

PSYCHOLOGY OF ALTRUISM:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS

by

Joshua Belk

Liberty University

A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Altruism is fundamentally a part of Christianity, but this phenomenon has never been researched from the perspective of Christian leaders. More than simple kindness or generosity, altruism can be defined as actions and behaviors which place a person's own interests subordinate to another's. This qualitative study interviews 31 Christian leaders to establish an understanding of what altruism is in the context of Christian faith. The study found that Christian leaders' experiences with altruism redefines what was previously known about the phenomenon and its role in our lives. Examining the Christian rationale of altruism provides a richer conception of altruism and its role in personal belief systems. Christian leaders' insights about how altruism functions in pursuit of a Christ-like lifestyle provides a rarely scene viewpoint regarding the sacrifices and struggles of giving to others. The study found that altruism in Christian faith is about surrender and love, but most importantly, it is about meeting the needs of others and spiritual growth. Many of the life experiences of Christian leaders can be expressed through a new concept, "spiritual altruism," which categorizes spiritual sacrifices for others and helps define the broader altruism phenomenon. The study suggests that the unique understandings of Christian leaders expands existing altruistic themes (e.g., kinship, reciprocity, personality, morality, and love), and that altruism should no longer be viewed as a zero-sum or egoism-altruism construct, but as a mutually beneficial activity that embraces the best in all of us and enriches our personal lives and communities.

Keywords: altruism, spiritual altruism, Christianity, Christian Leader, religion, psychology, spirituality.

Dedication

“Without God you are living a life of uncertainty with death.” – Pastor Brent Stencil

For those who search in faraway dark places, bring light with them wherever they go,
may your journeys be epic tales of joy and passion for a Christ filled life. Save not one,
but all who love him...for we are the children of God.

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Families each have their own treasures, mine is full of religious men who have provide living examples of altruism and were the initial source of this study's topic. Having always impressed upon me the values of spirit-filled life, I am grateful for your enduring presence all these years. Thank you – Dr. A.G. Belk, Pastor Gary Belk, Pastor Roger Belk, and Mr. Joel Belk. No one can overlook the sacrifices of a mother, thank you Ms. Laney Belk for taking part in every journey I have had...it is a comforting peace when you are around.

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As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. – Joshua 24:15

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Over the past two hundred years there has been an ongoing discussion that has emerged in western society about an intriguing behavioral phenomenon. The phenomenon coined *altruism* by Auguste Comte, concerns the act of placing another's wellbeing before your own (Mangone, 2020); it is something that philosophers have struggled to explain for centuries before Comte's rationalizations (Cimagalli, 2020; Ebong, 2020). Despite our capacity to understand what helping others is, sacrificing for the sake of someone else, or selfless acts of heroism, there is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding altruism (Efthimiou & Allison, 2018). The term itself is a bit abstract and on many occasions has been used by researchers and scholars to mean different things for economics, mate selection, and caregiving; still yet, altruism is used interchangeably with terms like prosocial, helping, charity, and social benefits (Ahmed, 2021; Dovidio, 1984; Evans & Lane, 2011; Farmer & Dyne, 2017; Harris et L., 2019; Jin & Ryu, 2022; Kinnunen et al., 2015; McMahan et al., 2006; Pfattheicher et al., 2022; Schott et al., 2019; Toumbourou, 2016). Altruism remains elusive to researchers and despite the lack of a clear definition, for the purposes of this study, altruism is defined as *acts or behaviors that sacrifice a person's own interests for another's* which in general terms is supported by various scholars (Mulinge, 2018; Myers & Diener, 2018; Nichols, 2022; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Usman & Bulut, 2022).

Background

An exhaustive review of available literature has resulted in several primary themes of altruism. The themes are evolutionary (divisible into reciprocity and kin),

personality, punitive or moral, and love (Bliz & Nadler, 2014; Craig et al., 2013; Crewe, 2021). Biblical illustrations of these altruistic themes are displayed through a variety of scriptures (Black, 2022; Kline, 2022). Altruistic theories have been developed from evolutionary, economic, social, and psychological perspectives. Scholarly disagreements exist about the motivations of altruism and there is a dichotomy within most of the published literature between altruism and egoism (Jin & Ryu, 2022; Mangone, 2020; Nikolay, 2022; Sawyer, 1966; Septianto & Soegiarto, 2017; Voorhees, 2014; Yildirim et al., 2021). There is an argument that altruism cannot exist without self-sacrifice, sometimes referred to as *pure altruism*, which many scholars contend only exists in extreme circumstances such as risking one's life to save another or martyrdom (Belanger et al., 2014; De Dreu et al., 2015; Lewis, 2002; Ramachandran & Jalal, 2017; Rankin & Eagly, 2008; Robert et al., 2019; Talisse, 2013). Yet, heroism and altruism are believed to be related in their shared value of human life (Becker & Eagly, 2004; Bishop & Rees, 2007; Ford et al., 2018; Khoury & Khoury, 1981; Rankin & Eagly, 2008; Robert et al., 2019). Short of extreme behaviors, altruism has been studied greatly in conjunction with envy and empathy (Kaplanski & Levy, 2017; Lange et al., 2018; Li et al., 2017; Park & Kim, 2022, Van de Ven, 2017; Wang et al., 2021) demonstrating potential motivations for prosocial behaviors.

Altruism has a dark side, as well, which causes one to consider the mental, emotional, and spiritual foundations that undergird this phenomenon. Social constructs are a combination of environmental factors and self-image which can plausibly be explained as the mechanism used to create, understand, and behave altruistically (Flynn & Black, 2013; Grijalva & Zhang, 2016; Harris et al., 2019; Hong, 2021; Huang &

Brown, 2022; Kinnunen et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2006; Mikulincer et al., 2005).

While social constructs surrounding altruism have been heavily researched, the spiritual and religious aspects of altruism's relationship to Christian faith has not been fully appreciated. Researchers have examined altruism and spirituality with mixed results regarding the effect of religion making people more altruistic (Lancaster & Miller, 2020; Neugebauer et al., 2020; Ozhiganova, 2019; Rajasekhar et al., 2022; Titus, 2017; Williams, 2018).

Biblical applications and examples of altruism range across various interpretations and perspectives which include the topics of love, resurrection, salvation, death, charity, and comfort (Efferin & Hutomo, 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2020; Lai & Gu, 2022; Mulinge, 2018). Specifically, altruism is demonstrated in the Books of Job, Ruth, Joshua, Daniel, Judges, John, and Luke. Samson's final acts in Judges (16), Jesus' actions, death, and resurrection described in John, and the story of the *Good Samaritan* in Luke (10:25-37) each illustrate altruistic themes (New American Bible, 2011). Biblical stories require interpretation as they are meant to demonstrate situational events; pastoral efforts to describe the implications of altruism, either positive or negative, on Christian faith remains largely undocumented (Landi, 2022).

Problem Statement

Altruism research has been highly concentrated in the areas of evolutionary science, psychology, and economics (Ramachandran & Jalal, 2017). The past two hundred years of research have produced thoughts about altruism relating to reciprocity, empathy, ego, and self-image (Bykov, 2017). Altruism was a precursor for the popular cultural movement known as *positive psychology*, which has dominated psychology

research for the past twenty-five years. Yet, altruism has received little rigor or effort beyond the mundane and largely unimaginative attempts at explanations, with outdated survey tools and irrelevant games used to justify why people give to charity, volunteer, or why someone is more likely to help another person (Wang et al., 2021; Anwar, 2016). Darker attributes of altruism have pointed to narcissistic traits, major depressive disorder, guilt, and low self-esteem (Fujiwara, 2009). All said, any theory of altruism has difficulty withstanding elementary analytical probing because they are poorly fashioned and insufficiently comprehensive.

A recent meta-analysis of 273 studies from 2010 to 2021 resulted in only 70 (25.6%) articles including a relevant definition of altruism indicating that nearly 75% of recently published articles on altruism do not adequately define their central concern which leaves their studies open to interpretation (Pfattheicher et al., 2022). Altruism research lacks cohesion within the social sciences, it has been operationalized in numerous ways to illustrate what someone might do given fictitious circumstances (Bykov, 2017). The possible motivations for altruistic behavior are too many to enumerate, eliminating confounding variables requires a structured understanding and controls which are difficult to imagine or employ for many researchers. The experiments surrounding the subject have been focused on how altruism happens with little regard for what causes altruism which has made predicting altruism nearly impossible (Ashton & Lee, 2019; Huang & Brown, 2022; Schott, 2019). Psychologists, sociologists, and economists alike all search for a rationale which explains the behavior of altruism (Wang et al., 2021; Yildirim et al., 2021). Some scholars have reported self-interest and egoism as motivations; disagreement remains about the source motivation(s) of altruism which

has created a compounding effect across social science research where assumptions about altruism are introduced without validation and accepted or cited as accurate (Ozhiganova, 2019; Patton et al., 2018). Despite emerging research in the neurosciences, the majority of typical altruism experiments are unreliable and weak because they cannot be reproduced with similar accuracy or results (Curry, et al., 2018).

Christian researchers have rarely focused on exploring altruism as it relates to faith, Christian relationships, religion, or theology. The few existing studies are centered around prosocial acts of service (volunteering), charitable donations, and universal love (Gallarza et al., 2013; Hoffman et al., 2020; Karataş & Gürhan-Canli, 2020; Mulinge, 2018; Reddish & Tong, 2021). A biblical view of altruism is missing from virtually any meaningful discussion of the subject with the possible exception of certain types of love (Hoffman et al., 2020). Religious leaders have discussed altruism in relation to attitude and emotion (Hudson, 2014) but not how it relates to one's faith, spirituality, or relationship with God. Without a clear definition of altruism or its relationship to Christianity, no one can know if altruism is a motivation for Christian behaviors such as: prayer, worship, and faith practices. Secular studies philosophize about altruism's associations to God or religion as motivation but not an understanding of what altruism means to Christian faith (Crosby et al., 2020; Karataş & Gürhan-Canli, 2020; Lane, 2021). Discovering what altruism is and what it means to one's faith could prove to be the turning point in new pastoral counseling approaches, sermons, and religious study materials. The result of this study will provide a uniquely Christian faith perspective in support of the expansion of spirituality, philosophy, and a voice in academia for Christians who desperately desire to be heard and understood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore altruism through the perspective of Christian leaders. The study also intends to investigate what altruism means within the context of Christian faith, Christian values, and Christian theology.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do *Christian Leaders* describe altruism from their life experience?

RQ 2: How do *Christian Leaders* describe the relationship between altruism and Christian faith?

RQ 3: How do *Christian Leaders* describe personal insights of altruism in Christianity?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of the study, some of which might be difficult to directly assess. First, *interviews* may prove to be a limitation. There may not be a strong desire to participate and finding those willing to provide interview time could be a challenge. Leaders have time limitations and constraints which may preclude them from participating even if they want to. Demands of organizational, staff, and congregational responsibilities will compete with participation in this study. Second, *Christian Leader's lack of understanding of altruism* may prove to be a limitation. It is possible that this could be the first time they are considering the topic and might be uninformed about altruism. While lacking knowledge of the topic does not disqualify participants, it will create cause for the researcher to explain the construct which could influence the participant's responses. Third, *the method of solicitation* (e.g., telephone, email, social media, etc.) may prove to be a challenge because there is no existing list, roster, or

organization which can provide access to accurate contact lists for participants. Fourth, *lack of Eastern cultural input* is a limitation of the study. The study is limited to addressing altruism from a Western cultural perspective.

A major assumption is that *Christianity* is best suited for this study in comparison to other religions. Of the three Abrahamic religions, Christianity is the only one which teaches a philosophy of altruism because Christianity emphasizes agape love and assisting others without reward or through self-sacrifice. Judaism sets forth a series of 613 laws which provide guidance about how to interact with God, people, and the world. These laws and their subsequent interpretations never mention altruism, instead they focus on one's duty to perform good deeds and sacrifices as atonement for sins. The concept of *mitzvah* (good deeds) is a key tenant of Judaic faith and practice. Mitzvahs are described and applied in many ways throughout the centuries. Rabbinic discussions of mitzvahs have identified the underlying motivation of the mitzvah being performed as one of the key components of the good deed itself. Doing good deeds for the sake of doing good is in itself a positive activity (Neusner & Avery-Peck, 2005). However, there are several aspects of doing good deeds which Rabbis argue and they are essentially levels of the mitzvah. The range from doing a charitable act where the giver and receiver remain unknown as the highest form of a mitzvah, through to the complicated system of either the giver or receiver knowing who the other was, and finally, the scenario where both giver and receiver are aware of who the other person is at the time of the mitzvah. The strength of the mitzvah is greater when neither the giver or receiver know each other because it is believed that both are then free to enjoy the blessing of the act since neither of the people involved know the other party, they will not form expectations, judgements,

or considerations which might diminish or detract from the act in the first place. Not knowing who will benefit and not knowing who provided the benefit means both parties are free to look each other in the eye without any sense of compromise. Altruism has no place in a system like this because Jews are commanded to support others which excludes key elements of altruism (e.g., self-sacrificing, and not receiving rewards).

From a Jewish perspective, altruism is fulfilling the law. Therefore, potential altruism is reduced to prosocial, helping, kindness, or good deeds because the acts do not meet the threshold for the definition of altruism. Without minimizing the significance of any mitzvah, Judaism is not an appropriate religious perspective to engage for this study or conversations of altruism at large. Islam presents another view altogether in which altruism does not exist because every act of generosity is rewarded by God. Therefore, it becomes impossible to distinguish altruism from any reward seeking behaviors which might increase one's experience in the afterlife. Muslims are taught that self-sacrifice is rewarded on the day of judgment. Similar to Judaism's doctrine of ethical behaviors, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of motives in moral actions (Homerin, 2005). For all the similarities of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there is a difference in the application of good deeds and individual motivations.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

While several emerging theories of altruism have been debated in previous research, none of them are appropriate for inclusion in this study because their concentration has centered on altruism's interaction with ego, empathy, and dichotomies creating a dialog about what altruism looks like or how it appears in human behavior. There is no single unifying theory of altruism, but the two most prevalent concepts are

altruism-ego and altruism-empathy ideas. Most researchers discuss altruism from an egocentric point of view which debates the dichotomy of self-versus-others and has inadvertently established a zero-sum type of construct. Under this paradigm, altruism is discussed and researched as an either-or phenomenon through which an individual is altruistic for their own egotistical motivations. The second major idea is the altruism-empathy hypothesis put forward by Batson, who articulates that altruism is a product of empathy and that altruism is predictable based upon the empathy of the individual. Creating empathetic responses increases altruism responses but does not explain the effects, benefits, or other motivations of altruism. The relationship between altruism and the Bible is irrefutable. The descriptions and depictions of Jesus Christ state a clear example of altruistic behavior which Christians are taught to make use of. Although the link between altruism and the Bible does not explain the psychological motivations of altruism, it does provide important understanding of the psychological construct of altruism because altruism's spiritual connections have been all but lost in contemporary research. Consideration was given to altruism's relationship to *virtue theory* and *positive psychology* theories, but they more focused on personal development, civil responsibility, and the care of others which do not provide a theoretical basis for this study (Balashov, 2022; Kidder & Parks, 2001). The purpose of this study is to explore what altruism means to Christianity from the perspective of Christian Leaders, for which no theoretical foundations currently exist.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Altruism – Altruism is defined as *acts or behaviors which sacrifice a person's own interests for another's* (Mulinge, 2018; Myers & Diener, 2018; Nichols, 2022; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Usman & Bulut, 2022). The basic foundation of altruism has five requirements: first, the altruistic act must benefit another person; second, the act must be performed voluntarily (not forced out of obligation or guilt); third, the act must be performed intentionally (versus by accident or coincidence); fourth, the benefit must be the goal by itself (as opposed to being the by-product of another goal); and fifth, the act must be performed without expectation of external reward (Piliavin & Charng, 1990).

Altruistic Love – Altruistic love is defined as unconditional compassion or concern, freely given without expectation, for the suffering and injustice of others (Koenig, 2007; Mangone, 2020; Mulinge, 2018).

Altruistic Personality – Altruistic personality is defined as a persistent quality of caring for other's wellbeing, showing care, and putting other before oneself; including a strong sense of social responsibility, empathy, belief in a just world, and possessing the qualities of generosity, helpfulness, kindness, and self-control (Kao et al., 2022).

Christian Leader – Christian leader is defined as a person who influences others towards God's kingdom by believing, reflecting, and obeying Jesus Christ and one who has held a role which required them to give sermons, preach, or evangelize as part of a Christian organization of any denomination or non-denomination who may or may not be ordained or certified (McLaughlin, 2002). For the purposes of this study the terms *clergy*, *pastor*, *pastoral staff* are synonymous with the term.

Kin Altruism – Kin altruism is defined as acts performed to enhance or protect the survival of relatives; a genetic tendency to act in the benefit of close relatives. It is the

most common type of altruism across species (Palmer & Palmer, 2022; Scott & Seglow, 2007).

Prosocial – Prosocial is defined as positive behaviors intended to help others. Generally, acts of kindness, thoughtfulness, and charity are considered prosocial (Pfattheicher et al., 2022; Yin & Wang, 2023).

Punitive Altruism – Punitive altruism is defined as the punishment of an individual for violating social norms. Often carried out by an outside observer who is not directly affected by the violation (Filkowski et al., 2016).

Reciprocal Altruism – Reciprocal altruism is defined as acts performed with the expectation or intent of obtaining future reward, favor, or preference from the recipient person or beneficiary, typically not those of close relations (Palmer & Palmer, 2022; Scott & Seglow, 2007).

Significance of the Study

The research presented here is the first of its kind and aims to discover how Christian leaders think about, talk about, and experience altruism in their communities. Certain vocational choices align with altruistic behaviors and there have been efforts to explore these subgroups (e.g., police, firefighters, nurses, counselors, etc.), but there is a gap in literature about altruism's interactions and views of the clergy or pastoral staffs (Almeida et al., 2022; Hong, 2021; Patton et al., 2018; Timmins et al, 2018). Describing the unique perspectives of *Christian Leaders* is critical to future conversations about altruism and the Christian faith.

Christian research involving altruism will help establish better insight and promote greater understanding among theologians, researchers, clergy, and the social

sciences about what altruism means to the Christian faith through from the perspective of Christian Leaders. The study will contribute to existing altruistic themes and may discover new or emerging themes which have not previously been considered or published. The results of the study may provide a reference for pastoral counselors to develop new faith building practices for Christians and research strategies for the social sciences.

Summary

There are no Christian based versions or descriptive definitions that are all encompassing of the altruism phenomenon which makes it difficult to describe altruism. Despite many attempts to quantify altruism, only a few theories have emerged over the past two hundred years. Auguste Comte is credited with coining the term and his views on altruism focused on selflessness, but altruism has always been a part of human behavior. The working definition presented in this study is: altruism as *acts or behaviors which sacrifice a person's own interests for another's*. Christian behaviors of prayer, worship, and faith interact with altruism in unique ways. The significance of this study supports the understanding of the opinions of Christian leaders regarding altruism.

The study contains data from 31 interviews of Christian leaders in the autumn of 2023 about the relationship between altruism and Christian faith and Christian theology. Altruism in Christian faith is presented as altruistic surrender and altruistic love but there are examples of five altruistic themes in the Bible. The study is the first attempt to establish a parallel connection between altruism and Christianity. Qualitative interviews of Christian leaders will inspire future Christian focused studies and new research

designs. Framing this social science phenomena in a creative way provides a path to new research; this study publishes a Christian perspective of altruism.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

What motivates people to be kind, cooperative, helpful, and altruistic?

Researchers have been attempting to answer this question for thousands of years.

Changes to society are happening faster, globally, and in unprecedented ways since the digital age swept in at the beginning of the twenty-first century and society is awkwardly attempting to adjust. There is no constant, except to say that change has been constant, and people are struggling to adapt (Sproul, 2000). Perhaps another constant is religion, which seems to be ever present throughout history, but it too has faced changes. Easing out of the present and looking at the near recent past, the last several hundred years, one can see the development of education, industry, corporations, and technology each having had significant effects on society. Have these changes actually changed what why one chooses to be altruistic? During the period of enlightenment Western societies created many philosophical ideas and critics continue to debate about human motivations and faith.

Auguste Comte wrote about positivism in the 1800s and within his writings the word *altruism* was born, previously the term had been discussed in numerous abstract methods. From Comte's perspective, altruism represented thinking, acting, and consideration for others before the self, perhaps a type of selflessness (Gualda, 2022; Mangone, 2020). The motivations and circumstances for selfless acts are touched on from time to time in literature but altruism essentially falls asleep, lost in the philosophical dialogs of politics and ideologies, to reawaken again a hundred years later in mid to late twentieth century. During the past 70 years altruism has begun to pick up more force as

an idea, a concept, even a way of being (Bykov, 2017). Yet, it has been poorly understood by many who in a rush to make use of altruism create their own interpretations of it. Hence, not a single codified theoretical explanation of altruism exists.

Altruism is a bit of a mystery, even to today's researchers, because its origins are not well understood, nor are its motivations (Bykov, 2017). Numerous explanations have been provided in many diverse ways across the social sciences, as there is no unifying definition of altruism, any discussion about altruism requires level setting or perhaps expectation management about what altruism is, what it can do, and how it can be operationalized. Altruism is commonly conflated with prosocial acts, utilitarianism, and socialism (Ahmed, 2021; Dovidio, 1984; Evans & Lane, 2011; Farmer & Dyne, 2017; Harris et al., 2019; Jin & Ryu, 2022; Kinnunen et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2006; Schott et al., 2019; Toumbourou, 2016). Theories of altruism that do exist, have been formed from evolutionarily, economic, social, and psychological perspectives (Batson, 1994; Bykov, 2017), but theories of altruism remain even more elusive when examined through faith. The closest any researchers have come to explaining altruism from a biblical view is to conceptualize altruism as love, unconditional and sacrificial (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Klein, 2022; Lai & Gu, 2022).

Through an exhaustive review of available literature several themes of altruism emerge. The *evolutionary theme*, which is further segmented into kin and reciprocal altruism, concentrates on the fitness or survival of one's DNA as the motivation of altruistic behaviors. The *personality theme* attempts to explain altruistic motivations as part of one's self-identity shaped by a collectivist attitude towards cooperation with both

ingroups and outgroups. The *moral or punitive theme* centers its discussion on unfairness and perceived injustices as the motivation for altruistic behaviors. The *love theme* is a biblical perspective describing the motivations of altruism as self-transcendent and part of fulfilling one's duty to God. Beyond these themes there are also neuroscientific efforts to explain the phenomena of altruism in the brain, sociological efforts to incorporate altruism into political views and (e.g., global warming, saving endangered species, and civil rights), and efforts to shape the behaviors of consumers through marketing, branding, and social media. Each of these themes brings to life the concept of altruism in different ways. However, this chapter establishes the basis of these themes by beginning with a brief review of philosophical thoughts related to altruism, followed by a review of the themes. The chapter closes with a focus on the core of altruism before providing the biblical foundations of this study.

Description of Search Strategy

The search methodology for this study consisted of a variety of terms and techniques to discover all available information regarding altruism and altruistic behavior. The following Dissertation Databases were searched utilizing the terms altruism, phenomenology, and Christianity: ProQuest Database and Liberty University Dissertation database. Amazon Books was searched for relevant materials and recent publications about altruism. The Liberty University Online Library was the primary source for articles related to altruism, searches were conducted utilizing the following terms: altruism, altruistic. The following items were searched as [*altruism*] + one or more combinations of these words: prosocial, hero, heroic, punitive, reciprocal, loyalty, envy, depression, survey, tools, scales, narcissist, neuroscience, Christian, religion, religious,

spirituality, personality, archetypes, egoism, kin, first responder, and phenomenology. Google Scholar and Research Gate were used to gain access to research articles and citations for published materials which were not otherwise accessible, based on similar search terms used for the Liberty University Library. Biblical research included reading the Bible, listening to sermons, internet searches, and Judaic scriptural sources including, the Talmud and Rabbinical literature to provide background and context for altruism perspectives.

Review of Literature

To properly discuss *altruism*, the complexity of the subject should be explained to establish a common analytical perspective and foundation from which the basis of this research study was completed. When discussing an abstract psychological construct such as altruism, there will naturally be questions about the motivations of the behavior, the genesis of the behavior, and the complexities or influences acting on the behavior. Altruism is derived from behaviors towards others which depend on a series of considerations (Walker, 2020). Similar to other human behaviors, altruism relies upon one's assessment of the present situation and willingness to act but also implies an ability or a sense of evaluating future outcomes. At the core of altruism is the final decision to act because altruism cannot exist in thought alone. Therefore, scholars and philosophers have focused on what causes one to act in an altruistic manner. A holistic review of altruism includes a brief description of the philosophical perspective which has led to the emergence of thematic altruistic concepts. Following these thematic points, the present facts of altruism through neuroscientific explanations, religious psychology, and altruism expressions employed in the social sciences will be considered.

Altruism manifests in many ways, we are familiar with these behaviors because they are on display in everyday life and are commonly referred to as prosocial behaviors. The terms *altruism* and *prosocial* are often interchanged or referred to without much consideration of their true meanings. Albeit they are not exactly the same because altruistic behaviors require self-sacrifice and prosocial behaviors do not (Septianto & Soegianto, 2017). In its purist form, altruism is to self-sacrifice for the benefit of another. Short of this sacrifice, many researchers think of altruism as *prosocial behaviors* instead (Neuberg et al., 2010; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Prosocial behaviors may include acts of helping, cooperating, giving, and volunteering (Dovidio, 1984). Acts of altruism are ones in which the individual promotes the interests of others over their own (Neuberg et al., 2010) or acts of sharing with others without expectation of any reward (Apuke & Omar, 2021; Rushton et al., 1981).

Altruism is typically framed in several ways: 1) as an economic decision, 2) as a survival or biological decision, 3) as a belief system associated with a particular religion (Rushton, et al., 1981; Windmann & Hein, 2018), and 4) as punitive action (Filkowski et al., 2016). Biblically, altruism is represented by the story of the Good Samaritan in the book of Luke, along with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (*New American Bible*, 2011). Humans have the capacity to act in a combination of interests (self, other, or both) using whatever criteria they deem relevant (Kaplanski & Levy, 2017). Cognition is one detail that separates us from other species. Part of what drives the human experience according to Farmer & Dyne (2017) is one's identity, the social construct which is the foundation of an individual. Voorhees (2014) brings perspective to the considerations of how prosocial (altruistic) behaviors occur and the motivations of why they occur given

social and economic benefits along with psychological benefits. No act can be altruistic if it is not socially valued by culture or society. Therefore, altruism's relevance is tied to the environment in which it is being performed.

Philosophical Basis of Altruism

To be sure of something is to know it, and in knowing something one also knows what it is not. The clarity of knowing something is that one no longer guesses, makes assumptions, or creates hyperbole about the topic. In the absence of knowledge or knowing, there is debate. Throughout the ages philosophers have described man's understanding of God, the universe, and our existence in their own words. No one can definitively answer these questions which is why they remain debated today. If God is the source of involuntary ideas as George Berkeley states, then perhaps God is also the source of inspiration, as inspiration is arguably involuntary (Sproul, 2000). Is altruism divinely inspired or merely the byproduct of a complex series of social calculation? No one has offered a definitive answer to this question. Therefore, as mankind evolves or devolves his thinking, he must first understand himself in order to understand God.

We cannot *be* and *not be* at the same moment any more than we can demonstrate the rationality of God or altruism. You either *are* or you *are not* something, but you cannot be both at the same time, which is to say that man is a series of paradoxes. Rene Descartes gave 21 rules for direction of the mind but still man struggles with the source of truth. Is truth, natural law as John Locke says, or a system of mental changes which culminate in a psychological belief and passion to obey and follow God? One can argue either point of view against the other, but neither will emerge as the victor because truth is subjective according to some and to others truth is God (Sproul, 2000). Altruism is

equally subjective because where a person performing an act might be viewed as kindness by one person, another person might perceive the act as duty and obedience. Understanding God, our existence, and the world around us is explained through our sense of self and our ability to interact with our environment, which is also how altruism can be understood.

The term altruism did not even exist before the 1800s, and although its elements were observable even as far back as the ancient Greeks, this bizarre behavior is only represented in vague explanations of philosophical dialog that is intertwined with other concepts. Aristotle had no means of utilizing the term during his description of *friendship* and *acting for others* which he attributed to one's desire for "another self" –a concept that lays the foundation for altruism's future connection to love (Berchman, 2005). Later, Christianity introduced loving others as a pillar of faith. Other philosophers, Nietzsche, Comte, Kant, and Spencer viewed altruism as a Christian construct, which influenced their opinions and writings about altruism, mainly casting their dialogs along an egocentric versus altruistic comparison (Scott & Seglow, 2007). The significance of altruism over time has grown and at the point when Comte decided to rationalize altruism, because it had become important enough to warrant specific designation. Even though altruism existed in all ages, its cultural relevance was only reaching a pinnacle in the 1800s. The benefits of altruism are difficult to demonstrate in a universally convincing manner because people engage in acts of generosity, mercy, kindness, and self-sacrifice daily without understanding their impact or effectiveness. Carl Rogers rejected Sigmund Freud's notions that people were innately egocentric and selfish by nature, and instead, promoted the belief that people were capable of positive growth and

self-actualization (Rogers, 1951). Attempting to reconcile these early thoughts about altruism is what led to further analysis from several points of view.

As Comte's description of altruism was being written, another theoretical work was being born, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Darwin himself recognized that other species, along with humans, sometimes behaved contrary to their own interests. The idea that people would promote another's interests over their own, even to their own detriment, was out of alignment with evolutionary explanations unless the act could somehow be linked to a behavior that promoted the species. Darwin dismissed altruistic behaviors as traits aimed at improving mate selection (Dugatkin, 2006). Evolutionary altruism evolved into two distinctions during the twentieth century, kin and reciprocal altruism. Both were attempts to explain the motivations of altruism, and each distinction has been heavily researched across the social sciences.

Altruism Phenomenon

Altruistic behavior is admired in circumstances in which it is appropriate to act for the sake of others (Dovidio, 1984; Mulinge, 2018). Prosocial behaviors do not include every act of kindness, just as altruism does not encompass every act of kindness, consideration of others, good deed, and demonstration of morality which are ultimately judged by society. In order for an action to be considered prosocial, it must meet a somewhat subjective perception or judgment of the general population because it is a sociocultural construct; prosocial behaviors are referred to as such because they are valued by the society in which they are being performed (Dewhurst et al., 2023; Walker, 2022).

The evolutionary sociobiology explanation of altruism requires that the phenomenon of altruistic behaviors be viewed within the context of supporting personal fitness. Since personal fitness is the key element of the evolutionary theory, altruism and selfishness must be biological. Evolutionary examples of altruism refer to Darwin's survival of the fittest theory which posits that all behaviors are intended to further the genetic reproduction of the species. Kin altruism theory was developed by Hamilton and explains altruistic behaviors as a means of promoting the survival of offspring and family, which is the epitome of the idea, *family first* (Dugatkin, 2006). Evolutionists categorize any other altruistic act as reciprocal altruism which is part of the mate selection process and herd (tribe) survival. They define altruism as surrendering one's personal genetic fitness to enhance another's personal genetic fitness. Altruism is explained away as representing a form of DNA transmission and, thus, reduces all other views of altruism to self-serving acts where even spirituality becomes an enabling device for reproduction (Grant, 2000).

The dichotomy of the altruism-egoism theory stems from the evolutionary altruist views that everything an individual does is connected to their reproductive fitness, thereby equates altruism to selfishness (Mangone, 2020). At the core of altruism is an acknowledgement of *others* which places it in contrast to the opposite of others, the self. The egoism argument is a heavily researched area in the social sciences, especially when researchers introduce variables like empathy, envy, and self-enhancement as operationalizations of altruistic motives, and a means to observe changes in behavior (Jin & Ryu, 2022; Nikolay, 2022; Sawyer, 1966; Septianto & Soegianto, 2017; Voorhees, 2014; West, 2022, Yildirim et al., 2021).

Neuberg et al. (2010) discusses our human nature related to thinking and doing (acting), and the importance of both content and context since relationships are both innate and spiritual. Nietzsche (1966) warned that altruism has the potential to harm a person's capacity to be generous. To the extent that one engages in altruistic acts, one will either undermine his or her ability to be generous or simply become incapable of being genuinely kind, as though doing so causes one to neglect one's values and desires. When one's values are neglected, the person loses their identity and self-esteem (Mulinge, 2018). It is easy to become depressed or disenchanted when assessing one's social relevance to others and finding that you have been taken advantage of or have been the victim of giving too much (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Assuming that altruism or helping others is always good should be avoided. The lack of consensus about altruism's benefits has resulted in numerous explanations for its motivations.

During the 1970s, Darley and Batson set out to discover the variables at play when helping others. Their famous seminary experiment was based upon the concept of the Biblical *Good Samaritan*, someone who helps unknown others in need, which is a generally accepted social norm in Western society. The idea of the *Good Samaritan* is so pervasive in American culture that all 50 states have *Good Samaritan* laws, and several federal laws exist to cover specific circumstances, because Americans believe in a moral duty to render assistance to others in need when possible (West & Varacallo, 2022). The Darley and Batson (1973) experiment studied the variable of time as a factor which influenced a person's willingness to stop and help a stranger. What they found was that when people are hurried, they are much less likely to stop and assist a stranger. Aiding others became more subjective scientifically because altruism engages our morality.

Since the 1970s, there have been many attempts to operationalize altruism to determine what the motivations and influences are.

In a study about COVID-19 and fake news, Apuke and Omar (2021) found that altruism was positively associated with gathering and sharing information on social media platforms. The altruistic behavior of sharing information about a rapidly spreading virus during the pandemic seems somewhat common at first glance. However, considering the self-enhancing behavior involved in researching or gathering information and building one's knowledge about a socially relevant subject indicates several possible motivations: egoism or self-promotion, empathy, and moral justice or punitiveness. From that vantage point the altruistic behavior of sharing the information to help protect others, a socially desirable and positively viewed activity, could be viewed as self-enhancement. Other ways in which people might promote themselves through altruistic behaviors volunteerism, caregiving, or charity (Muralidharan, 2023). Anderson et al. (2019) found that one of the themes associated with caregivers expressed a sense of altruism and activism which fostered a sense of giving back to their community. Additionally, they were likely to engage in information sharing as a self-care strategy through blogs and online forums. Charity is also commonly considered an altruistic behavior, and giving to others because they are needy has been associated with a desire for greater social status, prestige, respect, and acclaim (Anderson, 1981). In these scenarios, self-enhancement presents itself in giving back to the community and information sharing, two activities which are likely to generate positive self-comparisons but may or may not qualify as altruistic.

Almeida et al. (2022) conducted a study of Portuguese volunteer firefighters who represented approximately 92 percent of the country's firefighters during the COVID-19 pandemic; their empathy, compassion, and authenticity in the face of adversity were the reason many people received care and assistance. Altruism often looks the same as empathy and compassion because of the resulting community benefits. Self-enhancing activities of bravery and selflessness towards others are a more extreme examples of how people socially promote themselves, and how others will promote these acts positively. By increasing their social status, through volunteer firefighting, for example, they decrease downward social comparisons, which automatically contribute to higher self-image and greater self-esteem (Fiske & Taylor, 2021; Coleman, 2006). Not everyone is convinced of altruism by heroic deeds or self-sacrificing behaviors.

There are scholars and researchers who believe that altruism is something made up, a social construct, and nothing more than a cultural nuance that cannot be measured or observed in the brain (Bishop & Rees, 2007). Others believe that altruism is associated with depression disorders because prosocial behaviors create feelings of lack, ineptitude, and increased self-judgment (Fujiwara, 2009). The motivations for altruism are not well understood as they can range from prosocial behaviors related to economic interests, mate selection, reciprocity, and egoism (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Dessalles, 2018). Prosocial behavior has been placed under *positive psychology* for many scholars. However, while positive psychology seeks to brighten our surroundings and our understanding of our environment, altruism is but one aspect which could be framed as positive. Some studies have shown a dark side to altruism, when giving too much "costs someone" their sanity, often leading to depression and other types of personality disorder

(Neugebauer, et al., 2020). Perhaps Aquinas was right about his description of a good man when he claimed that goodness did not extend to the entirety of man but only to certain aspects (Sproul, 2000). Altruism might be thought of in a similar way; it is possible to fluctuate in one's attitudes towards others as it is in one's attitude towards God, which is why further understanding of spirituality and altruism is needed. By defining the relationship between altruism and the potential effects that spiritual beliefs have on it, there could be a breakthrough in the explanation of human motivations, namely altruism.

Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* stands in opposition to altruism altogether because acts of altruism must be voluntary and not born of obedience, otherwise they are merely *good deeds*. Jesus said, "if you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), implying that one should be obedient to the commandments to love one another. But there exists a gap in this theological argument. There is no definitive guidance on how one is supposed to love another; to fill this void, the *golden rule* is often inserted. Yet, in terms of altruism, there could be another perspective. Altruism is based in a desire to promote the welfare of others without regard for the self. From this perspective, the concept of self-love emerges, much like Nietzsche's concept of abandoning the ego (Sproul, 2000). Altruism requires one to think one way (about the self) and act in another. To fully embrace altruism, one must be like the good Samaritan described in Luke (10:25-37), assisting someone without expectation of receiving anything.

The influence of religion on social behaviors is ambivalent, but religion does shape social norms and influences what society establishes as meaningful forms of prosocial behavior (Usama & Bulut, 2022). Religious beliefs and affiliations interact with

one's social identifiers influencing one's world view (Petrikova, 2019). Spirituality and religion are not the same, a distinction made by Huber et al. (2012), who isolated religion and spirituality as they relate to altruism. Huber's research found that nonreligious spiritual cognitions and spiritual experiences were the best indicators of empathy and altruism. These findings cause one to consider what are the experiences, specifically, shaping one's social awareness and self-transcendence.

Spiritual people value prosocial behaviors (Black, 2022; Saslow et al., 2013). Christians, Jews and Buddhists alike all value prosocial behaviors (*New American Bible*, 2011; Kennick-Urubshurow, 2001). Altruism is often lost in conversations about giving, making donations, and charity (in general) when people conflate *giving* with true altruism. Arguably there is nothing altruistic about donating money unless the amount of money represents a sacrifice, such as, putting a person in a position where they are unable to pay required debts or have to forgo a desire in lieu of the gift. Charitable donations are regularly used as a method to operationalize altruism but have been proven to be the result of other factors and are not based on religion, theology, or altruism (Reddish & Tong, 2021; Karatas & Gurhan-Canli, 2020).

Do monks or priests assume altruism? Through their vows perhaps they do, because they sacrifice material and worldly pleasures to serve others and to be spiritual leaders. Vinokur (2022) found that servant type occupations, which provide communal good, are altruistic, and this finding can be extended to several different careers. Yet, for altruism to truly be involved there must be at some level a tradeoff or sacrifice of one's assets, possessions, freedoms, or potential future gains and accomplishments. Certain vocational choices do align with altruistic behaviors, and there have been efforts to

explore these subgroups (e.g., police, firefighters, nurses, councilors). Yet, there is a gap in the literature about altruism's interactions in view of clergy or pastoral staffs (Almeida et al., 2022; Hong, 2021; Patton et al., 2018; Timmins et al, 2018). At present we do not know how the altruistic motivations of any of these career fields, but certainly faith in Christ plays a significant role.

Kin Altruism Theme

Perhaps the best summation of this theme is the phrase "*family first,*" which denotes that one's actions and activities should promote the welfare of their family before other goals. William Hamilton is credited with developing the concept of kin altruism during his study of group selection preferences in various insects when he created what became known as *Hamilton's Rule* (Hasegawa & Kutsukake, 2019; Scott & Seglow, 2007), a formula designed to predict kin selection which included certain traits. One of the traits observed in mammals is their territorial or aggressive behavior when threats get too close to offspring. During a 2020 study, Kay, Keller, and Lehmann rediscovered the underlying implications of Hamilton's work through a review of 200 studies from three decades of research where 43 of the studies cited altruism as the basis of evolutionary kin behaviors.

Durkheim discusses kin altruism as family altruism, he argued that family altruism was synonymous with society because there will always be solidarity in society when it relates to family matters. People will act to protect their offspring, they will sacrifice to please their family members, and they will aid and assist their neighbors in times of need (Bykov, 2017). In terms of Durkheim's view, altruism was a social construct and not a biological one as Darwin might have argued. Therefore, kin altruism

can explain tribal behaviors and protection of family amongst ingroups from outside threats. Kin altruism feeds a collectivization or cooperative theory model for society, in that altruism is the mechanism which brings people together and keeps them together through prosocial behaviors that benefit both the group and the individual.

In some rare and specific circumstances, kin altruism can be observed outside of the family when an individual forms strong bonds with non-family members, effectively creating a type of surrogate family (Robert et al., 2019). These types of non-traditional families are observed in groups or professions where the individuals experience stressful, enduring, and uniquely shared situations or circumstances. The range of these groups extend from fraternities and sororities to sports teams to firefighters, police, military, and clergy. All of these are examples of exclusive groups. Individuals experience lifelong bonding during crisis, which later results in people regarding one another as extended family, and therefore, are eligible for receiving special treatment. The special treatment may come in the form of altruistic acts, especially, when one of the individuals has a pressing need that can be alleviated by the other.

Altruistic Reciprocity Theme

Today, the Western cultural focus on individuality has meant a loss in community identity leading to the theory of identity fusion (Robert et al., 2019) which states that people are willing to act altruistically toward non-kin if they perceived the recipient as having a shared identity. Altruistic reciprocity at its core, is collectivism and politically represents socialism (Zyuzev, 2022); it can be referred to as *the neighborly thing to do* or as a means of gaining social acceptance among others because psychologically people who share things are more like to view each other positively (Fiske & Taylor, 2021).

Where kin altruism is about family, altruistic reciprocity is about getting along with other which includes family but extends towards all people.

Humans are unique species, we have intellect and understanding to create complex social constructs which have led to the creation of a space where altruism was born. Reciprocal altruism explains smaller community level behaviors and transactions, which were intended to promote the welfare of the community, and at a tribal level creates a dynamic of interdependence among members (Vlerick, 2021). People are unpredictable because they have the ability to act in a blend of interests for the self or others, using whatever criteria they deem relevant at the time, which does not always support the evolutionary perspective of promoting one's natural fitness (Kaplanski & Levy, 2017; Vlerick, 2021). Part of what drives the human experience is our identity, a social construct that is a significant part of our foundation as an individual (Farmer & Dyne, 2017). Theories associated with identity focus on an individual's doing or belonging as central themes which guide our behaviors (Hogg et al., 1995). The struggle each of us endures to obtain a sense of belonging and to identify with our families, friends, co-workers, and social groups, is based largely upon our perceptions of social norms (Brent, 2015).

Reciprocity is one reason we help others, but is it truly altruistic or merely self-serving? Our ability to consider and perform prosocial (altruistic) behaviors are informed and influenced by our moral judgement, emotions, and identity (Septianto & Soegianto, 2017). Even our culture influences these complex calculations. One's identity can evolve over time and with it an individual's regard for social relationships, which is where we begin to see altruism emerge (McMahon, et al., 2006). Our identity begins forming in our

preschool childhood and continues throughout our life (Harris, et al., 2019). Extending outwards, beyond ourselves, are our social and cultural identities, which are now shaped by digital media and the society of the internet.

Societal groups are a complex system of community-based enterprises where people interact, share, and develop (Dentoni, et al., 2018; Voorhees, 2014). Some scholars have surmised that altruism was no more than a means of economics within a tribal society. As each person had both shared and specific tasks, they contributed to the success of and survival of the tribe. Those who had more, gave to others knowing that the circumstances could reverse in the future and because the success of the tribe was of greater value than an individual alone, and altruism was likely no more than a cooperative agreement. Yet, other studies argued that altruism was about microeconomics (Kaplanski & Levy, 2017; Vlerick, 2021), those with more were able to provide for their relatives and in tribes that also meant that hunters (men) would be viewed positively if they were successful, eventually resulting in their preference of a bride. However, these are humanistic views and suppositions because there is no means of knowing the exact motivations of humans living in tribal societies 10,000 years ago. Scholars' best educated guesses are that altruism was an extension of reproductive selection, choosing a mate, mating, and extending the life of the tribe which mirrors anthropological explanations of small group society.

Altruistic Personality Theme

In the 1980s, J. Philippe Rushton sought to establish that an altruistic personality existed. He founded his claim by creating the Self-Report Altruism (SRA) Scale (Rushton et al., 1981) which became the de facto model for altruism surveys for the next

forty years. The basis of his argument was that an altruistic personality did exist as more than merely being kind towards others or acting out of good will. Forty years later Dewhurst et al. (2023) linked prosocial personality with the theory of planned behaviors, which offers that altruistic personality is conscious and not innate. Establishing the foundational understanding of the altruistic personality requires discussion of tangential concepts such as, the self and identity, because they contribute to the overall altruism dialog. Attempting to answer the question of what motivates altruism, begins with the self, and expand outwards to others through empathy, envy, loyalty, admiration, attraction, and identity.

The altruistic personality is observed on a macro level as one who promotes public awareness, global causes, and social justice. Not everyone agrees that defending a social cause is altruistic because altruism is subjective to social norms, which means that two divergent sides of an issue could both be acting altruistically from their own points of view. Feelings of admiration and envy have been associated with altruism (Kaplanski & Levy, 2017). People search to express themselves, even at the expense of others or the good of society, which is the opposite of altruism. When one person succeeds, there are others who diminish the individual's success by dismissing its impact or accomplishment or through refusal to acknowledge its significance (Voorhees, 2014). These behaviors are most prevalently displayed today across social media, news outlets, and within the digital popular culture. Zhou et al. (2023) studied the relationship between altruists, community self-esteem, and brand loyalty. He established altruism as a moderating factor for positive brand loyalty. As consumerism is a reflection of the self, the behaviors of consumers can show true intentions and motivations (Muralidharan, 2023; Robertson et al. 2022; Shin et

al., 2021). Being altruistic, prosocial, loyal, or kind, are subjective values established differently for each person but one's shopping behaviors helps shed light on what one values.

Prosocial behaviors are largely associated with altruistic personality; one of the most sustainable means of prosocial behaviors is an individual's personal goals and values which are heavily shaped by their collective experiences and socialization (Lieder et al., 2022). The altruistic personality is derived from the concept of self or subjective well-being, which is a collaboration of the physical, mental, and emotional (Usman & Bulut, 2022). To be uniquely you, you are the result of the experiences you have had. These experiences shape your perceptions, your mood, prime your dispositions, and eventually establish the foundations of your beliefs, values, and judgments, which is the foundation of *who* you are. There are, however, questions about if we have complete free-will with our choices or if the physiological chemistry of our body compels us to behave a certain way. Much effort has gone into exploring our social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 2021), but research is still lacking the answers to the specific motivations of altruism. Could our self-concept influence the way we approach self-enhancement, and therefore result in altruistic behaviors or personality traits? There certainly seems to be support for this concept (Muralidharan, 2023), although it has not been independently verified or researched. People are social and want to be accepted and included by the groups they identify with. However, automatically ascribing altruism to positive personality traits should be cautioned as studies have demonstrated that the dark triad personality traits have also been positively correlated with altruism (Gouveia et al., 2021).

Does self-enhancement drive the way in which people approach their goals and where do their goals come from in the first place? As society develops and cultures change, we see more connectivity between what were once very eccentric groups, who now show influences of globalization. The internet, Hollywood, and social media are examples of digital changes which have transformed every community. With the ease of access to information also comes the side effects of cultural crossover and while not a negative thing, it does create questions about individual importance and what people value or care about. Particularly in American culture where self-sufficiency is valued, there is a tendency of self-judgement based on social comparison (Sedikides, 2020). Social competition can be healthy causing us to seek out new skills, set new goals, and expand our self-enhancement, but also can be damaging and depressing (Wang et al., 2021). When social competition turns from positive to negative, one may see the same altruistic behaviors but the motivations underlying them have changed.

The difference between envy and competition is the manner in which one views their circumstances. Competitors will push each other and often during competition they may even advance themselves further from one engagement to the next, resulting in an evolving exchange of the best performer and performance. No one will always be first place or the winner, but someone can always be part of the competitive group. Behavioral economic theorists assume that decisions are based upon the motivation of materialism rooted in selfishness because they believe people are acting in a homo-economicus manner, and that altruistic acts of giving away resources violates this economic theory (Ahmed, 2021). Envy is the dissatisfaction of one's circumstances, which is not so different from the results of social comparisons that drive competition but born more

from a desire for something which they were unable to attain (Van de Ven, 2016). Envy has an aspect of ill will towards others where competition has a spirit of continual improvement and both can seem like altruism when true intentions are masked because both can also produce self-enhancement (Lange et al., 2018). For the envious person to win, they only need to perform well enough and wait for others to fail, instead of striving to reach their highest potential.

There is no end state to self-enhancement, it is a continual process which involves how we respond to changes in our environment. At times, the behaviors of others can appear altruistic or prosocial, as seemingly generous acts of kindness, good will, or gesture. In positive competition, we would promote the best in one another knowing that we are competing against ourselves first and others second. Winning, achieving, and being superior are relative to the task. Yet, envy can appear as altruism when someone is attempting to correct or repair their image and social standing. Charity, volunteering, and philanthropy are topics that have been studied to identify altruistic motivations, because they represent providing resources to others, but are often associated with social reward (perceived or not) and recognition which depending upon the motive could eliminate them as acts of altruism (Almeida et al., 2022; Anderson et al., 2019; Gallarza et al., 2013).

As one's self-esteem is tied to their perceptions of achievement and agency, their self-enhancement strategies naturally are designed in manners consistent with maintaining their social group connectedness. Envy and behavioral economics argue that fairness or the lack thereof, is the underlying cause of envious (anti-altruistic) behaviors (Park & Kim, 2022; Sharma et al., 2020). Evolutionary economics on the surface requires

that an individual's success to be selfish instead of altruistic. The complex calculations of one's attempts to get ahead in life are based upon many outside factors but emotions are key to the motivations that determine which path one will take. Deciding to be altruistic in the moment because one needs greater social status after a few days of feeling disconnected or experiencing rejection is arguably a social economic calculation (Lancaster & Miller, 2019). An increase in one's social status can boost their self-esteem. When self-enhancement fails, people can resort to more dramatic behaviors.

In some societies there are built-in strategies to manage self-image and social comparison. Maintaining a good reputation is valued in many cultures because the theories of indirect reciprocity and cooperative altruism state that information about one's reputation will affect their ability to benefit from prosocial behaviors of others (e.g., their community) and outgroup member (Oda et al., 2011). Attempting to improve one's status through compliance with social norms is a typical strategy based on appearing mature, well-mannered, and polite. These types of social environments are classically recounted in countless movies where the antagonist becomes envious of the protagonist and decides to create a dilemma for them after which the truth is discovered causing a loss in social status. Envy amongst in-group members is commonly displayed as low levels of altruism which go undetected by the envied until something dramatic occurs causing them to realize what has happened (Saunders et al., 2020).

Among the discussions of altruism's motivations is the school of thought that empathy is the driving factor, the determinant, and therefore the most predictable indicator of altruistic behavior. Baston established three models of the *empathy-altruism theory*, which were his way of explaining empathy as the motivation of altruism. Baston

argues that people aspire to social or personal reward, want to avoid punishment, or act to alleviate the impact of anguish on others (Cipriani, 2022). Batson's empathy-altruism theory is based on the thought that humans are empathetic, and that if one empathizes with another, they will quickly offer aid, assistance, help or perform some altruistic act based on their perceived view and understanding of the person's circumstances. The empathic motivation implied, is that the person performing the altruistic act themselves, might fear experiencing similar circumstances in the future or had in fact experienced the same circumstances and wanted to avoid them again. By relieving the suffering of another, because they know what it feels like, the altruistic behavior is motivated by empathy.

The problem with empathy-altruism theory's train of thought is that it relies on multiple assumptions: first, that one can accurately empathize with another's suffering; secondly, the other person wants to receive assistance; thirdly, being altruistic towards the other person will actually benefit them; and fourthly, acting altruistically towards others is equal and unbiased (Cipriani, 2022). To appreciate the empathetic response, one must consider, when and how do we act on our empathies. Early research in this field found that altruism levels were different when we identified with the recipient, versus when we did not hold a shared identity. Karylowski expressed this as *endocentric* altruism and *exocentric* altruism (Scott & Seaglow, 2007); this was a wise observation, because many social sciences studies have demonstrated ingroup versus outgroup biases separately from any association with altruism, making empathy a weaker argument for predicting altruistic behavior.

Turning to psychological personality tests, altruism has been studied in a variety of ways to identify which personality traits could predict altruistic behaviors. Agreeableness and openness are big five personality traits associated with loyalty and altruism (Dargan & Schermer, 2022; Ou, 2021). Shin et al. (2021) discovered that brand loyalty was a product of individual value, meaning that if an individual self-assessed that they were more valued, they were more loyal. Loyalties are derived from trust, when an individual trusts someone they are more likely to act in a manner that is positive towards a target person (recipient) even at the expense to themselves. Love and loyalty have been established as being connected, meaning that trust is present but also a shared identity (Mann, 2023; Robertson et al., 2022; Tinayre, 2020). Therefore, one might infer that altruistic personality traits require faith which in some measure, involves trustworthiness, loyalty, fidelity, and love (Pace & McKaughan, 2022). These types of behavior are not exclusively altruistic, but they point to similar motivations for why people remain committed to situations and relationships that are not in their best interest (Bakshi, 2019).

Another aspect of the altruistic personality which has been heavily studied is giving (Jin & Ryu, 2022; Farmer et al., 2020; Anderson, 1981). People give their time through volunteering, they give money through charity, and they give information to others through a variety of social interactions (Ahmed et al., 2022; Apuke & Omar, 2021; Gallarza et al., 2013; Graham, 2021; Robert et al., 2019; Taylor, 2020). Giving can be altruistic in some situations but not in all circumstances and the altruistic personality may attempt to over give. Examining the psychology of giving, one observes motivations ranging from sincerity to self-interest. There are people who desire prestige, rewards, and recognition for their acts of charity and generosity. According to Ayn Rand, these types

of charity are considered benevolence and not altruism because there was no sacrifice involved (Smith, 2018). In extreme cases, deep depressive states have been linked to ultra-altruistic personality traits where someone gives and gives until they experience mental, emotional, and physical burnout (Fujiwara, 2009).

Rounding out the discussion of the altruistic personality theme are those who serve causes larger than themselves. People who act altruistically because they believe in saving the planet by recycling or consuming less by living green or more efficiently, are examples of the altruistic personality because they are making sacrifices in some aspect of their life to serve a cause for which they cannot know the measure of success of their actions. Recycling is generally accepted by most as positive, meaning that society values the act, and the beneficiaries are unknown and, on the surface, appears to qualify as altruistic (Costa Pinto, 2019). Acting altruistically for the sake of larger causes can be applied to many aspects of life. However, when the cause is based on morality, the altruistic personality begins to cross over into other themes.

Punitive Altruism Theme

At the outset, the idea of punitive or moral altruism might seem like a bit of an oxymoron or counterintuitive. Yet, there are a number of examples within society that highlight this theme, and some are popularized throughout our culture today. The concept of the hero is introduced to us through punitive altruism because good heroes are known to step in and stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. The underlying significance of the hero actions is that it represents the social correction or informal response to violations of social norms and injustice. Not all heroes behave altruistically. First responders and military members are uniquely trained professionals who are able to

readily distinguish differences in the gravity of human risk of death and life. Not all of them perform their duties heroically and not all of them react the same to similar situations. Heroism is an act of altruism undertaken to help others, despite the possibility that it may result in the helper's death or serious injury (Becker & Eagly, 2004).

However, in this case, one might argue that these professions are more aligned with the *altruistic personality* theme because these professions are not punishing others.

Vigilantes, activists, terrorists, and average citizens might be better examples of punitive altruism because they believe they are righting a wrong.

Moral altruism encompasses punitive and theological altruistic acts because the nature of these behaviors and decisions are grounded in judgements as perceived by the individual. Morality is developed through one's experiences, environment, and is culturally influenced (Walker, 2020). Paradoxically, self-sacrificing behaviors within groups are viewed as altruistic or heroic, while the same behavior between groups are seen as competitive or selfish (Usman & Bulut, 2022). The struggle each of us endures to obtain a sense of belonging and to identify with our families, friends, co-workers, and social groups, is based largely upon our perceptions of social norms and morality. Our performance of altruistic behaviors are informed and influenced by our moral judgement, emotions, and identity (Dewhurst et al., 2023; Septianto & Soegianto, 2017). Identity can evolve over time and with it an individual's regard for social relationships which is where we begin to see altruism begin to emerge (McMahon et al., 2006). Our identity begins forming in our preschool childhood and continues throughout our life (Harris, et al., 2019). Extending beyond ourselves is our social and cultural identities.

Punitive altruism can take place when members of the group violate social norms and are punished for their violations (Filkowsky et al., 2016). Crosby et al. (2020) found that religious sacrifices were motivated by reward-seeking and predicted increases in spiritual well-being along with an overall increase in life satisfaction. Within in-groups there is a social order or justice among its members creating greater sharing as compared to out-groups (Wu & Han, 2021). Societal groups, or tribes, are a complex system of community-based enterprises where people interact, share, and develop (Dentoni, et al., 2018) which indicates that there is also a higher likelihood of punitive altruism in smaller communities because there is greater expectation among members to maintain social norms and behave morally (Crewe, 2021).

In relation to extreme self-sacrifice, there is evidence of *impression vulnerability* regarding future positive or negative outcomes, which influences attitudes about cooperation, altruism, and agency (Belanger et al., 2014). The perception (or impression) of being unable to change one's situation could produce extreme altruistic behavior (martyrdom) because the person believes that they have nothing to live for or no chance of improving their circumstances. Self-esteem is the extent to which an individual bases their ability to achieve specific goals or standards (Swann & Bosson, 2010) because self-esteem mediates one's life satisfaction (Kong et al., 2012). Feeling defeated can provoke emotions of envy if one perceives injustices or unfairness and occurs when people are experiencing periods of low self-esteem.

Here one finds the proclivity of the previous themes emerging as a moral dilemma, which engages the individual's ethical views and personal values (Walker, 2022). The decision and questions associated with taking actions that put an individual at

great risk to aide another are considered in similar ways as the decision-making processes in the previous themes. When injustice or social norms are violated, Roberts et al. (2013) reported a correlation between engaging in punishing behaviors and personality. Furthermore, participants who had lower scores in agreeableness on the Big Five personality dimensions expressed more anger towards others and a desire to punish. In practical application, people may break the law to enforce their own personal values because their perception is that an injustice is occurring. Terrorists and activists are examples of those who fight for their cause. Vigilantes on the other hand, are people who fight for others. Each represents a different type of the punitive altruist.

Altruistic Love Theme

The concept of love has existed since the creation of mankind. The basis of all love is a choice, a freedom, an ethical evaluation, and a cognitive understanding of oneself and their situation, all of which are considered attributes of love (Natividade et al., 2022). Love was born out of necessity because everyone has a need for belonging, pleasure, acceptance, and affection. Therefore, love represents many different things to many people because their needs are based on their perceptions of their environment and are shaped by their social and cultural norms. Safety and security, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually are each in their own way affected. Love motivates, it creates fantasy and dreams which become goals and actions (Karandashev, 2022). Love is an emotion which is activated along with attachment bonds during sexual and non-sexual circumstances (Long et al., 2020). The ancient Greeks and Romans discussed love in several forms which have withstood the test of time: eros, philia, agape, and storgé.

Eros is the love of self and desire; it is the love that embodies romance and passion (Chilton, 2005; Klein, 2022). Recent research suggests that perhaps there is a fifth type of love, romantic love, which is argued to be somehow separate from eros (self) love (Natividade et al., 2022) but more likely was a result of semantics and cultural bias because the prevailing thoughts in love research indicate that romance is a selfish desire. Altruism can present itself as eros in acts of martyrdom, if the act is based on maintaining a principal belief or depending upon the circumstances dying to save a lover. Other acts of love towards romantic partners would almost certainly be viewed as transactional in nature and selfish in motivation which is not to diminish or reduce their significance but only to point out that most of eros love is not altruistic.

Storgé is the love one attributes to their family and represents the psychological construct of attachment (Enright et al., 2022); it is the love for siblings, parents, and children (Klein, 2022; Chilton, 2005). Storgé can present itself as altruism under similar circumstances as eros, dying to save a family member or sacrificing for the well-being of one's parents or kin. Performing acts of love for one's children is often regarded as prosocial but not altruistic because they represent one's genetic potential in future generations. Altruistic love towards family is observable in children sending remittances home to their families, which tends to happen in more collective societies and amongst lower economic classes (Poirine & Dropsy, 2019).

Philia is the love one attributes to their friends, the city of Philadelphia received its name from this word and is called the *City of Brotherly Love*. Where *phobia* keeps one away from something, *philia* brings people together and through shared experiences and interests people form bonds which we recognize as our most regarded friendships, best

friends, or BFFs. Aristotle described *philia* as brotherly love or platonic (friendship) love which was perhaps one of the purest examples of altruism at time when the word did not exist (Klein, 2022; Chilton, 2005) but within *philia* love philosophers have argued that one sees themselves in their friendships and that our friendships are a projection of our self-image as we want to be.

Agape love has been defined as a love in service to others and is argued by some to be a moral virtue (Enright et al., 2022; Graham, 2020). By others it is described as compassion, unconditional love, and self-giving love (Post et al., 2002). Agape love is a choice. One cannot sacrifice for another without choosing which is what links agape to morality. It is nearly impossible to separate agape from God. Ancient philosophers discuss agape love in the same manner as more recent secular philosophers discuss altruistic love, both describing love as unconditional and transcending the self (Graham, 2020).

Determining what is altruistic love is complicated because “altruism is not understandable from a sociological knowledge that limits one’s gaze of observation to rational action alone; only by extending the analysis to what one calls ‘superconscious’ can altruistic behavior be interpreted” (Cimagalli, 2020). Thinking beyond the self is what altruism requires, conceptualizing the life of others through a view not one’s own takes effort to accomplish. Altruistic love creates a common bond among people which can have other positive effects (e.g., healing, forgiveness, compassion, etc.). The altruistic love theme is best exemplified through what most people might call unconditional love because it requires one to love another with acceptance which in

practice is very close to pure altruism definitions minus the requirement to have no ulterior motive or expectations resulting from the altruistic behavior (Mulinge, 2018).

Akdemirci (2010) explains that altruism and love cannot be separated because they go hand in hand. One cannot love unconditionally with being altruistic and one can be altruistic without loving unconditionally. Koenig (2007) relates altruistic love to true love which is unconditional and unexpecting of others. There have been numerous attempts to measure love (e.g., Love Scale, SMILE Inventory, and Compassionate Love scale) in different ways and even an agape love-based tool (Love Attitudes Scale), each of these scales takes a different approach to deconstruct love in a variety of forms and styles (Enright et al., 2022). Through the studies of love one can see the relevance of emotional maturity which introduces a number of relationship topics outside of the scope of this study.

Neurosciences and Altruism

An entire series of literature has been dedicated to the neuroscience of altruism which established its association with oxytocin (Bellucci et al., 2020; Garrett & Hough, 2021; Hurlemann & Marsh, 2016; Hurlemann & Scheele, 2016; Tombeau Cost et al., 2017) and brain activity in regions of the emotional salience network including the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and insula, reward regions including the ventral tegmental area, striatum, nucleus accumbens, and anterior cingulate cortex, and generally in the medial prefrontal cortex and temporoparietal junction (Fronza & Balconi, 2022; Filkowski et al., 2016; Rhoads et al., 2021; Windmann & Hein, 2018). The association of brain function to these areas has ruled out altruism as an emotion and instead as a complex behavior resulting from an unknown set of perceptions, evaluations, and

preferences (Fiske & Taylor, 2021; Hong, 2021; Weaverdyck & Parkinson, 2018; Yasin et al., 2022). Further study of altruistic brain function illuminated parallels with narcissistic brain functions leading to the idea that some altruistic behaviors could be deep psychological calculations to maintain power and control of social dynamics and situations (Raskin et al., 1991; Saunders et al., 2020; Taylor, 2020; White et al., 2018).

Neurological assessments of emotions and cognition in psychology have expanded greatly over the past decade offering some understanding where and how certain brain processes happen (Weaverdyck & Parkinso, 2018). Self-enhancement, envy and altruism functions overlap in the brain's medial prefrontal cortex which is not surprising as this area moderates decision making (Garrett & Hough, 2021; Yasin et al., 2022). Envy has been associated to the medial prefrontal cortex, left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, and superior temporal gyrus likely because these areas play important roles in social cognition perception and comprehension of emotions and intentions (Xiang et al., 2017). Altruism associates with reward areas of the brain (Hurlemann & Marsh, 2016) and has been observed within limbic regions such as the nucleus accumbens, anterior cingulate cortex, medial prefrontal cortex, and temporoparietal junction (Filkowki et al., 2016; Windmann, 2018). The neurological activity of love and altruism overlaps in certain areas, too, namely oxytocin production, the right ventral pallidum, ventral tegmental area, and caudate (Acevedo et al., 2019; Carter, 2022)

A 2021 study conducted in China's Peking University attempted to isolate neurological indicators of altruism by triggering empathy through the perception of pain others were feeling which would cause participants to make monetary donations as result of their experience (Wu & Han, 2021). The study used a mixed method approach which

combined self-reported scale measures with electroencephalography (EEG) and fMRI testing. The results of the study were not conclusive due to emphasis placed on empathy. However, previous studies have indicated that neural response to agency are associated with altruism (Tankersley et al., 2007). The prefrontal cortex is the place in the brain where final determination is made prior to producing a behavior (Garrett & Hough, 2022). Logically work backwards from PFC one might expect additional areas of the brain to interact, influence, or inform the final decision of a behavior. For this reason, research has focused on emotional brain responses where the amygdala evaluates emotional content and the nucleus accumbens the rewards aspects of given behavioral choices; ultimately the posterior parietal cortex concludes the reward probability before the PFC acts (p. 249). Of the studies where altruism was studied neurologically, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) was active (Filkowski, et al., 2016) suggesting that altruism correlates with reward areas of the brain.

Wu and Han (2021) were not the first to consider studying empathy as a trigger or prompter for altruism. Pfaff (2015) introduced the *Altruistic Brain Theory*, which intended to answer the question why people help others from the perspective of neuroscience. Pfaff's theory held that five neurological steps occur which involved three specific steps that were distinct from other neurological brain functions. After departing from normal neurological phases in step 1, steps 2-4, imagery of the intended beneficiary (seeing others), self-image merging with the image of others, and values and ethics decision making, ultimately result in either performing the altruistic act or not in step 5. The importance of this theory is its correlation to substantive psychological and social science views of altruistic motivations involving the comparisons of self-image and

others through personal ethical perspectives which indicates that if altruism can be shaped by ethical or moral views then it can evolve and change over time and is neither persistent nor static in an individual (Walker, 2022).

Biblical Foundations of the Study

A biblical view of altruism is described by Mulinge (2018) as *altruistic surrender*, when someone self-sacrifices their development for another's advancement. Within the New Testament Christians are taught "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33) which supports Mulinge's concept of surrender. By focusing on God, one has already moved away from a selfish or self-centered view towards a perspective of others. The experiences of Christians are uniquely individualistic, each person has a different interaction with their faith and that creates a broader acceptability of expectations about Christianity and God; this is why there are so many diverse types of Christians.

At the heart of this research is a central endeavor to illuminate the current understanding of altruism as it relates to the Christian faith. After briefly describing altruism, this study offers a systematic review of altruistic themes within the Bible. Various forms of altruism can be found in both the old and new testaments of the Bible. The construct of one's faith is well suited for the application of altruism because faith is the lens with which one views many life's subjects. The scriptures are the foundation of Christian faith, and they provide context and insight into Christian views; they give one the opportunity to critically assess how altruism is operationalized throughout our daily lives.

Given that at the time of the writing of the Bible and recording of the events in and around the Holy Land the word altruism did not exist, how can one consider what altruism means to Christians? The apostles did not have this word, but the concept was certainly present though the scriptures of the New Testament. Altruism is part of the Christian faith and is uniquely accessible by all Christians as both a human character trait and as an aspect of fellowship and faith with others. The psychology of religion also helps lay the foundation for understanding altruism's significance to Christians.

A Biblical Perspective of Altruism

Any understanding or conversation about Christianity or its faith requires context from the unique perspectives through which Christians view life, human nature, and God. Religious truths are often philosophical and theoretical but still hold as much value as any scientific truth, perhaps even more. Scientists of all ages have argued many truths, some of which we now know were false (e.g., the earth as the center of the universe), others we have come to accept but we cannot prove nor disprove them (e.g., theory of relativity) and so they remain guiding principles of our understanding, our activity, and our faith in knowledge. There are two parts of man, the earthly man and the spiritual man, both are together forming one human being. They remain inseparable despite their obvious differences. The spiritual man desires faith which brings with it psychological comforts such as a sense of belonging, an explanation of the supernatural, knowledge of one's place in the world, and a closeness to God (Black, 2022; Pace & McKaughan, 2022).

For Christians the Bible is a source of truth, as sacred books are for other religions. The Bible illustrates moral dilemmas, joy, sorrow, and the circumstances surrounding events, but more importantly, it shapes our understanding of earthly man's

relationship with spiritual man. 2 Timothy (3:16) says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.” The Bible is a representation of man’s relationship with God, the creator. Christians believe in the creation of all things by God and in an afterlife which includes a judgement. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, demonstrated the relationship of man with God from God’s perspective (Philippians 2:3). God did this to give man an exemplar, someone man could relate to, someone man could understand, and someone man could follow, John (13:15) “I have given you a model to follow, so that I have done, you should also do.” Christianity was created based on the reports of the experiences with Jesus to allow future generations the opportunity to benefit from and have access to the firsthand exposure to God incarnate. The Bible is every person’s path to connect with God.

Christianity is a continuation of the Judaic tradition and an extension to the rest of the world to have the same relationship which Israelites had with God, but in a new way through salvation. The concept of salvation is uniquely Christian, God saves those who are willing to submit to God’s laws, and these laws are a moral code which provides order and peace to man’s life. From the Christian’s perspective, spiritual man is immortal. The question is: *where will immortal man go in the afterlife?* The answers are heaven or hell, and the choice is ours. God provides a path to either destination, and naturally, man can choose either destination. The path to heaven is theoretically clear, but in earthly man’s reality, the path to heaven is full of daily decisions which lead to more decisions that ultimately cause man to arrive in a somewhat ambiguous place in relation to heaven, creating a sense of uncertainty. Theologically, the Christian is saved by God

after conversion (also called acceptance or salvation). However, there remains some questionability to man's salvation in so much as Christian and non-Christian arguments about levels of salvation, the requirement of good deeds, true repentance, and sacrifice (Pace & McKaughan, 2022). Some believe that salvation without transformation or adherence (submission) to the laws of God is meaningless and merely an act which might be considered *fake news* today; the implications of not showing a change in one's life leaves the door open for doubt and disbelief by others that salvation occurred (Pace & McKaughan, 2022).

The altruistic themes (personality, reciprocity, kin, punitive, love, and faith) are each expressed in biblical scriptures but not equally. The New Testament places a significant emphasis on altruistic love and altruistic personality traits as a means of conveying the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christian values are partially codified in one of the great messages of Jesus known as *The Sermon on the Mount*, where Matthew (5:3-11) recounts the *Beatitudes*, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) Luke (10:27) The greatest commandment – "you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Another study identified the following traditional Christian values: faith, good (kindness), love, mercy, modesty, forgiveness, purity of morals, God, and these values have remained unchanged over time (Bobyreva & Dmitrieva, 2022).

Copan (2016) discusses one's relationship with God which raises the question, *is altruism part of spiritual transformation?* The gospel of John (13:34) recounts Jesus' new commandment, "...to love one another. Just as I have love, you must love one another" and Matthew (5:43-48) tells us to "love your enemy" which clearly speaks to forming

kindhearted connections with others. St. Augustine promoted three core values: pursuit of unity, pursuit of truth, and fostering love (Baker, 2016). All three of these values are present in the passage below from Acts (2:44-47),

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. Day by day as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (*New American Bible*, 2011)

These Christian values are all examples of how one's faith can contribute to improved relationships and life experiences. Altruistic actions offer the opportunity to care for others and deep one's relationship with God at the same time, and such values are a source of unity for Christians (Ebong, 2020).

The book of Daniel gives Christians a perspective of what upholding faith looks like. Humans are created in the image of God, to rule over the world (Genesis 1:26). Daniel refuses to forsake his religion, even at the command of the King, keeping his faith, Daniel is condemned to death by being placed into a lion's den (Daniel 6:1-29). Daniel survives the ordeal because of his faith and in chapter three, his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are sent to the fiery furnace to die because of their refusal to compromise their faith (values). The faith of these men causes one to examine what faith truly consists of because their acts were altruistic in nature. In these cases, faith was something the men chose to die for, while the end result was salvation, it is impossible to

ascertain if the men knew they would be saved or if they believed they would be saved or if they simply did not fear death. Distinguishing between faith and altruism seems challenging in the context of the Book of Daniel. The dramatic impact of their actions, all four of these men, resulted in significant political and religious reform. After their salvation, the King ordered the conversion of the entire nation to believe and worship only Daniel's God.

The story of Daniel offers another aspect of faith beyond simply believing in God, it offers a view of the altruistic themes. Daniel was a victim of conspiracy and subsequent judgement, an injustice which is the basis of punitive altruism. The establishment of an immoral law created the setting for Daniel and the others to be forced to maintain their faith or abandon it as the law required. From this point, faith can be viewed as something which transcends humanity and unjust manmade laws, similar to altruistic love which also transcends humanity. Faith as defined by Christians is trust in God; "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). Daniel and his friends each demonstrated faith in the face of death, their sacrifice was *total*, it was *everything* because it represented the sum total loss of all future. The choice they made, without knowing for certain that God would deliver them, was absolute and they did so to strengthen their testimony to faith (Vette, 2022). The psychological benefits of faith are feeling grounded, calm, resilient, and present in difficult situations (Ozgul et al., 2021).

No other character in the Bible offers more resilience than Job, whose life is captured in the Book of Job. The suffering of Job is immense, his family dies, he loses everything he owns, and his body is afflicted with boils and soars. Within every person is the capacity to transcend the self through a connectedness with God, which is a

fundamental element of Christianity (Dillen, 2012). Job displays an array of human emotions related to faith and God. Through a series of discussions about Job's catastrophic losses, one learns more about his faith and his humanity. Job upholds the authority of God as the sole source of truth (Job 9:2-4) even in the face of great tribulation. Christians believe universal truth emanates from God, "to start with something else is to assume that there is something else more authoritative than God, a source of truth greater than the scriptures" (Baucham, 2023). In an act of altruism, Job declares his resolve not to speak against God at all costs (27:3-4) because of his faith, a true example of believing and trusting in something that he could not see. While the Book of Job recounts a series of tests and trials, it is intended encourage everyone that through life's struggles there is a just God who rewards those who have faith and are loyal.

Christian Altruistic Love

Christian theological discussions regarding altruism are formed around the concept of *altruistic love* and the teachings of Jesus' spirituality towards *others* or neighbors (Chilton, 2005). Christianity, according to St. Augustine, is a religion of love (Rigby & O'Grady, 1989). The famous sociologist Sorokin expressed *altruistic love* as incorporating three forms of love formulated by Western cultural traditions: agape (unconditional), philia (friendship), and eros (passionate) (Klein, 2022). Anders Nygren believed that agape was downward and transcendent versus eros' upward focus; these concepts of love are supportive of Christian theological discussions (Post et al., 2002). Agape is used 106 times in the New Testament which creates a significant relationship between altruism and Christian theology regarding love.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Bible's greatest illustration of altruistic love. Based on Jesus' example, sacrifice to the death for the atonement of the sins of all humans (past, present, and future) is the ultimate transcendent act which forms the core meaning of altruism. However, Christianity does not call for each of us to sacrifice ourselves in death but in life, as one must surrender altruistically and embrace Christian values (Milunge, 2018); Augustine equated obedience to truly agape love for God (Rigby & O'Grady, 1989) which in a sense typifies service to God, but Christianity teaches that love is not a duty, rather it is a gift. John (15:12-13) states, "my command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one other than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." By extending love towards others, one exemplifies God's transcendence because man was created in God's image (Genesis 1:27); the belief here is that the *spiritual man* is the part that was created in God's image.

Christians are taught to "walk by the spirit" (Galatians 5:16) which is a means of connecting the spiritual man with God, and thereby accessing the ability to cultivate and share altruistic love. Paul speaking to the Romans (13:10) explains that "love is the fulfillment of the law." Therefore, faith plays an integral part in the Christian experience of love because one must be willing to trust God by loving others even when the circumstance may seem otherwise contrary. Trusting in God is a critical element of altruistic love because there is a reliance upon God for support in the aspects of one's life which are beyond comprehension. Ephesians 5:18 encourages us to "be filled with the spirit" because it is a source of comfort. God's altruistic love for mankind is that source of comfort. God tells us, "*before I formed you, I knew you*" (Jeremiah 1:5) meaning that God has always had a hand in our lives, God has always known us even before we could

comprehend our own existence. Altruistic love in this case is demonstrated by God's connection with man...if man will embrace God.

Christian Altruistic Personality

Being created in God's image is a peculiar thing, what does it mean and why does it matter? Perhaps the best explanation of this is the attempt to explain our conscious and the theory of mind which is the major distinction between us and the rest of planet Earth's species. Precisely because we are so complex, there are a lot of questions about how and why we function in the manner that we do. People are naturally designed to look after themselves, to attempt to meet their basic needs, and in austere and challenging circumstances people will willingly and knowingly allow themselves to do things which under ordinary situations would be against their values, morals, and personal comfort. Maslow (1946) explained the theory of human motivation in terms of needs consisting of: psychological, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Christians are taught to consider others and when compared to Maslow's hierarchy, their actions tend to resonate with the middle because through the consideration of others, one can create a sense of belonging and experience love.

Dillen (2012) discusses perspectives about the resiliency of children in the context of spirituality and religion, among them are a concept that God is the source motivation for self-actualization. Another perspective Dillen shares is about resiliency as the result of grace, which is conveyed to humans as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through these two points of view, one can understand that they are not alone, God is with them, and from the security and safety of that knowledge, one can aim towards self-actualization. Following this notion, Maslow's theory of self-actualization was discussed by Victor

Frankl who ascribed self-transcendence as a prerequisite for attaining self-actualization (Dillen, 2012). At this junction it is fitting to discuss altruism because of its core function to focus on the *other* and not the self. Where this becomes relevant to a Christian, is in their daily walk with God, and their behavior towards others because altruism has been associated with religiousness according to Ashton & Lee (2019).

The story of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) is perhaps one of the most famous in the Bible, it is a prosocial story including generosity, care, kindness, and classically represents the altruistic personality. A traveler (the Good Samaritan) comes across another man (not a Samaritan) who has been attacked and robbed. Others pass the man without helping, but the Samaritan stops and helps the man, whom he has only just met, and ensures his care by tending his wounds and paying for him to stay at an inn until he recovers. By and large, the Samaritan demonstrates outgroup generosity and seeks no reward, acknowledgement, or repayment for assisting the man which leave one to contemplate. Why would he do this? Clearly, his values aligned with those of Christianity. Altruism in its purest forms can be simple kindnesses like these. Leviticus (19:18) tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves and the same commandment is repeated in Luke (10:27) by Jesus which is another example of altruistic behavior because it is a basic principle of relationships and people with higher belief systems are more likely to engage in altruistic behaviors like these.

The Book of Ruth is a story about loyalty which demonstrates altruistic personality traits through selfless service to others. There are three main characters, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, each of whom display some type of altruism. Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, she was a Moabite, which meant that she had married into the Israelite

community and was a foreigner. Her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law all died in a famine which left Ruth and mother-in-law, Naomi unmarried and homeless. Ruth chose to follow Naomi and declared her loyalty by converting to Judaism and accepting their customs (Ruth 1:16). In this instance, loyalty is often conceptualized as faithfulness or fidelity, and presents one's willingness to trust others without expectation or assurance of reward (Pace & McKaughan, 2022). Ruth's decision sacrifices any future with her family or people for a future with Naomi, who has nothing to offer her. Ruth is acting as support for Naomi and altruistically gives her the only things she has to offer, her time and work.

Naomi returns to her clan's territory bringing Ruth, at this point Naomi's other daughter-in-law, Oprah, also a Moabite, had returned to her own family. Naomi reconnects with relatives finds work for Ruth, harvesting grain and barley. Boaz having heard how Ruth had been loyal to and helped support Naomi, his family member, directs his field workers to leave extra grain in the fields where Ruth is working so she will have more to harvest for her and Naomi (Ruth 2:11-16). It is valuable to note that religiosity has consistently been reported in positive association with altruism, especially when predicting charitable giving, as is being described here (Ashton & Lee, 2019; Dargan & Schermer, 2022; Sharma & Singh, 2019). Boaz exhibits altruism in this case because he is sacrificing food and wealth to allow others to eat. He does this without their knowledge and then directs Ruth to stay and work with the other ladies of his clan during the harvest season which represents a second act of altruism by allowing another person to work the fields he is further diluting the harvest. In this era, working the fields was a means of

survival but only paid in a portion of what was harvested; it was difficult for women to find enough work to support themselves and Ruth was supporting two people.

Naomi sought out a husband for Ruth and gave her advice about how to marry Boaz. Culturally, at this time there was a practice known as redemption, where kinsman-redeemers were responsible for assist or aiding family members (Bolinger, 2020). Boaz was one of his clan's redeemers. However, the rules of the kinsman redeemer were such that the closest redeemer had precedence above all others to exercise their right to redeem family members. The act of redemption in this case meant that Naomi's lands would become part of the redeemer's lands as part of the transaction (Ruth 4:9-11). Boaz and Ruth end up married because of Naomi, her altruistic act was to sacrifice her husband's lands for the benefit of Ruth. Each of these acts was in one form or another an example of altruistic personality traits.

Christian Kin Altruism

When one acts to save family, without regard for their own safety, it is an act of kin altruism (Robert et al., 2019). Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute in the city of Jericho, was responsible for helping two Israelite spies prior to the Israelite victory over the city (Joshua 2:1-24). Being a prostitute, she was among the lowest groups of Canaanite society which meant that she probably had little to no bargaining power if she were accused of violating the law. By helping the two Israelite spies she risked her life, it was an act of treason to take them in and hide them. The sacrifice that Rahab was making would potentially lead to torture and death. Yet, Rahab chose to help the Israelite spies and requested that they save her family when they returned to take the city. Joshua (6:23) says that "the young men who had gone to Jericho as spies when in and brought out

Rahab, her father, mother, and brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought all her relatives outside to the Israeli camp.”

The actions of Rahab could also be construed as reciprocal altruism because she struck a deal with the Israelites (Joshua 2:12), but in Judaic texts (Midrash Rabbah, 1939) we learn that Rahab and her family converted to Judaism and that she had eight daughters before she married Joshua the Israelite leader. In essence, Rahab sacrificed the life she had before without knowing what would happen to her or her family and by converting to Judaism, she accepted God as her savior but also agreed to live by Israeli commandments and laws. Doing this for the sake of her children and relatives displays what may seem like a natural instinct of a mother, risking her life to save her children, but the sacrifice in this example goes beyond the initial act of helping the spies and lasts the rest of her life. Rahab’s story demonstrates a desire to help others by taking action, but also through faith.

Moses is one of the most recognizable names of the Bible. Largely due to his relationship with God and the great detail of his efforts to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt into the Sinai. In Exodus chapter 3, explains the moment where Moses speaks with God and is given the mission to go and lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses having been raised by Egyptians was perhaps not as familiar with Hebrew customs, but he demonstrated faith in God and returned to Egypt to speak with Pharaoh, a man who he was raised with like a brother and risks his life to help thousands of people (kin) who he does not even know. Pharaoh had issued a death warrant for Moses by banishing him to the desert, but Moses survived only to return and ask for the freedom of thousands of people. Moses sacrificed himself in life as the leader of Israel, he exhibited kin altruism

on a nationalistic level which further expands our comprehension of what altruism can truly mean in different circumstances.

Christian Altruistic Reciprocity

One of the most prolific statements ever made was *The Golden Rule*, “treat others the way that you want them to treat you” (Matt. 7:12). No other statement has had a more recognizable influence in popular American culture as this one. *The Golden Rule* is known by nearly everyone because it strikes at the core of one of the most important aspects of humanity: fairness. Maslow (1943) emphasized the hierarchy of needs in a five-level model where *safety and security* were the second most important basic human needs, which he described as including family and social stability. Fairness is a core foundation of social stability. The Bible prepares us for interacting with friends, family, neighbors, and enemies alike. Luke (6:27-28) says, “...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Deuteronomy (22:1-3) instructs our behaviors towards others:

“If you see your neighbor’s ox or sheep or goat wandering away, don’t ignore your responsibility. Take it back to its owner. If its owner does not live nearby or you don’t know who the owner is, take it to your place and keep it until the owner comes looking for it. Then you must return it. Do the same if you find your neighbor’s donkey, clothing, or anything else your neighbor loses. Don’t ignore your responsibility.” (*New American Bible*, 2011)

These passages illustrate the way one should behave towards others and how to establish good and meaningful relationships as a Christian.

The Book of Proverbs declares that “whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor” (22:9) which poetically speaks to sharing with others. The term *breaking bread together* which comes from the stories of Jesus, is among one of the most Christian things we all do; this idiomatic expression is meant to draw people together by sharing a food. The act of eating together creates a shared sense of social belonging which has the effect of placing those with whom one eats with into an ingroup. The implications of being part of the ingroup equates to higher levels of cooperation (altruism) and social support (Gualda, 2022). Psychologically, when one person shares with another, there recipient is more like to share back with the giver (Cialdini, 2007). Altruistic reciprocity for a Christian is about being a good neighbor to others.

Biblical examples of altruism can be viewed through relationships. Expectations for friendship are not based on symmetrical reciprocity, but how each individual can provide support and care for the other person. Thessalonians (5:11) says, “therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” The relationship one has with God is also important because one’s spiritual relationship quality does reflect in their personal relationships. However, 2 Chronicles (15:2) says, "The Lord *is* with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" which describes the reciprocal relationship one has with God. Relationships are strengthened by making contributions to the other.

Christian Punitive Altruism

When people are unable to protect their own interests, sometimes they are viewed as weak and vulnerable, which can result in their exploitation by others. Taking

advantage of others creates injustices between people. Proverbs (11:1-3) says, “The Lord detests the use of dishonest scales, but he delights in accurate weights. Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Honesty guides good people; dishonesty destroys treacherous people.” Relationships of all types can suffer from injustice which can be considered as circumstances where justice, fairness, and morality are missing. Kagan (2018) lays out the basis for human morality as a cognitive and emotional process which depend on “the agent, the action, the target of the behavior, and the context.” Morals are one’s beliefs about what is right or what is right behavior and justice. They are personal standards which are the result of social, cultural, and environmental influences. Formal standards of morals are codified into laws, but social and cultural moral behaviors are what become *social norms*.

In American culture these morals are considerations: *don’t take advantage of someone, returning shopping carts to the collection point after their use, offering your seat to another person, or not cheating on exams*. Yet biblically, one can find many instances of the proper moral behavior intended to keep peace among men. Our world stands on three things: justice, truth, and peace, as Zechariah (8:16) says “...speak the truth to each other; render true and sound judgment in your courts” (Belk & Belk, 2023). Leviticus instructs us twice “not [to] pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great but judge your neighbor fairly” (Lev 19:15) and “do not take advantage of each other...” (Lev 25:17). The prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of Jerusalem, admonishing them to uphold moral standards:

The sinners in Jerusalem shake with fear. Terror seizes the godless. ‘Who can live with this devouring fire?’ they cry. ‘Who can survive this all-

consuming fire?’ Those who are honest and fair, who refuse to profit by fraud, who stay far away from bribes, who refuse to listen to those who plot murder, who shut their eyes to all enticement to do wrong, these are the ones who will dwell on high. (Isaiah 33:14-16)

Ironically, what passes as social norms for some, do not for others, and this is where crime and punishment begin their story.

After the rule of Joshua, the Book of Judges tells us that the Israelites entered a period of different leaders, and judges were appointed to maintain rule over the land, this era was referred to as *the time of judges*. In the Book of Judges (chapters 13-16) the life of Samson, an Israelite who was born into the Nazirite order, is recounted. A Nazirite is one who takes a vow to God which requires them to abstain from wine, grapes, cutting their hair, and from touching the dead. The significance of Samson’s life and deeds is an example of punitive or moral altruism because he routinely dispatches Philistines who are persecuting Israelites. Punitive altruism is distinctly separate from other forms of altruism because the altruistic deed is an act aimed at correcting or countering an injustice. In contemporary times, Hollywood exemplifies this type of altruism in many Old Western films and virtually all superhero films, as the narrative of a hero is bound to altruistic behaviors. The motivation of someone engaged in punitive altruism is based in their perception of someone being wronged by another group or person who is stronger than their victims and therefore, the victims need an outside party to defend, protect, or save them.

Samson meets the criteria for many of these traits, Judges (14:1-4) describes his desire to marry a Philistine woman which would have been dishonoring to his family and

community, they attempted to talk him out of this decision, but he persisted because he saw a way to punish the Philistines. Later, we see Samson attack and kill 30 men and take all they had to pay a debt (Judges 14:19) which on the surface appears to be a crude and evil act. Skeptics of Samson believe that his behaviors are one of a psychopath (Lemardelé, 2016). However, in the greater context of the life of Samson, he was at war with the Philistines and had decided to punish them however he could. Heroic figures have supernatural abilities and Samson's was great strength. He killed a thousand men with a donkey jawbone (Judges 15:13-15) and in the culminating even of his death, he prays a prayer and asks God for strength one last time to destroy the temple and 3,000 Philistines who were there mocking him (Judges 16:26-30). At times Samson acted like a vigilante, a self-appointed person who evokes justice but has no legal authority which one understands in Judges (15:20) because "Samson led Israel for 20 years."

Heroic (punitive) altruism is truly best observed when one person is willing to die for the opportunity to serve justice to others who are acting above the law. The case of Samson provides us limited knowledge of the complexities of his life and the acts of the Philistines against the Israelites which leaves open the question about Samson's motivations. Researchers have correlated trait narcissism with heroic acts, especially when the person acting altruistically desires fame or greater social influence (White et al., 2018). Like many heroic figures, Samson has his own struggles with moral issues. The downfall of Samson is his lust for a woman which leads him to pursue Delilah, perhaps one of the most famous antagonists of the Bible, who convinces Samson to confide in her the source of his great strength. Much like kryptonite is to Superman, Samson's uncut hair, once gone he became powerless.

There are two themes emerging with Samson's life: relationships and revenge. First, Samson prioritized his relationship with Delilah over his relationship with God which resulted poorly and ultimately in his self-sacrificing death. Second, Samson sought out situations through which he could take revenge on the Philistines but even in his own vengeance, he acknowledged God and desired to serve the Lord which helps demonstrate the complex social and moral realities of life. As one struggles with their own personal issues, they also are engaged in many relationships simultaneously with family, friends, coworkers, supervisors, others, and God. Punitive altruism from Samson's life, was about punishing the Philistines and restoring order to the Israel at a time when the Israelites had turned away from God, God's laws, and were worshiping false idols.

Psychology of Religion & Altruism

The *Psychology of Religion* has been widely studied across the world in many variations. Religion provides structure to the human mind and life by establishing a set of principle beliefs. The beliefs are commonly one's values and in many cases are the foundations for the development of future psychological constructs of each individual. Religion has played a necessary role in society, too. It galvanizes communities and creates new social norms through which outsiders can integrate into new groups by joining a particular religion (Bennett & Einolf, 2017). The importance of social order has always been critical to communities, religion provides moral and ethical guidelines which have helped shape the laws and governments recognized today. The psychology of religion explored through altruism has largely focused on donations, charity, and volunteerism in numerous forms (Bennett & Einolf, 2017; Fraser, 2022).

One study found that Jews and Muslims were among the most likely to engage in prosocial behaviors towards others (Bennett & Einolf, 2017). Of particular interest was the willingness to perform altruistic behaviors by those of a minority religion in their country towards strangers, by men, by well-educated people, and by those with higher incomes. Fraser (2022) found that religion, not altruism, explained why larger charitable wealth transfers to assist the poor occur within communities. Religious giving reduces poverty and is motivated from spiritual beliefs which implies devotion to one's faith is stronger than altruism, even though both produce prosocial benefits to the community. Altruism has been dismissed as merely the byproduct of in-group favoritism, but Bennett & Einolf (2017) believe that those living in devout religious communities are exposed to greater amounts of altruism which leads to non-religious people having more opportunities to engage in altruism.

With consideration to the broader academic research of the psychology of religion, a recent study identified research and publication biases that negatively impact Christian research. The biases discovered was that others viewed religious researchers as having an agenda, as less intelligent, and as less mainstream (Rios & Roth, 2019). Why does this matter to studies of altruism and this study? Many prosocial behaviors have been researched from a religion perspective because there is a natural connection between religious practices and altruistic actions. Altruism has also remained somewhat less mainstream and therefore, studies fully exploring the relationship between altruism and religion do not exist. Religious views have been used as a framework to study social issues (e.g., marriage, LGBT, and abortion). However, psychology of religion literature falls short in adequately describing the basis of religion in altruism or its opposite. The

results of the studies which explore the altruism-religion connections or more accurately, studies that attempt to predict altruism based on religion, have been ambiguous with researchers finding support for and against religion as a factor for predicting future altruistic behaviors (Hoffman, 2020; Pace & McKaughan, 2022; Zarghi & Bolghan-Abadi, 2021). Part of the ambiguity is due to the differences in religions, religious views, and definitions of altruism.

There is no denying that religion and altruism are closely linked. Yet, beliefs in humanity appear to be a better indicator of potential altruism than beliefs in a higher power (Amormino et al., 2022). Another complication to the exploration of the altruism-religion connection is that both religion and altruism vary in application, meaning that two people can be religious but in very different ways. As one person attends religious services once a week, another person might pray daily and attend services three times a week and both could be labeled as *religious*. Altruism is similar this way, in that one person might make regular acts of selflessness while another dies for the sake of someone else. Both could theoretically be labeled *altruists*.

Counter Arguments

Religion creates its own discriminating behaviors from a theological and social perspective. Christian values of faith are attacked by evolutionists who argue that Christian altruists are secure in their service of Christ and the Church's immortality. Under such influence, prominent figures like Mother Teresa, are believed to have been motivated by selfish interests (service of Christ) and immortality (salvation) in lieu of altruistic love (Grant, 2000). At the core level of reciprocal altruism is a cost-benefit analysis which is why so many attempts to understand altruism have been operationalized

by experiments using games (e.g., prisoner's dilemma) that challenge this notion (De Dreu et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2019; Tóbiás, 2023).

Religion has been argued to have created an ingroup/outgroup effect on altruism with an “us” versus “them” mentality which has resulted in reduced altruism among groups (Saslow et al., 2013). Additionally, Hoffman et al. (2020) found that religious practices of confession, divine forgiveness, and absolution may decrease prosocial behaviors; “if one’s sins are forgiven, what motivation do they have to behave prosocially?” Comparing altruism viewed by sociology (relationships and society) and anthropology (gift giving), *altruistic love* refers to belonging to the same human community and crosses all other boundaries thereby eliminating an out-group. It is the sum total of all humanity and therefore, could be referred to as universal inclusion (Cimagalli, 2020).

One counterpoint of altruism is that altruism is not Christian at all and instead is merely benevolence, masked as altruism, to motivate sharing, cooperation, exploiting empathy and guilt as reasons to take action. Batson’s (1994) theory of motivation regarding empathy-altruism is technically incorrect if viewed from the perspective that empathy towards others’ circumstances is motivated by ulterior motives; Matthew (6:1-4) says,

Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you

give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. *Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you* (emphasis added). (*New American Bible*, 2011)

The last verse (Matt. 6:4) indicates that one will receive a reward from God for their behavior. Yet, the reward itself is not described but implied. Therefore, one can assume that the reward refers to something supernatural or of great value because the reward will be granted from God, who is capable of everything. Altruism cannot exist in this case, because it is motivated by reward or by hope in a reward. Matthew's intended message was aimed at not seeking public reward for giving gifts but that one's reward should be privately held and that by giving in private, the recipient might also be blessed by not facing public judgement for having been in a place of need. However positive the intentions of the behavior, this scenario does not conform to or meet the threshold for altruism.

The Christian response to evolutionary altruism is simple; while evolutionists are arguing the merits of fitness where selfishness always pays, cooperation pays more (Grant, 2000). Christian values and faith promote cooperation, peace, and altruism as instruments to improve our existence and to honor God. The "concern for others carries with it a reward from God that cannot be enhanced and is only undermined by anticipation of benefit in this world" according to Chilton (2005). Proverbs (25: 21-22) says, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them, and if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for live coals you will heap on their heads, and the Lord will vindicate you." Here are two examples in the Bible where people are asked to do something altruistic by being promised a reward from God. Measuring altruism does not allow for the isolation

of one's motivations. However kindhearted the behaviors might be, if they are motivated by rewards, they are not altruistic. Yet, since true motivations cannot always be verified, these acts are accepted at face value as altruism.

Altruistic love is not entirely Christian, it is a sociocultural phenomenon that can occur when people develop emotional attachments to others. Self-identity constructs are formed both neurologically (biological) and environmentally (social) which means that people are as much a product of their environment as they are of their genetics (Fiske & Taylor, 2021). Therefore, altruistic love can develop outside of religion when someone meets another person who reminds them of someone they knew in the past or perhaps even lost if the person associates them or similar feelings to them. Altruistic love is the result of a deliberate decision to choose ethical agape love over selfish eros love (Post et al., 2002). Therefore, action taken in support of another demands the same commitment one has to God because love is an act of godliness (Chilton, 2005).

The final counter argument is a passage in Exodus (21:1-11) which discusses laws about owning slaves. One might make an argument that there are contradictions between altruism and slavery. After all, owning slaves likely might be the furthest thing from helping others. However, slavery in Biblical terms was closer to what the British termed indentured servitude, it was an arrangement in which the slave worked six years while supported and then was set free. Altruism in the sense of slavery itself does not exist. Ironically, some people might take the inverse approach and attempt to turn every situation into an opportunity for altruistic love which could end poorly because that approach assumes that altruistic love is the appropriate response to all things which it clearly is not. The Bible offers different points of views for the sake of all who follow

God to recognize that “there is a season for all things, a time for everything under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Summary

There have been many attempts to quantify altruism. Scholars throughout the ages have described human behaviors towards others in many ways. Auguste Comte coined the term in the 1800s, his views on altruism were centered on selflessness. Today, altruism have been described as prosocial, benevolence, and compassion but the underlying motivations for altruism still are difficult to observe. The working definition presented here was, altruism as *acts or behaviors which place the one's own interests subordinate to another's*. The motivations for altruism could be argued numerous ways. There are five requirements for an act to be altruistic: benefiting another person, voluntarily, intentionally, benefit of the act is the goal, and done without expectation reward. However, when altruism is discussed in terms of religion, faith, or spirituality, several distinctions can be made.

Over the past 70 years several altruistic themes and theories have emerged. The themes are, evolutionary (reciprocity and kin), personality, punitive (moral), and love. These themes are present in the Bible and are pervasive within the Christian faith. The theories of altruism are primarily from evolutionarily, economic, social, and psychological perspectives. The altruism-egoism theory stems from the evolutionary altruist arguments about individual motivations of altruism are selfish versus selfless. The core of altruism is an acknowledgement of others. Kin altruism theory is the epitome of the idea *family first*. Christian authors describe altruism distinctions as self-transcendent

and part of fulfilling one's duty to God. An ideology which allows God and man to share in a relationship with altruistic love.

Altruistic themes are each expressed in biblical scriptures. The Bible is a representation of man's relationship with God, the creator. The scriptures are the foundation of Christian faith and values; Christianity is a religion based on love. Christianity presents the concepts of *altruistic surrender*, which according to the scriptures means seeking God first. By focusing on God first, one moves away from a self-centered view towards a view of others. Faith is defined by Christians as *trust in God*, the assurance of things hoped for but not seen, and faith can be altruistic.

Christian theology teaches *altruistic love*. The New Testament places a significant emphasis on altruistic love and altruistic personality traits through the lessons of Jesus Christ, most notably, *The Sermon on the Mount* and the *Beatitudes* but also in less transparent ways such as the Books of Daniel, Job, Ruth and Judges. Each of these books portrays figures who exemplify faith, loyalty, and altruism. Altruistic love creates a commonality and community among people. Love in the altruistic sense is intended to transcend oneself as God's love for mankind does. Altruism allows for the opportunity to exercise one's faith in a variety of ways.

Building on the commandments to love one's neighbor, the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) demonstrates prosocial generosity, classically representing the *altruistic personality*. Christians are taught to love their neighbors which is the foundation of the *Golden Rule* and the basis of all relationships. Altruism was illustrated by loyalty in the Book of Ruth which extends traditional concepts of altruistic personality to service for another. Here one also sees the concept of redemption operationalized as an altruistic

personality trait when Naomi gave her lands to ensure Ruth's marriage. There are certainly some parallels between altruistic themes and *kin altruism* is one of the themes that slightly overlaps altruistic personality and reciprocity.

Kin altruism theory was developed by Hamilton, who had evolved the idea of evolutionary altruism to mean that parents or family members will act altruistically for the sake of their children. Biblically, Rahab acted altruistically for her entire family and risked her life to help Israelite spies. Kin altruism is one of the easier themes of altruism to observe and isolate because it is a natural and understandable reaction within the parent-child relationships. Moses exhibited kin altruism on a nationalistic level, expanding what altruism can represent. Seeing people act for the benefit of their relatives is not unique to Christianity but nevertheless remains an essential part of the discussion because the Bible specifically emphasizes its importance.

Altruistic reciprocity is all about the *Golden Rule* and breaking bread together. Relationships are strengthened by making contributions to the other. Therefore, altruism has a role to play in how Christians form and build their relationships. Here one is reminded that of the ultimate relationship, our relationship with God, and the importance of cultivating this relationship as it will become an extension to all one's relationships. The Bible provides instructions on how to treat neighbors and enemies alike, these rules are designed to promote peace, prosperity, and community, but they also promote altruistic reciprocity as a value.

Morals are one's beliefs about what is right or what is right behavior and justice. They are personal standards which are the result of social, cultural, and environmental influences. American cultural morals promote fairness, justice, and opportunity. The

Bible frames these very well through a series of passages like Psalms (106:3) says, “Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!” Samson’s final act of self-sacrifice kills 3,000 Philistines in a punitive altruistic deed. He shows how a series of injustices can be corrected, though the justice is often punishment of death. Heroes and vigilantes are glorified or vilified depending upon social context and perspective. Biblical morality and justice are connected to our final judgement by God at death.

Counter arguments to altruism and its various themes attempt to dismiss altruism by diluting it through several points. Altruism cannot exist because it is motivated by reward or by faith or hope in a reward. Measuring altruism does not allow for the isolation of one’s motivations which implies that many behaviors will appear altruistic, but their true underlying motives will never be revealed and therefore, altruism itself is unreliable as a construct or variable in any experiment. Some claim that altruism is not Christian, but merely benevolence, masked as altruism, to motivate sharing and cooperation by exploiting empathy and guilt. Religion has also been argued as divisive, creating an “us” versus “them” mentality.

Christianity calls for a time and season for all things under heaven. It promotes values, faith, and behaviors which are good for individuals and for society. Altruism in any form is the result of a decision. It is not automatic. Thinking of others and accepting the consequences of doing something for another is a Christian value. Altruistic love and surrender are key aspects of Christian faith. They bring together Christians into a commonality which allows everyone to aid and assist those in need. Altruism is not about

self-anything, it is about promoting a sustainable set of values which maintains community standards and faith.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The *Psychology of Altruism: A Phenomenological Study of Christian Leaders* is a study fundamentally designed to obtain direct access to the source of how altruism relates to Christian faith and this chapter puts forth a research method design based on three guiding questions. Participants, procedures, and interview techniques of how the data was obtained are presented to demonstrate the rationale for analysis. Finally, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions affecting the study are discussed to enrich the understanding of the parameters under which the study was conducted.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do *Christian Leaders* describe altruism from their life experience?

RQ 2: How do *Christian Leaders* describe the relationship between altruism and Christian faith?

RQ 3: How do *Christian Leaders* describe personal insights of altruism in Christianity?

Research Design

A qualitative research design method is used in this phenomenological study of Christian faith and altruism. Qualitative research is a good approach for discovery, when the researcher may not be aware of important themes or key variables because it allows flexibility in the research method because qualitative phenomenological research aims to uncover what experiences mean and how they were experienced (Creswell, 2009). Through interviews of current and former Christian leaders, a uniquely Christian opinion of altruism as it relates to Christian faith emerged. Interviews and a demographic questionnaire were used to gather data from participants.

Psychology is a scientific study of the mind and behavior which requires techniques to elicit information that can be analyzed. Although altruism can be observed, merely observing a phenomenon does not imply that it is understood. To properly investigate the motivations of a phenomenon one must engage with individuals who are involved with the phenomenon. Interviews are a form of direct contact with individuals who can provide their own words, opinions, thoughts, and rationale to describe their experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Phenomenological qualitative studies rely heavily upon interviews as means for collecting data to gain insights into otherwise unobservable behaviors (Seidman, 2019). Following established phenomenological research practices two steps were completed prior to conducting interviews. First, identification of the phenomenon, altruism, was established from the outset of this study but nothing specific about altruism was identified. Second, bracketing researcher biases and assumptions is necessary to avoid introducing leading questions or otherwise manipulating the natural responses of participants, which for this study meant that the research bracket off personal experiences of altruism by refraining from interjecting with personal experiences during interviews and withheld judgement and interpretation of participant statements (Davidsen, 2013). The researcher used follow up questions during interviews to obtain fuller responses and understanding of the intended comments and opinions of participant's lived experiences.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Christian Leaders and their opinions, interactions, and understanding of altruism as they relate to the Christian faith because they are uniquely placed within society to observe and interact with many Christians and non-Christians, and the life situations through which Christians are engaged in or struggle with their own faith, motivations, needs, and desires. Altruism is a social construct and therefore is subjective to one's personal experiences. Social constructs are culturally dependent and are

lived versus learned (Hill, 2021). Interviews of Christian Leaders is an appropriate method of obtaining data because it is impossible to know the experiences of others without their input or consultation (Seidman, 2019). Interviews also provide the opportunity to discover important nuances of a phenomenon which may otherwise go unnoticed in quantitative studies.

Participants

Participants were first identified using a criterion sampling method and then were recruited using convenience combined with snowball sampling methods (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants were contacted based on physical proximity, location, the researcher's interests, churches the researcher has visited, via LinkedIn, via Instagram direct messaging, through the researcher's network of personal and professional contacts, and through participants who provided leads and or introductions to other potential study participants. Originally, 15-20 participants were planned for this study based upon the estimated sample size consistent with recommendations from Creswell and Poth (2018) for the number of participants within a phenomenological study. However, a sample of size 30 participants is ideal for qualitative research to obtain saturation and to identify thematic nuances (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2018). Therefore, a snowball sampling approach was used for this study because participants have unique access to other acquaintances who are qualified to participate within the study (Landi, 2023). The researcher asked participants to suggest, invite, or introduce other *Christian Leaders* who might desire to participate in the study (Browne, 2005; Goodman, 1961; Morgan, 2008). A total of 31 people participated in the study.

For the purposes of this research all participants had to qualify as a *Christian Leader*, which is defined in this study as any person who has held a role which required

them to preach, minister, or evangelize in any form. Participants could be from any denomination or non-denomination of Christianity and may or may not be ordained or certified. McLaughlin (2002) describes a *Christian Leader* as a person who influences others towards God's kingdom by believing, reflecting, and obeying Jesus Christ. Of the 31 participants, three were Catholic, four were Orthodox, and twenty-four were Protestants. Ministry roles included pastoral duties, leading women's, men's, and children's ministries, Bible studies, missionary and community outreach, evangelism, and Christian businesses. Demographic data is provided in Appendix F. The study conducted interviews during the fall of 2023.

Study Procedures

Solicitation of participants included direct contact, email, phone call, by referral of others, and through social media. No incentives or compensation was offered to participants for their participation in the study. All participants either received an email invitation (Appendix A) which included details and criteria for participating in the research or were provided a verbal summary of the study and its purpose. A consent form (Appendix B) acknowledging their personal information would not be published within the study and that they were entitled to withdraw from the study at any time for any or no reason, was completed with each participant. To participate in the study participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- Participants must be 18 years of age or older
- Participants must consent to allow their interview to be recorded
- Participants must qualify as a Christian Leader, as defined by this study

Interviews were the data collection mechanism for this study and were conducted in person or via virtual video conferencing software. Interviews were conducted in an

informal setting to elicit candid and natural responses and reactions from participants; interviews ranged between 20-90 minutes, but most interviews required 35 minutes (Granot et al., 2012). With a few exceptions all in person interviews were conducted at the participant's office or church meeting spaces, other interviews were conducted in outdoor areas or at a café. Interview protocols were developed by the researcher based on the researcher's extensive professional interview experiences. A definition of altruism used in this study was read to each participant at the beginning of the interview to provide a consistent understanding and representation of the phenomenon.

Instrumentation and Measurement

A questionnaire (Appendix C) was developed with committee guidance to ensure these semi-structured interviews were conducted in a logical manner and remained within the spirit and intent of the study's focus areas (George & Bennett, 2005). The questionnaire was designed using both open-ended philosophical and closed-ended direct questions to guide interviews and to elicit greater discussion of the study's focus areas (Belk, 2011; Granot et al., 2012; Seidman, 2019).

Data Analysis

Qualitative phenomenological research analysis progresses through several stages to gain a complete understanding of the data. The analytical approaches used in this study included a variety of techniques using a multi-phase (see Table 1) analytic strategy. The analysis of the themes, clustering, and comparisons of the interview data with respect to the research questions was the primary approach for this phenomenological study. A review of each interview transcript was completed to remove any unnecessary language to generate primary meaning units (Peoples, 2021). Coding responses associated to

research questions and themes established specific and relevant data clusters (Belk, 2011; Saldaña, 2021) which provided the basis for understanding the major and subordinate statements, units of meaning, and most importantly, developing the essence (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants were assigned a “P” number which was used throughout the data collection, analysis process, and for reporting results; assigning a number helped remove potential biases of the researcher while reviewing the themes and clusters of the participants.

Interview transcriptions were automatically generated from MS Office 365 or from the MS Teams recordings. These transcripts were reviewed for errors and accuracy, which required listening to the transcriptions a second and third time to compare what participants said and to correct mistakes in transcription. General themes were identified from each participant and listed in a table individually and consolidated by grouping concepts together which were semantically different but represented the same idea. The themes were transferred into a matrix to visualize the data (see Table 2). Transcripts were reviewed a fourth and fifth time to identify and export Biblical scriptures which were placed into a table. The scriptures were validated for accuracy by first confirming the scripture with St. Joseph’s Edition of the New American Bible, Revised Edition (2011) and then evaluating them within the context provided by the participant; this step was important in the understanding of participant’s Biblical explanations of altruism.

The aim of this research methodology was to elicit the meaning of altruism from Christian Leaders’ perspectives and lived experiences. Participant feedback was analyzed and synthesized across the study to provide a collective representation of study participants to ensure investigative research methods matched the study’s intended

conceptual design (Pfattheicher et al., 2022). After coding, a synthesis of the responses to research questions was applied to each transcript. Compilation of all participant data was synthesized to identify the study's findings which answered the research questions (Peoples, 2021).

Table 1
Qualitative Analytic Methodology

Phase	Analytic Methods
Phase 1	Production and structuring of data (Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Peoples, 2021)
Phase 2	Reading data for a sense of the whole (Englander & Morley, 2023)
Phase 3	Identifying and matching data to research questions + Clustering data (Belk, 2011; Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Pfattheicher et al., 2022; Saldaña, 2021)
Phase 4	Theme identification / Units of Meaning (Moser & Korstjens, 2018)
Phase 5	Exploring statistical implications (Kim, 2017)
Phase 6	Deriving the meaning of the results (Peoples, 2021)

This qualitative phenomenological analysis of altruism as experienced by Christian Leaders required reviewing the data for accuracy, validating Biblical scripture references provided during interviews, and comparisons amongst participants for similarities. Accuracy is important because multiple philosophical thoughts were provided within the data which referenced the Bible. In some cases, participants directly referenced specific Bible scriptures while others referenced Biblical stories, characters,

and general themes. Determining the accuracy of these statements and their corresponding Biblical references was a natural step within the analysis of data because the referenced stories or scriptures were provided by participants to illustrate and support their experiences with altruism. A list of Biblical scriptures referenced in the data was generated to help identify themes in Christian theology, values, and beliefs (See Appendix E).

Once all participant data was clustered under the theme within the research questions, duplicative data was removed and generalizing comments were added to each section to reflect the context of the statements quoted by participants. The researcher conducted a brief statistical evaluation of the data to determine if any unique observations were present because of the nature of qualitative data, data coding methods were used with statistical software to run Fisher's Exact test on combinations of altruism themes that were generated by the study. Based upon the themes presented the researcher believed that all themes were likely dependent due to the homogeneity of the sample group (see Appendix D). The presence of independent themes within the study might indicate divergent thoughts, ideas, philosophies, or lead to other contextual understandings about altruism.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

Delimitations of the study have limited the participation to only those individuals who have held a role as a Christian Leader during their adult lifetime. Persons of other faiths, beliefs, or religions were excluded from participation as the nature of this study was focused on altruism from a Christian Leader's perspective. The scope of the study was further circumscribed to the topic of altruism and avoided theories of positive

psychology, psychological behaviors such as neuroticism, antisocial behaviors, and diagnoses covered under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) because these academic areas represented tangential directions away from the Christian perspective of altruism and exceeded the time and resources of this study.

Limitations of the study were several. First, *access to Christian Leaders for interviews*: potential participants were primarily identified through internet searches for Christian Churches, every website was different, some listed direct contact information for Pastors, but most did not and therefore, general email inboxes were the target of the initial 26 email solicitations. Of these, only one responded favorably. Additional follow up via phone only marginally facilitated interest in the study unless there was direct contact with a Pastor, in which case the chances of their agreeing to participate was stronger but automatic. Social media searches for “chaplain” and “pastor” were used to identify and message potential participants. LinkedIn provided many potential participants but only one participant actually followed through and participated. No paid campaigns were conducted to solicit or advertise the study via social media which made it impossible to assess if these strategies might have led to greater participation in the study.

Second, *Christian Leader’s lack of understanding of altruism*, multiple participants stated that this was the first time they are considering the topic of altruism. While lacking knowledge of the topic does not disqualify participants, it did create cause for the researcher to explain the construct of altruism. Several participants stated that they did not understand altruism very well. To mitigate this issue, a definition of altruism was read to the participants at the beginning of their interview and the researcher answered

any of their questions. Third, *the method of solicitation* (e.g., telephone, email, social media, etc.) created challenges to access Christian Leaders because there were no existing lists, rosters, or organizations who could provide access to accurate contact information. Attempts to directly message potential participants via social media largely failed to obtain any response. Fourth, *lack of Eastern cultural input*, the study is limited to addressing altruism from a Western cultural perspective.

A major assumption is that *Christianity* is best suited for this study and not other religions. Of the three Abrahamic religions, Christianity is the only one which teaches a philosophy of altruism. Judaism sets forth a series of 613 laws which provide guidance about how to interact with God, people, and the world. These laws and their subsequent interpretations never mention altruism, instead they focus on one's duty to perform good deeds and sacrifices as atonement for sins. The concept of *mitzvah* (good deeds) is a key tenant of Judaic faith and practice. Mitzvahs are described and applied in many ways throughout the centuries. Rabbinic discussions of mitzvahs have led to the underlying motivation of the mitzvah being performed as one of the key components of the good deed. Doing good deeds for the sake of doing good is in itself a positive activity (Neusner & Avery-Peck, 2005). However, there are several aspects of doing good deeds which Rabbis argue and they are essentially levels of the mitzvah.

The range from doing a charitable act where the giver and receiver remain unknown as the highest form through a complicated system of either the giver or receiver knowing who the other was, and finally, the scenario where both giver and receiver are aware of who the other person is. The strength of the mitzvah is greater when neither the giver or receiver because it is believed that both are then free to enjoy the blessing of the

act since neither of the people involved know the other party, they will not form expectations, judgements, or considerations which might diminish or detract from the act in the first place. Not knowing who will benefit and not knowing who provided the benefit means both parties are free to look each other in the eye without any sense of compromise. Altruism has no place in a system like this because Jews are commanded to support others.

From a Jewish perspective, altruism is fulfilling the law (Fraser, 2022). Therefore, potential altruism is reduced to prosocial, helping, kindness, or good deeds because the acts do not meet the threshold for the definition of altruism and without minimizing the significance of any mitzvah, Judaism is not an appropriate religious perspective to engage for this study or conversations of altruism at large. Islam presents another view altogether in which altruism does not exist because every act of generosity is rewarded by God. Therefore, it becomes impossible to distinguish altruism from any reward seeking behaviors which might increase one's experience in the afterlife. Muslims are tough that self-sacrifice is rewarded on the day of judgement. Similar to Judaism's doctrine of ethical behaviors, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of motives in moral actions (Homerin, 2005). For all the similarities of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there is a difference in the application of good deeds and individual motivations.

Summary

This chapter validates the methodology for the proposed research study by illustrating the values and advantages of the qualitative phenomenological research design. The study focuses on three primary research questions which guide the semi-structured interviews of 31 *Christian Leaders* who provide the data for the study. The

study procedures were presented in a methodical manner and highlight the data analysis techniques used for answering the research questions from the interviews. The scope and expectations of the study were discussed to provide awareness of the research limits along with the rationale for the study's boundaries.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The study aimed to describe altruism from the perspective of Christian Leaders and obtained data by interviewing participants about their life experiences. After data collection was completed, a five-phase analytical process was conducted to identify themes, clusters, and to code data for deeper understanding of the altruism phenomenon. The results of the study are presented here beginning with a description of the participants and the themes identified by the study. The study findings are presented through 13 themes which provide insight into the perspectives, thoughts, motivations, and ideas of Christian Leaders regarding altruism. The responses to the research questions are presented through the associated themes supporting each question. An additional five themes previously identified in the study presented separately with associated participant descriptions. The chapter closes with a summary of the results.

Descriptive Results

The study generated 31 participants through a snowball sample strategy. There were twenty-seven males and four females, the average age of participants was 56 years old ($n = 31$, range: 20-83 years old, median: 61 years old), and the average length of time participants identified as a Christian was nearly 44 years ($n = 31$, range: 3-83 years, median: 49 years). The majority of participants were not ethnically diverse with 27 participants identifying as white (87%) and four participants belonging to other groups (one Black, two Hispanic, and one other); four participants were female and 27 were male. The majority of participants (17) were Evangelical Christians (55%), with seven Reformed Christians: Protestant, Mennonite, or non-denominational (22%), four

Orthodox Christians (13%), and three Roman Catholics (10%) representing the other participants. Geographically all participants lived in the United States, the majority of the participants were from Pinellas County, Florida (18, 56%) and the greater metropolitan area of Los Angeles, California (8, 24%), with other participants from Arizona (1), Colorado (2), North Carolina (1), and Wisconsin (1). Since participants were required to be Christian Leaders, 54% of participants (17) were either currently serving as clergy, pastors or priests or had previously held this type of role. Additionally, the roles of Chaplain (4) and Ministry Leader (10) were represented. More demographic data is provided in Appendix F.

Study Findings

The study found 13 themes discussed by 31 Christian Leader’s to describe their personal experiences and beliefs about altruism (see Table 2). The analytical methodology employed here included multiple phases such as, structuring data, obtaining a sense of the whole data, clustering data and matching research questions, establishing themes, statistical testing, and distinguishing the meaning of the data. Analysis of the data was conducted through five-phases which expanded the analytical approach.

Table 2
Altruism Theme Matrix

Themes	Altruism Themes By Participants																															Total			
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	P17	P18	P19	P20	P21	P22	P23	P24	P25	P26	P27	P28	P29	P30	P31				
Meeting the need		X		X	X	X	X	X		X				X		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	20		
Christ is the example of altruism				X	X					X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	19		
Love & Altruism				X	X	X	X			X		X			X	X	X		X	X		X	X		X								14		
The Calling	X		X		X			X		X	X						X			X		X									X	X	X	11	
Spiritual Growth		X			X	X	X	X	X		X			X		X	X			X	X		X					X	X					16	
The path to altruism		X		X		X	X	X				X	X	X				X	X	X			X	X		X	X		X					16	
Warnings to Christian Leaders	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X		X	X		X	X		X	X			20	
Aspects of Altruism				X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X		X				16	
Kin Altruism				X												X	X				X								X					8	
Reciprocal Altruism				X		X			X				X																				X		10
Altruistic Love	X		X		X	X													X	X							X	X	X					15	
Altruistic Personality			X			X	X	X										X		X				X								X			21
Punitive Altruism							X																												8
<i>Total</i>	4	5	7	9	10	9	8	6	6	6	6	3	7	7	6	5	7	8	6	6	6	7	5	6	4	4	4	8	5	7	7	6			

Note: Grey boxes indicate scriptural references provided by participants during interviews.

The research questions of this study are restated here:

RQ 1: How do *Christian Leaders* describe altruism from their life experience?

RQ 2: How do *Christian Leaders* describe the relationship between altruism and Christian faith?

RQ 3: How do *Christian Leaders* describe personal insights of altruism in Christianity?

The study identified unique eight themes in addition to the existing five prevalent altruism themes previously discussed in Chapter 2. A complete list of themes are provided in Table 3 below. The unique themes were mapped to the applicable research question they answered. The eight unique themes are: meeting the need, Christ is the example of altruism, love and altruism, the calling, spiritual growth, the path to altruism, warnings about altruism to Christian leaders, and other aspects of altruism. The five altruistic themes previously identified are: altruistic love, altruistic personality, kin altruism, punitive altruism, and reciprocal altruism.

Table 3
Altruism Themes

Unique Themes		Key Understandings
Aspects of Altruism	RQ3	A composition of considerations about altruism that help describe the phenomenon.
Christ as the example of altruism	RQ2	Descriptions of pure altruism as a key pillar of the Christian faith.
Love & Altruism	RQ1	A description of the how love plays out in situations and it's interactions with altruism.
Meeting the need	RQ1	Motivations of altruism described through actions and behaviors towards others.
Spiritual Growth	RQ2	Depictions of how Christians mature and grow to be altruistic.

The Calling	RQ2	Requirements of Christian Leaders described by altruism.
The path to altruism	RQ2	Descriptions of the behaviors and actions to become a better Christian.
Warnings about altruism to Christian Leaders	RQ3	Suggestions for Christian Leaders to ponder as they work to become more Christ like and altruistic.

Mapping to Existing Themes		Key Understandings
Altruistic Love	Love & Altruism Chris as the example	Agape, unconditional love, Christ like care for others and miracles.
Altruistic Personality	The path to altruism Meeting the need	Emulating Christ's compassion towards others.
Kin Altruism		Family focused supportive behaviors.
Punitive Altruism	Warnings about altruism to Christian Leaders	Sacrifice, correcting violations of morality, and judgement day.
Reciprocal Altruism		Blessing others by believing that others will bless you.
*Spiritual Altruism	Spiritual Growth The Calling	Faith focused supportive behaviors.

Note. *Denotes the addition of this theme to existing traditional themes.

Several themes were highly represented among participants, the prevailing themes were *Altruistic Personality* (n = 21), *Warnings about altruism to Christian Leaders* (n = 20), *Meeting the need* (n = 20), and *Christ as the example of altruism* (n = 19). The themes of providing warnings to Christian Leaders and meeting the needs of others were unanticipated and offer fresh perspectives on what Christian Leaders value in altruism. The altruistic personality and Christ as the example of altruism are very similar from the Christian Leader's perspective. They view their role as Christians to be one that attempts to emulate Jesus Christ's actions which many attribute to being altruistic. Thus, Christian Leaders believe that being altruistic is also being Christ-like.

The most interesting findings of the study centered around Christian Leader's descriptions of the path to altruism and spiritual growth contributing to altruism. Fifty-one percent of the participants (n = 16) discussed these themes and provided meaningful descriptions of how Biblical scriptures, faith, personal motivations, and altruism are interconnected. Altruism is truly embedded within Christianity according to Christian Leaders. Additionally, altruism was not associated with conversions (saving others or bringing others to Christ), baptism, and or salvation.

Demographic variables yielded limited insights into the data because the preponderance of responses were non-homogeneous. Themes associated with Christian denominations offered some ideas into the differences of participant experiences with altruism being associated to their belief systems. However, these were only observations and do not necessarily represent the themes which might emerge in these groups at large. Evangelical Christians were more likely to discuss aspects of altruism, spiritual growth, path to altruism, and altruistic personality. Orthodox Christians discussed altruism in terms of altruistic personality and warnings about altruism to Christian Leaders. Reformed Christians discussed love and altruism, altruistic personality, and warnings to Christian Leaders while Roman Catholics were unified in their discussions about altruistic love being the core of Christianity. Southwestern US participants (Arizona, California, Colorado) emphasized meeting the needs of others and the path to altruism themes which may or may not be the product of the sociocultural ideologies in that region. They also described pitfalls, Southeastern US participants (Florida & North Carolina) almost uniformly identified Christ at the example of altruism and discussed spiritual growth themes.

Statistical tests were performed on each theme to enhance the understanding of participant responses (see Appendix D) by answering the question: *Are any of the themes independent?* Fisher's Exact test was conducted for each combination of the 13 themes (categories) because of the small sample size and the less than five expected values for some categories (Simpson, 2015). The tests revealed only one statistically significant result relating to comparison of *The Calling* and *The Path to Altruism*. The results of Fisher's Exact test ($p = .009$) indicated that *The Calling* theme and *The Path to Altruism* theme are independent and almost completely unrelated at the 99% confidence level. All other comparisons were statistically insignificant indicating that an association or dependence of themes potentially exists but requires further examination which is outside the scope of this study.

The significance of independence for *The Calling* and *The Path to Altruism* themes requires further research, but it does allude to the potential for describing two completely different comprehensions of altruism within the context of Christianity. Suggesting that perhaps having a calling or being called is the result of a specific experience compared to those who expressed the path to altruism as gradualism punctuated by change.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do *Christian Leaders* describe altruism from their life experience?

Christian Leaders initially struggled to articulate altruism in their lives until they began to reflect on when they were involved in altruism towards others. These reflections often led to a specific example through which they described identifying needs of others and responding to those needs. A group of participants offered descriptions of how to

love others and how the Christian concept of love interacts with altruism. The two unique themes that emerged from participant interviews were *meeting the need* and *love and altruism*. With these themes Christian Leaders offered a glimpse into their cognitions and experiences about altruism.

Meet The Need

The most prevalent unique theme identified by Christian Leaders (n = 20), over 65%, was the description of altruism as “meeting the need” of others. Christian Leaders believe that altruism can mean many different things and is not isolated to any particular activity or behavior. However, Christian Leaders uniformly described altruism as recognizing a need, making a choice to get involved, and then meeting the need of the individual. As Participant 14 stated, “...everything we do should be modeling Christ. Watch him. You know, study him through the Gospels and he is always meeting needs, physical needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, you know. Meeting the needs of others should not be delayed, “when your neighbor has a need, don't go and come back tomorrow when you have it by you, when you're able right then. Help right then” (P5).

Christian Leaders emphasized the Biblical scriptures and examples of Jesus Christ seeing the needs of others and meeting their needs through a variety of means.

He [Jesus] never repels anyone. Everyone he meets, he recognizes as needing. Something more in their spiritual lives and because of his clairvoyance. He is able to know what's on their minds, and so he is there to help them. (P25)

Common examples of needs being met by Christian Leaders included: food banks, feeding the homeless, providing free meals, giving money to individuals or to their

church, providing material support, helping with church needs, assisting other Christians attending service by watching children, rendering roadside services, hosting people in their homes to live for various durations, and giving their time to support others during difficulty. Rendering service or support to others is not subjective, it is not dependent upon status because everyone has needs, albeit different needs, “I don't care what a person's economic status is. Everybody has needs in life. So, it's not always a matter of your physical or material deficits. Altruism, I really believe, ought to be happening all the time in congregations” (P17) and altruism can take the form of providing services to others,

So, I always talk about a need. There's a need, right? We have this need.

Either that need, was someone needed their fee paid or someone needed something... And so, the need, which is having somebody, you know, receive a prayer and anointing and Holy Communion, that's the need. And yet, I'm over here doing the administrative stuff right. But that's a reality, too, that the needs are out there, and we want to be generous of heart, but I'm the only guy. (P26)

Meeting the needs of others and being altruistic is not done for rewards or acknowledgement, it is done for a greater purpose and is easily observed in those closest to us, “I was raised in a Christian home. My folks were people that were sensitive to other people's needs [discussing why helping others is important]” (P19). Christian Leaders do not distinguish between needs, as they seek to help in many ways,

I think it's about where that you feel a need to help someone else, even when it means that it's maybe it's not the most convenient, leading the

women's ministry takes a lot of my time and energy, but I'm doing it because I feel like I'm helping the ladies at our church. I feel like it's helping somebody else and it's putting yourself second. Well, it's what the Bible tells us to do, to prefer others before us, and I enjoy helping people, so I'm not expecting anything in return...you do it because you want to do it because you feel a need to do it, not because you expect to get something back from it. (P8)

Some Christian Leaders pursue needs inside of their church, “we were really needing somebody that could step in as the sound engineer, and I stepped into it with almost no knowledge at all. And you know, have picked up what I picked up only for the grace of God” (P10). Yet, no matter what the need is, if someone is experiencing hardship, Christian Leaders are committed to assisting them and it is more than merely providing aid, it is the embodiment of altruism,

My view is if I see somebody with a need, I try to help. Sometimes it's not always about food. That's the main vehicle that I'm using. Sometimes it's about other things and sometimes it's something I can't do anything about, but my goal is to help where I can....So sometimes we can give them gas money, and sometimes we give them money for groceries. It depends.

Well, I don't think altruism even should be a consideration. It's just a matter of does this person sincerely need something and are we in a position to help them. (P20)

Helping others, protecting the weak and innocent, and treating others as equals were evident in the thoughts and experiences of Christian Leaders who described the

sacrifices associated with altruism. One participant discussed altruism as a teacher in a dangerous situation when under a lockdown because of a school shooting in the area the teacher decided to lock the children into a safe room and stayed with them to make sure the kids were safe (P12). At other times, Christian Leaders give in meaningful and significant ways, “I don't know this guy's yesterday, but I know what his today looks like and he needs some help and I got a way to help him [speaking about giving a meal to a homeless man]” (P27), and in ways that not only reveal their kindness, but also facilitates positive outcomes for others,

...there was a gentleman that worked with my wife who was hard up. His car broke down and we were able to bless him with the truck. No questions asked, nothing. Just we're able to give him a vehicle so he can keep trying to provide for his family. (P2)

Feeding the children of God is spiritual, but it is also practical, sometimes sharing with those in need results in a greater blessing to the recipient when the act of altruism goes beyond the initial response,

...he just saw a homeless guy and just went and, like, just bought him a meal, took it to him talked with him for a little while. And just you know. Seeking to bless him...But saw a need and went to meet that need. (P30)

Love and Altruism as a Christian

Nearly one half (45%) of the participants (n = 14) identified altruism as love. They describe how Christians should love, “...basically because of the spiritual aspect, I would say biblical love is not loving someone for your sake but loving them for their sake. So, there's no quid pro quo involved” (P3). Although the previously identified

altruistic love theme was anticipated, the manner in which participants made inferences, referenced, or described how love and altruism interact was unexpected. Their descriptions provide another view of love through the experiences of Christian Leaders which differs from the traditional definitions of Biblical love, "...but they don't realize that being a Christian is an act you have to, it's an act of love and of accepting Jesus..." (P20). Interpretations of the love-altruism relationship varied among participants which included love as a basic need. Christian Leaders believe that altruism can take many forms and love is one of the forms. Loving others can be as simple as touching them,

I remember he had been there for probably 10-12 years on staff and because these were, you know, these were paid positions that I was in and so you were an employee of the Mission and so you had to clock in and clock out. And yet, he was like, how do all these people know you, how do they know who you are? Because they would see me and they would call out to me and they just want to shake my hand. They're not the most sanitized individual. But you shake their hand, you love them, because they want that touch. Like the leper, Jesus touched the leper because he needed one to touch him. And they needed that touch... you just have to love them. (P6)

Love for a Christian Leader is a habit formed around the example of Jesus Christ which requires faith and loyalty,

We need more people to step up the plate, open their heart, take their talents, and just pour it out. Doesn't always have to be money. It could be taking your time and walking into sometimes lion's den. You hear stories

every so often. We make a big deal of it in the news. But for me, I want to teach our young people that, I teach it to my grandchildren all the time, and I've noticed that between their parents, myself, their other grandparents, that we really try to surround them with that unconditional love and show them it's a habit. (P16)

Christian love is something to be given and received, Christian Leaders strive to exemplify a loving attitude for all Christians observe and in which they can participate in,

When I see people show me such love. I accept it because it is Christian, it is about giving and receiving of love, so you can show me love, and of course they do. They're doing that because of my own basic sacrifice. So, if they showed me, it's welcome because that is a kind of manifestation that you know, you are accepted. You are loved just as you love and you are loved, too. (P28)

As Christian Leaders help others, it inspires new Christian Leaders to emerge within their community as in the case of a Christian who established a network of food donations and distribution with zero funds and only his pick-up truck,

Mike is a great example. He is not paid staff. He is a retiree, not in the best of health and doesn't have much, you know, just a normal guy. But he has a heart for the homeless. And so, during COVID he started setting up every day out in his truck, just sitting under the trees, making peanut butter and jellies by hand, and he did it out of his own pocket. And he's like, 'I just believe that we should be doing this.' And as he continued to be faithful in doing that, people took notice from other organizations and

began to hook them up with these resources and in that, honestly, man, he is an inspiration to me because he is out there. He is in the mission field. He is hearing people's hearts. And he always has such a smile on his face.

(P7)

Some participants described love as a relationship with God and expressed the connection between altruism and Christian faith being inseparable. Love being part of altruism as a Christian was explained that people should love one another, and that there is a manner in which people should love one another, “in my opinion, it's the heart of...let's say, behold how they love one another. The essence of love to me is sacrifice, generosity” (P22). Love is associated with the example of Jesus Christ or God but also that altruistic love could be a sacrificial love, “there is no part of Christian faith that you can live if you're not altruistic, because it's not about you. It's about, you know, a relationship with God, relationship with others, in spite of yourself” (P28). Christian Leaders underscored that the greatest examples of altruism were displayed by the Lord, citing the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as atonement for man's sins,

We, being in our sinful nature, we're unable to accomplish that. Therefore, God and his love, he came because unless he hadn't come, we would have no hope of salvation. We needed the Lord, and he sacrificed himself.

That's the greatest example that we find. (P4)

Participants reiterated during their descriptions of altruism that loving others means keeping God at the center of one's life,

Love your God and as the first love. So expressed, you know, as Jesus was talking about in Revelations too, he said, you know, I got a problem with

you. You've left your first love and for Christian leaders it's so easy and it because I fall victim of this more often than not, I mean just life comes at you and you get busy and next thing you know the Lord's off to the side somewhere and if we're going to be effective, we have to keep him front and center because if we do that then we will have altruistic character of his character. (P9)

Finally, the perspective of love was extended to include procreation and sacrifices associated with being brought into this world.

RQ 2: How do *Christian Leaders* describe the relationship between altruism and Christian faith?

Christian Leaders easily expressed their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and philosophies about altruism. Participants immediately provided examples of their expectations about being altruistic while serving in a leadership role and some referred to there being an internal drive, a calling, in which people feel that they are led to serve others as leaders or organizers. Two unexpected results about Christian Leaders' responses were their focus on spiritual growth relating to the spiritual maturity of Christian believers, and their explanation of the pathways to become altruistic. These responses generated the unique themes of *Christ as the example of altruism*, *the calling*, *spiritual growth*, and *the path to altruism*, which each provide a first scene observation of altruism within the Christian Leader's perspective and help shape the extensive relationship that altruism plays within Christian faith and spiritual development.

Christ as the example of altruism

When responding to questions about altruism and Christian faith or Christian theology, Christian Leaders (n = 19), over 61%, identified Jesus Christ or God as the ultimate example of altruism, “I’ve thought about this because the greatest example and sits at the very top of everything begins with Christ...” (P4) or “the biggest act of altruism is that of Jesus Christ in the Sacrifice” (P28), and “I see Jesus as the consummate image of altruism” (P17), who came to earth to provide us a path to salvation,

Most perfect example of altruism in my mind, in my life experience, is the life of Jesus Christ. As his incarnational witness and how he came to Earth, not because he wanted to and not because he wanted to win friends and influence enemies, but because of the will, the sovereign will of the father and that’s altruism. (P27)

More than one-third of participants did not readily identify or express Jesus Christ as altruistic during their interviews. Several participants referred to the sacrifice and altruism of Jesus, “Jesus Christ sacrificed himself. Christ on the Cross” (P20) and “Christ himself, self-sacrifice, the man hanging on the cross making the absolute sacrifice, blood sacrifice to redeem a lost people who had no way to be redeemed” (P10), while others described the ministry of Jesus as one of service,

I would say it is the way of Jesus. I mean, when I think of that kind of a leader, I mean. That's Jesus is. Shepherding and serving throughout his ministry, and he's the ultimate servant. He's the ultimate shepherd. (P30)

A couple of participants identified altruism throughout the entire Bible and made references to the books of Genesis, 1 Kings, Proverbs, Isaiah, and the New Testament, “I

would say that God's entire story is altruistic in nature. And so, I think that theology of the church, regardless of the denomination, I think that theology is just the study of God” (P11). and “we have the ultimately, we have the supreme example, who even when Christ was going through suffering, he added no threats and did not take up his own defense” (P19). The consensus among Christian Leaders is that Christians should emulate Jesus Christ’s actions as depicted through his ministry in the Gospels. Sacrificing for others as Jesus Christ did is central to the Christian Leader’s beliefs about altruism and represents the foundation of altruism in Christian faith,

I think Christianity has brought to the world a corrective definition of what altruism should be because if altruism means the other and the opposite of altruism is egoism, me, then my perverse version of altruism when I sacrifice another is suddenly revealed as false. And the truth of being in connection with life, the one who is life, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice is the one that clarifies and defines all the sacrifice for us. (P21)

Part and parcel to Christianity is the concept of *others*,

And altruism, if in fact it means putting everybody else's interest above your own, Jesus set the bar for that, I mean there's no doubt about that. And even as he was washing this off his feet and he washed him and Judas's, he washed his feet just like he washed, he didn't do a secondary job. He did them all the same. (P5)

With an emphasis on others, Christian Leaders explain that “Jesus always put himself. I'm sorry, that's a basic answer but I mean, Jesus always put himself before other people” (P12), and

So basically Christ. Why Christ? Because of him being selfless, like I automatically think of Jesus. I think you know, our Lord is like, someone that's selfless and loving and caring and kind, compassionate, you know. Willing to...willing to listen. That's why. (P23)

These explanations led to deeper insights about the connection between the example of Christ and one's altruism; “I think that one actually leads us to move into the other the idea of giving and forgiving and being like Jesus would cause us to live in that way, in an altruistic way” (P13). Fully understanding the concept of serving others means incorporating self-sacrifice and giving as part of being a Christian which was explained in the following manner,

I would always start with the altruistic model of Christ, would be always where I would start. Jesus teaches us both in model and in action in the Gospels, the record of this matter, of self-sacrifice and of giving of yourself. (P18)

The Calling

Over one-third (35%) of the participants (n = 11) identified their altruistic activities as part of a calling from God. These Christian Leaders described altruism as an act of following Christ, Christ's behaviors, and as sacrificing their time and talents to take care of others, “I feel like as a pastor, the call to altruistic types of behavior is fairly

constant” (P18). Christian Leaders do not believe that everyone is called to lead, “If you don't have it [altruism]. I don't think you're called ministry. It's a disqualifier” (P31), and

Not everyone is called to serve in the church, because I'd say probably 5% of the church are the people who serving and 95% is the congregation. So, if you're called to serve, you already have the mindset of doing good with your congregation or even strangers whom you meet or whatever. But having that mindset before you become an actual leader in the church, it's there. It's not something that you're trying to create because most people realize what they're calling is if they have one. (P1)

However, everyone can participate in the calling to follow Christ, because “He has called us, even our enemies. Love your enemies. Feed them, give them water, treat them as those are your equals” (P5).

Altruism is a key component of being *called* because it signifies a distinction or difference in the individual who must be willing to sacrifice and give more than others around them. “Being a shepherd is somebody that's willing to go out and risk everything to save their flock. I would call it a calling, a profession, in which it goes beyond monetary or anything that would be a gain” (P3). Additionally, other examples of being called besides Jesus Christ were referenced,

James and John and Peter they were fishermen. Okay, so they left that behind and followed the calling. You see [Chaplaincy is] a refined calling many times because they were prior service and they feel that they were called out of the service only to be put back in a ministerial capacity.

(P31)

Christian Leaders described the obligations associated with being called to serve means remaining focused on the Lord and to share one's gifts with others. They also spoke to the necessity of discipline needed to maintain a focus on serving others, "it's something that must keep in front of us every day, something to wake up with and go to bed with" (P28).

Service and the calling are not limited in their application as Catholic priests and military Chaplains describe the calling as a life of service which extends into personal lifestyle choices and decisions, "so basically, all my functionality as a priest, everything I do as a priest starts from this, that basic altruistic sacrifice of marriage, giving up marriage for the sake of service" (P28). Service to others is seen as a Christian value for those who are called and for those who join the military it is perhaps "a calling within a calling when you serve the troops who are willing to risk their lives to save yours" (P31). Giving to others and meeting their spiritual needs is at the core of the calling.

Spiritual Growth

Christian Leaders' experiences with other Christians and their congregations have shaped their understanding of altruism. Over half (51%) of the participants (n = 16) stated that spirituality is related to altruism. In a progressive description of personal experiences, Christian Leaders explained that from their experiences, that people who are more spiritually mature as Christians are altruistic compared to those Christians who are still infants or childish in their faith. One of the key differences discussed in their stories was a unique understanding that mature Christians come to church to help others, while immature (less mature) Christians come to church to receive from others or be fed spiritually. The maturity of a Christian is described as a process of internal change which

results from investing time into a relationship with God and connecting with the Holy Spirit. The change in someone is the result of a spiritual death, the death of a sinner, an internal rebirth of someone who seeks and follows God, which then manifests in the individual changing their behaviors and promotes altruistic actions within the person as they seek to become more God like. “You know, it's a fact. Something must die for us to live in the scheme of things” (P21) and “Paul said in Ephesians 5, to be filled by the spirit, you have to empty yourself...” (P30). Self-awareness is critical concept supporting any spiritual transformation,

The fathers of the church say, ‘I would not be surprised that someone who saw angels but would be surprised at someone who knew their own sin.’

You know the word sin, it doesn't mean lying, cheating, it means you're disconnected. (P21)

Being aware of one's sinful nature does not automatically bring about a change, because “most Christians have not progressed from an infancy in faith to an adult” (P15). Younger Christians, those who are new to Christianity, and those who are less spiritually mature, come to church to be fed or to receive from others while those who are more spiritually mature Christians seek to serve others which is what the New Testament teaches, that Christians are to come together to become empowered for the work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some world views have transformed contemporary Biblical views of spirituality by creating a view where abundance is at the center of the Bible, “I even think there's sometimes...there is a prosperity gospel spirituality out there that, you know, I think unfortunately, my criticism of it is it's too Old Testament. I think it's a regression into a

more immature spirituality” (P31). Christian Leaders believe that altruism can assist with spiritual transformation because altruism by its definition focuses on others, “altruism is the key to internal change...there is an awful lot of Christianity that's external. And the Gospel...is truth that changes our lives” (P13).

Being a Christian requires one to undergo a process of transformation which includes salvation, baptism, and faith. Christian Leaders advise that having deeper spiritual maturity increases one’s capacity to love others, to be compassionate, and to express greater altruism, but also that in order to increase spiritual maturity, “you know Romans 12:1, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may know what is good. So, there is the mindset of being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit” (P22). One needs to cultivate a personal relationship with God, to pray and spend time with Him, because it will fill the soul. Through this experience one will be restored, rejuvenated, and reinvigorated because being altruistic requires one to give and there is an emotional price associated with giving,

You know it can wear on you and that's why you have to pray. That's why Paul said, now be filled with the Spirit...it's a continual filling. It's something that you have to constantly do because this is the what the will of the Lord is, reset, you know. (P6)

Through the process of sanctification described in 2 Peter 1:3-10, a Christian learns to trust God and commit themselves to living a Christian lifestyle, to walk with God and become a better version of the *self*,

As a Christian grows, I would say that growth in Christianity is often manifested in a deeper commitment to altruistic types of behavior. So, I

would say that initially, at salvation, I think all of us are confronted with our own hubris. Confronted with our own pride, and over the course of time, as we grow, as we study the person of Jesus, and the writings of the apostles. We're constantly confronted with the fact that a life that exemplifies Christ, is a life of peace and simplicity. (P18)

Christians who are mature spiritually take different approaches to life than non-Christians or immature Christians because their perspective has changed, “when you're serving other people, it changes you, and it changes your thought process” (P30). The spiritual interaction with altruism is based in a Christian's necessity to reflect on life differently after salvation or baptism and act accordingly, “Saint Paul says that the old person must die and a new person must come out of it, and even tells us, after baptism, we're a completely new creation in Christ” (P31). Christian Leaders explain spirituality as becoming more like Christ because mankind is created in God's image according to Genesis 1:27 and behaving like Christ means walking by faith and encouraging other Christians by guiding them to grow spiritually. Spiritual growth also means speaking truth to society and providing people with the truth about God. Christian Leaders believe that sharing their personal stories as testimonies provides others with hope and an understanding of Christian faith,

I think that, of course the model for that is Jesus' sacrificial work on the cross, his finished work on the cross, as I like to call it, and I'm being made in the image of God, being made in the image of Christ. I'm supposed to emulate the character of Christ and all that I think, say, do, act, preach, teach, walk, believe, and so it's incumbent on me to ask him to

fill me with his spirit, to help me, to move in, in those kinds of directions that I see so profoundly in the scriptures that he displays. (P13)

The *sanctification process* and the process of spiritual maturity begin with *faith* (The Bible Counselling Center, 2021),

All I know is what the Lord has put in my heart. And that's kind of what it's been like, my whole walk with the Lord. I identify completely with Abraham when God told him to get out and because I was ready, just like Abraham obviously wasn't satisfied with his life and with his culture and so he made an about face and he left...and so we're just walking by faith, that's our faith walk. (P9)

Christian Leaders explained that having *faith* is not an easy task, it is often difficult and complicated by one's environment,

Faith is believing and believing is receiving. Now stand on faith. That's hard. It's tough to believe in something that is unknown. The toughest thing to do is have faith. We use faith and other things, but we need to use it more in the Lord. (P8)

Building spiritual maturity is complicated, many people believe that it is intuitive, common sense like, and easy to figure out. However, Christian Leaders acknowledge this and offer that spending time with others to allow them to learn to walk spiritually is a better investment than merely pointing them to scriptures,

You just need one step at a time. And so, taking that time I think is necessary. So that altruistic component, is to not just give them the answer, but to take them along the journey of discovery. It takes a lot more

time, but it's what's necessary for people to actually be able to follow Christ in a way that they can put some teeth in to that, they can actually follow and not just be a rule book, but it's a relationship. (P11)

As one Christian Leader recounted the emotional sentiments of a church that was pastored by a friend of his, he explained that the feeling of this church was authentic and that resonated with people which is important because it leads to greater commitment amongst the community or congregation and promotes Christian values. The result of spiritual maturity is a confrontation with the world view, through Christian culture we can speak truth to society (P17). As another participant reasoned, often the Christian's focus is not on God which inhibits spiritual progress,

Silver and gold, I have none, but what I have, I give unto thee and so here's the problem. We focus so much on what we don't have. The apostles said, so, we don't have what you're asking for, but we have what you need. So, don't worry about what you don't have. Worry about what you do have. (P14)

Part of the sanctification process is incorporating a godly response to situations, exercising one's faith, and then recounting to others the experience because it will give them perspective and will promote their own spiritual growth. Sharing events of your life experience with others is a powerful testimony which can encourage and grow others (P8). As Christian Leaders have reasoned, there is a relationship between spiritual growth and altruism. The path to becoming a better Christian is easily stated by some as, acting as Christ or asking the question, what would Jesus do? However, the real path to greater

Christian spirituality is greatly misunderstood which is a significant finding of this study was the identification of a path to altruism.

The path to altruism.

If becoming more altruistic is congruent with living more like Christ, then understanding how to become altruistic in the first place becomes essential. One-half of participants (n = 16), 51% described a variety of pathways to altruism from a uniquely Christian perspective. Christian Leaders defined becoming aware of God's calling or seeing God work in their lives as two paths to greater faith and altruism. By becoming a servant to the Lord and others, Christians emulate Jesus Christ, whom they believe to be altruistic. Christian Leaders explain that by accepting that we are mortal and that we need a savior, we can begin to become better Christians and be altruistic towards others.

However, the path to altruism lies within a proper understanding of faith,

I think that people's faith oftentimes is misplaced in a concept of God instead of our relationship with who He is...I think that faith has been having trouble playing out in people's lives. Their faith hasn't necessarily gone from their mind and into their actions, and so the church's job and that is to really help redirect that point them back to those verses in Romans, point them back to those verses in James. Talking about this is why we do this. We do this because we love Him. We do this because of what he's done for us, it's our reasonable service. It's what makes sense... And as we put our faith in those things, it calls us to be altruistic. It calls us to sacrifice and live for other people, no longer for yourself, it's not hell insurance. It's how you live your life. (P11)

Faith can be viewed retrospectively by identifying special moments in life where the Holy Spirit was interacting with you,

You know, if it's one thing I like to encourage people with and I try to encourage them to go back and look at those, take stock of those moments in your life where you know that God has spoken to you. You may not have understood it at the time, but they're important, high watermarks. And are you working towards those? And so, if you're going to be altruistic, God's put that in us, OK? It's His nature. And so, I believe with all my heart that those desires we have to manifest, those desires that He puts in us. And that's going to take faith, that's going to take purpose, that's going to take some work. But for me, following those and working them has been extremely gratifying. (P9)

Christian Leaders believe that the path to altruism is conjoined with the concept of servanthood or discipleship because there is a natural emphasis on others and “the Bible says that we are all servants and that we can either be a servant to the Lord or a servant to ourselves and if you're a servant to the Lord, then you're putting others before you” (P1). The concept of discipleship was demonstrated by Jesus Christ, “we are no greater than our master, than the Lord himself, and so we are commanded in the word of God to follow in his footsteps. Even though we don't do it with perfection” (P4). Speaking of the motivations of altruism and discipleship, Christian Leaders know that maintaining a Christian perspective requires the deprogramming of world views and social constructs,

We have to first accept that we need a savior. It's only through being regenerated that we get closer and closer to that point of that ongoing work of sanctification that is the daily, the daily task of the believer as they, you know, submit, and surrender to God each day... decide to surrender their lives to Christ, decide to start following Christ. But it is ongoing, you know, process of discipleship where our, you know, fleshly desires, our motives get purified, get regenerated through a reading of scripture, through being in community, through being a part of a church that we begin to kind of that a process of deprogramming our thoughts, our motives and really examining, you know, what is really the motive that's driving my desire to work here, live here or have these friendships.

(P29)

As an example of discipleship within the scriptures, Christian Leaders referenced “the whole Sermon on the Mount is, if we really look at it, it's all about putting others before us, that is the Christian standard (P19),” and that discipleship meant sacrifice, “...they [the Apostilles] sold everything they had... (P15).” The influence of world views separates Christians from discipleship and altruism, sin is a separation from God, a disconnection in the relationship with God. Making a choice to sacrifice worldly things to detach oneself from materialism, drugs, alcohol, sex, anti-social behaviors, or non-Christian behaviors requires an acknowledgement of the behavior in the first place and also an understanding that it is not good for you. Knowing that one is disconnected from God means that they are able to get on the path or follow the path of altruism and return

to God (P24). Being a Christian is not about perfection, no one can be perfect and therefore, the path to altruism is about spiritual self-improvement,

But you know even the great apostle Paul had it and I think that genuine altruism is not perfect but we see it in the scriptures, lived out so that we can examine it and follow it. I think it's one of the reasons we see so many flaws in the individuals and the Bibles because God is showing us you don't have to be perfect. You just have to be surrendered and willing to move forward and to bear the cross, that's all. You're not gonna do it perfectly. (P6)

Self-reflection of personal motives can provide what one participant called a litmus test of their behaviors towards others, "I'm constantly going back to Matthew 10 and I'm asking myself, Lord, am I not pushing into what the Lord has for me because I'm trying to protect my own interest?" (P7) which is a means of evaluating personal motives.

Altruism can be spiritually motivated,

God is always involved...It's the *Holy Spirit, just touches your heart* and be like, hey, stop and give this guy some food or see what's going on. If you're in tune with the Holy Spirit, the Lord leads you to the right people...When God speaks to you, you act upon it. You don't. Then you're not in tune. If God tells you to go and pray for some lady that's sitting on a park bench and you ignore it and you walk by it, then you're not in tune.

But if you go and talk to her and you pray for her, then you're in tune. (P2)

A common perspective of Christian Leaders about altruism is the connection to Christ, "I think that [altruism] actually leads us to move into [Christianity], the

idea of giving and forgiving and being like Jesus would cause us to live in that way, in an altruistic way (P13).”

Through self-assessment Christians can identify if their motivations are selfish or selfless. Having a heart for altruism is a path to joy and contentment and is the standard for Christian behavior. By meeting people where they are in their own life journey allows them the opportunity to grow in Christianity and to feel the Lord’s presence in their lives. Living a Christian lifestyle is not easy, “we’re still called to lead a modest lifestyle (P31)” which is inconvenient, and partly because no one is perfect and any attempts at living a Christian lifestyle will also be imperfect. “Paul said, I’ll give everything up in pursuit of the gospel, you know, and I’ll make myself a slave to anyone if it furthers the gospel and I’ll lay down my own privileges and my own freedoms” (P7).

Christians who focus on their *first love*, pursuing God, will be led by the Holy Spirit and will experience greater positivity and joy in their lives, and often they will experience more altruism themselves, because “it’s an expression of Christ’s life in us, you know. There’s nothing more important than our first love... You get that right. Everything else will fall in place” (P9). In service to others, Christians find purpose and the ability to encourage others who are struggling with worldly views and behaviors,

You know the path to joy, the path to happiness, the path to reward, are all found ultimately through salvation, but ultimately in service of Christ, and that service is manifest in our selflessness, our willingness to be able to give, either to our church or time to other people, and I think perhaps one of the areas where our churches may even struggle is in social issues, but we don’t give as much attention to those types of things. (P18)

The path to altruism is not easy, it requires sacrifices, but the upside is worth it, Christianity is inconvenient. If we're going to live as Christian people, it's hard. It's inconvenient. It's heartbreaking. But all of those things when prayed about and followed through lead to exceeding joy and the glory of the Lord, feeling his presence in your life, I think. (P13)

Altruism is a normal behavior for Christians as they separate themselves from world view,

To me, [altruism] is the definition of Christianity in action...and I guess from my point of view, it's such a weird question because to me, it is the normal way Christians should live their life, they should be denying themselves and serving others, but as you live, you realize that that is quite the biblical worldview versus quite opposite the world, worldview. (P14)

Christian Leaders equate living a Christian life with the *fruit of the spirit* (Galatians 5:22-23), or behaviors that manifest in one's life as a result of pursuing Christ which ultimately creates a peaceful and prosperous existence like when you have the Holy Spirit in you, people will see that glow and see that (P23).

All too often people are expected to know how to grow and how to become better versions of themselves and better Christians. However, Christian Leaders need to identify what stage people are in as Christians so they can connect with them at that place and encourage them to grow,

And I think that's the thing as churches we need to get better at is leading people from where they are. I think we expect people are way further down the road than they are or that they know the steps to get somewhere.

And we really need to disciple people where they're at and admit that, you know, none of us are altruistic...Put a spotlight on our recovery ministries and our church and small groups that really help people, you know, untangle the habits, the hang ups that keep them from staying in denial.

(P29)

Ultimately, the path to altruism is one that leads through loving others as one wants to be loved, sharing spiritual experiences with others, and discovering what stage people are in regarding their faith as Christians. Altruism means sacrificing for others and as a Christian, it will not always be easy according to Christian Leaders. However, there is a sense of community and personal growth which accompanies helping others.

One interesting finding of the study, albeit subtle, was the statistical independence of *the calling* and *the path to altruism*, no single participant discussed both themes. The results of Fisher's Exact test (two-sided test, $p = .009$), indicating that *The Calling* theme and *The Path to Altruism* theme are completely independent (See Appendix D). The two themes seem to differ in their approach to altruism and in participant's perspective of Christianity. The only discernable explanation for this appears to be geographically related because the majority of participants who discussed *the calling* were from the Southwestern United States versus the majority of those who discussed *the path to altruism* were from the Southeastern United States. The divergence of these themes also seems to speak to their application towards Christianity, each theme relating to Christianity from a different point of view.

RQ 3: How do *Christian Leaders* describe personal insights of altruism in Christianity?

All of the study's participants recounted stories that they had experienced in their lifetimes which described situations and events when they received altruism from someone else, when they observed others being altruistic, and when they, themselves were altruistic to others. Through these stories a wide range of altruistic behaviors and actions were observed. In some instances, Christian Leaders provided additional information about the characteristics of these stories which did not align with other themes. These amplifying details and insights are captured in the *aspects of altruism* theme and provide color and context to altruism which are not represented in other literature. Along with these anecdotes, Christian Leaders also spoke about darker aspects of altruism and offered insights into what other Christian Leaders can do to avoid problems in the future. The warnings provided by participants are a reminder of how being altruistic can go wrong despite good intentions and trying to do the God's work.

Aspects of Altruism

Fifty-one percent of the participants (n = 16) intuitively discussed the many ways that altruism took shape from their lived experiences and provided insights into a variety of aspects of altruism which help shape the Christian Leader's perspective of what altruism really means and how it manifests in acts and behaviors. Altruism is part of the Christian ethos in which man is in a relationship with God, man being created in God's image implies that altruism is divine and spiritual. "The very fact that God wants to be involved with His creation is altruistic in nature (P3)." An underlying belief of Christian Leaders is that non-Christians need to be converted, but none of the participants discussed this aspect of Christianity and instead, described altruism as a central behavior

of Christians which provides unbelievers an example of how to live. Even to the point that,

Altruism is a thread, I've never thought of this before, but it's a thread that goes throughout Christian theology. What's the altruistic principle within a Christian version of the study of God and I would say it's the thread that's binding throughout, so from creation to man's fall, to redemption, to, you know, pneumatology, you know, where the spirit comes down in Acts chapter 2 and the forming of the church. (P27)

In the context of creation, altruism is a key difference between humans and other species, "...because the purpose of His [God] creating [man] was to have relationship with His created and so He gave, in order to establish that, and the uniqueness [altruism] of that is of course God (P3)." Although God is omnipresent and all knowing, Christians need to develop a relationship with God, not for God's sake, but for the benefit of the individual,

Jesus said he knows what you need before you ask him. And yet he wants you to talk to Him and I say before our people, that communication is essential to any relationship. Communication is when, you stop communicating with your spouse, your kids, your parents, your coworkers, whoever it is, when you stop communicating, the relationship breaks down. It's still there. It begins to break down, begins to deteriorate. So, when you read, when we pray, we need to hear from Him, need to tell Him, but He already knows. We will never surprise Him. (P5)

As man is created by God, "...altruism has to have a root somewhere. The root is in Christ, then it has to come into you so (P21)," which means that "being like Jesus would causes us to live in that way, in an altruistic way (P13)."

Time is suggested as the greatest altruistic act because it requires sacrificing a finite resource but altruism can take on other forms, too. One Christian Leader concluded, "time, like that is the one thing that we never get more of, so I can make more money, I can get more things, but if I give you more time, I give you my life (P14)." Missionaries and evangelists described giving food, money, and resources as altruism because it requires service and meets a need. The "general Christian ethos involving giving, like you know giving of your time, giving of your treasure, giving of your service, giving of your gifts (P15)" is part of being a disciple of Christ which accompanies the selflessness of reaching out to those in foreign countries with needs,

Observing others being altruistic had a reinforcing effect on Christian Leaders, described as touching the heart, it caused participants to experience a deeper commitment to their faith because they felt that the Holy Spirit was working in front of them, and through them. Examples of selfless giving blesses others involved visitors attending Church services giving large amounts of money to complete strangers within the Church and witnessing this had an emotional, psychological, and spiritual effect on those present. The altruism made them believe in their faith and increased their trust in God (P15).

Christian Leaders described altruism as a normal and regular activity motivated by the Holy Spirit, "I do it all the time. Give unto others as you want to receive. Sometimes the Spirit speaks to me...and I follow" (P2). Acts of altruism reverberate beyond the

initial action and Christians can use altruism to make deeper and wider impacts within their communities because it has a ripple effect which may be seen or unseen (P16).

Philosophical narratives of altruism by Christian Leaders embraced the idea that man is free to decide to be altruistic, and that altruism is a choice. They also identified their observations of society by stating that sacrifice is not common word in use today. They acknowledged that altruism does exist outside of Christianity and Western culture, and that traditional Christian faith practices have changed regarding church attendance and participation which limits spiritual growth and altruism because people are not focused on God. Being altruistic was expressed in a unique way, *altruistic healing*, by introducing conflict and allowing others to be uncomfortable, or to experience the consequences of their actions instead of saving them which might allow one to reflect on their lifestyle as it contrasts a Christian lifestyle. Through difficult experiences, one can gain an appreciation for what a Christian life has to offer emotionally, spiritually, physically, and mentally.

Altruism requires sacrifice, “it's interesting that you say the word ‘sacrifice,’ it is never used, not very much. Today, the only time you hear about sacrifice is in a baseball game (P25).” Even “ministry if you're doing it right, does cause conflict, so you have to address the spiritual problem, you got to cause conflict sometimes in order to bring about the healing (P15),” as one participant referenced weaknesses in Christian culture and Christians being influenced by world views. Altruism is a decision, it is a choice, and,

In order to be altruistic, you have to automatically accept the fact that there's free will, moral free will, and without that there can be no altruism...I believe to be altruistic, whether you say it's synonymous,

would be agape, but that would include a spiritual aspect okay...In other words, you actually get to choose it and in choosing it you can choose to be selfish or selflessness and the act of being selfless would be the definition of altruism. (P3)

They also have observed altruism and the impacts of anti-Christian agendas within American society because the culture at large affects the culture in the church and “we are such a self-centered – me first culture. Our Southern Baptist friends now consider a person that attends twice a month as a regular attender. The culture I grew up with, it was three to thrive” meaning Sundays twice and Wednesdays (P14). Christian faith and values influence the way altruism plays out differently. Yet, Christians view all humans as equals who share in the Kingdom of God and despite the choices of an individual, we are still to love them and embrace them as our own (P7).

Christian Leaders expressed the difference between the roles of pastors and other Christian Leaders where altruism is prevalent in the activities of both, pastors have a responsibility to their congregation at large while other Christian Leaders are connecting more intermittently, as a Christian Leader explained,

Well, from my point of view, rightly or wrongly, a pastor is more, I want to say, more connected with the congregation. You're more connected with your flock because you're just there more and the expectations are different. A missionary, yes, we love the people, we're close to them and we're helping them and everything else, but we're not their pastors. I mean, although we will share intimately, one with another and stuff like that and help each other out there, there seems to be a difference. (P9)

Warnings about altruism from Christian Leaders to Christian Leaders

Christian Leaders were expressive in their concerns for others and especially for their peers. The lived experiences of Christian Leaders provide warnings about misplaced priorities, self-indulgence in altruism, and humility. Being a Christian Leaders requires sacrifice but Christians are reminded to take care of their own personal needs and responsibilities or risk losing the support of those surrounding them. Placing the needs of others above one's own spiritual needs and needs of their family will result in burn out, loss, and suffering. Christian Leaders admonished follow a priority of covenants, "God is first, your marriage is second, your ministry is third, and that's it." (P21) By maintaining a healthy spiritual and personal harmony, Christians can sustain altruism.

Through all the discussion of altruism there is a sense of responsibility, even duty or obligation because altruism is an emulation of the ministry of Jesus Christ. However, Christian Leaders are quick to point out that giving can become too much. The result of being overly altruistic is burnout and ultimately the inability to continue being altruistic which is how one participant summarized the needs of self while not being selfish,

It is okay to put yourself before others because I know there are other churches that you know, are always about me, me, me, you know, taking time to yourself and they don't want to reach out to the community. But I've always grown up to where reaching out to the community is a very important part of being a Christian, because that will also like bring other people in. So, I think my experience with altruism has been great and watching other people do it as well makes me want to continue and also teach the next generation that it is okay to put other people first.... but I

want them to be cautious because you need to have a balance and if you are always putting someone before you may feel a sense of burning out. Altruism is great, but making sure that you have time to yourself with the Lord is a very important aspect. (P12)

Christian Leaders highlight a critical issue surrounding altruism. They know that people cannot serve others without a support network which in many cases is the individual's family. Several participants discussed the issue of failed Christian marriages amongst pastors because the pastors neglected their family,

I think that one of the dangers of altruism is that you will sometimes take it to a place where you're really satisfying your need to the point where you actually might even hurt your own family, not even realizing it. We've seen it a lot especially in the pastoral realm, men and women, getting so involved in ministry, reaching out and helping others that they ignore their own family unit without realizing it and they're sacrificing. I mean I think I could even look back at myself and say, that was probably true. I mean I just gave and gave and gave until I say my son was about maybe nine or ten years of age and I realized, I have to focus on my family. (P6)

Christian Leaders believe that keeping God front and center is the key to being a good leader,

Love your God and as the first love. So expressed, you know, as Jesus was talking about in Revelations too, he said, you know, I got a problem with you. You've left your first love and for Christian leaders it's so easy and it because I fall victim of this more often than not, I mean just life comes at

you and you get busy and next thing you know the Lord's off to the side somewhere and if we're going to be effective, we have to keep him front and center because if we do that then we will have altruistic character of his character. (P9)

By taking on too many responsibilities Christian Leaders can become overwhelmed, because they feel obligated to touch everyone, instead of relying upon their congregation to engage the community through faith and love. Pastors take all the burden and try to save the world alone and wind up ignoring their family and it is an easy trap to fall into. “Yet, that's kind of a classic thing I've seen happen with a number of ministers, especially younger ministers” (P6).

Altruism has been described by other authors as egoism with the motivation of self-enhancement; Christian Leaders agree that altruism done for a prideful or materialistic reasons is the wrong motive. Pride and ego are not too distant from one another, and pride as a pastor can look like taking (accepting) credit for the outcomes of a good service or message when in fact God was working through them and should receive the glory and praise which touches on a basic Christian principle that man can do all things through Christ (Philippians 4:13) but not of himself. “If I've accomplished anything today, it's only because of you [God]. Remember the glory goes to the Lord, always direct it to Him” (P4).

Altruism is part of a Christian's life. Yet, Christian Leaders who allow the world view to enter the church and influence worship services are risking more than they know. “The focus of Christian Leaders should be learning how to be more like Jesus and loving others in that same way, treating others in that same way (P13).” Christian Leaders were

unified in their displeasure as they discussed the *production Sunday* mindset or mass appeal strategies of some churches. Christian Leaders were adamant that entertainment in churches should not be the focus, but that establishing a deep connection with those who attend church would establish a richer and more meaningful experience for Christians,

There's a lot of American dream that has infiltrated churches today. Where we feel like. If we don't grow to a certain extent, or if we don't meet certain quotas...I think there is a measure in the Bible that says we ought to be fruitful or strive to be fruitful. In ministry, I just know that we cannot use it as the measure of success. And I feel like, sometimes altruism is lost when we get lost in trying to outgrow what God intends for us, outgrow what God wants for us in the beginning, and I see this across the board.

(P18)

The current Christian culture is intertwined with secular ideas to the point that, “what we've created in this country is a consumeristic Christian culture. Right. So, what we've created is, is that you come to church in order maybe to get fed, right? That's the purpose here...(P15)” and because of this there is a disconnection between discipleship, serving others, and our daily lives,

The American version of Christianity, which is anemic. Yes, we have changed a lot of that to suit ourselves...So, we practice our version. We meet on Sundays, sometimes Sunday nights, sometimes Wednesday nights, and we're doing God a favor and the first church met every day! They didn't fail to meet. We are a long way in America, we're a long way from where the first church was. It's a sad commentary. (P5)

Many churches are focused on bringing more people into the church, which Christian Leaders argue is somewhat counter-productive because there is very limited investment being given to those who are regular attenders,

There is an emphasis on the front stage and what we are doing, how big a ministry is and what we're growing, how do we grow it, and how do we get bigger, stronger, better than our neighbor? We've lost the heart of the gospel in much of Christianity, especially in America, I think we have lost the ideal of altruism, of giving of ourselves... And so, I wish we could be more on the same page as Christian bodies, as Christian Leaders, as Christian people. (P13)

Consumerism of Christian Leaders is a separate issue that can make altruism appear as egocentric behaviors. One warning to Christian Leaders is, "I believe that more pastors, ministers, reverends, evangelists should be able to give more to others than themselves (P2)" because people in leadership have to demonstrate their concern for those whom they serve. Christian Leaders admonish that many people who have a bad experience at church may never return and that the Pastor is ultimately responsible for this. A lack of investment into the Church congregation in favor of attracting more people to come into the Church presents a serious problem to the spiritual wellbeing of the Christians. Pastors who focus on building the congregation size need to be careful not to alienate the dedicated Christians who already attend services (P17). Christian Leaders resoundingly agreed that deeper and engagement focused spiritual development of Christians is more important than attracting new members.

The importance of focusing on Christ is synonymous with Christianity, but discipleship is the activity a Christian should be engaged in with others because it is impactful theology, where James said true religion, pure vision, that's the widows and orphans, and the people. Some Christian Leaders worry about trying to meet everybody's entertainment need, physical need, and spiritual need by giving them a show from the pulpit. "We're performing and then we've got to get away from that. It's not about the production on Sunday. And I'm just very afraid that modern church culture is entertainment driven, not engagement driven" (P14). It is human nature to make judgements and to assess one's environment, these are explained in psychology as heuristics and are a productive and positive cognition. How these judgements influence the behavior of Christian Leaders is an important consideration, Christ simply attempted to reach the lost, and Christian leaders need to do that without sacrificing the whole of the Church (P10).

Having humility and refraining from excessive or materialistic behaviors is important in maintaining perspective. Organizations, churches, and Christian Leaders are being judged by their behaviors, attitudes, and actions, which implies that being altruistic is part of being a Christian Leader, "Well, I think that unless you've got that concept [altruism], you shouldn't be in the position that you're in as a pastor (P4)." Christian Leaders can actually create a greater impact in their communities by being responsible with the resources they already have. Authenticity is trait that accompanies altruism, people can feel one's care and concern.

Christian Leaders describe the necessity for living the Christian lifestyle which might seem intuitive or even automatic, but it is challenging and requires constant engagement and focus,

We have to be, you know, accountable you know, we have to be good stewards but sometimes we will get so, so centered and focused on that or just so centered and focused on. It's like, I know for me, like I can get so involved in teaching and preaching that that's all you're focusing on and it's like no, it's people you know. Two greatest commandments, you know them, love God, love people...simplified version of it. I think is the thing that that I would remind other Christian leaders is that we need to live it out. We need to not just be teaching or preaching about it and not be so involved in the mechanics of ministry and the administrative part of ministry that we forget we're dealing with people. (P6)

Christian dogma instructs that there is a narrow path to reach heaven but that many will take the wide road and miss the narrow one, even while believing that they are on the narrow path. Christian Leaders can avoid falling into the self-deception associated with thinking they are doing God's work while they are missing the intent of the Holy Spirit, by asking themselves, "Am I really following in the steps of Jesus like he asked of us? It's different to really invest in a stranger and say I want to get to know you and I want to point you towards Jesus" (P7).

Living a Christian lifestyle may bring criticism from those who are not Christians, but Christian Leaders advise not to let others or non-Christians have influence over their lives or decisions, "be original and stay true to the Lord, stay on your knees and

prayer...and then you will be doing what you do for the people for unselfish reasons”

(P8). Christian Leaders are held to a higher moral standard by virtue of their position and the risk of being involved in or associated with an organization that acts in a non-Christian way creates hypocrisy, breaks trust, and provides a poor example to others despite acts of giving one can be involved in an organization which is corrupt or has bad leaders (P24). The larger issues created by the misbehavior of Christian Leaders have led to a general mistrust of Christianity and the Church across American communities. Non-Christians are very suspect of Christian leaders who appear to be very flashy or appearing to be very altruistic for the sake of a social media following or publicity. The church was built not on flashy celebrity pastors. It was built on faithful men and women of God. “We need to love our neighbor down the street...the family that's under our own roof. We need to find ways to give back to our communities (P29).

Christian Leaders believe that America is a Christian nation with Christian values but warn of the decline in Christian values. Turning away from God as a nation will result in greater suffering amongst the people. Christian Leaders are encouraged to find unique and creative ways to encourage Christians, build their faith, and increase altruism within their communities which will expand the influence of local churches and foster love, grace, and Christian values. Christian Leaders emphasize the need to reengage local communities and to meet their needs instead of investing in faraway places which implies there is a lack of involvement in local communities where the benefits of altruism could be readily accessible.

Altruism is part of the American spirit because America was founded as a Christian Nation, “nobody forces the American people to give, but the American people give when they can't afford to give. Americans, I think, have always given and have always had a generous spirit” (P31). Many Christians have focused on helping other nations, but Christian Leaders are unified in their belief that local communities come first. If you are not helping your local community then you have missed the point of the Gospel, “altruism isn't being practiced enough by Christian in this country” (P2). The disconnection between the Church and the community can be improved by Christian Leaders who find ways to bond with their communities, “we have to find ways to encourage our people to feel like they can give. I would say we got to find different languages to talk about altruism. That isn't just money, it's of time and it's of talent” (P26).

Existing Altruism Themes

Christian Leaders did not make direct distinctions between the themes of altruism which was expected because the majority of the participants were not immediately familiar with the term *altruism*. They offered their insights from lived experiences which at times perfectly described existing altruism themes despite their limited knowledge of the phenomenon. Christian Leaders were most familiar with what is described as *Altruistic Personality*. However, Christian Leaders provided 55 Biblical scriptures during their interviews, the scriptures ranged from specific verses to entire chapters and in several cases the depiction of a specific story (see Appendix E). These scriptures were evaluated in the context of the participant's interview and assigned to an existing altruism theme. The rationale for this process was based on the participants' exposure to altruism

without recognizing the different types of altruism, therefore, participants if asked would generically categorize all scriptures provided as altruism but not as specific theme.

Participants were not informed about the existing altruism themes prior to their interviews in order to elicit their natural responses to altruism questions.

Altruistic Love

Christian Leaders referred to altruistic love as agape, all inclusive, and as a responsibility commanded by God. “I would define the word [altruism] as love, as agape love and agape love in that sense, is a moral, a moral concept that is defined by basically First Corinthians chapter 13 (P3).” Altruistic love is a Christian concept, its definition was expanded by Christian Leaders to include acts of the supernatural, or miracles, as described in the Bible. Participants referenced more than a dozen scriptures to exhibit the richness of altruistic love but also highlighted what not to love.

So, all I'm saying is that the people who hate, have called us the haters, but we're called to hate both in the Old Testament, Amos, and the New Testament. Amos said, ‘Hate the evil. Love the Good.’ In Romans 12:19, Paul said ‘Abhor that which is evil, clean that which is good.’ So, we're told to hate. We're told to love, but then we are told what to hate and what to love. (P5)

Several instances of healing people and miracles (1 Kings 17:21-22, John 3, and John 4) were cited to demonstrate the altruistic love of God towards man which was explained by Jesus as, “I came to do my father’s will” from John chapters 4, 5, 6, and 9 each one with the intent to communicate God’s will or willingness to aid mankind (New American Bible, 2011).

Following the examples of Jesus Christ's ministry, Christian Leaders offered Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (New American Bible, 2011)." Others see sincerity in our acts and through our acts they can gain knowledge of God,

You know, you see people that are willing to give even though they have nothing. That is what really speaks to me and just really affects me, you know in my life not that I expect people with wealth to give but it's easier for them to give and I and I appreciate it. But when you see someone just because they love the Lord and they want to and they want to be a minister to you...that's just powerful to me. (P6)

Altruistic love in the context of "Christianity, is learning how to be more like Jesus and loving others in that same way, treating others in that same way" (P13). Love is a commandment given by Jesus which should be regarded as the greatest law,

God revealed to me that I didn't love people the way Jesus wants us to love people. So, ever since that day, my prayer has been that Jesus would teach me how to love people. And I think he gave me this food ministry as a vehicle to teach me how to do that. (P20)

Loving others as a Christian means becoming a new person as stated in 1 Corinthians 5:17 where salvation is the metamorphosis of one's life through their acceptance to live a Christian lifestyle which returns to loving others as God does.

Following the concept of loving others as God does, the psychological construct of forgiveness was described in the setting of altruistic love as requiring great sacrifice

because it meant allowing past discretions to be released. “I think forgiveness is just the biggest thing because you need to sacrifice a lot in terms of being able to come together...(P26).” Being able to love another requires forgiveness and the process of forgiveness can require sacrifice.

Kin Altruism

Christian Leaders highlighted marriage as an act of sacrifice in one’s life which was altruistic. Being a parent was a secondary trend amongst participants, as parenthood was described as many small sacrificial acts that has perhaps diminished in popular culture but remains greatly needed. The story of Ruth was provided as an example of altruism and family through which one see’s Ruth’s sacrifice and commitment towards her mother-in-law (P8). Marriage is a continual theme within Bible and provides a logical construct through which to understand kin altruism because it is a familiar subject to most.

Christian Leaders have adopted the idea that mankind and God are in a covenant, Christ died for each of us. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. One of the very greatest demonstrations of love is marriage; God is the groom and we the Church are his bride, and he likens it to the relationship of marriage. In other words, the love within that marriage union should be one of ultimate sacrifice if necessary (P4). Christians are bound by their covenant with God which was also explained through altruism as a priority or system of covenants that each person has to manage. A brilliant depiction of what Christian kin altruism and values should be based on was stated as,

There is a priority of covenants, and a covenant is actually the recognition of the fact that we share one nature. On a very deep level, we share one nature in the Godhead. The first covenant is you and God. The second covenant was you and your parents. When you marry, your parents moved to third place, for this reason the man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one. Then you and God, you and your wife, then your parents and when you have kids, your parents move to fourth place. (P21)

The duties of a husband and a wife are expressed through Ephesians 5:21-32 where men are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church which implies,

Marriage is a relationship which is equivalent to probably the highest relationship that one can have within humanity. Okay, as being created where you're in relationship with another human being, but you're called to sacrifice. In Ephesians 5th chapter talks about the marriage relationship where the husband is to sacrifice himself as Christ did for the church. And so, you're to actually be willing to set all of your desires aside for the selflessness of that relationship...(P3)

Turning towards parenthood, Christian Leaders also see the altruism required to manage a family and to raise children,

Parents aren't even aware that they're doing it, and I think today parents have traded one 's' word, sacrifice for another one, selfish. What about me? When's my time coming? When do I get some time to myself? And I think those old-fashioned parents, they didn't sit there saying, 'Well, I'm

sacrificing while I'm doing something altruistic.' It's just what it was.

(P21)

Punitive Altruism

Referencing the book of Revelations, two participants alluded to God's mercy and justice as a form of altruism with the understanding that sinners, Christian or not, would be judged in the end. God's sacrifice for our sins in Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of altruism. However, certain careers were also identified by participants as naturally altruistic, namely law enforcement, firefighters, and the military which all deal with some type of moral dilemma. "Anybody I think that puts on the uniform and it can go beyond the military to law enforcement or firefighters. There's a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others, but more centric to the military community (P31)." Punitive altruism as a Christian could look like engaging others through a dialog using the Gospel if it strikes on a moral aspect of their lifestyle,

The Christians are persecuted and literally they're becoming martyrs because they won't deny nor recant their Christian faith. The apostles as we understand it, that every one of them except for the Apostle John died a martyr for his faith. The Apostle Paul said, 'I bow the knee' and what he's talking about is he was going to be executed and he was. He says, 'I'm bowing the knee, being in the will of God, that if it cost me my life, it cost me my life.'...The Bible says that we are to be faithful to the end. (P4)

During a gay rights parade, one participant explained that challenging others was not about direct confrontation but about moral confrontation and gave the example that

Christians should engage others from the foundation of their faith if they want to bring about a moral or social change,

There's no reasoning [with angry people] but anger is not wrong. Be angry and sin not. It was at the [gay pride] parade a guy walked up to me and he's wearing this complete rainbow color outfit, he says 'I'm a pastor, too.' I just said 'Okay.' There's no point in arguing with him, and because I didn't argue with him he turned, walked off and most of them, when they would come up and say things to me that were provocative, I didn't get in their face. I had nothing to gain by that. If they were one on one, I still wouldn't go after them. I would go after them in terms of the Gospel. (P5)

The Christian punitive altruism theme provides the introduction of God's wrath as a punishment which Christians are taught to exercise restraint to allow God to do his work. Christian Leaders stated, "Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19) as an approach to difficult situations where an injustice may have occurred.

Reciprocal Altruism

The concept of *The Golden Rule*, treating others the way you want them to treat you, dominated Christian Leaders' recounts of altruism. In some cases, this played out as a hierarchy of priorities and in other ways it was a continual and conscious decision to be altruistic because of the belief that others would be altruistic in return, even if the results of their actions were unknown or if the reciprocation came from another person or a complete stranger. The motivations of altruism for Christians certainly surround their

belief and faith in Christ which they believe is a continual cycle of good will towards others,

Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you. And I think that's one of the major things that he [Jesus] taught to his disciples and to us in general. And then another one is, he taught that you love your neighbor as yourself. And both of those are commands of altruism. I hadn't looked at it that way until just now, but actually it is. (P1)

Other participants recounted stories of altruism during which they helped someone else because *The Golden Rule* is a core component of Christian faith.

Discussing the motivations of altruism in helping the homeless by members of their congregations, Christian Leaders could see mutual benefits for givers and receivers. “The more I involve him, the more he’s involved (P13),” referring to Christ being at the center of one’s life and the source of our desire to help others. Altruism is,

It's something that I think works in a reciprocal way, that they fail, first they are serving the Lord. They failed with that call to do that and by doing that, they're going and they're doing it on their own accord. And I think the reciprocal or the reciprocation is that they feel the blessings of the Lord. It comes as maybe it's not a selfish ambition and in other words, I'm not going that I can be blessed. I am blessed because I'm going and so they give of themselves... (P4)

The Gospel has many examples of altruism and Christian Leaders referred to a variety of examples demonstrating that for each person, altruism is implemented in a slightly different way,

...the parable of helping of his people, that one's just always stuck out. It's the sheep and the goats you know and 'I said, well how did we help you? He says, well, it's when you help those, the least of these, you're helping me' and that always stuck out. (P9)

Altruism is not diminished by the fact that the giver also receives a benefit because the goodness resulting from acts of altruism are lessened except perhaps by the motive.

Christians should act for the good of the community,

If you benefit in the process, that's okay because you are part of the community. The [important] thing is that your actions whenever you are promoting the common good and you're looking more for that common good. The common good includes yourself. (P28)

As expected, some participants provide stories of others who give selflessly on a regular basis for others to continue to grow spiritually,

I think some of them are way more altruistic than I am because they are there on their off day, on their weekends, you know, showing up to love babies. And we have, you know, some incredibly dedicated nursery volunteers that hold, you know, screaming, crying babies. So, the kids can go into the nursery and parents can go into service...But they know that by using their gifts and talents that it is building up the body of Christ. It's helping these kids move forward in their own faith and it's helping the parents. (P29)

Giving to others in extreme ways was a regular theme of participants as they expressed opening their homes to strangers, taking children in, and supporting people who had

nothing. The sacrificial nature of this could only be described by their belief that they were acting in a manner that God would have. Reciprocal altruism seemed apparent as one participant referenced Galatians 6:9, “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up (New American Bible, 2011)” which expressed their convictions about God providing for them while they provided for other.

Loving others for their sake one participant related,

I've given up my house so that I could use the rent to keep the doors of the church open to house homeless people. I've denied myself, to give them the opportunity to participate in developing a relationship with God.

We've given everything we've got in that sense with the thought of loving people for their sake. (P3)

Altruistic Personality

Beyond over one-hundred stories shared by the participants of this study, there were several underlying consistencies which emerged. Christian Leaders related that the *altruistic personality* is actually a Christian paradigm that provides the example for others. Some called it the Christian *ethos* or the ultimate Christian experiences, but regardless of terminology, *altruistic personality* represented the serving others. Altruism is a “general Christian ethos involving giving like you know giving of your time, giving of your treasure, giving of your service, giving of your gifts (P15)” and “what you are describing should be the ultimate Christian experience. The life of giving. You've heard the time, talents, and your resources, God has taught me to be generous. My father was so generous...faith has to have action (P22).” Having a heart of others is one-way Christians think of altruism and they relate it with following in God’s footsteps, because “He said, I

came to serve and not to be served” (P4) implying that Christians must have the same calling to serve and help others. Christian Leaders observed members within their churches being of service and displaying altruism, in particular they recounted examples of those who volunteer to cook, clean, and organize Church facilities to take the burden off of the pastoral and church staff. They also volunteered to watch small children and infants so others could attend services. Christians view church as a place where all can come and congregate to worship God and support each other. Through this perspective they find opportunities for altruism towards one another which builds their sense of community and fosters connections.

The path of Christian believers is often considered to be a narrow path through which Christians must resist worldliness; Matthew 7:13-14 informs us that many believe they are treating others well and do good for the right reason when in fact they are motivated by secular desires. Christian Leaders often referred to the apostle Paul as an example of someone who found a path to Christ and one of altruism. Paul was cited as describing though Jesus Christ was rich, for our sake, he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. “That is the essence to me of altruism. You can't have Christianity without altruism...If we're going to be like Christ. Then we must be altruistic, and if we're not altruistic, we're not Christian” (P5). The transfer of altruism to others through actions can leave lasting impacts but it can be done for selfish reasons which detracts from the value of the act,

Another time is that someone bought me a freezer because I wanted a freezer for my house so I could store food...And one of the ladies at church came around and told me, said God told me to fill your freezer and

she filled my freezer with food and it is wonderful that people just do it and not expect anything back because I think if you expect something back, you're doing it for the wrong notice. It's not altruism anymore, but it's wonderful when people bless other people. (P8)

Christian Leaders discussed the implications of altruism in society and the responsibilities that Christians must evangelize. Acts of sacrifice through giving back to or investing in local communities is something that although popular in the 1950s and 1960s, had waned to the point of extinction in modern society. Other societies, poorer societies, tend to have more altruism on an individual level compared to American society. Ultimately, the Christian Leader recognizes that their efforts, if done for the wrong reasons, may have some impact but will not be edifying to God and therefore, keeping God as the focus of their lives is paramount,

We're told to go to all the world and proclaim the Gospel, to take up our cross, you know so there's this aspect of sacrifice, you know always in following Christ and I think is a driving force for altruism. But again, you have to take that into balance...(P6)

Altruistic personality is something that does not exclusively belong to Christianity. However, Christians have the roadmap to being altruistic,

But it is beautiful to see that in other cultures, there are bits and pieces of the truth. People that really will give, you know, some of the poorest people I've met were some of the happiest people I've met and some of the most giving people I've met, their last dollar, their last shirt, it didn't matter. (P24)

Altruism for Christians can take on many forms and one is that of missionary work which often requires great sacrifices in living conditions and the quality or standard of living. Christian Altruistic Personality is signified by those willing to leave their homelands and travel abroad to share their Christian faith with others. Finding creative ways to inspire others to become altruistic while learning about Christ is gift of the Spirit. One group of missionaries in Costa Rica volunteered to clean-up local graveyards which resulted in introducing Christ to the town (P7).

Over time Christian Leaders have confided that altruism is in decline across America, and from a generational perspective they offered that,

There was a day that people willingly gave so much of their selves to ministry and it was of course, we judge everything in the context of this time. So, you know, JFK asked not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. That whole theme was generational, that was a generational thing, the world had that idea. But the church I've lived in, people were willing to give hours of their life for outreach and for evangelism, and mission. (P14)

A final consideration of Christian Leaders regarding altruistic personality is one that highlights the need for altruism to reflect God's will, which is to say that while we can do good for others, if a Christian is not following God and resisting world views, these acts themselves are meaningless because the person has become a hypocrite,

Looking at altruism, there's a modern subsection of psychology called evolutionary psychology, and they talk about poor social behavior and improving the gene pool, and inculcating this notion in hereditary biology

and all these crazy things which in the end are all meaningless because it's secular knowledge, constantly in labor and never giving birth. And the truth of being, is there's only one altruistic act, there's only one leader, there's only one confession, there's only one baptism and it's all him [Christ]. And unless our altruistic sacrifices brought to him, placed in his altar, connected with Christ's sacrifice, it ends up being meaningless, it goes nowhere. (P21)

The Christian standpoint of the *Altruistic Personality Theme* presented here clearly identifies altruism as an individual *value*, part of a belief system through which Christians can emulate Christ, build their faith, and serve others all at once. As a moral value, Christians learn altruism from the actions of other Christians.

Summary

The results of the study were presented in this Chapter along with a brief explanation of the analysis process applied to interview data. The purpose of this study was to illuminate and understand altruism from the perspective of Christian Leaders. Christian Leaders described personal insights of altruism in Christianity through a variety of observations which they communicated as warnings for others to be mindful of. The study resulted in the identification of eight unique altruism themes and provided additional Christian perspectives towards the existing five altruism themes (love, kin, personality, punitive, and reciprocity). Most of the eight unique themes can be resolved into existing themes but several can form a single theme, the *Spiritual Altruism Theme*. Christian Leaders' experiences with altruism overwhelming established altruistic personality traits and their association with being Christian, Christian ethos, Christian

theology, and was a core component of their belief system. Christian Leaders described the relationship between altruism and Christian faith as *meeting the needs* of others which offered insights into how Christians view altruism's functionality and purpose. By identifying the needs of others, Christians believe they can have a greater impact in their communities and that the act of altruism is more meaningful than merely donating to charities. Other themes also emerged from the study which explain how Christian Leaders should consider their own behaviors.

The *Spiritual Altruism Theme* is represented by the themes of *spiritual growth*, *the path to altruism*, and *the calling*. Spiritual Altruism is transcendent behaviors motivated by faith, pursuing a Christian lifestyle, and encompasses the foundations of psychological transformation associated with the healings of Jesus Christ. Being spiritually altruistic is as simple as praying for others but could also be acting to inspire deeper faith in others. Christian Saints have traditionally exemplified lives of spiritual altruism.

Warning to Christian Leaders included not burning oneself out through taking on too many responsibilities. Paralleling with another theme, spiritual growth, Christian Leaders believe that each person needs time to reflect and connect with God. This idea was a key component of recharging and being able to continue to serve others. Altruism is about service to others, which comes in many forms. However, Christian Leaders agreed that altruistic love, agape, is the link bringing all other types of altruism together and that altruistic love is a Christian principle and value. Christian Leaders provided 55

scriptures to describe the context of their stories and they referenced many examples of Jesus Christ's behaviors or the behaviors of the Apostles.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The genesis of this study was to understand altruism from another perspective, one that would inspire future work in the field but also empower psychologists, social scientists, Christian researchers, and Christian leaders with the Biblical view of altruism. Throughout this undertaking, the study traversed a wide variety of examples of altruism from previous publications and the participants, bringing together previously unconnected thoughts, ideas, and perspectives about the phenomenon. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of these finds and gives readers a unique insight into altruism and inner workings of the Christian Leader's mindset regarding this phenomenon. The chapter concludes with implications and limitations to the study of altruism and provides guidance to researchers interested in future studies of altruism. The entirety of the study is summarized to provide readers a sense of the significance of what altruism means to Christian Leaders.

Summary of Findings

The study identified multiple themes through which altruism and Christianity are better understood. Altruism is explained from the perspective of 31 Christian Leaders across the United States. Eight themes identified by the study provide a compelling narrative of what altruism is for a Christian as expressed by the participants of this research as they view it. The study presents 55 scriptural references provided by participants to help illustrate their lived experiences and interactions with altruism but also illuminates how Christian Leaders associate scripture with altruism. The study provides new information for the context and understanding of the altruism phenomenon

by developing the *Spiritual Altruism* theme. Altruism is a Christian value and Christians who are spiritually mature, are altruistic. Altruistic attitudes express what spiritual altruism truly means which is that altruism is at the core of the relationship between man and his creator. The results of the study were consistent with other religion-altruism studies in that altruism is positively associated with spirituality and that happiness was positively associated with altruism because of religious values, beliefs, and practices (Pessi, 2011). Spiritual growth is often indicated by greater altruism because it signifies a transformation from self-focus toward other-focus and leads to a desire to meet the needs of others. Being altruistic is Christian and epitomizes the teachings of Jesus Christ. Altruism puts Christian faith and values into action, promotes a personal relationship with God, creates communal support and social networks in congregations, and correlates with teachings in the Bible.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore altruism through the perspective of Christian leaders by investigating altruism within the context of Christian faith, values, and theology. The study provides three contributions to existing body of knowledge of the altruism phenomenon. The focus on Christian Leaders as participants narrows an existing gap by offering the first seen insights from a strategically placed social group who explain altruism from a Christian viewpoint. Christian Leaders provided insights related to the existing five altruism themes (kin, love, personality, punitive, reciprocity). Their experiences focused on love and personality more than the other themes. The altruism themes identified within the study overlap in a variety of ways, begging the question: Are they truly separate themes or merely extensions of the existing five themes? In particular, the

study identifies several themes that support the development of a greater theme, *spiritual altruism*, for which no Christian study exists at this time. Participant experiences detailed spiritual growth, the path to altruism, and the calling, each with their own anecdotal significance but all part of spiritual altruism. The study reshapes traditional views and paradigms of the phenomenon by illustrating altruism as a beneficial, collaborative, and self-enhancing activity unbound by egoism or a dichotomy paradigm.

Defining spiritual altruism as acts or behaviors inspired by an internal summons or sense of purpose derived from one's faith in God that sacrifices one's interests for another, leaves room for exploration of this theme. Spiritual Altruism might take the form of meditation, prayer with others, fasting, and healing. Perhaps even responding to others with kindness during hardship or loss, take for a moment the parent whose child was lost to a drunk driver and through their faith they bless and forgive the person instead of acting on their grief. The definitions of altruistic love and personality cause some questions of redundancy with spiritual altruism. Yet, altruistic personality is a broad generalization of altruistic behaviors typically aimed at larger social issues such saving the planet, protecting rainforests, supporting those with cancer in its various forms, volunteerism, and charity. We see these campaigns on TV and social media regularly and they are intended to evoke empathy and compassion but have nothing to do with spirituality. Altruistic Love is primarily understood as agape or unconditional love, which relates to how people should engage with one another and the importance of emulating God's love for mankind. Broadly, love is extended to many activities, but psychologically, love is affection towards others and experiencing pleasure from another individual because it draws upon attachment and attraction. Where altruistic love is about attachment and altruistic personality is about acceptance, spiritual altruism is about agency, self-identity, and sanctification, in that it

represents those behaviors which are transcendent and cause one to break away from ideology, image, and self, towards greater awareness and appreciation of God, and greater internal depth and strength, which all manifest in a transformation of the self (Ozhiganova, 2022).

The study found that responses to RQ 1 (How do Christian Leaders describe altruism from their life experience?) were mostly expressed through altruistic love and personality under the overarching umbrella of the ministry and actions of Jesus Christ, the ultimate example of altruism, which included meeting the needs of others. The study offers a thought-provoking response to RQ 2 (How do Christian Leaders describe the relationship between altruism and Christian faith?) by expanding our focus to the role that spirituality plays with altruism as a Christian. The relationships between faith, altruism, spirituality equate to spiritual growth and how a calling to server others can influence all levels of society. Reflecting on RQ 3 (How do Christian Leaders describe personal insights of altruism in Christianity?), from the perspective of Christian leadership that was not previously associated or reported in other studies, altruism can be a sustainable activity under the right circumstances. Insights provided help demonstrate and reinforce what other researchers have found with respect to managing one's altruistic behaviors but Christian Leaders extended this understanding by giving us a view into the spiritual practices needed to manage altruism. The discussion which now follows expands upon these findings.

General Discussion

Altruism themes have been established through the collective works of many researchers. The participants of the study were not aware of altruistic themes and most

were not specifically familiar with the definition of altruism. However, upon being presented the definition, Christian Leaders immediately identified altruism throughout their life and in the lives of others. They readily associated altruism with altruistic love and although they could not provide a name for it, they gave examples of stories which represented altruistic personality. The significance of their interviews on the most basic level served to authenticate the altruistic themes identified by this study. Christian Leaders with no prior knowledge of altruism, altruism constructs, or the phenomenon of altruism were able to explain examples of altruism that accurately correlate with existing literature and prevailing published thoughts. The result of their interviews has expanded upon the understanding of altruism and has contributed to the explanation of the Spiritual Altruism theme which has until this time only been referred to in theoretical contexts.

If God is the source of involuntary ideas as George Berkeley states, then perhaps God is also the source of inspiration, as inspiration is arguably involuntary (Sproul, 2000). Is altruism divinely inspired or merely the byproduct of a complex series of social calculations? Perhaps it is both, as Christian Leaders reference Genesis (1:27), mankind is created in God's image and therefore, suggest that altruism which remains a mystery to the social sciences, is the result of our relationship with our creator, God. Therefore, the root of altruism, which is innately within every human being, is the source of a natural predisposition to help others, divinely inspired as we were created in God's likeness. Furthermore, altruism, even if divinely inspired, is corruptible by mankind. The dichotomy of altruism-egoism, other-self, and the connotations associated with these constructs are flawed in their inability to accurately account for the complexity of social, psychological, and spiritual cognitions at play during the decision process to act

altruistically. Altruism up to this point has been discussed in terms of benefiting the other but not the self (Barclay, 2023).

Yet, Christian Leaders exactly articulate the flaw in this logic. An individual is part of a larger group on many levels (e.g. gender, ethnicity, culture, language, hobbies, career, age, personal preferences, etc.). As such, individuals are acting within the contexts and influences (social, psychological, spiritual) of these groups, which psychologists refer to as self-identity (Fiske & Taylor, 2021). Christian Leaders described this phenomenon in terms of their congregations and community, stating that an individual is part of their community and if the person decides to act altruistically towards others and the community, the individual will naturally benefit as a member of the community through their own actions. Therefore, this study rejects the dichotomous approach applied by previous scholars that frames the *psychology of altruism* and *the altruism phenomenon* as an *either-or*, self-other, egoism-altruism construct. Altruism can no longer be presented as a zero-sum paradigm in which the altruist is unable to receive any benefit from their actions. Attempting to portray altruism in an *either-or* philosophy adulterates the act of altruism by limiting the power of these behaviors to one-sidedness. Altruism is a blessing to others and those who bless others will be blessed (Proverbs 11:25). The discriminating factor and judge of altruistic behaviors is *the motive* because altruism is only understood by its motives.

Accepting any previous paradigm through which altruism is shaped or described by egoism is to promote theories of evolution and automatically rejects the theory of divine creation. Humans are created in the likeness of God, the key difference between humans and other species is spirituality and free will. Altruism is spiritual in nature, to

the extent that it represents a sense of self-mastery, especially when sacrificing to help others. Compassion and empathy are important motivators of altruism and when combined with spirituality and free will the altruism phenomenon takes shape in a divinely inspired way. Spiritual altruism can be operationalized as the transcendent behaviors that promote faith, purpose, and a deeper spiritual self-realization where the individual acts selflessly to benefit the spiritual needs of others (Ozhiganova, 2022).

The altruism spectrum extends from the most extreme self-sacrifice, death, towards acts of simple kindness, if performed under the motives accurately identified by Piliavin and Charng (1990), who also did not exclude acts or behaviors as altruistic if the altruist benefited, as long as the intent (motive) was not to benefit or receive reward. Altruism is acts or behaviors that sacrifice a person's own interests for another's. If the benefit to the altruist is a sense of feeling good about themselves as result of their action, this does not diminish the benefit to the recipient, nor does the altruist have any control over the attitudes, dispositions, and emotions, of the recipient towards the altruist. The egoism-altruism paradigm attempts to limit the actions and behaviors of the altruist through a complete self-negation. Christian theology has espoused this belief at times, instructing believers to sacrifice everything for the sake of others. Christians have fallen into the worldview paradigm of altruism, partially because of the ministry of Jesus Christ who was an altruist. However, the worldview places the individual in contrast to others, dividing them, creating separation, individualism, and disharmony. As Barclay (2023) states, altruism is not the self-in-contrast-to-others, but the self-in-community with others. Therefore, Christians must begin to reshape their understanding of altruism to

view this phenomenon in its truth which supports and promotes a community of people who share collaboratively, meeting the needs of all its members.

Christ as the Example

As expected, *Christ as the Example* of altruism, was discussed by many participants but it was surprising that more than one-third of participants did not readily identify or express Jesus Christ as altruistic during their interviews. The Bible is the classic guidance for Christian morality and the example of God's interactions with mankind. While non-Christians are altruistic, too, one must wonder where their motivations for altruism originate. Motivations for altruism differ greatly between those who are spiritual/religious and those who are not. Christian doctrine centers on the sanctification process through which an individual will mature and grow spiritually to become more and more like God. Christianity is fundamentally about salvation and the Church's purpose is to reunite sinners with God (Machinek, 2021). Christian values and lifestyle are chronicled in the Bible, most notably within the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), where Jesus invites each person to rise to the occasion, and live a Christians lifestyle (Clarence, 2022).

Christ is the supreme example of altruism and the Bible demonstrates altruism throughout its entirety. Humans are mortal and cannot fully comprehend the expansiveness of God which creates limits in rationality and understanding about certain behaviors, altruism being one of them. To sacrifice for another, the very act of altruism, seems a bit strange. What motivation would anyone have to do such a thing? Sacrifice is based upon an expectation or belief of the future. Psychologically, one can rationalize suffering or sacrifice today because of a desired or perceived positive outcome at a future

time. Christ is a beautiful example of altruism because he engaged so many people in different ways to heal them, perform miracles, and to show how God loves man. Without this example, humans would continue to suffer in their own limited understanding of altruism. Arguably, it still took over 1800 years after Christ to label this type of behavior which truly shows how slow mankind is to synthesize what God has provided.

Soteriology, the study of salvation, while at the core of Christianity, was not discussed in the context of altruism by Christian Leaders. Therefore, we can understand from their experiences that altruism is viewed as a post-salvation activity linked to Christ as the example. Through the emulation of Christ's altruistic behaviors, Christians will experience greater spiritual rewards, faith, and a deeper connection with God. The psychology of altruism can benefit from the famous question "What would Jesus do?" – WWJD – a popular American Christian concept that provides one with a moment to reflect on what they believe Jesus might do under their circumstances. The examples of Jesus Christ in the New Testament scriptures provides the backdrop for a self-transcendent and spiritual altruism to exist, where people are motivated to act in a Christ-like manner and sacrifice to benefit the spiritual welfare of others.

Altruistic Love. Christian Leaders easily identified with this theme and most participants provided biblical references to illustrate their stories which were filled with care, compassion, and accepting others as they were. For Christian Leaders altruistic love means, accepting people as sinners, who are imperfect, and because they are created in God's image, are worth of redemption and salvation. Society places an extraordinary emphasis on love, generally believing that through love towards others (community), society will increase unity, peace, and understanding, which will make society flourish.

The *love conquers all* paradigm, as it is called, is often used to describe the application of Christian values, too, because agape is considered self-transcendent, but the *love conquers all* paradigm overreaches. It does not account for rebellious or selfish attitudes and amorality which in the case of liberal sexual experiences actually resulted in a decline of individual spirituality and altruism (Rigo, et al., 2016). Altruistic Love is not all love. Christian's see love as divine and as a means of connecting with others. Through loving one's neighbor Christians will improve their lives and communities.

Love is promoted as empathy, kindness, generosity, and compassion but love is truly more about attachment and attraction. Yet, love is rarely discussed as the tough love that inspires growth, learns from failure, overcomes denial of support and rejection; love is all these things, and its opposite is apathy (Faw, et al., 2019). Loving others for their sake and not your own, is how Christian Leaders describe the purpose of altruistic love. Altruism increases with greater empathy, why? Because an individual can only understand the plight of others who are within their sphere of connection. *Knowing* someone who is suffering typically evokes empathetic responses, which is why salesmen attempt to establish credibility through commonality and why hostages attempt to humanize themselves with their captors, because psychologically speaking, it is difficult to deny a request from someone you *know* or identify with. Love plays a unique role in this regard because from the perspective of a Christian, love is the only way to behave towards others. It is the fulfillment of the second greatest commandment.

Consistent with the findings of Miller et al. (2021), Christian Leaders expressed the connection between God's altruism for mankind or agape love and their own love towards others. Accepting God loves you, opens up your capacity to love others because

when one has a transcendent relationship, they are likely to view others as connected to them, as having value, and being worthy of love and kindness. Christian Leaders and altruists alike, accept all people as being of equal worth (Sagberg, 2014). Christians view love as adoration and gratitude. If Christians are called to love others as they love themselves, then altruism becomes a part of their daily life. Christian Leaders spoke of agape in a similar manner as previous secular explanations provided and all agree that love cannot be separated from altruism.

Unequivocally, martyrdom is the final act of altruism in the lives of many apostles. Christian Leaders do not advocate for, glorify, or praise martyrdom as other religions might do. The usefulness of altruistic love is undervalued, as love is perhaps the greatest factor in achieving individual holistic well-being (Sorokin, 1950). Within the spectrum of altruism, martyrdom is the outer limits because all future opportunities to be altruistic have been conceded. However, short of total sacrifice – pure altruism – is a life similar to the lives of many Saints, one of total submission to God and to the work of serving others. Less than that is a life of semi-submission whereby people commit their lives to the service of others and this can manifest in a variety of ways. Certainly, Christian Leaders can be placed into this category, but there are many who portray altruism in their daily lives who are not Christian Leaders. These people are driven for any number of reasons and as discussed within the themes of altruism, their behaviors are aligned with one or more themes.

Altruistic Personality. Self-care and restoration are known methods for building resilience and maintaining altruism. A study of caregivers, an altruistic career, revealed similarities in methods for self-care which included prayer as the primary strategy

practiced by caregivers (Anderson, et al., 2019). Renewal of the spirit, as Christian Leaders expressed it, creates the ability to recover from the physical, emotional, and psychological demands of helping others and is supported by Anderson, et al. (2019) who extends our understanding of what Christian Leaders practice, as prayer allows caregivers to bounce back from challenging situations. Christians are instructed to live a lifestyle that accentuates good and righteousness because when a group of Christians live this way, they begin to transform the communities they live in by establishing a sense of community with increased justice and peace (Clarence, 2022; Machinek, 2021). The altruistic personality is perhaps a theme which many people might align with. Yet, this theme is subjective and requires self-awareness.

The Altruistic Personality in small measures can be fruitful to society, a blessing to the community, as was demonstrated by Christian Leaders' food ministries. However, Christian Leaders expressed the need for self-awareness, for rejuvenation of the spirit, and for managing altruism. In essence, they described the pitfalls of pathological altruism, which range from codependency to emotional and physical burnout through excessive expressions of empathy (Bachner-Melman & Oakley, 2016). The insights of Christian Leaders expresses what many psychologists already know, good mental health leads to a better life and is the result of proactive practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, reflection, etc.). Altruism truly serves two purposes, to improve the community and to improve the self, within good measure.

Altruism is deeply embedded within an individual's personality structure and is tied to the ideal self-image; it serves to strengthen one's self-image by performing acts of altruism, they are reinforcing an ideal self-image (Sliwak & Leszczuk, 1994). Much the

same way, Christians are seeking an idealistic self-perfection through their actions and behaviors which are intended to emulate God. Altruism is one of those behaviors and Christian Leaders identified altruism as the ultimate Christian experience. In this way, self-actualization can represent the fulfillment of a Christian's goal towards the ideal self by transcending the self to serve others; applying Frankl's theory of meaning, altruism quite literally is operationalization of the meaning of life (Wyzocka, et al., 2023).

The path to altruism. The perspective of Christian Leaders is that altruism is a moral value, which is supported by the research of Ozhiganova (2022) who's study found that maturity of an individual is determined by life experiences and that their spirituality inevitably includes altruism. Altruism is a choice; one must decide to be altruistic. Christians view all humans as having equal value to God and worthy of altruism. *The path to altruism* can begin with the acceptance of God, one's mortality, and our need for acceptance. Christian Leaders described over a hundred stories about altruism from their lived experiences and through these stories they related how altruism functions. Through testimonials and relating personal stories to others, which serves as a form of encouragement and inspiration to others, they are actively reinforcing their personal identities; these findings were similarly mirrored in the research findings of cancer survivors who also demonstrated psychological benefits from sharing personal stories with others (Gallagher-Squires, et al., 2021). Psychologically, the benefits of altruism are higher moral standards, greater self-esteem, increased feelings of acceptance, and potentially a deeper and more meaningful spirituality.

The path to altruism is a virtue-based metamorphosis of one's nature, requiring the deprogramming of societal constructs such as individualism, evolutionism, and

narcissism. The self-transformation that occurs as a Christian inspires greater faith, humility, and security that allow one to identify immoral societal ideologies. *The path to altruism* occurs over time, is a unique journey for each person, and arrives in the place where one has matured to the point that they habitually respond to others with love and compassion which provides them a source of joy and contentment. People benefit from kindness, and altruism is a worthwhile action that creates positive outcomes for the recipient and the altruist (Curry, et al., 2018). It promotes good mental and physical health, when someone is altruistic, they naturally tend to also be more resilient and express a higher quality of life (Martins, et al., 2022; Peacock, 2022). Loving-kindness meditations positively affected individual mindfulness and altruism towards co-workers (Liu, et al., 2022) because mindfulness is associated with compassion (Miller & Verhaeghen, 2022) which for the Christian, translates into spiritual applications of mindfulness such as prayer and sharing testimonial stories to encourage others.

Christian Leaders described altruism as a product of individual spiritual maturity where more mature, spiritually developed Christians are also altruistic, which is consistent with studies of older caregivers who also exhibited greater altruism (Kubsch, et al., 2021). Multiple studies have demonstrated spirituality's positive influence on altruistic attitudes (Wysocka, et al., 2023). Christian pastors teach, "...a sinful heart seeks out sin, a renewed heart seeks renewal in Christ..." (Shonebarger, 2023). The focus of mature Christians manifests in a decision and willingness to be of service to others because it represents the coherency or cognitive dissonance between actions and beliefs, truly living out their faith (Fiske & Taylor, 2021). Furthermore, mature Christians are

aware of the Holy Spirit's ability to restore relationships, heal woundedness, and create the capacity to envision new alternatives to hardships and challenges (Schaab, 2023).

Emotional regulation has been shown to decrease helping behaviors when repeatedly exposed to the needs of others because the individual perceives the altruistic act as overwhelming, ineffective, or chooses to diffuse responsibility allowing others to act (Cameron & Payne, 2011). Attitudes about altruism, similar to other psychological constructs, first develop during childhood and adolescence when individuals learn about *the self* (Bussing, et al., 2013). Egalitarianism attitudes tend to decrease with age while altruism increases as individuals mature (Cobo-Reyes, et al., 2020) which is particularly striking because Christian Leaders identified the growth of altruism associated with increased spirituality and agency (Schaab, 2023), both also likely increasing with age. Muralidharan (2023) found that *the self* is at the core of Christian spiritual identity for Americans and that Christians are more likely to be altruistic if they perceive the potential for self-enhancement. *Reciprocal Altruism* is often distinguished by gratitude towards others and God. Gratitude and indebtedness are motivators that promote the building of relationships (Zuniga, et al., 2023). Views held by Christian Leaders demonstrated profound emotional and altruistic attitudes as they recounted their stories of helping meet the needs of others.

Meeting the need is a unique Christian perspective of altruism, it requires an inherent understanding and ability to first recognize that a need exists; second, to properly identify a means for satisfying the need; and third, it requires making a decision to act. The needs of people are material, spiritual, financial, and psychological, and they vary based upon the individual's circumstances at any given moment. Christian values

align with altruism because they are one in the same. Christian Leaders provided examples of meeting needs that encompassed vehicle donations, food banks, gas money, places to sleep, human touch, and spiritual support.

A popular worldview of altruism is volunteerism, of 5,347 surveyed active volunteers, the strongest positive predictors of motivations to continue volunteering were community, self-image, and competence whereas fatigue and negative experiences were the primary reasons for not continuing (Prytz, et al., 2023). Volunteering is not exactly the same as *meeting the need* referred to by Christian Leaders, but it falls within the spectrum of altruistic behaviors. Although volunteerism has been shown to increase one's self-esteem, it is often intermittent and impersonal where *meeting the need* is reported as one of the most satisfying activities because it results in the knowledge of the altruist confirming that a need has been positively met, but also that the altruist is following their faith by exemplifying Christian values which positively reinforces their self-image. The edification of these experiences results in the inspiration of others to become altruistic.

Altruism is tied to one commodity that Christian Leaders identified, time. The limited resource that each of us possesses is the single limiting factor of altruism. Christian Leaders have experienced the lack of time, constantly dividing their time between family, faith, their congregations, and outreach ministries. Christian Leaders related numerous stories of finding the need and meeting it throughout their daily lives. Their collective experiences equate somewhat to an increased or high emotional intelligence which they likely developed through many social interactions, but they also have a desire to help others, a calling, which drives them to be open to helping others as best as they can. In many cases, Christian Leaders merely played the role of an

intermediary connecting people and resources across their communities. From their perspective, meeting the needs of others was the goal, but they did not care how it was done or who did it, which allows them freedom to adjust how much they help, when, and why.

Spiritual Altruism Theme

Spirituality has a positive relationship with altruism, but not with prosocial behaviors which means that people who are spiritually mature are also more likely to be altruistic (García-Vázquez, et al., 2022). For the most part researchers have placed altruism within a prosocial behavior construct. However, this study accentuates the key difference between prosocial and altruistic behaviors, which are sacrifice and faith. The lack of Christian perspective on altruism has allowed the academic study of altruism to spin in circles over the past fifty years with little to no major discoveries. Religion and spirituality are useful in the analysis of human behavior and human development because they offer an alternative of the human experience (Greenway, 2022). Altruism has been discussed outside of its proper setting and therefore, all the studies of altruism are chasing an incomplete understanding of the phenomenon. Faith is the missing element in secular research because faith is where people develop spirituality which leads to altruism. As such prosocial behaviors are actually lesser altruistic behaviors, not the other way around. The psychological construct of altruism has been greatly misunderstood up to this point.

Perhaps the most compelling understanding of altruism is one based in Christian pneumatology, theology of the Holy Spirit, which offers that God is the greatest or highest expression of otherness (Alvis, 2022). Holding this truth, altruism's connection with spirituality suddenly becomes clear, as the ultimate expression of altruism is to

become god-like. However, not in a manner that displaces God, but in line with the Biblical examples of those who walked with God, considering Enoch (Gen 5), Noah (Gen 6), Moses, (Exodus 33), Elijah (2 Kings 2), Levi (Malachi 2), and the Apostles.

Christians Leaders believe that walking with God is a process and a continuous journey, requiring faith and discipline, where spiritual altruism is selflessness as a state of being (Menon, 2007). Attaining such a state of being is explained by Christian Leaders as the process of sanctification in which an individual will mature and grow spiritually to become more and more Christ-like.

For Christians, the Holy Spirit is a liberating force that enlightens believers and promotes their separation from social sins of the world (Schaab, 2023). The Holy Spirit is transformative and psychologically, opens people up to hope and deeper faith (Macchia, 2023). Within Christendom, the Saints are often revered for their values, sacrifices, and in many cases, for their altruism. Today, the world has less examples of Saints from which to draw upon for inspiration, emulation, or example (Sorokin, 1950). Christians and non-Christians alike are experiencing social pressures and mass manipulation to the extent that most news, true or not, instead of motivating others to aid their fellow man, generate only apathy. Society at large is grappling with anti-religious ideologies which separate people through an assortment of individual identities. Traditional views of gender, ethnicity, family, or vocation have become obsolete in light of the current social climate in America. Value and morality across society have led to what Christian Leaders call the watering down of Christianity. The impacts of these events have resulted in a less altruistic society where communities exist in name only. Meanwhile, attendance of religious services, participation in religious or spiritual practices, and Christian values

overall have declined in their importance within Western society leaving individuals open to interpret morality.

The expression of an individual's spirituality is significantly related to their moral qualities and altruistic attitudes (Ozhiganova, 2022). Wysocka, et al. (2023) found significant positive correlations between transcendence, spiritual growth, and global quality of life; a positive correlation between altruism and the meaning of life along with altruism being positively associated with spirituality implies that without practicing or receiving altruism we are living less satisfying lives. Altruism is significantly associated with one's personality and may be inhibited by one's *real* self-image which causes difficulty for an individual to develop. Young adults were found to display low levels of altruism, which was attributed to their immaturity, a function of selfishness (Sliwak & Leszczuk, 1994). Furthermore, Christians are expected to be guides in religious, social, political, and cultural areas of society (Clarence, 2022). Christian Leaders highlighted the need for spiritual growth because individuals can mature spiritually to answer the calling of Christ by being the salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

One of the primary ways Christians can grow spiritually is through the sanctification process which is a transformative experience that brings individuals into a relationship with God and a Christian lifestyle, "...if we are giving people a relationship with the Lord, they won't want to part from it..." (Bayes, 2023). By choosing to focus on internal changes within one's inner life, the individual can improve their quality of life, outlook, and optimism (Clarence, 2022). Spirituality and morality are deeply connected because they activate one's values and passions. Spiritual transformation is an intentional movement towards that moral ideal which from a Christian paradigm involves the Holy

Spirit (Greenway, 2022). Prayer, fasting, meditation, and healing are all interactions with the Holy Spirit and provide a starting point from which to understand statements from participants which indicated *being moved by the Spirit or touched by the Spirit*.

Accordingly, Spiritual Altruism could take on many forms if for the purpose of benefiting another's spiritual welfare and faith.

Spiritual growth often is associated with the times in our lives where we experienced hardship. When our resiliency and coping mechanisms are put to the test, we are forced to reconcile, reflect, and renounce. Difficult times cause us to change because the previous options are no longer valid or available. At some point we develop the strength to move on and because the Holy Spirit is an empowering and energizing force in our lives, we can draw upon it (Schaab, 2023). Ironically, for some the Holy Spirit is not readily discernable and we receive support from others around us, who being altruistic, provide the path for the Holy Spirit to move in our lives. Altruism in all its forms encompasses aspects of the Holy Spirit's relationship with man. Acknowledging that altruism is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, one must consider how that instrument is best put to use, a compassionate and altruistic God has created a means for fulfilling our needs and desires if we have faith.

Being created in God's image suggest that man is still being created through a continuous self-development (Macchia, 2023). As such, Christian Leaders refer to the sanctification process, discipleship, but also to the need for self-reflection and personal time with God to build a relationship with Him. Spiritual growth is attained through one's own efforts, the more one contributes or self-invests, the greater they profit from their efforts. The New Testament scriptures provide multiple avenues and instructions about

how to live a Spirit-filled life. They also provide examples of how the Holy Spirit interacts with mankind. Observing these interactions leads one to see how concepts of “fruit of the Spirit” and “armor of God” work together to enrich our understanding of spiritual growth. Therefore, seeking to become mature Christians, spiritual maturity is the ultimate goal one should pursue because it offers a completely better life.

Having the ability to choose what to believe makes us individually responsible for our behaviors. The *agency* gained through spirituality is one that breaks free from the bondage of depression, guilt, and trauma. Sin, debauchery, and anti-social behaviors have negative impacts on one’s psyche which without God, leads to a life of despair and self-destruction. Many Christians have not progressed spiritually beyond their salvation experience and the Church is primarily responsible because it has allowed secular social views to soften the message of Christ.

The Calling. A calling can be an internal summons, a passion, a sense of purpose in life (Laura, et al., 2022). To be called is to receive and respond to a divine request or external summons because *The Calling* is a relationship with God, an experience often described by deeply felt understanding and emotions (Wightman, et al., 2022). Perhaps the most profound and spiritual experience in one’s life is the moment they receive *the calling*. Christian Leaders describe the calling in two ways, individual and collective. The individual is “called” to serve others such as clergy, lay leaders, evangelists, and missionaries with their time, talents, and energy which is often the result of an experience or life event that triggers their internal summons or significantly changes their perspective, outlook, or self-view (Laura, et al., 2022). Those who are called, accept that there is an inherent need to sacrifice their own desires and interests for the sake of others.

Individual calling is what leads people to take on altruistic work and to persevere in their labors. They perform their calling daily with a focus on their purpose, which includes regular and consistent spiritual activities.

The collective calling is one that every Christian has, it is the calling to love others as God would. In the collective sense, the calling creates community and promotes good behaviors in society. Altruism increases during moments of moral crisis. The polarizing effect of suffering on communities bring with it two distinct responses, cynicism and altruism. According to Riar, et al. (2023), altruists experience enjoyment as a natural consequence of helping others. Furthermore, altruism naturally occurs as a community participates in the collective calling by returning thanks to God and others (Nelson, 2022). Being grateful for the blessing that one has received, that the community has received, and recognizing those who sacrificed to aid the community are all important activities which build up and invest in communities. Having a calling to love your neighbor is incumbent upon all, it represents a type of civic duty, a type of public service, which is conformed to and upheld by moral beliefs that one holds due to their faith.

Jesus Christ gave examples of the calling through his ministry and life. His actions saved lives, fed the hungry, healed the wounded and sick, and blessed people. He inspired faith, freedom (agency), and hope through spiritual altruism and altruistic love. All of Christ's works on earth were intended to inspire the Holy Spirit within us, the calling to help one another and to create a community or church that is mutually supportive of its members. Christian Leaders agree that not everyone is called to serve others but that all can be of service under the right circumstances. Engaging in agape, loving your neighbor, and spiritual altruism are the primary ways of fulfilling the

collective calling. Individuals who are called to serve others must remain vigilant to the influences of society's anti-religionism views, narcissism, and materialism. Remaining as Jesus did, faithful until the end, by resisting temptation through prayer and meditation.

Warnings to Christian Leaders

No research currently exists about the ability to maintain altruism or altruistic behaviors over a long period. However, some research regarding pathological altruism offers insight into when individuals take the phenomenon too far. The pathological altruist victimizes themselves and others through self-destructive behaviors that are based on distorted thinking (Öz Soysal & Bakalim, 2023). Anyone can fall into the trap of trying to do everything for others, sacrificing their health and well-being in the quest to be a good person, and in the inappropriate or compulsive pursuit of another person's well-being. Christian Leaders instinctively provided techniques and tools about how to avoid burnout, depression, guilt, and being overwhelmed by giving too much. Prolonged, continuous, or intense exposure to stress can cause compassion fatigue which reduces altruism (Kubsch, et al., 2021). A healthy psychological lifestyle which takes into consideration the need for self-replenishment and self-investment, is the key to maintaining altruism on an ongoing basis. Self-replenishment involves among other things, prayer, reading the Bible, and fellowship with others, but it can also mean meditation and spiritual investment through digital media.

Christian Leaders reasoned that many Christian Churches today are not providing substance, growing their attendee's faith, and developing deeper connections between their members and the community. They criticized what they observe as mass appeal, "production Sunday," or being too accommodating because from their perspective,

Christians are not being served if the Church is not offering them opportunity or instruction of growth. In fact, Christian Leaders believe that by watering down the Bible, which placates to sensitive social issues, is the opposite of altruism, it takes from people instead of meeting their needs and building them up or strengthening them through spiritual growth. An individual is completed only by the assertion and practice of altruism (Ordorčák & Bakošová, 2021).

Implications

The information presented in this research extends what is known about altruism in several ways, 1) it strengthens the understanding of altruism's relationship with Christianity by providing perspective and context to the phenomenon, 2) it reinforces the connection between altruism and faith or spirituality, as spiritual altruism, 3) it provides a rationale for the motives of altruism such as meeting a need of others and emulation of a spirit-filled Christian lifestyle, 4) it identifies theoretical underpinnings of altruism's purpose and place within humanity, and 5) it establishes a view of altruism in light of individual values where altruism functions as part of a moral belief system. Altruism has been a bit of an abstract subject to study because of inconsistent definitions and applications of research practices. Together with the lack of researched Christian perspectives about altruism, the prevailing theoretical thoughts about altruism forced a dichotomous representation of the phenomenon.

The greater body of knowledge about the altruism phenomenon is fundamentally changed through the exploration of altruism's link with spiritual growth and spiritual maturity. Spiritual Altruism is perhaps one of the leading motivations for Christians to help others because it signifies not only aspects of their faith but allows for personal

growth at the same time. Being altruistic brings about changes within one's self-image and quality of life. Motivations of altruism can be taken too far or for the wrong reasons. However, the psychological benefits of altruism are notable and worth pursuing. In a world of individualism and a constant barrage of self-*ish* designed marketing, altruism provides a remedy to the disconnectedness, loneliness, and self-destructive thoughts propagated by modern Western society. Altruism can increase the psychological well-being and self-esteem of individuals and society at large (Öz Soysal & Bakalim, 2023). At a macro level, altruism benefits the community through the creation of good will and collaboration; on a micro level, altruism benefits the altruist and the recipient who are able to share in the tangible meeting of needs and the intangible spiritual and psychological growth. In both macro and micro levels, there is a knowing and understanding that people have aided each other which fosters what early Christians expressed as the ideal Church or community.

Implications to the areas of psychology, ministry, and teaching regarding altruism and Christianity offer many different research topics and areas of focus. By placing altruism into proper context, professionals and educators alike, can make use of the themes generated from this study.

Psychology – Thematic expressions of altruism have psychological underpinnings which help to distinguish their functions and social purpose. Altruistic Love supports emotional attachment through feelings of closeness by establishing meaningful relationships over time and develops grace. Kin Altruism promotes psychological and emotional development of group members. Reciprocal Altruism supports a sense of belonging among in and out groups to form a community. Altruistic Personality

contributes to self-enhancement and self-esteem, building self-confidence and empathy for others. Punitive Altruism addresses anger and revenge by providing moral fairness and justice which contribute to forgiveness, acceptance, and mercy. Spiritual Altruism supports agency and self-identity by freeing individuals from bondage and self-sabotaging behaviors (Swann & Bosson, 2010).

Ministry – *Altruistic Love* combined with *Meeting the Need* leads to greater relationships within the community and the Church. Ministries focused on meeting the need must display altruistic love to motivate others to accept Christ, grow spiritually, and experience the joy of providing service to others. In a community where everyone is helping each other, there are no needs which cannot be met. By engaging Christians to reimagine their personal identities, the Church can lead them away from societal and worldly influence. Inspiring Christians to take time to help one another and their communities is the most pragmatic means of change. Altruism has the capacity to be a vehicle of change across society, if done in a creatively organized way that promotes Christian values. Society is resistant to Christianity but their needs have not changed and governments cannot provide spiritual care to fulfill these needs. Ministries incorporating altruism that embrace children, young adults, and elderly will have the greatest impacts on society at large.

Spiritual development starts with the Pastor's sermon on Sunday mornings and carries through each day of the week until the next Sunday. Christian Leaders who do not focus on building the spiritual capacity of their Church are essentially alienating Christian who want to learn and become disciples. Much of Christian theology focuses on reaching out to the lost, and this has become a significant theme among Christian Leaders in

America over the past 70 years. What is missing is the discipleship that Christians want and need. There is no purpose in bringing new people into the Church when the Church will not invest in them. Too many people are left disillusioned and unable to continue their personal growth within Christianity because it is abstract or unfamiliar to them. By demonstrating Christian values within the Church and investing in Christian's faith, prayer, and understanding of God, Christian Leaders will empower their congregations to embrace their communities. Christianity can only grow if Christians begin to value what they have learned and can make sense of it.

Teaching – Educators can discuss altruism from a moral behavior perspective that emphasizes Christian values. By highlighting the role that altruism plays in one's spiritual journey and love that Christ exemplified through his ministry, educators may use altruism in the development of counseling, devotional, and Bible study materials. Altruism should be taught not from a *zero-sum* perspective, as secular scholars have done, but from a *benefit to all* perspective that embraces the values of a Christian lifestyle. Biblical perspectives provided in this study elaborate on both the moral and social benefits of altruism while normalizing altruism as part of Christian values and lifestyle. Altruism is something that works across time because it is a sacrifice of the present for the future. Animals cannot be altruistic because they have no ability to comprehend the future. Therefore, altruism is deeply connected to our spirituality as it pertains to our future. Teaching Christian values must include discussions on altruism. Developing Christians into mature people is a goal of the scriptures and altruism is a path to spiritual growth. Educating young Christians about altruism will positively reinforce their commitment to God.

Limitations

There were several notable limitations of the study. The study was conducted by a single interviewer and analyst which were both performed by the researcher and despite using best practices and techniques to remove biases, it is plausible that some natural biases may not have been eliminated because the researcher is also a Christian. The sample size of the study was large for a qualitative design ($n = 31$), while it appears that saturation was reached during the interviews, it is difficult to determine because of the representation of the participants. Therefore, the study was limited by its diversity, lacking substantial female participation. Since there were no similar studies to compare with, the statistical power of this study is limited because we do not know if there were enough participants to make the study truly significant beyond its qualitative aspects. The study interviewed Americans, although at least one participant was foreign born, the study does not necessarily reflect Christian Leader's experiences from other continents or other Western societies. The study was limited by diversity in that roughly 15 percent of the participants were either female or of minority backgrounds.

The study had no manipulations and internal validity was good because the study aimed to report the experiences and insights of Christian Leaders without making casual claims or inferences based upon their comments. External validity was lacking making it difficult to say if these experiences are completely inclusive of the majority of Christian Leaders despite good diversity among the different types of denominations represented (i.e., Evangelical, Reformed, Catholic, and Orthodox). The sampling strategy for this study was not random which might have influenced the types of participants due to limitations within the networks of those who participated. Despite a solid sampling

plan, the study relied on participants to provide introductions to others and recommendations of potential participants. The study did not solicit participation via the internet or social media and did not solicit participation from any form of advertising which may have limited the study by excluding those who might have wanted to participate. There was no funding for this research which limited its scope.

Furthermore, difficulty obtaining access to Christian Leaders although anticipated, occurred in different ways than was initially expected. In person visits to the Church's main office was the most effective method for obtaining access to Christian Leaders, their calendars, and availability. Attending worship services provided direct access to Christian Leaders but none agreed to participate without additional follow-up information or conversations. Several churches were without a Pastor, having only had a temporary Pastor assisting the church, and church staffs would not provide contact information. Demands of organizational staff and congregational responsibilities competed with participation in this study as expected and through a combination of calls, messages, and emails most of the people contacted eventually agreed to interviews. In several cases, potential participants expressed limited availability and requested early morning or evening meetings. None of the participants were available on weekends, which meant Friday to Sunday. Finally, some Christian Leaders and Churches outright declined to participate without providing any rationale.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study demonstrates the need for expanded research in the areas of Christian perspective, spiritual altruism, differences between the calling and the path to altruism, and what altruism actually represents to mankind. The scope of the study was limited to

Christians. However, another study could be conducted with the same style of questions applied to Buddhists or Hindus because they each have similar concepts of unconditional love and enlightenment. From such a study, comparisons of altruism between Eastern and Western religions could be researched. Furthermore, altruism could be researched from the standpoint of spirituality and spiritual growth to explore how altruism is associated with happiness, greater life satisfaction, and being closer to God. Conversely, there is a greater need for punitive altruism studies which could be useful in another research design if one was able to isolate a moral dilemma. By successfully selecting and isolating a social-moral issue, for example, pre-marital sex, one could design a longitudinal study that evaluated pre and post matrimony comparisons of altruism, spirituality, and expand the analysis to a within-group study. Punitive altruism offers a unique insight into human behavior and should be pursued.

Further future researchers may choose to focus on the variation among Christian Leaders by focusing on differences by denomination and comparing attitudes or insights of altruism. One observation was that Evangelical participants tended to speak of altruism in a spiritual way while Roman Catholic participants described altruism as love. Future research could focus on within or between group studies of regional attitudes towards altruism as the study showed that Southwestern US participants described the path to altruism compared to Southeastern US participants describing the spirituality of altruism which may have been environmentally dependent or socio-politically caused. Orthodox and Reformed Christians provided more warnings about altruism and its applications towards Christianity which may prove to be a useful research topic when comparing Christian insights to existing worldviews of altruism. Any study of altruism that could

describe its effects on the community would be useful in explaining the impact of altruism, especially when Christians are charged with supporting their community. Finally, altruism's association with soteriology could be researched to ascertain if parallels exist between God's altruism toward mankind and mankind's altruism towards each other.

Summary

The study expands upon the greater body of knowledge of the altruism phenomenon. Several key discoveries occurred as a result of this study and should be considered for further research. Christian Leaders provided unique insights into altruism's relationship with Christianity which was the first time a study focused on their experiences as people who naturally are in a position to observe and be part of the altruism phenomenon. The connection between altruism and faith or spirituality, as spiritual altruism was introduced based upon descriptive experiences of Christian Leaders. Motives of altruistic behaviors were suggested through the identification of meeting the needs of others and emulation of a spirit-filled Christian lifestyle. Engaging is agape, loving your neighbor, and spiritual altruism are the primary ways of fulfilling *the calling* that some people experience. The expression of an individual's spirituality is significantly related to their moral qualities and altruistic attitudes. Where altruistic love is about attachment and altruistic personality is about acceptance, spiritual altruism is about agency and self-identity representing behaviors that manifest in a transformation of the self.

A new paradigm of altruism in light of individual values where altruism functions as part of a moral belief system was presented. Theoretical underpinnings of altruism's purpose and place within humanity were discussed from a Biblical perspective which

offers new material for teachers of Christian values and gives practical applications for altruism as a Christian. Believing in God and following a Christian lifestyle are inclusive of altruistic behaviors. More Biblical perspective and research about altruism is needed as this study only touches the surface of what possibly exists. Altruism in all its forms encompasses aspects of the Holy Spirit's relationship with man. Although it remains somewhat illusive in that its motivations are difficult to fully assess, the predominance of Christian values in America have undoubtedly led to the cause of an altruistic predisposition in society that has recently started to diminish with the increase of secular individualism.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [Recipient],

I'm Joshua Belk, a graduate student in the School of Behavior Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand what Christian Leaders' life experiences of altruism as it relates to Christianity and Christian faith. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and are currently or have been a Christian Leader at some point during your adult lifetime. For the purposes of this research study, a *Christian Leader* is defined as a person who has held or currently holds, a role which required them to give sermons, preach, or evangelize. Participants may be from any denomination or non-denomination of Christianity and may or may not be ordained or certified. Graduation from a recognized theological program is not a requirement to participate in this research.

If you qualify and would like to be part of the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview which should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. Names and other identifying information provided will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

A consent document will be given to you and collected at the interview which contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document.

Sincerely,

Joshua Belk
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B: CONSENT

Title of the Project: Psychology of Altruism: A Phenomenological Study Of Christian Leaders

Principal Investigator: Joshua Belk, a graduate student in the School of Behavior Sciences at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and are currently or have been a Christian Leader at some point during your adult lifetime. For the purposes of this research study, a *Christian Leader* is defined as a person who has held or currently holds, a role which required them to give sermons, preach, or evangelize. Participants may be from any denomination or non-denomination of Christianity and may or may not be ordained or certified. Graduation from a recognized theological program is not a requirement to participate in this research.

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

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

The purpose of my research is to understand what Christian Leaders' life experiences of altruism as it relates to Christianity and Christian faith.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in a recorded interview for approximately 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded for the future reference of the researcher and will not be published as part of the study. Recordings will be either audio or video and audio depending upon the available technology.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study includes a greater understanding of their views on altruism as it relates to their faith practice and ministry.

Benefits to society include providing future academic researchers and Christians the unique perspective of altruism through the prism of Christianity.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

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 the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous or will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until the accuracy of the transcripts is confirmed and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Belk. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at

_____ or _____. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. William McMillan, at _____.

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

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/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions may be used during the interviews to build rapport. A minimum of one of these questions will be asked to each participant at the beginning of each interview. The number of questions asked will depend on the amount of time each participant takes answering each question and how well the researcher perceives the participant's comfort.

- Please state your name and your role or the Christian Ministry you lead or have led.

The following questions will be asked to gather demographic information on participants.

Demographic Questions

- Are you a Christian?
- How long have you been a Christian?
- What denomination do you belong to or non-denomination?
- What is your age?
- Are you male or female?
- What ethnicity are you?
- What is your home region (state)?

The following questions will be used to gather qualitative data. Each participant will be asked a minimum of three questions. The number of questions asked will be dependent on the amount of time each participant takes to answer each question and complete a 30-minute to an hour-long interview.

Meaningful experiences

- How would you describe altruism from your personal experiences?

- Could you describe for me any examples of altruism in Christian theology?
- What could you tell me about the relationship between altruism and Christian faith within your life?
- Tell me about a time when you were altruistic towards another person.
- Tell me about a time you received altruism from another person.

Concluding Questions

- Is there anything else about your experiences that you would like to share?
- What would you like other Christian Leaders to know about altruism?
- Is there anyone else you think would like to participate in this study?

APPENDIX D: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THEME PAIRINGS

Data was transferred to IBM, SPSS Statistics version 29.0.1.0 and coded with demographic and theme variables. The following data table provides the results of Fisher’s Exact test for each altruism theme pairing. Only the theme pairing of “*The Calling-The Path to Altruism*” was statistically significant. The results of the Chi Squared test, $X^2(1, N = 31) = 7.630, p = .006$, and the results of Fisher’s Exact test (two-sided test, $p = .009$), each indicated that *The Calling* theme and *The Path to Altruism* theme are completely independent.

Below Table 4 presents the findings of the Fisher Exact test results.

Table 4
Statistical Analysis of Altruism Theme Independence

Fisher's Exact Test for Altruism Themes Independence

Themes		MN	MN	CE	CE	LA	LA	TC	TC	SG	SG	PH	PH	WC	WC	AA	AA	KA	KA	RA	RA	AL	AL	AP	AP	PA	PA
Meeting the need	Fisher 2-Sided		1-Sided																								
Christ is the example of altruism		1.000	0.577																								
Love & Altruism		,258	0.134	0.724	0.475																						
The Calling		1.000	0.619	1.000	0.577	0.707	0.364																				
Spiritual Growth		0.458	0.269	1.000	0.589	0.479	0.300	1.000	0.533																		
The path to altruism		0.716	0.447	0.716	0.411	1.000	0.578	0.009	0.008	1.000	0.569																
Warnings to Christian Leaders		0.698	0.381	0.452	0.282	0.477	0.343	0.452	0.317	0.716	0.447	0.716	0.447														
Aspects of Altruism		0.716	0.447	0.716	0.411	0.722	0.422	1.000	0.553	0.479	0.293	1.000	0.569	0.458	0.269												
Kin Altruism		0.405	0.281	1.000	0.638	0.698	0.466	1.000	0.606	0.220	0.130	0.433	0.303	0.203	0.124	0.433	0.303										
Reciprocal Altruism		1.000	0.510	1.000	0.611	0.280	0.218	1.000	0.490	0.252	0.152	0.252	0.152	1.000	0.510	0.135	0.101	0.222	0.173								
Altruistic Love		0.273	0.189	0.716	0.411	1.000	0.578	0.716	0.447	0.724	0.431	1.000	0.569	0.273	0.189	0.724	0.431	0.685	0.382	1.000	0.602						
Altruistic Personality		0.423	0.221	0.447	0.308	1.000	0.503	0.262	0.202	0.458	0.306	0.458	0.306	1.000	0.510	0.704	0.398	0.222	0.173	1.000	0.595	1.000	0.602				
Punitive Altruism		1.000	0.606	0.676	0.362	0.412	0.232	0.676	0.394	0.685	0.382	1.000	0.618	0.676	0.394	0.685	0.382	0.154	0.092	1.000	0.517	0.685	0.382	1.000	0.483		

APPENDIX E: BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES PROVIDED BY PARTICIPANTS

Table 5*Altruistic Biblical Scriptures Provided by Participants*

Scripture Reference	Scripture Quote	Participant Context	Altruistic Theme
1 Corinthians 12 (P17)	-	Connectedness with Christ	Kin Altruism
1 Corinthians 13 (P3, P6)	-	The Love Chapter	Altruistic Love
1 Corinthians 9 (P15)	-	Rights of Apostilles	Altruistic Personality
1 Kings 17:21-22 (P9)	“Then he stretched himself out upon the child three times and he called out to the LORD: ‘LORD, my God, let the life breath return to the body of this child.’ The LORD heard the prayer of Elijah; the life breath returned to the child’s body and he lived.”	Elijah raising the child from the dead	Altruistic Love
1 Peter (P27)	-	Faith in duty	Altruistic Personality
2 Corinthians 5:17 (P21, P31)	“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”	The old person must die for the new person to come out	Altruistic Love
2 Corinthians 8:9 (P17)	“For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich.”	Though he was rich, he became poor...that you through his poverty might become rich.	Altruistic Personality
Acts 13-28 (P4, P10, P19)	-	Story of Paul	Altruistic Personality
Acts 2 (P15, P27)	-	Pentecost	Reciprocal Altruism
Acts 8 (P4)	-	Chased out of Jerusalem	Altruistic Personality
Amos 5:14-15 (P5)	“Seek good and not evil, that you may live; Then truly the LORD, the	Hate evil and love good	Punitive Altruism

	God of hosts, will be with you as you claim. Hate evil and love good, and let justice prevail at the gate; Then it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will have pity on the remnant of Joseph.”		
Daniel 5 (P3)	-	Lion’s Den	Altruistic Personality
Ephesians 4 (P15)	-	Equipping and Mending	Altruistic Love
Ephesians 5:18 (P30)	“And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”	Empty yourself to be filled by the Spirit; more Christ like	Spiritual Altruism
Ephesians 5:21-32 (P3, P4, P18)	-	Love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.	Kin Altruism
Ephesians 6:10 (P30)	“Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power.”	Live by faith	Altruistic Personality
Galatians 5:13 (P1, P5)	“For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.”	Love your neighbor as yourself	Altruistic Love
Galatians 5:22-23 (P23)	“In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”	Fruits of the spirit	Altruistic Personality
Galatians 6:9 (P1)	“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up.”	Bearing burdens and meeting the need	Reciprocal Altruism
Genesis 18 & 19 (P5)	-	Lot and family	Kin Altruism

Genesis 4:10 (P21)	“God then said: ‘What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!’”	Blood of the evil cried out from the ground to God	Punitive Altruism
Hosea (P16)	-	Marry a prostitute	Punitive Altruism
Isaiah 53 (P4)	-	Lamb of God	Punitive Altruism
James 2:26 (P22)	“For just as a body without a spirit is dead, faith without works is dead.”	Faith without works is dead	Altruistic Personality
John 3 (P14)	-	Promise of eternal life & God’s Love	Altruistic Love
John 3:16 (P3)	“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”	For God so loved the world	Altruistic Love
John 4 (P14)	-	Jesus Healing	Spiritual Altruism
John 4:5-42 (P25)	-	The Samaritan woman at the well (St. Photini)	Spiritual Altruism
John 5 (P4)	-	Jesus says, “I came to do my father’s will.”	Altruistic Love
John 9 (P5)	-	Jesus healed the blind man	Spiritual Altruism
Leviticus (P21)	-	Various Sacrifices	Punitive Altruism
Luke 10:29-37 (P10, P17)	-	The Good Samaritan	Altruistic Personality
Luke 7:1-10 (P21)	-	The Centurion’s Faith	Altruistic Love
Luke 7:11-17 (P9)	-	Raising the widow’s son from the dead	Altruistic Love
Mark 12:41-44 (P14, P31)	-	The greatest giver, the widow who gave all she had	Altruistic Personality
Mark 15:21 (P10)	“They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus to carry his cross.”	The man who carried Jesus’ cross	Altruistic Personality

Matthew 10 (P7, P10)	-	Bless others by giving and sacrificing	Kin Altruism
Matthew 19:16-30 (P15)	-	Rich young man, go sell all you have and follow me	Altruistic Personality
Matthew 20:28 (P4)	“Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”	Sacrificing & Serving	Spiritual Altruism
Matthew 22:37 (P5, P6, P9, P20)	“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”	Jesus & Greatest Commandment	Altruistic Love
Matthew 25:40-45 (P9)	-	Help the least of these	Reciprocal Altruism
Matthew 5:3-12 (P31)	-	Blessed are the poor in spirit	Altruistic Personality
Matthew 7:1 (P2)	“Stop judging, that you may not be judged.”	Love on others	Punitive Altruism
Matthew 7:12 (P2, P30)	“Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.”	Give unto others as you want to receive – The Golden Rule	Reciprocal Altruistic
Matthew 7:13-14 (P5, P19)	“Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”	Narrow is the path of believers; Sermon on the Mount	Altruistic Personality
Philippians 2:1-30 (P7, P18, P27, P29)	-	Look to the interest of others	Altruistic Personality
Proverbs 21:13 (P5)	“Those who shut their ears to the cry of the poor will themselves call out and not be answered.”	He that covers his ears to the cry of the poor, he will cry himself and not be heard.	Punitive Altruism
Revelations (P3, P9)	-	God’s mercy and justice	Punitive Altruism
Romans 1 (P5)	-	Salvation and punishment	Punitive Altruism/Altruistic Love

Romans 12:1 (P11, P22)	“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.”	Be transformed spiritually	Spiritual Altruism
Romans 12:19 (P5)	“Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay’ says the Lord.”	We are told not to hate, we told to love.	Punitive Altruistic
Romans 3:23 (P27)	“All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.”	All are sinners, no one is perfect	Punitive Altruism
Romans 5:1-11 (P11)	-	Sacrificing to help another	Altruistic Love
Romans 8:28 (P29)	“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”	Falling short of the glory of God	Spiritual Altruism
Ruth (P8)	-	Ruth’s selfless sacrifice for family	Kin Altruism
Zachariah 9:9 (P5)	“Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he.”	A promise of the triumphant entry of the Lord	Altruistic Love

Note. Scriptural references which included texts of more than two verses were truncated with a “-” for brevity.

APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic information about the study's participants is provided below in two tables.

Table 6
Raw Demographic Data of Participants

P-CODE	GENDER	AGE	CHRISTIAN AGE	ETHNICITY	DENOMINATION	REGION
P1	F	69	62	W	Protestant	CA
P2	M	40	21	W	Pentecostal	CO
P3	M	69	61	W	Protestant	CO
P4	M	68	55	W	Protestant	CA
P5	M	61	54	W	Baptist	FL
P6	M	62	43	W	Assembly of God	CA
P7	M	32	20	W	Church of God	FL
P8	F	70	53	W	Pentecostal	CA
P9	M	69	38	W	Assembly of God	CA
P10	M	61	24	W	Pentecostal	CA
P11	M	27	15	W	Church of God	FL
P12	F	20	6	H	Church of God	FL
P13	M	74	48	W	Protestant	FL
P14	M	55	49	W	Baptist	FL
P15	M	43	19	W	Church of God	FL
P16	F	62	54	W	Protestant	WI
P17	M	69	52	W	Protestant	FL
P18	M	50	43	W	Baptist	FL
P19	M	78	70	W	Conservative Baptist	CA
P20	M	73	55	W	Church of God	FL
P21	M	73	73	W	Orthodox	FL
P22	M	74	62	W	Mennonite	FL
P23	M	23	3	W	Orthodox	FL
P24	M	32	20	O	Orthodox	FL
P25	M	83	83	W	Orthodox	FL

APPENDIX G: ALTRUISM THEMES

A list of themes identified by the study are provided in Table 8 below.

Table 8*Altruism Themes*

Themes	Sub Themes	Morality	Psychology
Altruistic Love	Christ as the example	Harm/Care	Attachment
Reciprocal Altruism	Warnings to Christian Leaders	Fairness/Reciprocity	Belonging
Kin Altruism	Aspects of altruism	In-group/Loyalty	Developmental
Altruistic Personality	Meeting the need	Authority/Respect	Self-enhancement
Punitive Altruism	A path to altruism		Anger, Revenge
Spiritual Altruism	Spiritual growth The Calling	Purity/Sanctity	Agency