going to mean more to them than probably anyone else there. So I guess when they stop for a moment and talk about the song that they just played or the song that they’re about to play, it really gives the song more depth for the next time you hear that song you really understand more about the song and where they were coming with it rather than just going on like the feeling that you get or the thoughts that you have when you hear the song. You really understand the perspective they wanted it to be seen from.

Participant 5 is only 14 years old, but she is one of the tallest people in her youth group. She said that she is uncomfortable sometimes with her body. She feels she is “lording” over others in the room whenever she raises her hands while she sings. Her favorite way to sing and worship is with her eyes closed so she can be “just completely focused on God” and not get distracted by those around her.

Participant 6’s personal preference is to listen to Christian music only. She had a

problem with her parents listening to secular music because she feels it is full of “sex and a bunch of cuss words” that she cannot stand. Her parents sometimes make her feel like she is a “pastor” because they will turn the radio to the Christian station and say, “Look, it’s on your station now.” Like Participant 3, she receives comfort from Christian artists when she goes to Christian concerts. She hears their testimonies and thinks, “Well if they can go from that to that, why can’t I?” She said it was a “big eye opener” for her when she went to her first Christian concert.

Participant 7 said that music saved her life. She has struggled with depression for several years and even contemplated suicide. She confided in me that she even cut herself to help relieve the pain from the depression.

I was a depressed person honestly. I was one of those people who just listened to music that I didn’t really care for. And then I got into music instruments. I started out liking country music, and then I grew out of because it sounded like an old man...And then I got in the techno, rock, metal, and I really like metal so I think I’m going to stay in the metal area...like the Christian metal.

She was sensitive about Christian metal music. She wanted me to know that just because the vocals were not “clean” or because they were “screaming” did not mean they worship Satan. She felt their overall message was positive because it was Christian. She did not care what the type of music was as long as it had a Christian message. She wants to be a Christian professional musician. She is very “OCD” about her music. She wants her instrument, electric guitar, to sound perfect because music is her life.

Participant 9’s personal experience with music is “really intimate.” At first, she was uncomfortable with the music they sang at this youth group because it sounded like “something

you might hear on the radio.” As she grew to be comfortable with contemporary Christian music sung in services, she began to actually desire to sing, listen, and dance to it. About three years ago, she went to a live Christian concert at Liberty University. That is where she heard Third Day and LeCrae for the first time. When she came home from that trip, she went to the Christian book store and “bought all their CDs.” She sees this as the start of her love of Christian music. It was like this “whole other world.” When she sings, she likes to personalize it by substituting “you” or “us” in the correct places. She uses music in her devotion times. She said, “It’s one of the larger portions of my time spent with God, even like during prayer, music on in the background kind of thing.” Christian music impacts her greatly. She cannot just “casually” listen to Christian music. Her previous experience with Christian music was much different. She said, “It’s crazy like how – like people don’t put that much emphasis on it especially coming from the church background I did have. You sang songs, but you sang them religiously.” She loves Christian music, but she does not want to sing the same songs for 50 years like her mother and grandmother have done. She does not even want to sing the same song “six Sundays in a row.” She does believe you can over do a song, and then it loses its emotional impact.

Participant 10 expressed that music in his youth services are “very personal,” “very real,” “very energetic,” and “very intimate.” He is still youth, but he has been in the group the longest amount of time. He leads in singing and also is able to lead with his acoustic guitar at times. He finds himself on stage leading more than in the congregation being led. He appreciates that music can be personalized for each person’s liking.

Participant 11 is very particular about the type of music he listens to. He says he does not prefer the “mushy, gushy” style of songs like “How He Loves,” where they sing, “God, like a sloppy, wet kiss.” He prefers a message more like, “God you have restored me, you have

redeemed me. You made me brand new.” He also prefers male lead singers over female lead singers. He likes a “real powerful voice” where singers are “screaming” or “proclaiming” their message. He also recognizes his personal preference is to hear the original singer sing the songs. When he comes to church and hears the youth sing the same songs he hears on the radio, he does not like the different versions. That makes it even more difficult to worship with the youth band leading or when the adults lead on Sunday mornings. He does not like this about himself. He believes it is part of his “stubborn” ways.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the findings from my phenomenological research on Christian music in the faith development of adolescents. Eleven participants agreed to be a part of my study. I first completed four observations of the adolescents’ youth services. The observations covered their youth services at church and also during a youth retreat in the mountains of North Carolina. The observations were vital in the understanding of how their music experiences were organized. Average music services last about 25 minutes. At the retreat, they lasted more than an hour each. Average youth services include a full youth band with guitars, bass, drums, keyboard, and about six vocalists. The ones at the youth retreat included only an acoustic guitar, a cajón which is a six-sided drum that you sit on and hit on the front and back for different sounds, and one lead vocalist. Most participants actively sang, raised their hands during the music, swayed, danced, and cried during their music services. I observed more of these actions during the retreat than in the youth services upstairs in their youth room. They sang a wide variety of songs. I observed them singing 21 different songs throughout the four observations. Some of the songs were slow and some were fast. All of the 21 songs would be classified as contemporary Christian music.

The second piece of data collected was from the Faith Development Instrument (FDI). This consisted of 25 questions (Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004). I gave each participant a folder with the first six questions in it with lines so that they could journal their thoughts on those questions. The Faith Development Manual (Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004) that went along with the instrument suggested participants answer these first six questions before coming to their interview. This portion was called the Life Tapestry Journal. If they had not answered the questions by the time I had their personal interview, it did not keep me from meeting with them. The Life Tapestry Journal was added to the other 19 questions to make the total 25 questions. I first practiced giving the Faith Development Instrument to two pilots. I also met with a second scorer in Tennessee to teach me how to score the FDI. Once I understood how to give and score the instrument, I began the individual interviews on the 11 participants. The interviews lasted anywhere from one and a half hours to two and a half hours. The more the participants discussed their answers, the easier the interviews were to score. It took me about two months to get all 11 individual faith interviews completed. I then transcribed half of them and contracted a professional transcription service to transcribe the other half. Once the transcription was completed, I began to score them.

The FDI is split up into seven different aspects: a) form of logic, b) social perspective-taking, c) form of moral judgment, d) bounds of social awareness, e) locus of authority, f) form of world coherence, and g) symbolic function (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004; Streib, 2005) (See Table 1). I found it best to score Aspect A on all 11 participants before going to the next aspect. That helped me to be really familiar with each aspect and know exactly what to look for in each interview transcript. The manual broke down each aspect into the six different faith stages. Three of my participants were at a stage 2, four of them were at stage 3,

and four of them were at stage 4. My second scorer confirmed these scores. We varied on a couple of these participants but came to a mutual agreement on which stage to choose because we were so close in our scores (See Table 2). I then wrote narratives for each of the participants explaining the stage they were in and how their answers fit into that stage.

The third piece of data was the individual music interview. These interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. It took about a month to complete all of these interviews. There were only five open-ended questions in these interviews. Once these interviews were completed, I transcribed most of them and hired the same transcriptionist who helped me with the Faith Development Instrument interviews to do three of them. Once the transcriptions were completed, I went through them line by line looking for significant statements. Framed by the research questions, these statements were then organized and sorted according to main ideas. The main ideas were then sorted into themes. By the end of this process, I was able to develop the nine themes from the research questions.

Under the first research question, the themes belonging and youth band evolved. Participants used Christian music to connect with God as well as others in their youth group. Under the second research question fell the theme which was about the value of the message. Every participant discussed the importance of the lyrics, how they learned from those lyrics, and how they were shaped by the lyrics. From the third research question developed the theme of emotional responses. The participants freely explained the different emotions they experienced depending on the song. From the last research question emerged the themes growth and worship. The participants found themselves spiritually growing the more experience they had with Christian music. The Christian music was also used as an instrument to usher them into the presence of God. They desired to be in His presence because that is where they felt they should



be, and it was in those moments that they were positively changed.

Other findings developed that I did not anticipate. The participants wanted to talk about Christian music outside of the youth services. The youth service was not the only place that the youth accessed Christian music. They sought Christian music out, they paid for it, and they personalized it. They saw their personal listening habits as an extension to their youth service music experiences. Also throughout the interview, they talked often about different styles of music and their personal decisions to listen to Christian music. They wanted to share those stories and other stories that they felt were important for me to hear.

Music is a personal choice for these adolescents. Some like to sing, some like to play instruments, some like to listen, and some like to dance with their Christian music. They were quick to tell me their perspectives concerning Christian music. Through these statements, I was able to develop themes titled personal perspectives and music preferences. Some participants liked fast songs. Others liked slow, worship songs. Some participants preferred worship music while others prefer Christian metal. Every participant desired multiple styles of Christian music.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This dissertation investigated the role Christian music plays as a center of value for adolescents and how it influences their faith. Each person's commitments reflect what one chooses as his or her causes or centers of value (Fowler, 1991). The center of value refers to where people place their hearts and focus their lives in persons, causes, ideals, or even institutions that mean so much to humans. It is what gives meaning to people's lives (Fowler, 1991). This dissertation was a research study about the role music plays as a center of value for adolescents and how it influences their faith. This chapter will interpret the findings based on the main research question: What role do Christian music experiences play in faith development of adolescents in youth ministries? The four sub-questions are as follows: (a) How do adolescents perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services? (b) What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God? (c) How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents' emotions? (d) What influence does Christian music have on the adolescents' stage of faith? This chapter also includes the implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the role Christian music plays in the faith development of adolescents. Faith development was generally defined as a "broadly recognizable pattern of development characterized in terms of developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses" (Fowler, 2004, p. 405). Christian music was defined as "lyrical content, not musical style" (Price, 2007). Normally in a phenomenological study, the participants are referred to as co-researchers, but since my participants were adolescents, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) advised me to call them participants rather

than co-researchers due to their age and limitations on what they could contribute to the study through the analysis process. I chose Community Christian Church (pseudonym) in eastern North Carolina as the setting for my research. This church has a large, active youth group that promotes Christian music on a weekly basis. During their Sunday evening services, the youth band leads the rest of the youth in a time of singing. They call this time worship. I wanted to hear the voice of adolescents in exploring the lived experiences with Christian music and how it affects their faith as well as filling in a gap in literature.

### **Research Question #1**

How do adolescents perceive and describe their Christian music experiences at their youth services?

The majority of participants find belonging in their Christian music experiences whether in the normal Sunday night youth services, special youth retreat music services, or at Christian concerts with their youth members. They consider these experiences to be of utmost importance in feeling like they have a place to worship and also be a part of something bigger than themselves. Participants describe these experiences as awesome, amazing, wonderful, fun, and spiritually challenging. They also feel closer to God during these worship services. One participant said it was like God was “hugging” her.

The second major theme emerging from this research question is the importance of the youth band. Six out of the 11 participants were actually a part of the youth band, either playing an instrument or singing. One of the other participants expressed a desire to sing in the youth band. Three of the participants openly talked about how important the youth band was in helping them get into an atmosphere of worship. Only one of the participants had anything negative to say about the youth band. He struggled with hypocrisy in some of the members of

the youth band where they say one thing but act another way when away from church. He said that he is “stubborn” in his feelings, but that he just cannot help them.

## **Research Question #2**

What influence do Christian music experiences have on how students cognitively perceive God?

The lyrics play the biggest role in how students cognitively perceive God. They explained God using the lyrics from songs that they have sung. Every participant referred to lyrics at some point. The second music interview research question asked, “How do the music experiences connect with your understanding of who God is?” Many participants talked about how the music causes them to think that God truly wants them. Songs like “You Won’t Relent” and “How He Loves” speak of how much God wants them. These two songs were mentioned by almost every participant. Through songs like “Oceans,” they perceive God as someone they can put their trust in. One participant shared that some songs help her to see God in different roles, like Lord or Savior. Through the music, participants also perceive God as wanting them to be active Christians. Christian songs like “Not Ashamed” and Matthew West’s song “Do Something” challenge these adolescents to do something for God because that is what He created them for. Every one of them expressed in the Faith Development Instrument (FDI) in question #10 that they believe that God created them for a special purpose, and every person’s purpose was unique. The music is also a “dialogue” between God and adolescents. This is how they learn and express themselves to God and each other. It provides a way for the adolescents to visualize God and all of His characteristics. Participant 9 said when discussing the song “Cornerstone,”

I really like the way it works with this because it’s talking about all the great things about

God, and how we feel about Him, and then it says, you know, “You are my Cornerstone.”

Like I think of a corner and ...you’re on this journey, and you finally come to like the corner where you are like arriving, and I think of this like massive like monument or something.

The participants use the music to help “remind” them who God is. Participant 10 said the music lyrics “have the potential and power to encourage people and to lift them up and to remind them of who God is.”

### **Research Question #3**

How do Christian music experiences affect adolescents’ emotions?

This was by far the largest theme in my research. Emotion has been defined as “a relatively brief and intense state in reaction to a specific experience or event that lasts a few seconds to several minutes” (Lench, Flores, & Bench, 2011, p. 838). In music experiences, the brain responds to the musical sounds and secondly responds to the symbol systems such as words and notations. The most important part of musical experiences for children and adolescents is that both sides of the brain are activated which increases brain activity. In these instances, brains go through changes. When the brain changes, the person changes. All music experiences affect the brain, which in turn affects the emotions or feelings of the person experiencing the music (Reimer, 2004). Participants shared emotions freely. The emotional responses included frustration, happiness, sadness, enjoyment, fun, overwhelming, relaxing, amazement, and various attitudes. Christian music provokes many emotional responses from these 11 participants.

Participants shared so many stories about how they may cry when they are singing Christian music or laugh and jump for joy when they hear their favorite songs at church.

Participant 1 even described music as “kind of like a medicine.” When these adolescents are completely “stressed out” for whatever reason (school, family, friends, work, life complications), when they start to sing at their youth worship services, the stress “melts” away. One participant said if he was stressed or angry before the youth service, then he would leave a different person. He said that he cannot leave angry after singing like that. Some said that as soon as they start to sing, they feel a peace that is hard to explain. That peace therefore brings them happiness.

Christian music definitely evokes a range of emotions in these adolescents. They not only share those emotions, but they can be very specific about times in their experiences where they felt certain emotions, what songs brought those emotions on, and how they know they can feel those same emotions again. It all goes back to the Christian music. It changes them.

#### **Research Question #4**

What influence does Christian music have on the adolescents’ stage of faith?

Fowler’s stages of faith are based on cognition, emotions, and morality. Each one of the 11 participants listens to Christian music on a regular basis. Most of them listen to it daily and for multiple hours within that day. From the music interview and the faith development interview, I learned that every participant uses his or her cognitive abilities to process the music. The evidence of that is the amount of significant statements taken on the importance of the lyrics, and also the spiritual growth that takes place in their lives through listening, singing, and dancing to Christian music.

As for emotions, in the previous section I have already shown just how much music impacts the participants’ emotions. Their emotions change according to the songs that they listen to. One participant at stage 2 said that when she is feeling bad and depressed after a hard day at school, she will go home and listen to “How He Loves.” The line that says, “And I realize

just how beautiful You are,” changes her whole outlook on life and “releases” all her bad emotions. Whereas a participant at stage 4 described one of her emotions as “ironic joy.” When she listens to the song “Oceans,” she is not only “really challenged by it,” but also experiences “overwhelming...joy” and cannot help but “smile.” Every stage experiences those emotions through music.

Morality is a more difficult one to find in the interviews. Participant 11 said that Christian music does shape his behavior, but not as much as a “strong sermon” or “mentoring” would shape his behavior. When he is angry, he does not automatically start thinking of a song at that moment of anger, but music does play a role in shaping his behavior by getting in his “mind.” Others talked about how music convicted them of sin and made them sad for what they have done and draws them to repentance and life changes.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Christian music appears to have advantages for adolescents in their understanding of who God is, their relationships with Him, their ability to communicate with God, their relationships with each other, their ability to worship, and their emotional responses. The music program at this church is effective. It draws adolescents to the weekly meetings, it gives them a sense of belonging, it gives them something to aspire to, and it keeps them in the group. The music interviews were full of energy. Participants were excited to meet with me and tell me what they think about Christian music. They had not experienced anything like this prior to being in this group. They had favorite songs that helped shape their behavior. Those songs were either from the church youth services or from other places to get music like YouTube, Pandora, Christian radio, Christian concerts, or CDs. A variety of music was sought out and used often to encourage them, challenge them, and soothe them. All of this being suggested from the music

interviews, I find this implicates that Christian music is a necessary part of church's youth group.

### **Theoretical Implications**

According to Fowler's stages of faith, there are a total of six stages in faith (Fowler, 1991). Faith is defined as a "generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning and that it may or may not find religious expression" (Fowler, 1981, p. 91). It is an important part of a person's character or personality. Fowler uses cognitive development theory as a foundation and that is what he built his six stages of faith development upon (Astley, 2000). Most adolescents and some adults are at stage 3 (Fowler, 1981). They have not figured out how or that they are in faith or even where their faith comes from.

After scoring all of my participants' Faith Development Instruments and having a second scorer do the same, we compared our scores and came up with a final stage for each participant. There were three who scored at a stage 2, four who scored at a stage 3, and four who scored at a stage 4. These stages were not in correlation to their ages either. The stages varied among all of the different ages 14-18 (See Table 2). What I found was the most important part of this process was the cognitive levels of each participant. I did not have an intelligence level on any of them. After spending several hours with them in the FDI and music interviews, I began to see that students who emphasized doing well in school and who had high educational goals, the better they were able to articulate their thoughts, reflections, and answers to my questions. I received so much data from participants 3, 9, 10, and 11 compared to all of the other participants. These four participants are the ones who scored at a stage 4. This seems to go right along with Astley's (2000) statement about how Fowler used cognitive development theory as a foundation.

Participants expressed how Christian music helps them to "grow" in their understanding of who God is, their communication with God, their relationship with God, and their leadership



in the youth group. I think that growth is significant in the stages of faith, but more than that, I believe their cognitive level to think deeply, reflect, analyze, and synthesize what they sing plays more into it than anything. They use these same cognitive abilities in the rest of their lives. The Faith Development Instrument includes seven different aspects (See Table 1): a) form of logic, b) social perspective-taking, c) form of moral judgment, d) bounds of social awareness, e) locus of authority, f) form of world coherence, and g) symbolic function (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004; Streib, 2005). As an adolescent learns to “think” like stage 2, stage 3, or stage 4, they are able to do that same thinking with the music. I do not believe that music would help them move through the stages any quicker than they are cognitively, emotionally, or morally able to do so. All stages represented in this group of 11 adolescents felt the same way about Christian music. They love it, they appreciate it, they learn from it, and they use it to deepen their faith.

Faith development theory and research have “focused on a generic understanding of faith that sees it as foundational to social relations, personal identity, and the making of personal and cultural meanings” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17). Despite the wealth of research on adolescents’ music experiences and how music affects cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Allsup, 2003; AAP, 2009; Becknell et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2008; Labbe et al., 2007; Mast & McAndrew, 2011; Vist, 2011), little research has been done on the effect music has on an adolescent’s faith development from the adolescent’s perspective. This study pulled together the faith development theory and the wealth of research on the benefits of music for adolescents. To break down Fowler’s definition and compare it to my findings would be enlightening. As for “social relations,” in my findings the theme of belonging would fall under these social relations. Music brings the youth group together. They sing together, go to concerts together, listen to music together, and find comfort in worshiping together. It is one of the things that binds this

youth group.

“Personal identity” is next on Fowler’s description of faith development theory. In my findings, I list themes under each research question. Some of those themes would fall under Fowler’s “Personal identity” category: youth band, musical preferences, and personal perspectives. These participants found purpose when they joined the youth band. It is a place where they can be themselves and do what they love. The theme of music preferences is about personal choices. Some participants liked fast songs. Others liked slow, worship songs. Some participants prefer worship music while others prefer Christian rap or metal. The point is that they want to choose their own styles of music and have that freedom in their faith to do just that. The theme of personal perspectives was about how music was a personal choice. Some like to sing, some like to play instruments, some like to listen, and some like to dance with their Christian music. One participant shared that her choosing Christian music was her first step out into independence from her family’s traditions. Up until that point, she had listened to country music just like her parents. She wanted her parents to like her music, but if they did not she was okay with that too. She was still going to listen to it even if her parents did not care for it.

The last part of Fowler’s definition of faith development theory included the “making of personal and cultural meanings” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17). The theme of growth played an important part in the adolescents making meaning as people and also as a part of the Christian culture. They experienced growth in their understanding of who God is, their communication with God, their relationship with God, and their place in the youth group. Johnstone (2010) stated, “Worship is often regarded as being central to the life of a Christian and therefore plays a significant role in a person’s faith journey.”

Through these music interviews, I can see at work Fowler’s faith development theory and

research which “focused on a generic understanding of faith that sees it as foundational to social relations, personal identity, and the making of personal and cultural meanings” (Fowler & Dell, 2004, p. 17). Music theories and faith development theory work well together to form adolescents who are able to develop meaningful social relationships, grow in their personal identities, and make meaning for themselves and also for their religious cultures.

### **Practical Implications and Recommendations**

This research should be important for churches, youth leaders, and music leaders. Looking closely at the themes which emerged from four research questions will help develop strong programs that will encourage adolescents to grow in their faith. The nine themes are belonging, youth band, value of the message, emotional responses, growth, worshiping through music, music preferences, personal perspectives, and accessing Christian music.

**Belonging.** Youth want to belong to something. Adolescents can create lifestyles that are positive or negative. These lifestyles can present a burden of problems for years or help them become resilient adults (Call et al., 2002). If a church wants to keep their youth active, they need to consider what they can provide for the adolescents. A national survey in 2003 showed that 50% of teenagers attend religious services regularly (Wallace, Forman, Caldwell, & Willis, 2003). There has been a noticeable decline in church attendance from youth over the past decades (Smith, Dentón, Faris, & Regnems, 2002). To work against the decline, some churches use paid youth pastors to head up all of these programs. This is a major financial and resource commitment that the congregation makes to its youth ministry (Goreham, 2004; Kageler, 2004). Leaders in churches across America are looking for ways to help youth get involved in church ministries, stay in church, and continue being engaged in church. In this setting, the youth found belonging in their groups with music being an integral part of that belonging. Churches need to

invest in a youth leader that is comfortable developing a Christian music experience for the adolescents or provide a music leader to head up those important experiences.

**Youth band.** Every participant talked about the youth band. This youth band drew more youth. The youth band plays a variety of instruments including keyboard, drums, bass, and various guitars. At this site, they have a few people who can play the drums, bass, and guitars, so they rotate musicians on a regular basis to give everyone an opportunity to play. There are two male singers and four female singers. The paid music minister on staff meets with them each week to go over the music set and introduce any new music. Not every church has the ability to hire music ministers. Not every music minister is interested in working with adolescents. Not every youth group has that many musicians. Some churches are so limited in musical abilities that they have to hire someone to come in and play the piano. Every church is not going to be able to put together this type of program. The people and the resources may not be available. For those churches who cannot put youth bands together, they could start with music videos and one youth leading in singing. If they invest in one person, that person may draw others like the youth band at this site drew more youth to their group.

**Value of the message.** Since music is incredibly beneficial in the cognitive realm, it is not a surprise that every participant repeatedly talked about the lyrics. Music helps improve listening skills, enhance cognitive processing, and even helps students learn to talk (Hallam, 2010; Miranda, 2011; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). The message, or lyrics, to the Christian songs teach them. One participant said that the words he sings are the same words he can use when he prays. One participant spoke of the words sung to an old hymn she sang in her Presbyterian church, “My Hope is Built.” The remake of the song is titled “Cornerstone,” and they sing it in this youth group. She made the connection that Jesus was her Cornerstone. She described Him

as the “corner” of her journey. She also compared Him to a “stronghold.” These words are not words that she would normally use to talk about Jesus. The song taught her a comparison that encouraged her as a young Christian. Youth leaders and music leaders should consider the songs they sing carefully and not shy away from more complex vocabulary. The youth can handle a variety of lyrics. The harder concepts to grasp are a perfect opportunity to take them deeper in their understanding of spiritual concepts.

**Emotional responses.** Emotion has been defined as “a relatively brief and intense state in reaction to a specific experience or event that lasts a few seconds to several minutes” (Lench, Flores, & Bench, 2011, p. 838). Emotion has long played a significant role in human psychology, but it is now becoming a topic of empirical psychological investigation. Emotion has been studied to understand its role in everything from reaction time to pro-social behaviors. Medical research has shown that familiar and unfamiliar music is able to “induce strong emotions with positive and negative valences” (Petrini et al., 2011). This is why music has become such a popular tool in studying emotions and the effects emotions have on the brain (Petrini et al., 2011). Every participant experienced emotions when they sang, listened to, or danced to Christian music. The emotional responses included frustration, happiness, sadness, enjoyment, fun, overwhelming, relaxing, amazement, and various attitudes. Christian music provokes many emotional responses from these 11 participants. These Christian music experiences provide the right atmosphere for the adolescents to partake in positive emotional experiences. These positive emotional experiences can bring healing to hurting adolescents. During these experiences, both sides of the brain are activated and that brings change to the brain. The brain changes, and then the adolescent changes. That is what faith is about. Churches want to see their adolescents change, grow, and develop in their faith. All music

experiences affect the brain which in turn affects the emotions or feelings of the person experiencing the music (Reimer, 2004). The more experiences the adolescents have, the more changes can occur for the better. Youth leaders and music leaders need to be aware which songs evoke which emotions. In my interviews, I found there were favorite songs that multiple adolescents shared. These songs should be utilized, but not overdone. The adolescents did talk about how they would sing or play one song so much that they did not like it anymore. There is a balance, and the adolescents can help find that balance with the leaders.

**Growth.** The participants talked often about spiritual growth and music. The Christian music did not necessarily teach them new things, but reminded them of what they already knew. They spoke of these reminders often. In these new choruses I heard them sing, there sometimes was a chorus 1, chorus 2, and bridge. They often spoke of the bridges and how important they were for reminders of who God is, how He feels about them, the lifestyles they should live, and their relationship with Him. Several participants mentioned just how those bridges would stick with them for days after a worship service and how much that repetition encouraged them throughout the week. As youth leaders and music leaders are looking for new songs, they should be aware of the power that the repeating choruses or bridges have for the adolescents. They could even develop sermons based around these phrases that seem to capture the adolescents so much.

**Worshipping through music.** Worship expressed through music and singing is the dominant form of worship in many churches (Johnstone, 2010). These adolescents spoke of worship with an admiring point of view. They desired to worship God through singing, listening to Christian music, and dancing to Christian music as a gift for God Himself. They saw it as something they could give to God and also receive more of His presence through those acts.

People experience worship differently depending on what stage of life they are in, what lived experiences they have had, and spiritual investment (Johnstone, 2010). Worship through singing is a significant portion of the church service. When a faith community comes together and sings, that provides a different auditory environment than when individuals listen to the radio, worship CD in the car or home, or even create a worship playlist on their portable listening devices (Johnstone, 2010). Rosing (1984) calls this type of singing “social-interaction music.” That is exactly what the participants described also. They told stories of how the group sang together and changed together. They also told individual stories of worship experiences that changed the course of their lives. Their lived experiences are confirmation that a corporate worship time is a necessity in the youth services. They need to sing together. They need to worship together. Church leaders must make this as much of a priority as a time of learning through sermons or lessons.

**Music preferences.** The participants want a variety of music. They get “bored” with the same style of music. Thankfully, there is a wide variety of Christian music. Christian music in this research is defined as “lyrical content, not musical style.” Therefore, Christian music can use country, rock, hip-hop, worship, and many more styles (Price, 2007). Participants talked about how they got tired of the Christian radio stations because they continued to play the same songs over and over again. They want variety. It is difficult for one person to be comfortable teaching the many different styles in Christian music. This youth group enjoyed all contemporary Christian worship music during their song portion of their youth services. The various styles in the worship set included fast songs, older choruses, newer choruses, older hymns with a new twist, and slower songs. The leaders need to be cognizant of providing the best variety possible when putting together music for their youth.

**Personal perspectives.** Music is a personal choice for these adolescents. Some like to sing, some like to play instruments, some like to listen, and some like to dance with their Christian music. They were quick to tell me their perspectives concerning Christian music. There needs to be multiple opportunities in each youth group for adolescents to express themselves. If someone can play an instrument, they need to play in church. If someone can sing, they need to sing in church. If they express a desire to dance to Christian music, they need to have that freedom in church. If they like listening to Christian music instead of singing it, they do not need to be made to feel “bad” about not singing. If they do not sing well but still enjoy singing, they need to know that no one cares if they are on tune or not. They need to feel accepted and wanted even if they are not in the youth band with great abilities. Knowing their personal perspectives only comes from listening to them. These interviews taught me the importance of listening to the adolescents.

The youth pastor at this church does listen to the adolescents. In the faith development interviews, all 11 participants talked about their youth pastor. They described him as a father, pastor, friend, and mentor. It is evident that he has invested into each of their lives. He knows them. He listens to them. He challenges them to “make it happen” when they express an interest in some area of ministry. He gives them freedom to do what they are led to do and encourages them to be leaders in the group and outside the group in the schools, homes, and work places.

**Accessing Christian music.** The participants in the study found many ways to access Christian music. I learned of a couple new ways to get Christian music. One new way I learned was through Pandora. Pandora is an online radio and can also be downloaded as an app on smart phones and tablets. Some of them had a free account, and others had a paid account. The free account has a few commercials during each hour. The paid account provides commercial free



listening. In Pandora, they search for Christian music by typing in “Christian” and any type of genre in the built-in search engine. Some spoke of Christian rap, Christian country, and Christian worship. Others talked about their favorite artists and how they search for just a particular Christian artist. Some artists mentioned in interviews were LeCrae, Jeremy Camp, Building 429, Skillet, and Christian rapper Andy Mineo. Participants would go to YouTube or Pandora and type in their favorite artists and listen to them through those mediums. One participant shared with me that she would listen to a song on YouTube, convert it to an .mp3 file using the free website <http://www.youtube-mp3.org/>, and then put it on her handheld gaming system so she could listen to these songs while she played video games. They also mentioned traditional ways of listening to Christian music through local Christian radio stations, CDs, and Christian concerts. Adolescents are very comfortable with technology. Youth leaders and music leaders need to talk with adolescents about the ways they access music and allow the adolescents leadership opportunities to share with others ways that they can access more Christian music. It should not be taken for granted that every adolescent knows how to access Christian music.

### **Study Limitations**

The main limitation to this study is the fact that I pulled all of my participants from one youth group. Large mainline denominations such as the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, or the Episcopal Church do not have representation in this study. This will limit the ability to generalize to other populations of faith. This study includes the Christian faith only. James Fowler’s stages of faith are able to cross the faith traditions (Fowler, 1981; Fowler, 2004). Not including other faith traditions will also limit the ability to generalize to other populations of faith.

Another factor is that at the time I did this research, I was a regular attender of the church

setting where I drew my participants. I had been going to the church for about four years prior to the research. I had not been involved with the participants in any way prior to the research. In fact, I did not even know all of their names. The church is very large, and I had placed myself in senior citizen ministries mainly and also the adult music department. I believe that I was able to collect the data and analyze the data without this relationship hindering my ability to do so objectively. An important part of transcendental-phenomenological reduction is the ability of the researcher to bracket out his or her “preconceived biases and judgments, setting aside voices, sounds and silences that so readily tell us what something is” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). This is where the fresh look was so important. I had to be able to look at the phenomenon as if seeing it for the first time. This was a challenge for me because I came to the study with a passion for music and for children. I also was concerned with their faith development. I worked diligently to bracket out my preconceived notions and greatly desired to see things anew in this research.

### **Future Research**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the role Christian music plays in faith development of adolescents. I wanted to provide a voice for my participants to be able to describe their lived experiences with the phenomenon of the relationship of Christian music and faith development. I chose James Fowler’s stages of faith development as the theoretical framework because it is accepted not only in the faith community, but also in the academic community. I found no research on this topic using James Fowler’s theoretical framework. I believe that more qualitative research is needed. I only had 11 participants. Other studies should be investigated also using different populations of students, gender differences, different religions, different nationalities, females’ versus males’ perspectives, different denominations, small rural churches versus larger rural churches, small urban churches versus

larger urban churches, rural versus urban churches, and younger adolescents versus older adolescents.

Research could be done involving church leadership and their priorities in providing Christian music experiences for their youth. Quantitative research could learn how many churches have youth music experiences on a weekly basis, how many have youth bands, how many have paid music ministers to work with youth bands on a regular basis, who is in charge of the music experiences in youth groups, or how often youth groups go to Christian concerts together to promote Christian music. Another quantitative research topic could be how faith stages and cognitive levels correlate.

Other studies could stem off of this qualitative phenomenological research to learn how much Christian music adolescents listen to compared to secular music and how that could affect their faith development. Several of my participants talked about that very topic. Case studies could be done on churches with extremely active youth bands and what we can learn from those sites.

### **Conclusion**

After finishing this research, I am convinced that Christian music needs to be a vital part of youth ministries in churches today. I personally know that this is not easy. I am a member of a small, rural church that averages about 65 on Sunday mornings and only about 5 of them being adolescents. On Wednesday nights, we have a larger youth group with about 15 being adolescents. The church needs to do something to connect with them on a musical level. Adolescence is a difficult time period. Over 100 years ago, Hall (1904) described it as a “period of storm and distress.” Generally speaking, this time of life is when people experience more independence, expanded world experiences, and new contexts of interactions. At this stage in

life, children are starting to look more outside of the home for influences (World Health Organization / United Nations Population Fund / United Nations Children's Fund Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health, 1999). This is the perfect opportunity for the church to capitalize on such a healthy outlet such as Christian music. These 11 participants are examples of just how important Christian music is to their spiritual walks and connection to the youth group.

I enjoyed hearing the firsthand experiences of these adolescents. Their stories challenged me as a teacher, parent, and church leader. I am left with more questions than answers. I wonder how I can open this door for the adolescents in my church? Do they even desire these experiences like these participants did? If not, why is that? Is it because they have not been exposed to it and therefore do not desire it? Do they choose Christian music outside of the church? I am encouraged by Proverbs 2:6, "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (HSCB). Now that I am aware of the role Christian music plays in the faith development of adolescents, I want that for my own children and for the children that I come in contact with in the future. God has promised to give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. I stand firm on that promise. He is my Cornerstone.

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## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVED FORMS**

### **Parent Recruitment Letter**

December 1, 2013

Parent's Name

Street Address

City, State Zip

Dear Parent's Name:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education degree. I am writing to invite your child to participate in my study.

If you choose to allow your child to participate, you will be allowing me to observe him or her during worship services on Sunday nights, to meet with your child to explain the research procedures, to give him or her a faith journal with nine questions to fill out, and to interview your child about his or her faith and Christian music experiences. It should take your child approximately three hours to complete the procedures listed. Your child's name and age will be requested as part of his or her participation but will not be used in the presentation of data.

To allow your child to participate, please fill out the consent form with this letter and drop it in the mail with the self-addressed/stamped return envelope that I have included. Once I have received your permission, I will be able to connect with your child.

If your child chooses to participate, he or she will receive a \$5 gift card to McDonalds and Sweet Frog. This is a small gift to say thanks for giving of his or her time to this research project.

Sincerely,

Winnie White  
Doctoral Student  
Liberty University  
Lynchburg, VA

**Consent Form**  
**CHRISTIAN MUSIC EXPERIENCES IN THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF**  
**ADOLESCENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

Winnie Gray White  
Liberty University  
School of Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study of discovering the role that Christian music plays in the faith development of adolescents. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he or she regularly attends the youth services at Clinton Community Church on Sunday evenings. I 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 Winnie Gray White, Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how music affects how adolescents grow in their faith.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to your child being in this study, I would ask them to do the following things:  
I will observe each participant in the music worship services first. After observing, I will meet one-on-one in order to introduce the study to him or her and to distribute the Life Tapestry Journal. That journal is interested in learning about the faith journey that your child has taken thus far. The journal can be written and handed back to me during our next session or typed and emailed to me when finished before our next session. The second interview session will consist of giving your child the Faith Development Instrument. This is an interview instrument to assess which faith stage your child falls in. The last session will include five questions about your child's music experiences with Christian music. The first session will take about 15 minutes, the second session will take about an hour and a half, and the third session will take about 45 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks. The risks are no more than your child would encounter in everyday life.

There are no tangible benefits for being in this study. There is a benefit to society though. This study will add to the body of knowledge out there on faith development for adolescents and also could impact youth ministries in the future.

**Compensation:**

There is no financial compensation for being a part of this study. I would like to give each participant a \$5 gift certificate to McDonald's and Sweet Frog as a way to say thanks for their time and input.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Before I interview any participants, I will first get signed consent from the parents/guardians. Once I



have consent from their guardians, I will then get assent from them to participate in this study. I will use pseudonyms through the entire course of duration. I will assign the participants generic names like Participant #1, Participant #2, etc. I will record those pseudonyms on their assent forms so that I can keep up with the correct participant and his or her pseudonym. Only pseudonyms will be recorded on the transcripts. Participants have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. All research documents will be password protected on my computer. Written documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for extra protection for up to three years after this study is completed. After three years, I will shred the written documents and permanently delete the digital records including the audio recordings of the interviews.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or with Clinton Community Church. If your child decides to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study or your child decides to withdraw from the study, his or her audio record recordings will be permanently deleted.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Winnie Gray White. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (omitted) or (omitted). Mrs. White's dissertation chair is Dr. James Swezey, (omitted), (omitted). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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

### **Statement of Consent:**

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

☐ Yes ☐ No I give permission for the interview sessions to be audio-recorded in order for transcripts to be created.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Numbers: 1732    IRB Expiration Date: 12/3/2014**

## **Assent of Child to Participate in a Research Study**

### **What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?**

Christian music experiences in the faith development of adolescents: A phenomenological study.  
Investigator: Winnie White

### **Why am I doing this study?**

I am interested in studying the faith development of adolescents (ages 13-18). I would like to learn more about how Christian music influences how they grow in their faith.

### **Why am I asking you to be in this study?**

You are being asked to be in this research study because I needed young people who were very active in their youth services and who participated in the worship music on Sunday evenings. Pastor Dwayne believes you will have a lot to say about faith and Christian music. That is why I am asking you to be a part of this study.

### **If you agree, what will happen?**

If you are in this study, I will meet with you first to explain everything in person. At that meeting, I will give you a faith journal that has nine questions that I will need you to fill out. After you complete the faith journal, we will meet again for me to ask you specific questions about your faith. Our last session will be an interview about your experiences with Christian music.

### **Do you have to be in this study?**

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell me. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. I will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

### **Do you have any questions?**

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to me. If you do not understand something, please ask me to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

---

Signature of Child

---

Date

Researcher: Winnie White

Dissertation Chairman: Dr. James Swezey  
Liberty University Institutional Review Board,  
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515  
or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

## Institutional Review Board Approval Form

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 3, 2013

Winnie Gray White

IRB Approval 1732.120313: Christian Music Experiences in the Faith Development of Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Winnie,

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.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

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

Sincerely,



LIBERTY  
UNIVERSITY.

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## **APPENDIX B: EPOCHE STATEMENT**

From the time I was born, I was involved in Christian music. My grandmother, mother, and father were part of a southern gospel singing group. My grandmother and mother sang, and my father played the steel guitar. In my earlier years, my parents stepped out of the group, but my grandmother continued singing. She would take me with them to many of their concerts at small, rural churches. I remember falling asleep on the front pew during concerts and falling asleep in the van returning home late at night. I enjoyed music then, and I enjoy music now.

I have several preconceived notions about what adolescents should be listening to. Growing up in a conservative, Christian home limited my music options. After years of listening to only Christian music, that was all I was interested in listening to. Country, rock, metal, pop, or any other genre has never held any interest for me. I did enjoy classical music on special occasions because of my knowledgeable piano teacher of 10 years. He would take me and my brother to hear orchestras once in a while. He also taught us the history behind the music which made the music come alive for me. Knowing that I am coming to this study with this type of background, I purposed not to let this cloud my judgment in determining the affects Christian music has on adolescents. I wanted to hear their stories. I do not want this to be about me. In no way do I want them to feel I am judging them for their music choices or for any of their comments. I am thankful that they took the time to be a part of this study and want to honor them by bracketing out my own preconceived notions as much as possible during my research.

As I entered in to this study and also as I progressed through it, I kept this in mind. As I talked with participants, I tried to say as little as possible to keep from leading them to say something that I felt they should say. In fact, as we began the faith development interviews, I would preface the interview by saying, "In this interview, I am going to say little and listen a

lot.” In the music interviews, I also listened and only asked questions when I needed clarification or wanted to know more about what they were describing. As I looked for significant sayings, I included every saying even if it hurt me some. Hearing some of the participants describe their hurts and disappointments in the faith interviews or music choices in the music interviews without commenting was a challenge. I learned a lot through this “bracketing” out process. I learned that I do not know everything, and I refuse to be that person. Learning to listen objectively is a skill that I want to use often. It opened the door to some amazing descriptions of their lived experiences with Christian music.

## APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

### Observation Protocol

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Session \_\_\_\_\_ of 4

Which participants I am observing during this session: (Each session I will focus on 3 or 4 participants)	Participant # _____ Participant # _____ Participant # _____ Participant # _____
Gender, age, dress, appearance, ethnicity	
Attitude toward subject, toward others	
Interactions	
Level of participation, interest	
General climate	
Levels of support	
Nonverbal behaviors	
Facial expressions, gestures, postures	
Worship leaders	
Sequence of activities	
Physical surroundings (The room, space, comfort, suitability)	
Seating arrangements	

## APPENDIX D: LIFE TAPESTRY

### Life Tapestry Exercise<sup>1</sup>

(Folwer, Streib, & Keller, 2004)

Words appearing in bold are used as prompts on the scoring sheet.

1. Reflecting on your life, identify its major chapters. What **marker events** stand out as especially important?
2. Are there **past relationships** that have been important to your development as a person?
3. Do you recall any **changes in relationships** that have had a significant impact on your life or your way of thinking about things?
4. How has your **image of God** and relation to God changed across your life's chapters?  
Who or what is God to you now?
5. Have you ever had moments of intense joy or **breakthrough experiences** that have affirmed or changed your sense of life's meaning?
6. Have you experienced times of **crisis** or suffering in your life, or times when you felt profound disillusionment or that life had not meaning? What happened to you at these times? How have these experiences affected you?

---

<sup>1</sup> The Life Tapestry Journal can be found on-line at [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-downloads/FDR-Manual\(2004-11-11\).pdf](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-downloads/FDR-Manual(2004-11-11).pdf) on pages 17-18. It is a free instrument that anyone can use.

## APPENDIX E: FAITH DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT

### Faith Development Instrument<sup>2</sup>

Words appearing in bold are used as prompts on the scoring sheet.

1. Reflecting on your life, identify its major chapters. What **marker events** stand out as especially important?
2. Are there **past relationships** that have been important to your development as a person?
3. Do you recall any **changes in relationships** that have had a significant impact on your life or your way of thinking about things?
4. How has your **image of God** and relation to God changed across your life's chapters?  
Who or what is God to you now?
5. Have you ever had moments of intense joy or **breakthrough experiences** that have affirmed or changed your sense of life's meaning?
6. Have you experienced times of **crisis** or suffering in your life, or times when you felt profound disillusionment or that life had not meaning? What happened to you at these times? How have these experiences affected you?

#### Relationships

7. Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your **parents** and your current relationship to them? Have there been any changes in your perceptions of your parents over the years? If so, what caused the change?
8. Are there any other current relationships that seem important to you?
9. What **groups**, institutions, or causes, do you identify with? Why do you think that these are important to you?

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<sup>2</sup> The Faith Development Instrument can be found on-line at [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-downloads/FDR-Manual\(2004-11-11\).pdf](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/theologie/CIRRuS-downloads/FDR-Manual(2004-11-11).pdf) on pages 18-21. It is a free instrument that anyone can use.



## Present Values and Commitments

10. Do you feel that your life has **meaning** at present? What makes life meaningful to you?
11. If you could **change** one thing about yourself or your life, what would you most want to change?
12. Are there any **beliefs**, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?
13. When or where do you find yourself most in communion or **harmony** with God or the universe?
14. What is your image or model (an idea or a person) of **mature faith**?
15. When you have an important **decision** to make, how do you generally go about making it? Can you give me an example? If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to whom or what would you look for guidance?
16. Do you think that actions can be right or wrong? If so, what makes an **action right** in your opinion?
17. Are there certain actions or types of actions that are **always right** under any circumstances? Are there certain moral opinions that you think everyone should agree on?

## Religion

18. Do you think that human life has a **purpose**? If so, what do you think it is? Is there a plan for our lives, or are we affected by a power or powers beyond our control?
19. What does **death** mean to you? What happens to us when we die?
20. Do you consider yourself a **religious person**? What does this mean to you?
21. Are there any religious ideas, **symbols** or rituals that are important to you, or have been important to you? If so, what are these and why are they important?

22. Do you pray, meditate, or perform any other **spiritual discipline**?
23. What is **sin**, to your understanding?
24. How do you explain the presence of **evil** in our world?
25. If people disagree about a religious issue, how can such **religious conflicts** be resolved?

## **APPENDIX F: MUSIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### Music Questions for the Interview

1. Will you please describe the music experiences in your youth services?
2. How do the music experiences connect with your understanding of who God is?
3. What emotions do you feel when you are in these music experiences?
4. How does music influence your faith?
5. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the music experiences?

## APPENDIX G: FAITH DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT SCORE SHEET

Snapshot of the Faith Development Instrument scoring tool retrieved from Heinz Streib (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004). The scores are calculated in Microsoft Excel using the preset formulas. This makes stage-aspect mapping possible. The manual encourages the readers to email Dr. Streib for an electronic copy of the scoring sheet. I did email him, and he sent it to me within a day of my email. This is a sample of the scoring guide for Participant 3. Since he scored the highest at stage 4, that is considered his final stage.

	Participant #3		WW	0	2	9	10	4	0
	↑ Interview ID#	↑ Anonym	↑ Rater (ID)	↑ frequency of stage assignm.					
	Themes / Interview Questions	Interact #	Scoring Criteria	Stages					
				1	2	3	4	5	6
A/Form of logic	Breakthrough	#135-142	(1) Subject is reflective				4.0		
	Crises	#143-158	(1, 4, 5, 9) Subject is explicit, displays an awareness of the tensions and polarities, sense of thought, yields to deeper understandings, inclusive, multi-dimensional, openness					5.0	
	Changes in self	#265-268	(1, 5) Subject is explicit, aware of the tensions and polarities inherent in some phenomena and has a sense of thought or analytic approach, multi-dimensional					5.0	
	Decisions	#339-354	(1, 2, 5) Subject is explicit, deeper understanding, multi-dimensional, orient towards process					5.0	
B/Perspective taking	Current relationships	#173-180	(2, 5) Subject is embedded in his social relationships, able to take the other's motives and intentions into account		2.0				

	Past relationships	#71-106	(1-6 ) Subject has systematic approach to perspective taking in terms of thinking of others by their ideas, histories, worldviews, able to consider and analyze the viewpoint of the other, constructs the other in terms of general rules or principles of relationship, center on the forms of relationships, not able to construct the full interiority of the other, attempts to genuinely see the other as other				4.0		
	Parents	#159-172	(1-8) Subject attempts to recognize the other, and is willing to bracket his own thoughts or feelings in the attempt to see from the other's perspective, self-critical					5.0	
C/Form of Moral Judgment	Right action	#355-360	(3) Based on a concrete and simple reciprocity		2.0				
	Sin	#441-458	(7) Subject values interpersonal harmony, values resolving matters in your own mind or view of the way things are			3.0			
	Evil	#459-472	(4) Values his own ideas, tries to explain we are born evil and without God/Holy Spirit, we can't fight evil, trying to explicitly and rationally defend his beliefs				4.0		
	Religious conflicts	# 473-481	(7) Subject values interpersonal harmony, values resolving matters in your own mind or view of the way things are			3.0			
D/Social awareness	Marker events	# 1-70	(1-3) Subject talks about family, homeschooling, school groups, sports groups, his diagnosis of scoliosis, more peer groups and less family as time progressed in his life			3.0			
	Changes in relationships	# 107-124	(1-3) Focus is on friends he has chosen, fun friend, music friend, work out friend, accountability partner			3.0			
	Groups	# 181-246	(1-3) Emphasis is on youth group where people are like him, school/community group, teen court, leadership group at church			3.0			

E/Locus of authority	Your life meaning	# 247-264	(1-6) Rationally defended from ones own perspective and ideology, God, school for career purposes, public speaking				4.0		
	Beliefs	# 269-318	(1-6) Rationally defended from ones own perspective and ideology, God, Christianity (not about rules like in Old Testament times), youth band, swim team, being part of my research, value a person's word				4.0		
	Always right	# 361-362	(1-6) Subject rationally defended from his own perspective and ideology, great illustration of Apple and Microsoft for different points of view but both great products				4.0		
F/Form of World Coherence	Mature faith	# 325-338	(1, 2, 3, 4, 5) Subject is tacit, represent conventional values and attitudes, external authority (father), center around interpersonal concerns			3.0			
	Purpose of human life	# 363-376	(6) Subject uses statements which defer to others as authoritative, God, Government, they yield control, but he believes people still have choices in finding their true purpose in life			3.0			
	Death	# 377-378	(1, 2, 3, 6) Statements defer to the Bible as authoritative, tacit			3.0			
	Religious Person	# 379-390	(1, 2, 3, 4) Subject explicitly defines why he wants to be called follower or believer, rationally defends his view				4.0		
G/Symbolic Function	Image of God	# 125-134	(1, 2, 3, 4, 5) Subject explicitly explains how he moved from knowing about God to knowing God personally, how his ideology changed over time, it actually changed who he was				4.0		
	Harmony	# 319-324	(3, 4, 5) Symbols evoke feelings and emotions, youth group or communal norms, interpersonal qualities			3.0			
	Symbols, Rituals	# 391-406	(1, 2, 3, 5) Subject is able to translate symbols into concepts and personalize them, explicitly explains symbols and their functions				4.0		

	Spiritual discipline	# 407-440	(1, 2, 3) Subject can name and utilize these symbols in his worldview / framework				4.0		
			<b>Summary Stage Average</b>						
			<b>Frequency of Stage Assignment</b>	0	2	9	10	4	0
			<b>Total Number of Codings</b>						

## **APPENDIX H: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION TO USE THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT**

Dear Winnie White,

Thank you for your request for permission to include the faith development interview (FDI) questions and the FDI scoring sheet in your dissertation.

I grant permission for reprint and inclusion for both the faith development questions from the Manual for Faith Development Research 2004 and the FDI Scoring Sheet.

Here are some details: The FDI questions, as anyone can find out, have been published originally in Fowler's (1981) Stages of Faith; then they were included in the 1st and 2nd editions of the Manual; for the 3rd edition of the Manual, we just copied the FDI questions from the 2nd edition. Therefore it is safe to argue, that the FDI questions are published in multiple locations in print (not to speak of many other dissertations that have included the FDI questions) and that the 2004 Manual has no exclusive copy right on the FDI questions. Furthermore, you are rightly stating your footnote that the FDI question is "free instrument that anyone can use." This was the reason to post the entire Manual in the Internet for free. (If we had wanted to have it copyrighted, we would have handed the rights over to one of the publishers for test instruments; but this is not what Fowler, Keller and I decided ten years ago.) The FDI Scoring Sheet is my own product and I give it to other researchers for free. It is also important to note that your Appendix G is NOT retrieved from the 2004 Manual, but from your own work with the electronic version that I have sent to you.

I hope that this helps to resolve the copy right issue for your dissertation.

Best wishes  
H. Streib

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Prof. Dr. Heinz Streib

Archive for the Psychology of Religion, Editor

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