

CHRISTIAN GRADUATES' LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH PROFESSIONAL MORAL  
COURAGE: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by Jeffrey Moreira

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

Graduation 2024

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### **Abstract**

This purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. The moral foundations theory by Haidt and Craig guided this study to find the innate responses that frame these graduates' lived experiences to understand better external influences, intrapersonal conflict, and rationale for the willingness to demonstrate moral courage when confronted with a moral dilemma. A sample of 10 graduates from Christian-based institutions completed the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, participated in one-to-one interviews, and attended a focus group to identify and validate significant themes about the phenomena. Data analysis established the themes and meaning of the phenomena. Results corroborated three themes: 1. Initial reaction/Intuition, 2. Moral Foundation, and 3. Moral Courage. Triangulation provided a method to confirm the results' authenticity and credibility concerning these graduates' lived experiences. One-year post-graduates experience an intuitive response in the presence of a moral dilemma. Their decision to act on this reaction is influenced by a Christian education and the value of honoring God. Moral courage is present with faith and confidence in one's Christian values.

*Keywords:* Christian-educated graduate student, intuition, morals, moral foundations theory, and moral courage

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Jesus Christ, my Lord, and Savior.

### Acknowledgments

To my wife, Jennifer, and sons, Matthew and Mark, who stood by my side throughout this process, thank you for the support and love. I want to thank my chair and committee. Thank you to all my fellow students and professors who provided feedback and encouragement throughout this process.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

How do Christian graduates describe their lived experiences with moral courage in the workplace? This is a question to identify personal faith or worldly influence. The Bible teaches humankind in Luke 6:31, “Do to others as you would like them to do to you” (New Living Translation, 2007). The second passage in Luke 6:45 is equally important, “A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart” (New Living Translation, 2007). This is the essence of the research question and this study. Christian expectations are a higher standard than those of the general society. God is their guide and the foundation of a Christian's decisions. Christians search deep in their heart when presented with a moral dilemma in the workplace. The courage demonstrated reflects Jesus Christ.

This study aimed to identify the willingness to act upon one’s initial (intuitive) response with courage according to one's faith when challenged. The actions of Christians should reflect the “Good Word,” representatives of Jesus Christ to this world. A Christian’s morals and values may conflict with happiness in this world, but together, they are one in heaven (Jakobsen, 2022). A phenomenological approach to this study provides an opportunity to identify the essence of participants’ responses. This chapter addresses the historical background of higher education’s biblically moral roots. It shares societal views of morality. The problem, purpose, and significance of studying Christian college graduates’ experiences with moral courage is discussed. The research questions' conclusions based on the Moral Foundations Theory establish the basis of the participants' innate reaction and the willingness to demonstrate moral values in personal work experiences. These are bound to identify an opportunity for change in the education of students.

## **Background**

This is a time of chaos, worldly expectations, and many religions challenging this world. This study aimed to explore the experiences of Christian morality and faith to see the righteous outcome in conflict. The outcome's relation to belief, influence, higher education, and courage were explored on the personal level of the participants to identify reasoning and response in conflicting situations.

### **Historical Context**

Higher education's role and evolutionary development have significantly changed. During the early development of higher education in Greece, human interests and needs were relative to truth, goodness, justice, or beauty, with truths valid for a given time and place (Lucas, 2006). Morality tends to vary from one society to another, with a goal to serve human needs (Lucas, 2006). The educational system developed in Europe and the United States placed its foundation on the value of rhetoric, mathematics, oratory, logic, grammar, eristics, and dialect. The evolution of education from its onset was to prepare young men for public life and clergy. The focus was on teaching and academic freedom for all individuals. Current trends address teaching with the limitation of expressing one's voice, whether on social media or electronic publication, to avoid a negative reflection of one's institution (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Lucas, 2006).

Higher education in America has evolved through 10 generations from its inception in 1636, with Harvard College as the first institution (Lucas, 2006). The founding institutions of higher education, such as Harvard, William and Mary, the Collegiate College of New Haven (Yale), Dartmouth, the College of New Jersey (Princeton), the College of Rhode Island (Brown), Queen's College (Rutgers), the College of Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania), and King's College (Columbia) trained clergymen who became community leaders in

preparation for statesmen (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Lucas, 2006). They were advancing to a higher level of knowledge in the previously mentioned foundations of education to law, medicine, and further into theology with no government restrictions (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). They hoped to build communities with a solid religious focus and orientation set by their governing boards, which consisted mostly of ministers (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Through the influence of the various churches, these founding years addressed the higher education institution's teaching toward morality and proper conduct of young adults (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Lucas, 2006).

As times change, so does the higher education system. The growth and expansion of higher education institutions, the federal government's policies, influence on all aspects of higher education and student funding, and the institutions' philosophies have changed. Mission statements have changed. Focus has changed through the 10 generations of higher education development. Transitions have occurred from the classical curriculum to an elective system of courses to earn a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, or a Doctor of Philosophy degree (Bastedo et al., 2016). There are many influences on the development of higher education.

The ebb and flow of higher education have changed to meet the market demands of society (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Higher education's curriculums are so diverse that opportunities and degrees exist in a person's education choice to meet their personal and financial needs. This showed a positive impact on self-confidence, sufficiency, and self-direction with a belief the individual can control their destiny, making a positive economic return on investment, which presents personal gains with a significant direct drop in religious orientation (except in secular institutions) and no mention of changes in morality and value are present (Bastedo et al., 2016; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). One is blind to life's experience of personal needs being met in cooperation with others' needs for the pursuit of a common good makes life work

for everyone (Jones, 2019).

The benefit of morality is present in the current Christian-based education (Hansen, 2021; Milojev et al., 2014). Many people in this world have lost their sense of morality, common decency, and a sense of common good (Jones, 2010). An opportunity existed in this study to establish higher education with an understanding of the benefits of moral and value-based curriculums that influence students to understand their role as individuals and members of society to guide positive externalities and benefits for a more significant cause.

Personal growth is facilitated by understanding of one's morals in the decision-making process. Society, particularly the educational system, has progressed away from moral and biblical education. Education has transgressed toward a free mind, free choice, and less morality system. The higher education system in the United States was founded on Judeo-Christian values. The wisdom and knowledge from these religious traditions should not be lost but provide a basis for a flame to ignite morality, integrity, and values to a level of life fulfilling everyone encountered (Joines, 2019).

### **Social Context**

Recent studies address many aspects of courage, values, empathy, and morals in different individuals and environments. These characteristics in a study of nurses provided a means to maintain their ethical codes while showing respect and advocating for others (Rosa, 2014). A similar study relates how we live (behaviors) to our ethical or moral values, especially in our relationship with the environment and maintaining its wonder and beauty (Chuvieco, 2012). Historically, research needs to include the Christian-educated student in the workforce environment. All college graduates have many new opportunities in front of them. Many new decisions are made daily. The rationale for those decisions is individualistic. A study supported these findings by identifying business ethics coursework that involved morally courageous role

models enhanced students' ethical attitudes and promoted their moral courage to act accordingly in these challenging situations (Comer & Schwartz, 2017). These studies lead to the question: What are the foundations for these decisions?

Society influences decisions. Vocational demands and restraints cause people to change their opinions, attitudes, morals, values, and decisions. But Christians have a higher calling. In the New Living Translation (2007), James 4:17 says, "Remember, it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." Christians and people are placed in morally challenging situations. A person's moral foundation affects their perceptions, opinions, and decisions. In these situations, God's teachings are to be present in a Christian-educated graduate and all Christians. Christians are expected to be emotionally stable in situations because they reflect Jesus Christ. The Bible says in James 4:15-16, "What you ought to say is, 'If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.' Otherwise, you are boasting about your pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil" (New Living Translation, 2007). Christians are to do the will of God. They are an example to society.

Christian and atheist views were compared in the areas of responses and attitudes based upon the moral values of one another, utilizing the moral foundations theory (Simpson & Rios, 2016). Similarities were present in the foundations with their ingroups for caring/compassion and justice/fairness, but differences were present for loyalty, respect for authority/social order, and wholesomeness/decency (Simpson & Rios, 2016). The consensus of the study showed that both groups underestimated and were unfamiliar with the other's foundational moral concerns (Simpson & Rios, 2016). Applying this study to higher education, corporations, and college graduates show Christians and atheists are unfamiliar with one another in the decision-making process. Their decisions are based on differences in morals and values.

Christians distinguish their decisions on the binding foundations of the moral



foundations theory: loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation, but the care/compassion foundation is present too, established by Graham and Haidt (2010). Christian decisions reflect their morals, values, and God. Their decisions are the light of their beliefs. This reflection directly affects the workplace, peers, and society to be the light of their faith. Christian morality exists to protect the physical and psychological welfare of the individual's rights with a purity of one's soul to honor God's revealed moral code for mankind (Fasoli, 2017).

This study addresses the role of a morality-based, value-oriented Christian higher education. First to address is the personal effect on the Christian graduate. Second is the direct effect on those involved in the dilemma. Thirdly, society is impacted by the lived experiences shared by these participants. Whether a positive or negative outcome, the participants obtained an in-depth understanding of themselves and their effect as Christians on others. Society has an opportunity to understand the role of Christ and his work from the beginning to the present and beyond for the benefit of humanity. An understanding of Christ's second greatest commandment in Matthew 22:39, "A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself" (New Living Translation, 2007). The benefits of this study help believers and nonbelievers learn to understand one another's hearts and perspectives. Christians draw closer to God and not compromise their faith when faced with challenges.

### **Theoretical Context**

Throughout the ages, morality and education have evolved to great lengths. As mentioned in the historical context section, educational reform has progressed for centuries. This is where the focus changes to address the theoretical backgrounds leading up to the moral foundations platform for this study. Moral psychology has its foundations in two areas of development. The empiricist believes morality is learned in childhood (Haidt & Craig, 2004).

For example, Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory of moralization (six stages) in education was based upon findings by Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Beck et al., 1971; Piaget & Cartalis, 1928; Reimer, 1977). The nativist believes that evolution builds morality into the human mind (Haidt & Craig, 2004). This was the stepping-stone for the proposed study.

Throughout history, cognitive developmental theorists, sociologists, and behaviorists have theorized and debated morality (Haidt, 2013; Haidt & Craig, 2004; & Reimer, 1977). Theorists like Durkheim, Piaget, Freud, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Skinner participated in the debate with the mentality that morality is not innate but learned in childhood (empiricists) or evolved through centuries from the implementation of universal moral knowledge, regardless of parental guidance (nativists) (Haidt & Craig, 2004). The theory of innate origin is the origination of the moral foundations theory, whereby Haidt (2013) refers to the works of anthropologist Richard Schweder who theorized that children are assisted in learning morals through adults and the child's expression of emotions in response to rule violations build morality, no matter the culture. Haidt (2013) was inspired to build upon this idea to confirm that moral judgment or reasoning, regardless of culture or social interactions, is engaged after an automatic process has already pointed the person toward a judgment or conclusion.

The moral foundations theory created by Haidt and Craig (2004) establishes five foundations in which individuals process decisions based upon innate, subconscious realizations and rationalize these responses influenced by one's culture. These are the building blocks of society. Intuitions are judgments, solutions, and ideas that pop into consciousness from subconscious mental processes that lead to them (Haidt & Craig, 2004). Intuition is an automatic response. Often, the gut reaction is intuitive. Growing up, teachers and coaches always recommended going with your first "gut" reaction. Jones et al. (2018) describe a virtue-based

model whereby one's character development is at the heart of their decision-making process. This reaction to demonstrate moral courage flourishes in environments that promote moral decision-making and character expression of one's values (Jones et al., 2018; Sekerka et al., 2009).

Moral foundations theory's role in the study assisted in identifying the Christian-educated graduates' framework of courage to demonstrate a biblical approach to decision-making. The theory provides the rationale for Christian graduates' decisions when encountering ethical dilemmas in the workplace. Supporting evidence shows that shared beliefs, experiences, and mentorship programs establish a moral community on campuses and in society (Davignon & Thomson, 2015). This is a comfort zone to demonstrate morality. But is it enough for individual faith and morality? Will they abide by their religious beliefs to make morally correct decisions? Or will they fold, giving into society's worldly demands? Establishing a basis to identify this innate reaction is at the forefront of creating a curriculum focused on the practical application of morals and values.

Professional moral courage is a managerial competency that can be applied to many occupations because courage is a virtue of moral strength (Sekerka et al., 2009). The courage to do the right thing in any circumstance. Good leaders uphold their beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). A leader holds others accountable for their set of values. Leaders who add the role of spiritual mentors increase religious practice (morality) and belief (Davignon & Thomson, 2015). No matter the position held, individuals have their principal morals, values, and ethical standards. These virtues are beyond rules, regulations, and policy. Morals are the stature that changes a defensive decision to one of a proactive, responsible, and ethical one. Christians apply faith from Biblical teachings to their decisions. Their morals and values are an example of their relationship with God. Matthew 6:13 says, "And don't let us

yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one” (New Living Translation, 2007). Christians are to act according to the Bible, thereby setting an example of Jesus Christ for the whole world no matter the circumstance, situation, or dilemma, Christians are to respond with biblical morals and ethical values.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that post-graduate Christian students have difficulty demonstrating moral courage in the workplace. Moral education is one whose curriculum is focused on the common ground of understanding moral and civil values with the motivation and willingness to act righteously in contributing to society (Colby, 2014). Research shows that 61% of the United States population believes the higher education system is going in the wrong direction and questions professional ethics (Rine et al., 2022). The literature focused on leadership and educational teachings on morals, courage, and decisions (Afar et al., 2019; Baehr, 2013; Dustman, 2018; Erwich & van der Stoep, 2017; Hansen, 2021; Milojev et al., 2014; Mostafa, 2019; Nelson, 2004; Schroeder, 2018). One study identifies that in a pluralistic society, homogeneous religious groups united against a broader worldview exemplify encouragement of the practice of one’s beliefs. Other studies identify creative people as having a psychological belief of greater entitlement, the tendency to take risks, break the rules, and demonstrate dishonesty (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016). A follow-up study of creativity and perspective-taking grew from these findings and recommended a holistic approach to higher education collaboration creativity, perspective-taking, and morality in coursework (Hui et al., 2021). Current research focuses on various aspects of morality, including various clientele. There is no evidence of a Christian education's role in its graduates’ will to demonstrate moral courage. These studies provide a gap in understanding Christian-educated students’ experiences with moral courage in acting righteously. This is an opportunity for Christian voices and

experiences with morality to be understood.

A Christian's courage to speak up or do the right thing in a demoralized situation reflects the word of God. Do they fold under pressure or fear? Do they speak up in those situations which could negatively affect their position, career, and possibly family? A morally courageous act is a personal challenge. Proverbs 3:27 says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to help them." (New Living Translation, 2007). Changes in the past decade demonstrate that what would have been viewed as a violation of basic decency is now commonplace (Joines, 2019). Christians have a higher standard, a higher calling. Personal expectations have a higher calling. Matthew 6:10, "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (New Living Translation, 2007).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. Moral courage is defined as an innate virtue or attribute that motivates and inspires one in the presence of a negative outcome to overcome fear and demonstrate the willingness to choose the right path of action based upon personal moral principles in relation to an ethical conflict (Khelil et al., 2018; Pajakoski et al., 2020). Identifying the lived experiences of the innate response to moral courage in Christian graduates provided the groundwork for this study. The reason for addressing Christian post-graduates is to identify the effect outside influences may have on their perspective and innate reaction to demonstrate moral courage. Identifying the lived experiences with moral courage provides insight into Christian-based higher education institutions' role and opportunities to implicate moral guidelines, expectations, and application into the curriculums.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is that it sheds light on the Christian perspective, influence, and moral foundations engrained through a biblically based education when making decisions. Teaching and understanding the Bible is one aspect of Christian education. Applying these principles to life is another aspect. Moral foundations theoretical background supports identifying the innate response. Christian-educated graduates should have an ingrained moral footing. Christians should reflect this moral code in society. One may call this a sacrifice. Christians call this humbling oneself to honor their heavenly father. This study addresses the influences, faith, and the value of one's moral code. The study sought to promote the value of moral teaching in education, the individual, and the world.

### **Theoretical Significance**

Morals are the foundation of one's decisions, actions, and choices. Moral foundations theory demonstrates moral decisions begin with an innate reaction based on five foundations to limit selfish behavior (Smith & Hatemi, 2021). Outside influences create internal conflict, influencing a person's reasoning and causing them to conform to the progressive and evolutionary way of life. These personal decisions can establish common ground with others when shared values and morals are present. Moral courage can positively influence all through its service as the ultimate moral standard and the divine inspiration elicited (Fasoli, 2017). Moral foundations theory identifies these instincts. The study began with the underlying reaction and progress through the reasoning process into the essence of one's conflict with demonstrating moral courage. The moral foundations theory provides insight into moral growth and positive societal application.

### **Empirical Significance**

The five foundations of moral foundation theory identify one's innate response to acting with moral courage. Caring, justice, and bravery were identified to demonstrate moral courage

despite social pressures in undergraduate students at a Catholic university (Sonnetag et al., 2018). Research showed that people who actively participate in religion have a highly traditional God concept and demonstrate a greater sense of fairness/reciprocity (individualizing foundation) when giving to all charities (Shepherd et al., 2018). Adding a spiritual mentor to one's life influences religious practice, particularly in the campus environment (Davignon & Thomson, 2015). These studies indicate that the constant influence of a Christian educational presence reflects the values of protection and justice that are suitable for all (Shepherd et al., 2018). This study adds to the literature researching the influence a morally based biblical education can have on displaying moral courage in a moral dilemma. The opportunity to describe faith, values, and morals in these decisions established specific themes to clarify the authenticity of the phenomenon. The research assisted the participant in a deeper level of understanding of personal values and faith in everyday decisions.

### **Practical Significance**

People have certain morals due to their experiences and upbringing. Outside influences, such as governmental policies and society, affect attitudes and values. Whether one demonstrates morality or not is an individual choice. Religious values provide a solid ground for understanding the benefits of personal sacrifices of comfort for moral behavior, spiritual joy, and happiness to delve deeper into relationships with one another and our surroundings (Chuvieco, 2012; Joines, 2019). Fear of ostracism, unease, or censure can directly result from one's moral courage and organizational stagnation or decline (Simola, 2016). The righteous acts of courage can positively affect the individual and a companywide infrastructure by expanding the focus of the moral action to systemic change, holistic, and authentic cultivation of a company's ethics and values (Simola, 2016). This study sought to identify the personal reaction to acting upon these morals. Does an individual have the will to be an example for right when challenged with

wrong?

In this case, Christians can be courageous, exemplify their faith, and demonstrate righteousness. The personal lived experience of one's morals and values in situations calls for a Christian representation in the world. Christians have a calling to God's will on this earth. This phenomenological study allowed Christians to share and maintain their faith in the workplace when faced with a moral dilemma. It provided an opportunity for personal growth and Christian institutions and society to understand the actual pressures, influences, values, and integrity present in a Christian follower. The study provided an opportunity to gain insight into a Christian moral education in the teaching, understanding, and application of values present in their students.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are to establish participant perspectives, reasoning, and personal accounts of their life experiences. Identifying one's morals and values to develop a foundation of faith and belief provides a background for decision-making. Understanding the decision-making process and the experiences participants encounter is critical to this study's development and the research questions.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are educated Christian graduates' experiences regarding the decisions to demonstrate professional moral courage in the work environment?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What are the lived experiences of Christian-educated graduates with internal conflict and initial gut reaction demonstrating professional moral courage when confronted with an ethical dilemma in the workplace?

#### **Sub-Question Two**



How does the Christian-educated graduate describe the experience of the influences that resulted in demonstrating or not demonstrating professional moral courage?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How does faith play a role in the lived experiences of educated Christian graduates in the decision process of professional moral courage?

### **Definitions**

1. *Christian education*- teaches religious morality for personal development and its positive contributions, creating a society of justice, civility, and respectfulness for all (Barnes, 2011).
2. *Innate*- structured before the experience (Haidt, 2013).
3. *Moral courage*- is a person's ability to overcome fear, stand up for their values and principles, listen, and be an advocate despite conflicting obligations (Afar et al., 2019).
4. *Personal values*- an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or ending-state existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of behavior or end-state (Rokeach, 1973)
5. *Professional moral courage*- is an innate virtue brought to light with the willingness to act in response to a moral or ethical dilemma (Sekerka et al., 2009).

### **Summary**

The problem is that post-graduate Christian students struggle to demonstrate moral courage in the workplace. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. When presented with moral dilemmas, this study addressed educated Christian graduates' lived experiences, reasoning, faith, and belief systems. The

willingness of a Christian to make the morally correct decision when presented with a dilemma is a challenge, providing a basis for this study to find the innate response and will of the participant to elicit moral courage. Through their lived experiences, Christian graduates shared their intrapersonal challenges to rationalize their decisions. An opportunity presented self-reflection and interpretation of the decision-making process to provide a clearer understanding and self-actualization. The moral foundation's theory offered a theoretical framework for this process. It facilitates an understanding of the moral reasoning behind the decisions of Christian graduates when presented with a moral or ethical dilemma. The research allowed Christian higher education institutions to understand and implement a curriculum drenched in biblical teachings and the application of morality and righteousness for their students.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The literature review in Chapter 2 addresses the current literature on this research topic: The lived experiences of Christian graduates' willingness to express moral courage when confronted with a moral dilemma in the workplace. The study's theoretical framework, the moral foundations theory by Haidt and Craig (2009), is described including the composition of five foundations, the reasoning, and the application of this theory to this study. This theory is explained in terms of moral courage, moral emotions, moral decisions, moral stereotypes, and moral education in secular and Christian individuals. Current literature is utilized to elaborate on this theory's relevance to the participants' lived experiences and values. In addition, the literature reviewed in this chapter provides a background of current research on the value of moral education in higher education institutions, particularly Christian-based institutions. A summary presented the relevance of the literature, the present gap, and the benefits of the proposed research study to Christians and higher education institutions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Moral foundations theory is divided into five foundations, which are differentiated into binding and individualized categories (Haidt & Craig, 2004).

The moral foundations theory consists of five foundations:

1. Care/Harm- emotional reaction or virtue of caring/compassion, empathy.
2. Fairness/Reciprocity- virtues based upon justice and equality.
3. Loyalty/Ingroup- group membership obligations and relationships with outsiders.
4. Authority/Respect- social order and values of authority, obedience, and role

delineation

5. Sanctity/purity- physical and spiritual values concerning human behavior and wholesomeness (Chen et al., 2016; Haidt et al., 2009; Romig et al., 2018; Smith & Hatemi, 2021; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020).

Research shows that the moral foundations theory is an automatic, intuitive response that shapes moral behavior below the consciousness level (Greenway et al., 2019). Moral reasoning acts as a secondary guide to one's actions. This innate, initial "gut reaction" is why this study proceeds to find its presence in the moral experiences of Christian-educated graduates. The initial reaction and willingness to abide by one's Christian faith for moral and ethical responsibility is an excellent example of a compromising dilemma.

The phenomenological approach to this study presented a defined understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Intuition, thinking, and processing of information, personal reflection, and the entire decision-making is an individual experience that no one besides the individual can truly comprehend the intellect occurring in one's brain. The results may guide a Christian higher education institutions' change in moral leadership roles. A 2019 study demonstrates that each person has value and a position of influence in society, where they live together in support and self-empowerment through lessons learned (Mays & Brevetti, 2019). Morals can be the self-empowered act to be righteous.

The moral foundations theory began with Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph, who presented that morality is innate and learned (Haidt & Craig, 2004). This theory arose from fundamental elements in all cultures: reciprocity, loyalty, respect, limitation on physical harm, and regulations of eating and sexuality, to which clinical empiricist and nativist approaches apply. Empiricists believe morals are learned in childhood. The empiricist named Isaac Newtown (Stanley, 2017) was influenced by his scientific and religious interests. Nativists

believe morals develop through evolutionary processes (Haidt & Craig, 2004).

The idea that humans have an intuitive ethic (innate) moral preparedness to approve or disapprove of events affecting other human beings based on suffering, hierarchy, reciprocity, and purity was identified in the work of Haidt and Craig (2004). Unconscious reactions or responses (emotions) to an event emerge within oneself, a “gut feeling” or “I know it in my heart.” An individual consciously will attempt to rationalize and justify this feeling, grounding their innate response. Research utilizing moral foundations theory to elaborate and outline the first gut reaction is guided by the need to address common recurring adaptive social challenges (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). This reaction changes according to one’s experiences within one’s culture. Then, moral judgment reflects the first intuitive response about the foundations for a morally reasoned conclusion (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). The first reaction precedes rationale. This was the gut reaction of an educated Christian graduate to formulate this proposed study. The search for the first response and the carry-through into the moral decision-making process of one’s underlying values when presented with a moral dilemma.

Previous studies have found that the five foundations consist of care/harm, fairness/reciprocity, loyalty/in-group, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity Care/harm-emotional reaction or virtue of caring/compassion, empathy (Chen et al., 2016; Haidt et al., 2009; Romig et al., 2018; Smith & Hatemi, 2021; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020). This theory provides a framework to compare the moral courage decisions in individuals when presented with an ethical and moral dilemma in the workplace. Moral foundations theory is commonly used in predicting political orientations, and moral judgments and behavior are firmly embedded in a social-cultural context (Feldman, 2021; Graham & Haidt, 2010). Further, there is a theoretical belief that personal values are linked to moral intuitions (Feldman, 2021; Graham & Haidt, 2010). This is the moral foundation of this study. The aim was to identify this

underlying intuitive reaction, the decision-making process, and individual experiences concerning the values of a Christian-educated graduate.

### **Related Literature**

Related literature comprises several areas related to the moral foundation's theory, morality, faith, and higher education. The subject matter can take this research on an extensive journey. This literature review focuses on identifying the past and present research concerning these areas to compare all participants' personal experiences.

### **Moral Education**

Christian education teaches religious morality for personal development and its positive contributions to creating a society of justice, civility, and respectfulness for all (Barnes, 2011). A Christian education is a type of education whereby a Christian religious worldview determines the curriculum, teaching, and other educational practices to train the intellect, the emotion, and the will to work in harmony to effectively influence the world from a lens with a focus on a supreme creator, God (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities philosophy focuses on supporting, protecting, and promoting the value of integrating the Bible, divinely inspired, accurate, and authoritative, throughout all curricular and co-curricular aspects of the educational experience on our campuses, including teaching and research (Hammond, 2019).

Christian education's teaching philosophy focuses on developing values and morals for one's character in the image of God. Christian higher education institutions are obligated to encourage students to think and explore personal meaning from a Christian perspective to understand the world, not from a self-centered view, but one in love and friendship to make a profound impact personally and worldly (Wells, 2016). Christian higher education cultivates a biblical orientation for its graduates in virtues and morals with the understanding of future

application in daily life (Wells, 2016). This is reiterated in biblical teachings: all living things share a relationship and a connection, and this bond through awareness and education builds communities of values and ethical decision-making for all with a reflection of God's creativity (Chandler, 2021).

Christian colleges have been shown as the foundation and continual guide of Christian moral traditions in the current higher education system (Hansen, 2021). Furthermore, the research addresses higher education to limit morality by teaching toward one's freedom, whereby the individual is focused on pursuing personal material desires (Hansen, 2021). A second study reinforces the moral foundation's theory with religion (Milojev et al., 2014). Their research concerning a New Zealand population showed that one's religious orientation was directly correlated with having high morals and an affinity to the binding moral foundations (Milojev et al., 2014). Christian students share a moral foundation in their lives: the Bible.

The Bible provides a basis for morals and values that encourage integrity, honor, and courage in the reader. Moral foundations theory encompasses systems of values, virtues, psychological mechanisms, and social norms to interact with the suppression of selfishness and facilitate social interactions (Johnson et al., 2016). Ephesians 6:14 says, "Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness." (New Living Translation, 2007). Being honest and truthful takes courage. It implies being selfless to be honorable to God for the greater good of one's peers, culture, community, and society.

The aim of education is the formation of an entirely virtuous person (Formosa, 2019). The essence of personal analysis and reflection on values and principles is not only a guide but as an inspiration of motivation to do something meaningful and right to fabricate a virtuous person (Duta, 2018). A Christian education addresses applying these values in personal relationships with one's peers, culture, community, and society (Horowski, 2020). An

institutional education with clear theology, practical application, values, and motives helps to build a foundation for a better society (Hammond, 2019). Entangled in this philosophy are the opportunities for personal growth, reflection, and spiritual development.

In the past, this entanglement of values with others was evident as yielding to one another was part of our daily lives to a barely noticeable degree: ordinary grace (Goodman, 2022). The result is a higher understanding of personal morals and values and the significant effect on their daily relationships and surroundings. It provides an opportunity to be empowered and act in Jesus' name, demonstrating truth, honesty, and open-mindedness: values that foster the moral foundations of a higher education institution (Damon et al., 2018; Goodman, 2022).

A learning community that facilitates opportunities for an individual's moral development is present in the Christian college as the foundation and continual guide of Christian moral traditions in the current higher education system (Hansen, 20121; Horowski, 2020). However, secular higher education institutions limit morality by teaching toward one's freedom, whereby the individual is focused on pursuing personal material desires (Hansen, 2021). This study addressed the Christian-education role in moral intuition.

Religiosity (strength of one's religious conviction) was shown to directly correlate with self-regulating traits that affect one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors comprising their personality, which reflect religious principles, values, and teachings (Toh et al., 2021). Religiosity predicts the relevance of one's values when challenged in situations to what one should do to be moral (Sverdlik & Rechter, 2020). A second study shows a connection between religiosity, spirituality, and virtues and the foundations of care/harm in medical students (Shepherd et al., 2018). Spirituality correlates directly with empathic compassion, and the care/harm foundation predicted generosity from moral intuitions (Shepherd et al., 2018). Morality judgments are shaped by one's religiosity (Sverdlik & Rechter, 2020). Higher



education curriculums in caregiver professions are encouraged to foster spiritual growth due to their influence on the care of others stemming from one's moral foundations (Shepherd et al., 2018).

### **Benefits of a Christian Education**

There are personal benefits gained from the application of Christian education. Institutions participating in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) have a higher level of religiosity due to the moral communities' students and faculty participate in thorough formal and informal interactions (Hill, 2009). One example of a Christian education's benefit is from Hammond (2019)- The Bebbington Quadrilateral of a Christian education's academic model: Firstly, Biblicism- devotion to the Bible as God's word. Secondly, Crucicentrism- puts the cross of Christ in the center of evangelical teaching and preaching. Thirdly, Activism- acting out one's faith through good works in society. Lastly, Conversionism- every person turns away from sin, believes in Christ for salvation, and lives a life of discipline (Hammond, 2019). This is evident in Matthew 16:24, Jesus says to his disciples: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." (New Living Translation, 2007). And in Matthew 16:26, "And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul." (New Living Translation, 2007).

There are benefits of religious values and practices that generate greater satisfaction and commitment to fellow employees (Hussain et al., (2021). Secular, educated individuals view pluralism as satisfying to all by placing the representation of religious education and morality as separate entities, allowing separation of their reasoning to conform to their views accordingly (Barnes, 2011). This separation of morality and religion directly affects one's decision-making rationale. This is evidenced by the fact that the students who cheat in college are more likely to cheat in their professional work fields, increasing social corruption (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020).

However, ethical pedagogy generates self-reflection and functionality across societal and political matters, whereby the teaching space permits growth and understanding of social justice for all (Klaasen, 2020).

Furthermore, religious moralities have positively contributed to personal development and created a just society where civility and respect are present (Barnes, 2011). British education identifies 24 different “dispositions” or moral qualities, such as being courageous and confident, being thankful, being fair and just, sharing and being generous, and being open, honest, and truthful (Barnes, 2011). All such qualities are present in the moral foundation’s theory. More importantly, these qualities are all linked to religious content (Barnes, 2011). These are the natural characteristics of a Christian portrayed in the armor of God in Ephesian 6:13-17 (New Living Translation, 2007).

As referenced in the literature, these qualities, values, morals, or attributes set an environment of moral obligation to one another, promoting understanding, tolerance, and compassion across cultures, genders, races, and ethnicities (Klaasen, 2020). Another study showed that 85% of students believe moral values and principles are essential for developing one’s career, especially in the areas of teamwork and cooperation (80%) and tolerance and mutual respect (74%) (Duta, 2018). A Christian education exemplifies education as a means by which character is built and beliefs are woven with behavior and virtues instilled into young people who will eventually become leaders in this world (Abolarin & Babalolas, 2020).

An education based on morals and values teaches integrity, honesty, and the importance of others. The Bible gives us the Ten Commandments, the ninth of which is in Exodus 20:16, “You must not testify falsely against your neighbor,” (New Living Translation, 2007). In Matthew 19:19, Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (New Living Translation, 2007). Applying these commandments to our morals perpetuates a Godly interpersonal relationship

interwoven in solidarity, comradery, and a morality-based foundation.

A separate study questioned the appropriateness of the effectiveness of Christian colleges and seminaries in moral maturity (Dirks, 1988). His study referenced Kohlberg's theory of moral development concerning spiritual developmental maturity from the beginning, as stated in 1 Corinthians 3:1, "people who are still worldly- mere infants in Christ" to Hebrews 5:14, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (New International Version 2007). A point was observed that evangelical students were mediocre in mature or principle reasoning due to Christians' inability to relate biblical principles to life's challenging situations (Dirks, 1988). He further suggests teaching challenging reasoning to apply biblical principles to personal life. A second study reiterates Dirks' (1988) original analysis: providing education on morals and values promotes internal change and an attitude of personal reflection of one's behavior with the opportunity to affect interpersonal behaviors at work and in society in the image of God (Duta, 2018).

These studies challenge the current framework of pedagogy (Dirks, 1988; Duta, 2018). They represent the challenges of this study. If students are Christian educated but never mature in their Christian faith through education, how can we expect them to be an example of Christ in the workplace? How can they apply academic teaching to life? How can they overcome fear and react instinctively to make morally righteous decisions if they are not spiritually mature? Recent research clarifies these answers of higher education as a place for solid moral good (Monaghan, 2022). Higher education creates a connection to moral virtues producing a morally righteous character in a student, which benefits their family, community, nation, and the world (Monaghan, 2022). Higher education transforms the student intellectually and morally to participate actively in society.

Thirty-four years after Dirk's (1988) study, a research article corroborates his findings,

with 61% of the United States population believing that higher education is going in the wrong direction (Rine et al., 2022). Research shows dissatisfaction with the system and questions professional ethics (Rine et al., 2022). These findings were corroborated in a study at Babcock University, which demonstrated that a few bad apples could ruin the bunch (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). A survey of 36 institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU) found that professional codes of conduct built public confidence by instilling a sense of ethical morality in faculty and students (Rine et al., 2022). In particular, the principles of conduct were highest for moral turpitude tenets, which outlined faculty members' sexual boundaries with students, the refrain from drugs and alcohol intoxication, and the non-harassment of students (Rine et al., 2022). These codes exemplify integrity and morality for all students to demonstrate in their lives.

Christian education is morally focused. It takes the biblical teachings of Christianity and applies the Bible to the students, faculty, and administration with an attitude to reflect God to make a difference in this world (Barnes, 2011; Dirks, 1988; Duta, 2018). Yes, the process can have flaws, particularly in one's actions. Christians reflect the morally based teachings of Jesus Christ (New Living Translation, 2007). Education is a foundation to experience the true meaning of Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit (Hammond, 2019). As Christians, we make a daily choice to pray and honor our heavenly Father, Ephesians 6:18 says, "Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion." (New Living Translation, 2007). It is challenging, but when we return daily to scripture, listen, and apply it to our educational background, we can be the image and child of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to a society and world that has lost the meaning of morals, values, and understanding for one another. 1 Timothy 2:1 says, "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them, intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them." (New Living Translation).

Other research focuses on the benefits of applying and teaching morality and intellectual virtues in higher education curriculums (Baehr, 2013; Dustman, 2018; Nelson, 2004). Further research demonstrates the importance of a guide for higher education institutions to teach emotional intelligence biblically (Dustman, 2018). Teaching Christian and secular educated students how to control their emotions in the decision-making process maintains sovereignty with God for Christians, reinforces God's word, and resolves conflicts by managing emotions in situations.

The application of a deep curriculum involving themes of courage, heart, passion, and the inner life of a teacher to prevent burnout and limit success was assessed in one study (Valtierra & Michalec, 2017). They identified stressors, societal intrusions, values, and the remembrance of their passion for teaching about self-identity and self-awareness. Self-identity and self-awareness of personal values establish a basis for success as a teacher. The components of courage, values, and heart comprise individuals, directly affecting their decisions and responses (Valtierra & Michalec, 2017). A change to higher education policies focusing on minimizing these tensions (stressors) promotes the sensibility of a teacher's roles and a positive self and professional identity (McCune, 2021).

Higher education should be understood as a public good, not a consumer good, because it creates a morally just society through the individual fulfilling societal demands (Espinoza, 2017). Wong (2020) explains that students believe the university has a responsibility to equip students to become the type of person that promotes the good of society through developing critical thinking for moral inquiry. Higher education allows molding the students' minds by sharing their life experiences and perspectives in active discussions, understanding personal morals and ethics, and challenging their current beliefs for future contributions to society (Wong, 2020).

The modernized world loses tradition because everything is fast-paced and complex (Broer et al., 2017). Our reactions become reflexive instead of reflective. The moral foundations theory of intuition interweaves with this world. Christian higher education institutions can be a resource to mend traditional religious beliefs with fast-paced worldly demands (Barnes, 2011; Broer et al., 2017). A Christian education builds a relationship between personality and professionalism, professionalism and spirituality, and interpersonal professional relationships (Broer et al., 2017). These studies exemplify the necessity of Christian education to build students into professionals characterized by the virtues of faith, hope, and love to honor God by being disciples of their beliefs (Barnes, 2011; Broer et al., 2017). Professionals whose character reflects grounded traditional biblical morals inspire peers to follow a biblically righteous path to impact their community and world (Broer et al., 2017; Hammond, 2019).

### **Moral Courage**

Kouzes and Posner (2017) discuss how a leader “must have the courage to be human and the courage to be humble.” (p.307). Courage is letting your guard down to do the right thing in a situation you cannot control (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Proverbs 3:27 says, “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to help them.” (New Living Translation, 2007). The importance of Christians’ role in society as examples of Christ, to be servants of God and others to glorify his kingdom, is evident (Erwich and van der Stoep, 2017; Kinghorn, 2019; McEwen et al., 2018). Individuals share the morals given to them through the grace of God in every situation, with the courage to act righteously in the face of risk. Moral courage is the humility to admit mistakes and humble oneself (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Ganu, 2018). Moral courage is further defined as rejecting evil conformity, denouncing injustice, and defying immoral or imprudent orders to take the appropriate action (Ganu, 2018).

The moral of integrity was described as a firm adherence to a code of morals and values, maintaining a condition of incorruptible, unimpaired, and undivided morals to live by their word without compromise (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). Friedrich Neitzsche sums up Christian moral courage as an individual whose Christian beliefs provide a foundation for morality but are absolved in those who sunder with their Christianity (Zmirak, 2019). Christian morals stand on one's faith to instill the courage to act according to scripture when faced with inevitable negative consequences. These values help us to grow and develop (Duta, 2018). Morals were outlined in the Ten Commandments and Jesus' sermons. An educated Christian student is taught morals based on scripture. Learning and understanding scripture is an intellectual thought process; applying scripture to life is actively participating in the fulfillment of others.

Philosophers: such as Aristotle, Kant, Tillich, May, and MacIntyre are referenced for various definitions of moral courage (White, 2015). There are levels to demonstrate moral courage and are situationally dependent. Utilizing different philosophies and purposes of moral courage collaboratively describe moral courage as a set of principles, values, or characteristics that can be developed, are principle-driven, recognize the danger involved to demonstrate a persistent willingness and determination of self-sacrifice to endure hardship for those suffering (White, 2015). In addition, moral courage bridges the gap between knowing and upholding one's values and professional obligations and acting on them despite risks such as social ostracism, embarrassment, loss of employment, and fear of harm or vulnerability (Bickhoff et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a study demonstrates moral courage as a virtue that can be developed into a natural part of one's behavior (Pajakoski et al., 2020). This courage can be strengthened through education, self-study (reflection), and support from managers in organizations, as evidenced in the nursing field (Pajakoski et al., 2020). This moral courage emerges even in the presence of

the fear or threat of negative consequences or repercussions (Bickhoff et al., 2016; Pajakoski et al., 2020). This is the courage Christians follow—stepping onto the path of moral righteousness and integrity. In many respects, sacrificing oneself for the greater good of others. Moral distress, regarding moral courage, occurs when a person knows the correct action but is constrained from taking it (Gibson et al., 2020). Another study of clinical nurses identifies active awareness of problems that results in displaying courage, cooperatively speaking up, and persistent action to address the underlying meaning and background of these problems (Jameton, 2017). This is the courage to seek a justifiable resolution dependent upon one's values—the insight and will to act righteously (Jameton, 2017).

Moral courage is an individual challenge. A personal dilemma can involve one or more of the five moral foundations (Haidt, 2008). The virtues of compassion and care present in the moral foundations theory facilitate and guide responses to situations encountered in this world to bring peace and harmony to the conditions and within the individual (Romig et al., 2018). A third value, integrity, was found to provide personal moral conviction of acting righteously in all circumstances (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). Moral foundations are a guide to planning to demonstrate or withhold moral courage. Caring, justice, and bravery were three characteristics justifying moral courage and action in undergraduate students at a private Catholic University (Sonnentag et al., 2018). Individuals who demonstrate moral courage are sometimes labeled “moral rebels” (Sonnentag et al., 2018). No matter the label, these students had the moral courage to respond appropriately to the ethical dilemma presented. One key conclusion of these studies was that students acted and willfully chose the right path based on their morals despite social pressures (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2018).

Higher education could provide a moral education that facilitates inner change and promotes interpersonal relationships through cooperation, honesty, compassion, mutual respect,



and forgiveness for the betterment of the individual and the parties (Duta, 2018). Duta's observations were substantiated in a study that showed a Christian education drenched in theological reflection, and teaching builds virtues and insight for a broader context in students (Wells, 2016). These conclusions are intricate to this study's purpose of identifying the presence of moral courage in Christian-educated students in the workplace.

### **Morals and Emotions**

The moral foundations theory states that emotions are stirred up innately, causing moral intuitions for a given response (Chen et al., 2016; Haidt & Craig, 2004; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020). Research reflects this in a study of employees who were allowed to express their moral values and participate in the decision-making process; this act increased their sense of control, satisfaction, and autonomy in their jobs (Xu & Yu, 2019). This stimulated a change in attitude and behavior with higher moral satisfaction. Personal resolution to be better can gradually progress by cultivating a change of mores through practicing being good (Formosa, 2019). This allows one to strengthen one's commitment to morality in bad situations.

Neuroscience research shows emotions often trump rational factors, and our initial, intuitive response to a topic is a much more accurate read on our true feelings than a post-rationalized view on a debate (Trayner, 2017). These studies show that organizations must change people's perspectives, communications, and discussions to be rooted in core values and entice a broader array of emotions to provide resolution through moral change and application (Formosa, 2019; Sekerka et al., 2009; Schwepker et al., 2019; Trayner, 2017).

Two studies of 392 participants corroborate previous research in a direct correlation between moral foundations and emotions (Chen et al., 2016; Li et al., 2016). A further study reinforces these findings present in 156 junior-level employee participants working in a foreign-invested manufacturing company in Eastern China confirmed a positive change in behavior

when ethical models are incorporated into the workplace (Xu & Yu, 2019). Similarly, nursing students demonstrated moral courage when they felt a strong emotional connection with their patients, placed themselves in the patient's shoes, and reminisced emotions from previous life experiences (Bickhoff et al., 2016). Good physicians who scored high in the harm/care foundation correlated with empathetic compassion and interpersonal generosity (Shepherd et al., 2018). Morals and values directly affect our emotions. Positive or negative emotions are forthcoming, pending the situation.

Recent research revealed that as a culture's level of modernization progresses, moral anger is more prevalent in ethics violations (Chen et al., 2016). They elaborate on three forms of moral anger: personal anger (perceived unnecessary harm to oneself), empathic anger (anger when someone else is hurt), and moral outrage (anger in response to a violation of ethical standards and principles) (Chen et al., 2016). These three forms of anger address the current research topic concerning the underlying cause of the differences between secular and Christian-educated individuals and their moral will to act accordingly. This qualitative research topic accounted for the underlying emotions in the courage to react based on one's morals. Further research by Li et al. (2016) provides evidence that certain feelings coincide with certain moral foundations, personal beliefs, and values. These emotions were tied to religion and secular values. The same emotions stir reactions to identify if moral courage is enacted. 70% of responses shared do nothing (Ganu, 2018). Courage is the difference maker in moral values.

Christian graduates' experiences are challenged daily by new challenges and dilemmas, and their Christian morals can be questioned. These research articles provide evidence of the relationship between morals, emotions, and behaviors in the moral foundation's theory (Ganu, 2018; Li et al., 2016). The research establishes a building block to understand and investigate the participating graduates' cognition, spirituality, and will when morally challenge.

Corporate leaders and mentors in any field must build their entities with a focus on core morality and strategies to reflect and observe values and morals that motivate employees. In comparison, an environment facilitating unethical behaviors to fabricate an attractive outward appearance promotes a corrupt environment, employee dissatisfaction, fear, and, in many cases, a hostile environment (Ivcevic et al., 2020). One in four employees is pressured to do the wrong thing in the United States (Ivcevic et al., 2020). Establishing a work environment involving understanding staff emotions in their contributions and interactions and accepting the unconscious factors that shape one's behavior allows individual perspectives to have a confident voice in the decision-making process for the company's benefit (Trayner, 2017). Moral foundations theory shows the values that motivate individuals, their perspectives, and a framework for moral integrity and resolution (Trayner, 2016).

The moral foundations theory was applied to professionals in the workplace who act intuitively without considering the full impact of their actions, only to rationalize the behavior after the incident was studied by Hauser (2020). The influence of a company and work environment plays a crucial role in positively and negatively affecting employee well-being through unethical behavior (Schwepker et al., 2019). Research shows that strengthening employee intuition and gut reaction through various training approaches and applying this knowledge to ethical situations teaches employees to act accordingly (Hauser, 2020; Sekerka et al., 2009). Negative influences prevent the implementation of righteous behavior. The research presents a comprehensive educational training approach necessary to bridge the gap from knowledge to practice (Hauser, 2020). Research has shown that ethical organizations create ethical climates that decrease employee stress and well-being and proactively develop employees' vitality, personal growth initiatives, and learning on the job (Schwepker et al., 2019). This environment encourages employee retention, improves individual and peer performance,

and creates an opportunity for ethical resolutions.

Moral foundations theory was researched regarding deviant behavior (behaviors committed “outside the workplace or off-duty that are deviant by organizational and societal standards) outside of the workplace and the implications presented internally due to the social media platform (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). These posts influence co-workers and managerial/ employer decisions and policies such that the observers (third party) condemn or approve the firings of these deviants concerning the behavior violating their moral foundation synchronizing in agreement with organizational leaders and others (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). Our conscience leads to ethical intention, behavior, and decisions (Sulaiman et al., 2022). Deviant behaviors lack conscience and the guilt associated with violating moral standards. Moral education in students improves ethical judgment, minimizing unethical behavior (Sulaiman et al., 2022). These studies reiterate the presence of innate reactions and morals as a standard for action.

This study focuses on Christian-educated employees in situations presenting a moral dilemma, behaviors challenging their values, and the willingness to stand up for what is right. Christian-educated employees behave with a moral code to set a precedent for colleague perceptions. Their example may establish a crucial point to influence their organizations' policy, ethical decisions, and morale.

A research study sought the relationships between the personal values presented by Schwartz’s model of multidimensional circular proportions and Graham and Haidt’s moral foundations theory (Feldman, 2021). Schwartz’s model of multidimensional circular proportions consists of two bipolar dimensions: self-enhancement (power and achievement) versus self-transcendence (benevolence and universalism) and openness-to-change (self-direction and stimulation) versus conservation (tradition, security, and conformity) (Feldman, 2021). He compared this through a mini-meta-analysis to Haidt et al. (2009) five domains of

moral judgment (Moral Foundations Theory).

The results strongly correlate Schwartz's conservation and self-enhancement values with the moral foundation's binding domains (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Feldman, 2021). A strong correlation between self-transcendence and openness to change with the individualizing moral foundations was apparent. Politically speaking, conservation and self-enhancing values are correlated with the conservative party, and the self-transcending and openness-to-change values are directly associated with the liberal perspective (Feldman, 2021; Graham et al., 2009).

Feldman's research precedes this study by identifying an opportunity to understand a Christian participant's values and moral foundations. The research provides a frame of reference to compare the values experienced and the conflicting internal tensions to make an ethical decision. This is an opportunity for Christian higher education institutions to instill a value system of biblical proportions in their students. This study applied the moral foundations theory to student intuition and the practice of moral courage in life. It sets a precedent for Christian institutions to establish a curriculum of policies and procedures put in values every student can firmly place their beliefs, confidence, and behaviors now and in the future.

### **Morals and the Decision-making Process**

Christians, as believers in Christ, are new people. A Christian's character is an ensemble of habits, traits, capacities, and inclinations (Gill, 2004). Decision-making is more than a skill. It reflects one's character. Christian decision-making originates from a generous, honest character that habitually respects and values all people as made in the image of God (Gill, 2004; Jones et al., 2018). This is further corroborated by the decisions one makes that reflect their values and beliefs directed toward a specific purpose: an individual or organizational purpose (Duta, 2018).

Suppose Christians respect God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In that case, the decision-making process in a moral dilemma will consider all parties involved,

conflicts, resolutions, and repercussions, with a decision reflecting one's moral character and resemblance to God. This belief is perceptively contrary to secular societies, which are regarded as 'less moral' and respectful to one another (Barnes, 2011). Honoring God with our choices demonstrates a profound respect for his creations and biblical teachings. Christians will listen to their innate "gut" response guided by their Biblical values, showing honor and courage to all stakeholders. Christians have an innate call to act according to God's call and are responsible for making choices to positively impact themselves and others (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Yonker et al., 2019). Luke 11:33 says, "No one lights a lamp and then hides it or puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where its light can be seen by all who enter the house." (New Living Translation, 2007). An example of this light is Christian ethics (or moral theology). Christian ethics is a theological discipline that critically reflects human behavior in every sphere of life-based on ethical norms, obligations, and values concerned with moral character and promoting moral action (Kretzschmar, 2014).

Human conflict is complex. The courage to address conflict is even more challenging. The study of one university found that by allowing communication of people to air their frustrations and concerns to the appropriate committee, they actively participate in the decision-making process for the improvement of the university's programs and function (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). This is an opportunity for all rankings of staff and students to encourage holistic growth and development of the entire body for the good of God (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020). A resolution grounded in character with a heart of empathy and compassion, balancing the values of others for the betterment of all through the wisdom of Christ-led leadership (Jones et al., 2018).

Further research found that the ability to recollect one's thoughts, discern internal emotions and feelings, and act according to personal values was necessary for decision-making

(Pawl et al., 2021). Identifying the innate or habitual response to work according to one's values occurs through practice and reflection on various scenarios to fortify the morally righteous act (Pawl et al., 2021). The ability to understand oneself and the inner reaction to a situation directly corresponds to the will to act through the self-actualization of morality. Self-actualization is developed through higher education ministering (Leihy & Salazar, 2017). This is described as "sensitivity" to a moral foundation, which varies among people within a culture and their life experiences concerning their values that influence their moral decisions (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). Christians have a biblical moral code at the forefront of their intuition. Following this code is challenging. God's gift is to guide humanity to honor him with one's courage. Proverbs 12:17 says, "He who speaks truth declares righteousness, But a false witness, deceit." (New King James Version, 2002).

The biblical reference: "A false witness bears deceit" (New King James Version, 2002) pertains to a person's integrity. Such words describe people with integrity as honesty, authenticity, truthfulness, and ethics as a synonym for integrity. Honesty is the number one characteristic of admired leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Integrity in an individual leader is present when one holds steady to God's teachings. Integrity displays gratitude, a thankfulness of others through an understanding that one's abilities are limited but elevated from others (Yonker, et al., 2019). Christian leaders are humble followers of God's agenda, purpose, and plan (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

A person with integrity stands by their word (moral values) and is grateful to others. They are comparing this leader to a vulnerable leader, described as an individual who is transparent and open to emotional exposure in one's relationship with others (Prinsloo & de Klerk, 2020). Research shows that individuals with Christian educational backgrounds who practice gratitude and prayer develop prosocial attitudes and corporate virtues for long-lasting

positive relations in their surroundings (Yonker et al., 2019). Furthermore, unrestrained integrity resembles narcissism, self-righteousness pushing humility and vulnerability to become absent (Prinsloo & de Klerk, 2020). The results of their research establish a direct correlation between vulnerability and integrity positively impacting moral character and leader attractiveness, which are critical components to facilitating a healthy and ethical workplace and society (Prinsloo & de Klerk, 2020). Vulnerability is a value that allows a person to be relatable.

As an individual, whether you are a leader or follower, vulnerability and integrity are attributes that provide a sense of security in others. They establish a common bond, a level playing field to converse and confide in one another. Characteristics that contribute to courage. In Philippians 2:3-4, “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for own interests, but take an interest in others, too” (The New Living Translation, 2007). Having a Christian heart means serving. It is doing the righteous act when the world expects the wrong. It involves being honest and vulnerable in times when others are in need. Christian practices teach that we are created in God’s image, designed for a relationship with God and others, and are the foundations of God’s will here on earth to create transformation in individuals (Yonker et al., 2019). The Christian moral of integrity is following one’s beliefs and values in unprecedented situations.

Professional moral courage, morals, and ethical decisions are ever-present in the workplace. Leadership makes daily decisions that profoundly affect employees, stakeholders, customers, and the direction of a business. Current research focuses on management or supervisory-level decisions (Erwich & van der Stoep, 2017; Schroeder, 2018). A positive correlation and benefits of moral efficacy in decision-making are present when confronted by an abusive supervisor (Afsar et al., 2019; Mostafa, 2019). In another study, there was a direct correlation between virtues and the process of moral reasoning in ethical decisions and moral



responsibility (Small & Lew, 2017).

As the affirmation of this study's theoretical framework being the moral foundations theory, Bezael (2020) described "moral dumbfounding." This study seeks to observe the initial gut reaction described in the moral foundations theory and its pertinence to moral reasoning in decision-making. This is evident and confirmed by studying integrity in individuals (Bezael, 2020). He identifies this moral dumbfounding as moral intuitions lack reasoning.

A similar study investigated various philosophies of reason in moral judgment, identifying the presence of moral intuitions as an underlying meaning of one's moral judgments (Kihlstrom, 2013). For instance, one can justify helping another in need instead of going to church because this act is an example of God's love and his will in us to demonstrate the morally correct option of helping another as observed from God's perspective (Fasoli, 2017). This is evident in education. The observation is that the pluralist moral outlook must appreciate the nuances and subtleties of people's differing beliefs and practices, and that topics of controversy require engagement within (Bezael, 2020). Christian education has the opportunity, through moral foundations theory, to establish a curriculum focused on the ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity to instill in their students understanding, integrity, honor, and a moral code to live out morally right actions in one's life experiences and this world (Bezael, 2020; Fasoli, 2017).

This research sought to identify the moral character of the Christian graduate, self-reflection of faith, and the example of their moral integrity. Their willingness to speak the truth considering their morality. The integrity to demonstrate a righteously, and often courageous, act inspired by moral good and responsibility of oneself in the presence of sin to serve others and honor God (Fasoli, 2017). This act of suppressing selfishness in sacrifice to the needs of the community is evidence of the morality present in the moral foundations and the values of a

Christ-led character (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Jones et al., 2018).

The moral foundations theory outlines five moral foundations present throughout all cultures, as noted previously by Haidt and Craig (2004). The five foundations correlate with an individual's innate reaction. The contribution of Shweder's (1997) work in moral domains identified three distinct clusters of these domains: autonomy, community, and divinity (Romig et al., 2018). Autonomy identifies individuals who independently have a right and freedom for personal fulfillment of wants, needs, and preferences if they do not interfere with other individuals' rights and freedoms (care/harm and fairness/reciprocity foundations).

These first two foundations: care/harm and fairness/reciprocity, are referred to as individualizing (autonomy) foundations, as they provide a framework of laws and norms for individuals to interact positively (Clarke et al., 2020; Simpson & Rios, 2016). The focus is on the individual. The individualizing foundations center on protecting an individual's welfare or rights, especially when confronted with bullying or oppression from influential people or groups (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Another study reiterates that consistency within an individual focus was just that: decisions about morals had low religious fundamentals of external influence (Greenway et al., 2019)—a philosophy based upon personal self-satisfaction.

The community domain is a binding function between the individual and social group's relationship. Moral foundations' binding (community) consists of the ingroup (betrayal)/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity, where moral behaviors are present in group relations. Defining ingroup (betrayal) and loyalty, Graham et al. (2011) describes the effect of the individual building strong alliances with others, in turn, a desire for national and family security. Authority/respect develops hierarchies in groups and demonstrates evidence of obedience, respect for tradition, honoring one's parents, a desire for social order, and approval of corporal punishment (Graham et al., 2011). Conservatives are more aligned with this domain due to moral

belief systems reflecting their community with reference to personal values (Graham et al., 2009; Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2020).

This domain emphasizes ingroup loyalty and authority/respect foundations. In related studies, obedience, roles, and group dynamics are evident as individual needs are sacrificed for others (Haidt et al., 2009; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020). The divinity domain implies that individuals have a spiritual essence that places value on a person's virtuous and moral dignity, which is related to the meaning of their life (Romig et al., 2018). Religious beliefs and principles provide a foundation of truth and guide to live one's life. Regardless of religion, individuals seek to establish decisions based on these principles. Intuitions of right and wrong are present in the decision-making process in this domain. Christian-educated graduates gain knowledge of the relationship between religion and morality, which define and mold their character and actions. (Horowski, 2020).

Furthermore, the purity/sanctity foundation elicits a disgust response, whereby individuals avoid physical contamination and disease (Graham & Haidt, 2010). Purity is associated with religious attendance, values of cleanliness, self-discipline, and negative views toward homosexuals and casual sex (Graham et al., 2011). The binding moral foundations were described as the focus on facilitating or protecting group interests and cohesion to which the individual belongs (Johnson et al., 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2019). These articles were justified in their research by demonstrating a high correlation between religion and morality across the five foundations (Greenway et al., 2019). Further discussion and clarity of the individualizing and binding foundations will be addressed in the later section: morals and stereotypes.

Western cultures are predominantly autonomous (Romig et al., 2018). Western societies emphasize the care/harm and fairness/reciprocity domains (Romig et al., 2018). This is correlated with the history of the United States, whereby independence and civil wars played a

part in the evolution and presence of these foundational morals. This is observed in the rise of evangelical Christians' activism centered on the presidential election rather than the local needs of one's community (Hammond, 2019). In contrast to the autonomy domain, the community domain of loyalty is present in Eastern civilizations and religious/ political conservatives in the United States who utilize an ethic of community reference point when faced with moral concerns (Romig et al., 2018).

A person who has a change of heart seeks personal character change and practices any of these virtues can only cultivate and habituate moral progress (Formosa, 2019). No matter the domain, moral maturity is the ability to identify one's intuitive reaction and act righteously in present and future endeavors. Moral maturity in architects, building engineers, and business developers' transformation of themselves for a societal change (in this case, sustainability) occurs from identifying one's normative values and their implications to their external environment (Johnsen, 2018). In this study, the Christian graduates' understanding of their moral values directly affected their will for courage.

The divinity domain houses the foundation of purity and sanctity. This domain presents the sacred aspect of one's body and life concerning religious principles applied daily (Romig et al., 2018). People who operate out of this domain demonstrate characteristics of spiritually pure, righteous, and moral individuals who incorporate these characteristics into their daily lives (Romig et al., 2018).

No matter the domain or foundation an individual's morals are based, moral foundations theory is present in the decision process. Individual characteristics are observed in one of the foundations. Decisions can be identified in one of these foundations. Intuition plays an intricate role in environmental decision-making under time pressure (Haidt & Craig, 2004; Sun & Zhong, 2021). These findings complement Haidt and Craig's (2004) original study concerning

the moral foundations theory grounded in intuition. It is this observation that brought this research study to the forefront.

Sinful acts contradict God's law because the sin itself is an offense that is directly against God (Ashfield, 2021). One may intuitively know the morally respectful decision to honor God, but the conscious choice to respond immorally in a moral dilemma is sinful. Christians represent this higher moral standard which forms an intimacy with God. Humans are created in the image of God (Joines, 2019; New Living Translation, 2007). Christians, when challenged, need to follow their innate Christ-like teachings to connect and glorify their heavenly Father. Acting with moral righteousness establishes a precedent for future endeavors. Ephesians 6:11 says, "Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil." (New Living Translation, 2007). It is putting on the whole armor of God. The will to follow God and not man's desires.

Kohlberg's cognitive theory of moralization and Piaget's cognitive stage theory are studied to compare how the individual progresses through moral and cognitive development (Reimer, 1977). The stages do not clarify the innate and potential reasons one may or may not act morally. Demonstrating morals according to one's society may not be one's personal moral code or values. However, there is evidence that various societies are identifying the importance of moral education (Wong, 2020).

In the United Kingdom, multiple values are considered crucial elements in different disciplines while teaching; Chile has increased discussions of moral and ethical higher education; and in Hong Kong, a philosophy present in higher education to instill students with moral and ethical values can contribute to "civic engagement" (Wong, 2020). The moral foundations theory will facilitate the underlying intuitive reaction or "gut reaction" of morality as one's response and courage, not a stage of moral and cognitive development to determine

one's judgment, but the learned experiences of their response.

These studies exemplify the rationale for the intuitive process in decision-making. An individual's upbringing, whether secular or Christian, will play a role in their decisions in the workplace. Their moral foundation will be evident. The courage and value to act or not was identified in this study.

### **Morals and Stereotypes**

Diverse groups, people, and cultures have different morals and values. Morals affect one's beliefs, actions, and personality. A study from 2009 shares the observation that people of faith often struggle to connect religious beliefs (morals and values) with their work (Lynn et al., 2009). This relationship takes on many forms, and integration is challenging. Moral virtues have the potential to reach a level of accepting specific challenges for a Christian only if they have a relationship with God (Horowski, 2020). Individuals can be classified as Christians, atheists, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, liberals, conservatives, and more. Either way, there is stereotyping and differentiation. In religious and non-religious groups, fingers are pointed to alienate the other group (Clark et al., 2020). Their research discusses that secular individuals are more likely to support church-state separation, a secular basis for ethics, and have a different political perspective than religious individuals (Clarke et al., 2020). This article relates to atheists being more open to progressive and individual rights (Clarke et al., 2020). Extreme liberals (open to new ideas and behaviors) emphasized the foundations of harm or inequality toward an individual. Extreme conservatives (one who holds traditional values and is reluctant to change) emphasized these exact domains but included the foundations of group-centric values of authority and in-group relations (Clarke et al., 2020; Tansey & Kindsvatter, 2020).

The moral foundations theory identifies moral characteristics which place an individual

in one or several of the five foundations. These characteristics can identify moral values which classify individuals into a stereotype. The theory can help to explain the viewpoints and perspectives of these stereotypes. The mistrust in moral differences present between liberals and conservatives could explain the perceptions between believers and nonbelievers, according to Clark et al. (2020). The claim of moral relativism in higher education has shaped political attitudes and identities, stoking a fire of cultural conflict (Brocic & Miles, 2021). Their research confirms that a higher education degree or higher graduate level promotes a moral profile of truth (moral absolutism) and a change in moral attitudes with an increased concern for others and a weak commitment to traditional social order (Brocic & Miles, 2021).

However, the results identified a decrease in moral relativism, suggesting a higher education instills a greater conviction of moral certainty (Brocic & Miles, 2021). They observed, curiously enough, that as degrees in higher education progress, education does not influence moral concern for others in the moral foundations of care and justice. However, concern for social order decreases as students obtain higher education levels than religiosity, which increases in concern (Brocic & Miles, 2021). The results show that higher education can facilitate moral change but is more focused on innate moral impulses, as described by the moral foundations theory (Brocic & Miles, 2021; Haidt & Craig, 2004).

A study of moral foundations and religiosity found that Christians follow the binding moral foundations of loyalty, authority, and purity (Johnson et al., 2016). This study has similar results to the findings of Rouse (2018). However, their study concludes that Christians have many ways of being religious. Separating the political views evidenced in the moral roots TED Talk with regards to “openness to experience” by Haidt (2008) and Johnson et al. (2016) identify those individual differences in religiosity, particularly in the level of degree of commitment to a religious group, beliefs about the nature of God, and the style of scriptural

interpretation directly predict the U.S. Christian's variability in moral foundation priorities.

As referenced previously, a discussion of operationally defined humility in a Christian sample is the gap between self-adherence and perceived other adherence to religious tenets as the Ten Commandments (Clarke et al., 2020). A notion that presents Christians as motivated to appear suitable rather than to do good in response to social desirability. A similar study found that cultural humility can bridge the gap to enhance tolerance, disarm conflict, and facilitate forgiveness of those individuals whose morals reflect the foundations of care/harm and fairness/reciprocity (McLaughlin et al., 2019). In a study by Clark et al. (2020), 284 college participants were surveyed online using the Likert-type scale: Moral Foundations Questionnaire, of which 151 were Christians, 129 were nonbelievers, and four others. The results of this study, along with Simpson and Rios' (2016) findings, reiterate that believers tend to support all five foundations. In contrast, nonbelievers support the two individualizing foundations of care/harm and fairness/reciprocity. Another study by Simpson and Rios (2017) involved a random survey of 181 Christian believers (67 Protestants, 66 Catholics, 21 Baptists, and 27 Christian-other) who completed the 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire. Results showed Christians viewed atheists as immoral when the caring foundation was of concern. These views create a perceived bias between the two groups. Christians tend to see atheists with lesser morals (Clark et al., 2020). This study showed Christians have a more excellent value to in-group moral behaviors, although at a rate lower than perceived exemplar Christians in moral value, compared with atheists. Also, Christians who attend services regularly were shown to be humbler in the Sanctity foundation.

Religiosity (strong religious beliefs and practices related to a supernatural agent) is a complex, multiply determined phenomenon capitalizing on social and personality psychology theory (Sedikides, 2010). This article's findings referenced and complemented previous research



on the moral foundation's theory as the social aspect of religion in part focused on the group-focused values of in-group or loyalty, authority or respect, and purity or sanctity (Haidt et al., 2009; Sedikides, 2010). However, the article does not identify the individual's conflict or innate struggle in their choices, the missing component of obeying or respecting authority versus choosing the right and moral way when presented with a moral dilemma.

Christians have differences in religiosity across the U.S. and the world. In a study observing people in Western culture demonstrate less affiliation with tradition, such as a religious upbringing, to one of modernization and radical change by secularization reducing the meaning of religion (Broer et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2018). Rouse (2018) agrees, identifying a decrease in reliance on religion (God at the center) and an increased reliance on common sense and science in American culture. Furthermore, Rouse (2018) identifies differences among various American groups about Jesus' morality. However, among these groups: religious unaffiliated- Agnostics perceived his morality as grounded in compassion; and Atheists perceived Jesus as having a higher level of Neuroticism (Rouse, 2018).

In religiously affiliated groups, Non-denominational Christians: higher level in authority than Catholics- Jesus' morality is grounded in authority, loyalty, and purity foundations (Rouse, 2018). As evidenced, each person can have a different perception of Christ and application of his and biblical moral teachings. This does not negate the consistent presence of the moral foundations presented by the Bible and Christian education.

Integrity is consistently honest and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values even when no one else does (Aborlarin & Babalola, 2020). Integrity as a moral provides a standard for fairness and a personal conviction of doing the right thing in all circumstances (Aborlarin & Babalola, 2020). It is one moral which provides a valid path to being morally righteous. Integrity as part of one's education establishes a clear

perception that academic dishonesty directly correlates with ethical behavior in the workplace (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020). It signifies biblical education's personal, innate reaction, representing loyalty to God and reflecting one's actions toward him. This study embarked on a journey to understand the morals present from a Christian standpoint with peers in the workplace.

### **Summary**

Current literature demonstrates that moral decision-making begins with the presence and application of the five foundations to suppress selfish behavior in the Moral Foundations Theory, as stated by Smith and Hatemi (2021). This theory further establishes the significance of the two individual (care and fairness) and three bindings (loyalty, authority, and sanctity) foundations, of which research shows religious believers value binding foundations and secular/atheists love the individual foundations, as discussed by Simpson and Rios (2016). This theory opens the door to the researched question. Evidence shows religious believers find atheists/secular people demonstrating morals at a different level, especially in the caring foundation (Simpson & Rios, 2017). Compassion provides a common ground and an equal playing field when addressing professional moral courage. Finding value and bias regarding our morals allows us to identify with others to resolve issues through understanding and respect. This caring foundation could be the moral common ground for Christians and secular, educated students to demonstrate moral courage in the workplace.

Moral courage considers many aspects of the decision-making process. Morals affect our individual and relational decisions. Courage is the difference between personal identity and morally "shining." The research study addressed the moral courage to act based on the moral foundations engrained in an educated Christian graduate. The moral courage to act righteously in public, work, community, society, and the world. In the work environment, Lynn et al. (2009)

explored religion's application in their study of their Faith at Work Scale (FWS) and found that spiritual belief and practice directly connect to life and work in unique, integrating, integrating ways. Students develop their spiritual and religious identity during post-secondary education (Astin et al., 2010).

Higher education has an opportunity to teach and refine morals, such as courage, and apply moral and ethical values to manage conflict and ethical issues in real-world challenges and environments yearning for moral leadership. Higher education can instill the groundwork for morally intuitive values and personal development in its graduates. It is a steppingstone for moral self-actualization and self-reflection. This study encompassed these factors in the participants' various data collection forms.

Moral Foundations Theory implies that intuition precedes one's morals. The theory suggests intuition provides the foundation and resolution to our decisions. This is the essence of the problem in Christian and secular-educated students. The ingrained courage to do the right thing, say or act accordingly, based upon one's moral beliefs and upbringing. Moral courage is confirmed as an unconscious characteristic, a gut reaction to be courageous in challenging circumstances (White, 2015). This presents the gap in the literature of the bold underlying response of an educated Christian graduate to maintain their morals and values to honor God in a real-life moral dilemma.

The Bible is the blueprint for anyone who seeks moral guidance. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus replies, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself" (New Living Translation, 2007). To love your neighbor as yourself involves selflessness and the moral courage to stand up for others. Valuing one's morals means respecting another as well. Applying the moral foundations theory to this qualitative study as a

theoretical framework is precisely that: identifying the lived experiences, contrary to political views, is the rationale for this study. This research proposal embarked on a journey to find the moral essence of courage to demonstrate courage in an ethical dilemma. Faith and biblical guidance enable Christians to separate from the worldly view by establishing a heavenly perspective on earth. The moral foundations theory is a building block to identifying an individual's courage to make an ethical and moral decision.

Adhering to the moral values from education with biblical principles sets the groundwork for individual personal accountability for not only a relationship with Christ but a basis for the earthly representation of him in humanity. This proposal addressed the Christian-educated graduates' innate, heartfelt experiences for who they are and who they want to be by seeking the knowledge and courage to follow their Biblical beliefs. The courage to follow their moral guidelines and be a light in the darkness in situations challenging their values and moral foundations. An opportunity for personal insight and reflection on their Christian higher education's influences.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. The following sections of chapter three address the research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, and the interpretative framework of the study. Following these sections, the researcher's role is discussed. Data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are outlined. A summary concludes the chapter to clarify the importance of the various sections.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, as the researcher studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret a phenomenon in terms of the conscious awareness and meanings of one's perceptions, senses, and experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Gall et al., 2007). Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem honoring an inductive style with a focus on individual meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A study by Joyner et al. (2018) discusses qualitative research as focusing on the meaning and understanding of individuals and occurring in naturally occurring situations. Moustakas (1994) shares that an intuitive-reflective process clarifies a phenomenon to find the pure essence and source of the experiences.

Qualitative research seeks to find the meaning of an individual's lived experiences, not the importance to a group, community, or society. A structured description of the essence of the experience and the conditions associated with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). It

manifests the individuals' sense of what occurred, their feelings, and the outcome according to their perspectives. No one can give meaning to or justify one's thoughts, feelings, or actions. These are personal characteristics. The experiences are their own. This separates qualitative research from quantitative research. Quantitative utilize tools to measure and compare statistically or correlate variables present in data amongst individuals as a sample population (Warner, 2013). These correlations, comparisons, or contrasts have no strength or validation in justifying the individual's subjective experiences with the phenomena.

Quantitative data loses personal values and perspectives of the experience's essence. This study addresses individual experience, perspective, and understanding to clarify morals and values. Inferring an experience from quantitative statistics misses the essence of the individual. Finding the underlying meaning's personal experience, feelings, and mentality substantiates this study's value of moral courage. A study where quantitative numbers and comparison will not provide answers to a person's character.

A phenomenological approach to a study describes the ordinary meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In phenomenological studies, the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs questions or problems to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection to describe a relationship between external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological study searches for the meanings and essence of the phenomena to validate the content of the experience of oneself (Moustakas, 1994). This study sought to find the meaning of Christian morals and courage through these perceptions, memories, and judgments.

In addition, a phenomenological approach provides the framework for this researcher to

bracket himself out. Personal experiences can be shared while focusing on the participant's knowledge of the phenomenon. This qualitative study desired to understand the deeper meaning of a Christian's moral influence and courage in the workplace. The role in understanding a person's faith and willingness to share that faith. A purpose only descriptive experiences can provide.

Personal self-reflection in a transcendental approach is an opportunity for an individual to gain essential insight into an experience through an intuitive process, applying a perceived meaning (noemata) to the phenomena to act intentionally (Moustakas, 1994). Using a transcendental approach to this study provides a framework for the participants to establish insight into the moral dilemma, an understanding and meaning into personal intuition, and self-reflection to formulate an idea of morals to respond intentionally. The lived experiences from this approach establish a unique, fresh perspective of the individuals. It provides an opportunity for actual value and meaning to the essence of the phenomena by reducing the experience to its source (Moustakas, 1994).

A transcendental phenomenological approach provides an interaction with the participants to gain insight into their perspective and an intimate analysis to comprehensively interpret their moral reasoning and fundamental core values in their lived experiences. It provides an opportunity to understand the background and underlying meanings. The design minimizes the researchers' interpretations to understand the underlying meaning and descriptions of the participant's experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Here lies the reasoning for this design: the phenomenon to understand the educated Christian mindset in applying moral judgment in a dilemma.

The transcendental approach is the framework whereby Moustakas (1994) explains clarity of all things observed derives from an intuitive-reflection process of personal judgment

and deeper understanding of oneself. This brings the study to the heart of the intuitive moral decisions participants make in their moral courage to act or not: identifying the first reaction and willingness to follow through morally. The results from this transcendental qualitative study furnish personal meanings and feelings and an opportunity for acceptance and reflection on the outcomes. Inevitably, the opportunity for personal change.

This research design separates the researcher's influence as an on-looker, bracketed out of the participants' experiences to justify their perceptions and interpretations of the facts. An outsider is hearing innovative ideas for the first time. An interpretation without interpretation whereby Moustakas (1994) describes observation as genuine reflection combined with the suspension of judgment and fore-going conclusions which may cloud insight. Transcendental phenomenology allows participants to share and elaborate on their experiences without outside influence. This approach provides a framework for unbiased participant rationalization and negligible external impact.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are the foundation of this phenomenological study. They present an opportunity to identify the essence of the phenomena in the Christian-educated participants. The questions seek to enlighten the participants to gain an understanding of themselves with the experience with moral courage.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are educated Christian graduates' experiences regarding the decisions to demonstrate professional moral courage in the work environment?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What are Christian-educated graduates' experiences with internal conflicts and the initial gut reaction demonstrating professional moral courage when confronted with a moral dilemma



in the workplace?

### **Sub-Question Two**

How does the Christian-educated graduate describe the experience of the influences that resulted in demonstrating or not demonstrating professional moral courage?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How does faith play a role in the lived experiences of educated Christian graduates in the decision process of professional moral courage?

## **Setting and Participants**

The setting is the workplace of an East Coast Christian graduate in the United States. The phenomena are established from the experiences of one postgraduate Christian in the workplace setting. The study's purpose was to elaborate on the moral courage present in the experiences of these graduates.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was the workplace of East Coast Christian-educated graduates living in the United States. I chose this setting for ease of access to potential participants. The workplace is where professional moral courage occurs in a moral dilemma. Graduates of a Christian institutions on the East Coast were contacted through alumni relations to gain access to candidates for participation in the study. The institutions enabled the researcher to access participants via email, face-to-face interviews, phone calls, and video conferencing with no obligation to participate. Interviewing participants face-to-face presents a minimal driving effort for this researcher in the densely populated states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. This setting focused on businesses employing Christian graduates can be expanded to gain access to employed graduates outside of Connecticut and across a more expansive territory

utilizing the above interview techniques.

## **Participants**

Participants were one-year post-graduation from an East Coast Christian educational institution and have worked at one job consistently for the past year. The reason for one-year post-graduation is to identify the changes outside influences may or may not have when maintaining one's moral values. One year of experience provides an opportunity to challenge one's beliefs, credibility, and values of an individual in the workplace. Previous works in integrated learning (mentoring) developed various skills, including credibility and support to the learning new student (employee) (Martin et al., 2019). This study accounted for the Christian graduates' opportunities for learning, development, and credibility over the past year in their present work environment. A sample size of 10 participants were included in the study per institutional requirements and for optimal saturation of the themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These participants were individuals who have experienced a moral situation or dilemma constituting a decision whereby their morals are challenged in the work environment. The participants met a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree in any field. Participants chose whether to participate and may decline at any time during the process. There were no age, gender, or ethnicity preferences. As part of this study, participants participated in a focus group for personal reflection and member checking of the results (Galvan & Galvan, 2017). The participants were addressed outside their place of employment to minimize any possible negative bias or discussions in their work environment. This approach maintains the confidentiality and autonomy of the participants. Participants received information about the study, including its purpose, benefits, autonomy, participant and researcher roles, and consent forms to participate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a Christian in the medical field, I struggled daily with providing patient care according to their deficits, needs, and struggles. Understanding the role of outside influences such as insurance authorization, cost of doing business, profit, and patient diagnosis-driven pathways provides patients with a limited quality of care. Often, personal morals and values are challenged and questioned. These situations sometimes converge on ethical dilemmas.

I understand the significance of faith and the value of God in his life. The Bible teaches in Proverbs 19:21, “You can make many plans, but the Lord’s purpose will prevail.” (New Living Translation, 2007). All things are possible through God. The world places limitations on hope, on the limits of what having a little faith can do. Being a faithful Christian means standing up for what is right when the world sees it as wrong. Maintaining one’s faith keeps values and morals in these situations. This challenged me for some time. Believing everything that happens is from God places a rationalization on the limitations of man. Philippians 4:13 says, “For I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength.” (New Living Translation, 2007). This study sought to find Christian experiences with moral courage when challenged with a moral dilemma in their workplace environment.

### **Interpretative Framework**

The transcendental phenomenological approach provided the background for conducting this study through a social constructivism paradigm as the interpretative framework. Social constructivism is an opportunity to understand the world through recognizing one’s background, which shapes perspective where morals and values are honored from lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding my social constructivism viewpoint allows applying moral foundations theory to the research framework. Social constructivism provides a structure where I can bracket personal experiences from the research to maintain an

unbiased study of the participants and their experiences with the phenomenon.

I applied a social constructivist lens to the study based upon the participants' perspectives and experiences. Many years of personal experiences and moral righteousness have shaped personal interactions and views of this world. These experiences and moral challenges have promoted my lifestyle's personal change and growth to one of the values and mutual respect for others. A view to understanding the heart-felt experiences of others for the betterment of all. Creswell and Creswell (2018) outline this lens:

1. Researchers recognize the backgrounds that shape their interpretations,
2. The researcher intends to make sense of others' meanings of the world,
3. Humans engage and construct meaning of their world and make sense of it based on their social and historical perspectives.
4. The subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically through interactions with others. This lens allows the researcher to identify the purpose, personal conflicts, and willingness to demonstrate moral courage.

Moral foundations theory's five foundations seek to identify one's decisions based on morals (Haidt & Craig, 2004). The approach addresses one's intuition and rationalization of their choices. As Creswell and Poth (2018) mentioned, it shapes perspectives of morals and values. Combining social constructivism and moral foundations theory incorporates a scenario to understand the participants' viewpoints, views, and personal understanding of the phenomenon. The two provide an opportunity for self-actualization and emotional growth of the Christian graduate's faith.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Philosophical assumptions provide the framework or intersection of philosophy, research designs, and specific methods for a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This framework was the

basis to develop descriptions of one's experiences' essence and the deep underlying meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This assumption was the basis for the social constructivist view of seeking an understanding of one's presence in life and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The goal of this viewpoint was to rely on the participants' view of the situation, a subjective meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Ontological Assumptions***

The study required the participants to be Christian believers. Explaining our perspectives and reasons for decisions based on our Christian faith establishes an everyday reality and theme. The Bible is the foundation of a Christian believer's morals and values. It provides the lens through which our Christian morals are based. Our interpretations formulate personal reality. The Bible as a foundation for morals and values establishes a solid common framework for ideas and perceptions of one's reality. The Bible has provided a deeper personal understanding and insight into me. The Bible has provided insight into personal growth and values which have changed my life.

### ***Epistemological Assumptions***

Christianity is the new belief in Christ of an individual. For example, obeying the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 New Living Translation, 2007) provides a beginning for moral righteousness Christians are to follow. The biblical teachings of Jesus are a new way of life for me. This study placed me close to participants to understand their experiences, feelings, and reasoning behind their decisions in the various moral dilemmas. An opportunity presented to walk alongside the participants as they recall the incidents in question and their heart to act accordingly. Interviewing the participants outside the work environment was necessary to establish confidentiality and a haven from peer judgment and gossip. This was an opportunity for

a fact-based expression of faith, belief, and the essence of the phenomena to be shared with me.

### ***Axiological Assumptions***

Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the values of the researcher and the biases present directing the interpretation of the information gathered from the research. As mentioned previously, I am a Christian. I was brought up Catholic and never had a relationship with Christ. A new Christian faith, firsthand experiences, and upbringing contributed to my study's rationale. Workplace dilemmas that challenged me to provide illegal documentation and fraudulent activity have presented themselves throughout my professional career as an Occupational and Physical Therapist. The moral dilemma of maintaining my faith and values versus satisfaction with the corporate world was challenging. Fear was ever-present. My faith in Biblical teachings was the guide and foundation of truth to resolve the dilemma. Discussions followed to elaborate on and identify participant themes. Common themes were discussed with participants. Reflections to clarify themes and meanings were reinforced. Individual and focus group discussions with the researcher took place to generate a holistic understanding of participant experiences with common morals and beliefs. This researcher allowed discussion while refraining from deception and using ethical interview practices (Creswell & Geutterman, 2019). My personal views and perspectives were bracketed out of the data collection and analysis through *epoche* to find the phenomena of the participants.

### **Researcher's Role**

The researcher explains their educational background, vocational role, and general family life status. I currently attend Liberty University. My eldest son has recently graduated from Liberty and is pursuing a life of pastoral ministry. My other son is in high school but is studying courses through Liberty's online programs.

The participants were chosen randomly. I provided the questionnaires, interviews, and data collection from a bystander's point of view to fully understand the meaning of the participants' lived experiences. I acted as an interviewer to address any bias during the data collection process. During the research process, I maintained a journal of reflection to understand my personal biases and perspectives to maintain focus on the participant's individual experiences.

### **Procedures**

The following procedures were conducted for this study. Permissions from participants and IRB approval letters are addressed. The recruitment plan describes the sample pool, size, and consent for participation.

### **Permissions**

The Christian collegiate institutions were contacted via phone to speak with alum relations for possible graduates' demographic information and access to alumni records for contact information. IRB approval (see Appendix A) from Liberty University was obtained before data collection from Liberty University. Recruitment permissions (IRB approved) (see Appendix B) were signed upon agreement from institutions to release possible candidates' contact information through email or phone contact. Participants were contacted through phone calls or emails, initially addressing 10 candidates, and adding one new candidate until 10 participants consented. Following the participant's verbal agreement, a written consent form (IRB approved) (see Appendix C) was signed by each participant.

### **Recruitment Plan**

This researcher established phone or email contact with 10 viable participants to explain the study and recruitment letter (Appendix D). Clarifying willingness to participate was

obtained verbally or via email at this time, followed by a written IRB-approved consent letter. Consent forms authorized voice recordings and possible videotaping of the interview and data collection process (see Appendix C).

Participants were selected based on the criterion previously mentioned. In addition, snowballing (recommendations of current participants) to identify other Christian participants for the opportunity to develop deep and rich information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allowed for the previously outlined criterion to be met and establishes a basis for future participants.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began with a one-to-one interview. This proceeded with a review of the moral foundations questionnaire. Data collection concluded with a focus group to justify themes and codes of participants' experiences.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were the primary method of collecting information and data. Interviews were set up according to the participants' location preferences and method of interaction (in-person or via phone/videoconferencing) to maintain safety and autonomy. Interviews began with demographic questions of participants and the researcher. The following list is the demographic questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. What is your age?
4. How long have you been a Christian?
5. What is your occupation?

This established a rapport and understanding between the participant and the researcher.



The interview process occurred face-to-face or via videoconferencing as allowed by state and federal regulations of Covid-19 mandates. These five questions provided the groundwork for the one-year post-graduate from the East Coast inclusion in the study. The questions set the stage for the interview questions.

The interview process for the 10 one-year post-graduate participants established and provided the groundwork for qualitative inquiry. Data collection was via face-to-face or video interaction. As discussed by Moustakas (1994), interview data collected via recording and journaling to transform the individual's experience into insights through the ideation process (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological approach provided a framework for this researcher to listen, assess, and revisit the phenomena through a position of epoche for the concrete essence of the individual's experience (Moustakas, 1994). The ability to hear and reiterate the personal experience of the participant. This approach assisted in confirming the Christian-educated graduate's experience demonstrating moral courage in the workplace. The following questions aid in answering all research questions (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, and SQ3).

### ***Individual Interview Questions***

1. How are you?
2. How do you feel about participating in this study?
3. Describe an ethical situation in which your moral values were challenged at work. CRQ
4. Describe your initial "gut reaction" when facing this morally challenging dilemma. SQ1
5. Describe your decision-making process with this moral dilemma. SQ1
6. How does your moral faith affect your decisions at work? SQ3
7. How are you an example of your Christian morals at work? SQ3
8. Describe how you demonstrated moral courage in the presence of the dilemma? CRQ

9. How did it make you feel to demonstrate or not demonstrate moral courage? SQ2
10. What consequences have you endured demonstrating your moral courage? SQ1
11. Describe challenges presently occurring due to your decision. CRQ
12. What are your strengths and weaknesses regarding demonstrating moral courage? SQ2
13. Describe how you might change your decision today. SQ3

Please refer to Appendix E for an outline of the above interview questions.

These questions sought to understand the personal experience of the one-year post-graduate participant. The questions provided an atmosphere of comfort for the East Coast post-graduate participant to share their experience with the interviewer. Questions 2, 3, and 8 illuminate the participant's lived experience with moral courage. Further, questions 4, 11, and 12 facilitate a deeper, innate response and personal understanding of the experience, the dilemma, the decisions chosen, and the resolutions of the outcomes. The post-graduate participant gained insight into themselves and the foundation of their Christian education. The goal was to provide insight into the participants' internal conflicts, influences, and the role of faith in their decision.

Teleconferencing was utilized if face-to-face interviews were not an option. Either format allows for a one-on-one scenario to facilitate the interview process and the goal of understanding the deeper meaning of their experiences. As evidenced in the consent form, participants knew the interviews are audio-recorded by the researcher for further analysis. Interviews encompassed the previously mentioned research questions and the moral foundations questionnaire. Participants were notified before the interview process that they should expect 45-60 minutes for the interview's completion. Participants' names and any identifying information were assigned a pseudonym.

### ***Individual/Teleconferencing Interview Data Analysis Plan***

Following the data collection from the interview processes, data was reviewed and coded into themes and codes to interpret the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Common themes, codes, and phenomena were placed in a comparison table (Table 2) for identification and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final interpretations of the phenomena were analyzed and presented in clusters to confirm descriptive meanings, clarify themes, and validate the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994). The themes were interpreted to create a comparison table to understand the phenomenon. Verbatim examples were utilized for textual-structural descriptions of the meaning and essence of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). I bracketed out personal bias and perspectives through epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Journaling assisted in eliminating my thoughts and perceptions of the data collected. The results were triangulated with the moral foundation's questionnaire and the focus group data.

### **Moral Foundations Questionnaire**

The second data collection method was the moral foundation's questionnaire (<https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaires/>). Please refer to Appendix F for a copy of the questionnaire. Before the interview, this questionnaire was presented as a take-home item for the Christian-educated one-year post-graduate to complete and return within a week of accepting the document. The questionnaire was available to the public and researchers on [www.moralfoundations.org](http://www.moralfoundations.org). The website encourages research and the use of this tool to enlighten societies' viewpoints on morals and culture. A link to [www.yourmorals.org](http://www.yourmorals.org) takes the participant to a sign-in page to create an account. Once the account was created, access a link (<https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaire>) to complete the moral foundations questionnaire (MFQ30). Johnathan Haidt, one of the co-founders, was consulted, and verbal authorization was allowed to utilize the questionnaire. The moral foundations questionnaire provided insight into

an individual's morality based on the five foundations. A discussion (including journaling and audio-recording) about the questions and results assists in formulating a deeper understanding of the essence of the phenomena, the personal insight into the underlying intuitive morals and perceptions present with the individual's experience with moral courage. The questionnaire facilitated personal reflection and self-awareness to understand better one's experience with the phenomenon (Mostakas, 1994). The moral foundations questionnaire relates to all research questions presented. The foundational questions established insight into the influences (SQ2), internal conflicts (SQ1), decision-making process (CRQ), and the presence of faith (SQ3) in demonstrating moral courage.

### ***Moral Foundations Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan***

The SPSS tool was provided on the moral foundation's website as a quantitative analysis tool. However, after participants completed the questionnaire, results were compared individually with the SPSS tool for common themes and codes to identify the underlying meaning present in the phenomenon. Clustering of themes from the questionnaire validated personal experience with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Validation of the experience's essence were expressed via a comparison table developed for a concrete visual confirmation of the phenomena of each participant. Verbatim examples were utilized as a part of the data collection (Moustakas, 1994). Results were confirmed during the interview and focus group interactions. Please refer to Appendix H for a comparison table.

### **Focus Group**

The third plan for data collection was through a focus group involving 6 East Coast Christian-educated one-year post-graduate participants. This group occurred in one of two ways. The first was in person. This depended upon the participants' location and state and federal mandates dealing with Covid-19. The second method was via teleconferencing. This method

occurred via videoconferencing. Either way, participants knew the session was recorded via audio. If participants were hesitant to participate, videoconferencing was limited to facial recognition, and all participants were set on voice-only modes with video feed off. This prevented any facial recognition of the individual. Maintaining participant confidentiality was precedent.

This focus group answered several questions about their experience with the phenomena. The open-ended questions facilitated sharing and discussion to address the central research question and sub-questions 1, 2, and 3. Experiences were shared to generate conversations of support and understanding of individual experiences. Personal perspectives and viewpoints were encouraged to facilitate an understanding of the influences and deep underlying meaning of the essence of the phenomena. Personal perceptions were encouraged as a foundation for personal reflection, self-actualization, and comradery in order to support one another (Moustakas, 1994). The corroboration of themes and the essence of personal experiences were addressed (Moustakas, 1994). The open discussion presents an opportunity for all to share their lived experience. After the focus group, the researcher shared the reasoning for this study.

### ***Focus Group Questions***

1. Please share your experience with the group. CRQ
2. Describe your initial reaction when presented with the moral dilemma in the workplace. SQ1
3. How, in any way, has the experience with moral courage changed your perceptions, morals, and faith? SQ3
4. How has the experience with moral courage in the workplace affected your life?  
CRQ

5. How does your experience of the workplace dilemma personally reflect your morals and values? SQ1

6. Reflecting upon your peer comments, how do you relate to their experience?

SQ2

7. Describe what you have learned from your experience in the workplace. SQ1

8. Describe the consequences, repercussions, and response to your experience with moral courage? SQ1

9. How would you change your response knowing the experiences of your peers?

CRQ

10. Describe the influences which guided you through this dilemma. SQ2

11. How did your response reflect your Christian education? CRQ

12. Is there anything you would like to share? CRQ

Please refer below to Appendix G for the focus group questions.

Like the interview questions, the focus group questions provided an outline for sharing personal experiences with others. The focus group format questions provided an opportunity for relational support in the decision-making process. The questions facilitated personal insight, and various perspectives enlightened the post-graduate participant into a deeper understanding of their experience. Support and personal reflection were encouraged with questions 5, 6, and 9. The focus group questions eased the East Coast graduate into a conversation of understanding oneself and their Christian moral's effect on their decisions. Personal reflection, Self-actualization, and support concerning the individual participants' experience with moral courage were encouraged as part of the focus group's structure to improve personal growth and morale (Moustakas, 1994).

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

The phenomenon and lived experiences were confirmed by identifying the central theme and interpretations of participants' experiences from the focus group. All data verified the validity of groupings of codes and themes presented regarding their experiences with the phenomenon through the integration of member checking. Verbatim examples were presented in the data collection (Moustakas, 1994). The clustering of themes from participant descriptions established the essence of the phenomena. The underlying meaning of their experiences was described and validated (Moustakas, 1994). The participants compared all data collected (codes and themes) for the accuracy of their individual experiences to create a comparison table (Table 2) for formulated results.

### **Data Synthesis**

As the previous data collection sections outlined, the interview sessions were coded to identify themes and explain the phenomena. The moral foundation's questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS tool on the website. Information from the focus group was coded to identify underlying themes. Combining and comparing all this data through horizontalization provided clustered meanings to establish the phenomena' final themes and underlying meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The underlying themes surrounding moral courage were explained.

### **Trustworthiness**

The study's trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The triangulation of the moral foundations questionnaire, interviews, and the focus group in data collection gave credibility to the study. The participants' corroboration of themes and codes provided meaningful results and vindicated this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was achieved through clarifying and confirming all interpretations and themes with participants (member checking) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding the researcher's and the participants' reflection assisted in reconfirming experiences and justifying the meaning of the phenomena. Obtaining the deep underlying meaning of the participants was essential to the study's transparency to other readers and researchers. Corroborated meanings were essential to the trustworthiness of the results. Member checking, established as part of the focus group, clarified themes and the reality of interpretations by asking participants to substantiate results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Galvan & Galvan, 2017). The triangulation of the three data collection methods (interview, survey questionnaire, and focus group) established rich and deep data from the experiences to clarify the phenomena with moral courage and Christian education (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Triangulation of the participant's data from the interviews, moral foundations questionnaire, and focus groups provided a framework and comparison of themes and the phenomena. Triangulation provided accurate and credible results (Creswell & Guetterman 2019). Utilizing these three methods incorporated comparison and authenticity of the data presented. Triangulation justified and established credibility for the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Transferability**

This study can be replicated following the research design, data collection, and conditions outlined at other times. Applying the descriptive findings to other Christians in the workplace can assist in identifying the presence of professional moral courage. One example is an article from Kretzschmar (2020), who found that Christian leaders can live righteous lives and be stewards of truth and justice in all aspects of life. The study could potentially address any Biblically based follower at various times in their employment career.

### **Dependability**



Dependability was directly related to the study's procedures, design, and methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The procedures provided a framework for replication with other participants. In addition, all results were consistent with participant responses, as evidenced by clarification through member checking and triangulation. The collaboration of the focus group solidified findings through member checking and corroboration of the two questionnaires. In addition to focus groups, colleagues/peers were consulted for feedback and relevance on data collected, codes, and themes as seen from their perspective. These consultants are peer debriefers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Liberty University's dissertation committee and qualitative research director were the peer debriefers to establish dependability through an inquiry audit.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability was obtained through triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Secondly, reflexivity provided an avenue to establish an unbiased interpretation by clarifying their findings with participants' responses. Maintaining the boundary between researcher and participant provided reality to the participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This researcher, through memoing, bracketed himself from the study to better understand the participant's experiences of the phenomena. Past experiences were shared, but the focus group's corroboration of themes and essence demonstrated the phenomena of the participants, not this researcher.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for this study were addressed through all institutions' and participants' written informed consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and withdrawal from the study at any time is acceptable with no repercussions. Data collection and storage were coded by number or pseudonyms to maintain privacy. Data was password protected. The computer and recorded data were locked away in the

researcher's home office. Data will be destroyed after three years. There are no other risks to the participant. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms or fictitious names were utilized to maintain the privacy of individuals. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Summary**

This qualitative research study is based upon a transcendental phenomenological design to identify the deep underlying meaning of a Christian's moral courage. Data collection occurred through interviews, the moral foundation's questionnaire, and a focus group to provide corroboration and collaboration of themes and phenomena. Research and interview questions were the foundation of a better understanding of moral courage in the participants. As the researcher, I stood back from the data to understand the participants' perspectives of their lived experiences. Finally, the focus group validated the phenomena's themes and essence. External consultants and peers clarified the validity of the study and results. This study did maintain participant safety, privacy, and respect to understand moral courage in the Christian postgraduate. This study established an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of a Christian's morals and values concerning courage.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. Participants were one-year post-graduates from an East Coast Christian educational institution who consistently worked at one job for one year and experienced a moral dilemma. The chapter begins with participants' experiences discussed in the interview, moral foundations questionnaire, and the focus group. The data reflect established common themes, subthemes, results, and answers to the research questions.

### Participants

Participants were chosen using a random sample from East Coast Christian educational institutions. In addition, snowball sampling was completed and rounded out the required sample size of 10 participants. An initial email was sent to all participants regarding interest in the study. Following an interested response, a recruitment letter (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix C) outlining authorization and criteria for the survey were emailed to participants. All forms were signed before the interview and the Moral Foundations Questionnaire completion. The focus group followed the completion of all interviews. Table 1 outlines the 10 participants' general demographics.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Information*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Years Christian</b>	<b>Position/Degree</b>
Adam	60	17	Prison Chaplain, PhD.
Amy	57	Since childhood	Director Operations,

			EdD.
Brian	49	Since childhood	Prison Chaplain, PhD.
Charlie	45	33	Military Chaplain, PhD.
Delilah	23	11	Ministry Coordinator, BA
Fritz	22	9	Youth Pastor, BS
Ian	25	13	Administration Analyst, BS/MBA
Kim	25	Since childhood	Nurse, BS
Larry	28	15	Young Adult Pastor, BS
Michael	22	10	Pastoral Intern, BS

### **Adam**

Adam is a 60-year-old male Chaplain who has been a Christian for 17 years. He is a chaplain at a correctional facility. He was interested in this study, stating:

I sense a whole lot of people do things that they ordinarily would not do and only because of pressure from the organizations. I am not sure most organizations should be setting the moral standard for their employees, particularly when those standards are against the will of the individual as far as morals go.

Adam was challenged by an instance when he set the location, time, and place for a prison wedding. A request to marry two male prisoners was presented. He was unaware of this request. The fiancée's name was not a typical English name, and the inmate's voice over the phone was a high, soft voice. "According to scripture, God made man for a woman and a woman for man." A dilemma against his morals: "I will not lay down who I am." His instinctive reaction was, "I was so angry, I was ready to cry." The request placed him in a position to do something morally, ethically, and scripturally wrong. I take the word of God at face value." In this instance, the decision-making process was irrelevant. Adam's role was to set the wedding time, place, and

location. It was an endorsement to be married. This was against his morals. A dilemma challenging his beliefs of morality. The participant said, "I would rather obey God than man." Lying is against God.

Adam morals are evident in his actions. His boldness for their faith is evident in their actions, living God's morals, which speak for themselves in the workplace. In the presence of the dilemma, the participant stood up and objected. There was no other choice: "It was the right thing to do." "Standing for the right, someone will be offended by that right, and they will let you know." Backlash occurred, but no challenges were present from the decision. No repercussions were present. The participant reflected, "I would not change my decision. My Christian education has bolstered my stand on scripture."

The moral foundation's questionnaire application was of no interest to Adam. The questionnaire was irrelevant to Adam. After the interview, the relevance was evident. He scored highest in the foundation of purity. His reasoning was, "I am forthright." The authority foundation was the second-highest score, reflecting his respect for authority. His marine core upbringing, biblical background, and Christian education bolstered who he is: respectful of authority and loyal to others. Adam's heartfelt decisions are grounded in his respect for biblical scripture: "taking God's word at face value."

### **Amy**

Amy is a 57-year-old Christian educator living in Virginia. She was interested in participating because it was intriguing, as she relies on what the company needs concerning what her superiors are asking to move the company forward to meet the needs of students. There was a conflict with her morals. "My personal lived experiences are different than the formal education works."

Amy's dilemma involved a request to complete learning modules for a student to graduate. The student did not like the class. Amy disagreed with graduating the student according to these demands. The administration gave her company the ok to complete the module for the student. Her initial reaction was gut-wrenching. She questioned the values of leadership, requesting this course of action. She stated, "It hurt me that they would ask me to do this". Amy questioned herself. She desired to obtain all information for a logical resolution and sought insight from her spouse. "My reaction was: 'Oh, no way', but I didn't want to abandon the student's needs and meet the expectations of the company's owners."

The decision process began with: "I received the question. Let me see what I am being asked to do, and maybe I am missing something. I wanted to gather as much information as possible." "There was no way I could do this, and I didn't want to make a bad decision." She walked through the process to address her 'no' answer with someone she respected and trusted. The approach to decline the request went to the highest level. This process gave the participant a better understanding of the education system and its deficits. Ultimately, "I don't think morals had anything to do with the administration's decision".

"My faith is knowledge of what is right and wrong." "Everything is a God thing." Knowledge has allowed this participant to understand that "our basic moral fabric" is the foundation for situations in life. "We need to trust what we are put here to do and how God uses you to make a difference." Faith is a guide in everything we do. This participant shared, "It has taken me a long time to come to that."

Morals allow us to be transparent and accountable. Amy shared her courage to act according to her beliefs and her Christian education allowed her to approach this situation with

self-confidence, and trust in her moral compass. Amy said, “It will never lead me wrong.” She believes this is the Holy Spirit. The inner voice gives her the confidence to assert her values.

Amy did share an experience from 35 years prior that bothers her to this day. Amy called it the “imposter syndrome,” her inadequacies over-took her limiting her moral actions. She lacked the moral courage to act. Since that incident, Amy has changed. She comments, “It gives me joy to care for other people. It gives me joy to see other people succeed and help them move along their path.” It goes back to my faith.” This was evident in her high scores of caring and authority on the moral foundations questionnaire. Amy identified her respect for authority and desire to care for others arose from her Christian education and moral code. Her decisions are morally grounded. Her faith provides insight and confidence in her everyday life: “The Lord put me here to be an example.” Her life has changed.

### **Brian**

Brian is a 49-year-old male prison Chaplain who learned from his mom who was a missionary and an authoritative father “to work for what you got.” Instilled in this participant was an ideology to obey God first and foremost. This is evident in his high scores on the Moral Foundations Theory in authority and loyalty. He has insight into the Holy Spirit’s presence and an ear to hear God in this chaotic world. His character is one of understanding and caring for others, and his initial reaction to situations is one of a servant (a high score on the moral foundations questionnaire). He has a calling to be there for others.

Brian has been through many challenging experiences in his lifetime. He recollects God’s presence in each one. He recalled a person he never met before turning to him to say, “You need to be a Chaplain.” Multiple times, chaplains have turned to him to point out he is to be a chaplain. Prayers after a life-threatening accident brought him to see and listen to God, accepting his

chaplain calling. His Christian education continued to build upon his belief system and military background. He learned his responses in life are guided by these beliefs, the Holy Spirit, and his reactions are based upon his morals: caring and servitude. These values guide his daily life. The courage he demonstrates aligns with his faith in God.

### **Charlie**

Charlie is a 45-year-old male military Chaplain who has been a Christian for 33 years. He has been challenged by the requirements to take the same training modules yearly for ethical compliance for the past 24 years. Many allow the training to play, then copy and paste the questions and answers utilizing Google. The training can be cumbersome and time-consuming. Brian identifies himself as a virtuous person, one of integrity. One of moral intuition is “Theologically and experientially sound”. His desire to be a virtuous person and who he wants to be as an example of Christ. “I don’t want to be a detriment to the gospel of Christ.” Completing the training is an obedience to God.

Charlie shares education as one piece of God's worship: “It is pursuing God with the mind, the intellect, the education. It is holistic. There is a higher level of thought and moral intuition in everyone. But one can practice ignoring this moral intuition.” He continued, “I have learned to listen to my moral intuition, the voice that tells me to do something or not do something.” Charlie feels faith has evolved his decisions to live out his life and demonstrate his courage.

Charlie lives by and is expected to follow a standard of honor, courage, and commitment. His faith is humbling. It entails generosity. “I demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit” through the care and well-being of others. His ethical system of virtue, “the person I become” is reflected in his decisions. Demonstrating his moral courage, he said: “Standing up for your convictions even



in the face of popular opinion,” is evident in his virtue to respect and reflect the Lord. His reaction and instinct are grounded in his wisdom and awareness to honor God. This is present in his moral foundations scores, where authority was elevated, theologically respecting God. In many circumstances, he holds back to maintain approachability with his colleagues. He believes in maintaining certain standards and traditions. He feels making courageous decisions is intuitive and reflective of his virtues and purpose in life. His virtues are reflected in the scores of purity, authority, and loyalty. Charlie shared,

The violation of something’s design creates impurity. Authority is derived from the ultimate authority that starts with God. Loyalty is a function of integrity. Value who you are virtue-wise, and your integrity is directly tied to your willingness to follow through on your word.

Charlie identifies the heart as the centerpiece of virtues (foundations). These virtues are present in decisions and, ultimately, are reflected in actions. He feels these virtues, especially loyalty, give stability to his courage.

### **Delilah**

Delilah is a 23-year-old female ministry coordinator who has been a Christian for 11 years. She was nervous about participating in this study due to uncertain expectations. Delilah was challenged when a gift was presented to a specific department, but the administration declared this unacceptable. The gift was to be applied to all departments. She was uncomfortable with the plan to allocate the gift based on need. This needed to be corrected.

This challenged her morally. “I wanted to honor their request.” She was upset, disagreed, and desired to honor the person's God-led request. “The sense of being controlled” did not sit

well. A follow-up conversation occurred; Delilah understood the administrator's perspective, but questions remained about honoring the individual request.

Delilah shared, "Jesus was all about love and honoring those around you." Faith led her to honor their request. Honoring administration and team played a role in her decision. She states, "There is beauty in the unity of honoring a teammate." Her value of team provides peace, and her Christian values instill an understanding of honor. She shared, "Ultimately, I am honoring the Lord." In this situation, "I honored the Lord in going to the director, rather than submitting. I gave him my thoughts. We agreed to disagree. I walked away feeling I did my part to what I could do well."

This experience has given her insight and understanding into her leadership skills, especially the value of honor. It has also instilled confidence in her ability to voice her concerns for justice in the presence of conflict. She states, "I can have a value that doesn't match the administration. I can have a voice in what I think is true. I know that as a leader, I have to make hard decisions. The value of honoring is a biblical concept."

Her Christian education has changed her worldview. "It has deeply affected who I am, what I claim to be my values, and how I see the world around me." Her biblical education "justified and clarified" her internal reflection of Christ's presence. The values of unity and honor are heartfelt. She shared, "I am honoring my values, not changing my values."

Her scores reflected these values in the foundations of authority, purity, and caring on the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. She shows compassion and care to protect, honor, and defend others while maintaining the purity and righteousness of Jesus. "My education changed my view, my life because it gave me understanding and challenged my view of authority."

**Fritz**

Fritz is a 22-year-old male youth pastor who has been a Christian for 9 years. Fritz had no expectations participating in this study. He shared a challenging situation where he angrily felt the need to speak up to be true to his morals, but the negative repercussions of the world outweighed his initial reaction. His moral instinct was to address the dilemma, but the impression from those involved was the issue was being addressed. A secondary challenge of this moral dilemma was the participant was unable to establish his role in the situation. The result he shared, "I didn't demonstrate moral courage. I followed the normal response. I didn't ask for transparency, which would have shown my courage." This participant said, "I had too much to lose. I chose the worldview."

This moral dilemma has changed his life. He faces new challenges with a Christian worldview honoring God. His lifestyle has changed, and all decisions honor Christ: "My beliefs and values come from my presence in the church, my role as a youth pastor, and my will to follow scripture, which is why I don't follow nonbelievers." He scored high in purity, loyalty, and authority on the moral foundations questionnaire. He reflects his scores in authority and loyalty are directly related to his upbringing and military background. His Christian education instilled the value of purity. His education has solidified his faith in Biblical scripture. He states, "I want to live a life of purity and loyalty, and I do my best to reflect this in my character." Fritz relies on scripture to provide confidence and moral courage to reflect God's will. It provides loyalty to God and a renewing of faith.

### **Ian**

Ian is a 25-year-old male analyst who has been a Christian for 13 years. He encountered a moral dilemma due to office politics at work. His dilemma is with a co-worker who takes over certain challenging assignments the analyst is addressing. The co-worker seeks the approval of

upper management by taking the credit for the work. She leaves meaningless tasks to the analyst. Ian hesitates to address the issue with the co-worker because he is new to the company. His initial reaction is defensive. He desires to address the issue but fears an argument or loss of his job. He suppresses the reaction. His morals to love and serve are challenged.

Defense and suppression are the initial response. His insight to avoid conflict changes his perspective to “Look at it in a positive way. I value being a servant and glorifying God. Colossians 3:23 says, ‘Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people’” (New Living Translation, 2007). This analyst values serving. He believes in doing good work with love, presenting his faith respectfully as a sounding board for his coworkers. He often holds in his opinion and perspective to honor the Lord. This creates a workplace of serenity.

Ian is thankful for his Christian upbringing and education. He shares, “I strive to do the right thing by maintaining my Christian values: be patient and kind, be the light of the world, not for me, but for God”. This value system was present in his high scores in the foundations of authority and purity on the moral foundations questionnaire. He exemplifies the concept of servant leadership he learned through his Christian education and biblical studies. He justifies his respect for authority in this dilemma by honoring God first through serving his peers with kindness and love. He sacrifices his needs for his co-workers. Ian understands his posture in this dilemma. Ian stated, “I realize my Christian education has taught me to control my emotions, be level-headed, show compassion with a servant attitude. This conversation has given insight into a healthy balance of my emotions in moral situations. Trust my instincts, as I honor God.”

**Kim**

Kim is a 25-year-old nurse, lifetime Christian who was confronted with a moral dilemma working in a hospital. A patient's husband and family struggled with interventions to save their loved one's life as she deteriorated quickly. She was confronted with a situation challenging the need for care, particularly end-of-life care, for this suffering patient. The family was not told the severity of the patient's situation. Current treatment and interventions to save her life were prolonging her suffering with no benefit to this patient. Kim knew deep down inside the end was inevitable. End-of-life comfort measures were the appropriate resolution for the patient. She fearlessly spoke up to her supervising team.

In the medical field, new graduate nurses or clinicians are considered naive and lacking knowledge of caring for patients. They are challenged with severe repercussions. In this situation, her courage to provide the appropriate care for this patient inspired her to confront her supervisors. She contacted the ethics committee and the palliative care team to become involved in the patient's care. This participant knew this recommendation was in the best interest of the patient. Her loyalty to this patient and family as a medical provider was evident. This intervention provided a moral and ethical solution for the patient and the family.

The family understood their family members' situation, particularly the suffering she was experiencing and unable to express. This participant appreciated her moral upbringing, which is the foundation of her faith. This directly relates to her moral courage exhibited in this situation. She explained, "I did not fear speaking up for this patient and family. I saw there was no communication amongst our team. I respectfully went to the authoritative members of the team with my concerns. My loyalty was to the patient and family". She shared her strong morals of loyalty and authority, which were evident in her high scores on the moral foundations

questionnaire, which were established from her family's faith. Growing up, her morals differed from those of her peers.

### **Larry**

Larry is a 28-year-old pastor, Christian for 15 years who was challenged by a concern of sexuality and marriage. The underlying issue is the church has not established a clear statement of faith regarding sexuality in the transgender individual. Larry states: "I have a moral obligation to speak truth to the church, but we have no clear policy and procedure to address the issue. It is clear to me, based upon the Bible, that God created males and females". Recently, a transgender Bible study participant is choosing to use the bathroom of their gender choice. This is a moral dilemma to this pastor's biblical belief system. It is clear morally, the appropriate bathroom for this individual. He cannot address the issue because the church has no policy. His initial reaction was surprise and discouragement with church leadership. They had no direction or policy and recommended to refrain from addressing the issue at this time.

Larry understands this dilemma's biblical, legal, and ethical repercussions. He said, "I have a moral obligation to care for everyone. I need to go to bat for them. Morality is from God. I base every decision on what God says." He boldly addressed this dilemma with church leadership. This is evident in his high score of authority on the moral foundations questionnaire. Furthermore, he scored the highest in the care foundation. In addition, this young pastor scored high in purity and shared: "God teaches what purity is. My morality is focused on his purity". He relates this to his faith, biblical education, and application of God's word to his ministry. "I follow my moral compass. My family established my morality. School gave me proof of the law and a deeper understanding of the Bible solidifying my morals." His insight into his morality and

ability to care for the church followers has created an environment of respect for God's authority: a ministry respecting the word, the care, and the love of God for every individual.

### **Michael**

Michael is a 22-year-old male pastoral intern who has been a Christian for ten years. Michael's dilemma occurred when his lead pastor asked him to make a \$1,000 on his church credit card. The dilemma is that this intern did not have the authority in his current position to make such a purchase. Secondly, a purchase in that amount needed to be made by a staff member with the approval of the finance director. He knew this was against the church's policy and procedures. He shared, "I thought it was wrong from my previous experiences with much smaller purchase amounts." Michael chose to satisfy the request of his lead youth pastor. He states, "I was angry and irritated with the request, but I was trying to please my boss. I knew it made me unsettled to purchase the large amount as an intern." This response created a series of repercussions: 1. Finance director questioned this intern, 2. The intern questioned his trust in his lead pastor, and 3. His lead pastor resented this intern for addressing the issue with the finance director. This dilemma instilled in him: if the situation presented is not biblical, then he should not follow the demands of others. He stated: "I understand I need to be courageous and follow my Christian morals, trust in God, and share the truth when my morals are challenged".

Michael shared that since this dilemma, he now questions when challenged morally by authoritative figures. He expressed, "My morals come from the Bible. My Christian education taught me to rely on Jesus and look deeper into the Bible for answers. I try to satisfy God first and man second." His moral foundations questionnaire scores were lower on authority than purity and loyalty. Reflecting upon his moral dilemma, Michael demonstrated personal insight into his past experiences and his will to maintain purity which was a high score on the moral

foundations' questionnaire by doing for God. His loyalty, second highest score on the moral foundations questionnaire, was to man. He learned from his decision. Michael stated, "My Christian upbringing and education have ingrained my first loyalty to God. His teachings are my moral code." This dilemma was a life-changing experience for this young man. He continues to serve as an intern under the lead pastor. Their relationship has grown. They mutually respect this intern's newfound courage in demonstrating loyalty and the will to honor God.

### Results

An analysis of individual interview questions, the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, and the focus group established the following results present in this study. All interviews and the focus group findings were recorded and evaluated to clarify the research questions. The research findings support the literature concerning moral courage, an innate response, and the value of a Christian education extrapolated from the answers to the research questions. Initial reaction/intuition, moral foundation, and moral courage were three themes from the 10 participants. Table 2 outlines the themes, sub-themes, and contributing codes throughout the data collection process.

**Table 2:**

#### *Resulting Themes*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Contributing Codes</b>
Initial Reaction/ Intuition	Action	Upset, disgust, anger, morally and ethically wrong, theoretically sound, moral code, righteous
	Stagnant	Anger, discouraged, irritated, surprised, defensive, upset
Moral Foundation	Honor God	Loyalty, servant, respect, moral obligation, justice, right versus wrong, abide, faith, humble, trustworthy
	Honor Man	lack of confidence,



		insecurity, fear, unknown repercussions or expectations
Moral Courage	Courageous	Fearless, justice, truth, moral code, moral obligation, equality, virtuous, loyalty, abide
	Apprehensive Courage	Fear, respect authority, inexperience, insecure

### **Initial Reaction/Intuition**

Every participant in this study identified an initial response or “gut reaction” to their dilemma. Some type of emotional response was present. These responses reflected a moral characteristic valued in each participant. Charlie stated, “Everyone has moral intuition. We can practice ignoring moral intuition. I learned to listen to mine.” The research data presents there is a choice to follow this intuition, but there is an initial response. All participants shared a response, but choice to the response had many influences. Brian shared, “The questionnaire reflected my authoritative military background and years in law enforcement. Authority is based upon God.”

### ***Action***

Six out of 10 participants (60%) followed their initial response and acted upon this reaction. They felt the dilemma was morally wrong. These participants addressed and confronted the dilemma head-on. There was no holding back from the feelings originating from the dilemma and the moral challenge in these individuals. Adam responded, “This is morally and ethically wrong.” These participants had the confidence or faith to listen and act upon their initial reaction. Initial reactions were described by words such as theoretically sound, morally wrong, and faith-based. Amy stated, “Faith is my foundation for answers. My mother taught them, and religious education solidified them. I scored high on caring because I believe in taking care of others.”

### ***Stagnant***

Four out of 10 participants shared this initial response. There was a reaction, but they failed to act upon this “gut feeling.” In the focus group, Michael stated, “I was irritated and angry. I knew it was wrong.” Ian shared, “I was defensive. It challenged my Christian values.” Delilah stated in the focus group, “I messed up. I had a fear of failing and messing up with authority.” These participants' emotions of surprise, anger, disgust, upset, and discouragement arose. There was a fear of repercussions of demonstrating courage in the presence of authority. There was no action initially.

### **Moral Foundation**

Many participants, nine out of 10, reiterated their initial response was to honor God. Their gut reaction was to reflect their biblical upbringing and Christian education. The participants based their responses to the moral dilemma as a reflection of God. Ian stated, “I need to reflect the fruits of the Spirit, reflect the will of God.” Their decision-making process reflected the will of God. Their intuition demonstrated the moral characteristics present in the Bible.

### ***Honor God***

Six out of 10 participants demonstrated the courage to follow their moral instincts. These participants understood their actions reflected God. Their decisions were based upon this Godly intuition to act accordingly. Nothing prevents their insight from following God’s will. Adam stated, “I take God at his word. I obey God, not man.” In the focus group, Ian stated, “I’ve learned to seek wisdom from different people. I have the confidence to serve humbly as a leader.” Michael shared in the focus group, “I look to the Bible for answers.” All focus group members shared a personal change in moral courage. They seek to honor God in each challenge.

### ***Honor Man***

Contrary to honoring God, participants honored man. Several participants identified their initial reactions and responses reflected the presence of a biblical moral foundation but failed to act upon their instincts. They frequently referenced the Bible and their Christian education through the data collection process. Confronting their dilemma, four out of 10 participants followed man's requests. Quotes such as "I was afraid to lose my job" from Ian in the one-to-one interview and the focus group to Fritz, who shared, "I'm not 100% consistent with my values. I do fall back to man's will." The code words: lack of confidence, insecurity, and fear were prevalent in these participants. During the focus group, Delilah stated, "I had to change my morals to work with the church. Now, after the fact, I've gained confidence and trust in my morals. I'm not afraid to have conversations with leadership."

### **Moral Courage**

Moral courage is an innate virtue or attribute that motivates and inspires one in the presence of a negative outcome to overcome fear and demonstrate the willingness to choose the right path of action based upon personal moral principles in relation to an ethical conflict (Khelil et al., 2018; Pajakoski et al., 2020). Moral courage is further defined as rejecting evil conformity, denouncing injustice, and defying immoral or imprudent orders to take the appropriate action (Ganu, 2018). Moral courage bridges the gap between knowing and upholding one's values and professional obligations and acting on them despite risks such as social ostracism, embarrassment, loss of employment, and fear of harm or vulnerability (Bickhoff et al., 2016). This research investigated moral courage present in these 10 participants.

Seven out of 10 participants followed their intuition, demonstrating moral courage in their dilemma. Kim shared, "My scores on the moral foundations questionnaire reflect my loyalty to patients and families. My value is to speak up respectfully to authority. I feel guilty if

I don't." Three out of 10 participants shared the presence of their initial reaction but did not respond to their dilemma according to their intuition. Fritz referenced the moral foundations questionnaire regarding his response, "My values come from the church. I value authority and loyalty. I had comfort that leadership would take care of the issue. But I was not 100% consistent with my values and fall back to man's will."

### *Courageous*

Seven out of 10 participants older than 24 followed their instincts. They identified the dilemma as a moral challenge. Following their insight, the participants addressed the dilemma accordingly. Amy stated, "I had faith in knowledge this was right versus wrong." Larry stated, "My morality is from God. I have a moral obligation to care for my ministry members." Brian stated, "I stand up for what is right and wrong. I take the time to find God's direction, not mine." These participants, without hesitation, addressed the dilemma according to their moral values. They had no fear of repercussions or negative feedback to their moral decision. They acted courageously, adhering to their moral code.

### *Apprehensive Courage*

Three out of five participants younger than 26 years old listened to their gut instinct but failed to act courageously in the storm of the dilemma presented. Fritz did not address the situation due to fear of questioning authority and losing his position. He said, "I assumed the leader was addressing the situation. I feared legal issues." The dilemma was never resolved, but he learned from it. Ian refused to act and address the dilemma at first response. In the focus group he shared, "I had fear and anxiety of being wrong, being rejected, or possibly losing my job." After some time, Ian indirectly addressed the situation with another peer who intervened and calmed the situation.

Michael indirectly confronted his dilemma after a higher-level authoritative figure

confronted him to explain his role. He stated in the focus group, “I look to the Bible, other leaders, and friends for advice to understand various perspectives. I try to understand peoples’ backgrounds, their personal life and the affects these have on a person.” The focus group members shared code words such as fear, respect for authority, inexperience, and insecurity. Since their initial interviews, these members have learned humility, honor, and courage to reflect their Christian values and moral instincts in each new moral dilemma encountered.

### **Outlier Data and Findings**

Two unexpected findings were related to age and experience. Four out of five participants, 25 years old and younger, failed to demonstrate moral courage initially in their moral dilemma. Two out of five followed their moral values and intuition following a lapse in time to demonstrate moral courage in this dilemma. Responses consisted of code words: fear- loss of job/position/unknown repercussions, insecurity, inexperience, and respect for authority. This was unexpected. They admitted their confidence in the intuitive response and faith needed to be improved. The fear of man was greater than their faith in God. These results are reflective of changing the study's design to accommodate participants at the graduate level degrees necessary to meet the minimum participant requirement.

### **Research Question Responses**

The following research questions were designed to address previous and current literature surrounding moral courage and Christian-educated graduates. Data collected from the 10 individual interviews, the Moral Foundations Questionnaire, and the focus group substantiate the answers to the research questions.

### **Central Research Question**

The central research question was: What are educated Christian graduates’ experiences regarding the decisions to demonstrate professional moral courage in the work environment?

The three themes presented previously answer this central research question. First, there is an initial reaction to a dilemma. An underlying “gut reaction” tells the participant the moral response to address the situation. Charlie states, “Faith is the foundation of my answers. My mother taught them, and my religious education solidified her teaching. My moral intuition guides me to be virtuous in everything I do.” Every participant identified an initial gut reaction and the righteous path to follow.

The next decision participants reiterated was their upbringing and Christian education influenced their will to honor God versus man. Most participants maintained their moral foundation by honoring God and following their initial response. They were true to their moral foundation. Their morality in representing God was the priority in the outcome of their decisions.

Outside influences created by this world affected a few participants to satisfy man's needs. Fear, insecurity, authoritative influence, and inexperience instilled doubt in these individuals. They shared that their choices satisfied men. Michael reported, “I didn’t want to fight or argue. I wanted to satisfy my boss.” All three participants regretted their decision.

Demonstrating moral courage is a challenge. Decisions entail many factors and influences. There are positive and negative influences. There are positive and negative consequences. These participants identified and shared the consequences. Six out of 10 participants followed their intuition and demonstrated moral courage. Brian stated, “I choose to do what is right and morally sound based upon my Christian compass.” Two participants required a longer process time to follow their intuition. Delilah said, “I learned as a child to hold my voice not to be heard. I gained confidence to speak truth.” One participant required confrontation to follow his initial reaction: Michael stated, “I learned to trust my Godly instinct from this experience.”

**Sub-Question 1**

The first sub-question was: What are Christian-educated graduates' experiences with internal conflicts and the initial gut reaction demonstrating professional moral courage when confronted with a moral dilemma? All ten Christian-educated graduates report they experienced an initial response, an intuitive moral foundation meditated on God in their dilemma. The will to react and demonstrate moral courage relied on their moral foundation to honor God or honor man. As mentioned, there are the initial gut reactions, internal turmoil, and the courage to act. There is the battle to follow what one knows is biblically correct, intuition present in each Christian participant, to honor and reflect their biblical teachings. A perspective intertwined with a worldview. There are many influences externally which affect one's decisions to demonstrate moral courage. In these participants, their courage to adhere to their intuition directly reflects the satisfaction of God versus man. Nine out of 10 participants maintained their intuitive response to follow their biblical morals and values.

**Sub-Question 2**

The second sub-question was: How does the Christian-educated graduate describe the experience of the influences that resulted in demonstrating or not demonstrating professional moral courage? The moral foundation theme regarding honoring God versus honoring man answers this question. In addition, the moral courage theme, along with code words of fearlessness, virtue, and loyalty, answers this question. Kim, a new graduate nurse working in a hospital, was challenged in caring for her end-of-life patient. A significant influence to new graduate clinicians is a lack of respect for one's experience and knowledge. The nursing staff, doctors, and other care providers were not communicating with one another and the family on

the patient's status. The family requested continued care, but the patient was actively dying. The patient was suffering.

Kim's response answered this question well, "I didn't stand back. I asked questions. I advocated for this suffering patient and family with the team. I spoke-up with no fear of repercussions." One's moral intuition can be convicting. Many participants shared positive and negative influences. Larry shared his positive influence, "I follow my moral compass. School gave me proof of the law and truth of scripture. The Bible solidified my morals." Delilah stated, "My education expanded, justified, and clarified my beliefs. It deeply formed who I am." She shared a negative influence, "I respect authority, as reflected in the morals questionnaire, but past trauma with authority has made me hold my voice." The result was confidence and security in their moral intuition to demonstrate the courage to act. Brian shared, "Your flesh steers you in one direction, but God steers you in the right direction."

### **Sub-question 3**

The third sub-question was: How does faith play a role in the lived experiences of educated Christian graduates in the decision process of professional moral courage? All three themes answer this question. All 10 participants shared that faith is first and foremost in their decision-making process to demonstrate professional moral courage. Ian shared, "I strive to do the right thing by maintaining my Christian values. I am doing this for God." His faith reflects a servant's attitude. In his dilemma, he sacrificed his needs for another. His sacrifice happens often. Ian did share in the focus group, "I'm learning to speak up. I continue to be humble. I am learning wisdom from mentors and others."

Faith gave many participants the confidence to demonstrate moral courage. Amy said, "Faith will guide me through all." Faith was the cornerstone of the participants' choice to follow



their intuition. Fritz shared, “Have faith in God no matter the circumstances.” Charlie stated, “All authority comes from God. My faith is how I live my life: humble, generous, care for others, reflect the fruits of the spirit.”

Despite faith, several participants were concerned about possible repercussions from outside influences. Michael stated, “Experiences affect my morals. My morals come from the Bible. My education put my trust in Jesus, and I am loyal to God.” His loyalty was reflected in his moral foundations questionnaire. In his dilemma, Michael stated, “I knew I was on shaky ground trusting man.”

### **Summary**

The three themes, Initial Reaction/ Intuition, Moral Foundation, and Moral Courage were corroborated by the 10 participants. All participants experienced a moral dilemma that challenged their moral character. Many participants maintained their faith and demonstrated moral courage, representing their values, character, and honor for God. Each participant acknowledged that their moral character influences their decisions. They are also aware of the world’s effects on their decisions and will to demonstrate moral courage. The data collected established the three themes that answered the central research question and research sub-questions. The participants provided insightful information into their decision-making process.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast. This study collected data from 10 participants of various ages and degree levels, each graduating from a Christian educational institution. The data was analyzed, confirming three distinct themes. In Chapter five, I interpret, summarize, and elaborate on various implications and policies for this research. I address theoretical and empirical implications and conclude with limitations, delimitations, implications for future research, and a conclusion of the entire study.

### **Discussion**

The following discussion reflects the data collection, themes, and results provided by the 10 participants. It reflects the intuitive responses present in by Haidt and Craig's (2004) moral foundations theory. The implications for policy and practice in educational and business institutions are discussed. The research findings are applied to theoretical and empirical implications. I discuss the study's limitations and delimitations of the study, concluding with future recommendations for research.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The data from all 10 Christian-educated participants showed the initial (intuitive) response theme. This response represents the second theme: a moral foundation based upon God but influenced by man to demonstrate courage. The final theme, moral courage, directly correlates with one's moral intuition to represent God or satisfy man in decision-making.

This study originated from several personal experiences this researcher encountered in his lifetime. The intent was to keep references to God out of the study. However, as the research progressed through the various Chapters, especially the significance of the study and related literature, I admitted it was impossible to negate God's presence. The data collected from individual interviews, the moral foundations questionnaire, and the focus group were triangulated to establish the themes of initial reaction/response, moral foundation, and moral courage.

### **Critical Discussion of the Findings**

This study's findings provide significant evidence of a Christian education's positive effect on a person's intuition. The Christian-educated graduate has a moral foundation engrained in biblical teaching. This intuition precedes their will to honor God in demonstrating moral courage.

#### ***Godly Intuition***

All 10 participants confirmed an initial, legitimate faith and a Godly reaction to their moral dilemma. Various emotional responses challenged their morals. Six out of the 10 participants demonstrated courage regarding their moral intuitions. A response reflecting one's moral foundation is righteous and biblically led. The participants' Christian education positively influenced this intuitive reaction and the will to honor God, demonstrating moral courage.

The Moral Foundations Theory by Haidt and Craig (2004), supported by research from Ganu (2018), and Li et al. (2016) gave evidence there is a relationship between morals, emotions, and behaviors within this theory. This study reiterated the presence of an initial response reflective of Godly morals. These morals represent the spiritual component of the moral foundations theory's authority and purity foundations (the binding foundations) (Graham & Haidt,

2010; Johnson et al., 2016). This research supports the benefit of a Christian education on moral intuition to reflect the influence of God in one's decisions.

### ***Christian Education and Moral Intuition***

A Christian education exemplifies education as a means by which character is built and beliefs are woven with behavior and virtues (Abolarin & Babalolas, 2020). This study confirms a Christian education solidified participants' moral foundations. Matthew 6:10 (New Living Translation, 2007) says, "May your kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." The results showed that a Christian education is part of one's moral intuition. It supports the personal moral foundations present. The education reaffirms a moral foundation to reveal God in exhibiting moral courage.

Individuals have a choice in making decisions. This research followed the Christian-educated graduates' thought processes, from intuition to courage. The study shows a will to act. In doing so, they followed their moral intuition, honored God's teaching and will, and demonstrated moral courage to act according to this moral intuition. They followed this instinct, representing the moral values present in the Bible. An ingrained intuitive value system strengthened by a Christian education. Moral courage is saturated in faith and reaffirms one's strength and stability in God. This study supports the findings that individuals have a spiritual essence, placing value on a person's virtuous and moral dignity concerning the meaning of their life (Romig et al., 2018).

This research substantiates that a morally sound biblical education sets a precedent for embodying positive externalities in daily life. It provides solid evidence of the effects a biblical education ingrains in individuals to live a life of compassion, love, and understanding toward a neighbor, a friend, a stranger, and even an enemy. The research shows that biblical education can

change an individual for the betterment of mankind. An opportunity awaits to educate with morality as the foundation for enlightenment.

### **Implication for Policy and Practice**

This transcendental study encourages and recommends future policies and practices regarding moral intuition and courage. The three themes represented provide a basis for establishing policies in educational institutions, policymakers, teachers, professors, and any educational or business stakeholder valuing a moral education and courage. This research is a building block for future studies identifying the benefits of Christian education and the positive biblical influences on an individual's morality.

### ***Implications for Policy***

This research presents several implications for educational and business policies. The educational institution can establish policies focused on moral values. Based upon my findings, the moral foundations questionnaire and interview questions can be implemented into the interview process of potential student applicants and faculty for insight into the character of these individuals. This process may enlighten shared values and opportunities for personal growth upon acceptance or hire. My research may assist in clarifying an individual's moral character regarding the institution's mission statement and vision.

In addition, this same process may be considered in businesses as part of the hiring process and human resources relations. The moral foundations questionnaire and interview questions may provide insight into employees' professional development and suitability for certain positions. Furthermore, my findings may support training opportunities for staff development and morality enhancement in educational institutions and businesses.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Christian educational institutions can provide morality-based curricula with references to biblical scripture. My findings could support secular institutions' development of morality courses for student growth and moral intuition in decisions for future endeavors, such as workplace dilemmas. Christian institutions can establish courses teaching students the application of biblical morals and their relationship with the moral foundations theory in building their Godly moral character. This research can support the teaching of critical thinking in conflict resolution, human commonality, and understanding of one another for the betterment of all.

My research identified three younger graduates who refrained from demonstrating moral courage in the workplace. This research encourages implementing the morals foundations theory, questionnaire, and interview questions to develop student growth, insight, thought processes, and confidence in their moral decision-making process with various workplace case scenarios. These case studies could improve a student's confidence in their morally grounded decisions to demonstrate courage in all aspects of life. It will prepare them for real-life work dilemmas. The course design can incorporate understanding moral intuition and influences present affecting an individual's choice to be morally courageous in various case scenarios. My research authenticates previous research findings that Christian decision-making originates from a generous, honest character that habitually respects and values all people as made in the image of God (Gill, 2004; Jones et al., 2018).

This research is a basis for moral development in various aspects of life. It promotes personal change. The findings indicate application in the workforce. Businesses may develop training and educational opportunities for personal development and interpersonal relationship building. Workers can be challenged with case scenarios to solve problems, dilemmas, and predicaments with moral integrity and courage through team building and uniformity.

Liberty University preaches the motto: “Training Champions for Christ.” This research is perfect for our institution. This study recognizes self-identification of the moral intuition, decision-making process, and the will to honor God in stakeholders. When applied to students, faculty, administration, and alumni, this study identifies their moral foundation, intuitive response, and intent to be a Champion for Christ in all endeavors. The research establishes a foundation of Christian education and individual Christian morality to exemplify a heart for Christ, fulfilling a Champion for Christ's calling.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

Empirical and theoretical implications connect this research study's findings to previous literature and the moral foundations theory as the groundwork to conduct this research. The empirical implications compare the results with previous literature regarding morality, religion, and Christian education. The theoretical implications section aligns the moral foundations theory as the basis and clarification of the results present in this study. The two sections reveal the significance of this study in Christian-educated graduates.

#### ***Empirical Implications***

This study explored a relationship between the moral foundations theory and the Christian-educated graduate, particularly the influence education has on an individual's moral courage. Research has shown that Christian education teaches religious morality for personal development and contributes positively to creating a society of justice, civility, and respect for all (Barnes, 2011). Previous research showed one's religious orientation was directly correlated with having high morals and an affinity to the binding moral foundations (Milojev et al., 2014). Ten out of 10 participants in this study experienced faith and a Godly influence as the foundation for

their decisions to demonstrate moral courage. Seven of the 10 had the will to carry out this faith-filled gut reaction in demonstrating moral courage.

Christian higher education cultivates a biblical orientation for its graduates in virtues and morals, with an understanding of future applications in daily life (Wells, 2016). The aim of education is the formation of an entirely virtuous person (Formosa, 2019). Accordingly, seven out of 10 participants stated their Christian education solidified their moral foundations, nine out of 10 participants' initial reaction was to honor God, and seven out of 10 displayed the moral courage to follow their intuition. This is reiterated in Romans 6:20, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right" (New Living Translation, 2007). Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of all those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (New Living Translation, 2007). All living things share a relationship and a connection, and this bond through awareness and education builds communities of values and ethical decision-making for all with a reflection of God's creativity (Chandler, 2021). The Bible recognizes a value system of morals such as honor, humility, integrity, respect, and courage to enlighten the reader on a life of selflessness and servitude. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone--- especially to those in the family of faith" (New Living Translation, 2007). A Christian education applies biblical theory to life. It influences, supports, and strengthens intuition for selflessness and a reaction to honor God through serving others according to a biblical moral value system.

The divinity domain of the moral foundations theory implies that individuals have a spiritual essence that places value on a person's virtuous and moral dignity, which is related to the meaning of their life (Romig et al., 2018). Religious beliefs and principles provide a foundation of truth and guide to live one's life. Nine out of 10 participants shared an initial



Godly innate reaction. Christian individuals seek to establish decisions based on these principles. Intuitions of right and wrong are present in the decision-making process in this domain. Moral judgment reflects the first intuitive response for a morally reasoned conclusion (Cook & Kuhn, 2021). Higher education ministering develops self-actualization to understand oneself and the inner reaction to act willfully according to one's morality (Leihy & Salazar, 2017). Ten out of 10 participants reiterated the dilemma aroused this right versus wrong emotion. Christian-educated graduates gain knowledge of the relationship between religion and morality, which define and mold their character and actions. (Horowski, 2020).

Christian education institutions can utilize the moral foundations theory to establish a learning environment focused on ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity to instill integrity, honor, and a moral code to exemplify morally righteous actions in the lives of students (Bezalel, 2020; Fasoli, 2017). All participants expressed their intuition initiated a moral response of right and wrong. All the participants corroborated faith and their Christian belief system strengthened their intuition. This faith exemplified their will to demonstrate moral courage. This is a way of life for a Christian. A Christian education teaches how to apply these values in relationships with one's peers, culture, community, and society (Horowski, 2020). All the participants shared moral courage is directly related to their belief system and intuitive response. Seven out of the 10 participants implemented their intuition demonstrating moral courage. Moral courage is defined as rejecting evil conformity, denouncing injustice, and defying immoral or imprudent orders to take the appropriate action (Ganu, 2018). These Christian-educated participants reiterated that their education instilled faith and the will to represent God in their decisions. Their intuition to honor God faithfully was in their will to demonstrate moral courage. Christian morals stand on one's faith to instill the courage to act according to scripture when faced with inevitable negative consequences (Duta, 2018). A Christian education can change one's character and make one

morally courageous. This confirms moral courage is a virtue developed into a natural part of one's behavior and strengthened through education (Pajakowski et al., 2020).

Previous research shows students acted and willfully chose the right path based on their morals despite social pressures (Abolarin & Babalola, 2020; Sonnentag et al., 2018). However, this research study showed a slight divergence as three participants did not choose the morally righteous path. They decided not to follow their intuitive reaction. Fear and insecurity were common findings in these participants. In another study, a Christian education saturated in theological reflection and teaching builds virtues and insight for a broader context in students (Wells, 2016). This research study reiterates these findings. The participants in this study acknowledged a Godly-based moral intuition. The literature shares that education is the foundation to experience the true meaning of Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit (Hammond, 2019).

The Christian-educated graduates shared experiences with various influences that affected their decision-making process. Christians have an innate call to act according to God's call and are responsible for making choices to positively impact themselves and others (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Yonker et al., 2019). Older, experienced participants whose faith in honoring God was the focus of their intuition displayed moral courage. They were courageous. Six out of the 10 participants acted outright, demonstrating courage. One required time to execute their moral courage. These six demonstrated a will and compassion to honor God no matter the dilemma. Christian decision-making originates from a generous, honest character that habitually respects and values all people as made in the image of God (Gill, 2004; Jones et al., 2018). Younger, less experienced Christian graduates verbally shared these morals and God's presence in their initial reaction. Still, fear, insecurity, and lack of confidence directed them to avoid being courageous.

These three participants learned from their experiences. This study was an insightful learning experience for them. Two participants gained the confidence to follow their moral intuitions in the presence of negative feelings. The moral courage demonstrated in the new dilemmas positively affected their relationships within the work environment. This supports previous research that feelings coincide with certain moral foundations, personal beliefs, and values to identify if moral courage is enacted (Li et al., 2016); Ganu, 2018). Moral courage can emerge in fear or threat of negative consequences or repercussions (Bickhoff et al., 2016; Pajakoski et al., 2020). Moral intuition, faith, and a Christian education assist one's confidence to express moral courage.

According to participants in this study, their Christian education influenced their moral courage. This supports the literature that education aims to form an entirely virtuous person (Formosa, 2019). It provides security and stability in one's Christian faith. Christianity instills a moral intuition of righteousness. Christian beliefs provide a foundation for morality (Zmirak, 2019). A Christian education provides insight into an individual's reflection of their relationship and walk with Christ. It establishes a moral character of righteousness with God, a moral foundation seeded in selflessness, and a will to be courageous in servicing others. These findings identify with previous literature whereby a Christian education builds students into professionals characterized by virtues of faith, hope, and love to honor God by being disciples of their beliefs (Barnes, 2011; Broer et al., 2017).

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The moral foundations theory began with Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph, who presented that morality is innate and learned (Haidt & Craig, 2004). This theory arose from fundamental elements in all cultures: reciprocity, loyalty, respect, limitation on physical harm,

and regulations of eating and sexuality, to which clinical empiricist and nativist approaches apply. The moral foundations theory was the basis of this study. The significance of this study was to find the intuitive response and its influence on the decision-making of a Christian-educated graduate with moral courage. In addition, a Christian education's influence on one's moral intuition is essential. The moral foundations theory embraces a system of values, virtues, psychological mechanisms, and social norms to interact with the suppression of selfishness and facilitate social interactions (Johnson et al., 2016).

The moral foundation's theory identifies one's innate moral response (Haidt & Craig, 2004). All participants shared that the moral foundations questionnaire reflected their moral values. This study corroborates the presence of intuitive responses (initial gut reaction) and moral foundations in individuals. All participants had an initial response, intuition, based on their Christian morals and education. There was a gut reaction grounded in the moral foundations. The results show a foundation in a Christian graduate is dependent on faith in honoring God (10/10 participants). The foundations provided a moral characteristic the participants identified as the reasoning behind their decision-making process with moral courage.

Moral judgment reflects the first intuitive response about the foundations for a morally reasoned conclusion (Cooke & Kuhn, 2021). Nine out of 10 participants identified their intuition as righteous and honoring God. Seven out of 10 chose to follow their intuition to display moral courage. Eight out of 10 represented the binding foundations of purity and authority, which contain spiritual and respectful characteristics. These are examples of honoring God. Their innate response was to act according to their beliefs. The participants' responses verify the moral foundations theory demonstrates moral decisions begin with an innate reaction based on five foundations (Smith & Hatemi, 2021). A Christian's morals and values may conflict with the

happiness in this world, but together, they are one in heaven (Jakobsen, 2022). Christian morals and values (the participants' morals and values) represent a heavenly influence. This influence procured seven out of 10 participants to act courageously in the presence of their moral dilemma. Colossians 3:23 says, "Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ" (New Living Translation, 2007). The presence of God grounded these participants' reactions.

According to the moral foundations theory, initial reaction precedes rationale (Haidt & Craig, 2004; Greenway et al., 2019). This study exemplifies this reaction in Christian-educated graduates founded on God's biblical teachings (10 out of 10 participants). The results support this intuitive response and a Christian education's positive effect on one's intuition. This confirms the theory of moral judgment or reasoning, regardless of culture or social interactions, is engaged after an automatic process has pointed the individual toward a judgment or conclusion (Haidt, 2013). All participants expressed faith, outside influences, and internal conflicts play a role in rationalizing one's choice to demonstrate moral courage. Previous literature explains an individual's reaction to demonstrate moral courage flourishes in environments that promote moral decision-making and expression of one's values (Jones et al., 2018; Sekerka et al., 2009). The benefit of morality is present in the current Christian-based education (Hansen, 2021; Milojev et al., 2014).

Christian higher education cultivates a biblical orientation for its graduates in virtues and morals, with an understanding of future applications in daily life (Wells, 2016). Seven out of 10 participants stated their Christian education solidified their moral foundations. The Bible recognizes a value system of morals such as honor, humility, integrity, respect, and courage to enlighten the reader on a life of selflessness and servitude. This study identified nine out of 10

participants' initial response was grounded in God. Seven of the 10 participants followed this Christian response and acted courageously. A Christian education applies biblical theory to life. It influences, supports, and strengthens intuition for selflessness and a reaction to honor God through serving others according to a biblical moral value system. This research justifies the influence of Christian education on moral foundations, the presence of faith, and the moral courage to maintain integrity in decisions that reflect the righteousness of God.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study has several limitations and delimitations. Several factors influenced the following information. Limitations address those factors outside of this study's control. Delimitations are my decisions to limit and focus my study on the participants, setting, and methodology to identify the underlying heartfelt meaning the participants experienced with moral courage.

#### ***Limitations***

This study had several limitations. First, it focused on postgraduates from Christian institutions who experienced a moral dilemma within one year after graduation. The participants had varying academic degrees and experienced a moral dilemma within that year. Four participants held doctoral degrees; one had a master's degree. Second, there was a wide age range. Half of the participants were over 25 years old. Four were over 40 years old. Age and advanced-level degrees correlate with a broader range of experiences and wisdom that led to demonstrating moral courage. The study's poor initial response rate affected the participants' increased age range, experience, and degree level regarding acceptance into this research study.

#### ***Delimitations***

This study focused on Christian-educated graduates from East Coast Christian institutions. It used transcendental phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of the Christian-educated graduates. The qualitative approach provided insight into the true heart-felt meaning of this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies may include a comparison of Christian-educated versus non-Christian graduates from secular institutions. Future research may address a more significant population across the United States or worldwide. Studies may seek to identify the secular graduates' educational background application to the secular experiences in the workplace environment. Another study could address first-time college graduates with a bachelor's degree, limiting outside influences such as age or life experiences on moral courage. A study focusing on a particular age range may be of value. Another study may seek to identify specific positive and negative influences on individuals to demonstrate moral courage in a moral dilemma. My research was a transcendental phenomenology. Future studies can be a case study or multiple case studies of students at different schools and their experiences in the workplace. Studies can research the intuitive responses, the moral foundations, and the moral courage of employers and employees in businesses and legislatures in their decisions concerning executive decisions, legislation, and policies for the betterment of all stakeholders. A future study of present participants could be conducted to identify if responses are replicated three, five, or 10 years later.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of demonstrating moral courage in the workplace when confronted with an ethical dilemma for post-graduate students of Christian-based educational institutions on the East Coast.

Ten participants completed the moral foundations questionnaire. This utilized the moral foundations theory as the theoretical framework. I interviewed participants and incorporated the moral foundations questionnaire to identify various moral foundations that comprise an individual's intuitive responses. I concluded with a focus group to saturate the data and establish three main themes of the study. Triangulation of the data sources confirmed personal experiences and the essence of the phenomena, establishing three themes: initial response/intuition, moral foundations, and moral courage in the presence of a workplace ethical dilemma.

The first theme was the initial responses/intuition to act or remain stagnant, demonstrating moral courage. Six out of 10 participants acted upon this initial reaction. Four out of 10 remained stagnant. Second was the moral foundation of one's intuitive response to honor God versus man. The results showed six out of 10 participants honored God with moral courage. Four out of the 10 honored man in their experience with the moral dilemma. Finally, the theme of moral courage or apprehension to demonstrate moral courage was evident. Seven out of the 10 participants demonstrated moral courage in the workplace. Three participants were fearful of exhibiting moral courage. The results show every participant has an intuitive, innate response when presented with a moral dilemma. All Christian-educated graduates' innate responses were in faith and reflective of God. However, worldly influences did affect younger, inexperienced, Christian-educated graduates. The three participants knew the Godly or righteous response morally but did not demonstrate their moral courage; instead, they satisfied man's needs to prevent possible negative repercussions.

This research reaffirms previous studies concerning intuition and a Christian education. Ethical pedagogy generates self-reflection and functionality across societal and political matters, whereby teaching space permits growth and understanding of social justice for all (Klaasen,



2020). Participants shared personal growth experiences from their moral dilemmas—personal changes in confidence and faith to demonstrate moral courage in the following dilemma. A Christian education solidifies one’s moral character, integrity, and intuition to follow God’s commands in every circumstance. Morality judgments are shaped by one’s religiosity (Sverdlik & Rechter, 2020). Faith is a building block. The Bible is a solid foundation for morality. We need to have faith in our Christian beliefs.

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**Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 5, 2023

Jeffrey Moreira

Christine Saba

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1562 Christian Graduates' Lived Experiences With Professional Moral Courage: A Transcendental Phenomenology

Dear Jeffrey Moreira, Christine Saba,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the

subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

YOUR STAMPED CONSENT FORM(S) AND FINAL VERSIONS OF YOUR STUDY DOCUMENTS CAN BE FOUND UNDER THE ATTACHMENTS TAB WITHIN THE SUBMISSION DETAILS SECTION OF YOUR STUDY ON CAYUSE IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

G. MICHELE BAKER, PHD, CIP

*Administrative Chair*

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICE

## Appendix B: Recruitment Permissions Request

2/25/23

Dear “Institution”,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration degree. The title of my research project is Christian Graduates’ Lived Experiences with Professional Moral Courage: A Transcendental Phenomenology. My research aims to understand the lived experiences with moral courage in working Christian-educated graduates.

I am writing to request your permission to utilize your alumni membership list to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to participate in an online survey, followed by a one-to-one interview with this researcher, then a focus group. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Moreira  
Doctoral Candidate School of Education

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** CHRISTIAN GRADUATES' LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH PROFESSIONAL MORAL COURAGE: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

**Principal Investigator:** Jeffrey Moreira, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a Christian educated graduate with at least one year of work experience post-graduation. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences with moral courage of working Christian-educated graduates.

#### 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 one-to-one interview which will take no longer than 60 minutes. The session will be audio-recorded.
2. Complete the moral foundations questionnaire located on the website [www.moralfoundations.org](http://www.moralfoundations.org). There is a link to [www.yourmorals.org](http://www.yourmorals.org) to create an account and take the moral foundations questionnaire (old version-MFQ30). This takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.
3. Participation in a focus group in person or via teleconferencing for 45-60 minutes, pending COVID-19 regulations. The session will be audio-recorded. Confidentiality can be maintained through face masks for COVID-19 protection if the group meets in person. Teleconferencing can maintain confidentiality by setting modes to voice-only, no video feed.
4. Member checking will be utilized throughout this focus group to provide meaning and essence to individual experiences with moral courage.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include a deeper understanding of morality and the effect an individual may have on others.

### **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.

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include the psychological stress associated with recalling the event. To reduce risk, I will discontinue the interview at this time.



**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 kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in a locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and/or hard copy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years/until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to the 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 participation will not affect your current or future relations with the institution. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**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, apart from the focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffrey Moreira. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or by phone, number is [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Christine Saba, at [REDACTED].

**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 want to talk to someone other than this 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](mailto: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 of 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 video-record and/or audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

## Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

2/25/23

Dear Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the moral courage of Christian educated graduates, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be Christian-educated graduates working for one year who experienced a moral dilemma in the workplace. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a survey, interview, and focus group, including member checking to clarify their experiences. It should take approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey, one hour to complete the interview, and one hour for the focus group. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please go to [www.Yourmorals.org](http://www.Yourmorals.org), create an account, then log onto <https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaire> to complete the attached MFQ30 survey. Print the scored results. Please respond to [REDACTED] to set a time for the one-to-one interview. This researcher will contact you to schedule participation in a focus group. Follow-up emails will be sent throughout the study.

A consent document is attached to this letter/email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign the consent document and return it to this researcher during the interview.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Moreira  
Doctoral Candidate- School of Education, Liberty  
University  
Email: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

### **Appendix E: Interview Questions**

1. How are you?
2. How do you feel about participating in this study?
3. Describe an ethical situation in which your moral values were challenged at work. CRQ
4. Describe your initial “gut reaction” when facing this morally challenging dilemma. SQ1
5. Describe your decision-making process with this moral dilemma. SQ1
6. How does your moral faith affect your decisions at work? SQ3
7. How are you an example of your Christian morals at work? SQ3
8. Describe how you demonstrated moral courage in the presence of the dilemma. CRQ
9. How did it make you feel to demonstrate or not demonstrate moral courage? SQ2
10. What consequences have you endured demonstrating your moral courage? SQ1
11. Describe challenges presently occurring due to your decision. CRQ
12. What are your strengths and weaknesses regarding demonstrating moral courage? SQ2
13. Describe how you might change your decision today. SQ3

## Appendix F: Moral Foundations Questionnaire

**Part 1:** When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using the scale:

[0] = not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = not very relevant

[2] = slightly relevant

[3] = somewhat relevant

[4] = very relevant

[5] = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong)

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was good at math

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted unfairly

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society

\_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something disgusting

- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was cruel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

**Part 2:** Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

[0] = Strongly disagree [1] = Moderate disagree [2] = Slightly disagree

[3] = Strongly agree [4] = Moderately [5] = Strongly agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am proud of my country's history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is better to do good than to do bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ One of the worst things a person could do is to hurt a defenseless animal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It can never be right to kill a human being.

\_\_\_\_\_ I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

(<https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaire>)



### **Appendix G: Focus Group Questions**

1. Please share your experience with the group. CRQ
2. Describe your initial reaction when presented with the moral dilemma in the workplace. SQ1
3. How, in any way, has the experience with moral courage changed your perceptions, morals, and faith? SQ3
4. How has the experience with moral courage in the workplace affected your life? CRQ
5. How does your experience with the workplace dilemma personally reflect your morals and values? SQ1
6. Reflecting upon your peer comments, how do you relate to their experience? SQ2
7. Describe what you have learned from your experience in the workplace. SQ1
8. Describe the consequences, repercussions, and response to your experience with moral courage. SQ1
9. How would you change your response knowing the experiences of your peers? CRQ
10. Describe the influences which guided you through this dilemma. SQ2
11. How did your responses reflect your Christian education? CRQ
12. Is there anything you would like to share? CRQ

