A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ANGER’S DISSONANCE: EXPLORING THE ATTRIBUTE OF MEEKNESS AMONG CHRISTIAN EXEMPLARS

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

by

Stephen Ethan Halstead

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research examined the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of spiritual and behavioral change in the lives of mature Christian exemplars within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) located in the Southeast Region of the United States of America by peering through the lens of the emotion of anger to explore one’s transformation toward meekness. Utilizing a purposive sampling, this study sought to explore the magnitude of behavioral change from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness as one matures as a Christian. It sought to close the gap in understanding how Christians viewed this emotion as either a God-given gift intended to serve the Holy Spirit’s work in the sanctification process or as a deadly sin one must wrestle with on one’s own, tame and domesticate through self-help, in order to make one’s behavior acceptable to society at large. By utilizing Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, this research expanded upon what is known regarding this multi-faceted emotion’s ability to influence one’s behavior and what is perceived regarding its employment by Christians in executing the will of God—and how that can require changing or modifying one’s behavior. To accomplish this, this research addressed the head-heart connection of why we do what we do—which required focusing one’s attention on the less understood affective domain as well as the more understood and well-researched cognitive domain.

Keywords: Anger, behavior, change, cognition, dissonance, meekness, sanctification
Dedication

To Rai

—whose strength of character has served to strengthen me,

—whose unfailing love has held me up when the weight of this world pulled me down,

—whose internal beauty shines forth like a beacon of light into the darkest night.

Surely, you are a gift God had prearranged to help guide me on my journey through this life.

Your sacrifices during the writing of this dissertation were so deeply appreciated. Your selfless efforts served to demonstrate your unconditional love for me more than words ever could. I am so thankful for your gentle ways, your peaceful patience, your powerful and palpable tenderness, your thoughtfulness, your assistance and support, your encouragement, your words of wisdom, your calming presence, and your perpetual pleasantness in the face of my many frustrations. You helped me through all of this by simply being you.

I love you so much and I am so grateful to have learned to appreciate you even more during this process.

Thank you!

Yours & His,

Stephen
Acknowledgments

Before acknowledging the many individuals who have helped me in this academic pursuit, I must first thank the following saints and sinners (in no particular order) for preparing me for the journey that would lie ahead. This dissertation perhaps owes its very life to the memory of my dad, whose life was overshadowed and consumed by a singular emotion (anger) that did more to destroy and divide than promote harmony and peace—in his own life and the lives of those around him—may he rest in peace. To my mom for her myriad sacrifices at the altar of motherhood; who wore a mustard seed necklace around her neck and her faith on her sleeve. To my six brothers for blessing me with childhood memories well worth keeping. To my children, Tabitha and Stephen, I pray you can see the amazing work God has done in transforming me—one of the worst of sinners—into the man I am today. Lastly, to the late Betty Diane “Dane” Sampson. Dane, I pray when I get to Heaven there is a way to convey all that I wish to say to you that goes beyond the realm of human words—that are so utterly insufficient in expressing feelings and emotions—so, for now, please forgive me and accept this simple thank you—for it is all I have to offer. This work was only completed because I “THOUGHT” I could do it. In this life, you made me believe I could do all things through Christ who gives me strength—but you did it with your life and the simple story of a “Little Engine that Could.”

To the United States Air Force for showing me the world and allowing me to witness the best in others—often during the worst of circumstances. To Robert Jeffers for your support, encouragement, friendship and faithful leadership during our decade-plus serving the brave men and women of Air Force Special Tactics within Air Force Special Operations Command, as well as the citizens of the United States of America—and the world—during long decades of deadly conflict and warfare. Thank you!
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To those who would endeavor to read this work, I pray it worthwhile.

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray what is written here glorifies You. Thank You for calling me to Yourself. Send thee, my Lord, where Thou needs Thy humble servant. Thy Will be done. Hallelujah! Amen! And…Amen!
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Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA)

In-depth Individual Interviews (IDI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (LU)

New International Version (NIV)
CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

This research posited that anger can and does have a positive and productive role in resolving conflict as well as in aiding the ability to totally transform the lives of those who come to see the benefits of setting anger aside at the altar of Almighty God and picking up one’s cross and carrying away the quality, characteristic, or attribute of meekness. [For without the valley, how would one ever experience the heights?] Those who have been transformed (and have let go of anger’s powerful grip to take hold of the righteous right hand of God) can clearly see the carnage in the past, yet looking ahead one is able to see what can be gained by giving up the guilt, hurt, pain, shame, and resentment—the residues of anger, to stand in the light of a new day—forever, changed!

Emotions are the fountain from which all behavior flows. Sampson (2011) stated, “Emotions are the foundations of our motivations” (p. 115). Over the course of time, some have attempted to categorize and classify certain emotions as vices and others as virtues; however, the many facets of our God-given emotions serve myriad purposes where the lines can become blurred and crossed between what is good and what is bad; what is for better or for worse; or what is right and what is wrong. One emotion many view negatively, is anger. Its reputation in the West has earned it a place among the infamous Seven Deadly Sins (Lester, 2003). However, much of this malignant view of anger is based upon anecdotal evidence. More current research has concluded, and continues to substantiate, that it is wrong to classify anger as entirely and solely negative.

Emotions motivate us to take action. They move us to do something. Emotions, in and of themselves, are neither good, nor evil (LaHaye, 1971; LaHaye & Phillips, 1971; Lester, 2003).
However, as sinful human beings, we often employ them in sinful ways. This researcher has come to believe that God uses one’s emotions to change His children more and more into His Image—His likeness—the Imago Dei. Anger, as an emotion, has driven some to righteously protest the outrageous behavior of others—to petition for change, such as to abolish slavery or to champion civil rights. Anger has also put others behind bars. It has given a young shepherd boy the audacious will to go into a battle against a giant mocking his God, and it has led strong armies to be annihilated at the hands of smaller and weaker foes.

**Background to the Problem**

In Ephesians 4:26 the reader is told not let the sun go down on one’s anger. In Proverbs 16:32, Solomon writes, “He that ruleth his spirit [is better] than he that taketh a city” (King James Bible, 1769/1990). Anger is one of those emotions most people wish to avoid at all cost, but try as one might, it is unavoidable. We grapple with anger’s reason, we question its utility and benefit, we debate its purpose—and we usually come up short in finding much value in it at all. Many conclude the emotion of anger has zero redeemable properties (Ghezzi, 2018; Lindebaum & Geddes, 2016). Lindebaum & Geddes (2016) state,

> …we challenge ongoing beliefs in society and organizations alike that anger is always bad, deviant, and even dangerous. Instead, we assert that anger has important prosocial forms that need to be better understood and, at least, allowed because they help us identify and address problematic situations in work and beyond. (p. 753)

Therefore, one shall see, anger possesses tremendous value in the realm of conflict resolution. And we may find that it does, indeed, possess redeeming qualities. We are given a Scriptural commandment that, as godly leaders, we must develop righteous anger; we must hold others accountable; and we must be obedient to Christ (Holy Bible New International Version,
However, we are also cautioned that we must temper our temperaments to ensure our anger is righteous, and not sinful nor driven predominantly by our prideful, ego-driven emotions. We must be slow to anger (NIV, James 1:19) and act always out of love—the difficulty exists in praxis, for this is all much easier said than done. The paradoxes are plentiful.

In Genesis, we are informed that we were created in the image of God, but we have great difficulty living in this stated truth in light of the reality we find ourselves experiencing here on Earth. Employing the theory of cognitive dissonance and statements made by Sampson (2011), espousing “Our tendency to be moral may also be hardwired as is our tendency to be immoral” (p. 171), this research focused on the sometimes, seemingly imperceptible “gap” between immorality (our sin nature) and morality (our Godly hard-wired design)—one’s pre-programmed righteous way of thinking when responding to situations via one’s behavior, by conducting research of Christian leaders—termed exemplars—focusing on a singular, powerful emotion: anger. Sampson (quoting Damasio, 1994)ponders, “Does reason construct institutions, beliefs, conventions, and rules? Or does morality emerge from prerational processes” (2011, p. 172). The aim was to investigate whether, as one becomes more mature as Christians, does one’s behavior truly change as a result of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work in one’s life—or from one’s own mastery of self? Does one become more moral simply because of reasoned (or conditioned) responses, or more righteous because God’s Word is written on one’s heart? As Christian exemplars mature in one’s relationship with Christ and sin less…and less, can this phenomenological grounded theory study lead to determining whether one can isolate the source of motivation behind such change in behavior over time?

1 All Scriptural references from this point on, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New International Version (NIV) cited here.
Central to Christian doctrine is the biblical truth that humanity is created in the image of God. Kilner (2015) consumed much of the introduction to substantiating the aforementioned statement. In fact, his entire book makes this case. Kilner writes, “According to Carl Henry, with a second from Charles Sherlock, the image-of-God concept is ‘determinative for the entire gamut of doctrinal affirmation’” (p. 5). He goes on to state, “In fact, many see humanity’s creation in God’s image as ‘central,’ ‘at the heart of’—in fact, ‘the most important matter in’—theological anthropology” (p. 6). However, this seems contrary to one’s experience and leaves others questioning how this is possible in light of one’s personal experience. Kilner states, “How can something foster both liberation and devastation” (p. 3). A paragraph later, Kilner says, “Viewing people in terms of the image of God has fostered magnificent efforts to protect and redeem people. It has also encouraged oppressing and even destroying people” (p. 3). Empirical evidence would seem to lead to a conclusion that this biblical truth that human beings are made in the Image of God is clearly questionable, if not in fact, a lie. How does one make sense of observations that appear counter and contrary to, and which seem to serve to disprove, this biblical truth? How does one ever learn to behave in ways opposed to the ways of this world and conform to exist in harmony with the will of God? Perhaps by looking to those who exemplify behavior counter to one’s expectations—those who actually turn the other cheek—even when the world would tell them they would be right to react and respond with force and violence or condemning words.

This study excluded those who do not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Christian God, since much has to do with one’s metaphysical-epistemological view of reality which forms one’s theology. One must believe there is a God or else the biblical truth that we are created in God’s image—or any biblical truth, for that matter—would hold zero weight. If there
is no God, His image is insignificant to one holding such a view. One’s life and behavior are greatly influenced by one’s philosophical perspective. Knight (2006) claims, “The acceptance of a particular position in metaphysics and epistemology is a ‘faith-choice’ made by individuals, and it entails a commitment to a way of life” (p. 27). Later, Knight states, “Human beings are the discoverers, not the originators, of truth; and the entire edifice of scientific inquiry is built upon a priori principles” (p. 181). He then tells us, that “Bernard Ramm has correctly remarked that reason is not a source of religious authority, but is rather a mode of apprehending truth. As such, ‘it is the truth apprehended which is authoritative, not reason’” (p. 181). Finally, Knight concludes, “The findings of reason are always checked in a Christian epistemology by the truth of scripture” (p. 182). Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me” (NIV, John 14:6).

Therefore, if Christian doctrine (based in a belief in God), which gives credence to the Bible and the passage in Genesis that states we are made in God’s image actually guides our lives, does it follow that our behavior is conformed toward righteousness by the Holy Spirit or by what social scientists would call conditioned-response to moral and reasoned truths? Is it possible to conclude whether changes in one’s behavior—as one matures as a Christian—are the result of conditioned-responses to reason and logic or to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

This phenomenological study explored the behavioral change in moral tendency among maturing Christian exemplars—with regard to anger and a presupposed transformation toward meekness over time. Two theories guided this study. The first was “Cognitive Dissonance theory, as it was originally proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger, [which] proposes that a person’s values, beliefs, and attitudes must be in a consonant relationship to one another (Festinger 1957, 2)” (Parker, 2007, p. 6). The second theory was unpacked by Sampson (2011)
where he addressed many facts surrounding the subject of morality. Among them, and most significant to this researcher, was “Fact 2: Our tendency to be moral may also be hardwired as is our tendency to be immoral” (p. 171). Sampson pondered, “Does reason construct institutions, beliefs, conventions, and rules? Or does morality emerge from prerational processes” (p. 172).

Scripture claims God wrote His laws upon the hearts of His children. In Hebrews 10:16, Paul writes, (quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33), “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law on their hearts, and write them on their minds” (NIV). If morality does emerge from prerational processes, (in essence, from a pre-programmed script within our DNA written on our hearts by God, Himself) would this not prove beyond a doubt that God exists—and could this ever be discerned, scientifically, by studying observable and identifiable changes in a Christian’s demonstrated behavior as they grow and mature in Christ?

This study investigated perceived behavioral change filtered through the lens of the emotion of anger by exploring one’s transformation toward meekness as one matures as a Christian. Anger clouds judgment and drives responses: some righteous, others…evil. In the Garden, after the Fall, man was given the knowledge of good and evil—yet, we experience difficulty discerning right from wrong (good from evil) when our emotions derived from our humanness come into play.

Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance “starts with a very simple proposition. If a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, he experiences dissonance: a negative drive state (not unlike hunger or thirst)” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128). Could this dissonance be derived from the Holy Spirit’s work upon one’s conscience? In an attempt to seek validity to Aronson’s statement, and Sampson’s stated facts regarding morality, this research explored
anger’s value and purpose as it relates to morality’s role in behavioral change via the theory of cognitive dissonance utilizing an inductive approach as outlined by Creswell (2014) to seek out themes and patterns, “generalizations which represent interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole” (p. 66) using data collected from Christian exemplars. Creswell further stated, quoting Lather (1986) that, “Building empirically grounded theory requires a reciprocal relationship between data and theory. Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks…” (p. 67). An a priori framework relates to or denotes reasoning or knowledge which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience. There is a point where the research derived through the inductive approach will be “reasoned,” described, and explained by this researcher to draw attention to interconnectedness and relationships in the gathered data that may not be readily apparent without such detailed illustration and narration.

In an article, on Vanderbloemen.com, a Christian research website, the authors write, “In Acts 15 Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let’s go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.’ (Acts 15:36) Barnabas readily agreed, but wanted to take Mark again. Paul adamantly refused to have Mark on the team again! ‘Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated’ (Acts 15:39)” (Vanderbloemen Search Group, 2016, p. 2). The authors continue to inform the reader, “This was not some mild difference of opinion—it was intense and passionate. So big was the disagreement that they parted ways. Paul picked up a new partner, Silas, and set out on another mission. Barnabas took his cousin Mark and sailed for Cyprus—and sailed right off the pages of the Bible, never to be heard of again” (p. 2). Paul eventually rewarmed to Mark, but Barnabas is never mentioned again in Scripture. It seems tragic that this voice was silenced over a disagreement between two
Christian brothers, but this happens…and in each case it is tragic for the Kingdom of God because their hearts are what matter to Christ and it is their hearts that have become hardened over a matter in which they simply did not see eye-to-eye.

BarnaTrends 2017 shows the leading response by pastors when asked the question, “What is an area of ministry you wish you had been better prepared for?” Fifty-three percent stated handling conflict (BarnaTrends Ministry Matters.pptx, 2017, slide 20). Conflict is often derived from anger. Managing conflict internally would seem to precede being able to lead others to do so, externally.

Some research has revealed that in order to learn, there must be an underlying tension. Plueddemann (1995) writes, that in addition to Festinger’s theory, “Piaget felt that children do not learn unless faced with an optimum level of dissonance” (p. 50). Plueddemann (1995) stated, “Piaget is best known for exploring the mechanism and the stages of cognitive development from birth to adulthood” (p. 51). Piaget proposed “two important factors [that promote development] social interaction and the process of exploring tensions, ‘disequilibration.’” [Stating further] People tend to grow and develop as they struggle with problems in a social setting” (p. 51). Perhaps dissonance, tension, and disequilibration serve as a factor and force the Holy Spirit utilizes as a change-agent.

Finally, constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many settings at some point. The ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive, creative ways can challenge status quos, improve teamwork, flesh out and resolve issues, and even transform lives; but it does require a great deal of wisdom. Man’s “wisdom” can blind us and lead us into moral minefields. God’s wisdom can bring to light truth and justice. God’s wisdom requires us to seek to be moral in all things in order to transform us into His Image. This research
demonstrated that He appears to be utilizing the emotion of anger to lead us to the characteristic of meekness—and that He may be using other emotions in similar ways to perfect us and sanctify us in this life—in the here and now.

**Statement of the Problem**

Sampson (2011) unpacked the topic of morality in the final chapter of his book, where he addressed many facts surrounding the subject of multi-faceted morality. This research focused on the sometimes, seemingly imperceptible space between immorality and morality—to discern whether, as one becomes more mature as a Christian, does one’s behavior truly change—or does the person change? Does one become more moral—or more righteous? Although one does not become sinless, does one sin…less? If the Holy Spirit actually indwells us and directs one’s steps, do others see more displays of the fruit of the Spirit present in the lives, actions, and observable behaviors of exemplars? What if one could isolate a specific variable: an attribute—perhaps, meekness? Perhaps, by observing the changes in one’s behavior [for instance, in their tendency to get angry or to refrain from getting angry] in similar situations by comparing one’s inclination toward responding in a particular way before coming to Christ against one’s behavior after becoming a Christian. It would seem some anecdotal evidence already exists in the minds of many Christians—and even some non-believers that this occurs. Although observing or measuring such change does not seem possible, it did seem one could inquire of those who appear to possess the attribute of meekness—to determine if the tendency toward meekness was always present, and if not, to what factors (what other variables) would these exemplars ascribe to their acquiring this attribute?

In his book *The Advantage*, Lencioni (2012) writes that “Contrary to popular wisdom and behavior, conflict is not a bad thing for a team. In fact, the fear of conflict is almost always a sign
of problems” (p. 38). The authors for Vanderbloemen.com (a Christian Executive Search Firm), discuss Lencioni’s text and state, “Lencioni pictures team conflict on a continuum. At one end is no conflict at all, and at the other end is relentless and destructive conflict. When there is no conflict at all, Lencioni says that this could be a kind of ‘artificial harmony’ (Vanderbloemen, 2016). Lencioni (2012) notes that “Nowhere does this tendency toward ‘artificial harmony’ show itself more than in mission-driven nonprofit organizations, most notably churches” (p. 44). The authors for Vanderbloemen.com go on to state, “There is a belief in churches that we should always have harmony and never disagree. However, some church teams also lapse into destructive (and sinful) kinds of conflict. Destructive conflict moves from challenging ideas and perspectives, and resorts to attacking persons” (Vanderbloemen, 2016). Conflict will occur and will require church leaders to enter the fray.

Halstead (2010) states, “Disagreements are a natural and healthy part of progress. Conflicts, on the other hand, are disagreements gone astray” (p. 90). Conflict is synonymous with the feelings and expressions of anger (Jun, 2018, p. 4). Constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many organizational settings. This author intended to demonstrate that by acquiring and exemplifying the attribute of meekness one can lead others by facilitating a team’s ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive and creative ways, as a servant-leader. Discerning if, when, and how to respond during conflict is a leadership challenge which requires wisdom and perspective.

Lindebaum & Gabriel (2016) argue “that anger can be a positive force in society and organization” (p. 903). In an essay, where they are clearly looking at anger through a moral lens, they “oppose current conceptualizations of anger as, at least, a temporary individual psychological disorder and as a cause of social disorder” and go on to “conclude that a world
without anger would be, possibly, a compliant and quiescent world but not a just world” (p. 903). They contend that anger is an appropriate response to a moral infringement. They inform us, “Beyond containing coded information about the stress points in an organization, anger provides a hugely valuable, though volatile, source of energy, a source of motivation that, if properly contained and channeled, can unleash creativity, imagination and hard work” (p. 914). This [capitalizing on the positive effects and power of anger] can only happen if the necessary leadership exists and is present to facilitate this containment and channeling—without it, the risk exists for things to spiral out of control.

However, anger is not synonymous with aggression—although anger is often associated with aggressive behavior. In an article in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, the authors conducted two studies in which [they] examined the relationship between anger and the willingness to engage in positive risk-taking and support non-violent policies in the context of political negotiations between adversaries. Results indicated a significant positive relationship, supporting the hypothesis that anger is not an exclusively militant emotion, and its effects are situationally dependent. (Reifen Tagger, Federico & Halperin, 2011, p. 157)

They “suggest that anger can also bring about constructive…attitudes, in the service of the same goal of correcting wrongdoing” (p. 157). They also allude to and include results from “three previous studies [which] suggest that anger may not exclusively be an aggressive emotion” (p. 158). The research points to the fact that anger and the associated aggression [observed behavior] “help” achieve something beyond a solution and actually work to lead to transformation of the group in coming to a non-violent conclusion using de-escalatory efforts and methods (Reifen Tagger, Federico & Halperin, 2011, pp. 162-163). It is posited here that one of those methods is manifested in the counter-force of meekness (what editors Hindson &

This hermeneutical, phenomenological study explored the development of behavioral change in moral tendency among maturing Christian leaders with regard to anger and a presupposed transformation toward meekness. This researcher studied the role cognitive dissonance played in helping exemplars ‘learn’ to grow, change, and transform.

**Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological research examined the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of spiritual and behavioral change in the lives of mature Christian exemplars within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) located in the Southeast Region of the United States of America by peering through the lens of the emotion of anger to explore one’s transformation toward meekness.

**Research Questions**

When engaging in *a priori* research, one must rely upon others’ perceptions to lead one to a place where theoretical deduction can take place. This researcher believed much could be gained by asking Christian exemplars what factors—from their perspective—led to behavioral change (as it regards becoming more meek in manner than one perhaps was in a ‘prior life’ before coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ). It appeared the source of perceived tension [dissonance] serving to motivate such change must have been internal all along, but this posed the question how can that be? As this would mean such motivation always existed within them, but it simply was not tapped into and utilized—until ‘they’ changed ‘their’ desire to change. This researcher aimed to discover how—in the view of these exemplars—such transformation was
made possible with regard to a tendency toward anger becoming instead a tendency toward meekness.

**RQ1.** What specific behaviors do exemplars identify that they perceive to be evidence of moving from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness?

**RQ2.** What perceived past, angry behaviors experienced by exemplars generated the cognitive dissonance which served as the motivation to modify their behavior?

**RQ3.** How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness?

**Assumptions and Delimitations**

This study excluded the general population. It further excluded those not meeting the definition of exemplars within the Christian community. “Tenure” as a Christian was also an important qualifier as morally-based, behavioral change would appear, at least anecdotally, to be a relatively long-term process. Further, serving in leadership positions signified some degree of vetting of one’s character. This phenomenological research explored the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of spiritual and behavioral change in the lives of mature Christian exemplars within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) located in the Southeast Region of the United States of America by peering through the lens of the emotion of anger to explore one’s transformation toward meekness. This qualitative study explored the lived experience of these exemplars to determine which factors were most significant from their perspectives in the process of spiritual transformation in overcoming anger and how this transformation has benefited these subjects in minimizing and managing conflict, enhancing relationships, leading others, and providing a sense of peace by bridging congruency between thoughts and behaviors—while also exploring the degree such behaviors were considered cognitively intentional or affectively innate (inborn), natural responses.
Further, this study focused only on the perceived behavioral change as related to the emotion of anger (or closely associated feelings such as frustration or irritation) from the perspective of the exemplars. Other emotions were not considered or studied although there may have been similar conjectured correlations between spiritual maturity and behavioral change and other emotions.

**Research Assumptions**

This researcher is a core team member of an EFCA church plant in a coastal community located in Northwest Florida. Therefore, there existed the assumption this researcher will know (and have well-established relationships with) approximately half of the participants in this study. This researcher also assumed that anger is a universally experienced and understood emotion, most often viewed negatively. It was also assumed that meekness is an often-misunderstood attribute of human nature, sometimes viewed positively and other times viewed negatively—as a weakness rather than a strength. For this study, it was assumed that meekness is perceived by most Christian individuals as a polar opposite (an antithesis) to anger—and as a strength. For Jesus Christ proved that the power and presence of a meek person could command an audience and advance a powerful ministry.

**Delimitations of the Research Design**

1. This research was delimited to those holding a Christian worldview. It did not include those who do not possess a Christian worldview.

2. This research was further delimited to those Christians professing faith in Jesus Christ for twenty years or more. It, therefore, excluded those Christians not professing faith in Jesus Christ for twenty years or more.

3. This research was delimited to those holding a revered position as a pastor, leader, elder (or the like) within the EFCA’s Southeast Region. Likewise, it did not include those failing to hold one of these esteemed positions, nor those serving in such positions outside of the EFCA’s Southeast Region.
4. Participants (termed *exemplars*) were further delimitated by one’s character, demeanor, and disposition which was either known (experienced and observed by this researcher over time) or by other’s selected by this researcher as participants for this study who, in turn, vouch for another’s character as snowball sampling was incorporated to reach the required number of participants. Therefore, those who were unknown to this researcher, or to others selected by this researcher, were excluded from this study.

5. Further, to hold strictly—and without question and debate—to literal Scriptural interpretation regarding those instructed to serve in leadership positions, participants in this study were men. Therefore, women were not included in this study.

6. This study focused only on the emotion of anger and its antithetical attribute of meekness. It did not focus on other emotions, with the exception of love. Therefore, it avoided other emotions (and their antithetical attributes), not previously identified or excepted.

**Definition of Terms**

1. *A priori*: “knowledge [that] refers to truth that some thinkers claim is built into the very fabric of reality. It is independent of human knowers and is true whether any human knows and accepts it or not” (Knight, 2006, p. 21).

2. **Actions**: the fact of doing something, typically to achieve an aim.

3. **Anger**: an emotion that “involves both an inner reaction and an outward response” (Ghezzi, 2018, p. 9). The response usually falls on a spectrum ranging from “looks” of mild frustration and irritation to physically violent actions.

4. **Behavior**: physical actions related to impulses and responses to stimuli, usually directed at external situations or other people with varying levels of skill and ability. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) depict a situation where what they term a motive (internal desire or compulsion) fuels a goal (an aim), something to be obtained from outside sources (external) which generates behavior (what they refer to as goal-directed activity) physically-manifested responses and efforts intended to address seeking the goal (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 25, Figure 2-5).

5. **Behavior modification**: change in behavior of a person—regardless of whether the change is viewed positively or negatively by others, usually in response to rewards (positive reinforcements) or punishments (negative reinforcements) which support or discourage goal-oriented activities (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, pp. 24-48).

6. **Character**: “a person’s moral constitution, in which is embedded a stable set of values” (Howell, 2003, p. 296).
7. **Characteristics**: “a set of criteria for elders and deacons that centers around moral virtues that spring from and evidence godly character” (Howell, 2003, p. 296).

8. **Cognition**: “The application of knowledge and [the] changing of preferences. Cognition or cognitive processes can be natural and artificial, conscious and not conscious; therefore, …analyzed from different perspectives and in different contexts” (Cognition, Sciencedaily.com, Reference Terms).

9. **Cognitive development**: a process of growth from birth to adulthood promoted by social interaction and the process of exploring tensions, or [what Piaget referred to as] “disequilibration” (Plueddemann, 1995, p. 51), normally through education.

10. **Cognitive dissonance**: a negative drive state (not unlike hunger or thirst)” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128).

11. **Conflict**: a broken relationship, a spiritual collision that is inevitable, necessary; yet also represents an opportunity (Van Yperen, 2002, pp. 96-108).

12. **Conflict resolution**: quelling conflict through one or more means from peaceable communication to all-out war. For the church, Van Yperen (2002) terms this ‘making peace’ through true reconciliation and not a counterfeit peace (pp. 23-254).

13. **Education**: “the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations” (Pazmino, 2008, p. 88), quoting Bernard Bailyn’s definition.

14. **Emotions**: Lester (2003) states, “Most definitions of emotion are similar to Aristotle’s that emotions are ‘states of feelings—passions…conditions in which one’s mind or consciousness is affected, moved, or stirred up’” (p. 19). Lester continues by informing us that “[d]ictionaries describe the same phenomenon with phrases such as ‘an agitation or disturbance of mind’ and ‘excited mental state’” (p. 19). He tells us that they [emotions] serve to “move us to action” (p. 20).

15. **Exemplar**: a person serving as a perfect example or excellent model. For the purposes of this study, Christian leaders within the EFCA Southeast Region professing a belief in, and having a relationship with, Jesus Christ for twenty years or more who are also viewed by this researcher (or others selected by this researcher for inclusion in this study) as possessing the attribute of meekness.

16. **External behavior**: actions taken or performed in physical space, observable and definable as good or evil, right or wrong from a particular perspective on the part of the observer.

17. **External law**: a perspective on law, a third-person view on the rightness or wrongness of something (Litowitz, 1998, pp. 127-150).
18. **Frustration**: “the blocking or thwarting of goal attainment” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 22).

19. **Immorality**: failure to conform to morality (Lewis, 2002, p. 44).

20. **Internal code**: one’s values, morals, personal norms which breeched create tension and dissonance within the person. These may be intrinsic, genetic, learned, imprinted, loosely held, or firmly fixed within one’s psyche.

21. **Internal conflict**: synonymous with “dissonance”…“two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128).

22. **Internal law**: a perspective on law, a first-person view on the rightness or wrongness of something (Litowitz, 1998, pp. 127-150).

23. **Leadership**: “leadership is influencing people to follow in the achievement of a common goal” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, p. 86). Hersey and Blanchard (1988) attribute this definition to Harold Koontz and Cyril O’Donnell.

24. **Maturity**: levels of progressive development as one acquires knowledge and experience through formal education, life experience, past mistakes, etc. Usually holistic, but may be applied to one specific aspect of one’s life, e.g. – a mature Christian may not be mature in all aspects of life.

25. **Meekness**: an attribute of human nature and behavior displayed as patience, gentleness, and peacefulness.

26. **Morality**: a “Law or Rule about Right or Wrong [that] used to be called the Law of Nature” (Lewis, 2002, p. 16). Also related to fair play or a standard of behavior: e.g. - not lying, cheating, stealing.

27. **Motivation**: internal cognitive processes that lie behind and drive one’s behavior. These processes may be intentional, but are often innate and arise from one’s subconscious nature, e.g. - hunger or thirst, lust, or anger. Usually fueled by a “need” or “desire” whether physiological, psychological (emotional), or spiritual.

28. **Quality**: a characteristic or trait one displays, usually inferred positively.

29. **Sanctification**: being conformed to the righteousness of Christ in a process of maturity as a Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. “The individual’s spiritual condition is progressively altered; one actually becomes holier” (Erickson, 2005, p. 918).

30. **Tendency**: prone toward, predisposed, inclined to a given direction, trending.
31. Tenure: the span of time one holds/or has held a position. Roget’s Thesaurus identifies the following synonyms which serve to give broader context to this term as employed throughout this work: “ownership, reign, term, occupancy, possession, residence, security, tenancy” (Tenure, Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus, Third Edition Copyright © 2013).

32. Theory/theoretical lens: Creswell defines theory in quantitative research as “an interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions, or hypotheses, that specify a relationship among variables (typically in terms of magnitude or direction). A theory might appear in a research study as an argument, a discussion, a figure, or a rationale, and it helps explain (or predict) phenomena that occur in the world;” [whereas, in qualitative research] “researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective” (Creswell, 2014, pp. 54-64).

33. Vices: immoral or wicked behavior.

34. Virtues: behavior showing high moral standards.

Significance of the Study

In the view of this researcher, the emotion of anger is still something of a mystery. As an emotion given to us by God, it clearly has a purpose in executing His will on earth, yet it is viewed predominantly as anachronism—a hold-over, now out-of-place in modern society. Many are prone to view those who are peaceable as Christlike or Gandhi-esque in many cases, or conversely, as weak and spineless; while viewing anger through a critical, judgmental lens as if one is somehow a lessor human for allowing this emotion to rule in any circumstance—spawning the question, “Is stoic passivity to be equated with meekness?”

Therefore, the intent of this research was to determine what factors and other processes were at play in changing one’s behavior—influencing positive change and eliminating undesirable behaviors by studying Christian exemplars who have overcome the tendency to become outwardly angry and who demonstrate instead, the attribute of meekness—which seemed to consist of wise, reserved restraint born out of love, rather than mere, passive stoicism. Powlison (2016) stated,
Jesus did not live a calm life. He cared too much. Yet he was not a tense person. He was not irritable, anxious, or driven. But he was not detached, cool, or aloof, either. He was no stoic or Buddhist. He plunged into the storms of human sufferings and sins. He felt keenly. At his friend Lazarus’s tomb, in the presence of death and human woe, he both bristled with anger and wept with sorrow. (p. 114)

Meekness therefore seemed to be an intentional internally controlled “tactic” employed with intentional restraint for the benefit of all involved, yet somehow it refrained from becoming merely a stoic lack of response or reply.

For Christian leaders, maneuvering through the many minefields made manifest by the emotion of anger requires great wisdom, restraint, patience, and self-control—in a word, meekness. It would seem acquiring this attribute is possible, this study explored how this may come about by looking to those who have matured in their faith to the point where anger served constructive purposes and where peace reigns, even in situations where peoples’ passions are peaked and piqued.

**Summary of the Design**

The intent of this phenomenological grounded theory study was to explore whether there was a relationship between the cognitive dissonance surrounding anger to serve as a motivator to lead one to seek harmony through behavior modification—or if the dissonance could be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. This study looked at data acquired from ten individuals meeting the definition of exemplars in a purposive sample and provided responses to a questionnaire that served to capture before and after self-reports on their behavior prior to becoming a Christian and as a current, tenured Christian. Other methods included face-to-face interviews and survey questions which gathered demographic information along with narrative data to reach saturation in the data collection and data analysis phases through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding in a bottom to top approach as outlined by Corbin & Strauss (2007).
This inductive approach was employed to seek out themes and patterns, “generalizations which represent interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole” (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). To further add and ensure validity and qualitative reliability within the study while striving to eliminate bias, the researcher “triangulate[d] different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes” exposed during the research (p. 200).

Once more, the research population for this phenomenological grounded theory study was comprised of ten exemplars (defined previously) selected by purposive sampling from the EFCA Southeast Region of the United States, predominantly within the State of Florida, who agreed to participate in the study and who met the definition of exemplars as described and outlined above. Although the population cannot be and was not representative of all Christians from across the United States, the sample area was comprised of a diverse population as a result of large military installations, and a substantial southern migration of people from other regions, which generate an inflow of people from diverse backgrounds coming together in a unique melding on par with larger metropolitan areas.

This study relied upon “purposeful sampling” which is the most common sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is described in greater detail in chapter three when discussing the methodology and design employed in this study. By employing Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance as a foundational backdrop this researcher hoped to demonstrate that the emotion of anger is not sinful, that although our behavior may be sinful, our emotions are gifts God gave us that He is using to sanctify us (to make us holy and righteous) and to execute His Will here on earth. One objective was to determine whether exemplars concurred with Sampson’s conjecture that our morality is derived from pre-rational processes. It appeared to this researcher that with
anger—and perhaps all emotions, God’s Holy Spirit is utilizing the cognitive dissonance arising from the disparity between our thoughts and our behaviors to help us change and be transformed, by making it uncomfortable to operate in the ways of the world. Ironically—and paradoxically—it seems, God may be using this conflict, this tension, this cognitive dissonance, to lead us, and others, to…and through, conflict, in a process of sanctification—from glory to glory.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This study sought to demonstrate that by acquiring and exemplifying the attribute of meekness one could lead others more effectively by facilitating a team’s ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive and creative ways, as a servant-leader. Discerning if, when, and how to respond during conflict is a leadership challenge which requires wisdom and perspective. Halstead (2010) states, “Disagreements are a natural and healthy part of progress. Conflicts, on the other hand, are disagreements gone astray” (p. 90). Conflict is synonymous with the feelings and expressions of anger (Jun, 2018, p. 4). Constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many organizational settings.

What is the truth regarding anger? How should we categorize this emotion? Is anger a blessing or a curse? A vice or a virtue? Is overcoming anger a secular self-help project, work best left to psychologists or psychiatrists, or part of the sanctification process designed and intended by God to help us see the incredible work He is accomplishing in us and in the world—in the here and now? Ultimately, what is anger’s role in spiritual formation—one’s transformation?

This document investigated many aspects of anger, predominantly, how the process of transformation helped in overcoming the negative effects of anger in the lives of maturing Christians, so that if employed at all, the emotion of anger is employed with purpose—as righteous anger containing reason and redeeming value; but also how anger can be let go—never to reign again over a human heart as one adopts anger’s seeming antithesis: meekness. This study addressed the broader question of the morality of anger. Is anger bad? Is it a sin? Many articles speak to the difficulty of determining (discerning) the difference between what Aristotle referred to as being “good tempered,” which consists in being “angry at the right time and for the right
reasons and in the right way” (Vernezze, 2008, p. 2), by walking a tightrope of emotion and “being appropriately angry at sin, but not truly angry at a person” (Mattison, 2007, p. 839). However, it is imperative to establish a theological framework for this study, to see how God views human beings, how we are to view God, the emotion anger, and what we are to glean from its effects in our lives and how we are to handle and respond to situations which warrant anger (Glieber, 2012, p. 65).

**Theological Framework for the Study**

Sampson (2011) espoused two statements that launched this study. The first statement claimed, “Our tendency to be moral may also be hardwired as is our tendency to be immoral” (p. 171); and he further contemplated, “Does reason construct institutions, beliefs, conventions, and rules? Or does morality emerge from prerational processes” (p. 172). The aim of this research was to investigate whether, as one becomes more mature as a Christian, does one’s behavior truly change as a result of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work in one’s life—or from one’s own mastery of self? Does one become more moral simply because of reasoned (conditioned) responses, or more righteous because God’s Word is written on one’s heart?

**A Christian Biblical and Theological Foundation**

Christian leadership evolves from Christian education. Wilhoit (2000) claimed, “Christian education needs theological grounding in the central doctrines of Christianity” (p. 35). Central to Christian doctrine is the biblical truth that humanity is created in the image of God. However, this truth seems contrary to one’s lived experience and leaves many questioning how this is possible in light of one’s personal experience and observations. Kilner (2015) states, “How can something [writing of the image of God] foster both liberation and devastation” (p. 3). Kilner continues on to say, “Viewing people in terms of the image of God has fostered
magnificent efforts to protect and redeem people. It has also encouraged oppressing and even destroying people” (p. 3). Empirical evidence would seem to lead one to the conclusion that this biblical truth is clearly questionable, if not in fact, a lie. How does one make sense of observations that appear counter to, and which seem to serve to disprove, this stated biblical truth? How does one ever learn to behave in ways opposed to the ways of this world and conform to exist in harmony with the Will of God? Perhaps by looking to those who exemplify behavior counter to our expectations—those who actually turn the other cheek—even when the world would tell them they would be right to react and respond in anger with force and violence or condemning words when wronged? Perhaps by looking to those who have decided to follow Christ? But this requires one to possess a Christian worldview—a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of mankind, and Lord of All.

**Worldview**

What is real and true affects what one does. Knight (2006) informs his readers, “Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of reality. ‘What is ultimately real?’” (p. 15). He further states, “‘Metaphysics’ is a transliteration from the Greek that literally means ‘beyond physics’ (p. 16). In principle, it is the study of things above and beyond the study of matter and the visible, physical universe. Knight also writes about another “branch of philosophy which studies the nature, sources, and validity of knowledge [or] epistemology”, or ‘what is true?’” (p. 20). He tells us, “Educators must understand their epistemological presuppositions before they will be able to operate effectively” (p. 27). He sums up this metaphysical-epistemological dilemma by claiming:

At this point it is evident that humanity is suspended, so to speak, in midair both metaphysically and epistemologically. Our problem is that it is not possible to make statements about reality without first having a theory for arriving at truth; and, on the
other hand, a theory of truth cannot be developed without first having a concept of reality. We are caught in the web of circularity. (Knight, 2006, p. 27)

Therefore, this study excluded those who do not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Christian God, since much has to do with one’s metaphysical-epistemological view of reality which forms one’s theology as to what is real and true. One must believe there is a God and that the Bible is the Word of God or else the biblical truth that we are created in God’s image—or any biblical truth, for that matter—would hold zero weight. If one believes there is no God, God’s image is insignificant to one holding such a view.

_Beyond All Reason—Apprehending Truth_

One’s life and behavior are greatly influenced by one’s philosophical perspective. Knight (2006) claims, “The acceptance of a particular position in metaphysics and epistemology is a ‘faith-choice’ made by individuals, and it entails a commitment to a way of life” (p. 27). Later, Knight states, “Human beings are the discoverers, not the originators, of truth; and the entire edifice of scientific inquiry is built upon _a priori_ principles” (p. 181). He then tells us, that “Bernard Ramm has correctly remarked that _reason_ [italics mine] is not a source of religious authority, but is rather a mode of apprehending truth. As such, ‘it is the _truth_ apprehended which is authoritative, not reason” (p. 181). Finally, he concludes, “The findings of reason are always checked in a Christian epistemology by the truth of scripture” (p. 182).

Therefore, if Christian doctrine which is based in a belief in God, and, thereby, gives credence to God’s Word, the Bible, (and the passage in Genesis that states we are made in God’s image actually guides our lives), does it follow that one’s behavior is conformed toward righteousness by the Holy Spirit or by what social scientists would call conditioned-responses to moral and reasoned truths? Is it possible to conclude whether changes in one’s behavior—as one
matures as a Christian—are the result of conditioned-responses to reason and logic, or to the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life?

**Behavior & Belief: Axiology—Values & Desires Drive What We Do**

Behavior stems from a wellspring—a source, whether from one’s values, one’s desires, one’s emotions, one’s needs, or one’s beliefs. Researchers have long-labored at isolating and identifying which motivator (driver) is directly or predominantly responsible for how one ultimately behaves. For the moment, this researcher will address what is termed, axiology.

“Axiology is the branch of philosophy that seeks to answer the question, ‘What is of value?’” (Knight, 2006, p. 28). What one values leads to one’s ethics, or the study of moral values, which, in turn, turns one’s attention to questions, such as “What should I do?” “What is right or wrong in a given situation?” “How should I behave?” But what one experiences despite sounding simple in theory, is that one often behaves in ways one “knows” is wrong and one “desires” to change one’s ways of “thinking” and “acting” to better coincide with one’s “beliefs” so that one “feels” better about oneself.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg, for underlying it all is one’s worldview. Knight (2006) writes, “Perhaps before we go any further we ought to define worldview. ‘Roughly speaking,’ writes David Naugle, worldview ‘refers to a person’s interpretation of reality and a basic view of life.’ In that sense a worldview is very close in definition to that of philosophy itself, with its concern with the issues of reality, truth, and value” (p. 233). Hiebert (2008) gives readers a way to visualize what a worldview is by explaining “they are much like the submerged portion of an iceberg, which keeps it afloat but is unseen” (p. 46). He mentions a few paragraphs later that “[w]orldviews can also be made visible by consciously examining what lies below the surface of ordinary thought” (p. 47). In many ways, this is what the Christian life entails. It is
important to note here that Hiebert informs us, “Worldviews are the elements and rules of a culture that generates cultural behavior” (p. 50). He writes that, “cultures are made up of ‘three interacting dimensions: ideas, feelings, and values’” …as well as three themes: cognitive themes, affective themes, and evaluative themes (p. 50).

Scripture incorporates these same themes as well. For Christians, Scripture provides what is real and true, what is right and wrong, and how one should behave. The Bible conveys the values one is to imitate, incorporate, and initiate in one’s interactions with others. It contains and conveys what comprises Christian culture and what it means to be Christlike. Scripture serves as a compass, a map, a model, and more. Just as it depicts in Genesis the creation of the world, the Word of God creates in one’s mind—a holistic worldview.

**You May Say Metanarrative, Horton Says Meganarrative**

Horton writes:

> All of our worldviews are stories. Christianity does not claim to have escaped this fact. The prophets and apostles were fully conscious of the fact that they were interpreting reality within the framework of a particular narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, as told to a particular people (Israel) for the benefit of the world. The biblical faith claims that its story is the one that God is telling, which relativizes and judges the other stories about God, us, and the world. . . (Horton as quoted, Taylor, 2015, TGC)

In contrast to the narrative of the story of creation in Genesis, the science of Darwinists stands in opposition. Against the backdrop of the fall is what Darwinists would term, simple bad luck. Redemption is written off as mere progress mortals make by way of innate, technological prowess; and consummation is seen either simply as the grave or one’s legacy established by a life well-lived here on Earth. Without God, one can create one’s own faulty reality and decide for oneself what appears to be true—and therefore, right or wrong. In this postmodern world, many are prone to constructing fabricated fictions.
Taylor (2015) quotes Horton in this lengthy passage placed here to illustrate the lengths one must go in this postmodern world to ensure biblical truths are not trivialized as mere myths, by leveling the biblical story as yet another metanarrative amongst metanarratives:

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979 French edition; 1984 English translation), philosopher Jean-François Lyotard argued that the “postmodern” outlook can be simplistically defined as “incredulity toward metanarratives”—that is, mistrust or skepticism about the totalizing stories of modernism and their grounds for universal legitimacy.

In response to this line of thinking, it is not uncommon for Christians to suggest that Christianity itself is a metanarrative—the ultimate universal story.

But Michael Horton (and others) argue that this well-intentioned move is based on a misunderstanding of what “metanarratives” mean. Horton writes, “For Lyotard, a metanarrative is a certain way in which modernity has legitimized its absolutist discourse and originated or grounded it in autonomous reason.” The biblical storyline is not grounded in this way, so while it is a mega-story, it is not really a meta-narrative (which refers to the level of discourse and its basis, not to the size and scope of the story) (Taylor, 2015, “Metanarrative”).

Horton continues:

The prophets and apostles did not believe that God’s mighty acts in history (meganarratives) were dispensable myths that represented universal truths (metanarratives). For them, the big story did not point to something else beyond it but was itself the point. God really created all things, including humans in his image, and brought Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. He really drowned a greater kingdom than Pharaoh and his army in Christ’s death and resurrection. God’s mighty acts in history are not myths that symbolize timeless truths; they create the unfolding plot within which our lives and destinies find the proper coordinates. (Horton as quoted, Taylor, 2015 “Metanarrative”).

**Scriptural Framework**

Whether or not one uses the term metanarrative or meganarrative is less important to those who are simply seeking a term to describe the biblical story. Even the term story, when applied to the Bible seems slightly heretical—which is perhaps why the term narrative has been adopted. The point, though, is to get to the point where one can discuss the significance of the image of God, or the imago Dei, in a meaningful and concrete way. To do so, one must possess
the aforementioned Christian metaphysical-epistemological presupposition, or “faith-choice” coined by Knight (2006). Furthermore, one’s “values” must be derived from Scripture and aligned with the Gospel message. From here, one is also served by utilizing an appropriate framework conveniently made available in the pages of Scripture; by interpreting reality within the framework of a particular narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

**The Imago Dei**

“Imago Dei” comes from the Latin version of the Bible, translated to English as “image of God.” Madden (2002) posits, “As Ewert Cousins, Professor of Theology Emeritus at Fordham University writes, the phrase ‘image of God’ contains two positive affirmations: it identifies the human person as an image and, without any qualifications makes a straightforward affirmation of God (1990, p. 59). This statement describes one way humans experience God in which God is ‘grasped in his positive perfection’ and ‘this absolute, as positive perfection, is reflected in the image.’” (p. 33). Simply put, God is the source (the Creator) and is therefore, also, the standard for human beings to aspire to emulate.

Beyond this conclusive statement, there still exists an issue with one’s theological view regarding the image of God. As Erickson (2015) conveys, “There are three general ways of viewing the nature of the image” (p. 187). And that is, does one hold a substantive view which supposes “the image to consist of certain characteristics…either physical, or psychological/spiritual” (p. 187); a relational view consisting of a relationship between the human and God, or two or more humans—or by way of what the human does, as espoused by the functional view (p. 187). Does any particular view hold sway?

As mentioned, the doctrine of “the image of God” goes to the very heart of Christianity. From its first appearance in the text of Genesis, to the close of Revelation, the doctrine of
humanity being made in God’s image bears witness to our birthright as children of God. Kilner (2015) also tells us the image of God serves as a standard (p. 184)—a standard to which one is to aspire. It is clear this doctrine has deep significance and importance for humanity. But what exactly is one to glean from it? To get a better idea, one may look at its biblical origins, its historical foundations, and theological aspects related to the image of God. What this author believes one will find along the way is that what the image of God also gives us is nothing less than an identity—an identity in Christ. It informs us of who we are, what we are, and whose we are. It is this author’s contention that it is this identity that ultimately drives one’s behavior toward God’s standard—requiring one to change their behavior in the here and now.

Biblical Aspects of the Doctrine of the Image of God

In Genesis, chapter one, verse 26, God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (NIV). In the New testament, in Colossians 1:15, Paul affirms “[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (NIV) and Hebrews 1:3 states, “He [Christ] reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by the word of His power” (NIV). Jesus Christ gives a human model to gaze at and to emulate, to aspire to, in order to mature and grow into the image of God.

Being made in the image of God, however, is of limited help to those living in this fallen world. “God’s intention from the beginning has been to conform people to God’s image—to Christ (Rom. 8:29)” (Kilner, 2015, p. 91). One way one is “like” God is by having knowledge of good and evil (NIV, Genesis 3:22). With the Fall of humanity in the garden of Eden, humanity gained this knowledge, but in becoming autonomous…in the process, the knowledge of good
and evil required one to discern right from wrong—and this is not the easiest thing to do. As Kilner states, “Prophets in every age have had ample opportunity to lament ‘those who call evil good and good evil’ (e.g., Isa. 5:20)” (2015, p. 102).

**Historical Foundations of the Doctrine of the Image of God**

Just as there are biblical aspects giving us insight and understanding of the image of God, there are also historical aspects. Philosophers and theologians have endeavored to explain what, in their educated opinions, are most significant—but, like all things, the views over time have changed.

**Augustine: It’s All in Your Head.** In a review of a book by Boersma, Teslina (2016), states, “Augustine believe[d] that the anthropological image of God resides in the incorporeal element (often specified as intellect) of human beings” (n.p.). Over time, others have claimed that the image of God cannot be formed inside the human mind, but can only be revealed by God.

**Jesus-Christ Alone: Solus Christus.** Martin Luther concluded that Jesus-Christ is the image of God and God’s love for us. He explains, “Because there is only one peacemaker and intermediary between God and man: Jesus-Christ is the only Saviour, the only Sovereign-Sacrificer, Propitiatory and Intercessor with God.” (Protestant Museum, n.d., Martin Luther). Jesus Christ is the Image of God.

**Emil Brunner: Relationship with God.** Brunner would say, “It is not that a man has the ‘image’ of God, but that a man ‘images’ God” (Orr, n.d., Image of God). He would contend a “shift of emphasis in the use of the term by which one is not to think of the term ‘image of God’ as a noun,” contrary to what Kilner would tell us (Orr, n.d., Image of God). Lindsay (2013) claims that Brunner “sees the image of God present in man in two ways. It is present in the
formal sense, that is man’s ‘responsibility, capacity to respond to God’s love, and his need to
give an answer to God’ (Hoekema, 1986, p. 54). This sense of the image of God is where reason
resides. The other sense is the material sense, which consists of the love of God and love for
neighbor. The former is preserved in the Fall, but the latter is lost” (Lindsay, 2013, p. 12).

**The Modern View.** In modern times, the view has returned to one based upon the
thought that the image of God involves “freedom” or “free will.” Hibbert quotes Towner,
describing how “Towner states in a critique of the substantive view that ‘the image of God is
manifested in our ability to make moral decisions, which presupposes free will and a knowledge
of good and evil’” (Hibbert, n.d., Critique). Towner (2005) concludes, “We neither are God’s
clones nor are we ‘miserable offenders,’ wholly incapable of good. We are God’s creatures and
chosen partners in the work of the creation” (p. 356). We were created to work for the good of
God, voluntarily, out of love for Him.

The point of the discussion, thus far, is to illustrate that how one views God affects how
one views others, and will affect whether one’s motivations align one’s behaviors with God’s
expectations. For God’s anger is born of disobedience to his commands, precepts, and laws

**Theological Aspects of the Doctrine of the Image of God**

As alluded to previously, in Christian theology there are three common ways of
understanding the manner in which humans exist in Imago Dei: Substantive, Relational and
Functional (Erickson, 2005, pp. 520-536). “Some consider the image [of God] to consist of
certain characteristics within the very nature of the human, either physical or
psychological/spiritual” (p. 520). This view is the substantive view. Kilner (2015) does not
endorse this view. Kilner states human beings are in the image of God, not in light of attributes
like reason, righteousness, rule, or relationship (p. 113). Another view is one that “others regard the image not as something inherently or intrinsically present in humans, but as the experiencing of a relationship between the human and God, or between two or more humans” (Erickson, 2005, p. 520). This is the relational view. Still others “consider the image to be, not something a human is or experiences, but something a human does. This is the functional view” (p. 520). Kilner (2015) gives a wonderful caution in chapter three when he says, “Without clarity…based upon a careful reading of the Bible, it will be next to impossible to discern from the limited biblical data available what it means for humanity to be in the image of God” (p. 113).

One wonders if anyone has attempted to merge these three disparate views into some kind of amalgamation that encapsulates the best parts of each into one holistic view? From this author’s perspective, it seemed there would be tremendous value in doing so. But, perhaps a key overarching theological aspect to keep in mind is “The idea that people who dishonor the image dishonor the original” (Kilner, 2015, p. 120). Hence, God’s loathing of sin.

**How the Doctrine of the Image of God Relates to Education and Leadership?**

One does not study things, just to study things. One studies things to “flesh-out” truth so one can lead confidently and teach others the truth with conviction and purpose. As teachers, one never desires to get in over one’s head and be caught communicating anything which one is not, themselves, certain. Therefore, it is imperative one strives to establish an accurate image of God that one can stand on, to preach and teach those seeking the truth, and in so doing, not adapt one’s message to match the cultural feel-good message of the moment—that may be popular and welcomed, but may be 180-degrees out from truth.

The doctrine of the image of God appears to be used in theological anthropology to contrast with human sinfulness. Sin—which is 180 degrees out from righteousness, is not
something that can ever alter the image of God (Kilner, 2015, p. 143). God’s image serves as a standard for humanity. His character should be our character, but it often is not. But that alone should not keep one from endeavoring toward the goal.

**Image of God Summary**

Kilner rejects the notion that the meaning of the image of God is to be understood in capacities, or functions, or relationships. He contends the Image of God is innate within us—hard-wired and written on our hearts. We are made in the image of God, even broken and sinful as we are—within us exists the humanity created by God shown perfected in Christ, if only we place our faith and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ. So, despite our sin, we never harm the image of God, though our sin certainly offends God, and keeps His likeness from being seen by others. God’s image is a standard intended to lead us to Christ—to salvation—leaving within us His Holy Spirit to teach us how to become more and more like Christ. With faith in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit bears fruit.

**Pauline Doctrine & the Fruit of the Spirit**

The Fruit of the Spirit is derived from Pauline doctrine and beautifully expressed in the Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5, verses 22-23, where the Apostle Paul writes, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (NIV). This oft-quoted passage of Scripture speaks to the desire to possess these qualities. However, it is important not to become inextricably tied to these specific words, nor only these two verses within this one book of the New Testament. One must consider what underlies these nine qualities? What connects them? What do they have in common with one another? What is the larger point Paul is striving to get us to understand?
**Virtue & Wisdom**

Pope John Paul II contended the commonality within the Fruit of the Spirit is the virtue of purity, derived from righteousness (piety) which leads to wisdom. Addressing thousands, he stated, “Purity is, in fact, the condition for finding wisdom...,” and he went on to say that, “the virtue (purity) is in the service of wisdom, and wisdom is a preparation to receive the gift that comes from God. This gift strengthens the virtue and makes it possible to enjoy, in wisdom, the *fruits of a behavior* and life that are pure” (Pope John Paul II, 1981, The Pauline Doctrine). This self-perpetuating model seemingly simple on the surface fails most of us? Could it be, the Apostle Paul simply broke wisdom into its constituent parts so we may more clearly understand what wisdom is?

**Patience & Strength of Character**

Cornelius Plantinga (1999) provides valuable insight into one fruit of the Spirit, patience, and its importance in being able to control anger resulting from daily frustrations. He describes how it is also a key component to forgiveness and how we can develop this fruit by becoming apprentices of patient people by watching them, listening to them, and learning some moves from them. He addresses the fact, that patience is equated with strength of character, a hallmark quality admired by others. Most importantly the article shows how anger, that is restrained, and then appropriately timed and unleashed in the right situation will be seen as righteous anger—as it comes from someone for whom anger is not usually seen—and can be used as a rebuke, but he adds the caution, “Rebuke needs to be patient rebuke” (Plantinga, 1999, “Trying Patience on for Size”).
Surrendering to the Holy Spirit

Charles Stanley’s (2014) book, *The Spirit-Filled Life: Discover the Joy of Surrendering to the Holy Spirit*, documents the pitfalls and futility of trying to live life relying upon one’s own strength, but how one can live a joyful and wonderful life by “relying on the unlimited power, wisdom, and love of the Holy Spirit” (p. xi). Stanley endeavors to join experience with doctrine by giving us a lesson in theology presented in the form of a narrative. Finding this kind of life requires some work on our part, by seeking God in all aspects of one’s life through prayer, through participation in community with other Christians, by studying God’s Word, by considering outside influences and modifying our behavior as a result, to ultimately discovering the joy of surrendering to the Holy Spirit—who will come and counsel and guide us in the ways we should go. Essentially, Stanley informs us that we cannot expect the Fruit of the Spirit to be visible in our lives if we are seeking success on our own terms and paying little to no attention to God. The good news is, is that as we give God our time and attention, through commitment, devotion, and prayer, the Fruit of the Holy Spirit will be seen in our lives—not only by ourselves, but also by those around us.

Charity & Love

Editor Kyle Strobel (2012) points out that theologian and 18th Century preacher Jonathon Edward’s tied the Fruit of the Spirit back to Charity which is inextricably tied to Love. Strobel acknowledges a ‘debate’ that goes on to this day as to “whether the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is a menu of generally related terms or an actual list of ways the one fruit—Love—plays itself out in the life of the believer (as joy, peace, patience, etc.)” (p. 23).

Zig Ziglar (2007) segments the fruit into three parts. In part one, he examines the fruit of the Holy Spirit that comes from within—love, joy, and peace. In part two, he considers men and
women who display the outward fruit of the Holy Spirit—patience, kindness, and goodness, which he contends are the outward expression of love, joy, and peace. Finally, in part three, he focuses on the fruit of the Holy Spirit that are directed upward, toward Jesus—faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Similarly, the world-renown evangelist Billy Graham (2008) gave us a way of checking to determine whether we have received the Holy Spirit by asking ourselves one simple question: “Are we producing any fruit?”

In Hebrews 10:16, Paul writes, (quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33), “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law on their hearts, and write them on their minds” (NIV). If morality does emerge from prerational processes, (in essence, from a pre-programmed script within our DNA written on our hearts by God, Himself)—as Sampson (2011) conjectures—could this ever be discerned by studying observable and identifiable changes in a Christian’s demonstrated behavior as one grows and matures in Christ?

Theology of the Holy Spirit as Teacher or Educator

“The ultimate goal of Christian education is spiritual formation, which requires transforming the minds of believers. However, since man’s mind is impacted by sin, the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary to transform those minds. Since the Holy Spirit and Christian educators are striving for the same goal, one can state that the Holy Spirit has an educational ministry” (Lindsay, 2013, p. xiii). Lindsay continues claiming, “The curriculum used to train Christian educators should describe the educational ministry of the Holy Spirit” (Lindsay, 2013, p. xiii). In listing the many works of the Holy Spirit, Grudem (1994) informs us, “Another aspect of the Holy Spirit’s revealing work is teaching certain things to God’s people and illumining them so that they can understand things” (p. 644). In John 16:13, Jesus said, “But when he, the
Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (NIV).

In his dissertation, Lindsay (2013) conducted a content analysis of 44 textbooks used by professors associated with the North American Professors of Christian Education (NAPCE), which produced a five-point description of the Holy Spirit’s educational ministry. He concluded his research stating, “The Holy Spirit possesses characteristics that promote learning. He interacts with the student in particular ways. The Holy Spirit controls the environment in a way that promotes learning. There are certain learning objectives to the Holy Spirit’s educational ministry. The Holy Spirit uses certain instructional strategies to teach His students” (p. 161).

Erickson (2005) gives us insight into several strategies the Holy Spirit utilizes to teach: discernment, commitment, illumination, and conviction. In speaking of Ian Ramsey’s work on language, Erickson states, “One additional element should be added to Ramsey’s analysis. The discernment of which he speaks should be attributed to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the endeavor to effect discernment in another, the Christian may rely on, and utilize the assistance of, the Holy Spirit” (p. 153). He goes on to emphasize, “Note that the goal of religious language is not merely discernment. It is also intended to elicit commitment” (p. 153). Erickson then claims, “True Christianity is present only when commitment is present, and a total commitment at that. The process of discernment is a means, and a necessary means, to that end” (p. 153).

Later Erickson exposes the importance of illumination comparing and contrasting views of Augustine, Fuller, and Calvin. After giving an account of Augustine’s view, Erickson (2005) concludes, “While Augustine has given account of the process by which we gain knowledge, he has not differentiated here between the Christian and the non-Christian. Two brief observations
will point up the problem in this approach: (1) Augustine’s epistemology is not consistent with
his anthropology, according to which humankind is radically sinful; and (2) he fails to take into
account the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit performs a special work in relationship to
believers” (pp. 280-281).

In outlining Fuller’s view, Erickson (2005) informs us that, “Daniel Fuller has
propounded a novel view of what precisely is involved in the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination.
This view appears to be based exclusively on 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, and in particular the clause,
‘The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God.’ Fuller
maintains that what is involved here is not understanding of the biblical text, but acceptance of
its teachings” (p. 281). Fuller concludes, “Thus, the problem of the unspiritual human is not a
lack of understanding of what the Bible says, but unwillingness to follow its teachings.
Illumination, then, is the process by which the Holy Spirit turns humans will around to accept
God’s teachings” (p. 281). Erickson points out, “There are severe difficulties with Fuller’s view
that illumination is the Holy Spirit’s working with the human will (and only the will). Apart from
the fact that Fuller bases his view on but a single portion of Scripture, he has assumed that only
human will, not human reason, is affected by sin” (p. 281). Erickson, concludes this is where
Fuller’s novel view is flawed.

Near the end of his massive tome, titled, Christian Theology, Erickson (2005) touches on
one’s spiritual calling, saying, “Special calling is in large measure the Holy Spirit’s work of
illumination, enabling the recipient to understand the true gospel. It also involves the Holy
Spirit’s work of conviction, of which Jesus spoke in John 16:8-10. This working of the Spirit is
necessary because the depravity characteristic of all humans prevents them from grasping God’s
revealed truth” (p. 943). It is on depravity that Erickson bases his contention that “John Calvin’s
view on illumination is more adequate than that of either Augustine or Fuller” (p. 282). He states, “Calvin, of course, believed in and taught total depravity. This means that the whole of human nature, including reason, has been adversely affected by the fall. Humans in the natural state are unable to recognize and respond to divine truth” (p. 282).

The point of everything up to this point is for us to arrive where we can see the significance not only of the foundational belief in the triune God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit; and recognizing the Bible as God’s Word, but also to understand the relationship between biblical authority and reason…as well as reason and will for this is where cognitive dissonance arrives on scene and thrives in the chasm between these two actors. But we see, there is much operating behind the scenes that cannot be ignored. In this study, it is hoped the research uncovered the connections exemplars have discovered and identified as the key factors involved in overcoming anger and adopting meekness. It was speculated that behind the things the exemplars unveiled would be themes linking anger to reason, blurring reason and will, and listing things like power, authority, right, wrong, belief, as well as emotions (like fear and frustration), desire, and the need for justice and vengeance, along with a host of other factors. But somewhere along the way, this researcher envisioned discussion would touch upon the work of the Holy Spirit as an educator in resolving dissonance. Equally as interesting as the factors involved in anger’s genesis are the methods and means the Holy Spirit employs to conduct the work of transforming those predisposed to anger to meekness.

**Circumcision of the Heart**

What are the signs of this transformation? What is the proof change has taken place? God brands his people with a special mark. “In the Old Testament, circumcision was the proof of divine ownership…[i]t was an external sign of the covenant” (Erickson, 2005, p. 1046). In some
ways it was a cutting away of worthless flesh. “Instead of this external circumcision of the flesh, found in the administration of the old covenant, we find under the new covenant an inward circumcision of the heart. Paul wrote, ‘No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code’ (Rom. 2:29; see also Phil. 3:3)” (p. 1046). Therefore, we will no longer see a physical mark; instead, we will know them by their fruit. It will be through one’s disposition and one’s behavior—in their displaying of the fruit of the Holy Spirit—in their meekness—that others will know them to be children of God.

**Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Establishing a common perspective (in this instance, a Christian worldview) and then applying existing theories and research on cognitive dissonance to the emotion of anger, it is hoped one may gain a broader perspective and greater understanding in considering the difference as to how mature Christians view and value the virtue or vice of anger. Much research consulted touched upon the difficulty of discerning whether and when one should ever be angry, and if so, for how long, and for what reasons—but little research touched upon the effects of anger on those who lead in leadership situations from a Christian perspective. Several studies explored the tensions and issues caused by one’s behavior that were contrary to one’s thoughts, with fewer exploring what underlies these thoughts, for instance, one’s beliefs. Several studies addressed linkages to morality but few to the connections to one’s worldview, and fewer still to the implications of constructively managing anger in Christian settings—among Christians. Many Christian leadership texts employ secular leadership concepts. However, this researcher wondered whether Christian leaders should be expected to lead like secular leaders?
Underlying the Image of God and the Fruit of the Spirit is the difficulty of navigating one’s way in this fallen world. One finds doing what is right to be far more challenging than it first appears. As children, one quickly learns to navigate through time and space, but becomes perplexed by one’s inability to control the people and things around them. Emotions, like anger, arise and build inside oneself despite one’s best efforts to hold back…one often lashes out. Even as one learns in time how inappropriate certain behaviors are. It sometimes appears to be beyond one’s ability to master the forces driving one’s responses to fear, frustration, cruelty, malice, and hate. For Christians, anger is a particular problem. For Christian leader’s, anger can be a multifaceted problem. For instance, ignoring hurtful behavior aimed at a member of one’s flock by another member of one’s flock, may cause a strain in the relationship one has with the injured party. Conversely, lashing out and publicly rebuking the offender may serve to sever the ties one has with the offender. Beyond this, there is the possibility one did not possess complete understanding of the background issues involved and weighs in on a matter they did not fully understand creating irreparable damage.

Utilizing research derived from Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance, these complex issues outlined here served along with the research questions to guide this study. In this section, these various theories are described to give context by which collected data was applied to derive how mature Christian leaders have come to maneuver through the maddening minefields and leadership challenges posed by anger, which interestingly—to this researcher—certain research contended could lead one away from anger toward acquiring the attribute of meekness. This research hoped to determine how this was made possible? How did it happen? How did one ‘learn’ to behave in a way that was previously, not possible, and was once, unnatural. Who was the teacher?
Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance has been one of the most influential theories in social psychology (Jones, 1985). Harmon-Jones & Mills (2019) state, “A little more than 60 years ago, Leon Festinger published A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957). It has generated hundreds and hundreds of studies, from which much has been learned about the determinants of attitudes and beliefs, the internalization of values, the consequences of decisions, the effects of disagreement among persons, and other important psychological processes” (p. 3).

Festinger’s theory “starts with a very simple proposition. If a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, he experiences dissonance: a negative drive state (not unlike hunger or thirst)” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128). This researcher italicized the word psychologically in the above sentence, to make the point that one could insert the word spiritually here for a Christian reader. Therefore, a question that Aronson’s proposition generated in the mind of this researcher is whether this dissonance could be derived from the Holy Spirit’s work upon one’s conscience?

Aronson (1997) states, “In my judgment, dissonance is greatest and clearest when what is involved is not just two cognitions but, rather, a cognition about the self and a piece of our behavior that violates that self-concept” (p. 128). It seemed that what Festinger did was combine cognition with motivation in a theory that would pave a way toward human development, but is useful in gaining understanding of spiritual formation.

Self-Consistency

Festinger’s theory was developed originally to focus specifically on areas clearly considered cognitive in nature, not so much on behavioral aspects which serve to generate negative feelings associated with and derived from moral dilemmas, or issues affecting one’s
sense of self-esteem resulting in feelings like post-decisional guilt or shame. Such as the type of dissonance the Apostle Paul experienced when he wrote, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (NIV, Romans 7:15).

Therefore, there is little surprise as Harmon-Jones & Mills (2019) inform us that, “One of the first revisions proposed was the self-consistency interpretation of dissonance (Aronson, 1968, 1992). It is based on the idea that situations that evoke dissonance do so because they create inconsistency between the self-concept and a behavior. Because most persons have a positive self-concept, persons are likely to experience dissonance when they behave in a way that they view as incompetent, immoral, or irrational. This revision interprets the effects observed in the Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) experiment as resulting from an inconsistency between the person’s self-concept as a moral person and the person’s behavior of telling a lie to another person. This revision has led to an examination of the way in which variables related to the self, such as self-esteem, are involved in dissonance processes and to the generation of new research paradigms” (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019, p. 15).

**Cognitive Dissonance Combined with Kohlberg’s Model**

Another theory which merged cognitive dissonance with moral aspects was Sica’s (1978) research that advanced this goal in his dissertation, titled, “Proposed Synthesis for Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance with Kohlberg’s Model of Moral Development”. Kohlberg’s Model consists of the Six Stages of Morality which closely mimic aspects of Christian transformation. Sica (1978) tells us, “A moral dilemma is a controversial situation involving a moral conflict and calling for a decision to resolve the conflict by choosing among a variety of options” (p. 23).
In leading up to discussing Kohlberg’s Model, Sica (1978) provides some historical context, stating, “Empirical research conducted by Hartshorne and May (1930) [had]…indicated the failure of the traditional, didactic approach to moral education” (p. 2). Hartshorne and May (1930) concluded that there is no such thing as ‘moral conscience’ or ‘moral character’ that can be educated (p. 2).

Sica (1978) states, “According to Kohlberg, a child cannot move to a higher stage of cognitive moral development until he has internalized the previous stage. When a child internalizes a particular stage of moral reasoning, this involves an acceptance of such reasoning that goes beyond the mere ability to intellectualize or memorize the characteristics of the reasoning process. This implies, prima facia, that indoctrination and preaching by teachers will not be effective in raising the child's stage of moral reasoning” (pp. 4-5).

**Six Stages of Morality**

*“Carrot & Stick or Quid Pro Quo”*

Cottone, Drucker, & Javier (2007) write, “Among modern theorists, Lawrence Kohlberg's model of moral reasoning and development is perhaps the most widely known and researched. According to Kohlberg's (1981) model, moral development is hierarchical and proceeds through three levels, comprised of six stages. At the lowest or preconventional level, [Kohlberg] suggested that moral decisions are based on the physical consequences of action (i.e., the Punishment and Obedience Orientation stage) and/or the ethics of quid pro quo (i.e., the Instrumental Relativist Orientation stage). Elements of reciprocity and fairness exist, but are interpreted through the lens of one's own needs in a concretely pragmatic way” (Cottone et al, 2007, p. 37). The first stage could be termed “carrot and stick” and the second stage could be referred to as “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”
“The Road to Hell is Paved with These & The Letter of the Law”

“At the intermediate or conventional level, the emphasis in decision making is on maintaining the existing social system. Kohlberg (1981) suggested that conventional moral reasoning is guided by stereotyped notions of ‘natural’ or ‘good’ behavior (i.e., the Interpersonal Concordance stage and/or the drive to uphold society's laws, norms, and conventions, regardless of their perceived fairness (i.e., the Society Maintaining Orientation stage). The rules governing behavior at this level are concrete, like the Ten Commandments, leaving little room for ambiguity or relativism” (Cottone et al, 2007, p. 37). The third stage can be viewed as having the best of intentions, and the fourth stage as living up to a hard and fast, black and white, concrete standard and doing one’s duty.

“We Hold These Truths & No Greater Love Hath No Man”

“At the highest or postconventional level (a.k.a., the principled level), Kohlberg suggested that moral judgments are made in light of the principles that form the basis of society's norms and laws, as well as advancing the rights of every human being, even if doing so conflict with existing laws or social norms (Kohlberg 1981). Here, the emphasis is on recognizing that laws and conventions, though necessary, need to be flexible in order to account for temporal and personal relativism, as well as standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole of society (i.e., the Social Contract Orientation stage). In addition, moral decisions at this level are guided by abstract universal principles, like the Golden Rule, that are consistent with the universal principles of justice, reciprocity, equality of human rights, and respect for the values and dignity of all human beings (i.e., the Universal Ethical Principle Orientation stage)” (Cottone et al, 2007, pp. 37-38). These final two stages shift the focus away from one’s self.
The Spirit of the Law Not the Letter of the Law

It is upon these highest levels of morality this research was focused, as it is at this level where something called discernment plays a large role. Discernment requires difficult decisions derived from moral dilemmas. For instance, breaking and entering, or stealing, is against the law. One knows this, yet, it is likely one would see nothing wrong with someone who by a tragic accident finds themselves stranded in a blizzard finding their way to a farmhouse or cabin in the woods (where no one is home) breaking a window to gain access to shelter and food. It seems logically clear despite the law, life is superior to the law and—one internally concludes—even the crafters of the law would likely agree with this modified interpretation and breach of the law, because there was likely no way possible, they could have foreseen this unique circumstance.

This scenario is similar, but not the same, as Jesus Christ healing the man on the Sabbath. Some would claim that Jesus ignored the Sabbath law to heal a man with a deformed hand—but this interpretation is flawed. In healing the man, Jesus did not ignore the law, He fulfilled the spirit of the law (Miller, 2015)—a law the Pharisee’s had corrupted.

On the website, Biblical Hermeneutics Stack Exchange, a question and answer site for professors, theologians, and those interested in exegetical analysis of biblical texts, a discussion centers on how “Jesus defended his disciples gleaning on the Sabbath by retelling a story about David captured in Mark 2:23-28 (ESV)” (Biblical Hermeneutics, n.d.). “One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ And he said to them, ‘Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the
priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?’ And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath’” (Biblical Hermeneutics, n.d.). A respondent concludes and clarifies, “These two statements are not unconnected truths. The point being that God's (or the 'Son of Man's') intention with regard to the Sabbath law trumps obedience to the ‘letter of the law’. Jesus explains the Sabbath ‘was made for man’ (i.e. to bless him) not the other way round so if a man breaks the Sabbath law to avoid harm coming to himself, he is more in tune with God's intention than if he keeps the law to his harm” (Biblical Hermeneutics, n.d.).

**Discernment**

What these stories depict is the difficulty in determining, distinguishing, discerning whether a particular course of action is right or wrong. Sometimes, this is quite difficult to do. Some decisions appear to be completely outside of one’s control, meaning such decisions do not feel like cognitive thoughts at all, but are perceived more like compelled responses motivated and driven from within our nature. Anger is an emotion that drives one’s behavior. Situations arise that spark one’s anger and motivate them to take actions that sometimes backfire when external actions (negative consequences) impact one’s feelings or self-esteem and generate a disharmony, internally. Cogley (2014) quotes Aristotle in the preface of an article on the study of virtuous and vicious anger in which Aristotle claims, “Getting angry [. . . ] is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is not easy, nor can everyone do it (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1109a27-29)” (p. 199). Sometimes, it is the consequences of our actions that inform us that our behavior was inappropriate—and one feels guilt, shame, and remorse.
Therefore, if, as Sica’s (1978) research concluded happens to be true, “Empirical research conducted by Hartshorne and May (1930) [had]…indicated the failure of the traditional, didactic approach to moral education” (p. 2); and [these authors] “…concluded that there is no such thing as ‘moral conscience’ or ‘moral character’ that can be educated” (p. 2). How can such internal change be accomplished? From where does the motivation to change come? And can we observe the effects of such change, empirically? Can we identify the factors that brought about such change and transformation? From where did this education come? Perhaps, it began in light of the previous, post-decisional situations that spawned those negative feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse? Perhaps from the work of the Holy Spirit using these instances to re-educate the child by convicting one of one’s transgressions?

**Gender Differences Regarding Morality**

One final area to briefly discuss regarding morality is required before moving forward, mainly to address an elephant placed in the room by Gilligan (1977), and that is the difference—or conjectured difference—in perspectives brought to moral judgments and decisions by those of different genders. Donleavy (2008) informs us, “Gender plays a fundamental role in ethical thinking, Gilligan asserts (1977, 1979, 1982), and she rejects Kohlberg’s taxonomy as exclusively male-oriented. Gilligan (1982) illustrates how women emphasize the notion of ‘‘caring’’ in the cognitive handling of ethical dilemmas whereas male values center on a ‘‘justice’’ concept” (p. 809).

Donleavy’s (2008) research concludes,

The evidence for Gilligan’s assertion of a radical gender difference in moral orientation has largely been anecdotal, narrative and phenomenological, following her own methodological preference. Guided interview and studies have not offered much support for the gender difference assertion. (p. 809)
In sum, the evidence suggests that though real quantitative scoring differences between males and females can be identified on reported tests, they are barely significant, apt to be exaggerated by the research method itself and are not necessarily tightly correlated with justice or care as core values. (p. 809)

Donleavy (2008) further states,

Although Gilligan (1982) claims that females have a care orientation and males typically emphasize the importance of rights, justice, and obligations in the resolution of conflicts, she also stresses that both males and females are capable of considering both perspectives. However, one perspective or orientation predominates. (p. 809)

Donleavy’s research, for the most part, concluded that any contrived controversy between Kohlberg’s Model and Gilligan was mostly that…contrived. Donleavy’s text leaves us with little doubt as to his conclusion. The research confirmed we are different—men and women, but moral issues (right or wrong) whether viewed through a female lens of caring or a male lens of justice will—despite those differences—lead both genders to the same moral conclusions.

**Linking Pedagogy, Learning, & Congruency Among Domains**

Once more, cognitive dissonance theory was used as the background for this study to investigate the dissonance caused by various factors intrinsic to exemplars’ (mature Christian leaders) extrinsic behavior prior to becoming Christians against factors intrinsic to exemplars’ current behavior that have eliminated the dissonance—as it regards the emotion of anger. Behind these behaviors were moral aspects, and the focus was on higher-level moral judgments. However, the goal was to arrive at an understanding of how identified changes took place within the exemplars. What served to motivate them to change. What pedagogy was employed, and by whom? How did the exemplars progress from their previous state to their current state?

**Bowen’s Link to Pedagogy & Relevance for Christian Educators**

Bowen (2012) explicates, “In pedagogy, educators attempt to transform students; teaching-method books abound to tell them how. What has been unsuccessfully sought is a means of triggering the innate desire to learn, a drive that seems to be inherent to humanity” (p.
This inference alludes to the fact that something (as yet unidentified) underlies and serves as the source of motivation. Bowen claims, “Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory describes an innate, post-decisional drive to reduce the discrepancy between elements of knowledge in cognition, affection, or behavior, which coincide with the three domains of learning” (p. 166). He informs us, “This research was aimed at improving the descriptive fidelity and extending the prescriptive facility of Festinger’s original theory” (p. 167).

Under the heading, Application of the Research, Bowen (2012) states,

The improved descriptive fidelity of the biblical-theological model of Cognitive Dissonance Theory allows for prescriptive facility as the model is applied. The purpose of the present research was to develop a model of Cognitive Dissonance Theory from a biblical-theological presupposition that would be relevant for Christian educators and give relevance to pedagogical practice. (p. 178)

**Bloom’s Taxonomy: The Domains of Learning**

Education and leadership involve an interplay between the intellect (the realm of cognition) and what Bloom referred to as the affective domain—the place where will and desire, emotions and feelings, motives and passions, morals, values, and virtues, reside and rule the spirit and the heart. As Bowen (2012) alluded to, there is more than one type of learning. A SAGE article stated, “A committee of colleges, led by Benjamin Bloom, identified three domains of educational activities: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (“Bloom’s Taxonomy,” 2018, SAGE).

**Seeking Congruency Among Domains**

Within the different domains, it is important to understand that there are also levels of learning that are progressive in nature, going from lower levels to higher levels—similar to the levels and stages of moral development within Kohlberg’s Model. For instance, within the cognitive domain, learning evolves from knowledge, to comprehension, to application, to analysis, to synthesis, to evaluation; and within the affective domain, learning progresses from
the realm of *receiving* phenomena: awareness or a willingness to hear; *responding* to phenomena, meaning active participation on the part of the learners (e.g.-motivated to learn); *valuing*, attributing worth or value to a particular object, phenomenon, or behavior; *organization*, which involves prioritizing or contrasting different values to resolve conflicts between them, and thereby creating a unique value system; and finally, *internalizing values* (or what is referred to as *characterization*). This level is reached when one has established a value system that controls their behavior. This would be observable in behavior that is pervasive, consistent, predictable, and most importantly, characteristic of the learner (“Bloom’s Taxonomy,” 2018, SAGE).

Just as within Kohlberg’s Model, where this study was mainly concerned with the higher-level stages, this research was also predominantly concerned with the higher levels of learning contained within Bloom’s Taxonomy within the cognitive and affective domains. A significant focus was directed toward the affective domain, as it is the domain where moral judgments are processed and where emotions (such as anger) are filtered, in conjunction with (the cognitive function) reason, before a decision and action is undertaken—before a response was generated. There is one exception to that which has just been stated, and that is in regards to the behavioral domain where this researcher’s focus begins with the lowest level of learning: imitation.

Before one’s behavior can ever change, one must first learn to imitate others. Before one can progress from imitation, to manipulation, to precision, to articulation, and ultimately to naturalization—where a high level of proficiency is apparent—one must practice, until practice makes perfect; where the behavior is performed with the least expenditure of energy, and has become routine, automatic, and spontaneous. One must observe and then imitate the actions and example of others (Bloom’s Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain, n.d., Graphic). One will likely recall, the Apostle Paul instructed first century Christians to imitate him as he imitated Christ
(NIV, 1 Corinthians 11:1). John preached, “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good” (NIV, 3 John 11). Smith (2016) states, “Since the time of Aristotle, one of the tasks of literature has been described as mimesis, imitation” (p. 93).

**Mimesis (Imitation)**

Smith (2016) describes several important aspects that will likely come into play within this research. In discussing virtues, he states, “Virtues, quite simply, are good moral habits. (Bad moral habits, as you might guess, are called ‘vices.’)” (p. 16). He tells us,

Thomas Aquinas points out, there is an inversely proportionate relationship between virtue and the law: the more virtuous someone is—that is, the more they have an internal disposition to the good that bubbles up from their very character—the less they need the external force of the law to compel them to do the good. (pp. 16-17)

But most significant, at present, is when Smith says, “Thus philosophers and theologians from Aristotle to Aquinas have emphasized two aspects of virtue acquisition. First, we learn the virtues through imitation. More specifically, we learn to be virtuous by imitating exemplars of justice, compassion, kindness, and love” (p. 18). Samra (2008) states, “Paul explicitly presents Christ as a model to be followed in 2 Cor. 8.9; Rom. 15.3-9 and phil. 2.5. In each case it is clear that Christ’s attitudes and actions provide the standard or norm for believers” (p. 74). Samra tells Christian readers, “To ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ refers to taking on the ‘characteristics, virtues, and intentions’ of Christ and ‘points to the adoption of his mind, character, and conduct’” (p. 75).

**Second Nature**

Learning implies education. Smith (2016) tells us, “Education in virtue is not like learning the Ten Commandments or memorizing Colossians 3:12-14. Education in virtue is a kind of formation, a retraining of our dispositions” (p. 18). He continues, “‘Learning’ virtue—becoming virtuous—is more like practicing scales on the piano than learning music theory: the
goal is, in a sense, for your fingers to learn the scales so they can play ‘naturally,’ as it were. Learning isn’t just information acquisition; it’s more like inscribing something into the very fiber of your being” (p. 18). In essence, it is imitation with lots of practice.

Wilhoit (2000) claims, “there is a place in Christian education for contributions from the social sciences. Many of these contributions are in no way incongruent with the Bible or traditional Christian doctrine” (p. 131). He also tells us, “Education is primarily concerned with shaping, informing, influencing, and developing the cognitive side of an individual, but every aspect of the learner has at least an indirect role to play in the accomplishment of this rather narrow task” (p. 145). Certainly, one’s values and level of motivation are aspects that govern one’s ability to accept instruction, or reject it based upon whether one perceives the instruction meets a valid need, and thereby serves as an underlying source of motivation to learn—and change.

**Our Singular Goal**

What all of these theories exclude—with the exception of Bowen’s (2012) research—is the work and influence of the Holy Spirit. As Christians, the Holy Spirit is always with us. This Wonderful Counselor is always engaging our conscience, striving to lead us in the right direction. If we listen closely and heed the Holy Spirit’s voice, guidance, and instruction, we can continue to develop with the best teacher of all…God, Himself! The proof of the change in our lives will be observable, measurable, and quantifiable; however, secular society will likely desire to give the credit to the underlying psychological theory behind the educational pedagogy which drove our learning; not to the Holy Spirit as an educator. The credit though belongs to Christ crucified, to a man (who was God incarnate) who willfully gave Himself to be nailed to a cross for the sins of mankind, so humanity could be saved, redeemed, and restored into a relationship
with God, the Father. The singular goal of Christian educators is to assist others in developing the knowledge and skills the Holy Spirit can use to sanctify them over the course of their lives in preparation for coming into the presence of Almighty God.

Congruency

What these theories all seem to share with the biblical and theological concept of sanctification (employed here to mean conforming to the image of God, or what in Christian circles is referred to as acquiring Christlikeness) is that the goal of transformation (the observed or perceived positive change conforming closely to a standard) of the child (i.e.—the pupil or learner) is congruency among the three domains. The speculation being, that if there is congruency across domains, there would exist empirical support suggesting that one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors align cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. There would be some observable or perceived proof that reason syncs with one values and with the actions one takes; and that the consequences meet with one’s expectations in the aftermath of the post-decisional behavior.

There have been many different versions of cognitive dissonance (referred to as paradigms) created and fielded since Festinger published his original version in 1957. Each offering a slight variation to the view one should take in looking at cognitive dissonance. After recapping a list of these many versions in their book, Harmon-Jones & Mills (2019) state, “Although the…revisions disagree about the specific underlying motivation for dissonance effects, dissonance theorists agree that genuine cognitive changes occur as a results of dissonance processes. They also agree that these cognitive changes are motivated in nature and that the source of this motivation is a form of psychological discomfort” (p. 17). Once again it
seems, one could insert the word *spiritual* in the place of the word, psychological, in the previous sentence, for the Christian audience.

**The Significance of Congruency**

What is the importance and significance of congruency across the domains of learning for Christian educators and leaders? Jesus presented His disciples with this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher” (NIV, Luke 6:39-40). To be fully trained is to reach the highest level within each of the domains. To be intelligent (operating at a high cognitive level) but, socially inept (behaviorally deficient); or compassionate (affectively excellent) yet, sinful (morally bankrupt), fails to produce a character like Christ—a character that moves others to follow. To be lacking in any educational domain, leaves one lacking characteristics of leadership.

**Leadership**

Leadership is a topic that has been studied for centuries. Countless college courses, business seminars, and military educational institutions have endeavored to synthesize, consolidate, and package it in many ways to teach those placed in leadership positions how to lead more effectively. Influencing others without asserting authority is not something one will find in most leadership texts or courses. Most will teach that one must rely on power, position, personality, authority, the chain of command, or an organizational hierarchy to lead effectively. What is often overlooked is the power derived from one’s dignity. Many would have you believe that leadership involves a complex calculus of myriad functions comprised of an array of inputs and variables. But at the end of the day, the equation involves human beings in relationship, and because this is true, leadership can take place, anywhere two or more are gathered. The goal of
leadership should not be simply about obtaining a singular result or accomplishing a workplace project or classroom task, it should involve opportunities to mentor and shape future leaders who will, in turn, shape future leaders. Leadership should focus on serving others instead of seeking to be served.

**Servant Leadership**

Research consulted points to the fact that a mature Christian living in the Spirit; demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit will have a positive effect on those around them, enabling them to lead others more easily and more effectively. This style of leadership has come to be referred to as servant leadership. But how and why does it work? Pope John Paul II once stated that “wisdom is a preparation to receive the gift that comes from God” (Pope John Paul II, 1981, The Pauline Doctrine). So, what others are observing when they see someone exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, one does not literally see this or draw this conclusion, one instead sees someone who is behaving wisely (or, conversely, who is not behaving foolishly); who is exhibiting behavior one desires to emulate. Solansky (2014) quoting Sternberg states, “Wise leaders are humble, considerate, impartial, prudent, merciful, sincere, and are driven by discernment in administering justice and distinguishing right from wrong (Sternberg 2003)” (p. 47). Solansky contends that the research shows most are motivated to seek wisdom out of a fear of its antithesis, foolishness (pp. 43-44). She mentions that King Solomon stated that fear is a prelude to wisdom in Proverbs, chapter 9 (p. 43). So, from an egocentric motivation of not wanting to appear foolish others are attracted to leadership in which they witness the presence of wisdom, such as that demonstrated by a leader modeling the Fruit of the Spirit.
Therefore, whether one seeks wisdom, or simply discovers wisdom by desiring not to appear foolish, one can still arrive at the truth. Howell (2003) conveys,

Servant-leaders are not visionaries who devise a brilliant plan, then by dint of personal charisma draw others to fulfill those ambitions. Rather they are faithful stewards of the divine mandate—to fish and to feed, to evangelize and to teach, to pioneer and to pastor. (p. 301)

Halstead (2010) quotes Greenleaf (1970) stating,

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 15)

Although leaving a legacy would not seem paramount to servant leaders, it appears to be a consequence. Halstead (2010) later offers this profound statement under the heading, History of Servant Leadership,

It is amazing how often a fragile beginning turns into a colossus. But only when the original idea is totally sound. That beginning for Greenleaf was realization that the essence of leadership is service; being ‘the first person to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. (p. 16)

It should be noted here that Jesus said, “…the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV, Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45) and “the greatest among you will be your servant” (NIV, Matthew 23:11). It would seem that Jesus Christ was the originator of servant leadership, Greenleaf simply coined the phrase, received the credit, and secured a lasting legacy as a result.

**Legacy Leadership**

Not only is leading others in the pursuit of worthy goals, and living a life of purpose, important; but so is leaving a lasting legacy. In their research, Whittington et al. (2005) state, “We have chosen “Legacy Leadership” as a reflection of the fact that Paul created a self-perpetuating model of leadership that not only had an impact on the Thessalonians, but…also in
every place your faith toward God has gone forth (1 Thess. 1:8)” (p. 753). The authors’ model consisted of a leader who is ‘worthy of imitation,’ the followers become ‘imitators’ of the leader and then an ‘example for others to follow,’ and in turn they become leaders worthy of imitation, repeating this cycle into the future. Whittington et al. (2005) describe Paul’s motives as pure; authentic and sincere; follower-centered, not self-centered, and affectionate and emotional. The authors depict his methods: worthy of imitation, boldness amid opposition, influence without exerting authority, vulnerable and transparent, and active, not passive. They list only one measure: changed lives. They conclude their work with the following statement, “We believe the qualities of legacy leadership can be practiced in all leadership settings from home to the classroom to the boardroom. But it all begins with motive, and the changing of a leader’s motives may require a transforming encounter on the road to Damascus” (p.768).

If everyone could control their emotions, there would be little need for leaders to manage interpersonal dynamics—breakdowns in communication and the corresponding negative impact on relationships within organizations, but our emotions often seem to have a mind of their own and conflict will occur. Since researching the moral aspects of every emotion is not feasible, this researcher focused on a singular emotion that is more likely than the others to create the biggest problems for those in leadership positions as they shepherd and supervise others: anger.

Much research posits that destructive, sinful, unrighteous anger serves no purpose, and can actually irreparably damage existing relationships, impede goal accomplishment, and negatively impact the overall mission of an organization. Thus, the need exists for those in leadership positions to identify the source of anger quickly to determine how best to address it. Much hinges upon whether there is a moral premise to the anger. If there is no moral foundation to the anger, it must not be given long life in the form of words or behavior. It is unhealthy to the
individual and the organization to carry unwarranted, destructive anger into the future, so in such instances the leader must engage to eliminate the source of such anger, quickly. But for morally-based anger, it must be given some latitude. If someone has been hurt, harmed or offended, they have a right to be angry and to state their anger. How much latitude to grant requires some discretion. Too little, and one injures further the injured party. Too much, and one risks losing one’s moral standing as a righteous leader. In the end, even moral anger must be resolved, but it is crucial to understand the ramifications. Resolving anger, even moral anger, will come at a cost. For Christian leaders, the level of judgment involved is increasingly important since the possibility exists to being drawn into a heated fray and leaving a good deal of collateral damage along the way should one lose sight of their role as a respected leader.

Constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many settings at some point. The ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive, creative ways can challenge status quos, improve teamwork, flesh out and resolve issues, and even transform lives; but it does require a great deal of wisdom. Man’s “wisdom” can result in the blind leading the blind into moral minefields. God’s wisdom can bring to light truth and justice. God’s wisdom requires one to seek to be moral in all things in order to transform into His Image. This research showed that He appears to be utilizing the emotion of anger to lead His followers to the characteristic of meekness—and that He may be using other emotions in similar ways to perfect and sanctify His children in this life—in the here and now.

Those assuming teaching or leadership roles will find, at some point, it will be necessary to address and manage conflict. However, governing others—or even one’s self—will require harnessing the powerful forces contained within the stealthy emotion of anger. This research investigated cognitive dissonance arising from the emotion of anger (by isolating the study to
this one emotion) and focused on the magnitude of change in behavior that takes place as one matures (transforms) toward Christlikeness as a Christian—from a disposition, attitude, or tendency where one was easily angered to a demeanor tending toward meekness. Despite volumes being written on the topic of cognitive dissonance theory, there was a meager amount of research that addressed the topic from a Christian worldview—or from its application to morality. The goal was to investigate and close the gap in understanding which factors appeared universal and most significant in the Christian formation process with regard to gaining mastery over anger by looking closer at the affective factors in causation rather than cognitive factors as had been done, historically, within social science research.

**Related Literature**

Acts, chapter seven, depicts the story of Stephen’s stoning. Falsely-accused, Stephen begins his response to the Sanhedrin’s inquiry—likely already realizing the outcome and his fate. Stephen begins recounting the glorious, yet long and troubled history of the nation of Israel as he slowly unveils his mounting passion—ending his rebuke in a crescendo of righteous anger. One can almost envision his face…moments before seen as the face of angel (NIV, Acts 6:15), now contorted with rage, bellowing, “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised” (paraphrased from NIV, Acts 7:51).

The interest this researcher had with this passage of Scripture in Acts was derived from how, in this instance, one could see ‘reason’ in anger, beauty and virtue in its application partnered with Truth. It altered this researcher’s view of anger. Anger appeared to possess a positive purpose! In Rick Warren’s best-selling book, The Purpose-Driven Life (2002), he states, “Many people are driven by resentment and anger. They hold on to hurts and never get over them. Instead of releasing their pain through forgiveness, they rehearse it over and over in their
minds” (p. 28). He goes on to say, “Some resentment-driven people…internalize their anger, while others “blow up” and explode it onto others.” (p. 28). Near the end of the passage in Acts, we read of Stephen, not only forgiving those who stoned him, but also, asking God to forgive them.

The Problem with Anger

The problem with anger is not the emotion itself, but its derivatives: malice, spite, vindictiveness, vengefulness, hatred from which aggressive, dangerous, and even deadly behavior is birthed; where actions are taken and damage is done—that cannot be undone. The problem with anger is it is likely to affect those closest to us and not some stranger on the street. The problem with anger is it is often directed toward those we love and toward God…creating a vast separation between us and the sources of Love.

Returning to the story in Acts,

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this [Stephen’s rebuke], they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, Acts 7:54-58)

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep” (NIV, Acts 7:54-60). In Stephen’s final words, there is no hint of anger, it is gone! Was it ever there? Were his words not filled with anger at all? What purpose did his anger serve? Were his words actually the passionate plea of love and compassion—cloaked in a scolding rebuke (like that issued by a loving parent to a belligerent child) with the hope of disciplining the prideful, stiff-necked Sanhedrin for their own good? Did he fail? Was it all for naught? Was the
young man, named Saul, not moved by this event? If not in this incredible moment, perhaps on a future trip on a ‘Road to Damascus?’

Anger possesses a dynamic that few things do...anger possesses many facets, some positive and some negative, but aspects which can change dynamics in a “flash” and in the blink of an eye, depending on one’s perspective. What was perceived initially as bad, comes to be seen as good, in hindsight. Perhaps this was exactly how God intended this emotion to be used...as a puzzling conundrum intended to confound and temporarily blind until bringing a moment of absolute clarity, so vivid one sees the heavens opened “and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (NIV, Acts 7:56), in a process called, transformation (that Christians may be more inclined to call sanctification).

What is Anger?

Anger has been referred to as an emotion, and many have developed a loosely contrived idea of what anger is, but to establish a clear reference for the purpose here requires a definition. Hunt (2008) says, “Anger is a strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met” (p. 12). Chapman (1999) refers to anger as a universal experience. In describing anger, he states, “Anger involves the emotions, the body, the mind, and the will, all of which are stimulated by some event in the individual’s life” (p. 18). Chapman continues, defining “Anger [as] a response to some event in life that causes us irritation, frustration, pain, or other displeasure” (p. 18).

West (2014) informs us, “Anger is a way of ‘seeing’ that presents the world to us in terms of blameworthy offense, presents us to ourselves as being in a moral position to judge, and breeds in us a desire for ‘pay back’” (p. 22). The problem with anger is that it can take many forms. Ghezzi (2018) lists a range of more subtle forms of anger, such as “snide comments,
insults, cynicism, brooding, or passive-aggressive gestures, [which] can, in some cases, be more damaging than overt expressions of anger, not only to…recipients but also to those who harbor these subtle forms of anger” (p. xi). Carter (2007) describes anger using an analogy of an old building imploded from the inside, or a bomb exploded bursting outward destroying with wanton disregard, [claiming] anger must find an outlet—it must be “suppressed, expressed, or released” (p. 99). Anger, therefore, must be managed, controlled, or constrained, in some way. Anger may be explosive, but it does not have to be.

**What Anger Is Not**

Lester (2003) informs us,

> While anger often leads to aggressive behavior, this result is not always the case. Anger, as an emotion, can be suppressed rather than expressed, or it can be disguised and expressed in passive ways that are not normally viewed as aggression. (p. 73)

He continues, making the point clear that in his view, aggression is a behavior…not an emotion. He states, “In defining anger…, I suggest that anger results in ‘the desire to defend or attack,’ but this may not be expressed in aggressive behavior” (p. 73). He concludes, “Therefore, because I am interested primarily in the emotion we commonly call ‘anger,’ I do not use the word ‘aggression’ in this book unless it clearly refers to behavior” (p. 73).

Warren (1990) claims that “Anger is not a primary emotion, but [that] it is typically experienced as an almost automatic inner response to hurt, frustration, or fear” (p. 3). He goes further to state, “Anger is physiological arousal. It is nothing more” (p. 3). Although some of what Warren concludes differs from the opinions of other researchers, most research coincides with his declaration that “anger and aggression are significantly different;” [that] “how we use our anger is learned,” and “the expression of anger can come under your control” (pp. 4-5). Anger may actually be best defined as a moral feeling that drives a desire to respond to something in a specific way. Kiefer (2005) lays a foundation for understanding the source of
negative emotions by describing how and why ongoing organizational change impacts our emotions and the role negative emotions play in how much one trusts, or mistrusts, one’s organization and, therefore, either engages in or withdraws from the organization. Anger being perceived by many to be a negative emotion is one he addresses. The research presented the results of previous studies by Herzberg and subsequent studies by others looking at antecedents of negative emotions within the context of organizational change. What the studies point to is the link between organizational change and negative emotions effecting trust, and in turn, behavior in the form of withdrawal. As the authors make clear, “This study has important implications for change management” (Keifer, 2005, p. 891). But simply because anger is perceived by many to be a negative emotion, does not necessarily make it a negative emotion, does it?

The Aptness of Anger

To answer the aforementioned question, one must consider the aptness of anger. Can there be anything positive to come from this “perceived” negative emotion? Srinivasan (2018) plunges into a profound philosophical thought piece on the topic of anger, which opens with a great debate from more than a half century ago between two titans of their day. Set in the midst of the civil rights era, an African American writer (James Baldwin) and white journalist (William F. Buckley) weigh in on whether anger is appropriate [apt] in any circumstance. He spends a great deal of time developing the backdrop to anger’s deep-rooted connection to moral violations as the only reason by which anger can be “apt.” Anger that fails to harbor a moral violation is thus, inappropriate [or to employ the term utilized by the author, counterproductive] and should result in a return to the realm of lessor emotions like frustration or mere disappointment. This likely seems intuitive to most readers. However, as the author elucidates, “this debate between critics and defenders of anger’s productivity tends to obscure something significant about anger.
There is more to anger, normatively speaking, than its effects” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 126). To paraphrase what the author appeared to convey is that anger is an incredible source of power one has within them at all times. This power was given to them by God and it is available even when one is oppressed (p. 126). The anger may be internalized, felt, and suffered within their soul, or externalized and brought to bear and wrought upon those in the world through whatever available weapons in their arsenal: words, wrath, vitriol, violence or unexpectedly, in meekness and selfless sacrifice—laying their anger aside at the altar of Almighty God, if doing so is for the greater good (e.g.—God’s Glory)—like Stephen did in his final breath.

**Anger: A Double-Edged Sword**

There is tremendous power in anger, which can be used for good or evil. This power comes from God, as all things do, but sadly—like in most things—Satan has found a million ways to manipulate this emotion, this source of power, in an attempt to beguile and destroy lives in the process. But the fact is, God created the emotion of anger. So, He certainly created this intense emotion for a reason. What is that reason? To get one’s attention? To bring his wayward children back to Himself through a rebuke? To discipline? To punish? To turn hearts of stone to hearts of flesh? To shape, refine, and restore broken souls by tempering and quenching lives like steel in a blacksmith’s forge—strengthening lives in the slow transformative process of sanctification? Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (NIV). John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (NIV). Anger, in many ways is like war, as it is often the last resort, the last tool in one’s arsenal to employ against those one wishes to correct; to change those in whom one wants to see change in behavior; to set against those whom one demands cease doing
whatever one does not like. Perhaps, it is the last tool God has available to use as well, to intercede, before one of his children becomes lost forever…condemned for all eternity to the pit of Hell? If so, one can pray His wrath is relentless and that His divine anger serves to bring every sinner to their knees and to salvation. For as Lisa Harper (2018) states, “Ultimately, if our outrage results in restoring people into loving, healing relationships with Jesus, it’s righteous anger” (pp. 1-2).

**Righteous Anger**

As an emotion, anger resides within, and although it motivates external behavior—behavior is a choice filtered through the mind and let loose by the will—powered by one’s spirit; whereby, the response may either restore another in righteousness or meat-out malevolence. Ghezzi (2018) states, “Anger is righteous if we direct it against wrongdoing and control its expression. Anger is unrighteous if we direct it against something good, or if we use it to express dissatisfaction at not getting our own way” (p. 32). As Srinivasan (2018) concluded, for anger to be righteous there must be a moral premise to anger for it to be considered appropriate, or “apt.” Lindebaum & Gabriel (2016) argue “that anger can be a positive force in society and organization” (p. 903) and in their essay, they clearly are looking at anger through a moral lens and state that they “oppose current conceptualizations of anger as, at least, a temporary individual psychological disorder and as a cause of social disorder” and go on to “conclude that a world without anger would be, possibly, a compliant and quiescent world but not a just world” (p. 903). They contend that anger is an appropriate response to a moral infringement. They inform us, “Beyond containing coded information about the stress points in an organization, anger provides a hugely valuable, though volatile, source of energy, a source of motivation that, if properly contained and channeled, can unleash creativity, imagination and hard work” (p.
Jon Bloom (a staff writer for John Piper’s website DesiringGod.com) answers the biblical question, “How Can We Be Angry and Not Sin?”, by informing us, “Righteous anger is being angry at what makes God angry. And ‘righteous anger’ is the right word order. Because God is not fundamentally angry. He is fundamentally righteous. God’s anger is a byproduct of his righteousness” (2016, DesiringGod). He contrasts righteous anger against sinful anger so one understands the difference. He explains, “And if we’ve suffered under the tyranny of a sinfully angry person, emotionally it can be very difficult to distinguish between sinful and righteous anger.” He also tells us, “We will never be perfectly angry in this age. But we can grow in grace and righteous anger. God means us to. It is a part of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)” (Bloom, 2016, DesiringGod). To lead others to Christ, one must follow Christ’s commandments (NIV, John 14:15), and one of his Scriptural commands is, “Be angry, and do not sin” (NIV, Ephesians 4:26). The only way to do this is to be slow to anger (NIV, James 1:19) and act always out of love—easier said than done.

**Nicomachean Ethics & Wisdom**

It is in bringing the power of anger under control that requires an equally-powerful counter-force to de-escalate conflict and to control anger in order to use it constructively. Hindson & Dobson (1999) in a brief editorial passage titled, *Meekness: Power Under Control*, state, in a summary of Jesus’s comments on the Sermon on the Mount, “Jesus surprised his listeners by stating that the meek, not the powerful, are blessed and will inherit the entire earth (Matthew 5:5)” (p. 712). The editors continue, claiming, “Jesus was saying that the person who
has discovered the secret of meekness has uncovered priceless treasure. This *lifestyle* [italics mine] of seeming insignificance will be rewarded by God” (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, p. 712).

Pettigrove (2012) informs us that, “Most controversy will surround what is called ‘righteous’ anger or ‘moral’ anger” (p. 356). Pettigrove explains how, “In book 4 of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle famously claims, “There is praise for someone who gets angry at the right things and with the right people, as well as in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time” and “people who do not get angry at things that they ought to get angry at are thought to be foolish” (pp. 356-357). Discerning if and when one should act, and in what way, requires wisdom—and self-control.

**Virtuous and Vicious Anger**

West (2016) informs us, “One recent proponent of a broadly Aristotelian approach is Zac Cogley” (p. 881). Cogley (2014) offers an incredibly thought-provoking article on virtuous and vicious anger which presents three functions of anger that are helpful in capturing a complete view of anger:

1. appraisal of wrongdoing—does the anger fit the situation
2. its role as a motivating force—as a source of intrinsic power
3. its communicative function—fitting and proportional.

Cogley (2014) makes the argument that anger can be either, virtuous or a vice depending upon whether all three aspects are in synch. For instance, if someone is rightfully grieved (meaning they have accurately appraised the situation and they are right to be angry), but then simply wallow in one’s rage never utilizing the motivating force of anger to take action, and thereby communicate their anger and associated level of one’s anger—they have failed to behave virtuously (p. 204). He states, “We thus need to consider the relationship of anger to action,
motivation, and deliberation to determine the motivational and deliberative profile of an excellently angry person” (p. 205). But he also speaks to how fitting the level of response is to the anger and therefore, how appropriately proportional. For instance, one would not normally scream at a child to correct their behavior unless the situation absolutely warranted it, e.g.—a child getting ready to place their hand on a red-hot stove. Similarly, one would not rage against a minor irritant. Cogley continues, “In spite of its sometimes, negative uses, anger has value in dispute resolution” (p. 208). Cogley states, one can be viciously meek and wrathful. For instance, each can be a vice, such as, “we can characterize the viciously meek person as deficient with respect to all the functions of anger: [if] he fails to feel anger in situations where it is fitting and [or] feels less anger than is fitting for the situation” (p. 218).

Cogley’s (2014) observations mirror Robert C. Roberts views. Roberts (1997) states, “Anger is a natural consequence of morally well-formed concerns” (p. 589). He goes on to say, “Anger expresses a sense of justice and a sense of being in the presence of responsible agents” (p. 589). But perhaps most significant is as Roberts explains, “From first to last, the Bible affirms that anger is sometimes right and fitting. God's anger provides the clearest case of righteous anger. The prophets often report that God is angry and recount the hurtful things that he has done or threatens to do to the people who now appear repugnant in God's sight” (p. 589). He then lists several instances captured in Scripture that speak of Jesus becoming angry. Concluding, “Because God can be angry, we know that anger can be right and fitting” (p. 589).

In light of the previous discussion surrounding anger, this writer questioned, “How does one lead angry people through conflict to a peaceful solution that is right and fitting while maintaining one’s own peace?” Does one lead by reason and logic, process and procedure, or by faith and trust in the Spirit of God? Much of the research appears to show the most effective way
to lead others is ‘by example’, through Christ’s example, as a servant-leader—subordinating one’s will to the Will of God (Halstead, 2010; Cogley, 2014; West 2014 & 2016). To lead in this way, though, requires possessing a Christian worldview, an understanding of the significance of the Image of God, a relationship with God, as well as some knowledge of the foundations of motivation.

**The Power of a Christian Worldview**

Perspective is everything. In order, “To consider the relationship of anger to action, motivation, and deliberation to determine the motivational and deliberative profile of an excellently angry person”, as Cogley (2014) explained, we need a common perspective (p. 205). If “anger is a way of ‘seeing’ that presents the world to us…” (West, 2014, p. 22), then perspective matters? How do we perfect perspective? It is this author’s contention that it is here where one must look at the philosophical origins of one’s worldview, specifically a Christian worldview, along with the significance of the doctrine of the Image of God, and the “need” for a telos (a fixed aim) as Smith (2009) would contend…or what he defines as the focus of our heart’s desire—which prayerfully will lead one to Christlikeness, virtue, and love filling them with the Fruit of the Spirit and an inclination toward meekness (pp. 47-55).

**Change Management**

Earlier this researcher mentioned a study conducted by Keifer (2005), which pointed to a link between organizational change and negative emotions effecting trust and in turn behavior in the form of withdrawal, alluding to the fact that as the authors made clear, “This study has important implications for change management” (p. 891). For those in leadership positions, one thing is certain: one must be prepared to confront change and be prepared for those under their
charge to be reluctant to change. From change will come conflict, so not only must one become savvy and versed in change management skills, but competent in conflict resolution as well.

In an article in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, the authors “conducted two studies in which [they] examined the relationship between anger and the willingness to engage in positive risk-taking and support non-violent policies in the context of political negotiations between adversaries. Results indicated a significant positive relationship, supporting the hypothesis that anger is not an exclusively militant emotion, and its effects are situationally dependent” (Reifen Tagar, Federico & Halperin, 2011, p. 157). The authors “suggest that anger can also bring about constructive…attitudes, in the service of the same goal of correcting wrongdoing” (p. 157). They also allude to and include results from “three previous studies [which] suggest that anger may not exclusively be an aggressive emotion” (p. 158). The research points to the fact that anger and the associated aggression “help” achieve something beyond a solution and actually work to lead to transformation of the group in coming to a non-violent conclusion using de-escalatory efforts and methods (pp. 162-163).

Change management will require risk-taking, negotiation, and a great deal of skill to maneuver attitudes toward transformed ways of thinking. It is not attempting to dissuade the anger and aggression, but using de-escalatory methods to “bleed off” some of the enflamed emotions and re-direct them in a positive direction. By allowing anger issues to be expressed will be bring to light important things that may have otherwise been overlooked and may have lingered long into the future; it encourages input and problem-solving; it gives everyone a voice and an opportunity to speak; it serves to bring all parties concerned not to consensus, but to transformation—where even those who do not want to change can see that change has arrived and it is up to them to put aside their negative emotions and become an instrumental change-
agent working for and not against the goals of the larger entity. It is coming to a mature realization that they fought the good fight, made their case, were heard, and understood.

**Conflict Resolution**

Change involves conflict, conflict involves emotions—normally, the emotion of anger will be one that must be tackled. Bodtker & Katz Jameson (2001) address the morphing of emotion, “contending that it is no coincidence that the same Western biases that view emotions as ‘irrational’ and counterproductive have also resulted in a normative belief that conflict is bad or dysfunctional” (p. 260). They state, “In this paper we suggest that the biases against emotion and conflict are the same” (p. 260). Anger happens to be a vital emotion instrumental in bringing to light issues that must be addressed in order for members to air their concerns fully and for others to consider other’s points of view to come to a solution all can understand and support because without this, the team’s efforts will be fragmented, if not inefficient or worse, ineffective.

Brown (2016) opens part five of his series Bible Teacher’s Guide: Nehemiah—Becoming a Godly Leader addressing conflict, stating, “Conflict is a result of the fall. After Adam sinned, he blamed God and his wife. He said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it’ (Gen 3:12, NIV). The woman then blamed the serpent. The blame game began when sin entered into the world” (Brown, 2016). In his list of ten ways godly leaders can be more effective in resolving conflict in their own lives and with others, he includes as number two, that “To resolve conflict, godly leaders must develop righteous anger.” He tells us in number five, “godly leaders must practice a biblical method of confrontation.” And in number ten, “godly leaders must use accountability.” The point of this article is that anger has a purpose in confronting others with righteous anger in order to hold them accountable. No society can
exist in humble unity by way of contrived politeness which would allow by way of passivity immoral practices or behaviors to go unchecked. Correcting ungodly behavior is not a sin, it is a duty and obligation performed out of obedience to God. “Nehemiah’s anger was spurred on by the knowledge of God’s Word and the nobles disregard for it. Our anger should be something that is motivated and confirmed through Scripture as well.” (Brown, 2016).

**Peacebuilding**

What was of interest to this researcher was not simply the study of the emotion of anger, or its value in organizational behavior as it related to change management or conflict resolution, but in its role in the transformation of the whole person—specifically, its utility in leading them to Christ and ultimately to Christlikeness as they *learned* to leave the old version of one’s self, behind. Jun (2018) presents a paper published by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies which describes peacebuilding within two congregations forced to come together out of necessity that harbored fundamental incompatibilities—different group identities and values, in a process of leading others through intergroup conflict to transformation. Jun (2018) describes peacebuilding going beyond mere peacemaking and peacekeeping, to a level beyond consensus. “The data analysis revealed the causes and nature of the intergroup conflict in the five stages of its development” (p. 2). Stage One looked at fear and anxiety; Stage Two addressed competition for gaining the initiative in the conflict; Stage Three discussed growing animosity; Stage Four focused on the damage done as a result of power struggles until in Stage Five, the author articulates how the breakdown morphed into a schism between the two congregations. The transformation within these now merged congregations was a long-term process. “A healthy congregation does not mean that it has no conflicts, but that it has the capability to deal with the conflict in a healthy manner” (p. 13).
In a masterful book, Lester (2003) presents a study on the topic of anger from “cradle to grave” from a purely Christian perspective. He begins with the commonly accepted premise held by many, established over the course of millennia and influenced by traditional Western thought that, “Many Christians...have learned that anger, in any shape or form, is sinful” (p. 3). Lester states, “I believe, in contrast, that our capacity for anger is one of God’s good gifts, intentionally rooted in creation and serving important purposes in human life” (p. 3). Brain research has proven anger is a hard-wired emotion—meaning, we all get angry, although not all may display it (p. 4). He looks toward a pastoral theology of anger, from a care and counseling perspective, investigating whether anger is a sin (concluding it isn’t, but rather a God-created and God-given gift) and what makes it good and what makes it bad. He sums this up when he says, “While creative anger moves us and our community toward spiritual well-being, destructive anger moves us and our community toward spiritual dysfunction” (p. 4). But how does one recognize and discern the difference and acknowledge anger and make appropriate use of it. Lester does his best to present clear advice, but in all things learning something and knowing it and ultimately putting into practice create the chasm one must cross—for most this is not possible alone, fortunately there is Jesus Christ through whom all things are possible, and in Whom, we can do all things.

**The Gap: Somewhere Between Transformation and Meekness**

Where does all of the research on anger lead? Does it stop at transformation? What one likely finds is that meekness is not the absolute antithesis of anger and that meekness is counter to the world’s frame of reference. Few understand a person who has been harmed, who instead of lashing out (who has every “right” to lash out and who may even have a moral duty to be angry), forgives the person who has harmed them. It is not done in weakness, but in strength. It releases
the anger and leaves the consequences born upon the offender alone. Perhaps Christ has paved a path through the minefields, war zones, and carnage created by the emotion of anger to demonstrate the value in letting go of anger—to lead those who believe in Him ever closer to Christlikeness in this life. Perhaps, by letting go of anger’s grip, one can grab on to a new source of power that is stronger and more secure than the fickle feeling of anger. What happens should one choose to love in spite of the wounds and wrongs inflicted by others?

West (2016) illuminates an important truth, quoting DeYoung, “As such, anger, like the other emotions, is an expression of concern: ‘you don’t get angry unless you care’ (DeYoung 2009, 121–122; italics original). In other words, to be disposed to anger’s way of seeing, one must care about something in such a way that the contravention of one’s concern is perceived in anger’s terms (i.e. as a blameworthy offense)” (p. 882). Care and concern derive from love.

Caring & Loving

Concern and caring often are made manifest in love. West implies, “One accompanying virtue is love. Love orients the heart of the self-respecting person beyond the protection of her own dignity, placing her will squarely on the well-being of others (Pettigrove 2012a, 86–95; Roberts 2003, 294). West (2016) states,

In this way, love keeps the self-respecting person’s anger from being selectively self-centered. After all, if you love others, blameworthy offenses against them may also draw your ire. As Nussbaum points out, the centrality of love in the Christian outlook is a primary source of the disagreements between stoic and Christian wisdom concerning anger. (pp. 883-884)

So, one finds that love can lead one to become angry and one finds that love can also lead one away from anger. It is in loving others where wisdom manifests itself. To act or react requires a reason. Wisdom requires us to consider, why do what we do? For disciples of Christ the main motive is to guide and teach. But, what do we hope to “teach” by way of one’s response
to anger’s call? Perhaps peace, patience, kindness, …love? Behind every emotion and subsequent action is a desire and intention to “teach”…the virtue is to teach…for if there is no instruction there is no point, nor purpose, in taking any action unless to ensure justice…to punish or to right a wrong—but the latter seems best left to God (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, Romans 12:19).

Closing the Gap Between Anger & Meekness by Trusting in Jesus Christ

The gap between anger and meekness is determined by the degree of trust one places in Jesus Christ. For trust is the giving over of responsibility for someone or something to another’s care (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, p. 816). As for anger, if one lacks trust, one will seek vengeance and justice on their own terms; whereas, one who trusts in Christ…has peace that surpasses understanding (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, Philippians 4:7).

As a leader (particularly a Christian leader) one must realize that helping to change others is not one’s job. If anything, a leader’s role is to reveal Christ’s work in one’s self, by the way of one’s behavior. “Projecting peace is the first step in defusing anger in others so that progress can be made for all” (Shrand & Devine, 2013, p. 111). Without anger, it would not be possible to reveal a power beyond this world—the power of meekness—by bringing peace and calm into an environment where peace is lacking. When one replaces anger with its antithesis, it affords one the ability to turn the other cheek—and in doing so, display the love of God, the Light of Wisdom—the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that only comes by dying to self. In letting go of anger, and taking hold of God’s righteous right hand, one shows others the way. One leads by example. One mimics one’s master. One reveals the Image of God through one’s behavior—in one’s character—in ways which do not follow the ways of this world.
Meekness

Pettigrove (2012) investigated the characteristic of meekness and those prone to apply meekness in situations where anger would otherwise seem warranted. He states, “Meekness is the virtue whose purview is the governance of anger and related emotions” (p. 343). Note he does not claim it is the absence of anger. He claims, “…if confronted by circumstances in which the only options are enduring evil or attempting to ‘overcome evil with evil,’ the meek will choose the former” (p. 344). In Pettigrove’s opinion, meekness is a trait going beyond simply restraining one’s behavior, but seems more of how one normally operates (something to which one is predisposed)—mirroring self-control, among one of the Fruit of the Spirit. He claims, quoting Shaftesbury, that “Restraining one’s anger simply out of the belief that to do otherwise will lead to punishment is not meekness…but servility” (p. 344).

Pettigrove (2012) continues,

Similarly, if the absence of anger reflects one’s indifference to the well-being of oneself or others, or if it indicates that one has given up in despair, then one is not manifesting meekness but some quite different trait. To see what else meekness involves, it is useful to consider the partially synonymous terms with which it is frequently associated: moderation, fortitude, patience, toleration, calmness of temper, gentleness, clemency, forgiveness, charity, compassion, graciousness, generosity, and kindliness. The attributes at the beginning of this list share an important quality with meekness, namely, self-control. (p. 345)

It likely comes as little surprise to the Christian reader, that these terms sound a great deal like one describing the Fruit of Spirit. Pettigrove (2012) defines meekness by saying, “Meekness, then, can be characterized as follows: …the virtue of meekness [is] when [one] characteristically responds in a calm and kindly fashion to aggravating treatment” (p. 345). His treatment of this virtue is exquisitely paired against “moral anger” to show that meekness is not the absence of anger or is a lack of strength, but a source of power.
Meekness would seem to require a better definition. One that includes not wrath, not justice-seeking, but which applies the attributes of the Fruit of the Spirit when encountering anger—that acknowledges anger but addresses it with grace, mercy and forgiveness by refusing to get wrapped-up in reason and logic—where and when, even if one is right, one’s actions often incite and invite compounding wrongs and evolving evils. Meekness is pouring water on the flames of anger—cooling passions while not ignoring the offense. Meekness is applying peace-seeking wisdom when the way of the world would lead one astray. Meekness is the harnessing of the power of the response to anger in a form which glorifies our Creator and His Image. The editors of the New International Version, The Knowing Jesus Study Bible, Hindson & Dobson (1999) write, “True meekness may be defined as power under control, as the ability to be tender because of great strength” (p. 712). In reflecting on the literature, this author would define meekness as an attribute that depicts the character of Christ in the calm, peaceful, gentle behavior of a human being that is observable by others and which personifies wisdom comprised of the Fruit of the Spirit and not a single virtue (Pettigrove, 2012; West 2014 & 2016; Cogley, 2014).

**Implications for Those in Leadership Positions**

In an article for *EXPLORE* (2014), the authors (Perlman et al.) offer some valuable counterpoints to the arguments for anger, by providing a model for a leader focused on addressing their own internal mental and emotional state, on how they interact with others, their ability to work in team settings and how they influence their organization and in turn, culture. Although portions of the article touch on Buddhist concepts, like mindfulness and meditation, and though much of the article is written for a purely secular healthcare audience, it contains valuable insights which can serve to show that an integrative leader would be the perfect person
to facilitate leading others through the minefield of conflict to transform their organizations into high performing entities where everyone identifies with each other and harbors a sense of belonging and community. It covers well the topics of transformation, teams and effective group dynamics, motivation, conflict resolution, as well as the role of an integrative leader as a cultural change agent—which is exactly what a Christian should aspire to be (Perlman, A., Horrigan, B., Goldblatt, E., 2014, pp. 1-14).

In looking at this model as well as others’ previous research and studies, this researcher showed a direct relationship between spiritual maturity and evolving meekness and its corresponding correlation between letting go of anger to firmly grasp the hand of God that has been reaching down from Heaven. In doing so, one’s weakness became a strength one never knew one had. LaHaye (1971) offers a look back to the Four Temperaments—predominant ways of perceiving the world which is the basis for how one interacts with and engages the world. From these four temperaments were derived the Seven Deadly Sins and Western views that categorize and pigeon-hole certain emotions as virtues and others as vices—which he concludes was more presumption than fact. LaHaye (1971) informs the reader that there is much to glean from these four temperaments, to determine one’s prevalent tendencies; to gain perspective into what one’s strengths are and what traits comprise one’s weaknesses. Doing so will help one see how God is working in their lives to transform those weaknesses into strengths. He uses the depiction of a Melancholy Moses whose “anger waxed hot” (NIV, Exodus 32:19); a Phlegmatic Abraham (a Mr. Nice Guy) yet “stubborn, stingy, and indecisive” (p. 191); a Choleric Paul (a hot-headed Type-A); and a Sanguine Peter, to show how God turns weaknesses on their heads and makes them strengths—according to His impeccable timing.
West (2016) states, “And if, as in Christianity, love is to be universal, then enemies and offenders – not merely victims – are to be viewed with love’s generous gaze. In this way, love tends to decelerate, mitigate, and otherwise qualify anger by inclining one to see putative offenders in benevolent terms, and love facilitates forgiveness” (p. 885).

Meekness, of course, does not imply weakness. Clearly, Christ communicated that meekness is and can be a quality of strength and power. Wisdom is not something outside of us to be obtained. Wisdom is as much the result of an inner exploration and the coming to know and understand one’s self in order to gain mastery over that which may desire wisdom, but also “wants” its own way. Obtaining wisdom requires seeking God’s Holy Spirit and Christlikeness. How do we do this? By serving, not over-powering others, even though one may possess the power to do so.

West (2014) presents what he refers to as “three potential remedies—watchfulness, practicing virtue, and prayers—highlighting how these cures can help redirect and retain the ‘eyes of our hearts’” (p. 22). Watchfulness equates with being on guard and proactive to anger’s cues and triggers. In discussing the practicing of virtues, he describes how the Apostle Paul instructed believers to “get rid of anger” by “clothing” themselves in the fruit of Spirit. He continues by informing us, “These virtues are good in themselves—that is, we should seek them for their own sakes. But they are also instrumentally good and that by “putting them on” they can serve to help us “take off” anger. He advises that we practice these virtues, as the distinct virtues (peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc.) could defuse varieties of anger (pp. 24-25). So, it appears a single virtue is insufficient, but one requires a host of virtues each “put on” and put into practice to confront anger. In fact, West (2016) informs us in a separate paper,

When we individuate virtues we have to assign them their functions in the moral life, and if we think there is more than one virtue, we are committed to assigning different
functions to different virtues. Anger can express a variety of virtues and vices, often simultaneously. And different virtues have distinct functions with respect to anger. (p. 878)

The third remedy of prayer is self-explanatory, but the author states,

Prayer is a key tactic in battling anger. The chief reason is that prayer is an appeal for divine assistance, and without God we can do nothing. But here I focus on the direct effect prayer has on us, in changing our ‘take’ on a situation. (pp. 26-27)

If anger is, indeed, a gift from God, yet it is seen as one of the Seven Deadly Sins by many, and meekness is viewed as a virtue by Christians—yet as a weakness by secular society, how is it possible to competently and confidently lead others in the current culture one finds oneself living in, if most desire to follow a strong leader? It was hoped that by surveying and interviewing Christian exemplars—those who lead in Christlikeness as mature Christians; by researching and studying the change in behavior from a tendency once prone to anger to being inclined toward meekness—that factors emerged by which a model was formed that others may follow. Ultimately, this research investigated how the exemplars were educated. How they learned that change was necessary and required, and how this change took place. It provided answers to the question, what facilitated their transformation? Who was their teacher?

**Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature**

This research focused on the seemingly imperceptible “gap” between immorality (one’s sin nature) and morality (one’s Godly hard-wired design)—one’s pre-programmed righteous way of thinking and responding to situations via one’s conduct or behavior—to discern whether, as one became more mature as a Christian, did one’s behavior truly change? Did one become more moral? Although one does not become sinless, does one sin...less? If the Holy Spirit actually indwelled and directed one’s steps, did others see more displays of the fruit of the Spirit present in one’s life, in one’s actions, and through observable behaviors? Did one conform to the image of God or the character of Christ? What if a specific variable was isolated? Say, by observing the
changes in one’s behavior [for instance, in one’s tendency to get angry or to refrain from getting angry] in similar situations by measuring one’s inclination toward responding to the emotion of anger in a particular way before coming to Christ and comparing or contrasting this pre-Christian behavior against one’s behavior after becoming a mature Christian. It would seem some anecdotal evidence already exists in the minds of many Christians—and even some non-believers, that this occurs, but it also seemed this could actually be substantiated to some degree of magnitude through a qualitative study of exemplars.

Bastian (2019) tells us, “Dominant models of behavior change assume that key barriers to changing behavior broadly include attitudes, norms, and perceived control” (p. 68). He continues on to say, “to achieve behavior change, people need to be convinced that there is a mismatch between their behavior and personal or social standards/goals” (p. 69). Finally, stating, “The theory of cognitive dissonance provides a useful framework for understanding this process (Festinger, 1957)” (p. 69).

**Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance**

Despite voluminous articles being written on the topic of Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, there is a meager but growing amount of research that addresses the topic from a Christian worldview. Bowen’s (2012) research was the first to establish a biblical-theological model of cognitive dissonance theory as it relates to pedagogy and is relevant for Christian educators. Lindsay’s (2013) work established the theology of the Holy Spirit as an educator. There is very limited research which addresses what has been termed, Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance (SCD), or which focuses on the divide between one’s beliefs and one’s behavior. Sica (1978) was among the first to link Festinger’s Theory with Morality. O’Flyrne’s (2019) work appears to be concerned less with cognitive decisions than with the affective sense
(spiritual belief) that one is acting against one’s conscience to be the primary motivator at play in modifying one’s behavior or in changing the way one thinks to return one to a state of consonance. This research investigated the dissonance arising from the emotion of anger (to isolate the study to one emotion) in order to study the change in behavior that takes place as one matured (transformed) toward Christlikeness as a Christian from a disposition (attitude or tendency) where one was easily angered to display behavior more meek and mild. The goal was to investigate and close the gap in understanding what factors appear to be universal and most significant in the Christian formation process with regard to gaining mastery over anger by looking closer at the affective factors in causation rather than cognitive factors as has been done, historically.

**Connecting Domains**

This study sought to bridge the chasm existing in previous research conducted across various domains and a host of disciplines, such as within educational pedagogy; psychology; organizational behavior; conflict management; and leadership. This researcher did so by synthesizing and linking themes and similarities using Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957), Sica’s (1978) proposed synthesis for Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance with Kohlberg's model of moral development. Also considered was Bowen’s (2012) biblical-theological model of cognitive dissonance theory and the relevance for Christian educators of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1969) and McCall’s (2014) associations between cognitive dissonance, religious beliefs, and religious behavior—what he calls, religiosity.
Pertinence of Religiosity

McCall (2014) observed, “In the original manifestation of the model of religiosity the developers recognized three core components of religiosity: a belief component; a commitment component; and a behavior component. (Cornwall, et al, 1986)” (pp. 7-8). These three components can be viewed as variables. This research isolated the study to the behavioral component (variable) by limiting the subjects to Christian exemplars [fully committed to Christ] and their fully fixed belief in God in order to determine the magnitude of change (perceived by the exemplars) in their behavior over the course of time from before the time they were saved (previous state) to the present (current state) So, in addition to isolating the emotion to one emotion (anger), this study also placed a great deal of focus on the behavioral component to isolate it, to determine which factors had the greatest effect upon the change process.

Desiring the Kingdom

Smith (2009) describes the concept of a telos, an ultimate aim or target of desire (something one loves above all things), and he informs his readers, that all have such a target—whether one realizes it or not. It could be status or success, or other such worldly ends that we seek, consciously or unconsciously. He contends that if one makes God their telos, one’s intentions (one’s thoughts and actions are motivated by one’s love for God) will be directed on things of God. One’s actions result in the development of habits, which in turn develops one’s godly and spirit-filled characters—something viewable and visible to others (pp. 52-56).

Whole Person Transformation

In Whole Person Transformation, a video presentation produced by Liberty University, narrated by Lowe (2018), we are informed that we are more than just our pieces and parts, that we are the sum of those pieces and parts, altogether. Every aspect of who we are affects every
other part—for better, or worse. Lowe referred to this as an ‘ecological interplay’ of moral, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical self that is an extension of our spiritual self and he explains that these aspects in return affect our spiritual self. He goes on to describe us as psycho-physical organisms (units of vital power)—corporate personalities; meaning our characters are tied to our actions as the result of these influences (Lowe, 2018). It is similar with corporate maturity. The body of Christ is only as strong as the collective community comprising it. The author, Samra (2008), states, “Paul reminds the Philippians of their obedience both in his absence and in his presence, and proceeds to remind them of their responsibility for working (i.e. ‘achieving’ or ‘bringing about’) their salvation in fear and trembling” (p. 39). Therefore, each Christian must focus on their own maturity and use it to build others up, so that each will benefit as a result of doing so, in a reciprocal fashion.

One’s life should bear witness to one’s godly character and one’s character’s congruence should align with the gospel of Christ, with the image of Christ. Samra (2008) states, “A mature believer is a believer whose life conforms to his/her status as an heir of God’s kingdom” (p. 59). One matures in one’s faith, first by learning; gaining knowledge of Christ in order to gain insight into Christ’s character—what Samra claims, in Paul’s mind, refers to being “a person who is like Christ, actualizing his character in contingent situations” (p. 82), then imitating Christ in order to be conformed to Christ; therefore, not being conformed to the world (p. 96). Paul does not expect followers of Christ, however, to be eloquent or possess human wisdom. He states, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, 1 Corinthians 2:4).
Sin & Inability to Love

What anger illustrates so clearly is one’s propensity to rely on reason to rationalize sin. One will claim they have a right to be angry. Erickson (2005) sums up sin well. He writes, “Finally, sin results in inability to love. Since other people stand in our way, representing competition and a threat to us, we cannot really act for the ultimate welfare of others if our aim is self-satisfaction. And so suspicious, conflicts, bitterness, and even hatred issue from self-absorption or the plural finite values that has supplanted God at the center of the sinner’s life” (p. 636). Erickson emphasizes, “Sin is a serious matter; it has far-reaching effects—upon our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to other humans. Accordingly, it will require a cure with similarly extensive effects” (p. 636).

By exhibiting a mature spirit-filled relationship with Christ, one can live and lead as an example before others in the role of a servant-leader, modeling and emulating the Fruit of the Spirit observed as the attribute of meekness. This can be accomplished by utilizing a leadership lifestyle (by simply being a Christian striving toward the Image of God) more than by way of mere methodologies with step-by-step instructions, processes and procedures, or tactics and techniques. The gap in Christian leadership often comes down to the relatively small flaws in one’s character. Usually, from one striving to capitalize on one’s strengths without addressing one’s weaknesses—and tending to all of the virtues (plural), which are made manifest by way of the Fruit of the Spirit and which become observable to others, as meekness.

In his commentary, Preaching to Galatians, the author, David L. Bartlett, (2000), reminds us, “it is not what we work but what God works in us that shapes Christian life” (p. 291). In turn, our mission as Christians is to serve others through the Fruit of the Spirit. Traditional leadership theory has long preached that success is equated with one’s own efforts
(works), superior intelligence, tenacity, or superb organizational skills (see Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, or any similar text on Organizational Behavior). This study did not discount the need for these attributes, but posited instead, that a leader is best served by seeking to serve, rather than looking to lead. Because of this, Christians are by default leaders who are reluctant to wear the label.

**Servants of the Servant**

Howell (2003) offers a profile of the Servant-Leader that should serve as the profile of every biblical leader. Howell tells his readers that in addition to proven character our actions must be powered by a doxological motive (a holy ambition) focused on pursuing a divine agenda (pp. 296-301). He states, “to construct such a profile of a servant-leader one would need to assemble an extensive list of virtues into a composite comprised of the sum of its parts, but that the fundamental identity of all servant leaders is character, motive, and agenda” (p. 296). He claims, “Character can be defined as a person’s moral constitution, in which is embedded a stable set of values. For the biblical leader these values are conditioned by revealed truth recorded in Holy Scripture” (p. 296). In discussing motives, he describes how Jesus warned his disciples to check their motives because even ministry can be carried out for the wrong *reasons* [italics mine], (pp. 298-299). He informs, that by keeping God’s honor and glory in front of our motives, it governs one’s holy ambition (p. 299). Lastly, Howell claims Christians are stewards on a mission with a divine agenda possessing the “ability to conceptualize the message to different audiences” (p.301). Showing others who one is in Christ, leading by example, in moments of conflict is most effectively done by demonstrating that one has acquired and exemplifies the attribute of meekness—and the ability to bring anger under control. In this way,
one can lead others through anger by facilitating a team’s ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive and creative ways, as a selfless, servant-leader.

When considering the research conducted for this study, it appeared leading those in Christian communities through conflict was quite different from leading in secular businesses and organizations in broader society. In society, one may display great power through great displays of anger; whereas, in Christian circles—such outward expressions of anger are unlikely ever to positively attract or influence fellow Christians toward Kingdom ends. This fact, in and of itself, creates some cognitive dissonance for Christian leaders who strive to learn how to lead in a fallen and broken world—one moment leaning on logic and reason, and on Christ in the next moment—when the book stores and bookshelves are filled with bestsellers promoting step-by-step instructions which seem intended for a different audience. How can one lead others in Christian ministry—if one cannot lead oneself or others through conflict in constructive ways.

Profile of the Current Study

This research expanded upon what is known regarding the multi-faceted emotion of anger and anger’s ability to influence one’s behavior and what is perceived regarding its employment by Christians in executing the Will of God—and how that may require changing or modifying one’s behavior to align with Christlikeness—or changing one’s mind to think like Christ. To accomplish this, this research addressed the head-heart connection of why one does what one does—which required focusing one’s attention on the less understood affective domain (the realm of emotions which move and motivate exemplars to behave in particular ways) as well as the more understood and well-researched cognitive domain.

The question as to the rationale of why this research is significant can be answered by simply looking at a few areas of applicability that will become obvious within this study. As
mentioned, anger and anger’s antithesis, meekness, can each have a positive or negative effect in situations of conflict and on the people involved. Just as anger can be viewed negatively, conversely, so can meekness. Indeed, some research shows that by not getting angry [when it is perceived by others to be warranted] can actually break faith and destroy trust that others have placed in another (e.g., a leader) and this can damage relationships and bring about dysfunction from the disharmony. In the course of leading or teaching others, the need for change will arise, and with change comes conflict and from conflict comes anger. From anger comes the need to seek to restore peace. This takes leadership. Leadership requires wisdom. Wisdom requires synthesizing information derived from diverse disciplines and incorporating it in new ways to make use of it in new ways. Livermore (2016) states, “Diversity leads to innovation” (p. 1). Livermore adds, “Looking at a problem from a diversity of perspectives is likely to yield better solutions than viewing it solely from one myopic view” (p. 1). What better way to seek a way through the wilderness—when the way is not clear—than by listening to what ten wise men have to say? This research did just that.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored the lived experience of Christian exemplars within the EFCA to determine which factors were most significant from their perspectives in the process of spiritual transformation in overcoming anger and how this transformation benefited these subjects in minimizing and managing conflict, enhancing relationships, leading others, making and providing a sense of peace by bridging congruency between thoughts and behaviors, while also exploring the degree such behaviors were considered cognitively intentional or affectively innate (inborn), natural responses.

In concert with researched, precedent literature, this researcher interviewed ten Christian exemplars to gain insight into how anger affected their relationship with Jesus Christ and others, and how their maturing relationship with Christ facilitated their relationships with others and their relationship with anger. The purpose was to gain understanding as to how these exemplars perceived anger—both its positive and negative effects—and how it has influenced one’s ability to lead others in ways that others perceived as Christlike.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

In his book *The Advantage*, Lencioni (2012) writes that “Contrary to popular wisdom and behavior, conflict is not a bad thing for a team. In fact, the fear of conflict is almost always a sign of problems. Lencioni pictures team conflict on a continuum. At one end is no conflict at all, and at the other end is relentless and destructive conflict. When there is no conflict at all, Lencioni says that this could be a kind of ‘artificial harmony’” (Vanderbloemen, 2016). Lencioni notes that “Nowhere does this tendency toward ‘artificial harmony’ show itself more than in mission-
driven nonprofit organizations, most notably churches” (p. 44). The authors for Vanderbloemen.com (a Christian Executive Search Firm), discuss Lencioni’s text and state, “There is a belief in churches that we should always have harmony and never disagree. However, some church teams also lapse into destructive (and sinful) kinds of conflict. Destructive conflict moves from challenging ideas and perspectives, and resorts to attacking persons” (Vanderbloemen, 2016). Conflict will occur and will require church leaders to enter the fray.

Conflict is synonymous with the feelings and expressions of anger. Constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many settings at some point. The ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive and creative ways can challenge status quos, improve teamwork, flesh out and resolve issues, and even transform lives; but it does require a great deal of wisdom. This research inclined to show that God appears to be utilizing the emotion of anger to lead His children to the characteristic of meekness—and that He may be using other emotions in similar ways to perfect us and sanctify us in this life—in the here and now. This research sought to explore the purpose and utility of this emotion, in the lives of those who have come to exemplify Christlikeness, as leaders within the Evangelical Free Church of America—and which factors were most significant (from their perspectives) in their spiritual transformation away from a tendency prone toward anger to a disposition tending toward the attribute of meekness, as well as what benefits resulted from this transformation.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of spiritual and behavioral change in the lives of mature Christian exemplars within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) located in the Southeast Region of the United States of America by peering through the lens of the emotion of anger to
explore one’s transformation toward meekness. For the purpose of this research, anger was generally defined as “a strong passion or emotion of displeasure, and usually antagonism, excited by a sense of injury or insult” (Chapman, 1999, pp. 17-18).

Two theories guided this study. The first was Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory and the second theory concerned moral aspects of dissonance’s causation as posited by Sampson (2011) in his book *Leaders Without Titles: The Six Powerful Attributes of Those Who Influence Without Authority*, where he addressed many facts surrounding the subject of morality claiming that moral principles are ingrained within human beings, as is one’s sin nature. The following research questions served to guide this study, which will be answered by analyzing data obtained from the research subjects.

**Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What specific behaviors do exemplars identify that they perceive to be evidence of moving from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness?

**RQ2.** What perceived past, angry behaviors experienced by exemplars generated the cognitive dissonance which served as the motivation to modify their behavior?

**RQ3.** How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness?

**Research Design and Methodology**

This qualitative study relied upon a phenomenological design utilizing purposive sampling to select participants with requisite characteristics to be researched from among leaders and congregants of the EFCA organization and churches within the Southeast Region of the United States. These research subjects were termed *exemplars* for the purposes of this study. This research further relied significantly upon the researched literature, to steer and guide questions, construction of questionnaires and interview tactics; in an effort to reveal, capture, and categorize data provided by the participants to the literature researched.
Roberts (2010) defined the qualitative approach of phenomenology as one “based upon the philosophical orientation [which] focuses on people’s experience from their perspective (p. 143). She further informed her readers, “Inquiry begins with broad, general questions about the area under investigation. Researchers seek a holistic picture—a comprehensive and complete understanding of the phenomena they are studying” (p. 143). Creswell (2014) states, “Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 14). Creswell goes on to say, “This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (p. 14). The author concludes claiming, “This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994)” (p. 14).

Leedy & Ormrod (2016) explain,

In its broadest sense, the term phenomenology refers to a person’s perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the person. A phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation. (p. 255)

The emotion of anger is a phenomena experienced (sensed and felt) by all human beings, albeit it is an emotion that is perceived and responded to differently dependent upon one’s values, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions. This research explored this powerful emotion’s connection to the attribute of meekness among Christian exemplars to explore the factors that resulted in behavioral change that would be unknowable without exemplars expressing in words what they thought and believed were the most significant factors in their transformation.

Roberts (2010) writes, “Qualitative research may also focus on organizational processes” [e.g. – organizational conflict] (p. 143). Continuing on, she states, “In other words, qualitative researchers look at the essential character or nature of something, not the quantity (how much,
how many)” (p. 143). Roberts claims, “Rather than numbers, the data are words that describe people’s knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings as well as detailed descriptions of people’s actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions,” (p. 143), which aligned precisely with the focus and intention of this study.

Corbin & Strauss (2008) state, “…qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (p. 11). Creswell (2014) writes, “Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (p. 196). Roberts (2010) informs us that “Strauss and Corbin (1990) offer five reasons for doing qualitative research:

1. The conviction of the researcher based on research experience
2. The nature of the research problem
3. To uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known
4. To gain novel and fresh slants on things about which quite a bit is already known
5. To give intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods” (as quoted in Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 19).

While much is known about the emotion of anger (the phenomena), far less is understood with regard to how some individuals are able to restrain it and retain one’s peace when hurt, harmed, or persecuted and still respond with love. As mature Christian exemplars would appear, at least, anecdotally, to possess the trait of meekness more than an average person—they were the subjects selected for this study.
Groenewald (2004) summarizes the history of the design of phenomenology beginning with the German philosopher, Husserl (1859-1938) in the aftermath of World War One, though he states it can be traced further back to Kant and Hegel (quoting Vandenberg 1997, p. 11), who regarded Husserl as “the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century” (p. 43). Smith (2018) sums up phenomenology stating that, “Heidegger explicitly parodies Husserl’s call, “To the things themselves!” , or “To the phenomena themselves!” Heidegger went on to emphasize practical forms of comportment or better relating (Verhalten) as in hammering a nail, as opposed to representational forms of intentionality as in seeing or thinking about a hammer” (“Phenomenology”). Therefore, the intent of this study was to study “intentionality” existing behind one’s behavioral change from anger toward meekness as one matured as a Christian and explored how this intentionality takes place during one’s transformation toward Christlikeness in the view of the exemplars.

The number of participants was fixed at ten research subjects to ensure the scope of effort remains manageable. The rationale for limiting research subjects to ten is best conveyed by many researchers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Roberts, 2010). Leedy & Ormrod (2016) inform prospective researchers,

Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews (perhaps 1 to 2 hours in length) with a small, carefully selected sample of participants. A typical sample size is from 5 to 25 individuals, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. (p. 255)

Creswell (2014) states, “From my review of many qualitative research studies I have found narrative research to include one or two individuals; phenomenology to typically range from three to ten [individuals]…” (p. 189). The reason for limiting participation to no more than ten participants was best summed up by Roberts (2010) where she states, “Analyzing huge amounts of qualitative data into meaningful themes and patterns is an awesome task requiring
considerable time and effort” (p. 144). She continues by conveying, “According to Patton (2002), ‘On average, a one-hour interview will yield 10 to 15 single-spaced pages of text; 10 two-hour interviews will yield roughly 200 to 300 pages of transcripts’ (p. 440)” (p. 144).

**Setting**

The Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) is comprised of approximately 1,500 congregations (1,321 churches and 177 church plants) across the United States. The EFCA supports 370,000 attendees. The EFCA is divided into 17 districts. Geographically, the Southeast Region is among the largest consisting of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The Southeast Region has its headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida.

In the late 1800s, northern European immigrants to the United States began meeting in homes and soon churches were being constructed. By 1884 several of these churches were sharing a common treasury. In 1950, the Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish Evangelical Free Churches merged to become the EFCA as it is known today. The churches are pastor and elder led.

This research was conducted in natural settings. The reality posed by the current worldwide pandemic, whereby strict and stringent public health social-distancing requirements were mandated limiting individuals’ movements, interactions, and social gatherings together due to the significant health risks posed by the Covid-19 virus, this researcher made use of a variety of methods to conduct this research. As possible, in-person interviews were conducted adhering to social-distancing requirements. When this was not practical or permissible, then interviews were conducted by utilizing technological communication platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime, or phone.
Participants

Participants selected for this study were termed exemplars. The exemplars for this study consisted of ten white males representing an age range between 50-79 (seven of them in their sixties). The exemplars were selected using purposive sampling. Editor Paul J. Lavrakas (2008) states,

A purposive sample, also referred to as a judgmental or expert sample, is a type of nonprobability sample. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. This is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner a sample of elements that represents a cross-section of the population.

In probability sampling, each element in the population has a known nonzero chance of being selected through the use of a random selection procedure. In contrast, nonprobability sampling does not involve known nonzero probabilities of selection. Rather, subjective methods are used to decide which elements should be included in the sample. (“Purposive Sampling,” 2008)

As this research involved purposive sampling, it required a strong degree of “knowing” those in the study as these participants were considered throughout as exemplars and selected based upon their tenure as Christians (twenty years or more) as well as their revered held positions as pastors, leaders, elders (or the like) within the EFCA. To be representative as Christian exemplars selected for this study one’s character, demeanor, and disposition must have been known and one’s behavior witnessed and experienced by this researcher or by ‘gatekeepers’ who were previously selected as research subjects utilizing snowball sampling incorporated to reach the required number of participants.

Therefore, exemplars were selected based upon their tenure as Christians (twenty years or more) as well as based upon holding a prominent leadership position such as pastor, leader, elder, or core member within the EFCA or local church (or church plant). A questionnaire served to capture basic demographic information and also served to confirm the required tenure as a Christian, position title, as well as to acknowledge informed consent for those
meeting requirements and agreeing to volunteer to be a participant in the study. The study progressed to the point of interviewing exemplars in separately scheduled one-hour interviews to capture data. Additionally, a follow up meeting with each participant was conducted whereby transcribed data, preliminary analysis, and generalized themes were shared with each participant to confirm and validate that the researcher had maintained the integrity of the research subject’s thoughts, feelings, and comments and had not taken things out of context during the data analysis. Exemplars were able to clear up any points, make additional comments, or request removal of any comments they did not wish to have associated with their pseudonym or alpha-numeric identifier.

Leedy & Ormrod (2016) inform prospective researchers, “Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews (perhaps 1 to 2 hours in length) with a small, carefully selected sample of participants. A typical sample size is from 5 to 25 individuals, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied” (p. 255). Creswell (2014) states, “From my review of many qualitative research studies I have found narrative research to include one or two individuals; phenomenology to typically range from three to ten [individuals]…” (p. 189). The reason for limiting participation to no more than ten participants was best summed up by Roberts (2010) where she states, “Analyzing huge amounts of qualitative data into meaningful themes and patterns is an awesome task requiring considerable time and effort” (p. 144). She continues by conveying, “According to Patton (2002), ‘On average, a one-hour interview will yield 10 to 15 single-spaced pages of text; 10 two-hour interviews will yield roughly 200 to 300 pages of transcripts’ (p. 440)” (p. 144).

Again, as this research involved purposive sampling it required a strong degree of “knowing” those in the study as these participants were considered throughout as exemplars. To
be representative as Christian exemplars, their character and characteristics had to be known and their behavior witnessed and experienced by this researcher or those whom this researcher inherently trusted, who referred other individuals as participants. They were selected because in the subjective, yet informed, opinion of this researcher, or in the opinion of those whom this researcher esteems (to employ snowballing to establish additional participants), the prospective participant possessed the character attributes being studied.

In addition to Christian exemplars selected for this study based upon one’s character, demeanor, and disposition, they were also selected based upon tenure as Christians (acknowledging being followers of Jesus Christ for at least twenty years) as well as based upon their revered held positions as pastors, leaders, elders (or the like) within the EFCA. The rationale would be that these individuals have had decades to firmly form mature, spiritual relationships with Jesus Christ and fellow Christians, and that by serving in leadership positions, either within the EFCA organization or within their churches, these “men” exemplify Christian characteristics, specifically, the attribute of meekness as a key leadership trait—as this attribute will be a central focal point within the research.

As mentioned, the exemplars were all men as the leadership role for men is outlined within Scripture and is upheld by the EFCA. Additionally, this was done to aid in maintaining confidentiality within the study, since if it were open to female elders such a small sample could have potentially exposed participant(s) rather easily. It was expected these men would be middle-aged or of an advanced age due to position, prominence, and the required tenure established for those making up this study. Due to the composition of the EFCA (its northern European Scandinavian roots) it was anticipated participants would be predominantly, Caucasian.

the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants” (p. 45). This research incorporated purposive sampling defined briefly earlier, which Groenewald states is, “considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants” (p. 45). This researcher, therefore, selected the sample based upon the researcher’s judgement and the purpose of the research (Groenewald, 2004; Babbie, 1995; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Schwandt, 1997), “looking for those who ‘have had the experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched’ (Kruger, 1988, p. 150)” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 45).

In addition to purposive sampling, this researcher employed snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46). This was done only as necessary to arrive at the necessary number of research participants, which again, consisted of ten exemplars for this study.

**Role of the Researcher**

From the start, removing all bias was unlikely; however, procedures were incorporated into this study to serve as a hedge against researcher-induced bias. Leedy & Ormord (2016) state,

In some cases, the researcher has had personal experience related to the phenomenon in question and wants to gain a better understanding of the experiences of others. By looking at multiple perspectives on the same situation, the researcher can then make some generalizations of what something is like from an insider’s perspective. (p. 255)

This researcher has certainly experienced the phenomenon of anger and likely brought some bias into this endeavor; however, every effort was made to have the participants speak for themselves in the themes established and through the data collected and the results were obtained from questionnaires and interviews.
Leedy & Ormrod (2016) convey the role of the researcher stating:

The actual implementation of a phenomenological study is as much in the hands of the participants as in the hands of the researcher. The phenomenological interview is often a relatively unstructured one in which the researcher and participants work together to ‘arrive at the heart of the matter’ (Tesch, 1994, p. 147). The researcher listens closely as participants describe their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon; the researcher must also be alert for subtle yet meaningful cues in participants’ expressions, pauses, questions, and occasional sidetracks. A typical interview looks more like an informal conversation, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening. (p. 255)

It is important to acknowledge that this researcher is a core team member of an EFCA church plant in a coastal community located in Northwest Florida. Therefore, it was likely this researcher would know several participants in this study. The remaining participants were anticipated to be individuals in senior leadership positions within the EFCA Southeast Region referred to this researcher by the four individuals identified initially as gatekeepers, who were personally invited to participate. One of the four did not respond to the invitation and did not refer others for inclusion in the study. Therefore, more than half of the participants (seven of the ten) were not chosen by this researcher. This study employed several tactics and procedures to mitigate bias—triangulation, member checking, and utilizing interview guides which will be discussed in the upcoming sections outlining data collection and data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The most important ethical consideration was the need to obtain informed consent agreement and the associated documentation required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This endeavored to eliminate any chance of deception on the part of this researcher as well as disclose as much information as possible regarding the research to the participants to include the following:
• The participants’ identities were kept confidential via the use of a pseudonym or an alpha-numeric code or similar descriptor

• The purpose of the research

• The procedures of the research

• The expected risks and benefits of the research

• The voluntary nature of participation in the research and the ability to remove one’s self at any time

• The procedures used to protect confidentiality

It was anticipated the IRB approval process would be relatively straightforward due to the benign, nonthreatening nature of this study. Further, the fact this research did not involve children, rather men who were of middle-to-advanced age who were speaking of past and current behavior from a mature perspective as Christian exemplars. Methods that ensured confidentiality and securely stored information and data collected will be discussed in the following section.

The consent form [Appendix A] was sent via email to prospective participants as an attachment to the gatekeeper invitation [Appendix B] or the recruitment letter [Appendix C], respectively.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This researcher intended to conduct research that was readable and which advanced the body of human knowledge while utilizing an accepted and creditable, scientific methodology, which applied empirical research techniques originating in grounded theory, which sought to gather qualitatively rich accounts from individuals’ perspectives and stories rather than simply digging into numbers, statistics, graphs, and charts. Roberts (2010) captures the essence of this researcher’s intention best in a quote attributed to Albert Einstein, in her chapter on Selecting and Describing the Methodology, writing, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted” (p. 143).
This researcher preferred exploring the realm of words and deriving the powerful meaning from what others had to say about this studied human behavior, by providing thoughts as to why one does what one does; to peer beyond the behavior, beyond logic and reason (cognitive functions) in search of truth and purpose (meaning) from a human perspective by exploring affective thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences. Therefore, the above factors led this researcher to select the qualitative design of phenomenology.

Every research methodology text consulted addressed the need for developing a well-devised plan, clear procedures, and a well-understood approach to how one intends to capture data without interjecting bias, manipulating data, or being deceitful (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Roberts, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Methods must be incorporated into the study which prevent the skewing of data (whether consciously or subconsciously), on the part of the researcher, such as by asking leading questions to research subjects during interviews, or being unethical in omitting research or responses which are in opposition to one’s expected or desired outcome. The plan must not only guard against being misleading or deceiving, but describe how the data will be obtained and the ways in which the researcher intends to ensure the study’s credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Data collection requires a plan (a design), participants, a place, and protocols. Creswell writes,

The data collection steps [for qualitative methods, including the design of phenomenology] include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell, 2014, p. 189)

He also instructs researchers to, “Identify the purposefully selected sites or individuals for the proposed study. The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select
participants…that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 189). This researcher employed these very generalized steps in very specific ways outlined and described in the following paragraphs.

Based upon what was previously mentioned, this researcher limited the study to ten research subjects, again, referred to as exemplars, predominantly gathering data through the use of open-ended interviews, and survey questions, but also from field notes that captured observations as to the tone and texture of a research subject’s responses. Field notes also were used to capture thoughts of this researcher that arose during the interviews that this researcher wished to explore, follow-up on, or research further. Following each interview—what is referred as memoing was accomplished, which involved constructing a document as soon as possible following the interview to record a thorough description of the interview in as near-time as possible to the interview, to capture context, predominate themes, keywords, powerful quotes, or impactful statements that may shed light on answering research questions. Wagstaff (2015) states, “Phenomenologies are characterized by in-depth, informal, open-ended interviews that allow participants ample freedom to tell their story” (p. 17). All of these interviews were used in concert with coding in the analysis phase [in a dialectic fashion] in a back and forth between open-coding and axial-coding to explore and derive meaning between concepts and categories, themes, and groupings of categories.

Before conducting initial interviews, several texts stated that researchers should utilize questionnaires to screen prospective research subjects to verify the individuals meet the research parameters as outlined for participants. Due to the Inclusion Criteria and the fact that those selected were known to those selecting or proposing them for the study, this was unnecessary. Questionnaires were used to obtain demographic information, and also incorporated directions or
statements required by the Institutional Review Board. Some researchers will read the questions to participants and record participants responses, such as statements covering informed consent, in lieu of obtaining a physical signature. Other researchers use questionnaires to convey required information to the participants such as, the voluntary nature of one’s participation, and the right on the behalf of the research subject to exit the study at any time (Groenewald, 2004; Roberts, 2010; Creswell, 2014). This researcher obtained hard copies of signed informed consent.

As mentioned, conducting interviews required the development of open-ended questions which permitted research subjects to speak at length on the topics to draw out thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs. These questions were designed to lead the discussion on the topics of the proposed research, to seek clarification, and to ensure the necessary focus on the phenomena being studied was maintained. In the next section, one will see that the goal and intent of the open-ended interview questions were to obtain useable data without attempting to lead research subjects on to a biased track, trajectory, and line of thinking, through any deception, or as the result of bias on the part of the researcher. However, interview questions are only one method of collecting data. The following section outlines the data collection methods, instruments, and protocols that were incorporated into this study.

**Collection Methods**

In qualitative research, data analysis begins with the first piece of data collection. Leedy & Ormrod (2016) state, “In qualitative research…the methodology often involves an iterative process in which the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and data analysis in what is sometimes called the constant comparative method” (p. 251). Though originating in grounded theory, it has benefit to phenomenology along with other methods that seek less connections and linkages, but seek, instead, the essence of things (Thorne, 2000). Capturing the
data involves the use of open-ended questions during interviews, taking field notes, memos, and employing technologies in the form of recording devices which are used to record the interviews whether by combined video and audio, or audio alone. The research subjects’ information must be stored and maintained in a secure fashion. Procedures must be established to control possession of technological devices used to capture participant interviews, and by password-protecting any digitally-stored files. Hand-scribed field notes or memos developed during data collection which could identify the research subjects must be stored in a way which prevents access by unauthorized persons (Groenewald, 2004; Roberts, 2010; Creswell, 2014).

It is important to mention here that there are various approaches to phenomenology which will, in turn, effect the approach to data collection and data analysis. Hein & Austin (2001) provide a comparison of the two broad categories of phenomenological research, referred to as empirical and hermeneutic approaches.

There are two main branches of phenomenology. Hein & Austin (2001) claim, “Adrian van Kaam is considered the founder of empirical phenomenology and described it as ‘an attempt to return to the immediate meaning and structure of behavior as it actually presents itself’ (1966, pp. 28-29)” (p. 7). They inform readers, “One of the characteristics of empirical phenomenological research, then, is its emphasis on the structure of the phenomenon of interest…” (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 8). The authors paraphrase Packer (1985), stating in comparison, “Hermeneutic phenomenology…involves a process of contextualization and amplification rather than of structural essentialization. It involves studying phenomena with attention to concrete, experiential details while avoiding, as much as possible, prior theoretical assumptions (Packer, 1985)” (p. 9).
Although the phenomenological study itself consisted of hermeneutical phenomenological research, Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance served to form the backdrop against which the research subject’s former dissonance (if any) was considered, to establish how one’s transformation toward meekness resolved any dissonance formerly experienced and perceived by the research subjects. Sampson’s theory regarding morality and immorality resulting from prerational processes was also considered.

The intent of this phenomenological study was to determine whether there is congruence between the theory of cognitive dissonance serving as a motivator to lead one to seek harmony through behavior modification—and if the dissonance could be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit within one’s conscience or simply logical intentionality toward a chosen meek response to anger. It incorporated some aspects of grounded theory in data collection techniques. This study explored the data acquired from ten individuals meeting the definition of exemplars selected via purposive sampling who provided responses to survey questions and in-depth interviews exploring behavior prior to becoming a Christian and as a current, mature, tenured Christian. Data analysis began following saturation [“meaning that no additional data are being found” (quoting Glaser and Strauss, 1967)] in the data collection phase through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding in a bottom to top approach as outlined by Corbin & Strauss (1990).

In the following table, acquired from a paper discussing saturation, at length, the authors depict four models of saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). For the novice researcher, it would appear the brief bracketed definition above [that no additional data are being found] is sufficient—but that saturation needs to be applied to each model (to each principal foci) and not viewed or considered only as ‘data saturation’.
An inductive approach was employed to seek out themes and patterns, what Creswell (2014) stated are, “generalizations which represent interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole” (p. 66). Creswell further stated, quoting Lather (1986) that, “Building empirically grounded theory requires a reciprocal relationship between data and theory. Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of *a priori* theoretical frameworks…” (p. 67). This research incorporated Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance as a touchstone. An *a priori* framework relates to or denotes reasoning or knowledge which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience, so there is a point where the research derived through the inductive approach will be “reasoned,” described, and explained by the researcher to draw attention to interconnectedness and relationships in the gathered data that may not be readily apparent without such detailed illustration and narration. Creswell (2014) describes this as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Principal focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical saturation</td>
<td>Relates to the development of theoretical categories; related to grounded</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>theory methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inductive thematic</td>
<td>Relates to the emergence of new codes or themes</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saturation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A priori thematic</td>
<td>Relates to the degree to which identified codes or themes are exemplified</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saturation</td>
<td>in the data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data saturation</td>
<td>Relates to the degree to which new data repeat what was expressed in</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>previous data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1897)
Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by
organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive
process illustrates working back and forth between themes and the database until the
researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. Then deductively, the
researchers look back at their data from the themes to determine if more evidence can
support each theme or whether they need to gather additional information. Thus, while
the process begins inductively, deductive thinking also plays an important role as analysis
moves forward. (p. 186)

To further add and ensure validity and qualitative reliability within the study and strive to
eliminate bias, this researcher “triangulate[d] different data sources of information by examining
evidence from the sources and used it to build a coherent justification for the themes” exposed
during the research (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). This was derived and accomplished from
consulting the literature, subject questionnaires, or interviews. Leedy & Ormrod explain:

Throughout the data collection process, phenomenological researchers try to suspend any
preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what they ‘hear’
participants saying. Such suspension—sometimes called bracketing or epoché—can be
extremely difficult for researchers who have personally experienced the phenomenon
under investigation. Yet it is essential if they are to gain an understanding of the typical
experiences that people have had. The ultimate goal of a phenomenological study should
be—not only for the researcher but also for readers of the final research report—to
provide a sense that ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that’

**Instruments and Protocols**

The instruments and protocols employed in this study are universal to qualitative
research. Instruments consisted of interviews utilizing semi-structured or unstructured interview
questions which were ‘guided’ by interview guides as described by Mokhtar (2000) and by
Patton (2002) which are discussed more in the next section. Before these interviews, however,
this researcher fielded a demographic questionnaire and brief survey to prospective participants
which served multiple purposes that are also described in the next section. Although the
interviews relied on semi-structured or unstructured questions, an order was applied when asking
the types of questions. Probing questions were used, as necessary.
During the interviews, field notes were taken to capture researchers’ thoughts and observations. Immediately following the interviews, memos were created to capture the context of the interview and to incorporate thoughts and observations from field notes (as well as any additional thoughts that were fresh in the mind of the researcher) and which served to document the interview while the memory was current and unaffected by excessive time, other actions, or other interviews. Document analysis was an ongoing activity conducted throughout data collection and data analysis. Procedures for implementing these instruments conclude this section on data collection, but it must be made clear, that like document analysis just mentioned, several of the steps identified under this heading of data collection were employed during data analysis, as the dialectic process unfolded.

**Interviews**

Interviews deal with questions and well-established procedures for best capturing responses that will aid in gathering the data that best serves the purposes of the research. Brayda & Boyce (2014) provide invaluable information on interviews to novice researcher’s informing readers that Patton (2002) categorizes six types of questions that a researcher can ask.

1. Experiential and behavioral questions, which are about what a person does or has done.
2. Opinion and values questions, which are designed to understand what people think about some issue or experience.
3. Other queries, known as feelings questions, [that] endeavor to elicit the emotional responses of people to their experiences and thoughts.
4. Knowledge questions seek to inquire about what facts the respondents understand.
5. Sensory questions [that] inquire about what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled.
6. Demographic questions (such as age, education, and occupation) identify characteristics of the person being interviewed. (Brayda & Boyce, 2014, p. 320)
**Question Order.** Patton (2002) suggested that questions be asked in a particular order. He recommended that opinion and feeling questions be asked first, then knowledge questions as a follow-up, and probing questions as necessary. One is informed that questioning about the present tends to be easier than asking subjects about the past. According to Patton, background and demographic questions are boring; therefore, researchers should limit these questions. For this reason, this researcher will obtain this data at the time of entry into the study, before interviews are held. Questions should also be singular with no more than one idea mentioned. Finally, questions should be formed to ensure they are understood (Patton, 2002; Brayda & Boyce, 2014).

**Interview Structure (Framework).** The questions may or may not determine the form and structure of the interview. However, after a researcher has determined the questions, the researcher must determine the interview approach. Brayda & Boyce claim Patton (2002) characterized three approaches to qualitative interviewing: (a) the informal conversational interview; (b) the interview guide; and (c) the standardized, open-ended interview.

**Informal Conversational Interview (Unstructured).** In the informal conversational interview, there is no predetermined set of questions. Questions flow from the immediate context.

**The Interview Guide Method.** The interview guide method provides a framework for the questions which keeps the interviewer from going into areas that are not covered within the framework. The guide lists some basic questions or issues to be explored during the course of the interview, but prevent an unstructured situation from developing leading subject or researcher into territory not required for the purposes of the research. Brayda & Boyce (2014) state, “According to Patton (2002), the [interview] guide also provides topics within which the
interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions. The guide helps to make interviewing several people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting the issues to be explored” (p. 320).

**Interview Guides.** Mokhtar (2000) utilized ‘interview guides’, stating, “In phenomenological research, it is important that questions are framed (Polkinghome, 1989) appropriately” (p. 41). These interview guides were used by Mokhtar, in an effort to attain the meaning and essence of the experience of the phenomenon, by broadly seeking three things: A.—the meaning of the phenomena; B.—perceptions about participants’ experience with the phenomena; and, C.—a reflection by the participants on the meaning of that experience. These ‘interview guides’ helped ensure participants provided data that would lead to Mokhtar’s formal research questions being answered while limiting tangential thoughts (p. 41). A similar process would be helpful to other phenomenological researchers to clearly orient participants on to the studied phenomena and was employed in this study. An interview guide was developed for this study [located at Appendix D].

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** In semi-structured interviews, one should prepare an interview guide as described previously, that designates which topics will be explored during the interview, however, the actual questions are not pre-written. This permits the interviewer to word questions spontaneously and explore topics in more detail, in the moment (Patton, 2002; Mokhtar, 2000; Brayda & Boyce, 2014).

**Surveys/Questionnaires**

As mentioned, a cover letter (termed a gatekeeper invitation or recruitment letter by this researcher, Appendix B and C, respectively) was emailed to prospective participants which included information describing the study, the organization behind the study, including the
contact name and address of this researcher, as well as details of how and why the respondent was selected, the aims of the study, any potential benefits or harm resulting from the study, and what would happen to the information provided. “The covering letter should both encourage the respondent to participate in the study and also meet the requirements of informed consent” (Kelley, 2003, p. 263). The primary intent for the cover letter (referred to within this study as the recruitment letter) is to seek participation, confirm eligibility for inclusion in the study, provide contact information, and also seek a referral to other individuals the contacted person believes would meet the requirements and characteristics being sought and might be interested in participating, should the contacted person not wish to participate, or merely to assist this researcher in identifying the sufficient number of participants required for the study.

An invitation [Appendix B] or a recruitment letter [Appendix C] was emailed along with a copy of the consent form [Appendix A] to prospective participants. Prior to the actual interview a brief questionnaire was provided designed to capture some very basic demographic information [Appendix E], and verified eligibility for inclusion in the study, along with a short survey [Appendix F] which posed several over-arching questions intended to collect the participants’ pre-interviewed general thoughts, perceptions, and feelings on the topics of anger and meekness, respectively, and employed a few survey questions with responses to be selected or described in the participant’s own words. This data was obtained to simply compare and contrast with the interview transcripts to denote continuity and congruency between responses provided in both forms, or conversely, identifying any broad deviation between the data sets as it related to a specific participant.
Observations

This researcher followed the ‘Participant Observation Steps’ outlined in the Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide, Module 2: Participant Observation (n.d.) located on Duke University Library’s website (p. 27). [See Appendix G]. Observations were collected in the form of field notes and memos. Both field notes and memos recorded what the researcher heard, saw, experienced, and thought in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process (Groenewald, 2004).

In addition to surveys and questionnaires, two other important instruments this researcher utilized were field notes and memoing. It appeared from what this researcher has read, that memoing was derived from grounded theory and that field noting derived from ethnography, yet both have become somewhat universal in their application to many forms of qualitative research, in general. Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) write,

By no means is this a review of memoing in grounded theory or field noting in ethnography, as documented in a number of research texts (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Glaser, 1992, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather, the purpose of this article is to describe and illustrate the application of the distinct and, at times, overlapping elements of these two forms of documentation. We argue that although these elements can blur as a study progresses, they nevertheless retain their independent functions. Without understanding the complementary functions of these recording processes, data cannot evolve to a higher interpretive level. (Birks et al., 2008, p. 68)

Field Notes. Various authors writing on research techniques categorize field notes and memoing together. Others separate them. This researcher decided to separate them, due to distinctions that seemed obvious and important. Both appeared to play roles in both data collection and subsequent data analysis. A distinction existed in the aspects having to do with, what purpose the narrative serves, for instance, when, why, and how the notes or memos were documented. Field notes were broken into two types: reflective and descriptive. Descriptive notes would identify aspects of interviews that were important to know later on, such as when
the notes were taken, what the setting was like that they were taken in, what happened to require
the note, who was involved, and other factual pieces one required to establish historical
accuracy.

Reflective notes involve some very preliminary ‘analysis’ on the part of the researcher
who captures observations that seem important to note, or which happen to be ‘theoretical’ in
nature, such as early “‘attempts to derive meaning’ as the researcher thinks or reflects on
experiences” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 49); methodological (reminders to oneself), or analytical—
which this writer classifies as memos (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007; Groenewald, 2004).

This researcher took field notes during each interview, that served, in conjunction with
the interview transcript, to provide a holistic and historical reflection while collecting the data.

**Memoing.** Memos served as a more analytical document, used more during data analysis.
Memos were used to consolidate field notes into a coherent single document that permitted some
degree of thinking to take place within this document in light of the interview, connecting and
linking thoughts from the recent interview, with the facts contained in the field notes. The
memos allowed some early analysis to take place outside of the parameters of coding that may
suppress or influence the data in one direction and into one category, when this could be an
unfortunate way of blurring or burying important meaning later on. Birks et al. (2008) state,
“Memoing serves to assist the researcher in making conceptual leaps from raw data to those
abstractions that explain research phenomena in the context in which it is examined. Memos can
be effectively employed by both the novice and experienced researcher as a procedural and
analytical strategy throughout the research process” (p. 68). Memos served as a patchwork of
writings ultimately brought together and formed the narrative contained in chapters four and five.
**Document Analysis**

The intent of the document analysis was to answer the research questions in the words of the research subjects, though this required having ten voices speak as one, so there was some degree of interpretation and summation. Therefore, a composite summary of finding was provided and reviewed with each participant to garner concurrence with the findings and preliminary conclusion to determine whether consensus occurred. Accomplishing this analysis involved much of what has been previously mentioned—though the taking of field notes and memoing were of more limited use than previously thought. The table that follows was made available on MaxQDA: The Art of Data Analysis—Research Blog’s website depicts the ten steps that were taken by this researcher in examining and thematically analyzing the content of the interview transcripts, documents (to include field notes and memos), and publications within the literature review consisting of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other textual sources to interpret and present findings that addressed and answered the research questions (MaxQDA, n.d.). The coding processes (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) described under the heading of Data Analysis was used.
Table 2

Steps Involved in Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Define the research question</td>
<td>What are you trying to find out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Collect and sample the data</td>
<td>What kind of data will best answer your RQ? Interviews, documents, surveys? Collect the data and sample it in a suitable and valid way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Select and prepare the data for QDA</td>
<td>Select the fitting data and prepare it for QDA: e.g. transcription of interview data, selecting important parts of documents, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - Codebook development</td>
<td>Develop a solid codebook (if needed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Unitizing and coding instructions</td>
<td>Unitize the data and set rules for coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Trial, training, reliability</td>
<td>Test the codebook and if necessary, train other coders. If applicable, test coding reliability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - Revision and modification</td>
<td>Revise the codebook if necessary and modify the coding instructions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - Coding</td>
<td>Code the rest of the data using the revised codebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - Analyze and compare</td>
<td>Run your analysis: what intersections are important? What patterns are there? What distributions are worth noticing? What did you learn in regard to the research question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - Interpretation and presentation of findings</td>
<td>Interpret and present the data in a suitable way and be transparent when reporting the findings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Procedures

As stated previously, this research employed a hermeneutical phenomenological approach incorporating much of what has been described throughout this document to this point: employed unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviewed using open-ended questions, applied a purposive sample, and limited the study to ten participants. Questionnaires
were fielded which obtained confirmation that participants met the parameters established for selection as a research subject, as well as to answer a ten demographic questions, and to acknowledge informed consent and provided statements or collect forms required by the IRB. A notice was included so research subjects were made aware participation is voluntary, and that participants were permitted to leave the study at any time. Interviews were audio recorded. An interview guides as described by Mokhtar (2000) was developed (Appendix D) and used along with some very general questions in scheduled one-hour interviews.

Data, in the form of documents (field notes or memos) attributable and identifiable to a specific participant were securely stored. Digital data was password-protected. During data analysis, data was coded manually and using NVivo. McNiff (2016) states,

> NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. NVivo helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyze and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required. (McNiff, 2016)

Interview transcripts were produced. Coding and themes were developed and preliminary connections and ‘meaning units’ [best thought of as clusters of themes or groups of coded data] were captured and incorporated into a draft product or composite summary presentation. This was shared with participants during a second interview held separately with each participant, lasting as long as necessary. This second interview and presentation filled two purposes. First, participants had the opportunity to challenge what was presented and ask for clarification or request changes, or have their personal-identifier reflected as not in concurrence with others should consensus not be reached on a specific point of contention. Second, it permitted this researcher to polish presentation skills, practice preparing to defend data, and to validate data via member checking.
A transcript of each participant’s interview was provided to the participants to confirm concurrence with the information contained within them. No requests were made to change any of the transcripts. Data analysis was accomplished in accordance with Hycner’s five-step process as outlined by Groenewald (2004) outlined previously. Validity and reliability were claimed based upon the use of triangulation “converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, and member checking” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202), in addition to using NVivo to remove human error and bias as much as possible within the coding process. This researcher concluded this study by finalizing and defending this formal dissertation.

**Data Analysis**

The word, ‘analysis’ has some negative connotations in light of the method selected for this study. Groenewald (2004) writes in his much-reviewed article,

> The heading ‘data analysis’ is deliberately avoided here because Hycner cautions that ‘analysis’ has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. The ‘term’ [analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon…[whereas ‘explication’ implies an]…investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole’ (1999, p. 16). (p. 49)

The data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews, along with field notes, memos, observations, and recordings were analyzed using a variety of methods.

In this qualitative study, this researcher made use of what is termed open-coding followed by axial-coding in a constant comparative analysis (originated in grounded theory) to organize and analyze the data, then incorporating themes and categories via selective coding into a single category. The only goal behind open-coding was to focus early on coding concepts that addressed causal conditions, contexts, and consequences of the phenomena, but then delved into the participants’ text which revealed themes, categories, and connections to other key concepts (by considering hypotheses between categories). Finally, all categories and themes were brought
together under one core category and a final narrative built around this one over-arching idea (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

**Analysis Methods**

Although there appears to be a plethora of step-by-step processes employing differing types of analyses, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the empirical, phenomenological, psychological (EPP) method outlined by Karlsson (1993), and many others. This researcher used Hycner’s (1999) explication process described by Groenewald (2004). He states, “this explication process has five ‘steps’ or phases, which are” listed below:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
2. Delineating units of meaning.
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary. (pp. 49-50)

**NVivo**

During data analysis, data was coded using NVivo. McNiff (2016) states, “NVivo is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International. NVivo helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyze and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required” (McNiff, 2016).

Despite relying heavily on the power of technology, this researcher also conducted a degree of ‘hand’-coding, from what may be best envisioned as from the ‘thirty-thousand-foot level’, that looked for overarching themes that may otherwise had been overlooked. Creswell
(2018) states, “Hand coding is a laborious and time-consuming process, even for data from a few individuals” yet, he remarks a few sentences later, “…the researcher still needs to go through each line of text (as in hand coding by going through transcriptions)” to assign codes (p. 192). This researcher created a master Word document from all interview transcripts in order to rapidly search and filter data. This was done as something of a check to NVivo data as well, and to compare with NVivo codes to determine if these themes were captured by the software as well. From NVivo and manually-derived themes, visual models were produced which illustrate graphically the themes and variables that stood out most, and by producing a word map that enlarged font-size to display predominant words compared to lessor words showing the connections to one another.

**Coding**

Although as previously mentioned, some degree of open coding was used to classify data, this data was consolidated, categorized, and incorporated into groupings seeking meaning units, beginning the moment the first pieces of data were collected. Axial coding was the predominate and most useful form of coding used throughout this research, especially during the data analysis stage. Axial coding is derived from grounded theory. Scholars across various disciplines agree that axial codes are linkages between data. In essence, axial coding seeks to identify central phenomena in one’s data. Emergent themes were compared to theories proffered by Festinger and Sampson, respectively to determine if there was a nexus between these theories and participants’ experiences and perceptions, as to whether and to what degree, the research subject’s “dissonance” led to their seeking consonance by changing behavior to coincide with deeply-held, spiritual beliefs.
Axial coding makes connections between categories that reveal themes, new categories, or new subcategories. Hypothetical relationships emerged throughout the coding process, which were repeatedly checked deductively in light of new data or material to ensure credible claims could be made. Axial coding has proved to be a trustworthy and credible tool for analysis throughout many disciplines. Once saturation was reached and a single, over-arching theme, theory, or category emerged, then selective coding commenced and a narrative was produced (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Trustworthiness

Not only is in-depth analysis important, but equally important is ensuring the trustworthiness of the research and the data. Creswell (2014) writes, “Qualitative validity [words bolded by Creswell] means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007)” (p. 201). Many methodology texts do not speak of qualitative validity or qualitative reliability, rather they use of the word, trustworthiness. Yet these two strategies mentioned by Creswell possess merit and were used by this researcher. Creswell states among the most frequently used and easiest to implement ways to incorporate a strategy to claim validity is to:

- Triangulate [Italics by Creswell] different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study.

- Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate. This does not mean taking back the raw transcripts to check for accuracy; instead, the researcher takes back parts of the polished or semi-polished product, such as the major findings or themes… (Creswell, 2014, p. 202)
This researcher intended to show—as Creswell described, quoting Gibbs (2007)—that “this research is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007)” (p. 201). Throughout the literature review (Chapter Two) previous research upon which this study expanded upon, drew from, referred to, incorporated, utilized, or otherwise employed to substantiate and validate the direction of thoughts and claims shared by other researchers, to support any conjectured statements or lines of argument. Therefore, the literature served to support the trustworthiness of this research, again, referencing Creswell (2014), who stated above, “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (p. 202).

However, the best way to ensure trustworthiness from the perspective of this researcher was to permit research subjects to speak for themselves, by quoting them directly, paraphrasing them without taking liberties to omit the context of their intended meaning, and by utilizing the power of ten voices to speak as one in this one study to respond and answer the research questions. The below table was provided by Gill, Gill, & Roule (2018) offering guiding criteria for enhancing trustworthiness in historical narrative research (p.195), but these techniques were incorporated in this phenomenological study as well.
**Criteria for Enhancing Trustworthiness**

**Table 1. Guiding criteria, principles and techniques for enhancing the trustworthiness of historical narratives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Underlying principles</th>
<th>Proposed techniques</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Credibility</td>
<td>Engage with the content and context of sources</td>
<td>Source criticism</td>
<td>Arndt and Bigelow (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss interpretations</td>
<td>Expert (historian) checks</td>
<td>Smoke (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Confirmability</td>
<td>Reveal underlying assumptions</td>
<td>Identification of the school or strategy of historiography</td>
<td>McKinlay (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure interpretations are grounded in evidence</td>
<td>Active citation and footnoting</td>
<td>Hassard (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dependability</td>
<td>Adopt different approaches to research</td>
<td>Triangulation of sources, methods and inquirers</td>
<td>Pettigrew (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow others to comment on the process of research</td>
<td>Reflexive accounts of qualitative judgments, through process tracing</td>
<td>Rowlinson (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Transferability</td>
<td>Build a richly contextualized account of the case(s) under study</td>
<td>Purposive and theoretical sampling</td>
<td>Chandler (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permit comparison of context under study to other contexts</td>
<td>Data and source archiving</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Gill et al., 2018, Table 1)

**Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree to which the conclusions match reality. The authors who constructed the above table, state, “Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 213) posit a major trustworthiness criterion is ‘credibility in the eyes of the information sources, for without such credibility the findings and conclusions as a whole cannot be found credible by the consumer of the inquiry report’” (Gill, Gill, & Roulete, 2018, p. 195). The authors [go on to] suggest “that this criterion is satisfied when their sources agree with or have confidence in the researchers’ interpretations or reconstructions. This ‘correspondence’ between researcher and sources (including participants and consulted literature) that harmonizes and speaks the same language adds credibility (p. 195). Underlying principles deal with ensuring the linkage between content and context is maintained, that any interpretation is clearly explained and acknowledged and not stated as fact.
**Dependability**

Dependability can be demonstrated by triangulation of sources (via literature, participants’ transcripts, and thoroughly describing how interpretations or findings were derived—process tracing) and by way of member checking (Roberts, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Gill, Gill & Roulete, 2018) refers to the detail of both the research context and your processes and procedures. Dependability was achieved by fully describing the processes used to collect and analyze the data, so others could replicate the study or incorporate it into potential studies proposed under the heading of transferability, below.

**Confirmability**

Further, confirmability was attained by ensuring the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data were well-established throughout this document, by outlining key factors used in selecting participants (e.g.-purposive sampling and snowballing), settings, revealing underlying assumptions, and ensuring interpretations are grounded in evidence (Gill, Gill, & Roulete, 2018). Also, confirmability was established by depicting where other authors or researchers made similar claims or inferences—once again applying some measure of triangulation. Lastly, by providing an ‘audit trail’ and informing readers that data would be made available for review by other researchers upon request.

**Transferability**

It would appear that a similar study conducted among a similar group of research subjects (exemplars possessing a Christian worldview for at least twenty years) would produce similar results. It also appeared possible that a researcher could utilize this research to establish a grounded theory through additional research. Further, it appeared possible, if not likely, that a similar study could be applicable in employing it to other emotions, which
also created sufficient cognitive dissonance in research subjects to motivate these individuals
to move from an established tendency toward an emotion (predominately viewed negatively),
such as lust, greed, or jealousy to a tendency toward some attribute of the Fruit of the Spirit
as well, by encouraging them in the direction of the emotion’s antithesis, for instance,
chastity, charity, or trust, respectively. It would appeared, at this point, to this researcher that
cognitive dissonance [or the spiritual dissonance brought by the Holy Spirit] would effect
similar research subjects in a similar fashion, convicting them and engaging them to change
their behavior in the direction of seeing value in, and acquiring taking on a different attribute
(i.e.-character trait) and tending to display this attribute more and more and, in turn,
displaying the previously predominate behavior less and less, as one transforms as a maturing
Christian. As West (2014) would refer to as ‘taking off” one emotion and ‘putting on’
“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, and
gratitude” (p. 24).

In Hebrews, Christians are informed, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a
great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily
entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on
Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross,
scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hindson &
Dobson, 1999, Hebrews 12:1-2). In retrospect, any perceived transformation as described by
research subjects in this study would appear to actually be growth in the form of discipline
on the part of exemplars putting into practice behavior that [for the research subject] was
not—prior to coming into a relationship with Christ—natural.
Chapter Summary

Constructively managing anger is a leadership challenge that will arise in many organizational settings, to include ministry settings, which, will require church leaders to become involved. Disagreements are a natural and healthy part of progress; however, conflict indicates disagreements have gone astray. Conflict is synonymous with feelings and expressions of anger. Expressions of anger are observable behavior(s), yet so is the attribute of meekness. In some of the research consulted, meekness seemed to be comprised of the Fruit of the Spirit, not merely a singular characteristic, trait, or virtue (West, 2014; West, 2016; Roberts, 1997). This research sought to demonstrate that by acquiring and exemplifying the attribute of meekness (comprised of the Fruit of the Spirit) not merely the display of a singular virtue, one can more effectively lead others by exhibiting wisdom; thereby, facilitating a team’s ability to discern, address, and utilize anger in constructive and creative ways, versus destructive ways, as a servant-leader.

From the personal experience of this researcher, and from all that has been studied during the literature review leading up to this research (Chapter 2), it appeared conflict often leads to anger and most often anger leads to behaviors that seek to satisfy self-interest and self-protection. This powerful emotion of anger tended to produce externalized, observable behaviors that often have negative consequences, not only for the individual who is angry, but for others (such as those who are the focus of the anger, or even innocent individuals who just happen to be in proximity of the angry person). Organizationally and individually there are tangible and intangible costs to anger’s consequences. Conflict and anger will require leaders to intercede in ‘some’ way—to act, as one cannot avoid being ‘forced’ to become involved in order to extinguish the flames of anger, best done counter-intuitively with love.
Although anger is observable by way of words or behaviors, what goes unseen, however, are the resulting true feelings ‘inside’ the angry person that have a direct corresponding effect on one’s ‘self-concept’, one’s ‘self-esteem’, and more importantly one’s ‘spirit’ and ‘spiritual condition’. Behind the emotion of anger is an affective domain [a realm that this author contends is synonymous with the spiritual domain] where unobserved feelings and invisible motivations ‘reside’, ‘lurk’, and ‘hide’ which only become manifest and visible when expressed in words or behaviors during episodes of anger. Perhaps, this is why the Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (Hindson & Dobson, 1999, 2 Corinthians 4:18).

Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance “starts with a very simple proposition. If a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, he experiences dissonance: a negative drive state (not unlike hunger or thirst)” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128). Parker (2007) states, “Cognitive Dissonance theory, as it was originally proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger, proposes that a person’s values, beliefs, and attitudes must be in a consonant relationship to one another (Festinger 1957, 2)” (p. 6). When one acts against one’s conscience, or when a Christian acts in disobedience to the Holy Spirit, the cognitive behavior is counter to their affective desire and an internal angst, a dissonance forms, that Festinger would contend must be resolved in some way. Could this dissonance be derived from the Holy Spirit’s work upon one’s conscience? It is not possible to say or claim, yet it would seem one could listen closely to Christian exemplars to learn what they believe brought about their change and transformation (in this one arena), by limiting the discussion to one emotion (anger) and its antithesis—meekness.
Christ came to serve, not to be served. Servant leaders must serve in the same way. If meekness is the way to possessing eternal peace and inheriting the earth and the Kingdom of God, how have others discovered it and how do they promote it? In this study, this researcher hoped to learn how others further along on their spiritual journeys; following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, have made their way along—bridging the gap between anger and love—through meekness. This phenomenological study sought to answer this question and others, to advance the human body of knowledge, build up the Body of Christ, and glorify God, by offering new and helpful insights on how to lead more effectively as servant-leaders.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This study explored the calculus behind human behavioral change amongst ten Christian exemplars comprised from the Southeast District of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) by investigating the exemplars’ perception of their transformation—over time—with regard to acquiring, adopting, and displaying the attribute of meekness, opposed to the natural tendency toward becoming angry in situations of conflict. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) website states that, “Calculus is the study of how things change. It provides a framework for modeling systems in which there is change, and a way to deduce the predictions of such models.” The problem for this researcher; however, was, “The fundamental idea of calculus is to study change by studying ‘instantaneous’ change, by which we mean changes over tiny intervals of time” (MIT, n.d., Calculus).

With human behavior, unlike the quantitative and measurable rate of change of physical properties, like speed, velocity, acceleration, or distance, over time, capable of being calculated by identifying and measuring fixed variables, any change in human behavior is slow, subtle, and almost imperceptible, even to the very human beings in which behavioral change has taken place—unless, and until, the change is made perceivable, normally via hindsight following a considerable period of time. Further, measuring such incremental change by a quantitative method does not seem possible. This fact required this study to employ a qualitative design methodology, whereby, this researcher conducted a phenomenological study which involved one hour-long interviews with each exemplar to gain insight and understanding, from their perspectives, as to causal factors for any perceived change in their behavior as it related to the topics of this study.
It is important to note here that the attribute studied was meekness (a propensity—or tendency—to display a controlled and measured demeanor in anger-inducing situations such as conflict). It was through the lens of anger that this study explored this attribute. The attribute of meekness was both sensed, internally, by the exemplars, and was externally perceivable by others who have observed the exemplars’ behavior over time—hence, the rationale behind the ‘Inclusion Criteria’ described for selecting exemplars for this study, and ultimately, their selection for this study. The interviews aided in understanding the causal factors and the perceived magnitude of change, from the exemplars’ perspectives. To summarize, the exemplars were asked to describe their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions on the topics of anger and meekness to help gain insight and understanding of the duration of the transformative process, in essence to “measure” how far each had come toward currently behaving in a meek manner, whether a relatively short period of time or over many years. Of course, one cannot “know” this, unless one asks…and “learns” the answer. What one learned, is one cannot profess to have learned anything, unless one truly applies what one professes to have learned.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The online Oxford English Dictionary provides a secondary definition of calculus which defines it as a “particular method or system of calculation or reasoning” (Oxford, 2021, Calculus). In a qualitative study such as this, one is required to reason one’s way in describing how one arrived at each step along the way, and how one ultimately arrived at the conclusion in the end.

Calculus: The Substitution of One Function into Another Function

In calculus, the substitution of one function ‘f’ into another function ‘g’ produces a new function. Like calculus, conducting this research required following a strict formula, meaning
adhering to the research plan as outlined in Chapters One and Three, respectively, and as approved by Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). For now, however, this researcher will depart from drawing further comparisons to calculus, but will return to this helpful analogy later in this chapter.

**Embarking on the Study**

Following approval by Liberty University’s IRB to proceed with this research effort, the researcher informed the Dissertation Supervisor of the change in IRB status and was subsequently granted permission to begin recruitment efforts to field the required participants as outlined in Chapter Three. This involved sending an invitational email to four individuals known to the researcher (termed gatekeepers for the purpose of this study), who met the Inclusion Criteria. This same email contained an invitation to take part in the study (Appendix B), and also contained the Inclusion Criteria (Appendix C) as well as a Consent Form as an attachment (Appendix A). Three of the four invited participants who were initially contacted responded in the affirmative stating they would gladly participate and each provided several names and contact information for additional prospective participants, who also met the Inclusion Criteria. Seven of these “snowballed” participants [participants known to the gatekeepers to meet the parameters of the Inclusion Criteria] agreed to participate in the study. This brought the tally to ten (the number required by the research design set forth in Chapter Three), and thereby, this “randomness” served to help diversify the sample, and simultaneously minimized and limited aspects of bias while also enhancing validity and reliability, referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research.
Fielding the Team of Exemplars

This study employed a purposive sampling. The rationale for implementing purposive sampling was outlined in Chapter Three. This type of sampling is the predominant form used in qualitative research because, as is the case in this case, the established Inclusion Criteria required some subjectivity. This research required “knowing” individuals who in the informed opinion of the researcher—and, by way of the informed opinions of the gatekeepers, displayed (and therefore, appeared to possess) certain biblical characteristics, and an equally important, specific attribute—meekness. Despite this initial subjectivity, the use of the “snowball technique”, whereby others identified other prospective participants—in this case seven of the ten exemplars—aided greatly in reducing bias on the part of the researcher while adding to the validity and truthfulness of the study. It is beneficial to identify here, however—when striving to field the remaining seven exemplars, several individuals initially identified by gatekeepers failed to acknowledge the invitation to participate. This required additional attempts to have gatekeepers provide additional names and provide contact information of several more prospective participants—further interjecting a greater degree of randomness.

Once all ten research subjects were sourced and fielded, permission was sought and granted from the Dissertation Supervisor to begin the actual data collection phase of the research by scheduling and conducting initial interviews. The researcher worked directly with each exemplar to schedule a convenient time to conduct the initial interview.

Creating Interview Transcripts

Following the interviews, each audio file was downloaded to a password-protected laptop computer that contained a specialized voice-to-text software, called Dragon Naturally Speaking, which was primarily designed for dictation. This software provided only a very rough initial
transcript of the subject interview, and required laborious manual editing. In an effort to maintain confidentiality, all files and all transcription processes were conducted on the computer’s hard drive and not in an online or cloud environment. The rough transcript produced by Dragon Naturally Speaking served as something of a skeleton containing disjointed text, inappropriate words (e.g.—the word ‘wood’ would appear where the word ‘would’ was intended), no punctuation, and nothing informing one, where or when, one speaker stopped, and another started. Editing transcripts into final form took several days despite the helpful start provided by the voice-to-text software.

Though the process was cerebrally-demanding and time-consuming, the benefits of spending so much time with the text of each interview were many, yet somewhat difficult to articulate. The process of going over some sections of each digital audio file many times in order to capture exactly what was said, served to imprint various passages of text into one’s mind. This exposed statements, that if they had simply been read over once, would not have registered as something containing the significance or profound importance that they did in actuality.

Coding the Data

Some passages of text were highlighted and some sections were manually-coded while still editing the transcripts using open-coding. The bulk of coding (axial-coding) was conducted once all ten transcripts were imported into NVivo (a qualitative software analysis program) where an inductive process took place—where codes emerged that had not been previously considered, permitting themes to materialize—like one to be visited shortly, surrounding the theme: *early modeling of negative behavior by one’s parents*.

Before continuing, it must be mentioned that during the coding process, the process was intended to be, and it quickly revealed itself to be, an iterative process. For instance, one finds
oneself coding an interview and coming upon a passage of text that solicits a new code for something that does not fit within the previously constructed codes, perhaps ‘peacemaking’. One then realizes that one must return to the previous interviews to see if there are areas within the text where this code might have been applicable as well. The point being made is the need to return again and again to the various transcripts. Again, the payoff was in becoming very familiar with the texts of each interview—to both the similarities, and subtle differences—whereby, more fully fleshed out themes began to emerge.

**Demographic and Sample Data**

Upon receiving the demographic questionnaires and survey responses from the exemplars, the researcher compiled the following demographics. The exemplars consisted of ten white males representing an age range between 50-79 (seven of them in their sixties), all married. Eight of the exemplars possessed graduate degrees (one doctorate candidate, all but dissertation) and two earned bachelor degrees. All had been baptized, and they each have been Christians for many decades (six of them 40 years or more). Their paths to becoming Christians diverged a bit with one coming to faith in Christ as a young child, five as teenagers, two as young adults (20-29), and two as mature adults (30-39). Seven are employed in ministry/pastoral positions, one serves as the administrator of a Christian School, one serves in the military, and one is retired. Finally, eight have been members of the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) for more than ten years, one for five years or more, and one less than five years.
Table 4

Demographics of Christian Exemplars in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Age Came to Faith</th>
<th>Christian Tenure (Years)</th>
<th>Baptized in Water</th>
<th>Years in EFCA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Doctorate (ABD)</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>13-19</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surveys

The survey questions were intended primarily to focus the exemplars attention on the topics (anger and meekness) and lead the exemplars toward thinking about the topics as a segue to the initial interview. Although the survey responses were interesting, they conveyed limited, useable information—predominantly, confirming one’s suspicions regarding how difficult it is to define anger and place it inside of a single defining box (e.g.—as to whether anger was considered good or bad, a vice or virtue—sinful, or not). The responses appeared to substantiate that anger and the associated feelings surrounding it are “situational” and “dependent” upon other perceived factors which one then utilized to make judgements or to draw inferences as to whether there was a moral premise involved—in the form of an offense to oneself or others—which subsequently served to elicit and/or justify a response. Further, even at this early stage, it was conjectured that because these situations involved “different circumstances, [they] required different responses” (Exemplar 1, Survey, Response to Question 7). The interviews would support such findings as well.
### Table 5

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 1, Before coming to faith in Jesus Christ, how did you view the emotion of anger?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a sinful emotion (a vice)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a normal emotion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a defense mechanism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a gauge motivating you to know when to act/react to situations perceived by you to be moral offenses against yourself or others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a virtuous emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td>X^1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X^2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1 “The emotion was one to be avoided. My dad had an anger problem. I didn’t like it, so I avoided it” (Exemplar 1, Survey, Response to Question 1).
2 “My father had a bad temper and [an] anger problem. Anger was something you expressed to make people back down. So, I saw my anger as a defensive weapon” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 1).

### Table 6

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 2, After coming to faith in Jesus Christ, how did you view the emotion of anger?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a sinful emotion (a vice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a normal emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a defense mechanism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a gauge motivating you to know when to act/react to situations perceived by you to be moral offenses against yourself or others</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a virtuous emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td>X^1</td>
<td>X^2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X^3</td>
<td>X^4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1 “I can’t say there were great change in my thought-process or my life [at] 19 years old. It’s [any change has] been gradual over time” (Exemplar 2, Survey, Response to Question 2).
2 “Very dependent of circumstances” (Exemplar 3, Survey, Response to Question 2).
3 “Anger is a normal human emotion that can be ‘virtuous’ when it is in support of Biblical truth or sinful when it arises to protect your own interest” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 2).
4 “People get angry at different times for different reasons. I think fatigue, stress and other issues can cause people to get angry quicker and make it difficult to exercise self-control” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 2).
In comparing before and after responses to the same question regarding how exemplars viewed the emotion of anger before and after coming to faith in Christ (Question One and Question Two, respectively), it is interesting to note that following becoming a Christian, it appears to have become more difficult for exemplars to define anger, than before one came to faith in Christ. In Table 5, one can see the bulk of responses were split identifying anger as a normal emotion and a defense mechanism, with only two identifying it as a sinful emotion. Whereas, exemplars had a more difficult time putting anger into a single defining box after becoming a Christian, and more exemplars concluded anger was sinful after becoming a Christian than before coming to faith in Christ—to the point, more exemplars were inclined to explain themselves—or felt the need to clarify ones’ response(s). In short, becoming a Christian appeared to have made defining and dealing with anger more difficult, not easier.

Additionally, when reading the exemplars’ comments in the footnotes to Question 1, the reader can see that the modeling of negative behavior (i.e.—an anger problem on the part of a father) was already being conveyed by two exemplars and captured by this researcher. Although not a part of every exemplars’ experience, nor a focus of this study, a parent’s behavior with regard to anger played an obvious and important role in one’s view of anger and an unexpected theme developed, not only in the surveys, but it happened to weave itself into and throughout the interviews as well. This will be discussed in later in this chapter.
Table 7

*Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 3, Now, as a mature Christian and a leader within your church, what do you ‘feel’ when confronted with a situation that would have previously made you angry?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less anger than in the past</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness toward the situation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief for the victim (or you were the victim)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrow for the offender(s)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much the same as in the past, but viewed through a different lens</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1 “I try to understand the root cause of my anger and repent when I realize my anger is caused by my own sinful nature” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 3).
2 “I realize that many things are outside of my control. I can’t control people and many times they will disappoint me. Nothing surprises me anymore” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 3).
3 “I don’t go immediately to anger like I did when I was younger. I can certainly get angry over time, but I think I can step back now and better see the issue behind the other person’s anger and try to find a way to defuse the situation. If I’m honest this is easier with some folks than others. My son has some significant anger issues and I’ve had to learn some steps towards him with gentleness even as he’s angry, to cut through the anger to talk to him in a way he’ll listen” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 3).

The bulk of the responses to Question 3 appeared to indicate that the majority of exemplars—from a current meek perspective—are more inclined to being less angry and to feeling instead, greater sadness toward a situation that would have previously made them angry. Thus, it seemed, the tendency was to be less critical and less judgmental of the persons involved in an argument or conflict, and focused more on the sadness one feels over the situation upon all of those involved—to include sadness toward the offender and the victim (even if the victims were the exemplars, themselves). The interviews touched on this as well, alluding to a desire on the part of exemplars to aid instead, in restoring peace and mending relationship(s) serving as the source of motivation behind their emotion versus attributing blame or casting judgments, or merely issuing wise advice or general counsel.
Table 8

**Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 4, Based upon your previous response, how do you react now to minor, day-to-day frustrations (e.g.—someone cutting in line, cutting you off in traffic, behaving inappropriately in public)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I still become angry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still become angry, but the period of anger subsides quickly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am still disturbed by the situation, but I pray for my peace to be restored</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am still disturbed by the situation, but I know God is in control</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I maintain my peace, trust in God, and pray over the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I maintain my peace and pray over the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁴</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments**

1. “I try to adjust my schedule. The thing that irritates me the most is when I want to have time alone to pray, study, or work and someone shows up unexpectedly at the church to talk to me. I may be passive-aggressive by slowing down and tapping on my brakes if someone is tailgating me” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 4).

2. “These situations are “not the end of the world”. No reason to react strongly. However, these are times when anger rises, to abuse, accusative, hurtful words, a distraction to the weak, etc.” (Exemplar 2, Survey, Response to Question 4).

3. “Depends on the situation and my walk with God at the time” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 4).

4. “I still become angry (though to a lesser degree) but I am much less likely to act on my anger in an impulsive manner.” (Exemplar 3, Survey, Response to Question 4).

Although the responses here (in Table 8) seemed to be all over the place, most responses confirmed that exemplars still suffered feelings of anger (or were at least disturbed) when experiencing these types of minor day-to-day frustrations, but knew that God was in control, trusted in Him, prayed, and therefore, were slow to anger, and any anger and any impulse to respond, subsided quickly. Although the comment (footnote 10) by Exemplar 9 illustrated that even a Christian exemplar may still demonstrate subtle angry responses by way of passive-aggressive displays directed at those who interrupted them, or by brake-checking a tailgating driver, gives insight that meekness might present itself in the form of a mitigated response, but did not entirely eliminate a response.
Table 9

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 5, How do you respond to situations involving moral offenses or ethical policies that you find offensive but which are supported by the law of the land which are contrary to God’s laws, such as same-sex marriage, abortion, etc.?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outraged, but silent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocally opposed and openly share my thoughts</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share my thoughts with fellow believers, but not in public forums or discussions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X^1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X^2</td>
<td>X^3</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am apathetic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passively support these things because I feel the fight more damaging than giving into the will of others while trusting God to set things right in the end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td>X^4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1 “If questioned or pushed, I state my beliefs and support my conclusion” (Exemplar 2, Survey, Response to Question 5).
2 “I am saddened that these people have been confused by Satan and that they will eventually pay a price for their unbiblical decisions” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 5).
3 “I believe and trust in the sovereignty of God and have come to the conclusion that I should never underestimate the depravity of human beings” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 5).
4 “I don’t think getting angry and going to war makes the heart changes that is needed to address these issues at more than a surface level. The early church changed the culture around them being loving their neighbors while have different standards on these issues. My sister in law is a lesbian and my wife and I make sure to stay with her and her wife. Everything we do to visit to keep our connection to them. They know where we stand since I am a southern evangelical pastor and they know we love them” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 5).
5 * “I explain my position, but acknowledge that this is a ‘State’ law not what God intended” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 5).

The responses in Table 9 to survey question five were unanimous. Every exemplar—either in marking the box or in the comments explaining their response textually, conveyed that they shared their thoughts on matters of conscience, predominantly with fellow believers, though most would not do so in public forums.
Table 10

*Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 6, How do you view a leader you perceive to be passive or laissez-faire?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecisive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As more a follower than a leader</td>
<td>X²</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁴</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments**

1. “Many pastors fight battles they can’t win. They create needless conflict in their churches by making unnecessary changes” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 6).
2. “This cannot be an initial judgment. Time and decision-making over time is important. So, initially this is good” (Exemplar 2, Survey, Response to Question 6).
3. “Some leaders [appear] passive because they don’t care and are in fact weak or disengaged. I know of some leaders who are quiet and soft spoken but very much on point and leading out of a collaborative focus” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 6).
4. “Depends on the person and situation. Bottom line: the emotional and spiritual maturity of that leader is the determinant. To disciple leaders, means to bring them along—grow them, teach them” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 6).

The majority of responses to Question 6 depicted a passive leader in a negative light, e.g.—weak, unsure, indecisive, more a follower than a leader, so it would first appear the response from Exemplar 9 stood alone, in opposition to his fellow exemplars’ responses. However, three of the exemplars provided explanatory comments that showed that their thoughts moved in Exemplar 9’s direction, by pointing out that these types of leaders [passive or laissez-faire] could indeed excel (or could be the best type of leader) in certain situations, such as in “leading out of a collaborative focus” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 6).
Table 11

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 7, Do you think great damage can be done by failing to speak out against immoral behavior by others in a timely manner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s complicated, please explain</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1 "I think how you speak out is important. Matthew 18 [mentions] of going to them first is important. I have found dealing with sin in others is a 10-round fight, and not 3. It always takes longer than you would like. Still, I have seen when issues aren’t addressed it usually doesn’t end well for that person or other[s] around them” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 7).
2 "I believe we need to speak the truth in love to those with whom we have a personal relationship. Making public pronouncements can cause more harm than good, if not done wisely” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 7).
3 “Sin needs to be addressed in the church, but we can’t expect unbelievers to live like believers” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 7).
4 “Key timely manner with the goal of restoration not punishment” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 7).
5 “Different circumstances require different responses” (Exemplar 1, Survey, Response to Question 7).
6 “It depends on whether the other person is a believer or non-believer. If he/she is a believer that I know I will seek to graciously confront them” (Exemplar 3, Survey, Response to Question 7).

The overwhelming response to this question was a resounding “yes” that the exemplars believed great damage could be done by failing to speak out against immoral behavior whether by marking yes as a response or by way of one’s comments—though the focus appeared to be centered upon one’s concern for fellow believers and restoring believers to a solid relationship with Christ or fellow believers, rather than striving or hoping to change nonbelievers’ behavior. Although not a topic that will be addressed, a topic touched on within a survey comment by one of the exemplars would come up again and again, and that was the need to address issues while they are relatively minor, before they become issues more difficult to manage.
Table 12

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 8, How do you respond to situations of conflict within groups you are a part of where members within the group have become angry with one another or with you—or with a cultural situation offending their beliefs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I listen closely to others’ views and strive only to help others see areas of common ground, while attempting to build consensus</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remain silent and refrain from becoming a party to the conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rebuke others when I believe it is necessary, but sparingly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I endeavor to use these situations to teach and provide counsel</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively engage in the conflict and strive to control the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please explain</td>
<td>X³</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁴</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments
1 “I try to understand the root of the conflict and then try to speak God’s Word into the situation” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 8).
2 “I try to challenge both sides to obey the Lord and love their neighbor as they love themselves and to treat others the way they would want to be treated” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 8).
3 “Actively engage with the goal of reconciling” (Exemplar 1, Survey, Response to Question 8).
4 “Bridge building toward Christian unity. It is a process” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 8).

Four exemplars highlighted an important theme that will appear frequently within the interviews, and that is the importance of listening. All but one of them endeavored to use these situations to teach and provide counsel. Another peripheral theme that emerged in the interviews is the goal on the part of exemplars of “seeing the bigger picture” and using isolated situations (like situations of conflict) to make long term gains in the lives of their followers, by not just focusing on fixing the issue directly in front of them and presented at that moment—but using these times as “teachable moments” to build relationships, and where their followers could “learn” lessons to take with them into their futures and ultimately incorporate these lessons into their lives and the lives of others—where one can be a source of help to others in times of trouble on down the line.
### Table 13

Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 9, As a leader, do you believe you are to be an agent of God’s Will in all matters—to include matters of conflict involving angry followers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X¹</td>
<td></td>
<td>X²</td>
<td></td>
<td>X³</td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁴</td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁵</td>
<td>X⁶</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁷</td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁸</td>
<td></td>
<td>X⁹</td>
<td></td>
<td>X¹⁰</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. If you answered no, how do you discern which matters of conflict require your involvement from those that do not?

b. If you answered yes, how do you discern when you should be forceful and assert the authority of your position of leadership, and when you should refrain from engaging others in order to first do no harm?

#### Comments

1 “When I have gained the trust of group members” (Exemplar 2, Survey, Response to Question 9).
2 “[Through] prayer and wise counsel” (Exemplar 5, Survey, Response to Question 9).
3 “I have learned to pray first and give God time to act. Prayer is not passivity, it is action. After some time in prayer (day-week?) I will move forward if God has not resolved the situation” (Exemplar 7, Survey, Response to Question 9).
4 “This depends largely on the relationship I have with the others that are involved and their willingness to listen to me. If they don’t want to listen to me, I will not engage in an angry discussion” (Exemplar 8, Survey, Response to Question 9).
5 “When the issue is a sinful issue or doctrinal[ly] heretical” (Exemplar 9, Survey, Response to Question 9).
6 “Need to be spirit-led with long-suffering” (Exemplar 10, Survey, Response to Question 9).
7 “Leaders should encourage individuals to work through conflicts biblically. Providing regular instruction in a church on conflict resolution is a must” (Exemplar 1, Survey, Response to Question 9).
8 “It depends on how well I know the people involved and if I have built a level of trust with them” (Exemplar 3, Survey, Response to Question 9).
9 “I’ll involve myself when there is immediate harmful behavior being displayed. I’ll involve myself when invited to do so. I’ll involve myself when I’m in direct authority over a situation” (Exemplar 4, Survey, Response to Question 9).
10 “There are issues that others who are closer to the folks involved that it makes more sense for them to intervene. I don’t want to micro-manage my people. My job as a shepherd [is] to equip my people for ministry and not to control every situation. That would be exhausting. I get involved when the conflict is expanding and heading in a bad direction or others are starting to get hurt” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 9).

Several exemplars expressed difficulty in responding to this question due to the word “all” [as in all matters]. These exemplars were leery of any response to a question containing such absolutes. This could be the reason for the lack of consensus in the response to this question. The comments, however, were telling. Those that stated, no, responded that they would act if the situation presented the potential for harm to be done, or if they were in a position of authority by way of their position, or in situations where they had built relationships with those involved and a corresponding level of trust, or when asked. Exemplar 2 (who checked ‘yes’ as a
response) also alluded to the need for establishing trust among group members. Others who marked ‘yes’, commented on the need to be spirit-led and to rely on prayer ‘before’ engaging others. So, it seemed that the wording of this question was somewhat problematic and would need to be better written, should it be used in any future research effort.

Table 14

_Exemplar Responses to Survey Question 10, How would you define meekness?_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Strength under control.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I think of a ‘tamed’ wild animal—a tiger for instance. The tiger is controlling his strength. Still strong and wild, but under control.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“The ability to put your ego aside and seek to be an agent of God’s love and truth in any given circumstance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Strength under control.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I would define it as [a] reaction towards others with gentleness and grace. It is not weakness or apathy or [being] passive. Meekness can be very active. It doesn’t demand a certain outcome or solutions on its pre-described time schedule, it is patient. It doesn’t seek it’s [own] agenda or its own solution. It allows God to do what he will with the situation and not demand a certain outcome. It is vastly underrated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Strength under control.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Power under control. Being humbly confident. Putting others needs before your own. Not insisting on your rights.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Strength under control.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Power under control.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it is important to keep in mind that these survey responses represented the exemplars first take on the topics, and the above definitions (Table 14) only captured their preliminary thoughts on meekness. However, even early in this stage of research, the theme emerged with regard to the definition of meekness, with many exemplars defining meekness as ‘strength (or power) under control’. This theme would run throughout the interviews and this theme will be discussed later in this chapter.
Interviews

The initial interview with each exemplar was scheduled to be one-hour in length. The interview transcripts consisted of 161 single-spaced pages of text, comprised of 91,221 words, with the average transcript being 16 pages in length containing over 9,000 words. The recorded digital, voice data that was transcribed totaled 10 hours, 52 minutes, and 36 seconds. The longest interview/transcript was 20 pages containing 12,136 words. The shortest was 13 pages containing 6,603 words. On average, it took three-to-four days of solid effort (24 hours or more) to produce a single transcript from the combination of raw transcript as produced using Dragon Naturally Speaking voice-to-text software, in concert with the subject audio file of the digital voice recording. Even utilizing the voice-to-text software, this was still a painstaking process.

Table 15

*Interview Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9,323</td>
<td>1:09:38</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>9,764</td>
<td>1:05:49</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12,136</td>
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<td>6,603</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>7,340</td>
<td>59:11</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9,694</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>91,221</td>
<td>10:52:36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once all of the interviews were transcribed into Word documents, they were imported into NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software program) to begin further open coding and eventually axial coding to more thoroughly analyze the text in order to identify themes and synthesize the responses from the exemplars in an effort to answer three research questions. Effort was directed on performing the data analysis by becoming more familiar with the texts of the interviews; utilizing the emerging themes to identify a predominant overarching theme (termed selective coding). It was during this time that the researcher began writing this chapter which would lead toward describing the data analysis process below and describing the findings that materialized from the analysis.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

It is worth mentioning here that an unexpected finding resulted when learning that several of the exemplars claimed to have been passive, conflict-avoiders who had to “learn” to “step into the mess and get dirty” by entering into [engaging in] conflict, because as Christian leaders in positions of authority they possessed a duty to do so, because of their leadership “position” in Christ. So, in some ways as one exemplar put it, some have to *rise* to meekness; whereas, others must get *under* meekness (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). This revelation produced a way of viewing an important truth—that neither a total absence of anger, nor a tendency to get angry served to depict the desired behavior of a controlled and measured Christian leader during situations of conflict, let alone display before others, the Image of God. It also generated something of a model, whereby meekness appeared to be the fulcrum between two opposing options (or forces) during situations of conflict (avoidance or engagement)—where too much of one force and not enough of the other possessed the potential for continued or future conflict. See Figure 1.
Figure 1

*The Fulcrum of Meekness: Restoring Balance*

One exemplar in defining meekness provided the following response. It captures many aspects of the attribute of meekness in a paragraph of text.

So, [with meekness] we want to be controlled, measured, and in control of our emotions, we want to be understanding, we want to have a big picture of those things; we don't want to run easily into something, or run too far over something. But I don't think of meekness as being mild or under-reaching or anything like that. I think meekness is reaching appropriately…but again—to highlight humility, it’s not going beyond the appropriate place that [the] situation demands—but, it’s meeting it, where it is. So, I guess the meekness goes into where I go in hesitantly, of myself, but confidently of the Lord. And so, when I’m in a situation and I want to be meek (where I think of meek, it is a positive), I want to be hesitant—that I might not be understanding everything, or I might not be seeing this right. So, I'm appealing to God to give me an understanding as I go into that situation. To me, meekness is my posture before the Lord going into a situation and then, responding appropriately. I’ll leave it at that. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview)

One can see in this definition of meekness, neither anger, nor passivity—both seemed to have been neutralized. What is illustrated in Figure 1 is something more like cognitive dissonance on a larger, external, corporate scale, depicting where those involved in conflict need to be returned to a state of consonance (balance), which may require a display of more anger (engagement) on the part of a leader in one instance, and possibly more passivity (humility and gentleness) in another. Again, meekness seemed to serve as the fulcrum (a point of
equilibrium—which also served as a point of leverage) that facilitated the restoration of balance and was made manifest by the leader possessing the ability to wisely discern how much of one force to visit upon a particular situation. Most often, a gentle, humble, yet mature and wise comment by a respected, compassionate, empathetic leader in a position of authority served to restore peace—although, sometimes, on rare occasions a stern rebuke without apology was not only warranted, but necessary. Though most exemplars would likely agree that tending to the small ‘fires’ (minor conflicts) [something like controlled burns] was the best way to ensure situations of conflict did not grow out of control.

Other constructive findings included exemplars seeking the thoughts, opinions, and advice of trusted fellow Christians (elders, peers, friends), if and when time permitted. Again, striving to listen to understand before engaging others involved in conflict was viewed as very important. Focusing on the goal of restoring the peace that is in jeopardy, and maintaining the relationship(s); not on winning, or fixing a problem, or being right was another finding. Exemplars focused instead on restoring peace and reconciling relationships, for as one exemplar put it so wonderfully, “the relationship is more important than the result” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Field Notes).

**Research Questions**

The overall goal of any research endeavor is to answer questions. This study posed three questions; the following are the answers to these questions as derived by coding the data—synthesizing the data—as if the exemplars were responding to this questions in one voice. Below, the answers are in the form of bulleted statements.

During member checking, when conducting the follow-up to the initial interview with the exemplars, each exemplar agreed that the following bulleted responses, represented well their
thoughts, and served as fitting responses to the questions. Additionally, following these bulleted responses are themes derived that link the seemingly disparate parts to a unifying motif.

**RQ1.** What specific behaviors do exemplars identify that they perceive to be evidence of moving from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness?

- Listening (seeking first to understand)
- Genuinely loving others and wanting the best for others
- Focusing on the benefit of others, not one’s self-interests; subordinating one’s desire to win and be right
- Restoring and reconciling relationships
- Controlled [Spirit-control and self-control] governing of one’s emotions (in this case, anger) guiding one’s language, which one uses to calm passions and help diffuse and de-escalate heated situations of tension and conflict among followers
- Serving as a peacemaker, not being passive and laissez-faire, nor angry and out of control

**Theme One: Subordinating Self to Listen, Love, and Lead Others To Peace**

One theme that emerged from the data that served to answer this research question, dealt predominantly with the motivations underlying one’s behavior—in this first instance, that to operate from a posture of meekness—one cannot be directed toward oneself, or one’s self-interest, but must be focused upon what is in the best interest of others. This was accomplished by subordinating one’s ego [what Christians would refer to as submitting to Christ or dying to self] in order to truly listen to what others were saying, to discover common ground, even where none seemed to exist, to help others in times of trouble. Not because it was one’s duty, but because it was one’s sincere desire born out of a genuine love for others—with the goal of leading others through conflict when it arose, by serving as a peacemaker (secular society and the world of academia would likely prefer to use psychological counseling terms like mediator).
However, this researcher has purposefully and intentionally relied upon biblical language in an effort to employ terms more in line with God’s Word. This researcher intended to highlight, when possible, throughout this work, how the world of academia has in some instances highjacked Christian concepts and renamed them, such as employing the term ‘cognitive dissonance’, which this researcher contends is synonymous with what Christian’s would likely refer to as the conviction of the Holy Spirit. To the extent possible, this researcher will point out the use of such terms, that are employed with authority in academic papers—only because they were given power by an institution over time, such as the wanton use of the word psychological (where Christians would be apt to employ the word, spiritual).

**Listening.** The requirement to listen was emphasized often by the exemplars within the interviews—in seeking to understand others during situations of conflict. Exemplar 1 stated, “…the very first verse of Scripture I memorized and it wasn’t that I had a problem with anger, it was just in the memorization pack and that was the first one, it was James 1:19 and let every man be…quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry…for the wrath of man is not the righteousness of God…King James obviously” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would go on to say, “But, if you're someone who is willing to listen; to stay quiet while the other speaks, that right there is a start” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 4 in speaking of someone behaving in a meek manner, claimed, “It’s someone who is composed; that is humble enough to listen, first. And then, speak. [Who] [i]s seeking understanding. But [who] will speak when they think that they have some understanding” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6 would describe what he had learned from reading Paul Tripp’s book, People Change, as to how the author “talk[ed] about the four stages, [the first stage being] one, you love people; you listen to people; then, you speak to people; and then, you do something…or you ask them to do
something. So, he [Tripp] starts off with, the very first thing you do with people is not telling them how to get straight, you start off by loving them, then you *listen* to them. So, I would say…that meekness is displayed by *listening*…” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview).

**Loving for the Benefit of Others.** Loving others, was also a common topic among exemplars. Loving others, however, may sometimes appear unloving. What is loving can sometimes defy the more common definition many would first consider, as Exemplar 3 alluded to, when saying, “…meekness is operating not out of a sense of selfishness or egocentric focus, but for the benefit of other people to demonstrate the love of Christ to them. And that love can be demonstrated not necessarily in what's comfortable, it can be a confrontation” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 5 goes on to state, “And, then, in love, we should want to be a part of what God's doing in the other one’s life, which means dealing with some thorny issues—sometimes” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6 made clear that, “…Christians in the first century didn’t change the world, by going out and hating their Roman neighbors—they did it by loving them” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview).

When asked if meekness is a panacea, something that should be applicable in every situation, Exemplar 3 replied, “If meekness is ‘I’m not about me’ I’m wanting to bring Christ's love into the situation, even if it's uncomfortable, then I think, yeah, it [meekness] should operate in every circumstance. (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6 when asked to define meekness, emphasized, “Meekness…ah, [pause]…meekness is a graciousness towards other people. It’s a…meekness is a lack [of concern for self]…meekness involves seeking the other’s benefit over my own” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would go on to say, “I would define meekness as seeking the other’s benefit over yourself” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview).
Exemplar 7 provided a caution of how anger could cloud one’s judgment and could skew perspective, reminding the reader that it was important to consider the cost of attempting to win an argument, saying, “But, in the anger you can't see any of that stuff. And we get into the mode of I’m going to win. I’m going to win the argument. And I remember someone saying, is it more important to win or to love? Oh, okay, it’s more important to love” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 8 alluded to the definition of meekness that first emerged in response to survey question ten, where many exemplars defined meekness as ‘power under control’, and also spoke of the significance of subordinating one’s self-interests, commenting, “So, it’s a person who has some power, but choses to use it, not for his own benefit—but for the benefit of others—who prefers others to himself. So, he doesn’t pursue his own rights, his own privileges, but looks to the welfare of others, first…” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 10 cemented the aforementioned point, introducing the context of why Christians are to subordinate their self-interests for others best interests, by reminding one of ‘under’ Whose authority and power one operates, stating,

I’m this masterpiece that God’s made me, …creating me to do big things, that He’s prepared for me to do, then that means I have got to be able to take whatever, happiness and joy…if it’s happiness, I have got to use that to the benefit of the kingdom and put that under the control of Christ, and not under my control. So, I think anger is just a much easier emotion to be able to understand and see that with. But, I think, we have got to do that with all of our emotions. (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview)

**Variable (p): Restoring and Reconciling Relationships by Becoming Less and Less.**

Working to restore and reconcile fractured relationships was another behavior promoted by exemplars. Exemplar 10 sums up one’s limitations and one’s role in doing so, however, confessing, “I can't make people be at peace with one another, so I'm just kind of leading people to that place, to where hopefully God will bring about reconciliation, whether it’s with me or somebody else or some other folks” (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview). Several exemplars
mentioned, as Exemplar 1 does, a tendency toward being reluctant to engaging in conflict prior to becoming a Christian. Exemplar 1 stated, “before I came to faith in Christ my response would not be like to step in, it would be to watch. As a Christian leader that changed because I felt a responsibility as a shepherd to…to promote reconciliation” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 3 illustrated how conflict early in his marriage served to demonstrate the power, not only of promoting reconciliation between others, but of the importance of initiating it and extending it even within his own relationships as well.

And even with my wife, early on in our marriage we would have more acrimonious disagreements than [we do] now. I think we both learned…this is really stupid, you know. We’re both going to go apart for about two hours and she's going to always be the one that always comes back [laughing]. And I think, I need to man-up here and be the one who initiates this reconciliation. But I think we both learned over time is…it’s probably not worth fighting about—let’s deal with this more appropriately. And I think that's growth and transformation and change. (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 10 identified the need to check one’s motives during situations of conflict, stating, “…the first thing I do is check, why am I doing this? Am I doing this because I want to prove he is wrong? Am I doing this to prove I’m right? Or am I doing this, and my motive is restoration” (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview). This exemplar also offered several tactics, employed to promote reconciliation during situations of conflict by detailing the approach taken by those within his inter-city ministry, beginning with being open-minded.

The phrase we use a lot around here, especially since we are dealing across racial and class lines is, ‘help me understand’. So, when I’m in those situations, am I willing to understand. Am I willing to set aside my anger, my angst. You know, hey, I’m hurt. Can I set that aside long enough to go, well, you said this, is that what you really meant? You said this, what do you mean by saying that? And so, it’s kind of a moving [target]…you know, because we have the ministry of reconciliation, which we have…in living right with God vertically [implying the vertical beam of the cross oriented toward one’s relationship with God through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross] and horizontally [implying the horizontal beam of the cross]; living right with one another. So, how do I live that on the horizontal plane? And most of that comes back to, you know, I must become less and less…you must become more and more. (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview)
Variable (s): Calming Passions and Sowing Peace to Serve Others. As exemplars became less and less a focal point or a part of the conflict, and were viewed more and more as compassionate, empathetic, and wise leaders, they were better able to accomplish righteous objectives, not by dint of power and position, but by way of the calming presence one brought into the heated situation. Again, Exemplar 9 alluded to the ‘source’ of the exemplar’s motives and the reasons behind one’s behavior, stating, “Because it [The Bible], specifically James 3, talks about wisdom of the world, there is bitterness, jealousy, envy, strife, but the wisdom that comes from above, is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, easily entreated, sincere, and then it says, peacemakers who sow in peace will raise a harvest of righteousness” (Exemplar 9, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 5 responded, that meekness is “a genuine Christlike behavior…that God's Holy Spirit uses…to genuinely change people” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 3 claimed, “…I think the Holy Spirit has given me that ability to—I hate to [say]…the Fruit of the Spirit is self-control…I like, the Fruit of the Spirit is the control of self. The Holy Spirit is allowing me to control my self—it is not self-control…it doesn’t originate with me, because, you know, I know what I am like…” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 2 chalked up the transformation toward meekness to be derived from maturity, saying, “I think it is just maturity. I think, it's not that I don't have anger inside, I just…I'm more able to speak about it in a more rational tone than in an angry tone” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 1 implied a desire to believe the Holy Spirit was involved behind the scenes in helping control one’s behavior, “…so I would say that it is having your emotions in check and I would like to think, spirit controlled” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).
Exemplar 8 explained how the transformation in becoming a Christian prepared him to serve others as a peacemaker, stating, “...as I mentioned early on, is that I very much believed that anger was wrong—any display of anger was wrong, and that the proper response to it was to stuff it. Now, I don’t believe all anger is wrong. And I don’t believe that stuffing it is a proper response to anger. Yeah, so, my development as a Christian has totally changed my view of anger and conflict, and my role in it, you know...avoiding it versus being a godly-influencer in it. I think God has called us to that. Blessed are the peacemakers. You can’t be a peacemaker, if...you are afraid to step into the mess” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview).

But becoming a peacemaker appeared to require some degree of discernment as to when one should engage and when one should be silent. Exemplar 7 describes how, by simply not being involved in the conflict, one can use this to help others gain perspective, stating,

Yeah, so, maybe you can see both sides a little better, and because you’re not the enemy, you can go, hey, did you ever...have you ever seen...can you look at this from this view? And, they go, ah, no, not really. So, you can do that mediator role and help people see things that they probably couldn’t from the other person because their angry with them. (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 3 would agree, but would add that more engagement would be required should someone be in harm’s way or required defending or protection, commenting, “So, you know, to try and mediate and to be a peacemaker in [a] situation. And again, we’ve talked about, that there are times when that is not possible, and you realize that somebody is being hurt and you need to say something” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). This exemplar emphasized this point again, when responding later in the interview, saying,

You know, to me, I think it would be to seek some peace in the midst of that heat, you know, to help both sides to see if they're talking past one another, to see...okay, this is maybe what this person is saying and you, I don't know if you're fully grasping what they're saying and trying to...to act as a mediator in that instance, where that's there. If someone is clearly wrong to step in and protect those that are being assaulted by someone
that is just using their position or whatever to dominate or just their attitude is bad and just needs to be confronted. (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview)

Finally, Exemplar 10 shared that a Christian’s mandate to get involved is not an option. This exemplar also highlighted an irony in the term peacemaker, that despite the term a Christian leader cannot make people be at peace with one another, rather it is more an act of leading them to a place where God can do the restorative work, claiming,

I mean, some of it…leading people in conflict and dealing with anger—there’s some long-suffering that has to go on. And, you know, like Paul said, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with one another. So, I’ve got to do my part. I can’t…I’m not a peacekeeper, Jesus didn’t call me a peacekeeper. He called me a peacemaker. And so, how do I do that, well, one, realize that just have to live out principles that guide people to Christ, I can't make people be at peace with one another, so I'm just kind of leading people to that place, to where hopefully God will bring about reconciliation, whether it’s with me or somebody else or some other folks. (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview)

What one sees weaved throughout the above text—and throughout the interview transcripts—is the importance of listening; genuinely loving others; focusing on the benefit of others, not one’s self-interests; subordinating one’s desire to win and be right; desiring to restore and reconcile relationships; effort in governing of one’s emotions (in this case, anger) by being Spirit-led/Spirit-controlled, or employing self-control with the help of the Holy Spirit, in guiding one’s language, which one uses to calm passions which helps diffuse and de-escalate heated situations of tension and conflict among followers. All of these things, performed with the goal of interjecting a peaceful presence in the midst of conflict, bring peace to a situation where it was not previously present to serve others.

RQ2. What perceived past, angry behaviors experienced by exemplars generated the cognitive dissonance which served as the motivation to modify their behavior?

• Negative behavior viewed in others (e.g.—parents) and not desiring to model the same behavior whether by being overly passive, passive-aggressive, or angry
• Internal anger “brewing under the surface” which manifested itself in stoic passivity that the exemplar realized was just as damaging

• An incongruency in striving “to be” what “others see”—knowing that they are to be an example to the flock [e.g.—one’s temperament and behavior that others witness is tied to Christlikeness and one’s credibility among one’s followers]

**Theme Two: Learning Requires Underlying Tension Producing Reasons to Change**

To revisit a passage from Chapter Two, some research revealed that in order to learn, there must be an underlying tension. Plueddemann (1995) wrote, that in addition to Festinger’s theory, “Piaget felt that children do not learn unless faced with an optimum level of dissonance” (p. 50). Plueddemann (1995) stated, “Piaget is best known for exploring the mechanism and the stages of cognitive development from birth to adulthood” (p. 51). Piaget proposed “two important factors [that promote development] social interaction and the process of exploring tensions, ‘disequilibration.’” [Stating further] People tend to grow and develop as they struggle with problems in a social setting” (p. 51).

It appeared the source of perceived tension [the dissonance] that served to motivate such change within the exemplars had been internal all along, which brought about the question as to how can that be? As this would mean such motivation always existed within them, but it simply was not tapped into and utilized—until ‘they’ [the exemplars] changed ‘their’ minds [their thinking] to match ‘their’ desired behavior. It is this desire that created the added question, where did this motivation come from? The answer appeared to be from another piece of learning that, when added to previous knowledge, posed a problem. For instance, when one became a Christian and learned the Bible mentioned something one is doing is wrong, (when previously one did not think, nor care, that doing this particular something was wrong), then one must come to realize
they are to refrain from doing that something to be in harmony with Scripture, and not be considered a hypocrite. It is the revelation of this new knowledge in combination with a previously learned piece of knowledge (a desire not be a hypocrite) that created the tension, and provoked the need, desire, intention, or reason to change one’s behavior.

**A Bad Example Is Not a Good Model.** There are a few lines in a popular, classic rock song by the band Aerosmith titled, Dream On, which sum up how most people learn, “Half my life is in books written pages…Live and learn from fools and from sages…” (Tyler, 1973). The point being that learning can be derived from what one reads, by studying non-examples (fools), or striving to learn by watching and imitating sages (wise men). This study was an effort in the latter. As the former ‘non-example’ is only of limited assistance in becoming wise—it appears only to be a striving instead toward simply not appearing foolish [See Chapter Two, Solansky, p. 74]. The non-example does not present a standard of wisdom, it only aids in helping one to learn what wisdom is not.

This was well-stated by Exemplar 1, when he communicated, “Before Christ, I was looking back at the examples my dad gave, and I don’t want to be like that. And that never changed. I never wanted to be like that. He still had those issues. But instead of looking back, I now had something I was looking to. I want to become ‘that’, it's not, ‘I don't want to become that’…it’s ‘I want to become that’. And it was to be like Christ” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). Although a nuanced change in perspective, it is one that appears to make a world of difference when one focuses one’s intentions upon a model versus its antithesis. As it was for this researcher when the focus changed from studying anger, to instead making the focus of the study, meekness.
However, often it is the non-example, the direct opposite, that serves to ‘lead’ one to the example. Exemplar 1 claimed, “But the thing that shaped me most with regard to anger, as I indicated in my written answer, was my dad, a guy with a short fuse…and I saw what that short fuse would do, how he would lose it and I didn't like it…and [I] had purposed to not be like that” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6 stated, “My father had a bad temper and [an] anger problem. Anger was something you expressed to make people back down. So, I saw my anger as a defensive weapon” (Exemplar 6, Survey, Response to Question 1). Exemplar 3 mentioned, “My dad…my mom and dad…were very different. My mom was more of a stuffer and my dad was more what I call Italian in his temperament [laughing]. He, my dad, would get mad, he’d blow, and then five minutes later if there's distance in the relationship…he’s like, ‘What's the matter?’” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Finally, Exemplar 5 would remark, “…my dad was not a hothead, but there were some times I saw some pretty good anger. My mom's pretty controlling, and so, particularly as I became a teenager there was a lot of frustration involved with that…that would come out as anger” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). Each exemplar sought instead to use the example of Christ as their lodestar.

**Anger is Not a Sin and Stoic Passivity is Not Meekness.** But it was not only exhibitions (or outward expressions) of anger that served (as non-examples) to motivate a transformation toward meekness amongst exemplars, it was also when the exemplars learned (realized) that holding anger in, was not healthy or helpful, either. Several of them expressed how in sensing internal anger “brewing under the surface” which manifested itself outwardly in something like a stoic passivity, that the exemplars realized this form of anger was just as damaging. Despite one’s desire not to act upon one’s anger, that in striving to suppress it, to ‘stuff it’ was not
serving oneself, others’ best interests, or God, and in fact was likely, or more likely, to be more harmful than addressing and confronting the situation in a thoughtful and measured way.

Exemplar 1 stated, “It is taking what is bubbling up, boiling and brewing in your head and heart and just dumping it—although, you again, [for] there is often the question is the emotion of anger unexpressed still a sin?” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 5 clarified that anger was not a sin, saying, “…the first thing you have to recognize is it is not a sin to be angry. Because if you try to stuff it and not [deal with it]…that’s not going to work. It’ll explode sometime later. So, you recognize, it is not a sin to be angry. But it’s figuring out why I’m angry” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview).

Others had to ‘learn’ that anger was not a sin. Exemplar 8 for instance, remarked, “I would say, you know, probably, my behavior response to anger would be…to be quiet; would be to stuff it. I would say that I always thought of anger as not a good thing. Even when I became a Christian” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 8 would continue by saying, “Because…because I very much…as I mentioned early on, is that I very much believed that anger was wrong—any display of anger was wrong, and that the proper response to it was to stuff it. Now, I don’t believe all anger is wrong. And I don’t believe that stuffing it is a proper response to anger” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview).

How did the learning happen? Exemplar 1 offered the following when asked, do you think your view of anger has changed? What brought about the change?

Yeah, I think that is one of the things…the evidence of salvation is the indwelling God. And the evidence of the indwelling Spirit of God is the change…the transformation…and now again… my family would not look at me and go, Wow!, he is just so radically changed. He was a raving lunatic. But I know the change…again being someone who tended toward being quiet, they didn’t know what was brewing under the surface, but I did, and so when you start to see the spirit of God work in your own life in ways that others may not see or wouldn’t notice necessarily then you start to realize, “Hey, I’m a believer. I really am. And so that for me was the clear change. Early on in my Christian
Exemplar 1’s response represented a theme echoed by the other exemplars. Exemplar 3 described how he observed a similar transformation in his mother who was prone to repressing her anger, but who learned to express her anger. He stated,

And I think of my mom, too, and how she responded to her anger was also...for her it wasn’t outward expression, for her—growth needed to be in expressing her dissatisfaction or her anger in an appropriate way not just stuffing it down. And she, I think, learned...it’s healthier to get this stuff out than to stuff it all down. (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview)

**Seeking Congruency: The Need “To Be” What Others “See”**. Cognitive dissonance seemed synonymous with perceiving [sensing] oneself to be something of a hypocrite as one came to realize that two cognitions were out of synch, producing an internal angst, an internal discomfort, which remained until the situation was rectified. For several of the exemplars, professing a belief in Jesus Christ and the truth contained in Scripture, yet behaving in ways that were odds with what was written in Scripture, and which appeared un-Christlike, served as motivation to unite beliefs with behaviors. Again, Festinger would inform the reader that there are two ways to repair this breech, either by changing one’s behavior or by changing one’s mind. Several exemplars spoke of an incongruency in “their character” that generated a motivation…a striving “to be” what “others see”—when becoming Christian leaders—realizing they were to be an example to the flock. The exemplars realized one’s temperament and behavior, that others were able to easily observe, affected one’s credibility among one’s followers. And, because of this, certain things had to be set right.

Exemplar 1 mentioned ‘the need to be what others see’ is not only a requirement for Christian leaders, but all Christians, stating, “And I was thinking about this actually as we were
talking about…a pastor can't afford to be angry in public, and be an example in front of the flock, and in truth, neither can a Christian, because we represent Christ” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 7 provided insight into the fact that the incongruency and resulting changes do not have to be monumental, or even observable to others to be recognized as a problem (it is a problem the moment the individual senses the need for change), stating, “…it’s been a great walk with God for forty-some years now. He’s done…you know, I was a compliant kid, so there’s not a lot of huge outward changes in me, but there were a lot of inward changes, you know, in pride, and other things that you can kind of keep hidden as a “good” kid” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). The Bible instructs, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Many exemplars, therefore, spoke of ‘working’ on areas that were not always visible to others.

However, sensing and realizing that correcting such deficiencies, often seemed outside of the exemplar’s ability to ‘fix’ on one’s own. Exemplar 4 presented nearly a step-by-step process for acquiring meekness, stating,

First, I want to exemplify—what we are talking about, meekness. So, as a leader I want to demonstrate those characteristics that we have already talked about, so just throw all of those, in here, to that point. Gosh, I think just trying to do it face-to-face and try to drill down into what the real issues are. Obviously, bathe it all in prayer. Try to have an end goal in mind. You know, we all want to please God; glorify Him, and accomplish whatever it is—that particular issue or situation might give out. Draw in those people who have those experiences or have experience in this, or might have something to say about this. Rather than thinking that I have all of the answers and try to bring in a community or some other people to help with that. Realize that there is time involved. It doesn't happen just like that. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 7 shared how the source of motivation to change behavior was closer to home, addressing an episode where anger nearly resulted in behaving in a way that would have been inappropriate in front of his young child, stating, “I didn't want to set a bad example for my
children, so that was mostly discouragement and that it was an issue that needed to be addressed—before it got out of hand” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6 offered similar insight, stating,

Another pivotal moment for me was our youngest son, he’s got a short fuse and he gets angry quick, and he’s only 17 now, but I still remember when he was three, and he would just have this volatile temper—and my DNA I’m sure. Not my wife’s. And he was kind of like yelling at me as this three-year-old, and I would stand and I’d be looking at him, and I’m yelling back and saying things like, “you’re not my weight-class”, “I’m going to win this argument”, and I’m trying to correct my son by being angrier than him, and there was this moment of where, I was like, what in the world am I by doing? I'm trying to out angry my kid and all I'm doing is just driving that stake deeper. It was enlightening, being this horrible example. And I quite honestly feel in some ways like that’s…I don’t want to get off on this side-note, but I feel that we’re tempted as we deal with the world and our culture, that we think if we just yell louder than our neighbors that we can win the argument. We’re not. It’s not how we are going to share the gospel. That is not how we are going to change hearts, so I get the impulse. I get it. And I have done it way too much in my life. But I think meekness…is vital. Vital for our Christian witness, especially at this time. (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview)

Whether it was the result of observing nonexamples in one’s past and desiring to be unlike these ‘examples’, or whether it was a subtle anger brewing under the surface within the exemplars—observable to others—in the form of [a lie] exhibited as stoic passivity—where others would never suspect the internal feelings rising up, or whether it was learning a new piece of information that placed one’s behavior at odds with being in harmony with biblical teachings contained in Scripture, ‘something’ served to establish a tension leading the exemplars on a path toward transformation. One’s motivation became, over time, a desire to truly follow the example of Christ presented in Scripture, and not merely strive “to be” what others “see”—even though this may have been one’s original motivation. The original motivation led to subsequent motivations as one realized that a bad example is not a good model. As each exemplar grew in their faith and matured, they ‘learned’ anger was not a sin, and that stoic passivity was not
meekness. They learned that their behavior needed to change, and they, endeavored to learn how to do so.

**RQ3.** How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness?

- Prayer
- Study of God’s Word (The Bible)
- Time spent among fellow believers
- A genuine desire to become Christlike
- Maturity
- Experience
- Holy Spirit’s work in one’s life
- Learning (applying logic and reason)
- Greater and greater conviction (growing) in one’s faith

**Theme Three: Tending to the Many Variables**

**Variable (a): Obviously, Bathe it All in Prayer.** Throughout the interviews, the exemplars addressed the power of prayer and the need to pray. Exemplar 3 said, “My prayer was, “My prayer was, God change me or change the circumstance—and I think he changed me” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 4 claimed, “Well, constant prayer. It is that constant communication with God in whatever situation. That’s the gift that He’s given us—is that opportunity to pray without ceasing. Practicing the presence of God in all things” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). This exemplar added, “Obviously, bathe it all in prayer” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 9 spoke of the need to pray for others, not only for oneself, saying, “So, …I try to, I try to portray [for others] an environment where people are…I pray every week, in my pastoral prayer…I still do a pastor prayer that our lives will be characterized by the Fruit of the Spirit, rather than our sin
nature” (Exemplar 9, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 6, “…I think just going back to the Word and being reminded…you know, like Paul says, in Ephesians, he prays that they would understand more and more the depth of God’s love for them” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview). Although not ranked, prayer would seem to be a vital variable when seeking to change one’s behavior—either one’s own or that of others—from a propensity toward anger to a propensity toward meekness.

**Variable (b): The Source-Book.** The study of God’s Word was indicated as another critical variable to help ensure one was ready to respond in accordance with the truth of Scripture, and not merely by issuing one’s own advice, to aid those engaged in conflict. Exemplar 3 communicated how one’s own attempts, though seemingly successful, may still lack important qualities, saying, “If I don't respond with the truth of God's Word…it may create less tension or conflict, but it's not going to be ultimately loving for them [those involved in conflict]” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). There was little doubt that the Bible was considered the exemplar’s authoritative “Source-Book”.

When asked how the transformation took place in their lives, the exemplars identified many things, some of these things have been identified as variables by this researcher, but it was clear that the Bible was instrumental and fundamental to one’s transformation and central to one’s coming to possess the attribute of meekness. Exemplar 7 alluded to this, “And so, as I've grown and looked at the Bible, and grown in maturity…my understanding of it [the Bible] has grown a lot” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would go on to say, “God's Word. It teaches you in there, and you get examples of that…So, that, [you see] you have choices in your response, that I think I see in the Bible, but I also see that God has changed my nature, so that I can respond more appropriately.” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 8 would add, “I mean, really, it’s just the study of the Bible and being around Christians, and
having…gaining…a biblical understanding of anger, and emotions. Like I said in my survey answer, it’s not just anger…it’s all various emotions. Obviously, a biblical understanding of emotions, and how we are to respond…and to what is a valid emotion that you need to discern something about, and what is a selfish response that you need to repent of—kind of thing” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 9 summed it up succinctly, stating, “I just try to obey the Bible” (Exemplar 9, 2021, Interview).

**Variable (c): The Effects of Time Spent Among Fellow Believers.** Whether it was overcoming anger or growing in wisdom, time spent among fellow believers factored significantly into the equation shared by exemplars. Exemplar 8 expressed how one needs to seek out someone who is likeminded who one can talk to, saying, “So, it’s good to talk to a fellow believer who has some wisdom and maturity of their own, who is trying to learn” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 4 mentioned, “What would help the anger was being in a community of believers that knew we wanted to be Christlike; knew that a lot of emotions weren’t necessarily Christlike” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would also present a question one should ask oneself often, “Are you in relationship with others…other believers—to be able to interact with as you described before?” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 7 expressed the gravity of isolating oneself, stating,

Yeah, that’s what, we’re talking about in church, right now—about community. And if you isolate as a Christian, …it's bad—that’s where I have seen all my friends fall. So, community is so important, that you go with people who are like-minded, or who you want to be like…so, that really does influence you…and how you behave…and how you see the world. (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 4 summed up in a sentence his thoughts, remarking, “And so I thank God that I had that community of believers” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview).
Variable (d): Christlikeness Equated with the Image of God Exposes Meekness. As stated in Scripture, and as outlined in Chapter Two’s literature review, human beings were created in the Image of God. If one believes the Bible, one will (or should) seek to live in accordance with Scripture and desire to become, Christlike. Christlikeness is a word bantered about in Christians circles, but it captures, carries, and conveys the essence of the goal and purpose behind every human life [from a Christian perspective]—to seek to become like Christ. It may be helpful to proceed beyond the somewhat esoteric concept of Christlikeness to present more concrete attributes Christians seem to be pursuing in seeking the Person of Christ, such as truth, wisdom, and virtue (in a word, righteousness). For the exemplars, each embarked on paths toward Christlikeness for many years, as evidenced in the demographics depicted earlier in this chapter. Their genuine desire to become Christlike was clearly obvious to this researcher.

Seeking Christlikeness, or the Image of God, required an internal desire to pursue the attributes of Christ. It goes back to that initial conundrum—described by Knight (2006) in Chapter Two—of what comes first, determining what is real, or determining what is true and then making a faith-choice in coming to possess a worldview that views God’s Word as truth and what the Bible presents within its pages as real, not a metanarrative (but a Meganarrative), a story of all stories of how the world began and how it will end…and also how one is to live, in and amongst others, in the here and now, until that last day comes.

The exemplars’ words captured the essence of their desire to become like Christ, and its impact. Exemplar 1, when asked during the interview if he would consider the transformation in how he approached conflict today compared to the distant past to have resulted from resolving any internal conflict between his internal beliefs and his corresponding outward behavior, stated,
“Yeah, I mean, even without much thought the answer is, of course…because before Christ I was not remotely in the image of Christ, and now that I am in Christ, I have a direction for my life and that is to become like Christ” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 4’s response addressed the collective desire among Christian exemplars to seek Christlikeness.

I think what probably took you to this topic is the issue of anger, but what you want…what we want…is Christlikeness. We want to be like Christ. And we see in some of our anger that – we don't think that represents Him, but we do want to live like Him. So, how can we do that? We gone to Him with the righteous anger, so that is Christlike, so what does that mean to have that anger? But you also went to Him with the illustration of meekness, but what does that really mean? And I think just the pursuit…our pursuit of Christlikeness is a worthy pursuit. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 5 communicated,

I think what God’s given us the opportunity to do is to be like God. He has given us a choice. So, He saves us. He indwells us with his Holy Spirit. We have the truth of his Word, and then, we have this choice in what we do with our thoughts, words, and deeds…We’re being given the opportunity…knowing good and evil…to choose good…but it’s what am I going to do with the motivations inside of me? I have a couple of options. And I want the option to be the one Christ would take, if He was making the choice. (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 10 described how his view of anger has changed and continued to change as he matured as a Christian, explaining,

Well, I guess, I’ll nuance the question to say, I think I have a different view of anger than I did twenty years ago than twenty months ago. So, as Christ…as we become more Christlike; hopefully, those things, you know, that God calls us to put off…you know, I just envision Paul saying…that don’t look good on you. So, he’s saying put off these things, and Paul says, let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth…well, let’s be honest, a lot of that stems out of anger, frustration, or your goals are blocked, or whatever. (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 5 also spoke of how in becoming Christlike, we continue to grow, implying one never truly reaches the target, commenting, “If we hit the target, we continue to grow in Christlikeness—that Christlikeness growth also occurs when we humble ourselves and ask for
forgiveness” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). When asked if meekness was a panacea, this exemplar responded, “[I]t’s not a panacea in the sense that it's some sort of covering over things. It’s a genuine Christlike behavior…that God's Holy Spirit uses…to genuinely change people” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). So, it would seem as one grows in Christlikeness, one also acquires greater degrees of meekness—that, in turn, becomes character traits born and displayed in one’s outward behavior—powered perhaps and motivated by the Holy Spirit. Exemplar 6 summed this up succinctly stating, “Christian meekness is Christlikeness” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview).

**Spiritual and Emotional Maturity.** Another factor exemplars mentioned as performing a role in one’s transformation was maturity. Exemplar 2 claimed, “I think it is just maturity. I think, it's not that I don't have anger inside, I just…I'm more able to speak about it in a more rational tone than in an angry tone” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). He would go on to state, “To compare it [change in perspective] back to then…it’s just maturity, I think” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 3 would agree, saying, “Yeah, experience, maturity, feedback from others, probably most specifically my wife, you know, I think she is the one that's closest…and is willing to confront me when necessary” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 4 would add how maturity has helped him avoid previous temptations to engage in former behavior, saying, “And so I thank God that I had that community of believers. I had the Word there. I had a good understanding of the Holy Spirit, confession, repentance, and a filling…that was able to track ourselves along; to where now, decades later, I haven't even had to use that [former Scripture memory verses], because I would like to think the maturity is such that I’m not even tempted to go to some of those places with my emotions—that weren’t heathy or that wouldn’t be heathy’ (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 10 addressed the need for emotional maturity on the
part of Christian leaders, commenting, “Yeah, I’m saying, you know, there is an emotional maturity as a leader. You know, there is that emotional content of leading that we can’t disregard” (Exemplar 10, 2021, Interview).

**Experience.** Experience was also viewed as a factor in one’s transformation—whether derived from one’s own experience or derived from watching or listening to others. Exemplar 2 stated, emphatically, “Experience. Experiences. You don't get to be seventy-three years old and not experience some tough moments in life. Career moments that were a little bit dicey. Moments with family. Moments with friends that you had to work through” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would also add, “Because you cannot disregard the fact that other people around the table or in the room or whatever are thinking as well, and they have their own experiences, and their own judgments, and their own things that have influenced them and they may see that just a little different than you do and their idea may be the help…the biggest help” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 3 also alluded to experience, claiming, “I think just experience, you know, you realize through making mistakes that, okay, I probably should just shut up and not say anything” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). This exemplar also addressed the need to consider the underlying motivation before acting today, versus when he was younger, stating, “Back then, I came to Christ in my early 20s, so I didn't have a lot of life experience but I’ve come to that place where I look at anger—it’s like, okay, what's behind this? What is driving this emotion; whereas, before I don't think I would do much introspective looking at why I was angry…I was just ticked off” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). He concluded, “And I don’t know how to get that perspective, other than by living. So, getting there. A part of it is just time and experience and you realize you know more at an internal level just how good God is, and how gracious He is, and how patient
He is. I think that just kind of begins to wear off and helps me to be patient with other people” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview).

Finally, Exemplar 4 shared,

There have been two times in my life…where I woke up…and I very specifically woke up, and said, “I was created for this.” I was made for this. And it was one time in New Orleans with that urban ministry, and early on in this ministry here. Where all my gifting, experiences, etc., all come to where I was made for this. And the “this” wasn’t anywhere near what I had thought it was going to be—way back when. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview)

**Function g(x): Holy Spirit’s Work in One’s Life.** One may recall from Chapter Two, that in listing the many works of the Holy Spirit, Grudem (1994) informed us, “Another aspect of the Holy Spirit’s revealing work is teaching certain things to God’s people and illumining them so that they can understand things” (p. 644). During the interviews, it was obvious, the exemplars relied upon and trusted the Holy Spirit to guide them in the learning process. When this researcher asked the following question, “I wonder who is doing that teaching, though?” Exemplar 2 responded without hesitation, “Oh, that’s the Holy Spirit…that’s the Holy Spirit. You know, it’s that still small voice in the back of your head…yeah, it's there for me a lot and as it becomes louder…I know” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 2 also alluded to how one may employ reason and logic, but that it is the Holy Spirit at work in the situation, saying, “It’s in that angst, that internal conflict that we’re trying to figure it out rationally and logically, but the Holy Spirit is giving us perspective and leading us to, hopefully, a solution” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 3 described how the Holy Spirit has helped him change the way he responds during conflict, proclaiming, “And so I think that…what gave me the ability not to respond in that way…to me, I chalk that up to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life through the years and just saying, hey, you don’t need to respond in that way” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). This
exemplar also explained how it was not solely the Holy Spirit’s role to teach and transform us, but was also one’s task to aid in the learning process by studying one’s Bible, saying, “But to me, the primary work is the work of the Holy Spirit and those people being in the Word recognizing, okay, there’s a time for righteous anger, but most of my anger is probably not righteous” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). It appeared that one must be exposing one’s mind to God’s truth via His Word before the Holy Spirit can illuminate that truth in one’s heart to unite these two domains (the cognitive and affective domains) of learning, so that righteous behavior can become the result.

Exemplar 5 spoke of a decision on the part of one to make the ‘choice’ to pursue the relationship with the Holy Spirit and then be obedient in responding, stating, “…and the essential thing there is, is that miraculous transformation that occurs at the moment of salvation. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and then, the choice we make to pursue that relationship” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). He goes on to say, “I think what God’s given us is the opportunity…to be like God. He has given us a choice. So, he saves us. He indwells us with his Holy Spirit. We have the truth of his Word, and then, we have this choice in what we do with our thoughts, words, and deeds” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 3 summed up the thoughts of many of his peers, saying, “To me, it's just that gracious gentle work of the Holy Spirit over time and just mellowing us out” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 5 said, “It’s a genuine Christlike behavior…that God's Holy Spirit uses…to genuinely change people” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 7 commented, “The Holy Spirit comes in and gives you that power not to sin” (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview). And Exemplar 8 remarked, “Obviously, through my coming to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior and having the Holy spirit working with me, …studying God’s Word…and being around
other Christians for the last thirty-four years” [that has served to change me] (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview).

Clearly the Holy Spirit (both in the minds and the words of these exemplars) was viewed as the ‘change-agent’ directly involved in the process of leading to one’s transformation over time. It is important to emphasize that each exemplar conveyed the need to be actively involved in the learning process, by applying logic and reason (cognitive functions) in order to be rewarded with the revelation or illumination of the Holy Spirit’s instruction (affective function at an internal spiritual level) in order to learn the lesson.

**Learning—Applying Logic and Reason to Evaluate Situations.** Several exemplars spoke of the need to ‘learn’ by realizing that newly acquired knowledge would likely not be applied perfectly “straight-out-of-the-gate”, and that mistakes would likely happen. One must not be afraid to put the effort in—nor mull excessively over early mistakes, either; but instead to endeavor to learn from one’s mistakes, grow, and move on. Exemplar 1 said, “…you don't night-and-day just change…but I think learning to control your anger is growth” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 5 offered this on how he dealt with anger in the cognitive domain, partnered with biblical instruction, saying,

“I worked very hard to control anger, particularly, in the thought-realms. So, the verses I would memorize…something happened and “Boom” you could feel it come up inside of you, you know, and I would start reciting a memory verse. Or, if I was in the car by myself for instance, I start singing a song that I had learned in church, out loud, just to cover over the thought. To kind of get out of there and, then, do the analysis of, okay, now, why did I get angry? Once the emotion was under control, why was I angry? Most of the time, it was because I felt like my rights had been…[violated]…you know, I was selfish” (Exemplar 5, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 6 stated, “I mean, I know, intellectually, there are reasons to be angry. There are things to be angry about. I know that’s true. I don’t think, I’ve often seen anger done well” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 3 would add,
Yeah, like I said, just to realize there’s a reason that I'm feeling angry, okay. I see nowhere in Scripture where it says feel a particular way. Emotions just hit me and then, it’s like okay, is that a justified emotion? Or not. And, all of those things—to me—need to be evaluated and it's like, okay, I'm mad right now. Okay, why am I my mad? I'm mad because my day was planned to go this way and now, none of that stuff is going to happen, my expectations are [impacted]...and it’s like, okay, that's not really a great reason (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview)

This researcher would respond to this exemplar, asking “So, you are using a little bit of intellect and logic?” Exemplar 3 responded, “I evaluate my anger much more now; whereas before, I would just [gestures, shrugs, like, ‘whatever’]. Probably shouldn’t, but…I’m much more introspective now as a believer than I was…” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 3 continued,

I guess the motivation, or the reason behind my anger may be different, but I don't view anger—I didn’t view it back-then, as just negative, you know. And I don't view it now as negative. Back then, I came to Christ in my early 20s, so I didn't have a lot of life experience but I’ve come to that place where I look at anger—it’s like, okay, what's behind this? What is driving this emotion; whereas, before I don't think I would do much introspective looking at why was angry…I was just ticked off. (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview)

Exemplar 4 commented on pushing on through early errors and mistakes, saying,

Yeah, I think it’s just continuing to journey. Not being afraid that once I do screw up that I learn from it and I just keep walking down that road—willing to learn and to grow and not just drawback because I made a mistake, and I won’t try that again. No, and this is part of the sanctification process…that continual walk. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview)

Finally, Exemplar 8 described the transformation to the view he held of anger and asserting his position power [as an administrator of a Christian school] to protect and defend those under his charge, stating “I mean, before I was a Christian, I just thought all anger was wrong—and should be suppressed, you know. I don’t believe that anymore. I believe that there are reasons to be angry, and that sometimes you need to do nothing, and sometimes you need to talk to the person...just to work through whatever relational problem” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview). This exemplar would continue to explain, “Because then, then I realized, being meek, you know, in not asserting my power over the other person is actually hurting another
person. I need to step in and exercise the power I’ve been given to end this” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview). And finally, “So, I’ve learned how to exercise my authority better, at least in managing conflict situations. When to shut it down and when to let people talk” (Exemplar 8, 2021, Interview).

Variable (t): Time— also Known as (aka) Growth Periods. Closely related to maturity and experience, and what might also be seen as applying reason and logic (acquired from learning) is the variable of time itself. Each exemplar expressed how time is working behind the scenes—even when one doesn’t recognize it. Exemplar 2 captured his observation of the effects of time, when he shared,

It [time] allowed me to be concerned about other things and think about what I was reading in the Bible, or what I was hearing in church a little more deeply and more understandingly. But I can’t say that there was just a ‘snap’ and my anger was gone or other things had taken its place. It's…it's been a growth thing. So, I would say it's hard for me to just say this is plus and this is minus. It's been a process…over time. And I think, I never really got to a fullness of who I am until I was in my 30s. (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview)

This exemplar would add, “…I still have growth periods in my life and I am 73 years old. There are still parts of my life that I'm not totally satisfied with as far as personal growth…there is still more work to do” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview). He concluded with this profound spoken thought, “God's never through with you” (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 4 spoke of the need to use time to one’s advantage, by not rushing to judgment, drawing rash conclusions or responding in haste; advising that it is best to seek the advice of others if there is time, stating, “Rather than thinking that I have all of the answers…try to bring in a community or some other people to help with that [situation of conflict]. Realize that there is time involved. It doesn't happen just like that” (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview). Exemplar 3 spoke of gaining perspective and God’s goodness over of time, “The reality is as you look at the
goodness of God over time. I don’t know how to get that perspective, other than by living. So, getting there. A part of it is just time and experience, and you realize more at an internal level just how good God is, and how gracious He is, and how patient He is” (Exemplar 3, 2021, Interview).

Exemplar 6 spoke of how it may take more time for those within whom anger is deeply-rooted to change, “Where people who have had years and years of consistent anger issues, I think it takes longer for that transition to happen, because of terrible habits, and God has to transform those [bad habits] to conform us in the image of His son. So, I think the transforming processes is slower than we want” (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview). And Exemplar 7 added how time, again, gives one perspective, stating,

So, I just realized as I have gotten older…as I have walked longer in this world—you don’t have to get involved in everything, but there are certain things you need to get involved in, even though, all of my senses inside are like this is going to be messy, it’s going to be ugly, it's going to take time. You don't want to…invest time here, but you’ve got to, because that’s either your Christian duty, or it’s my military duty, as a leader…and I've got to. And you’ve just got to wade-in and it's going to be messy, and you know it, but that's life. (Exemplar 7, 2021, Interview).

Time was a “dependent variable” that played a significant role in the transformation process. Not only was time itself a variable, but the time invested in the other variables also factored into the equation. Time multiplied the effects of praying, reading and studying one’s Bible, and being in community with other believers. These things, combined with the work the Holy Spirit, served to bring about one’s transformation. Meekness was not an objective, it was a side-benefit, a corollary, a by-product of growing and maturing into Christlikeness.

**Variable (e): Growing in One’s Faith and Relationship with Christ.** Growing and maturing in one’s faith does not require performing the other variables (Scripture tells us faith in Christ alone is sufficient). The exemplars would contend that the more one engaged in each of
the other identified variables, the better the likelihood of being transformed to leave behind one’s undesired behaviors and acquire and exhibit behaviors that are more aligned with the Image of God that one is seeking—to more fully display the Fruit of the Spirit. For several of the exemplars, the goal was to grow in one’s faith to be better prepared and enabled to do the things God would have them do—feed His sheep and tend to His flock.

Exemplar 1 commented, “I was explaining to someone that I am an introverted extrovert…in situations like this [conflict]…especially before I came to faith in Christ. My response would not be…to step in—it would be to watch. As a Christian leader that changed because I felt a responsibility as a shepherd to promote reconciliation” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview). This exemplar stated how quickly this initial transformation could happen, claiming, “early in my Christian life…within weeks of coming to faith in Christ, it's like, I [realized] my anger won’t accomplish God's righteous purposes, and so that shaped how I viewed anger from that point on” (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview).

This same exemplar would describe, once again, how for some—the transformation may not happen in one flail swoop, referring to Scripture, remarking,

You get a guy like Peter who was a famously ready, shoot, aim kind of guy. Well, even after he came to faith in Christ, he still had those tendencies. He was a guy who would be willing to stand up in front of thousands of Jews and point at them, and say, Who you crucified. We do not know his emotion…was it anger? I think God takes what would be rightly understood as maybe a weakness or a character flaw and He can turn them into a strength. (Exemplar 1, 2021, Interview)

Again, for some, change takes time and involves making mistakes and gaining experience before one will fully mature in Christlikeness, to the point where one will exhibit an attribute, like meekness. Exemplar 6 also referred to Scripture, linking several of the aforementioned variables to illustrate that it is in this dialectic, this back and forth, of trial and error that one’s faith grows as lessons are re-learned and reiterated as one overcomes mistakes by returning to
God’s Word, praying, relying on other believers in the Body of Christ to come to a deeper understanding—and a stronger conviction to one’s faith as a result. Exemplar 6 said,

I think just going back to the Word and being reminded…like Paul says, in Ephesians, he prays that they would understand more and more the depth of God’s love for them. And I think, just coming to settle more into that, and understand how much He loves us; how much He’s for us…gives me a reservoir to draw on, to not have to be angry, to not have to be so defensive, when someone confronts me with a sin, or some way I’ve let them down – that doesn't totally define me. I blew it. And I need to acknowledge that, and that doesn’t wash-away every single thing I’ve done before. I need to acknowledge this and grow and move on, but, for lack of a better word, my self-worth or my hope is still safe because it’s with Christ and that can’t be touched. I would say, that kind of growing…understanding, and even, not just understanding, I knew it before—but there’s just ways we have to experience it. I think you get the Word and the Body of Christ coming together, to let you have an experience in a way that makes it real. That…really is transformative. (Exemplar 6, 2021, Interview)

Calculus Revisited

It is important to keep in mind, the above list of thematic variables were a consolidation of many codes merged to become these variables [extrapolated and compiled by this researcher] and themes derived from the exemplars’ data taken from interview transcripts that answered the truly important Research Question 3, (How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness), for it is these things that the exemplars contended led to their being able to listen, to love, and to focus one’s behavior on the benefit of others, etc., addressed in Research Question 1. These things also served to help restore peace, an inner sense of consonance within their spirit addressed in Research Question 2. But these things ultimately led to these exemplars being able to come to lead others in industry and pastoral settings and to serve others by fulfilling the role of peacemaker. Take for instance, the following extended quote of one of the exemplars.

I think being able to calm the situation…point people to the issue rather than the relationship or the situation that the person's having with someone. The reason we’re here is for X. So, is this helping solve X? And I think the other thing is…is that I have found for myself, I have been able to from time to time—not every time, but—a fair number of
times been able to summarize where we’re at. To take the idea of the person [that] is really flamed up, to take the idea of a person [who] is a little bit more at ease and [in] total disagreement with that person and summarize them and find a way to work those things together. It’s not always possible. Sometimes people just have to say, okay, I give in. I will do this, because that's the best thing for the group or the situation, but for me that's been able to, I think, that diffuses things sometimes. Today people are being heard and understood, and being understood at a level that they…they can appreciate. (Exemplar 2, 2021, Interview).

It now seems a fitting point to return to the calculus analogy, for the purpose of illustration, in order to depict something more simply, that otherwise would be difficult to describe, arising out of the data. The goal is not to employ or teach calculus here, but to make use of how a function within calculus can employ many variables in an effort to calculate the magnitude of change on a particular dependent variable. Although many Christians would not see maturing in Christlikeness as being formulaic—to this researcher, in this study, something of a formula did emerge from the data.

**Probabilistic Model**

Stochastic calculus deals with probability and statistics and it is used in the world of finance, queuing theory, and computer algorithms. John Hopkins University’s (Whiting School of Engineering, Department of Applied Mathematics and Statistics) website states, “Stochastic processes are probabilistic models for random quantities evolving in time or space. The evolution is governed by some dependence relationship between the random quantities at different times or locations” (John Hopkins University, n.d., Probability and Stochastic Processes). Basically, this form of calculus makes use of calculations based upon the principles of the probability along the lines of “if this happens,” then this outcome is more likely. Again, the use of calculus here serves as an expedient for display purposes only.

For the purpose here, the following equation is intended to give a very basic, visual representation of what this researcher is attempting to convey, one hoped in a clear and succinct
fashion, in order to avoid generating many pages of a written text, providing a detailed explanation of such a model. Again, this researcher issues the disclaimer that there was no attempt being made here to give this study quantitative credibility, merely to use the following to help one gain a clear sense of the simplicity of a model that would be far harder to explain in any other way that this researcher could envision.

**Figure 2**

*Probabilistic Model Illustrative Equation – The Function of Becoming a Christian Exemplar*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F(x) = t • ((a) + (b) + (c) + (d) + (e) + (p) + (s) + (v))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F(x) = Function of becoming a Christian exemplar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x = degree (magnitude) of meekness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a = prays often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b = reads (studies) Bible often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c = interacts with fellow believers (in Christian community) often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d = is deeply committed to one’s belief in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e = desires to grow in relationship with Christ (submits to Christ’s teaching)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = seeks peace in self (internally) and between and among others (externally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s = desires to serve and not be served (humility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t = time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v = effort directed towards things perceived as virtuous (possessing moral value)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Incorporating the Holy Spirit into the Equation**

One may substitute one function into another function, for instance, one could incorporate the function f(x), from above, into a new function g(x) where it would become g(f(x)) = Christlikeness. Where one may designate the function g(x) as the work of the Holy Spirit magnifying and multiplying the effects of the function of meekness f(x).

The point of all of this is to illustrate that the exemplars either recommended doing these things or reported doing these things (the things identified as variables ‘a’ through ‘v’) and doing
them often, over long periods of time, as it is these things which lead to the acquisition of, not only the attribute of meekness, but also Christlikeness. The time variable was something of a composite comprised of age, maturity, and experience. But the caveat is that the Holy Spirit’s work in one’s life is the crucial function in giving context to the content—instilling the true lessons in the learning process; molding and shaping the Christian exemplar more and more into the Image of God and the likeness of Christ, only through the habitual application of what has been learned. The acquisition of meekness seemed to be merely a by-product produced by way of the process of transformation.

**The Epiphany**

During coding of the data in NVivo 12, this researcher combined various codes to come up with the above themes (in a process of data analysis termed axial coding), and ultimately performed the final step by selectively coding the data, which involved synthesizing everything that had been researched and identifying the core component—the ‘one thing’ that captured and encapsulated it all, when this researcher read over the following passage of text.

I think what probably took you to this topic is the issue of anger, but what you want…what we want…is Christlikeness. We want to be like Christ. And we see in some of our anger that – we don't think that represents Him, but we do want to live like Him. So, how can we do that? We’ve gone to Him with the righteous anger, so that is Christlike, so what does that mean to have that anger? But you also went to Him with the illustration of meekness, but what does that really mean? And I think just the pursuit…our pursuit of Christlikeness is a worthy pursuit. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview).

**Variable (v): The Pursuit of Righteousness—a Biblical Virtue**

It is the pursuit itself, the earnest movement in the direction of Christlikeness, that sets Christian exemplars on the path toward righteousness [a biblical virtue]—which is a process of sanctification. One does those things one professes to believe, in order to come closer and closer to the fundamental congruency of integrity between one’s (internal) beliefs and one’s (external)
actions (one’s behavior). It is the incongruity between two cognitions that are psychologically [again, this researcher prefers the word, spiritually] inconsistent, one experiences dissonance [referencing from the Literature Review, Chapter Two, Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance]. This path to consonance also leads one into community with other believers, exposing one’s strengths as well as one’s weaknesses. It is in this social laboratory where the commitment to these relationships is put to the test and kept in check. Over time, with sincere effort, the result becomes an increase in experiencing the ‘perceived’ positive changes taking place in one’s demeanor, as one’s character changes and takes on more of the attributes of the Holy Spirit (what the Bible refers to as the Fruit of the Spirit). Diminished anger and an increase in meekness within a Christian exemplar, appeared to be merely an outcropping of the changes made manifest and visible to others during situations of conflict. It is the pursuit of Christ that brings these things into the light.

*The One Thing*

Exemplar 4 provided the following words which are being inserted here due to how succinctly they capture and convey in narrative form, what was generally depicted in the probabilistic model’s illustrative equation (Fig. 2). What follows is this exemplar’s response [something like a gift] to the question, “How was your internal conflict changed as a result of your valuing more the things of God?”

Something I shared in the light of six discipleship priorities. And I used the star as the image for that. And the point of the star…at the top you have to have prayer. You have to have access to God. So, just keep talking to God about life and what goes on. The left-hand point at the top left is the Bible. It’s how you use the Word. Do you understand it? And seeing God—how He reveals Himself to be—are you growing in that awareness? In the top-right point of the star is community. Are you in relationship with others…other believers—able to interact with [them] as you described before? The bottom point of the star is submission. Am I submitting myself to God? Am I open to Him and what He wants to tell me? Am I fearing Him more than man? And the bottom right of the star is humility. That’s my position before others. Not seeing myself above or below, but am I
having my right place there. Of course, the real discipler is what fills the star from the center out is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has helped me to pray…and learn from the Word. It’s the body of Christ that convicts me when I am out of line with my submitting to Him…or in my humility and posture before others. I think as that star…those elements get filled up on a journey, day-by-day, and that star becomes brighter…you become more understanding or more aware. So, it’s not one thing. (Exemplar 4, 2021, Interview).

The Exemplar’s Gift—The Star Model: Six Discipleship Priorities

Figure 3

The Star Model

Therefore, it would appear that the one thing [the single, predominant theme running throughout this research effort] is most simply identified as the pursuit of Christlikeness among the exemplars. The pursuit is the ‘one thing’ uniting their stories that leads one away from a tendency to act out of sinful and selfish anger toward exhibiting, more and more, the attribute of meekness in situations of conflict. Ironically, however, the pursuit is not one thing, it is comprised of many things.
Evaluation of the Research Design

The qualitative methodology of phenomenology served this research effort well. Such a study required seeking information in the form of internal thoughts, perceptions, feelings surrounding the phenomena of anger as well as the not-well-defined or understood attribute of meekness. For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to interview those who possessed pertinent, significant, and valuable insight, to which others (within the study’s Christian population) would view as containing value coming from exemplars exhibiting the attribute, meekness. This study, therefore, required a purposive sampling, which as discussed previously, is the most prevalent sampling technique employed in qualitative research.

Interjecting Randomness When Building Team of Exemplars

By establishing and employing the Inclusion Criteria (Appendix B), it ensured that the exemplars selected met defined standards within this Christian community used to identify those who may serve in Christian leadership positions. By using purposive sampling, it enabled an initial fielding of three exemplars (termed gatekeepers) who, in turn, provided ‘leads’ toward selecting seven other qualified exemplars who were not selected by this researcher; which interjected a greater degree of randomness into the process of establishing the sample. All of the exemplars represented Christian leaders from among the EFCA Southeast Region.

Very few field notes were taken as the bulk of the time spent with the exemplars was already captured by digital audio voice recorders. Other than this, the data collection and data analysis transpired as outlined and intended in Chapter Three.
Removing Bias and Increasing Trustworthiness

**Triangulation and Member Checking**

Validating the data, most often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research, was accomplished by triangulating data, utilizing both survey data and interview transcript data, along with member checking. Preliminary findings consisted of the themes and variables which were used to answer the research questions, and which were incorporated into the two models depicted previously. Preliminary findings were presented in follow-up interviews to eight of the exemplars to determine whether these findings matched the exemplars’ thoughts and, in turn, garnered their approval. Two of the exemplars failed to return voice messages or emails seeking to arrange and conduct a follow-up interview. It is presumed these two exemplars voluntarily removed themselves from the study. All of the exemplars that participated in member checking agreed that the findings and conclusions represented well the thoughts expressed during the initial interviews, and in the responses to the survey questions. Presenting these preliminary findings and the initial conclusions to the exemplars, is termed ‘member checking’ (synonymous with a debriefing where exemplars may concur or refute findings and conclusions made by the researcher). It is not only an accepted means, but a preferred way, of validating data.

**Member Checking.** Member checking involved reviewing the consolidated responses to the ten survey questions (Tables 5-14), the interview data (Table 15), demographics (Table 4) as well as preliminary themes and variables emerging from the data analysis and the two models (the probabilistic model and the star model, respectively) arising from the findings and early conclusions. Exemplars shared comments such as profoundly valuable, highly-interesting, and impressive to describe their thoughts on what had been presented to them. Again, the eight exemplars that participated in member checking were of one mind and one voice—confirming
the early findings and conclusions were aligned well with their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation most simply could be viewed as analyzing different pieces of data, or looking at the pieces of the data, differently (from a different perspective). The authors of an article on the topic of triangulation, wrote, “Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999)” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545). The authors went on to identify four types of triangulation: method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source triangulation. This researcher utilized method triangulation, which consisted of employing multiple methods of data collection, in this case field notes, surveys, and interviews. The in-depth individual interviews (IDI) represented, what is referred to as data source triangulation.

Carter et al. (2014) stated, “Most qualitative researchers studying human phenomena collect data through interviews with individuals or groups; their selection of the type of interview depends on the purpose of the study and the resources available” (p. 545). These writers continue, “Fontana and Frey (2000) described the IDI interview as one of the most powerful tools for gaining understanding of human beings and exploring topics in depth” (p.545).

**Bracketing (or Epoché)**

In addition to member checking and triangulation, this researcher endeavored to “suspend judgment about existential assumptions made in everyday life and in the sciences” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 19). This is referred to as bracketing (or epoché).

The term originated in Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenology (The Idea of Phenomenology, posthumously published in 1950, English trans. W. P. Alston & G. Nakhnikian, 1964), which was strongly opposed to philosophical realism—the doctrine
claiming that an external exists independent of one’s knowledge of it. (Schwandt, 1997, p. 19)

The intent was to suspend the “everyday assumption of the independent existence of what is perceived and thought about (what he called ‘the natural attitude’)” to investigate what was perceived without that assumption. (p. 19).

The above were efforts made to reduce bias and increase trustworthiness. Although bias certainly plays a role in qualitative research, most textbooks speak to this, for it is nearly impossible to eliminate preconceived notions regarding a broad and familiar topic such as anger, or even an attribute as obscure as meekness, from entering into the writing process. Chapter Five includes the summary for the critical analysis and discussion on the three themes that emerged.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This study began with a concentration on the topic of anger (a single human emotion), and over time transformed to become a study of the acquisition of the attribute of meekness (an ill-defined, poorly understood quality). These two powerful actors were explored through the voices and words of ten exemplars—mature Christian men who voluntarily responded to survey and interview questions to help broaden one’s perspective on how one moves beyond anger to acquire the attribute of meekness—more fully defining meekness along the way. The purpose of this study was to help prepare today’s and tomorrow’s Christian leaders for the task of leading themselves and others through situations of conflict. For conflict will arise; it will require wisdom from above to bring it under control.

Constructively managing anger is a ‘leadership challenge’ that will arise in many settings. Being too passive during situations of conflict and a leader risks being viewed as weak, spineless, or indecisive. Being too aggressive, physically violent, or overtly angry and a leader risks being viewed as out of control. These extremes produce two poor ends to conflict, “Artificial harmony” at one end & “destructive conflict” on the other. Lencioni (2012) noted that “Nowhere does [the] tendency toward ‘artificial harmony’ show itself more than in mission-driven nonprofit organizations, most notably churches” (p. 44). Neither extreme should be the goal of a leader. There is another way of resolving conflict, restoring peace within relationships, and overcoming obstacles and challenges—that is far more effective than stoic passivity or blatant rage (where differing opinions propel passions to a boiling point)—by leading others with meekness. But what is meekness? What does it really entail? What does it mean? And how does one go about acquiring this attribute?
This chapter revisits the purpose of this research effort, and it re-lists the three research questions, identifies the three themes that emerged during the data analysis phase—with the sub-themes and variables which answers the research questions, and provides a summary of the research findings and conclusions gleaned by this researcher. This required returning to the literature review (Chapter Two) to illustrate how this research aligned with, differed from, was supported by, or expanded upon, prior research. Finally, it outlines what this researcher viewed as implications and applications arising from this study.

**Research Purpose**

This phenomenological research examined the role of cognitive dissonance in the process of spiritual and behavioral change in the lives of mature Christian exemplars within the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) located in the Southeast Region of the United States of America by peering through the lens of the emotion of anger to explore one’s transformation toward meekness.

**Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What specific behaviors do exemplars identify that they perceive to be evidence of moving from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness?

**RQ2.** What perceived past, angry behaviors experienced by exemplars generated the cognitive dissonance which served as the motivation to modify their behavior?

**RQ3.** How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness?
Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

This research revealed three overarching themes.

- Theme One: Subordinating Self to Listen, Love, and Lead Others To Peace
- Theme Two: Learning Requires Underlying Tension Producing Reasons to Change
- Theme Three: Tending to the Many Variables

These themes helped to better define meekness, they presented one with insight into the source of its power, as well as how one acquired and exhibited this attribute.

**Theme One: Subordinating Self to Listen, Love, and Lead Others To Peace**

The first theme that emerged from the data served to answer the first research question. It dealt predominantly with the motivations underlying one’s behavior. The exemplars mentioned that to operate from a posture of meekness—one’s motivations could not be directed toward oneself, or one’s self-interest, but must be focused upon what is in the best interest of others.

This theme encompassed the specific behaviors exemplars identified that they perceived to be evidence of moving from a tendency of anger to a tendency toward meekness. As outlined in Chapter Four, these behaviors included listening (seeking to understand), genuinely loving and wanting the best for others, focusing on the benefit of others and not one’s self-interests, subordinating one’s desire to win and be right, endeavoring to restore and reconcile relationships, and using one’s language to bring calm and peace to a place where these things were lacking.

One gets angry for a reason. West (2016) illuminated an important truth, quoting DeYoung, “As such, anger, like the other emotions, is an expression of concern: ‘you don’t get angry unless you care’ (DeYoung 2009, 121–122; italics original)” (West, 2016, pp. 883-884).
Love, Self-Respect, and Virtue

In Chapter Two, it was stated that care and concern derive from love. Concern and caring are made manifest in love. West (2016) in an article titled, Anger and the Virtues: A Critical Study in Virtue Individuation, claimed, “One accompanying virtue is love. Love orients the heart of the self-respecting person beyond the protection of her own dignity, placing her will squarely on the well-being of others (Pettigrove 2012a, 86–95; Roberts 2003, 294)” (West, 2016, pp. 883-884). West (2016) stated,

In this way, love keeps the self-respecting person’s anger from being selectively self-centered. After all, if you love others, blameworthy offenses against them may also draw your ire. As Nussbaum points out, the centrality of love in the Christian outlook is a primary source of the disagreements between stoic and Christian wisdom concerning anger. (pp. 883-884)

Care and Concern

Love (care and concern) can lead one to become angry and that love can also lead one away from anger. It is in loving others where wisdom manifests itself.

Pettigrove (2012) investigated the characteristic of meekness and those prone to apply meekness in situations where anger would otherwise seem warranted. He stated, “Meekness is the virtue whose purview is the governance of anger and related emotions” (p. 343). Note he does not claim it is the absence of anger. He claimed, “…if confronted by circumstances in which the only options are enduring evil or attempting to ‘overcome evil with evil,’ the meek will choose the former” (p. 344).

In West’s article, he proclaimed, “We’ve seen that love can be an anger disposition” (West, 2016, p. 885). And concluded, “[L]ove can decelerate and mitigate anger” (West, 2016, p. 886). It would seem that behind the exemplars’ behaviors exhibiting meekness exists the motivations of love for others, self-respect, and virtue.
Theme Two: Learning Requires Underlying Tension Producing Reasons to Change

The second theme disclosed the motivations driving the modification, change, or transformation of one’s behavior away from a tendency to become angry for self-serving reasons to the acquisition of meekness—engaging in behavior that is beneficial to others. These motivations were born of necessity derived from a deep-rooted, underlying, internal tension—what Leon Festinger would have defined and described as cognitive dissonance in his popular Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, which served as the theoretical framework for this study.

Festinger’s Theory & Aronson’s Judgment

Festinger’s theory “starts with a very simple proposition. If a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, he experiences dissonance: a negative drive state (not unlike hunger or thirst)” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128). Once again, this researcher italicized the word psychologically in the above sentence, to make the point that one could insert the word spiritually here for a Christian reader. Aronson (1997) stated, “In my judgment, dissonance is greatest and clearest when what is involved is not just two cognitions but, rather, a cognition about the self and a piece of our behavior that violates that self-concept” (p. 128). It seemed that what Festinger did was combine cognition with motivation in a theory that would pave a way toward human development, but is useful in gaining understanding of spiritual formation.

Plueddemann & Piaget

Some research revealed that in order to learn, there must be an underlying tension. Plueddemann (1995) wrote, in addition to Festinger’s theory, “Piaget felt that children do not learn unless faced with an optimum level of dissonance” (p. 50). Plueddemann (1995) stated, “Piaget is best known for exploring the mechanism and the stages of cognitive development from birth to adulthood” (p. 51). Piaget proposed “two important factors [that promote development]
social interaction and the process of exploring tensions, ‘disequilibration.’ [Stating further] People tend to grow and develop as they struggle with problems in a social setting” (p. 51). This researcher wondered whether perhaps this presupposed cognitive dissonance, this underlying tension, or ‘disequilibration’ served as a factor and force the Holy Spirit utilized as a change-agent in the lives of these Christian exemplars. [Reference Chapter Two, Theology of the Holy Spirit as Teacher or Educator, pp. 52-55].

**Spiritual Tension**

It appeared the source of the perceived tension [the dissonance] that served to motivate such change within the exemplars had been internal (and present) all along, which brought about the question as to how could that be? As that would mean such a desire and motivation always existed within them, but it simply was not tapped into and utilized—until ‘they’ [the exemplars] changed ‘their’ minds [their thinking] to match ‘their’ newly desired behavior. It is this desire that created the added question, where did this motivation to change come from? This researcher concluded that it was because the dissonance was not merely cognitive, but was instead, or also, affective (spiritual)…arising from one’s core belief in Christ.

**Harmon-Jones & Mills**

Harmon-Jones & Mills (2019) informed us that, “One of the first revisions [to Festinger’s theory] proposed was the self-consistency interpretation of dissonance (Aronson, 1968, 1992). It was based on the idea that situations that evoke dissonance do so because they create inconsistency between the self-concept and a behavior. Because most persons have a positive self-concept, persons are likely to experience dissonance when they behave in a way that they view as incompetent, immoral, or irrational” [contrary to one’s espoused beliefs or moral precepts] (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019, p. 15).
**Sica’s Theory**

Another theory which merged cognitive dissonance with moral aspects was Sica’s (1978) research that advanced this goal in his dissertation, titled, “Proposed Synthesis for Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance with Kohlberg’s Model of Moral Development”. Kohlberg’s Model consisted of the Six Stages of Morality [discussed in Chapter Two] which closely mimic aspects of Christian transformation. Sica (1978) tells us, “A moral dilemma is a controversial situation involving a moral conflict and calling for a decision to resolve the conflict by choosing among a variety of options” (p. 23).

**One Cannot Teach Morals**

In leading up to discussing Kohlberg’s Model, Sica (1978) provided some historical context, stating, “Empirical research conducted by Hartshorne and May (1930) [had]…indicated the failure of the traditional, didactic approach to moral education” (p. 2). Hartshorne and May (1930) concluded that there is no such thing as ‘moral conscience’ or ‘moral character’ that can be educated (Sica, 1978, p. 2).

Sica (1978) stated,

According to Kohlberg, a child cannot move to a higher stage of cognitive moral development until he has internalized the previous stage. When a child internalizes a particular stage of moral reasoning, this involves an acceptance of such reasoning that goes beyond the mere ability to intellectualize or memorize the characteristics of the reasoning process. This implies, prima facia, that indoctrination and preaching by teachers will not be effective in raising the child's stage of moral reasoning. (pp. 4-5)

If one cannot teach morals, and if they are later manifested in behavior when they previously were not, they must have been present all along, but lying dormant until called into action. In Genesis, [discussed in Chapter Two, Theological Framework section] it was posited that we were created in the Image of God, but we have great difficulty living in this stated truth in light of the reality. Sampson (2011), claimed “Our tendency to be moral may also be
hardwired as is our tendency to be immoral” (p. 171). This research appears to have answered Sampson’s question, “Does reason construct institutions, beliefs, conventions, and rules? Or does morality emerge from prerational processes” (2011, p. 172). This researcher believes this research supported the latter statement. If one’s self-concept is ‘married’ to the belief that one is in relationship with Jesus Christ and has been made in the Image of God, and if “a piece of one’s behavior violates that self-concept” (Aronson, 1997, p. 128)—then, any dissonance would also be a spiritual problem requiring resolution, not merely a psychological one.

Acquiring the attribute of meekness is counter-cultural, counter-intuitive, contrary to the ways of this world, so how would one ever “desire” to acquire such an attribute—if it were not for some internal motivation? If this moral desire was not hard-wired [written on one’s heart by God] to drive one to seek to learn this lesson that one had to learn, once one came to faith in Jesus Christ, in order to be at peace with God...how would it ever manifest itself? If, as Hartshorne and May concluded, there is no such thing as ‘moral conscience’ or ‘moral character’ that can be educated (Sica, 1978, p. 2), how was this lesson learned? How was it taught? Who was the teacher?

Whether it was witnessing negative angry behaviors exhibited by others, or sensing the discomfort derived from anger brewing internally inside of themselves, there was an undeniable incongruity (between their belief and behavior) within the exemplars that initiated the spark of desire to change one’s perceived evil ways and align oneself and one’s behaviors with those of Christ...captured, contained, and conveyed via the pages of Scripture.

**A Posture of Meekness**

The results of this study agree with the literature that the foundation for learning must be present in the form of an underlying tension, an internal angst, or some degree of cognitive (or
spiritual) dissonance. Something served as the casual factors to motivate the exemplars to desire to learn and put forth effort to learn and ultimately come to behave differently. The variables and themes that emerged in Chapter Four were “the something” the exemplars claimed aided them in learning the lessons that led them away from a tendency toward behaving angrily, toward behaving instead from a position that one exemplar termed, a posture of meekness—which evolved into the next theme.

**Theme Three: Tending to the Many Variables**

The third research question asked, “how was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness”? The exemplars were never asked this question (or the previous research questions) directly. The answers to these questions were gleaned from their responses to unrelated survey and interview questions by way of coding data and sought to discover themes that could be fitted together to identify an all-encompassing theme—the one thing that united ten voices. This was done in an effort to remove—to the extent possible—this researcher’s personal bias through a process called bracketing (or epoché) as described in Chapter Four.

**Empirical Implications**

*Meekness Merely a By-product of the Fruit of the Spirit*

These ‘variables’ which are indicative of an active Christian lifestyle appeared to work together in concert with one another over time to facilitate leading one toward transformation and toward Christlikeness. The variables consisted of praying, reading and studying Scripture, seeking to be a part of a Christian community, seeking peace for one’s self and others, desiring to serve others, and desiring to develop a deeper and closer relationship with Jesus Christ and others. The more one engaged in each variable, e.g.—the more time spent in prayer or reading
one’s Bible, the greater the likelihood or probability that greater change was taking place. This researcher would conclude that meekness was merely a by-product of the exemplars’ pursuit of Christlikeness. Acquiring meekness did not appear to be a conscious goal, or a cognitive desire. It was a happenstance, a glorious side-benefit that seemed to incorporate many, if not all of the singular ‘pieces’ of ‘fruit’ making up the plural Fruit of the Spirit.

**Meekness: Virtue of Purity & Wisdom (Make Possible Fruits of Behavior)**

Meekness seemed to be made up of many attributes, among them would be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. In Chapter Two under the heading: Virtue & Wisdom, this researcher wrote that “Pope John Paul II contended the commonality within the Fruit of the Spirit is the virtue of purity, derived from righteousness (piety) which leads to wisdom” (Pope John Paul II, 1981, The Pauline Doctrine). Addressing thousands, he stated, “Purity is, in fact, the condition for finding wisdom...,” and he went on to say that,

…the virtue (purity) is in the service of wisdom, and wisdom is a preparation to receive the gift that comes from God. This gift strengthens the virtue and makes it possible to enjoy, in wisdom, the fruits of a behavior and life that are pure. (Pope John Paul II, 1981, The Pauline Doctrine)

This self-perpetuating model, seemingly simple on the surface, fails most of us? Could it be that the Apostle Paul (in Galatians) simply broke wisdom into its constituent parts so one could more clearly understand what wisdom was? Could meekness simply be wisdom made manifest and observable through the righteous behavior of righteous men? It appeared so.

**Theoretical Implications**

Festinger’s theory has proven to possess tremendous value to those engaged in cognitive and behavioral research for more than a half a century. As other researchers have expanded upon his early work, the subsequent theories have focused mostly on motivation, few on connecting
this theory to education or learning. Bowen (2012) however, appeared to be among the first to link Festinger’s theory to educational pedagogical practice. Bowen claimed, “Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory describes an innate, post-decisional drive to reduce the discrepancy between elements of knowledge in cognition, affection, or behavior, which coincide with the three domains of learning” (p. 166). Bowen stressed, “This research was aimed at improving the descriptive fidelity and extending the prescriptive facility of Festinger’s original theory” (p. 167). In Bowen’s study, under the heading, Application of the Research, he stated,

The improved descriptive fidelity of the biblical-theological model of Cognitive Dissonance Theory allows for prescriptive facility as the model is applied. The purpose of the present research was to develop a model of Cognitive Dissonance Theory from a biblical-theological presupposition that would be relevant for Christian educators and give relevance to pedagogical practice. (2012, p. 178)

Chapter Two discussed the three different domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. The focus of this research was predominantly directed upon the affective domain which addresses learning as it progresses from the realm of receiving phenomena (like anger); awareness or a willingness to hear (listening); responding to phenomena, meaning active participation on the part of the learners (e.g. motivated to learn); valuing, attributing worth or value to a particular object (e.g. the Bible), phenomenon, or behavior (for instance, exhibiting meekness); organization, which involves prioritizing or contrasting different values to resolve conflicts between them (decision-making: What would Jesus do?), and thereby creating a unique value system; and finally, internalizing values (or what is referred to as characterization). **This level is reached when one has established a value system that ‘controls’ their behavior** (bolded for emphasis). This characterization would be observable in behavior that is pervasive, consistent, predictable, and most importantly, characteristic of the learner (“Bloom’s Taxonomy,” 2018, SAGE). Most of the exemplars in this study defined meekness as ‘power (or
strength) under control’. Acquiring meekness, therefore, implies valuing meekness—the ability to control one’s power (e.g.—the emotion of anger) for the express benefit of others. This begs the question, why?

The decision to value something underlies motivation which underlies behavior. Values drive one’s actions (i.e.—external behaviors that others witness and observe). What underlies one values? It is contended here that it appeared to be one’s beliefs. In Chapter Two it was stated, that one’s life and one’s behavior are greatly influenced by one’s philosophical perspective. Knight (2006) claimed, “The acceptance of a particular position in metaphysics and epistemology is a ‘faith-choice’ made by individuals, and it entails a commitment to a way of life” (p. 27). Later, Knight stated, “Human beings are the discoverers, not the originators, of truth; and the entire edifice of scientific inquiry is built upon a priori principles” (p. 181). Truth exists whether one discovers it or not. Yet, one can discover it, but one must search for it; one must ‘pursue’ it. This researcher endeavored to do so with this study.

**Practical Implications**

Managing conflict requires leaders be prepared to engage in conflict, not avoid it. With the exception of one exemplar, avoiding conflict was not viewed as a positive leadership trait by the exemplars. Though the dangers associated with anger and conflict were addressed, it was made clear that one must ‘step into the mess’ and be willing to diffuse and disarm conflict to return those engaged in conflict to a place where passions could be reduced so that constructive outcomes could be considered. To a place where other’s feelings could be given time and attention, and others were able to speak and be heard, so that peace could be restored and the people involved in conflict could be reconciled to one another.
The exemplars did not appear to offer any step-by-step leadership advice. Their advice seemed predominantly to focus on ‘the process’ of growing in Christlikeness, in essence, focusing on transforming oneself [through the instructive and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit] in order to be better prepared and better able to help transform others. Their advice appeared to point one toward pursuing Christ, and in doing so, developing attributes, like meekness followed.

\[ \text{Incongruency} = \text{Tension} = \text{Motivation to Change} = \text{Effort to Learn} \]

The incongruency, the dissonance, the tension one felt seemed to serve to lead (motivate) the exemplars to learning the lessons the Holy Spirit desired them to learn. One’s faith-choice of accepting Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior and believing that human beings are made in the Image of God led to reading and studying God’s Word. It led them to pray; it led them into community with other believers; it led them to desiring a deeper relationship with God the Father through His Son and this, in turn, paved the way for the Holy Spirit to teach them, educate them, and prepare them to receive the Fruit of the Spirit. It is the Fruit of the Spirit that appeared to be what others observed as wisdom or virtue in the form of attributes, like meekness.

\[ \text{Congruency} – \text{Learning Across Domains Made Habit Through Practice} \]

In coming to faith in Christ, the exemplars were led to a place of learning; where weaknesses were exposed that delivered them to a place where the exemplars desired to change their behavior as they learned to value the things God loves. Their objective was to become congruent across the domains of learning to reduce and remove the tension. The goal was to behave in a Christlike way, to imitate Christ. Imitation, as defined in Chapter Two (p.69) was the lowest level of learning in the behavioral domain. Before one’s behavior can ever change, one must first learn to imitate others. Before one can progress from imitation, to manipulation, to
precision, to articulation, and ultimately to naturalization—where a high level of proficiency is apparent—one must practice, until practice makes perfect. It must become one’s second nature (a new habit) (Bloom’s Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain, n.d., Graphic).

In discussing virtues, Smith states, “Virtues, quite simply, are good moral habits. (2016, p. 16). Smith also claimed, “Education in virtue is a kind of formation, a retraining of our dispositions” (p. 18). He continued, “‘Learning’ virtue—becoming virtuous—is more like practicing scales on the piano than learning music theory…” (p. 18). In essence, it is imitation with lots of practice.

**Applications**

Those seeking Christian leadership positions must engage in conflict. To persistently opt for a passive option, often proves to illustrate the lack of leadership on the part of one placed in a position of authority. In preparing to lead, one would do well to employ one of the two models described in Chapter Four, either the Probabilistic Model (Fig. 2) or the Star Model (Fig. 3). Unlike various secular leadership theories (comprised of step-by-step models), such as Hersey and Blanchard’s (1988) Situational Leadership Theory that requires focusing on various degrees of task and relationship “behaviors” that are weaved into complex quad-charts and 450 pages of technical-level text that attempt to simplify when one must be directive, or act as a coach, or empower others, or delegate tasks—these two models offer only ‘One Way’, pursuing Christ and Christlikeness. The exemplars indicated that in doing so, one can acquire His attributes (what Christians would refer to as Fruit of the Spirit), over time, and after much imitation and practice. In the view of the exemplars, one can only become a leader by serving others—caring for others in the same way Christ cares for His children. What the exemplars made clear was one will likely
make many mistakes before one acquires the desired attributes, but the pursuit of Christ and Christlikeness is a worthy pursuit.

Again, meekness did not appear to be a goal sought by the exemplars—it was a by-product. It was acquired as one matured in one’s faith and truly ‘learned’ the lessons being taught by the Holy Spirit and born of the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and a worthy teacher—still, today. These exemplars truly believed that Christ’s lessons were written and weaved into Scripture to teach one how to live in harmony, and at peace, with others. These exemplars believe that they—and all human beings—were created in the Image of God. These exemplars came to realize that to lead others to live like Christ, they first, must learn to imitate Christlikeness before others. That there could be no other way to lead.

The exemplars concluded that only through a congruency (though they would not have used this term), could they be observed by others to be exhibiting righteous characteristics. One weakness, one flaw, one chink in one’s armor would diminish one’s ability to lead. The exemplars came to understand that lacking to “walk one’s talk” would be rightly perceived as hypocrisy on the part of those following them. Only by pursuing the identity of Jesus Christ, the Whole Person of Christ, would they be fully and truly known as Christians.

By exhibiting a mature spirit-filled relationship with Christ, one can live and lead as an example before others in the role of a servant-leader; modeling and emulating the Fruit of the Spirit observed as the attribute of meekness, among others. This can be accomplished by adopting a leadership lifestyle (by simply being a Christian striving toward the Image of God) more than by way of implementing mere methodologies with step-by-step instructions, processes and procedures, or tactics and techniques. The lack of congruency in Christian leadership appeared to come down to the relatively small flaws in one’s character. Usually, from striving to
capitalize on one’s strengths without addressing one’s weaknesses—and failing to tend to all of the variables and the virtues of wisdom and truth. Only by striving to learn the lessons the Holy Spirit was striving to teach (across all three domains of learning) could one acquire the Fruit of the Spirit, which become observable to others, such as meekness during situations of conflict.

It is not contended here that one must be a Christian to exhibit the attribute of meekness, but it would appear to this researcher that the ‘likelihood’ or ‘probability’ of doing so without Christ would be less likely. For the less one does the things identified by the exemplars—identified in this study as the variables in the Probabilistic Model (Fig. 2) or the subthemes representing the points of the Star Model (Fig. 3), the more time it would take to acquire and exhibit the attribute of meekness. So, although it is not impossible to do so, it would be more unlikely.

Research Limitations

While the researcher still agrees that qualitative research was the right choice for this study, qualitative research tools, such as interviews, are not designed to capture hard facts. More credibility could be given to this study if coupled with quantitative research in some way, perhaps a mixed methods approach. For example, a survey designed for quantitative research, and subsequent statistical analysis, may offer more evidence to strengthen the data.

From a race perspective, this study lacked diversity of participants noting that all ten of the exemplars were middle-aged white males from the Southeast Region of the EFCA. This was anticipated from the start as the largest demographic of the EFCA is predominantly comprised of Caucasians due to its northern European roots and Scandinavian foundation. Therefore, a broader demographic of participants alone may be an area for future search.
Lastly, only eight out of the ten exemplars participated in member checking. Although this represented 80-percent of the exemplars confirming that the findings and conclusions made by this researcher were considered valid from their perspectives—consensus would have been preferred, and seemed likely. It is presumed that two of the exemplars removed themselves from the study following the initial interview for reasons unknown. Although, it is important to mention that both method and data source triangulation—considering other data sources such as survey responses and linking findings to the literature—were also used, in addition to bracketing (or époché) as additional means to insure or enhance the trustworthiness in this study.

Further Research

Several areas for future research on other targeted demographics could add to the findings in this study. Perhaps by employing this study among female Christian exemplars engaged in women’s ministries. Although this researcher would not recommend removing the limitation that one must possess a Christian worldview, one could likely explore other leadership realms beyond the confines of Christian ministries and pastoral settings, such as within Christian-based charitable organizations or non-profit agencies. It appeared possible that a similar study could be conducted that focused on other emotions, which also generated sufficient cognitive dissonance in research subjects such as lust, greed, or jealousy that motivated exemplars to a tendency toward some other attribute considered to be the emotion’s antithesis, for instance, chastity, charity, or trust, respectively. It appeared during this research that any weakness observed in a Christian leader would damage and hinder one’s ability to lead effectively—and would serve to lead these exemplars to seek to address these weaknesses to become congruent as well across the domains of learning, specifically, with effort directed toward the spiritual (affective) domain.
Summary

Any weakness in a leader can be exploited. Behaving in a manner of meekness does not banish anger to a spiritual netherworld—never to be employed again. Operating from a posture of meekness instead places the power of anger under the control of a person who has learned the lessons taught by the Holy Spirit, over time, with intentional and concentrated effort on the part of the pupil. Only by imitating Christ and practicing putting off anger can one acquire this attribute. Anger may still be unleashed in a rare and powerful display at some point, but for the most part, it is restrained and tempered in love for others—in the form of a well-timed, fully considered, purposeful response, measured caution, or tender rebuke. If these efforts fail, and the situation warrants it, there may still be a time to flip over tables in the Temple.
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APPENDIX A

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Anger’s Dissonance: Exploring the Attribute of Meekness Among Christian Exemplars in the EFCA
Principal Investigator: Stephen Ethan Halstead, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University’s Rawlings School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a male who serves in a leadership capacity (broadly identified as a pastor, elder, core team member of a church plant, or senior administrative figure within the EFCA), acknowledging a relationship with Jesus Christ for at least 20 years, and serving or worshipping within the Southeast District of the EFCA having its headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the acquisition of the attribute of meekness by those identified as Christian exemplars as a means of more effectively leading others through conflict while also eliminating or minimizing the effect(s) of cognitive dissonance within the subjects themselves. The study will rely predominantly upon the perspectives and perceptions of those participating in the study as to what factor(s) they attribute to any transformation in their character over the course of time. The study will explore how participants viewed the emotion of anger prior to becoming a Christian, and now, from their present state as leaders within the EFCA.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Complete a brief questionnaire of ten questions that will take approximately five minutes to complete which are designed to capture basic demographic information. All individual responses will be kept strictly confidential.

2. Be willing to complete a short survey regarding your views, thoughts, and feelings toward the emotion of anger prior to becoming a Christian, and your views, thoughts, and feelings regarding the emotion of anger from your present perspective—as well as your thoughts on leading others through conflict. This survey is expected to take no more than 15 minutes to be administered immediately following the demographical questionnaire.

3. Be willing to participate in a scheduled one-hour interview where you will be asked to share your thoughts on your personal transformation toward meekness as you have matured as a Christian leader. This interview will be recorded, but will be kept strictly confidential.

4. A transcript will be produced and subsequently shared with you along with preliminary results of the study in a second meeting once again scheduled for one hour; giving you...
the opportunity to expand upon, clarify, amend, or exempt comments contained within the transcript.

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<tr>
<td>Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This phenomenological study will benefit society as it seeks to advance the human body of knowledge, build up the Body of Christ, and glorify God, by offering new and helpful insights on how to lead others more effectively as servant-leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What risks might you experience from being in this study?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>How will personal information be protected?</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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 these records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms/codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher[s] will have access to these recordings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is study participation voluntary?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The researcher conducting this study is Stephen Halstead. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary Bredfeldt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

________________________

Signature & Date
APPENDIX B

EFCA “Gatekeeper” Invitation

Greetings in the Name of Our Lord, Jesus Christ:

My name is Stephen Halstead and I am a doctoral student attending Liberty University’s Rawlings School of Divinity. I am currently at a crucial stage of my studies where I am preparing to conduct social science research outlined below. My reason for contacting you is two-fold. First, I prayerfully hope you would be willing to participate in this study, and secondly, to seek your assistance in identifying two or three additional participants—who meet the parameters for the research who you believe would be willing to be a part of the study as well.

One very important aspect of empirical social science research is to remove—as much as possible—bias on the part of the researcher. This is where I need your help. The attached document outlines the qualities and characteristics of those being sought for inclusion in this study. Participants will be considered ‘exemplars’ who would represent a sample of one possessing the attribute of meekness among fellow Christians as a Christian leader (pastor, associate pastor, elder, deacon, core team member of a church plant, or senior leader in an administrative function).

I have selected you, as it is my humble and subjective opinion that you possess and demonstrate these characteristics, and I also possess knowledge that you meet the other parameters established such as having the required tenure as a Christian while also serving in a leadership position. By selecting you, obviously, this injects bias into the study. However, by utilizing a ‘snowball-technique’ whereby others gain entry into the study whom I did not personally select—it will assist greatly in diminishing the impact of bias on the part of this researcher. It will also allow me to later triangulate data within the study during the data analysis phase.

The title of the research is ‘A Phenomenological Study of Anger’s Dissonance: Exploring the Attribute of Meekness Among Christian Exemplars in the EFCA’. This study is predominantly comprised of one-on-one interviews with participants—whose confidentiality would be insured—who would be asked to complete ten basic demographic questions as well as a brief survey. Generally-speaking, the research intends to seek one’s thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding the emotion of anger and its antithesis, the attribute of meekness. It also will touch upon conflict and conflict resolution techniques from a Christian leader’s perspective.

Again, it is my sincere hope that you will agree to be a part of this research, but also that you would assist me in identifying others necessary to conduct it and complete it. I appreciate all that you do to glorify God through your calling. I humbly await your response and stand ready to answer any questions you may have. Thank you in advance for your servant’s heart and your help with this academic endeavor—which I pray advances the body of human knowledge, God’s kingdom ends, and this researcher’s education, transformation, and sanctification.

Yours & His,
Stephen Halstead
Inclusion Criteria

Matthew 5:37 and James 5:12 lend credence to the evidence that a godly man’s word is to be taken as sufficient. Although these two verses speak directly to oaths, it seems the underlying intention is clear. Though this research resides within a School of Divinity (within a Christian university), it is still governed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that follows rigorous and strict standards which fall under the same scientific standards and secular stench as the rest of academia. With this said, the following criteria has been established to provide specific parameters to be applied to those who will be included in this study. Fortunately, we can rejoice that Christ did not have to vet his apostles…for the university in His day would have likely claimed that He should have, because it would have kept him from including Judas among them.

Likewise, 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9 capture ‘qualifying/disqualifying’ criteria for those being considered for leadership positions within the church. I will not insult your intelligence by quoting them here, for you clearly know them, but I will simply state that the positive characteristics stated within these verses are to be observable traits you have witnessed in a prospective participant—along with the quality and attribute of meekness.

Requirements for Those Selected for Inclusion in this Study

1. This research includes only those who possess a Christian worldview.
2. This research includes only those Christians professing faith in Jesus Christ for twenty years or more.
3. This research includes only those holding a revered position as a pastor, leader, elder, core team member of a church plant, or senior administrator within the EFCA’s Southeast Region.
4. Participants (termed exemplars) will possess an impeccable character, demeanor, and disposition which must be known (experienced and observed) by this researcher over time or by those selected by this researcher as participants, who, in turn, identify a participant when relying on snowball sampling to reach the required number of participants.
5. Further, to hold strictly—and without question and debate—to literal Scriptural interpretation regarding those instructed to serve in leadership positions, participants in this study will be limited to men.
6. One chosen will be viewed as someone possessing the attribute of meekness*. [This is a subjective observation, and it relies predominantly on one’s judgment].

*Note: Meekness is defined for the purpose of this study as someone who appears to demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This may appear familiar as it is the Fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23.
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the acquisition of the attribute of meekness by those identified as Christian exemplars as a means of more effectively leading others through conflict, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be males who serve in a leadership capacity (broadly identified as a pastor, elder, core team member of a church plant, or senior administrative figure within the EFCA), acknowledging a relationship with Jesus Christ for at least 20 years, serving and worshipping within the Southeast District of the EFCA having its headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire of ten questions that will take approximately five minutes; and will also be requested to fill out a short survey expected to take less than fifteen minutes; as well as agree to participate in two interviews each scheduled for one-hour. The first interview is intended to collect data (your thoughts, esteemed perspectives, and perceptions on the topics) that will be incorporated into the study, and the second interview will consist of a meeting to review the transcript produced from the audio recording made of the first interview as a way of member checking—giving you the opportunity to expand upon, clarify, amend, or exempt comments contained within the transcript. Preliminary results of the study will also be shared with participants at this time. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please reply to this email or feel free to call me. For those who agree to participate, I will contact you to schedule the first interview. You will be asked to complete the demographic questionnaire and the brief survey previously mentioned when we meet.

A consent document is attached to this email and a copy will be given to you to complete at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. You do not need to sign and return the consent document as one will be provided, but you are welcome to do so and bring it with you to the interview should you chose to do so.

Sincerely,

Stephen Halstead
Doctoral Candidate
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Opening Comments]

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. Before we begin, I must ask that you sign and date the consent form mentioned in my initial email. If you brought a signed copy with you that is fine as well. Also, I would ask that you complete this very brief ten question demographic questionnaire and this short survey form, then we will begin the interview itself.

[After the participant has competed the aforementioned forms].

Thank you!

As I ask the following questions, I would request that you speak freely and at length to each question. I have attempted to keep the questions as general as possible to allow you respond to the questions in a variety of ways. I will be seeking your thoughts, your feelings, and your perceptions on the topics of anger, conflict, leadership, and meekness. I wish to stress to you that there are no right answers to these questions, however, your insight is certainly of tremendous value to this research and this researcher. Again, I thank you very much for agreeing to be a part of this study.
Prepared Questions

[Lead off Question] I would ask you to think back to your distant past before you were saved and became a Christian to a time when anger was not influenced by your Christian views…what do you recall as some behaviors you exhibited when you were angry?

Why do you believe you reacted in such ways?

How did you feel following a situation where you were angry and behaved as you did back then?

If I could, I would like to ask you to describe broadly your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions on the emotion of anger?

Do you believe you have acquired a different view of anger today than the view you held before you became a Christian?

Why do you think your views of anger have changed? What brought about the change?

[Follow-up Question]: Do you feel your attitude and behavior as it relates to anger changed as a result of your Christian beliefs?

Have you experienced others who seemed prone to anger whose behavior transformed following becoming a Christian?

What would you attribute as the cause underlying this change in their behavior?

Would you consider anger to be a sin?

How would you define anger?

Is there anything constructive and useful to be derived from anger?

Some consider anger’s antithesis to be the attribute of meekness, what are your thoughts regarding the validity of this statement?
In your own words, how would you define meekness?

In your view, should meekness to be applied at all times and in every instance of conflict?

What behaviors would you say indicate the display of meekness on the part of a leader during situations where conflict exists and when others are behaving angrily?

Do you consider meekness to be a panacea?

Can you share anything that you would attribute as causes for your change in how you behave now in situations of conflict?

How has this change in your behavior happened over the course of time?

How do you behave as a leader in situations of conflict? What are some of the tactics, techniques, or procedures you employ?

Would you consider the transformation in how you approach conflict today compared to the distant past to have resulted from resolving any internal conflict between your internal beliefs and your corresponding outward behavior?

How was this internal conflict resolved?

***

The above questions should generate responses that would answer the below research questions.

RQ1. What specific behaviors do exemplars identify that they perceive to be evidence of moving from a tendency toward anger to a tendency toward meekness?

RQ2. What perceived past, angry behaviors experienced by exemplars generated the cognitive dissonance which served as the motivation to modify their behavior?

RQ3. How was the internal conflict caused by the cognitive dissonance resolved and behavior ultimately changed toward a tendency of meekness?
APPENDIX E

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Gender:
   o Male
   o Female

2. Race or ethnicity:
   o Anglo/White
   o Asian
   o Black/African American
   o Hispanic
   o Other

3. Age group:
   o 18-29
   o 30-39
   o 40-49
   o 50-59
   o 60-69
   o 70-79
   o 80-up

4. Current marital status:
   o Never married
   o Married
   o Widowed
   o Divorced/separated

5. Highest educational status you have achieved:
   o Grade 0-8
   o Some high school, grade 9-11
   o High school graduate
   o Some college, 1-3 years
   o Associate degree
   o Bachelor’s degree
   o Master’s degree
   o Doctorate/PhD
6. Employment:
  o Corporate/Administration/Executive
  o Ministry/Pastoral
  o Military/Government
  o Employed in Private sector
  o Self-Employed/Contractor
  o Retired
  o Unemployed

7. Approximately age you came to faith in Jesus Christ:
  o As a young child (0-12)
  o As a teenager (13-19)
  o As a young adult (20-29)
  o As a mature adult (30-39)
  o As a middle-aged adult (40-49)
  o As a senior adult (50-up)

8. How long have you been a Christian?
  o Less than 20 years
  o 20-30 years
  o 31-40 years
  o 41-50 years
  o More than 50 years

9. Were you baptized (submersed) in water?
  o Yes
  o No

10. How long have you been a member of an EFCA church?
  o Not a member
  o Less than 1 year
  o 1-5 years
  o 5-10 years
  o More than 10 years
APPENDIX F

Survey

Please select a response following each question. Space is provided to further explain your marked response should you wish to do so, or should your response require an explanation.

1. Before coming to faith in Jesus Christ, how did you view the emotion of anger?
   o As a sinful emotion (a vice)
   o As a normal emotion
   o As a defense mechanism
   o As a gauge motivating you to know when to act/react to situations perceived by you to be moral offenses against yourself or others
   o As a virtuous emotion
   o Other, please explain

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

2. After coming to faith in Jesus Christ, how did you view the emotion of anger?
   o As a sinful emotion (a vice)
   o As a normal emotion
   o As a defense mechanism
   o As a gauge motivating you to know when to act/react to situations perceived by you to be moral offenses against yourself or others
   o As a virtuous emotion
   o Other, please explain

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
3. Now, as a mature Christian and a leader within your church, what do you ‘feel’ when confronted with a situation that would have previously made you angry?

- Less anger than in the past
- Sadness toward the situation
- Grief for the victim (or yourself, if you were the victim)
- Sorrow for the offender(s)
- Much the same as in the past, but viewed through a different lens
- Other, please explain

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

4. Based upon your previous response, how do you react now to minor, day-to-day frustrations (e.g.-someone cutting in line, cutting you off in traffic, behaving inappropriately in public)?

- I still become angry
- I still become angry, but the period of anger subsides quickly
- I am still disturbed by the situation, but I pray for my peace to be restored
- I am still disturbed by the situation, but I know God is in control
- I maintain my peace, trust in God, and pray over the situation
- I maintain my peace and pray over the situation
- Other, please explain

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
5. How do you respond to situations involving moral offenses or ethical policies that you find offensive but which are supported by the law of the land which are contrary to God’s laws, such as same-sex marriage, abortion, etc.?

- Outraged, but silent
- Vocally opposed and openly share my thoughts
- Share my thoughts with fellow believers, but not in public forums or discussions
- I am apathetic
- Passively support these things because I feel the fight more damaging than giving in to the will of others while trusting in God to set things right in the end
- Other, please explain

6. How do you view a leader you perceive to be passive or laissez-faire?

- Weak
- Wise
- Powerful
- Confident
- Unsure
- Indecisive
- As more a follower than a leader
- Other, please explain

7. Do you think great damage can be done by failing to speak out against immoral behavior by others in a timely manner?

- Yes
- No
- It’s complicated, please explain
8. How do you respond to situations of conflict within groups you are a part of where members within the group have become angry with one another or with you—or with a cultural situation offending their beliefs?

- I listen closely to others’ views and strive only to help others see areas of common ground, while attempting to build consensus
- I remain silent and refrain from becoming a party to the conflict
- I rebuke others when I believe it is necessary, but sparingly
- I endeavor to use these situations to teach and provide counsel
- I actively engage in the conflict and strive to control the situation
- Other, please explain

9. As a leader, do you believe you are to be an agent of God’s Will in all matters—to include matters of conflict involving angry followers?

- Yes
- No

  a. If you answered no, how do you discern which matters of conflict require your involvement from those that do not?

  b. If you answered yes, how do you discern when you should be forceful and assert the authority of your position of leadership, and when you should refrain from engaging others in order to first do no harm?

10. How would you define meekness?
APPENDIX G

Participant Observation Steps

Preparing for Participant Observation
1. Determine the purpose of the participant observation activity as related to the overall research objectives.
2. Determine the population(s) to be observed.
3. Consider the accessibility of the population(s) and the venues in which you would like to observe them.
4. Investigate possible sites for participant observation.
5. Select the site(s), time(s) of day, and date(s), and anticipate how long you will collect participant observation data on each occasion.
6. Decide how field staff will divide up or pair off to cover all sites most effectively.
7. Consider how you will present yourself, both in terms of appearance and how you will explain your purpose to others if necessary.
8. Plan how and if you will take notes during the participant observation activity.
9. Remember to take your field notebook and a pen.

After Participant Observation
10. Schedule time soon after participant observation to expand your notes.
11. Type your notes into computer files using the standard format set for the study.

Duke University Library. (2021, June 1). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide*