

**Kennedy Task 17: Final Dissertation**

Kennedy, Kevin J.

Executive Coaching Cognate

Post-Positivism

Flexible Design Multiple Case Study

Qualitative Methods

Character Challenges American Christian Business Leaders Face in the Secular Digital Age

CHARACTER CHALLENGES AMERICAN CHRISTIAN BUSINESS LEADERS  
FACE IN THE SECULAR DIGITAL AGE

by

Kevin J. Kennedy

---

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Ph.D. in Organization and Management

---

Liberty University, School of Business

December 2024

### **Abstract**

In the digital age, Christian business leaders are a minority who are commonly expected to change their leadership priorities to fit within the secularized culture. These expectations for change in their leadership principles can generate character challenges to the very core of a Christian business leader's beliefs forcing them to make decisions which pit the practice of their proclaimed faith against a secularized business practice. In these workplace challenges, the Christian business leader's faith, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion compete with secularized practices accepted in today's American culture. This research documents the insufficient understanding of Christian business leader character challenges prevalent in the secularized digital age. It provides granularized insights into the types of character challenges they face which form both practical implications to inform general business practices and theoretical implications to improve the understanding of business theory.

*Key Words:* Christian, digital age, morality, secular, moral imperatives

**CHARACTER CHALLENGES AMERICAN CHRISTIAN BUSINESS LEADERS  
FACE IN THE SECULAR DIGITAL AGE**

by

Kevin J. Kennedy

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Ph.D. in Organization and Management

Liberty University, School of Business

December 2024

**Approvals**

_____	_____
Kevin J. Kennedy, Doctoral Candidate	Date
_____	_____
Robert D. Ball, PhD, Dissertation Chair	Date
_____	_____
Jimmy Duncan, PhD, Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Alexander Averin, PhD, Chair, Doctoral Programs	Date

**Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	iii
Approvals.....	iv
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose Statement.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
The Nature of the Study.....	12
Conceptual Framework.....	24
Definition of Terms.....	41
Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations.....	43
Significance of the Study.....	46
Summary of Chapter 1 and Transition.....	51
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	54
Business Practices.....	54
The Problem.....	59
Concepts.....	78
Theory.....	90
Constructs.....	92
Related Studies.....	96
Anticipated Themes.....	102

Summary of Chapter 2 and Transition.....	103
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	105
Purpose Statement.....	105
Role of the Researcher .....	106
Research Methodology .....	113
Participants.....	118
Population and Sampling .....	120
Data Collection and Organization.....	131
Summary of Chapter 3 and Transition.....	150
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results.....	153
Overview of the Study .....	153
Data Analysis .....	158
Reliability and Validity Plan.....	172
Ethical Assurances .....	177
Results.....	177
Summary of Chapter 4 and Transition.....	221
Chapter 5: Conclusions .....	224
Additions to the Body of Knowledge .....	224
Recommendations for Further Study .....	231
Reflections .....	232
Summary of Chapter 5 .....	237
Summary and Study Conclusions .....	238
Study Summary.....	239

Study Conclusions .....	246
References.....	253
Appendix A: Participant Letter.....	272
Appendix B: Interview Guide, Demographic Questions, and Interview Questions.....	273
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form.....	276

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Diagram .....	26
Figure 2. Categorizing Personal Attitudes and Beliefs.....	68
Figure 3. Conceptual Framework with Digital Age Character Maturation .....	79
Figure 4. Sample Framework.....	126
Figure 5. Hybrid Matrix of Metrics Reflecting Data Saturation.....	129
Figure 6. Coding of Core Christian Beliefs for Bookend Participants .....	181
Figure 7. The Convictional Christian Business Leader Bookend.....	184
Figure 8. The Cultural Christian Business Leader Bookend .....	186
Figure 9. Coding for Middle Group of Participants.....	187
Figure 10. Afterlife Study (Jensen, 2023).....	192
Figure 11. Christian Business Leader Cultural and Convictional Bookends.....	193
Figure 12. Quick Look Summary of Research Themes and Participants .....	194
Figure 13. Participant Demographic Data .....	197
Figure 14. Christian Business Leader Character Challenges and Categorization .....	200



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The digital age has transformed the workplace, the way character matures in both its workers and supervisors, and secularized America. These three combined layers of rapidly onsetting transformational shifts have generated character maturation challenges which neither secular nor Christian leaders fully understand. This research focused upon the insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges with keen attention to those of Christian leaders since it is their perspective which is so commonly absent or mis-portrayed in available research.

The study starts with an explanation of the layered transformational change ushered in by the digital age. It describes the three near simultaneously occurring changes to the business environment, those working within it, and the resulting choices producing a secularized America. Only when these linked layers of transformational change are connected, can one begin to see the character challenges they create for both secular and Christian leaders. Building upon these essential first steps, the research then documents how digital age Christians and secular counterparts voice concern about future uncertainties regarding digital age character challenges. Their common concern, albeit for differing reasons, reflects an understanding gap generated by the linked transformational change.

This chapter includes an overview of the problem to be studied accompanied with a background framing of the problem. It then provides a detailed discussion of the research questions used to address the problem. The nature of the study and its conceptual framework design are also addressed. The chapter concludes with a review of the definition of terms, assumptions, and an assessment of the study's significance.

## **Background of the Problem**

In the pre-digital age year of 1965, business and belief structures were radically different. There were no personal computers, no virtual meetings, no big data, and America had a Christian consensus (Lo, 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The problem to be addressed has these two intrinsically linked roots, what the digital age has done *for* us, and what the digital age is doing *to* us (McClure, 2020). The former is widely researched, the latter a research gap for this study.

### ***What Digital Age Connectivity Has Done for Us***

In 1965, Gordon Moore forecasted a future trend for the doubling of microchip computing power every 12 to 18 months (Lo, 2021). This prescient technological foresight of computing power miniaturization is the technological backbone fueling all aspects of the digital age transformation of global business (Lo, 2021). Digitization, digitalization, and datafication describe this reordering and the digitized lives it birthed (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

**Digitization, Digitalization, and Datafication.** Affordable, miniaturized calculating power fueled access to digital computing in the form of personal computers which digitized typewriters into word processors and paper reports into digital files (Nazari & Musilek, 2023). Organizing societal life around these and similar *digitization* innovations birthed *digitalization*. Digitization and digitalization branched from business into personal lives and then went mobile through smart devices while all remained connected to the rapidly growing world wide web. Data sharing transmission speeds shifted from the speed of personal exchanges and *snail* mail to the speed of light and virtual presence (Lo, 2021). The ongoing digital conversion became global business transformation, and the speed of pre-digital age life experiences accelerated with them (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Lo, 2021).

The digitalization of work and human life introduced a digitized granularly robust view of people with their desires, and the workplace with its processes, in the form of digital documentation known as datafication. Datafication birthed the revolutionizing market of big data with associated analysis and the ability to fundamentally rethink and rework virtually all processes involving people, machinery, and the business around both (Krasic et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). In sum, the three-Ds have revolutionized every aspect of business organizations, are now critical infrastructure as essential as electricity, and have surreptitiously altered us (Bingaman, 2023; Lai & Widmar, 2021, Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McClure, 2020).

### ***What Digital Age Connectivity Is Doing to Us***

The digital age's inordinate expansion of individual choice and personalized service in business empowered similar tinkering in personal livelihood including the emancipating, syncretistic customization of personal beliefs apart from religious traditions (Brubaker, 2020; McClure, 2020). For many the internet serves as a buffering agent creating space for a personalized shaping of a secularized self (McClure, 2020). Research reveals direct correlations between internet use and the creation of a buffered self-identification as a religious *none*, an individual claiming no religious affiliation (McClure, 2020). The growth of *nones* has risen one percent per year since 2000, and by 2018, altered 70 years of survey history with a seismic shifting of the American consensus from Christian to secular (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

The speed with which the secularized digital age has come upon us reflects a digitally naïve society (Bingaman, 2020, 2023). Secularists worry the emancipating effect is evolving into an enslavement effect (Brubaker, 2020). Secular and biblical worldviews see the need for digital wisdom to understand and navigate the digital age (Bingaman, 2023). Failure to act poses an existential risk to human spirituality for all, including business leaders (Bingaman, 2020).

**Problem Statement**

The problem addressed is insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. American Christian business leaders are insufficiently prepared to address the character challenges they face in the secularized digital age workplace (Ecklund et al., 2020). A “seismic” cultural lurch toward secularism has occurred in America leaving many Christians, including Christian business leaders, digitally naïve and in need of digital wisdom to lead in a secularized workplace (Bingaman, 2020, p. 292; Bingaman, 2023; McClure, 2020). American Christian business leaders are unprepared to address secularized views advocating no more than civil faith in public places (Dick, 2021; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021; McDade, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023; Walker & Vegter, 2023). Failing to address this gap leaves future Christian business leaders with training blindsides by allowing unchallenged secularistic based thinking to dominate (Ecklund et al., 2020; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023). Failing to address this gap forces current Christian business leaders to conduct their own research to find balance in addressing secular workplace challenges (Dick, 2021; Duff, 2021; Ecklund et al., 2020; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023). Failing to address this Christian business leader identified gap contributes to their inability to fulfill their God-given integrated faith calling in this time and place (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Ficek, 2021; Guth, 2022; Jackelen, 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this flexible design multiple case study was to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today’s secularized digital age while producing credible themes and transferable findings which

inform further efforts to fill this gap. The research shows why the rapidly onsetting digital age cultural shift toward secularism causes individual identity challenges in virtually everyone, with a focus upon how it impacts Christian business leaders (Ficek, 2021). The biblical worldview framing of the research clarified how each business leader's Christian identity relates to the character challenges they see in the digital age secularized environment in which they work. Multiple cases were assessed due to the distinctiveness between leaders self-identifying as Christian. Furthermore, the research displayed how the individual perspective within each case connected to the group level actions the respective leaders directed. Finally, the research was purposed to explore any organizational influence which may have had a shaping effect upon the Christian business leader's perceived character challenges or freedom of action.

### **Research Questions**

Today's Christian business leaders face a dauntingly complex transformational leadership challenge in their respective secularized workplaces (Bingaman, 2020; McClure, 2020). How they work through these challenges with a biblical worldview, or why they might choose to shift their moral foundations represent an understanding gap this research addresses. Today's leaders must exercise agile workplace actions to meet the accelerated pace of the digital age 3-Ds, while simultaneously managing their virtual presence knowing this composite hybrid identity is highly scrutinized by both secular and Christian superiors, subordinates, and society (Ecklund et al., 2020; Granic et al., 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020, Skitka et al., 2021). Christian business leaders each seek their own selective blend of biblical and secular worldviews to tackle workplace challenges knowing their decisions are met by a majority view founded upon secularized research, and a minority view of research advocating for integrated faith resolutions (Dick, 2021; Ecklund et al., 2020; Furse, 2022; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021; Miller, 2021;

Murray, 2023; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Upenieks, 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023). A biblical worldview posits the heart of their character challenges reside in the heart of their identity and these research questions are shaped to discern the linkages between Christian identity, conviction, action, and character maturation through qualitative exploration from an individual, group, and organizational level (New King James Version Bible [NKJV], 1982, 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Psalm 139:23-24; Reyes et al., 2021; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

RQ1 – Why do Christian business leaders have an insufficient understanding of character challenges in the secularized digital age?

RQ1a – How are a Christian business leader’s perceptions of character challenges related to their Christian identity?

RQ1b – How are Christian business leader’s identity challenges different in a secularized business culture as compared to a Christian owned business culture?

RQ2 - How is an individual’s Christian character challenged by the digital age secularized culture?

RQ3 – How is business environment impacted by digital age secularized culture?

RQ3a - How are these impacts seen by Christian business leaders in a secular owned business work environment?

RQ3b – How are these impacts seen by Christian business leaders in a Christian owned business work environment?

### ***Detailed Discussion of RQ1 – Addressing Why a Gap in Understanding Exists***

The heart of the understanding challenge is captured in a very sizable but widely accepted theological conclusion that all human development, and the social sciences which inform the

same, reflect individual identity rooted in either an anthropocentric secular worldview or a Christocentric biblical worldview (Trentham, 2019a). The inverse relationship and divergence are best recognized by the biblical worldview end in an eternal city of God while the secular end envisions a worldly city apart from God (Trentham, 2019a). Such disparate worldview ends create a natural divergence in values, convictions, purposes, and, at times, the ways to resolve challenges thus creating sizable identity challenges in and choices for Christian business leaders (Ficek, 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). In sum, common grace provided by God, creates common principles but rarely common conclusions or common approaches toward resolution (NKJV, 1982, John 1:9-12; Romans 1:25; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

Given the heart of digital age identity consensus has shifted from Christian to secular while simultaneously making individual choices more readily visible to a wider audience, today's secularized culture readily showers a wide range of critical opinion for any of those who suggest their identity to be rooted in Christ (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Bingaman, 2020; Brautigam, 2019; Cortina et al., 2019; Dick, 2021; Jackelen, 2021; McClure, 2020; McDade, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, Murray, 2019b, 2023; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Many Christian business leaders believe they have inadequate moral counsel or practical guidance on how to display a testimonial integrated faith rather than simply appear as contrarians in today's secularized workplace (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019). These spiritual maturation ultimatums, compounded by the rapid sociological consensus shift, challenge Christian business leader identity to its core heart commitment leading some to conclude the balance of their personal secular and biblical worldview perspective requires adjustment (Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; Ficek, 2021; McGhee, 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Trentham, 2019b; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). The first research

question allows Christian business leaders to address all aspects of their Christian identity development stages and the collective data findings have deepened understanding on how these coalesce to shape Christian character and the challenges each perceives.

#### ***Detailed Discussion of RQ1a – Character Challenges Related to Christian Identity***

The digital age has ushered in an unprecedented level of digital behavioral visibility which creates digital identities (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). However, digital identities do not reflect an individual's character and, at times, may even reflect the challenges an individual is struggling with regarding their overall values, beliefs, and associated actions which more accurately reflect their character (Brautigam, 2019; Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Culton, 2022; NKJV, 1982, Matthew 23:25-26; Ochoa, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019). This research question deepens the understanding of how digital age hybrid, hyperconnected, identities create character challenges for Christian business leaders (Brautigam, 2019; Brubaker, 2020; Chambers & Sandford, 2019).

#### ***Detailed Discussion of RQ1b – Identity Challenges in Secular vice Christian Business Culture***

The identity challenge of a student at Liberty University, where a biblical worldview is encouraged; as compared to that of a student at a secular university, where a biblical worldview is critiqued is an example of what this research question explores (Cortina et al., 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Miller, 2021). When an individual faces a character maturation ultimatum, does the surrounding culture determine how the ultimatum is addressed? An individual's willingness to appear distinctive from their surrounding culture requires a deeper sense of conviction regarding any matter and this question explores how the two relate (Culton, 2022; Skitka et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).



*Detailed Discussion of RQ2 - Character Maturation through Developing Convictions*

The Christian leader identity challenges are reflective of how individual values, convictions, purposes, and attitudes mature across a lifetime. Maturation includes challenges which sequentially refine or reshape moral awareness, moral recognition, moral amplification, to eventually produce moral convictions upon which one typically grounds a choice to act or direct action. Digital age research may note how all this development has been altered by the digital age (Brubaker, 2020; Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021). Moral convictions are typically matters an individual sees as universally applicable imperatives, not just personal preferences, and the actions to be taken have more of an obligatory nature motivating them (Skitka et al., 2021). In the digital age, the number of participants involved in the shaping of these perspectives is logarithmically expanded (Brubaker, 2020; NKJV, 1982, Philippians 1:21; Skitka et al., 2021).

At the crux of any crisis a Christian business leader manages is an individual identity decision regarding standards for determining right and wrong, conclusions regarding the specific rights and wrongs of the situation, their relative significance, and whether their severity triggers a secular worldview or a biblical worldview based moral conviction with associated action (Brautigam, 2019; Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; Ficek, 2021; Ochoa, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). Workplace challenges are the experiential circumstances through which the Christian business leader arrives, perhaps for the first time, at a point of moral conviction to which identity alignment must shift (NKJV, 1982, Joshua 24:15; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The digital age guarantees a wider audience to applaud or critique the leader's decision (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

These are the types of character challenges Christian business leaders are facing and this second research question captured each individual's thinking about how personal preferences, at times, mature into moral awareness and moral convictions accompanied with a sense of duty or obligation to action even if a secular superior, subordinate, or surrounding society might object (Brautigam, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Polizzi & Harrison, 2022; Trentham, 2019b). This data collection provides new qualitative insights into rationale for the range of Christian identities reported by Stetzer and MacDonald (2020), indicators of shifting morals which might be reflective of Christian deconversion as reported by Starr et al. (2019), or a snapshot look at what appears to be a more civil faith as reported by McDade (2019), and most certainly deeper details regarding the Christian business leaders who want more help (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021).

### ***Detailed Discussion RQ3 - The Christian or Secular Business Organizational Factor***

The third research question captures qualitative data regarding an environmental distinction which are influencing character challenges perceived by and actions taken by the Christian business leader participants. Constitutional rights and Federal Court rulings show Christian business owners have legal protections to run their own businesses consistently with their core beliefs and that these rights do not readily extend to Christian business leaders working in businesses owned by secular minded individuals (Dick, 2021, Murray, 2019b; Perry, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2021). A Christian business leader working in a Christian owned business possesses legal latitudes and a different type of workplace feedback than their counterpart working in a secular owned business. These distinctions were reflective in the character challenges Christian business leaders perceived and impacted the range of choices they chose to enact.

***Detailed Discussion of RQ3a – Secular Owned Business***

Christians do have both public and private legal rights to practice integrated faith; however, the extent to which these rights can be practiced in the workplace are shaped by the type of workplace and their role within it (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023). This question explored the limits placed upon Christian business leaders working within a secular owned business which may be known as a public entity or a privately owned business of a secular worldview. The legal limitations can impact the choices of action available to a Christian business leader and potentially force them to choose between their way of life to provide and the integrated faith display of their character convictions (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Murray, 2023).

***Detailed Discussion of RQ3b – Christian Owned Business***

The starting point for this research question is like the last in that it recognizes Christians have both public and private legal rights to practice their integrated faith in the workplace. However, Christian leaders in a Christian owned business have even greater latitude to display this integrated faith (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023). This research question explored whether this broader acceptance of integrated faith on display has any impact upon them (Dick, 2021; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Murray, 2023).

***Specific Problem Statement Coverage***

These research questions assess the gap in understanding from three different perspectives to ensure they collectively provide a holistic look into the problem being studied. The unique individual, group, and organizational level lenses provided the desired clarity into the common gap in understanding. The individual level is essential because the digital age has altered the way individuals shape, mature, and display their identity leading all to more publicly choose either a secular or a biblical worldview in which to base their personal values and

assessments of right and wrong upon which rest their moral convictions (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Ficek, 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). While a lifetime of spiritual growth can produce an identity in Christ and a character portraying Christlikeness, this typically only comes through a passageway of Spiritually maturing life challenges formed in a place of daily work (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Psalm 139:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20). Allowing Christian business leaders to describe the life challenges they are facing in their cultural work environments and the moral convictions which mature through these experiences deepens the understanding at both the individual and a closely associated group identity level (Garrett, 2022). Gathering and assessing Christian business leader qualitative descriptions of how they chose to lead through these character challenges, including any legal restraints which may be associated, also deepens our understanding of their ability to identify as a child of God and fulfill the God ordained role in their time and place (Brailey & Parker, 2020; NKJV, 1982, Esther 4:13-14; Ephesians 2:10). Finally, the assessment of organizational level influence of the individual and group insights rounded out the desired holistic research of the problem studied.

### **The Nature of the Study**

This flexible design multiple-case qualitative study addresses a research gap unnoticed, unacknowledged, and misunderstood by a secularized community. To do this, it has been much more than a business-related research effort conducted *with* a biblical worldview. It was a biblical worldview shaped analysis of American Christian business leaders in a time and place of unparalleled digital age connectivity, transparency, and secularization. Only this kind of approach recognizes and documents the types of life-shaping character challenges Christian business leaders are indeed facing in the secularized digital age.

### *Discussion of Research Paradigms*

The positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism research paradigms represent sets of generalized beliefs, values, views of nature, reality, knowledge, which in sum are synonymous with an individual's worldview (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Given this study hinges upon moral convictions which compel action, the paradigm discussion is especially critical and even instructive in revealing such broad disparities in the perspective of reality, truth, and the moral convictions upon which society should justify action (Ficek, 2021; Skitka et al., 2021). The individual convictions of how one can understand reality and truth is captured in the ontological aspect of each paradigm, so this will be the key area of distinction focused upon in this discussion (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Each of the four paradigms is now addressed and assessed.

**Positivism.** Both positivists and post-positivists believe there is a single objective reality which can be studied and measured (Pak & Eltiti, 2023). A positivist paradigm focuses upon a quantitative worldview which blends measurable facts and observable phenomena to define reality (Omodan, 2022). Theism does not blend well with positivism because a positivist assesses any theistic belief in a transcendent being as nothing more than unquantifiable speculation since such beliefs cannot be directly observed, measured, nor replicated (Pak & Eltiti, 2023).

**Post-Positivism.** Post-positivism is similarly focused upon objectivity, standardization, deductive reasoning; however, allows room for yet unproven hypotheses including a realm of reality where a researcher may not be able to fully understand or measure (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). A biblical worldview fits well within a post-positivist paradigm because of this allowance for the existence of a single objective reality even though portions of it remain unknown or unquantifiable (NKJV, 1982, Isaiah 55:8-9). Positivism and post-positivism are often critiqued

for their insufficient attention to complexities made evident in qualitative research, yet post-positivism remains a dominant approach in social sciences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

**Constructivism.** As the name suggests, constructivism constructs reality based upon individual interpretations derived from individual experiences (Omodan, 2022). It represents a paradigm assembled from the bottom up (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Constructivism contains a broad range of individually defined realities altered across time and place, and thus knowledge is seen as relativistic and possessing no objective truth to be discovered (Omodan, 2022). While this approach may clarify individual experiences in unique circumstances, it is limited to very subjective perspectives which cannot adequately describe collective social phenomena (Omodan, 2022). Given its emphasis upon subjective truth and individualized views of reality, rather than single reality objective truth, this paradigm remains disconnected from a biblical worldview.

**Pragmatism.** Pragmatists believe reality changes across time, place, and turn of events and is not a static objective truth (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatists believe the world is the sum of unique experiences not universal truths (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism is oriented towards action, specifically in practical solutions of social world problems by understanding the experiences of the social group in focus (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism is assessed to be a valuable approach in analyzing and constructing resolute actions for social justice challenges, yet its relativistic approach to identifying what equates to social justice can become highly debatable between social groups (Damper, 2022a; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The relativity of truth within pragmatism makes it inconsistent with a biblical worldview.

**Research Paradigm for This Research.** The research design used in this study is post-positivist. This perspective is shaped from a conclusion that no other paradigm can fit with a biblical worldview adhering to a single universal truth albeit not fully understood by humanity

(Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Jeffries et al., 2019; NKJV, 1982, Isaiah 55:8-9; John 14:6; Romans 11:33-36). Skitka et al. (2021) showed the moral convictions which most individuals act upon, including those of this researcher, arise from deeply seated values and perspectives of broad truths and reality akin to a worldview or paradigm. These distinctions between paradigms are especially critical for this study since most character challenges are rooted in moral convictions at the paradigm level depth (Skitka et al., 2021). The distinctions between paradigms also reveals why today's digital age secularized culture does not readily grasp the depth of character challenges individuals with a biblical worldview are facing.

This post-positivist biblical worldview also recognizes that those with a positivistic, constructivist, or multiple reality research paradigms readily dismiss a biblical worldview because they perceive such Christian moral convictions as merely personal beliefs (Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Skitka et al., 2021). This sizable disparity between a biblical worldview's recognition of God as Creator and secularized worldview which sees god as a concept is also a critical aspect of self-awareness for this researcher keeps in mind to avoid bias and judgmentalism in researching (Beltramini, 2019; Damper, 2022a; Jackelen, 2021; Jeffries et al., 2019; Miller, 2021; NKJV, 1982, John 1:1-5; Paulus et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021).

### *Discussion of Design*

The choice of research design is guided by what best addresses the approved research problem, purpose, and research questions. The fixed, flexible, and mixed methods design options were each considered for best alignment. A brief review of each is incorporated in this section. It also shows how the qualitative nature of this research makes a flexible design the optimal choice.

**Fixed Design.** Fixed design is best for a detailed quantitative analysis of complex problems to assist in the identification of primary factors and potentially prove inferential or

causal factor theories through tightly controlled experimentation and regression analysis (Jeffries et al., 2019). Fixed design applied to complex problems can provide a generalized top-down understanding of the problem being studied (Clark et al., 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019). Fixed design research clearly shows the linkage between the growth of the world wide web and the gravitation toward secularism in America (McClure, 2020). While fixed design findings may be more easily generalized and transferable; they typically fail to address bottom-up details and thus may miss important hidden factors (Barwegen, 2019; Clark et al., 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019).

**Flexible Design.** Flexible design is better shaped for research more exploratory in nature such as character development in the secularized digital age (Brubaker, 2020; Clark et al., 2022; Culton, 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019). Before a provable theory can be assembled, flexible design research can be employed in intentional exploratory efforts to deepen understanding and the development of theory (Falk & Guenther, 2021; Jeffries et al., 2019). Flexible design with qualitative research is thus an optimal approach to address the understanding gap of character maturation challenges faced in secularized digital age life experiences, especially among self-proclaimed Christians (Culton, 2022; Ochoa, 2022; Starr et al., 2019). Flexible design may provide rich detail but can also present challenges and potential limitations on the generalizability and transferability of the findings; this is addressed in the case study section to follow (Culton, 2022; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Jeffries et al., 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Sneed et al., 2020; Starr et al., 2019).

**Mixed Methods Design.** When time and the breadth of research resources allow, the mixed methods design provides the ability to assemble both a top-down understanding of a complex problem through quantitative analysis accompanied by a bottom-up understanding produced through qualitative analysis (Ecklund et al., 2020; Jeffries et al., 2019; Reyes et al.,



2021). Mixed methods studies allow for convergent, divergent, and complementary triangulation from within the research effort (Barwegen, 2019; Stamenkov, 2023). This combination requires a more extensive volume of research resources including the time allowed for the study.

**Best Suited Research Design.** Due to the exploratory nature of the approved research problem, purpose, and research questions, and the time and resources available for this study, a flexible design is the best fit design (Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; Jeffries et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019). A fixed design could not explore the why and how complexities of human decision making which falls in the understanding gap to be explored (Pak & Eltiti, 2023). Flexible designs have proven effective in similar peer-reviewed research efforts addressing character maturation, foundational shifts in fundamental beliefs, and public decision-making challenges while operating under near ubiquitous secularized digital age behavioral visibility (Brubaker, 2020; Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019).

### ***Discussion of Method***

Flexible design methods include narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. All five are addressed with a separate paragraph in this section. The primary comparison included here is between the two allowed in this PhD program.

**Narrative.** The narrative approach captures the essence of an individual's perspective of truth by understanding the stories of their life experiences (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). The approach incorporates how the individual interprets these sequenced stories to shape their perceived truth or the reality they see (Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Setran, 2020). This version of extensive research into a single individual's perspective can produce an insightful representation of the complex, layered aspect of how human experiential knowledge shapes overall perspective

(Prosek & Gibson, 2021). However, the uniqueness of each individual's complex set of experiences naturally creates limitations on a researcher's ability to discover transferability to inform further research beyond the individual (Jeffries et al., 2019; Prosek & Gibson, 2021).

**Grounded Theory.** This form of qualitative research strives to illuminate how a process or directed action actually unfolds within the group impacted by it (Kegler et al., 2019). This approach reveals linkages to show both the direct and indirect, both the intentional and potentially unintentional implications of a directed or prescribed action (Kegler et al., 2019). Grounded theory research can be especially valuable for social strategies and public policy planning as it can provide insights into the potential unintended effects of a policy which may undermine the purpose for which it is to be implemented (Kegler et al., 2019).

**Ethnography.** This inquiry framework seeks to document the life experience of an entire group of individuals within a researched community (Kegler et al., 2019). Mapping, tracking, documenting, and understanding the complex interactions of individuals within an entire community demands extensive investment of researcher time (Kegler et al., 2019). Additionally, the researcher can only achieve this level of insight by joining in the community and adapting many aspects of their lifestyle for an extended period. One researcher invested 2 years deeply engaged in the Australian Aboriginal community to document and ethnographic understanding of the behavioral risk factors within the community culture (Kegler et al., 2019).

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology is typically aligned with a constructivist paradigm and focused upon capturing the research participant's lived experience (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Phenomenology can be shaped in either a descriptive or an interpretive manner (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). The descriptive approach attempts to capture the consciousness of the individual's lived experience while interpretive efforts attempt to investigate how each

individual makes meaning of their individual experience (Kegler et al., 2019; Prosek & Gibson, 2021).

**Single Case Study.** An explanatory or exploratory case study is typically aligned with a post positivist paradigm (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). The case study method has grown in popularity over the past 40 years due to its effectiveness in developing theory, exploring effectiveness, and providing a deeper understanding into a phenomenon (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). Properly bounded case studies have proven to be manageable and effective (McGhee, 2019; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). However, single case studies pose limitations in producing transferable themes needed to deepen understanding (Culton, 2022; McGhee, 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Sneed et al., 2020; Starr et al., 2019).

**Multiple Case Study.** Single case studies can produce useful insights; however, blending the insights from multiple case studies can provide a sound foundation for useful cross-case analysis and valid generalization from qualitative research (Falk & Guenther, 2021). Multiple case study is useful when researching disparate perspectives to discover common themes for resolution of a challenge at hand (Peters et al., 2020; Sneed et al., 2020). The product of multiple case study, blended in this way, can produce transferable normative truth statements which readily enhance the usefulness of the research efforts (Falk & Guenther, 2021). Multiple case studies can thus be leveraged to provide findings with advantageous rigor, credibility, and authenticity beyond those provided through single case study (Falk & Guenther, 2021). Several multiple case studies have been completed documenting the importance of organizational shifts driven by digital age transformations of the business environment, all of which address managerial related challenges accompanying such actions (Budde et al., 2022; Kazim, 2019; Pfister & Lehmann, 2023).

**Method Chosen for This Study.** This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a multiple case study was used. This conclusion was founded upon the following. Acknowledging this study is seeking to explore a why and how research gap, a qualitative case study provides the best opportunity to gather in-depth understanding and insights not captured by the other design methods (Ecklund et al., 2020; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Guth, 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019; McGhee, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021). Acknowledging multiple case studies have identified sizable managerial challenges directly related with digital age transformations to the workplace, it was appropriate for this digital age research into business leader character challenges (Budde et al., 2022; Kazim, 2019; Pfister & Lehmann, 2023). Acknowledging single case studies document that secularization creates an additional layer of character challenges which vary by both generation and gender (Culton, 2022; McGhee, 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Starr et al., 2019). Acknowledging this single case study approach creates a uniqueness which makes multiple case study a better option to ensure transferability in findings. Acknowledging the wide disparity between secular and biblical worldviews as well as perspective disparities even among leaders who self-identify as Christian; a multiple case study is appropriate (Ecklund et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2021; Sneed et al., 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). Acknowledging business leaders who self-identify as Christian possess a range of perspectives regarding universal truth, the origin and reliability of the Bible, the role of a Christian leader in the secularized digital age, and other distinctive qualifiers; a multiple case study provides the best approach to capture their perspectives and seek to find generalizable themes from which to draw transferable findings (Brautigam, 2019; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Jackelen, 2021; Jeffries et al., 2019; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; McDade, 2019; Natow, 2022; Sneed et al., 2020; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021).

None of the other inquiry frameworks would have been able to produce these combined results within the constraints of the Liberty University PhD guidance.

### *Discussion of Triangulation*

Triangulation is a method of systematically comparing findings from a variety of data collection methods for the purpose of enhancing one's confidence in the validity of the conclusions drawn (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). An overview of the four types of triangulation: methodological, data, investigator, and theoretical, is provided along with the intended use of them to produce similar validity enhancing confidence in this research.

**Methodological.** Triangulating data across methods can mean a comparison of data gathered from quantitative with data gathered from qualitative such as blending qualitative interview data with quantitative testing results (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). It also includes comparing qualitative data gathered in interviews with the quantitative data gathered in surveys or archival collection (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). Finally, it can include some other form of quantitative or qualitative data gathering means like a unique mix of quantitative and qualitative (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). During criminal investigations, triangulation can reveal convergent or divergent leads to guide next steps (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). In a courtroom, methodological triangulation is used to prove guilt or innocence, while in research it can be similarly used to prove viability of the research (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020).

**Data.** This type of triangulation includes the cross comparison of data from multiple sources such as searching archival data for similar data combinations (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). This is distinct from the methodological, because it includes a

variety of researchers, people, or stakeholders (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). An abundance of aligning data can confirm a theory just as an absence of aligning data can reveal a problem or gap in data (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). If a particular policing, hospital, or business policy requires a certain type of data collection but there is no archival history of such data being collected; then there is, at a minimum, an indication of a policy implementation problem (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020).

**Investigator.** When more than one investigator is involved in the research process, this type of triangulation can be applied in the comparison of findings after each has independently analyzed the data collection (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). Just as multiple witnesses of a crime may provide a better understanding of what occurred, multiple investigators can blend their unique perspectives to form a more robust analysis of the data collected. While this is commonly applied in coding transcriptions from participant interviews, or analyzing interviews for themes, it is not feasible for sole researcher efforts (Trenta et al., 2021).

**Theoretical.** This form of triangulation includes an effort to consider and compare multiple theories as seen in the problem to be studied (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). The greater the number of theories to be considered, the larger the data collection and assessment grows. This type of triangulation can become a sizable consumer of resources, including time, which makes it impractical and rarely applied (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). It was not considered for this research.

**Quantitative Methods for This Research.** The Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) research identifies three groups of Christians, including a group of nominal Christians who they show to be reclassifying themselves as *nones* in the digital age. Ecklund et al. (2020) and Reyes et al.

(2021) quantitatively shape similar groupings based upon quantitative measurements of their associated religious activities. These quantitative findings provide a good top-down perspective of digital age secularization and the character challenges it produces for those who self-identify as Christians which this research referenced against collected data. The mixed methods approach of Ecklund et al. (2020) and Reyes et al. (2021) align a portion of their quantitative data collection with qualitative insights into a sizable number of the individual participants.

**Qualitative Methods for This Research.** The tops-down quantitative shaped perspective is best enhanced with a bottom-up qualitative view. The data gathered from Christian business leaders in this research displayed both alignment with and disparity from these existing findings gathered from a broader population. Ecklund et al. (2020) provided insights into Christians seeking greater assistance from their church homes in addressing the faith at work challenges they faced. Many of these were seeking personal assistance but the research did not specify if any were business leaders with supervisory responsibilities. Reyes et al. (2021) suggested some Christians have resolved their challenges through deconversion and Starr et al. (2019) documented similar dissatisfied self-identifying Christians with their extimonies. Character challenges in the workplace may generate this level of shift in beliefs. Starr et al. (2019) suggested the extimonies are not just about nominal Christians but are reflective even of committed Christians reconsidering their beliefs in the secularized digital age and the pressures a supervisory role may be contributory toward this end.

Culton (2022) documented college-age adults with similar shifting of beliefs stating the church is out of touch with culture. Supervisors confirmed they have workers who reflect some of these perspectives. Ochoa (2022) documented Christian women who question the beliefs of their past because of perceived digital age disparities in church doctrinal positions or biblical

interpretations regarding women or other gender-based teachings. McGhee (2019) suggests the United States is simply following a European path toward a practice of civil faith in public. Given this is a widely advocated position, it was considered in data gathering and analysis. Finally, the multiple case study efforts assessed both commonalities and distinctions between the multiple cases assessed in an effort to derive transferable findings through cross-case analysis (Budde et al., 2022; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Kazim, 2019; Pfister & Lehmann, 2023; Peters et al., 2020; Sneed et al., 2020). The Methodological and Data forms of triangulation were liberally applied throughout this research. The investigator and theoretical were not used.

### ***Summary of the Nature of the Study***

A secularized world tends to portray Christian leaders more as outdated contrarian opinions rather than leaders working through core value character conflicts. The flexible design study written with biblical worldview framing deepens the understanding of these character challenges for both Christian and secular leaders alike. Qualitative data gathered from each of these levels documents the types of life-shaping character challenges Christian business leaders are facing. Methodological and data methods of triangulation help blend the study's qualitative findings gathered from the individual, group, and organizational level lenses. A multiple case approach was leveraged to properly capture the diversity of perspectives among those who self-identify as Christians. The multiple cases were then cross analyzed to find transferable and generalizable themes and findings to inform the gap in understanding.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual frameworks shape a study design and guide its development (Varpio et al., 2020). They answer why particular research is important and how it contributes to new knowledge (Varpio et al., 2020). A conceptual framework evolves as new insights develop and



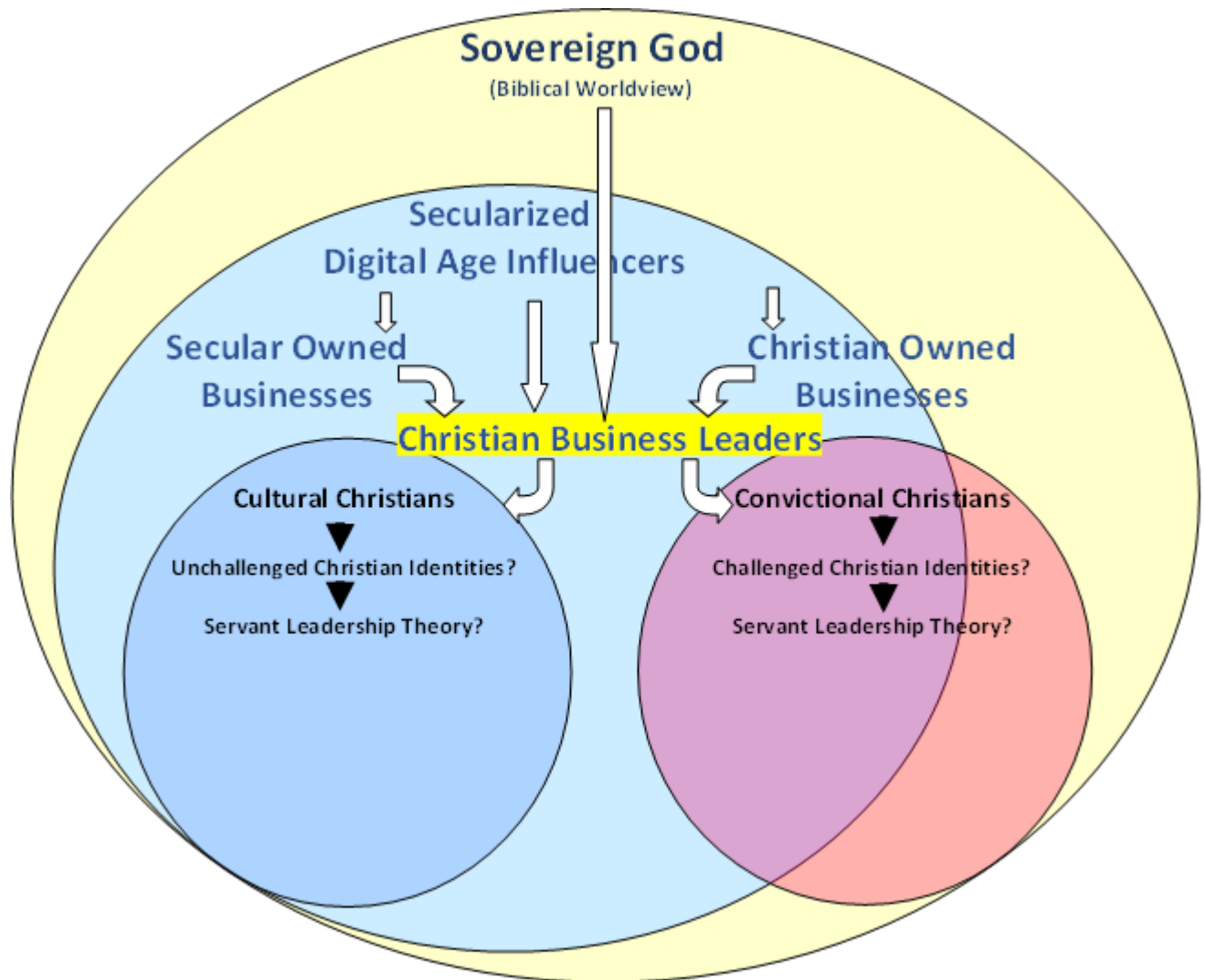
outlines the methodological underpinnings of a research effort (Varpio et al., 2020). Figure 1 provides such a graphic depiction for this study and this section introduces the concepts, actors, constructs, and theories considered within it. It reflects an understanding gap in how cultural Christian leaders and convictional Christian leaders interface with the secularized digital age and why they are distinct (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). It reflects the degree to which these leaders sense an accountability before the sovereign God in whom they profess belief (Brautigam, 2019). It reflects how a secular culture in the immediate surrounding may become a primary focus in shaping decisions rather than a seemingly more distant sovereign God (Culton, 2022; Paulus et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2021). It identifies ample volumes of secularized influencers seeking to shape Christian business leader decisions through digital age methods (Brubaker, 2020, McClure, 2020). It captures much of what extant research tells us about these leaders in the secularized digital age (Barwegen, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The Chapter 2 literature review further expands this initial framework and Figure 3 incorporates a secular researcher's perspective of the heart of Christian decision makers into this conceptual framework.

### ***Concepts***

A faith-based, heart level, identity challenge resides at the core of Christian leader character challenges, and the unprecedented behavioral visibility, enabled by hyperconnectivity, of the digital age has changed the global dynamics of how such challenges are exposed and resolved (Barwegen, 2019; Bingaman, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; NKJV, 1982, Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Jeremiah 17:5-10; Skitka et al., 2021). Research into faith-based character development in the secularized digital age reflects a broad use of the term Christian, spanning from nominal to convictional variants (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The research

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework Diagram*



reveals some Christians desiring to live out an integrated faith of deep biblical conviction while others self-identify as Christian but choose a more cultural blending of moral preference and a more selective intent to live by or develop under a biblical worldview (Barwegen, 2019; Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; McClure, 2020; NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:5-15; Setran, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The study is informed by this

prior research, contains two concepts drawn from their overarching findings, with both depicted in Figure 1.

**Concept - Convictional Christians Identity Primarily in Christ.** The self-centeredness of the human heart presents an ongoing obstacle to God-intended spiritual maturation and the transformation of identity in self to identity in Christ (Brautigam, 2019, Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 17:5-10). The digital age combination of real and virtual identities into a highly visible hybrid identity brings the faith-based maturation process into a vastly broader public view with the potential for public comment, criticism, or praise from virtually anyone (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Granic et al., 2020). Christian business leaders lead and struggle with this added, secular oriented, hybrid identity character maturation complexity and may even be unaware of the complexities digital age hyperconnectivity creates inside their own decision making (Brubaker, 2020; Ecklund et al., 2020; Ficek, 2021; McDade, 2019; McGhee, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022).

The predominantly secular digital age influence, applied in a hybrid manner, is directly linked to the shrinkage of self-identifying Christians at the rate of around 1% per year in the 21st century and has changed an American consensus from one defending Christianity to one questioning or even attacking convictional Christian faith (Bingaman, 2023; Culton, 2022; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This shifting may simply be a public revealing of pre-existing distinctions between personal moral beliefs and morally imperative convictions (Barwegen, 2019; Culton, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Skitka et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Researchers say the percentages of convictional Christians has not shifted across the decades, but rather it is the nominal Christians

who have chosen to shift towards pluralism and away from a Judeo-Christian worldview (Barwegen, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Qualitative findings did reflect some convictional Christian *business* leaders have an identity so committed to Christ that even a hybrid form of workplace secularized cultural challenge serves to clarify and deepen their proclaimed convictions rather than cause them to waiver from them, because they aspire to maintain an identity in Christ (Brautigam, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:9). This concept is captured in Figure 1 by depicting the convictional Christian surrounded by a secularized culture yet remaining committed to a sovereign God encompassing all. However, some researchers disagree, suggesting even convictional Christians may deconvert as extended hyperconnectivity with the secularized digital age turn questions into doubts and then skepticism, and this suggests a need for a second concept (Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019).

**Concept – Cultural Christians Identity Primarily in Culture.** Research shows the historically unprecedented digital age consensus shift toward pluralistic secularization in America reflects individual choices of nominal Christians (Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Some researchers suggest the online pluralism of the digital age has flattened hierarchies, equalized perspectives, lessened confidence in absolutes and created an emancipating space for Christian deconversion (Brubaker, 2020; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Soukup & Glader, 2020). It represents a shift away from theism toward deism ushering in a wider acceptance of a secularized society, a shallower theological foundation, and the practice of no more than a civil faith as a form of *civil* religion (Barwegen, 2019; Brautigam, 2019; McDade, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Soukup & Glader, 2020). This shift away from a convictional

biblical worldview is a shift in the moral imperative convictions upon which one lives, acts, and leads (Culton, 2022; Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:12-14; Setran, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021).

Acknowledging a range of beliefs regarding the meaning of the Christian modifier, the origin and reliability of the Bible, the role of Christ Jesus in this present world, and the purpose of the church in culture; a second group of cultural Christians is a part of this study. A culturally influenced Christian is more than a nominal Christian but is distinct from a convictional Christian. They are depicted in Figure 1 as surrounded by and more responsive to a secularized culture, thus a coloring shade which blends with culture (Ficek, 2021; McDade, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022).

Both convictional Christians and cultural Christians recognize their secularized culture surroundings but respond differently to it (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Both groups acknowledge, to varying degrees, a sovereign God; however, their perspectives regarding what the sovereignty means or to what degree it can be understood in the digital age are widely disparate (Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021). For these reasons, and more added in Chapter 2, these Christians are separated into two distinct concepts for this research.

### ***Theory***

Given the disparity in perspectives between cultural and convictional Christians, this section identifies what may be a form of potential commonality between the disparate entities.

**Servant Leadership Theory.** Servant leadership has proven to be an effective and sustainable transformational leadership style well suited for digital age business, and as such, a valuable leadership approach to leverage common grace principles even when they do not lead to common conclusions thus creating workforce challenges (Bragger et al., 2021; Trentham,

2019b). It is a valuable leadership theory to incorporate in this study and did provide some common unifying theme under which almost all Christian leaders coalesced.

Servant leadership has been found to both inspire service minded workers and grow service minded leaders (Bragger et al., 2021). It outperforms other forms of transformational leadership because a servant leader learns to balance the needs of individuals with the needs of the organization (Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Servant leaders help mature an organization in moral development which enhances a range of workplace behaviors and job performance while simultaneously reducing counterproductive workplace behavior (Lee et al., 2020). Servant leadership can serve as a human resource development practice which can morally develop and unify and organization purpose and performance (Bragger et al., 2021).

While most researchers attribute servant leadership core attributes to common grace springing from Judeo-Christian principles, most also agree the common principles can align with other religious traditions to encourage the maturation of individual life purpose from being self-centered to other-centered (Bragger et al., 2021). Given the employment of servant leadership has proven to help organizations grow from a group of self-serving individuals into a highly motivated other-serving team, data evidentiary trails did reveal several aspects of it being considered for use by Christian business leaders striving to resolve character challenges they perceived in their secularized workplace environments (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership theory is depicted in Figure 1 as a potential trait of a cultural or convictional Christian.

### ***Actors***

The interface of four distinct actors have been captured in this study and all are depicted in Figure 1. The primary actor in this study is the Christian business leader while the other three

are actors influencing the decision making of this primary actor. Documenting how Christian business leaders respond to other actors is an important aspect of this research.

**Christian Business Leaders.** These are leaders who self-identify as Christians with broad decision-making responsibilities and impact in a business workplace environment. The digital age has presented unique transformational challenges for all business leaders; however, Christian business leaders must face the additive daunting task of leading in a secularized workplace at a time when faith-based action is questioned and may even be criticized (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The character challenges they face most likely reflect a personal, core value, morally imperative choice; while their secular counterparts, or hybrid observers, do not readily recognize such complexities (Beltramini, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021).

The challenges may also reflect a maturation growth point in a Christian business leader's character demanding an identity alignment decision favoring an identity with Christ, a view of Christ in culture, or purely culture based (Beltramini, 2019; Ficek, 2021; Jackelen, 2021; McDade, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Joshua 24:15; Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Data collection from Christian business leaders help clarify what they perceive to be the moral imperatives in today's secularized digital age workplace and how their moral convictions translate into action to resolve each challenge. Finally, the digital age societal consensus shift toward secularism has also drawn many theists into deism thus producing some forms of *Christian* actions which might be more accurately defined as morally therapeutic deism (Barwegen, 2019; Setran, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022).

**Secularized Digital Age Influencers.** This is an actor living by moral convictions based in a secular, or deistic, set of humanistic values (Bingaman, 2020, 2023). Trentham (2019a) says

all humans develop along one of two inversely related paths, either a secular worldview or a biblical worldview. He suggests the best path for Christians to influence others is to focus upon the common principles revealed by God through His common grace blessing while always remembering these common principles seen by all do not equate to common conclusions by all (Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). Secularized digital age influencers may see precisely the same circumstances as the Christian business leader but arrive at completely different moral imperative conclusions on what should be done primarily because they see God as a concept who can be ignored rather than as a Creator of all we know (Barwegen, 2019; Beltramini, 2019; Brautigam, 2019; Ficek, 2021; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

In the secularized digital age, the influencers have societal consensus on their side and readily portray faith based activities as contrarian, naïve, out of step, a threat to society, and even symptomatic of mental illness (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Cortina et al., 2019; Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Dick, 2021; Duff, 2021; Furse, 2022; McDade, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023; Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Starr et al., 2019; Upenieks, 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023). Digital age behavioral visibility exposes the hybrid personalities of all Christian business leaders, thus introducing the potential for criticism from superior, subordinate, and public viewers, into their decision-making calculus (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McClure, 2020). Secularized digital age influencers have sizable impact upon Christian business leaders so understanding this actor is essential in this study.

**Christian Owned Businesses.** These are business organizations owned by Christians who seek to run their business in a God-honoring fashion (Nelson, 2019). Supreme Court decisions supporting freedom of conscience, non-domination, and mutual respect principles



produced favorable decisions for the Christian business leaders at Hobby Lobby Stores and in Masterpiece Cakeshop (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023; Nelson, 2019). However, the same legal principles prevent Christian business leaders from intruding upon the legal rights of any employees who seek to exercise a secular founded freedom of conscience (Nelson, 2019). These principles prohibit Christian business leaders from exercising domination or adverse influence over the spiritual lives of deistic or secular worldview individuals (Nelson, 2019). Christian business owners do have the right to establish a Christian work environment, but it must be established in such a way that it does not intrude upon the freedom of conscience of any secular employee (Nelson, 2019). Both the Christian business leader and the secular worker employed in a Christian owned business experience different work environment and different character challenges than their counterparts in secular workplaces. Therefore, the Christian owned business workplace represents another actor impacting Christian business leaders in the secularized digital age.

**Secular Owned Businesses.** Like the Christian business owner, a secular owned business leader may establish a work environment as they see fit; however, the same principles apply to protect the individual rights of the Christian business leaders and employees working within the organization (Nelson, 2019). Christian business leaders working for a secular owner and in a secularized environment face a different set of character challenges than their Christian counterpart working within a Christian owned organization. In sum, both a Christian business owner and a secular business owner may establish their workplace environment as they see fit; yet, in doing so, neither can infringe upon the freedom of conscience rights of their employees to select their own moral commitments and live their lives accordingly (Nelson, 2019).

### *Constructs*

Acknowledging a leader's choices for action to resolve character challenging workplace struggles reflect their individual conclusions of the moral imperatives in play, two constructs guide data collection and assimilation (Skitka et al., 2021). Both are portrayed with question marks on Figure 1, further detailed in Chapter 2, and displayed in an expanded form in Figure 2.

**Challenged Christian Identities.** Convictional Christians aspiring to live an integrated faith see more character challenges (Murray, 2023; Nelson, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Christian theologians and secularized researchers agree that an individual's identity continues to develop and mature across a lifetime with beliefs becoming moral preferences which shape perspectives of right and wrong and mature into moral imperatives one's character senses a compelling need, or duty, to act upon (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). Given this broadly accepted truth, this first construct simply suggests the Christian leader aspiring to align their individual identity with Christ and live out an integrated faith will face a greater number of character challenges in this secularized digital age (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Nelson, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). America's secularized workplace will be the sizable contributor to this increase and the hybrid identity nature of the digital age will serve as an amplifying character challenge factor. Data analysis provided ample evidentiary examples of this construct.

**Unchallenged Christian Identities.** Cultural Christians living with moral imperatives shaped to a greater extent by culture, see fewer digital age secularized workplace challenges (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The American shift from a Christian to a secular consensus in 2018 was the product of two-decade trend of accepting digital technology and digital theology in the shaping of belief systems (Bingaman, 2023; Culton, 2022; Setran,

2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020). The altering landscape in Christian identity foundation was the product of nominal Christians reidentifying as nones and cultural Christians shifting their moral imperatives to fit the changing culture around them (McDade, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Like all humans, these are acting upon the moral imperative conclusions they have chosen and since their choices are more accepted among a secular consensus, they will sense fewer faith-based character challenges in the secularized digital age workplace. Data analysis showed all Christian business leaders to have character challenges; however, evidentiary trails revealed the severity of the character challenges were noticeably higher for some of the convictional Christian business leaders than for the cultural Christian business leaders.

### ***Relationship Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs***

Five important relationships emerge within this conceptual framework. These are the relationships between the: (a) Concepts and the Christian business leader actor, (b) Servant leader theory and the Christian business leader actor, (c) Secularized influencers and the Christian business leader actor, (d) Christian or Secular Business Owners and the Christian business leader actor, and (e) Constructs and the Christian business leader.

**Concepts and Christian Business Leaders.** The secularization of American culture has placed Christian business leaders in a character challenging position (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ecklund et al., 2020; Paulus et al., 2019). The unprecedented behavioral visibility of the digital age brings Christian business leader character maturation challenges into the public eye and may even create internal character challenges due to hyperconnectivity (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). The combination of secularization and digital age visibility into Christian business leader decision making creates unprecedented public and private pressures to carefully choose where to root one's identity while simultaneously revealing the moral imperatives shaping each

decision. The heart, words, action alignment was publicly portrayed for some participants who chose to publicly display their Christian perspective; however, others intentionally held back their Christian perspective because of the potential for secular criticism. These are data evidentiary examples of the character challenges and reflective of how their core beliefs linked to behavior and reflected the heart of the Christian business leader decision maker.

These Christian business leaders character challenges are difficult to understand because: (a) they remain unrecognizable and unacknowledged by secular researchers who fail to comprehend the depth of faith based moral imperatives convictional Christians face (Beltramini, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021); (b) Christian business leaders may struggle to recognize their own character maturation challenges as faith-based struggles accentuating the tensions between Christian and secular perspectives (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brautigam; 2019; Brubaker, 2020; Trentham, 2019a); (c) Christian business leaders may, at their heart level, be more deistic than they think or more liberal in their interpretations of the Bible, and thus more comfortable with a civil faith lifestyle (Ficek, 2021; McDade, 2019); and (d) for a variety of reasons, including potential loss of a job, Christian business leaders may be more concerned about the public visibility of their heart, words, actions disconnect than they are of biblical counsel on the same issues (NKJV, 1982, Luke 6:45-46; Reyes et al., 2021; Soukup & Glader, 2020). This study centers upon Christian business leader identity maturation in choosing and implementing pertinent moral imperatives in their workplace, and for this reason a biblical worldview perspective remained essential to understanding the relationship between these described beliefs and displayed behaviors linked categories (Ficek, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; McDade, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Esther 4:13-16; Job 1:21-22; Daniel 3:17-25; Jonah 1:1-3; Skitka et al., 2021).

**Servant Leader Theory and Christian Business Leaders.** Servant leadership is a proven transformational leadership style built upon widely accepted biblical principles also recognized, via common grace, in other world religions and secular social practices (Bragger et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019; Trentham, 2019b). Servant leadership has been found to both inspire service minded workers and grow service minded leaders by deliberately maturing moral development in all (Bragger et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Servant leaders have effectively transformed organizations by maturing a group of self-serving individuals into a highly motivated other-serving team (Bragger et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019).

The common principles of servant leadership sufficiently align with other religious traditions, so it remains useful in pluralistic organizations (Eva et al., 2019). Research has shown the common principles of servant leadership remain effective as a meditating mechanism in resolving sizable workplace and social challenges by instilling trust and producing justice (Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020). These examples of success include a form of organizational engagement with community called organizational citizenship behaviors (Eva et al., 2019). However, these examples of common principles springing from common grace also begin to reveal uncommon conclusions regarding faith, worldviews, and the meaning of spirituality (Bingaman, 2023; Culton, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021).

One researcher cited the common belief among college age participants was that their faith was deepened in college (Culton, 2022). However, he concluded from his data collection that their understanding of distinctions between religious and non-religious convictions were at best murky and that much of what they professed would be better described as moralistic therapeutic deism, a common product of digital theology springing from digital technology in the digital age (Bingaman, 2023; Culton, 2022; Setran, 2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020). Christian

business leaders did leverage the common principles inherent in servant leadership to resolve secularized digital age workplace challenges.

**Secularized Influencers and Christian Business Leaders.** The complexities which make Christian business leader challenges difficult to understand are not made any simpler when considering the range of secularized influencers who are impacting each leader's decision making. Secularized influencers do live by moral convictions based in a secular, deistic, humanistic, or some blending of these beliefs and values (Bingaman, 2020, 2023). Trentham (2019a) says their values are based in a secular worldview which is inversely related to a convictional Christian. They see god as a concept which can be ignored rather than as a Creator of all we know and this gives them the identity latitude to base their moral imperatives in secularized thinking rather than a biblical worldview (Barwegen, 2019; Beltramini, 2019; Brautigam, 2019; Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Ezekiel 28:2; Luke 12:19; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). However, secularized influencers are nearly as heterogeneous as those who self-identify as Christians.

Some secular influencers merely see convictional Christians as contrarian, naïve, or dated and out of step with society while others portray Christians as hypocritical, a threat to society, and even symptomatic of mental illness (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Cortina et al., 2019; Damper, 2022a; Dick, 2021; Duff, 2021; Furse, 2022; McDade, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023; Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Starr et al., 2019; Upenieks, 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023). Some encourage convictional Christians to get in step with the times while others actively seek legal restrictions to their freedom of religion and freedom of conscience practices (Duff, 2021; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023).

A biblical worldview recognizes any secularized influencer may be spiritually changed by a discerning convictional Christian even as they strive in their Christian deconversion efforts (Bingaman, 2023; NKJV, 1982, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Paulus et al., 2019; Starr et al., 2019). A biblical worldview may recognize a range of Christians as broad as the Luke 8 parable of various soils (the heart of man), and an equitable range of variance describing secular influencers whom God desires to reach with the seed (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:11-15). The secular influencers are certainly having an impact upon the Christian business leaders. However, the data collection showed the opposite as well where God, working through Christian business leaders, were able to influence secularized individuals to reconsider their heart condition.

**Christian or Secular Business Owners and Christian Business Leaders.** Both Christian and secular business owners may establish their workplace environment as they see fit; yet, in doing so, neither can legally infringe upon the freedom of conscience rights of their employees to select their own moral commitments and live their lives accordingly (Nelson, 2019). This means some Christian business leaders must lead in predominantly secularized environments while others may have greater integrated faith latitudes available to them in Christian owned businesses. The character challenges Christian business leaders face differ in these two very different environments (Ecklund et al., 2020). Data collection displayed these differences, the legal latitude each presents, and the impact these factors have upon Christian business leaders' decision making and action plans taken to resolve workplace challenges.

**The Constructs and Christian Business Leaders.** All leaders face character maturing decision making challenges in their appointed leadership positions, and Christian business leaders are no exception. Prior research in similar areas suggest the types of Christian character challenges faced in leadership depend upon the workplace environment, the developmental

maturity of the leader, the size of the objecting party, and the public sensitivity to the core issue (Bingaman, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023; Paulus et al., 2019). In a secularized workplace, Christian business leaders did run a greater risk of deviating from the perception of a secular norm (Nelson, 2019).

Nevertheless, sizable attention has been given to court cases springing from Christian business leader actions in Christian organizations (Dick, 2021; Nelson, 2019). This said, there is little attention drawn to nominal Christians choosing to practice the more publicly acceptable form of civil faith, except perhaps secular applause for practicing a more *inclusive* approach to faith (Jackelen, 2021; McDade, 2019; Nelson, 2019).

Convictional Christians aspiring to live an integrated faith greatly differ from nominal or cultural Christians who believe any disagreement over matters of faith to be examples of an unloving Christian character (Brautigam, 2019; Culton, 2022). Christian theologians and secularized researchers agree that individual identity matures across a lifetime with beliefs, growing through life experiences, eventually becoming perspectives of right and wrong and moral imperatives to live by (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). The constructs helped aggregate findings and draw distinctions between convictional and cultural Christians displaying their beliefs with behavior that ranged between integrated faith and civil faith.

### ***Summary of Research Framework***

This conceptual framework was shaped to provide a biblical worldview of the secularized digital age business environment as seen by business leaders who self-identify as Christians. The biblical worldview shaped framework design reflects the concepts and constructs assembled



from the research gathered in the preliminary literature review. Data evidentiary trails showed it to be a very accurate reflection of Christian business leaders in the secularized digital age.

Christian theologian researchers studying the character challenges confronting Christian leaders today readily acknowledge the influencing nature of the secular digital age environment; but just as readily assert an even larger all-encompassing environment surrounds our digital age secularized business world, and that would be God's sovereignty (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; Garrett, 2022; McGhee, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Isaiah 40; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). All these suggest a God-given purpose and calling to Christians, including business leaders, to fulfill their God given purpose in this secularized time and place by remaining focused upon an eternal purpose rather than be distracted by those of time (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Ephesians 2:10; Hebrews 11:14-16; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15; James 4:17; Paulus et al., 2019; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

### **Definition of Terms**

The definition of terms is critical and a major challenge when conducting research in evolving fields (Gossell, 2022). Researchers or international standardization groups have played a sizable role in all the digital age terms used here. In cases where the definition of the terms is broader than needed in this study, only the aspect most pertinent to this study is listed here. For example, datafication, and its root word *data*, have had at least 10 various internationally accepted defined aspects which include the volume, variety, velocity, validity, volatility, and value of data processed and collected (Krasic et al., 2021). The following definition variants are intended when using the associated terms throughout the document.

***Behavioral visibility*** – The digitalization of the digital age has digitized many aspects of human life which allows a wider range of personalized choices for each individual while simultaneously generating highly personalized data files on each participating individual (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Hyperconnectivity further expands these individualized data files (Brubaker, 2020). These data files are commonly available for public consumption and, at times, reflect an unintended behavioral visibility into an individual's life (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

***Christian business leaders*** – Individuals with broadened business decision-making responsibilities and impact who self-identify as Christians. Research reveals the range of individuals who call themselves Christian has sizable disparities in the moral imperatives which compel their actions (Bingaman, 2023; Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Luke 6:6-11; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Research reveals character challenges exist for Christian businesspersons (Ecklund et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2021). However, given Christian businesspersons do not have an organizational requirement to resolve workplace challenges, this study addressed appointed leaders who must shape or direct team actions to resolve challenges in the workplace.

***Civil religion*** – an intentional bifurcation of personal religion practiced in private lives, from a more secular tolerant pluralistic framed *civil* religion practiced in public spaces and advocated as a civic virtue (McDade, 2019). Civil religion is symptomatic of religious indifferentism (Ficek, 2021). The civil religion practice is widely seen in the European Union and seems to be coming to America (McDade, 2019).

***Datafication*** – the processes by which the large volumes of data produced by digitalization are shrewdly analyzed with data analytics to produce even greater market

advantageous enhancements for internal or external business intelligence products (Krasic et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

*Digital immigrants* – generations of individuals who grew up in an analog world and are experiencing the digital age later in life (Bingaman, 2020). The natural cross-generational communication gap is made more challenging still due to this digital age technology transformative change (Bingaman, 2020).

*Digital natives* – the generation of individuals who from young adulthood have never known an analog world and have never lived without a digital screen (Bingaman, 2020). This is also a term commonly attributed to millennials (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022).

*Digitalization* - the digitization of an entire process for the purpose of improving business or creating revenue would be digitalization (Nazari & Musilek, 2023). Digitization enabled digitalization and the broad application of digitalization empowered a digital transformation of the business environment (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Nazari & Musilek, 2023). The efficiencies of digitalization created business advantages and spawned the leveraging of data-analytics to further refine digitalization efficiencies (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

*Digitization* – the conversion of analog information into digitized information through the use of digital encoding (Nazari & Musilek, 2023). Common examples are handwritten or typed pages becoming digital documents so they could be stored on computers and transmitted across the world wide web.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

This biblical worldview founded study regarding insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age captures the depth of moral imperatives Christian business leader’s face in the secularized

workplace environment (Beltramini, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021). However, this use of data to provide a deeper understanding of a sociological and theological transformational shift toward secularization in America requires clear assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to ensure the trustworthiness of the product. The data provides a deeper understanding of the why and how behind the human phenomena shift, but its limitation remains in its inability to clarify any inferential or causal relationships (Barwegen, 2019). A key delimitation is the case study boundaries established for this multiple case study. The key assumption underlying the entire study is that the voluntary participants, who self-identify as Christian, provided honest assessments of their self-identification rationale and the character challenges it presents them in the workplace.

### ***Assumptions***

The key assumption was that the participants would be frank and honest regarding their deeply seated beliefs which were directly linked to the moral imperatives driving their life choices. Many individuals self-identify as Christians but display moral imperatives which may cause others to question the proclamation (NKJV, 1982, 2 Samuel 11; Jonah 1; John 3; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Many Christians have proclaimed faith in Christ as a youth and matured in atypical paths in college or beyond yet still adhere to their Christian self-identification (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Culton, 2022; Setran, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

This study allowed each participant who self-identifies as a Christian to explain, in their own words, what they mean by the term and the degree to which the term is a publicly known modifier before others. This approach included self-proclaimed Christians with hearts paralleling the rocky soil, or the soil blended with weeds, as well as those with refined weed free soil (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8). The researcher believes this breadth of *Christian* participation produced

categories of Christians similar to existing data from literature review (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The researcher believes this approach may even produce a Nicodemus like leader who after careful thought, as a product of participation, may reconsider their own moral imperatives in play (NKJV, 1982, Luke 18:26-27; John 3; John 19:38-42).

### *Limitations*

The key limitation rested upon the researcher's ability to motivate participation, then accurately collect, and capture the moral imperative heart level struggles Christian business leaders see in their secularized digital age workplaces (Brautigam, 2019; Lourdunathan, 2022; Skitka et al., 2021). The researcher was able to create a positive sharing climate and believes this enabled honest and transparent sharing from each participant. Additionally, the researcher invited participation but was limited by the competing demands upon the busy participants and the prioritization they chose when balancing this voluntary act with their other compelling workplace needs. The 25 participants by in large reflect those that were best able to make time from the 35 who voiced willingness. The researcher took proactive steps to generate interest in the research, provide read-aheads to avoid surprises in the interview which seemed to be returned by the very transparent contributions each participant provided. The researcher also offered timely reviews of the collected data which also served to maximize a friendly and trusting atmosphere throughout the research. Such steps gave all appearances to have maximized the willingness of the participants which optimized the collection of an adequate sample size so as to develop findings with sufficient generalizability to be useful (Falk & Guenther, 2021; Jeffries et al., 2019).

### ***Delimitations***

The research focused solely upon individuals who self-identify as Christians and have broader decision-making responsibilities and impact in a workplace environment. However, the research allowed a broad latitude when defining the Christian, supervisory, and workplace modifiers. Thus, while the research excludes self-identified secular participants, it allows individuals to self-define what they believe a Christian to be. Finally, while the research excluded participants not serving in a workplace, it allows a broad scope of workplace environments to qualify as business. These focus areas were needed to address the research questions and needed to be maintained to produce meaningful conclusions yet were intentionally loosely defined since research is reliant upon voluntary participants in sufficient quantity to achieve data saturation.

### **Significance of the Study**

The combined effect of what the digital age has done for us and what we are allowing for it to do to us is so transformational that it is globally disruptive (Leonardi & Treem, 2020). A secular researcher's perspective acknowledges this, but completely misses the equally transformational, and additive, disruptive effects experienced by Christian business leaders aspiring to live out their faith in a secularized workplace (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019). The biblical worldview study of Christian business leaders is intended to be more than just an additional untold story; it is intended to address a research blindside of eternal significance.

As just one example, the digital age uniquely equips individuals to shape their worlds, preferences, and personalities as they see fit; creating new marketing opportunities, new efficiencies, higher customer satisfaction, and ample volumes of big data to enhance even greater

volumes of expressive individualism (Bingaman, 2020; Culton, 2022; Krasic et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Setran, 2020). However, while a secular minded individual may see all this as goodness, a biblical worldview business leader sees sizable challenges when so many choose to ignore God in favor of doing what is right in their own eyes (Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Judges 21:25; Setran, 2020). When expressive individualism becomes the good society seeks after, the foundation upon which moral imperatives are grounded shifts and character challenges for Christians, including business leaders, expand (Ficek, 2021). This study explores this secularized business culture's blindside.

### ***Reduction of Gaps in Literature***

Digital age business leadership research has been so focused upon managing what the digital age has done for the workplace that it has missed what it is doing to those in the secularized digital age workplace. This research addresses this gap by identifying the intrinsically linked layers of transformation and documenting how they are impacting Christian business leaders, why they are impacting Christian leaders, and how Christian business leaders are choosing to work through the character challenges they face. This research begins to address the gap in a way that can benefit all leaders whether they be biblical or secular in worldview.

Character challenges are a part of experiential leadership training and present in every leadership position (Eriksen et al., 2019). However, how a leader responds to the challenges they confront often reflects the degree to which they are successful in their roles (Eriksen et al., 2019). The resistance leaders encounter where they lead are symptomatic of either cognitive, emotional, or relational challenges (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022). An employee may not understand a problem being confronted (i.e., cognitive), or not like the direction of addressing the problem (i.e., emotional), or not trust the leader's motives for making changes (i.e.,

relational; Knudsen & Larsson, 2022). How each individual leader perceives the challenge reflects their worldview and how they choose to address it reflects the operating ethos linked to their worldview (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022). Faith-based leadership links worldview to ethos but many in the secularized workplace are convinced there is no room for faith-based leadership in the public forum (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022; McDade, 2019). This research showed how Christian business leaders bring powerful conflict resolution skills into the workplace because of their worldview – operating ethos linkages and despite a general distrust for faith-based leadership in the secularized digital age workplace (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023).

This biblical worldview researched study more clearly communicates the intercultural disparities between a secular and Christian worldview and documents the common principle paths which enable Christian business leaders to resolve them (Lourdunathan, 2022; Trentham, 2019b). It also documents situations where Christian business leaders face resistance of such significance, that they conclude it forces a necessary choice between secular and biblical worldviews (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Miller, 2021). The biblical worldview perspective linked to a Christlike living ethos can produce much needed insights into this gap in understanding.

### ***Implications for Biblical Integration***

Through the parable of the Sower and the seed Christ taught about how the eternal word of God works when sown into four different kinds of human hearts (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:11-15). It is important to note God is the ultimate Sower, His revelatory word is the promising seed He intentionally scatters across all time and place, and the four heart conditions reflect human



choice. The parallels to Christian business leaders in the secularized digital age workplace are quite clear.

One heart welcomes eternal things and chooses to deliberately weed out temporal distractions for the purpose of becoming eternally faithful and fruitful in accordance with God's calling (Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:15). The inversely related counterpart has no time for such speculations about eternity and actively seeks to weed out such specious beliefs from their life priorities in time (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:12). If all humans possess either a Christocentric biblical worldview or an anthropocentric secular worldview, this parable accurately portrays their juxtaposed perspectives, disparate life destinations, and inversely related moral imperatives driving their chosen life focus (Trentham, 2019a). Both groups are resolute, and the American consensus shift from Christian to secular has simply altered which one has greater public support (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

The two remaining heart types are initially receptive to the eternal word but over time choose other priorities thus hindering the eternal growth and fruit which might have been produced from the word of wisdom in the human heart (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:13-14). All four heart conditions are a part of the secularized digital age and all four face character challenges as a product of it; however, these latter two are perhaps the most contributory to the digital age secularization shift (Barwegen, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The parable suggests a rationale for why the word was not fruitful, but little research has been done to reveal why or how their life motivating moral imperatives were shifted (Barwegen, 2019; McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

Christian business leaders fall into at least three of these four heart types and the purpose of this research is to more deeply understand their Christian identity, the moral imperatives they

are founded upon, and how they choose and prioritize these imperatives in their secular workplaces. The study tells their stories as they considered the character challenges faced and describes the moral imperative shaped actions taken to resolve them. This story may continue to be criticized by those with a secular worldview and thus can only be accurately captured from a biblical worldview (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023; Paulus et al., 2019).

### ***Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Field of Study***

The calling for every Christian is to glorify God in the stewardship of the life He gives and sustains in us. This does not translate into hateful opposition of secular minded thinking, nor acquiescence from a Godly calling to live lifestyles of integrated faith (Lourdunathan, 2022; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This research provides some insights into how some Christian business leaders are striving to address these character challenges in a God-honoring manner in their secularized workplaces along with others which remain challenged to do the same.

A Christian leader professing a biblical worldview does face an unprecedented level of visibility in the digital age which thus requires they carefully consider the linkages between their declared faith, chosen words, and leadership actions (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; NKJV, 1982, James 2:17-19). Servant leadership is a natural fit for many Christian leaders and is generally accepted in both faith-based and secularized workplace environments (Bragger et al., 2021). This research provides useful insights into how Christian business leaders take action to resolve workplace challenges and how these fit as a digital age version of servant leadership in workplaces where faith-based leadership may not be welcomed (McDade, 2019).

These stories represent new insights into innovative methods Christian business leaders choose to resolve workplace challenges while not yielding from their faith-based worldview. The three sources of resistance identified in Knudsen and Larsson (2022) are optimally resolved with

the ethos of servant leaders. The practice of linking worldview to such Christlike operating ethos has proven effective in leadership training and this research adds depth to how successes are achieved even when intercultural resistance would suggest otherwise (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022).

Finally, the research shows Christian business leaders can effectively lead lives of integrated faith even when leading in secularized digital age workplace environments. The research offsets secularized research which heavily emphasizes no more than civil faith be practiced by faith-based workers (McDade, 2019). The research is intended to show that Christian business leaders can be true to their callings without yielding from the Christlike operating ethos all Christians are called to pursue in practice as well as proclaim (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022).

### ***Summary of the Significance of the Study***

This study addresses a blindside in the secularized research into the digital age business world. It provides a biblical worldview of the transformational shift in American consensus from Christian to secular and then deepens the understanding of this gap by exploring the character challenges Christian business leaders face in a secularized digital age business environment. These insights are valuable.

### **Summary of Chapter 1 and Transition**

This chapter included an overview of the problem studied, summarized with brief answers to two questions: what the digital age has done *for* us, and what the digital age is doing *to* us. Concisely stated, the first answer is the transformational change to the entire business environment; and the second answer being the digital age alteration of individual character development and interaction cumulatively resulting in an American consensus shift to

secularization. The digital age has transformed all aspects of the business environment including the financial markets which support it. It is the product of the 3Ds, digitization, digitalization, and datafication, all linked to the miniaturization of calculating power described by Moore's law. Virtually endless volumes of research continue to assist digital age business leaders leading their organizations through this transformational digital age shift; however, research is very sparse in describing what the digital age is doing *to* us and the business world workforce. The digital age datafication of most economically developed world business includes the datafication of many aspects of human life and preferences. The resulting hybrid personal identity behavioral visibility has created an unparalleled opportunity for businesses to personalize outreach and products to precisely fit individual desires.

Research into how this individualized level of attention to personal preferences is impacting people is only beginning, but most pertinent to this research effort is the American consensus shift from Christian to secular in 2018 that is linked to the 21st century access to the world wide web in America and the digital age personalization options and pluralism it delivered. More specifically, the problem to be addressed is the insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. Understanding cultural shifts is a challenge for Christian business leaders just as it is for their secular counterparts. Theologically, these two categories represent inversely related worldviews summarized as Christocentric biblical and anthropocentric secular. These worldviews share common principles exposed from common grace insights but produce sizably different moral imperatives due to the distinctions in their foundations with one worldview seeing the concept of god as nothing more than an individual choice while the Christocentric biblical worldview recognizes God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of all. The biblical

worldview perspective thus becomes essential if a deeper understanding of Christian business leader character challenges is to be grasped.

The research questions explore individual, group, and organizational aspects of the character challenges this digital age worldview disparity generates. The questions uncovered character challenges, reflective of character maturation, as Christian leaders worked through workplace crises which demanded they choose between secular or Christian based moral imperatives and then direct action to resolve the workplace challenge amidst a very scrutinizing digital age public eye. The optimal approach to deepen understanding in this research gap is through this flexible design multiple case study with qualitative methods.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review upon which the study is founded. It provides a detailed background regarding the anchoring of the study and insights gleaned from similar mixed method studies into digital age secular challenges in the workplace. It addresses the clear cultural understanding gap between the secular and biblical worldviews as exposed by research. The chapter clearly reveals the understanding gap into which this study is designed to explore and the value of this research in addressing it.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intrinsically linked roots of the problem studied are best summarized by describing what the digital age has done *for* America and what it is doing *to* Americans. The first is a well understood fact with three decades of research honing our ability to navigate and lead in the digital age business world; however, the latter represents an understanding gap and was the focus of this research. What the digital age has done for America, and economically developed nations across the globe, includes the digital age transformational modernization and mobilization of the workplace. The outwardly evident transformational power of digitization, digitalization, and datafication (the 3-Ds) in the business environment, continues to generate two equally transformational more surreptitiously invasive inward shifts. The 3-Ds have completely altered how individuals develop, mature in character, and interact with others which poses a new challenge for all business leaders.

The emancipating effect of the digital age has allowed an unparalleled range of personalization and choice which yielded an equally unprecedented shift toward secularization in America. This third layer of change poses distinct character challenges to Christian business leaders. In sum, these intrinsically linked roots of transformational change have altered not only the way we outwardly work but also the way we inwardly think and choose to interact with the world. This chapter provides a literature review of the character challenging aspect of this layered digital age change with a focus upon how the understanding gap is especially challenging for Christian business leaders.

### Business Practices

The 21st century is an historic time equitable to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Industrial Age, because these decades are the beginning of the Digital Age; a period starting in the mid-

1990s through today in which the entire business environment has been transformed along with the financial tools to support it (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Lo, 2021; Paulus et al., 2019). The transformative business environment power of the digital age is best explained by the prescient technological forecast made in 1965, by Gordon Moore, regarding the continued miniaturization of technological computing power which was proven true for over 50 years and has placed more calculating power in the hands of most Americans than existed when NASA first put a man on the moon (Lo, 2021). What the digital age has done for America, including the business world, is rooted in this technologically trending feat.

### ***What the Digital Age Has Done for America - Digitization and Digitalization***

The digital age transformative power of microchips is commonly summarized in three words: digitization, digitalization, and datafication (Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Digitization refers to the encoding of any action into a digital (zero or one) format and is the step which shifted workplace products from analog hard copies to digital virtual products (Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Digitalization refers to an intentional digitization of a series of associated processes to enable the benefits of digitization in that aspect of business or social life (Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Digitization blended the world wide web deployment and early forms of cryptographic software to enable secure digital financial transactions over the internet, but digitalization of the market trading processes raised trading volume from around 500,000,000 trades per day to 4,000,000,000 trades per day in just 25 years while simultaneously shifting transactions measured in seconds to micro-second exchanges (Lo, 2021).

Digitization of supply chains enabled greater awareness of supplies within individual companies, but digitalization of the global supply chain enabled companies to exchange the Sears Roebuck *vertical* supply chain integration model for the Amazon *virtual* integration supply

chain and all the cost savings efficiencies it delivered (Garay-Rondero et al., 2019; Zekhnini et al., 2021). The combination of these digital age technologies has transformed every facet of the digital age business environment from strategic alliance partnerships with smart factory production to global visibility of supplies, and from brick and mortar store sales to virtual shopping with personalized order home deliveries, all capped by globalized business reach through the world wide web to friendly geo-political trading partners (Garay-Rondero et al., 2019; He et al., 2020; Lo, 2021; Zekhnini et al., 2021).

### ***What the Digital Age Has Done for America - Datafication and Behavioral Visibility***

The world wide web enabled unprecedented global connectivity which produced global application of digitization and digitalization which incentivized the ubiquitous use of tracking and reporting devices called the internet of things (Garay-Rondero et al., 2019; Lo, 2021). The enhanced visibility of products powered by the internet of things enhanced competitiveness within digitalized processes and market opportunity for sophisticated analysis of newly available data and datafication was born (Krasic et al., 2021). Expanded mobile connectivity capability enhanced digitalization and datafication products by adding timely product visibility insights spanning from the manufacturing floor to the intended destination and even allowing for a timely redirection as needed thus introducing unparalleled facets of timely decision making (Garay-Rondero et al., 2019; Krasic et al., 2021).

Continuous connectivity combined with digitalization and datafication in the form of individualized shopper tracking, human wearables, and more, created unprecedented purchaser availability with digital personality profiles for every world-wide web user with each file incorporating orders of magnitude deeper insights into every participant's personal preferences, priorities, and future needs (via social media posts), all summarized as digital age *behavioral*



*visibility* enriched even further by hyperconnectivity (Brubaker, 2020; Krasic et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Digital real-time visibility of goods blended with hyperconnectivity enriched behavioral visibility into digital personality profiles and these insights have transformed marketing, advertising, sales, and virtually all aspects of the business environment (Brubaker, 2020; Garay-Rondero et al., 2019; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). This transformed business market continuously produces a data rich near real-time view of organization, product, people, and places for large swaths of human and business life and was put under a global public-health stress test in 2020 (Lai & Widmar, 2021).

### ***The Global Pandemic Digital Age Test***

Digitization, digitalization, and datafication, blended with behavioral visibility, were well underway in transforming America before COVID, but a global pandemic proved to be a perfect display of their transformative value, efficiencies, and effectiveness thus accelerating the demand for their deployment and availability (Lai & Widmar, 2021). The global pandemic leveraged the 3-Ds, mobile connectivity, and behavioral visibility to perform near real time analysis of pandemic related trends, initial findings, and guidance for national level decision-makers (Manheim et al., 2021). The proven value of these digital age transformative capabilities produced calls for nation-state support to accelerate and expand their deployment in several economically advanced nations (Gerli & Whalley, 2021; Hambly & Rajabiun, 2021; Lai & Widmar, 2021). These digital age information communication technologies were deemed as critical infrastructure, as important to modern societies as electricity (Lai & Widmar, 2021; Nazari & Musilek, 2023). The digital age has transformed all aspects of the business environment to include the personalization of consumer product to fit the ever-expanding depth

of hybrid personality identities fed by the digitization of many aspects of human life (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

***Summary of Business Practices – The Digital Age Has Transformed Business***

There is absolute agreement among researchers regarding the transformative powers the digital age has had upon the business environment. Digitization, digitalization, and datafication combined with mobile connectivity and visibility have produced unprecedented speed to business and associated decision-making, unprecedented globalization of supply chains, unprecedented behavioral visibility to the workplace, and unprecedented transparency to all (Krasic et al., 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Lo, 2021; Zekhnini et al., 2021). Large volumes of research are available to guide business leaders in understanding and handling these transformative changes to their workplace environment. This is what the digital age has done *for* American business; however, what is missing is the equally transformative impact of what the digital age is doing *to* the American people, including those in the workplace environment. This aspect of digital age transformation is intrinsically linked to the first. The pace of business cannot accelerate and transform without the workers accelerating and transforming.

What the 3-Ds of the digital age has done for business is directly linked to what it is doing to those working in the business environment including both secular and Christian business leaders. Perhaps most challenging is many are not fully aware of the breadth of character changes and challenges they face in the secularized digital age (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019; Soukup & Glader, 2020). All these interlinked pieces of transformation are a part of the problem to be studied.

## **The Problem**

The problem addressed was insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. This part of the literature review explores the additional layers of transformational change including first, the rapid digital age fueled shift to secularization in America; and second, the digital age change to how individuals develop, mature, and interact with each other and their workplace. Both aspects of digital age transformation are intrinsically linked with the 3-Ds that have transformed the business environment and addressing them in detail in this section informs the understanding of the problem studied, the gap in understanding, and additional aspects of the research questions guiding this study.

The first literature review step incorporates research into the secularization of America to determine if this shift is a problem worth studying or simply a protest from digital age disenfranchised, forlornly individuals who no longer represent the majority viewpoint in the secularized United States (Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). When considering what the digital age is doing *to* Americans, the unprecedented rapid consensus shift to secularism would be acknowledged by all, but considered progress by many and viewed as a problem by a far more limited part of the new minority (Bingaman, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; Ficek, 2021; McClure, 2020; McDade, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The minority view does not mean the problem does not exist, but rather is a further indicator of the insufficient cultural understanding of it. This section explores these varied perspectives by first addressing the undisputed rapid sociological shift to secularism in America and then addressing whether this shift represents a pointless protest of or a true problem for Christian business leaders in America.

### *Sociological Shift from Christian to Secular Consensus*

A well-documented trend of the 21st century is the rapid growth of religiously unaffiliated individuals, commonly called *nones* (McClure, 2020). By 2018, the grouping of nones became the largest single group on the religious landscape, growing larger than the two closest following groups of Evangelicals or Catholic; however, nones continue to grow at a rate of about one percent per year while Catholics and Evangelicals have primarily been the billpayers funding the growth of nones (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). While none disputes the growth of *nones*, confusion about them is evident in research (McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). In brief, when asking digital age individuals about their church affiliation, more are choosing to identify as nones; yet many still claim the *Christian* label, and discerning nominal Christians from convictional Christians requires deeper data scrutiny not always equally applied (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**What the Digital Age Is Doing to Americans – Choosing Pluralism.** Most observers would readily acknowledge some distinction in moral imperatives between a nominal Christian who never prays, never reads a sacred text, or never attends a church as compared to a more convictional Christian who regularly does all three. McClure (2020) discovered the higher an individual's internet use, the lower their religious attendance, frequency of prayer, time spent reading sacred texts, and the more likely they were to declare themselves as having no church affiliation, thus among the nones (McClure, 2020). The research documents the relationships between the growth of the internet with the growth of nones but does not explain why individuals choose to become more pluralistic, are over 20% less likely to believe in God, or why digital natives are far more likely to be among the nones than digital immigrants (McClure, 2020).

The findings contain granularized groupings to also show that the newly declared nones are most commonly shifting from a nominal Christian grouping. The individuals identifying as nones had a mean church attendance measured between once a month and several times a year and read a sacred text several times a year (McClure, 2020). This study focused upon *religious* sentiments so its questions regarding reading included the “Bible, Koran, Torah, or other sacred book” (McClure, 2020, p. 467). The findings portraying an American shift towards secularization revealed the inferential linkage between a growth of nones and associated internet usage among these types of individuals.

**Is Digital Age Secularism Progress, a Protest, or a Problem?** A sizable reason research into the implications of America’s digital age secularization is sparse is because a majority see secularization of the workplace, and public life, as American progress and not a problem to be studied (Bingaman, 2020; McDade, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019). This section provides an overview of the variety of these researched viewpoints and begins with those who see the secularization of America as a form of progress.

The secular worldview sees a consensus shift toward secularism as progress. These perceive religion to be absolutist, assertive, divisive, and irrational while secularism is none of these things and so a secular outlook in public spaces is clearly better and more humane (Culton, 2022; McDade, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021). The successful shift to a secular consensus reveals God is missing but not missed by most (McDade, 2019). This group does not typically oppose personal beliefs in God if they are kept in one’s private world and not brought into the public sphere (Ficek, 2021; McDade, 2019). From a secularist viewpoint, this form of *civil* religion has worked well in Europe and should be welcomed in the United States as pluralistic religion is *less*

damaging to self, to nations, and to a world (McDade, 2019). The more pluralistic civil religion supports human freedoms, social justice, and a more liberal social order (McDade, 2019).

A closely aligned second grouping of researchers appreciate the progress but are also more assertive in noting the protest opposed to the cultural shifts. Like the first set of researchers, these perceive growth in secularism as progress and would like to further accelerate such progress by stopping the bothersome protests of those who resist by forcing dualism upon their integrated faith practices. This more assertive form of secular minded advocates has many variants, all of which perceive and portray those who persist in practicing integrated faith in public spaces as protesters who should be discredited, ignored, contained, and at times publicly silenced (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Davis et al., 2023; McDade, 2019; Murray, 2019b, 2023; Nelson, 2019; Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Perry, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2021; Perry, Whitehead, & Grubbs, 2021; Upenieks, 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023). The only digital age secularization *problem* this group might assert as worth studying would be the problems caused by those, primarily Christians, who refuse to stop their practice of integrated faith (Dick, 2021; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023).

A third group perceives the cultural shift to secularism as a problem. This group primarily consists of Christian theologians and a small number of Christian business researchers who say the secularization of the workplace, and America, represents a seismic shift in social identity and an irreversible existential threat to human spirituality (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ficek, 2021; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Not all Christian theologians agree, but those of a more convictional Christian worldview suggest the world, both secular and Christian, are digitally naïve and in great need of digital age wisdom to navigate through these times (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). For those Christians

aspiring to live out an integrated faith, research shows they are facing character challenges linked to digital age secularization (Ecklund et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2021). However, some Christian researchers readily acknowledge a wide variance in the moral imperatives driving those who call themselves Christian (Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Some individuals who self-identify as Christian have moral imperative convictions which reflect a more secularized character foundation and certainly not an identity in Christ (Brautigam, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Problem vs. Progress – A Product of Worldview Variance.** While none disagrees about the growth of nones, and the transformational digital age consensus shift to a pluralistic secular society, there is great disagreement on whether the shift is a problem worth studying or a protest to be ignored or even quelled. Christian theologians assert there are only two worldviews, an anthropocentric secular or a Christocentric biblical (Trentham, 2019a). The Christian researcher provides findings documenting the absolute nature of truth in Christ while a secular counterpart says truth is relative, changing across time and place (Brautigam, 2019; Miller, 2021). The Christian researcher says wisdom comes from God while another says it is an outdated term and true wisdom in the secularized digital age resides in sophisticated and timely big data analysis (Fricke, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019). Christian researchers and secular researchers may have common insights from common grace but come to vastly disparate conclusions regarding the source of their wisdom, the universality of its appropriate application, or the value of American shift toward humanistic secularism (Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

Christian researchers say American convictional Christians are now exilic disciples who no longer have the home court advantage and must fulfill their God-calling amidst a secular majority with no anticipation of a change, while secular researchers say Christians are conspiracy

theorists and suffer from imagined threats (Bingaman, 2023; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Walker & Vegter, 2023). Christian researchers conclude the secularized digital age poses an existential threat to human spirituality, is creating sizable faith at work challenges, and undermining the development of Christian character (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ecklund et al., 2020; Paulus et al., 2019; Soukup & Glader, 2020). America's digital age shift to secularization is a problem for Christian business leaders and Christian workers in today's secularized workplace and, therefore, a problem worthy to be studied. The fact that most researchers do not agree is further evidence of the depth of the insufficient cultural understanding. The insufficient understanding of these character challenges is addressed in the literature review, and it reflects an area where a degree of secular – Christian agreement exists.

### ***The Term Christian Compared to an Individual's Set of Beliefs***

Chapter 1 included discussion of the wide breadth of individuals who choose to self-identify as Christians. The breadth of Christian is so wide because an accepted definition may not exist or not uniformly applied, therefore this modifier is broadly applied and misapplied. The Bible might be used to define Christian as a *disciple of Christ*; however, since not all people who self-identify as Christian read or believe the Bible, there would not be any uniform acceptance of this definition nor sufficient metrics to measure the sincerity of their heart conviction (NKJV, 1982, Acts 11:26; Reyes et al., 2021). This portion of the literature review addresses a secular researched alternative method to assess a heart condition; the psychological understanding of how an individual's attitudes and beliefs mature to shape individual development, interaction, and character maturation, and how this internal process has been transformed by the digital age (Brubaker, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021). This aspect of literature review is pertinent because it is



applicable to secular and Christian business leaders as well as every individual in their secularized workplace environment.

**Christian in Name.** Examples of flawed Christians portraying characteristics hypocritical to the modifier they choose to vocalize are regularly noted by secular researchers (Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, Whitehead, & Grubbs, 2021). Only rarely is attention given to bi-furcate these individuals by acknowledging the nominal nature of their self-chosen Christian modifier. One researcher identified a digital age Christian who chose to maintain the nominal Christian modifier simply because of the social benefits it provided and not because of their belief in Christ or a desire to be a disciple of Christ (Culton, 2022). Another researcher acknowledged an individual's testimony of their deconversion from Christianity while noting there were little indications a conversion to Christianity had ever even occurred (Reyes et al., 2021).

Some researchers suggest a contributing factor to the growth of nones may be the digital age byproduct of behavioral visibility and hybrid identities rather than shifting in theistic beliefs, “the Church of Twitter and its sister communion in Facebook have powerful ways of shaming heretics who breach the codes of civil religion” (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McDade, 2019, p. 227). Whether the growth of nones is fueled by the deconversion of convictional Christians or simply a nominal Christian shedding a misnomer modifier no longer convenient for their public image is an ancillary point of this section. The primary point is the acknowledgement that there is no human metric to measure the sincerity of a heart commitment; however, there is ample secular research about how beliefs and attitudes change through life experiences, and how this life maturing process has been altered by the digital age. This focus

area portrays the intrinsically connected transformational layer of how the digital age is altering the way one's character grows, matures, and interacts.

**How Beliefs and Attitudes Change.** Skitka et al. (2021) provided a secular based research insight into the shifting of beliefs and attitudes reflected in conversions, deconversions, testimonies, and extimonies which typically are linked to life experiences. One researched individual experienced a record setting hot summer accompanied by wildfires and the experiential knowledge motivated a sense of urgency to join in active political protests associated with climate change. A second example explained why the United States commitments in the Iraqi war weighed more heavily in the minds of most voters than did abortion (Skitka et al., 2021). The study also provided examples on how moral imperatives develop to protest Supreme Court cases rather than accept them, per constitutional guidance, as legal standards; or how similar convictions play within individuals as they consider a Presidential candidate or serving President (Skitka et al., 2021).

These examples help explain how an individual continually matures from fundamental beliefs about right or wrong, good, or evil, and how these then combine through experiences to form a depth of conviction that translates into a sense of moral responsibility so strong or pressing an individual needs to act upon it (Skitka et al., 2021). These examples relate to how God intended for Christian culture to influence the world instead of nominal Christians allowing the world to reshape Christian culture (Ficek, 2021). It is worth noting that the Greek word used by Paul to describe what Christ-like love does to a Christian has the same degree of pressing urgency: "For the love of Christ *compels* us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live *should* no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, *emphasis added*).

Secular and Christian business leaders lean upon their respective sets of moral imperatives to resolve workplace challenges and for these reasons it is useful to understand how life experiences and the influence of others alter these convictions, especially in the hyperconnected secularized digital age. Some may allow secularism to reshape their Christian culture through religious indifferentism (Ficek, 2021). Some may allow secularism to reshape their Christian faith into a more deistic form of digital religion (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). And some may choose to deepen their convictional Christian moral imperatives (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

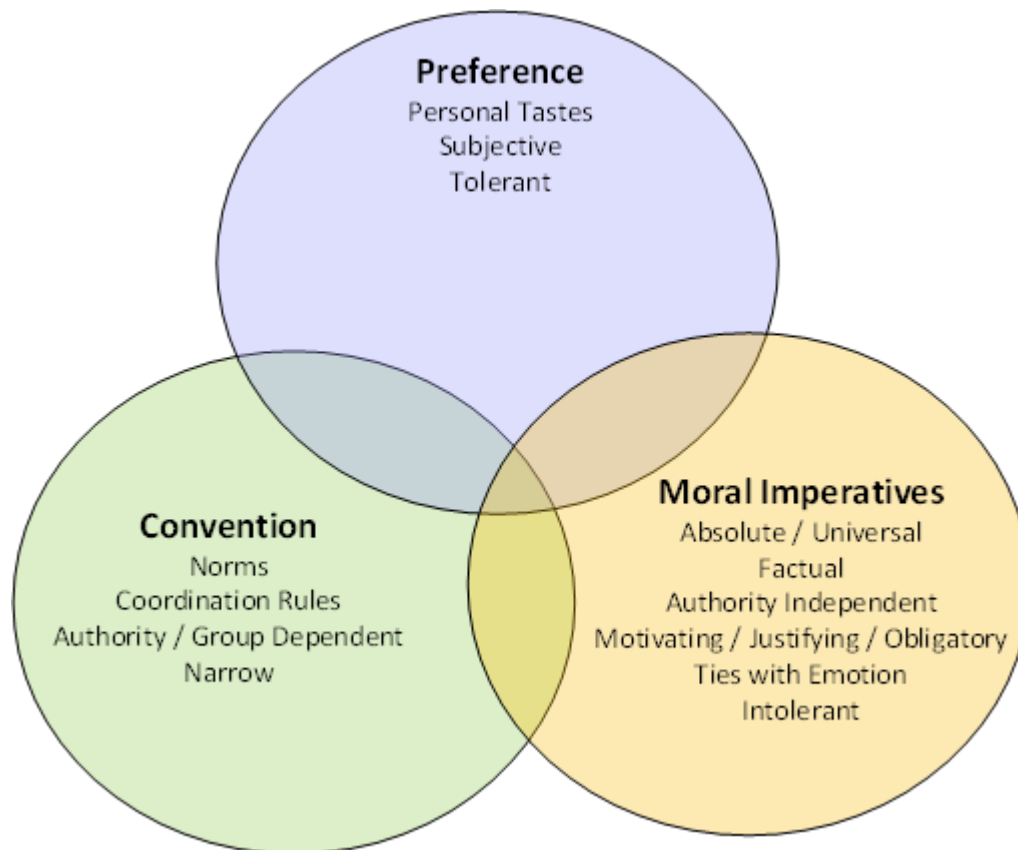
**Conforming to the Majority as Standard Practice.** The research on how attitudes and beliefs change begins with one of the most replicated psychological study findings in the tendency of individuals to conform to a majority group even when they might have a contrary perspective (Skitka et al., 2021). Individuals choose to align with group thinking because they value maintaining associations and avoiding potential ridicule more than stating their honest opinion with the associated risks such action might generate (Skitka et al., 2021). The conforming individual may also simply be unsure about what answer might be best, so they choose to just conform (Skitka et al., 2021). This starting point for fundamental beliefs, also called attitudes, is very instructive given the behavioral visibility component of the digital age and its insertion of hybrid identities for all who spend time on the world wide web. Attitudes and the other belief categories are depicted in Figure 2.

**Convention.** Attitudes are categorized within one of the three overarching groupings (Skitka et al., 2021). The Convention category represents cultural norms and rules which help a society coordinate their activities. This category includes laws and enforcement codes used by law enforcement (Skitka et al., 2021). An individual may understand a law, or a Court decision,

but still have an attitude that it is wrong and thus choose non-complying behavior. There are cross-cultural exemptions to these examples as laws in one nation and culture may not be deemed appropriate nor adopted in another nation and culture with examples being which side of the road is appropriate for driving (Skitka et al., 2021).

## Figure 2

### *Categorizing Personal Attitudes and Beliefs*



**Preference.** Attitudes fitting into the preference category are readily acknowledged to be personal choices (Skitka et al., 2021). The overlap between preference and convention can be one choosing how they will abide by norms or driving statutes. Most generally recognize the subjective nature of picking a favorite ice cream or sports team; however, picking a favorite political candidate or a position on a debated issue can begin to shift the attitude beyond the

preference category into the moral imperative grouping. Topics of comfortable conversation with strangers would normally fall in these first two categories; however, as the overlap between preference and moral imperatives is approached the tolerance for accepting other's thoughts may begin to shift and the level of emotion may rise (Skitka et al., 2021).

**Moral Imperatives.** Attitudes placed in the moral imperative category represent fundamental beliefs which an individual thinks are absolute or universal and should be applied to all. These attitudes are based upon what the individual believes to be factual findings which, in the individual's mind, are indisputable (Skitka et al., 2021). Moral imperatives typically are powerful enough that they generate an inner sense of obligation to act or get involved accompanied by a motivation to do so (Skitka et al., 2021). Moral imperatives can be deeply seated enough to generate emotional reactions (Skitka et al., 2021). Finally, emphasized throughout is the developmental nature of this process through age maturation, environment, and life experiences.

### ***The Digital Age Alterations to Individual Choice, Interaction, and Character Development***

To get to the heart of the why and how within the research questions and the problem to be studied, the literature review must incorporate one further step into the Skitka et al. (2021) research by describing how the digital age has altered this process of individual choice, interaction, and character development. This aspect of the literature addresses the manner in which digital age behavioral visibility and hyperconnectivity is impacting this inner shifting of the heart attitudes and beliefs to include or exclude the secular or Christian morals upon which leaders base their decisions and actions.

**How Digital Age Influences Alter Character Maturation.** Digital age behavioral visibility has altered this process by vastly expanding the volume of individuals involved in and

influencing through input and feedback (Brailey & Parker, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; Setran, 2020). Hyperconnectivity is a defining face of the digital age where no one *goes online* any longer because they *live online* (Brubaker, 2020). Data collection regarding individual likes and dislikes has expanded from web-based catalogs and shopping to all forms of social media, mobile device app-feeds, wearables with active location tracking, and digitally smart cities able to blend all these insights to provide timely artificial intelligence (AI) input recommendations to fit one's need of the moment at hand (Barlette & Baillette, 2022; Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Walentek, 2021). Emancipation of self leads to deeper exploring of self by listening to one's favorite music, news, or podcasts to the point one is saturated in self and with self (Brubaker, 2020).

Hyperconnectivity creates a hyper-saturated and “profoundly transformed” self (Brubaker, 2020, p. 771). Hyper-saturated selves skim things rather than read and multi-task rather than focus (Soukup & Glader, 2020). Soon, hyperconnected, hyper-saturated selves will become even more dependent upon customized artificial intelligence recommendations shaped to fit their preferences and emancipation will begin to shift toward techno-social system servitude (Bingaman, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020). This is how digital age pluralism with ubiquitous connectivity continues to contribute toward the syncretistic customizing of personal beliefs and attitudes (McClure, 2020).

All this tremendously complicates the maturation of Christian faith, moral convictions, and moral imperatives simply by removing the attention span required to begin to experience them (Bingaman, 2023; Brailey & Parker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019; Setran, 2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020). Some secular researchers agree with Christian researchers regarding an insufficient cultural understanding of this surreptitious alteration in character development

occurring in the digital age (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019). Some suggest the problem to be studied is more sizable than many naively think (Paulus et al., 2019). Secular and Christian researchers agree that hyperconnectivity is not morally neutral and this is impacting the development of individuals, their character maturation, and interaction with others; including the character of Christian business leaders and their secular counterparts (Bingaman, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020).

**Christian Character Maturation in Leadership Challenges.** Leadership roles bring additional visibility to those that occupy them while also positioning them as responsible to resolve workplace challenges which can often reflect sizable conflicts in beliefs, preferences, and even moral convictions (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022). Digital age behavioral visibility makes their decision making and directed actions readily available to superiors, subordinates, supporters, and opponents (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021). How they choose to determine the driving moral issues, the priorities of these issues, and the path to resolution reflects much about the foundation of their identity and their heart conclusions regarding each (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022; NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:11-15; Skitka et al., 2021).

Given Christian leaders assume their positions while in various stages of faith maturation and each face unique sets of workplace resistance, the character maturation challenge they face will vary from circumstance to circumstance but be reflective of God-intended growth and purposes (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28). Research shows these Christian business leaders are seeking counsel on how to best integrate their faith in their work to resolve these difficulties, and also show those who attend religious services weekly or multiple times a week find far higher levels of success in this pursuit as compared to those who only attend several times a year (Ecklund et al., 2020).

Character maturation, as evident from the growth of beliefs into moral convictions by which one leads their life, is important for every individual and especially one serving as a business leader (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022; Skitka et al., 2021). In the secular digital age, the equally important maturation of spiritual character has an added degree of difficulty since it is more publicly visible, more scrutinized by friend, foe, superior, or subordinate, and both a time and attention challenge in the high pace digital age (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McDade, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019).

**Christian Leader Character Challenges and Moral Imperatives.** Attitude groupings and characteristics are a part of every individual's character maturation through life experiences. The Skitka et al. (2021) Figure 2 framing provides a helpful description of what a business leader must sort through in tackling a workplace challenge and is especially informative when applied to a Christian business leader resolving workplace challenges in either a secular workplace or a Christian workplace. Figure 3 depicts two sets of these attitude groupings with one for cultural Christians inversely related to the convictional Christian set.

The cultural Christian attitude grouping is surrounded by the secular culture because it may be most influenced by the secular culture and thus the moral imperatives may reflect more of a secular culture perspective. The committed Christian attitude grouping is intentionally placed with the moral imperative category primarily surrounded by the God's Sovereignty backdrop to suggest it is primarily shaped by absolute truths the convictional Christian holds most deeply. Conceptually, this exemplifies Christian business leaders who recognize themselves as being a dual-citizen with an eternal home with Christ in heaven and a temporary home with Christ in this time and place (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Hebrews 11:14-16). The convictional Christian business leader would, as an exilic disciple, thus primarily rely upon



eternal values to derive their moral imperatives rather than values from the secular culture in which they serve (Brautigam, 2019; Jensen, 2023; NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The following concepts provide more details for Figure 2 and more examples of Figure 3 by describing the specifics of each concept.

**The Range of Practicing Christians.** The Bible gives no insight into the lives of the thieves crucified beside Christ. There is certainly no record of them ever reading scripture, attending any worship service, or praying prior to their conversations with Christ while all three hung on crosses. However, there were indications of noticeable distinctions in their heart attitudes. One requested Christ save him from the crucifixion; but the second requested Christ “remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (NKJV, 1982, Luke 23:42). Only God knows the true heart intent of any individual, but clearly some distinction in moral imperatives can be made between a nominal Christian who never prays, never reads a sacred text, or never attends a church and the convictional Christian who regularly does all three (Ecklund et al., 2020; McClure, 2020; Reyes et al., 2021). Some researchers have discovered indicators of a shift in heart attitudes reflected in action such as how one attempts to display an integrated faith at work.

**Faith at Work Survey of Christians.** One researcher seeking to understand the challenges of *Christians* in the workplace started with the data from 13,270 participants in a *faith at work* survey (Ecklund et al., 2020). Among their first tasks was to eliminate 5,965 participants who had never attended religious services, since their inputs on *faith* at work may create challenges to the findings (Ecklund et al., 2020). This insightful first step purified study findings by making some effort to reduce the effect of nominal Christian participation. Given the study’s

stated purpose was to assist pastors, it was sensible to eliminate the inputs of those who never attended church (Ecklund et al., 2020),

The study then proceeded to provide findings for the remaining *Christians* by further granularizing their level of faith in practice (Ecklund et al., 2020). Nearly 43% of these Christians reported attending a church “several times a year or less” while an equitably sized percentage attended nearly every week or multiple times a week (Ecklund et al., 2020). Study results suggest increases in participatory frequency are reflected in higher perceptions of biblical value and effectiveness in life applications producing greater progress in Christian character maturation. Other researchers show similar linkages with greater regularity in prayer and Bible reading (Barwegen, 2019).

This would be in line with biblical themes about abiding and the amount of time one spends prayerfully considering God’s purposes rather than worldly purposes (Jensen, 2023; NKJV, 1982, John 15:5; Matthew 16:23; Romans 8:6). It also reflects another researcher’s findings that the more frequent reading of the Bible was of value, but only a product of intentionally limiting hyperconnectivity through the mindful practice of disconnection to allow a time to reflect rather than living in a hyper-saturated self unceasingly (Barwegen, 2019; Brubaker, 2020; Lomberg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Paulus et al., 2019; Soukup & Glader, 2020). Such intentional time for deeper thought is also linked to maturation of moral imperatives (Paulus et al., 2019; Soukup & Glader, 2020). This level of granularity incorporated in this Christian researcher’s efforts deepened the understanding of Christian identity by revealing the sizable distinction between those who identify as Christian but rarely worship and those who see value in regularly participating in church fellowship and living out an integrated faith in the workplace (Ecklund et al., 2020).

In sum, the Ecklund et al. (2020) study provided insights into Christian character challenges by first attempting to reduce the volume of nominal Christians who participated. The blending of quantitative and qualitative research it reflects certainly informed theory regarding how future research into Christian character challenges could benefit from similar approaches. Their findings thus provided more insights into the character challenges the more devout groupings of Christians encountered in the secularized digital age workplace.

**Common Disparity in Secular Research Regarding Christians.** These quantitatively significant distinctions between convictional Christians and nominal Christians are typically explored in most biblical worldview shaped research and are most commonly minimized or not assessed in secular based research. The result is the cited biblical worldview-based research revealed quantitatively measured disparities within the group of practicing Christians; while most secular based research makes no such distinctions nor efforts to explore this level of granularity, therefore aligning particular attributes to all Christians when in fact they may be more accurately aligned to nominal Christians (McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

One recent secular research effort cited Christians as a majority in America and coupled this problematically broad use of Christian with an equally broad term Nationalism and then quantitatively documented how Christian Nationalists are susceptible to misinformation and belief in conspiracies (Walker & Vegter, 2023). A church attendance metric was measured however, the range of potential response included a graduated series from 1 to 9 and did not report what these values represented (Walker & Vegter, 2023). If any similarity exists between the McClure (2020) measures which ranged from 1 to 6, then the values of 8 and 9 might have represented a Christian who attends church nearly every week or multiple times a week.

The mean attendance of the 1219 participants was 4.299 with a standard deviation of 2.733 which suggests few if any of the Christians contributing to this research attended with the frequencies shown to be most significant in the Ecklund et al. (2020) quantitative study (Walker & Vegter, 2023). The mean of 4.299 most likely represented a grouping that attended something measured between once a month and several times a year and yet the product of these inputs is portrayed as homogeneous with Christians who attend church services weekly (Walker & Vegter, 2023). Similar granularity assessment shortfalls were seen in research pieces documenting Christian nationalists as racially biased, creating unhelpful health risks during COVID-19, and in favor of racial injustice (Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Perry, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2021; Perry, Whitehead, & Grubbs, 2021). The collected data may be accurate, but the conclusions are flawed due to the incomplete analysis of the pertinent data, or because of a worldview disparity which did not see the need for such granularity in the research.

The addressed literature review has included methodological and data triangulation which confirms a digital age consensus shift to secularism in America, a digital age worldview disparity regarding the significance of this cultural shift, some secular and Christian researcher agreement regarding the character development challenges associated with digital age hyperconnectivity, digital age confusion surrounding the term Christian generated by the loose use of the modifier, and a resulting insufficient understanding of the culture shifts impact upon Christian business leaders which cumulatively indicates this is a *problem* insufficiently understood by today's culture and worthy to be studied (Ecklund et al., 2020; McClure, 2020).

### *Summary of the Problem*

What the digital age has done to Americans is to enable such a wide range of pluralistic human choice that the consensus in the nation has now, for the first time in its history, chosen secularism over declared faith (McClure, 2020). All acknowledge this consensus shift toward secularism, but due to two inversely related worldviews, disagree on whether it represents progress to be applauded or a problem to be studied (Trentham, 2019a). Ample secular based research is available but biblical worldview-based research on the significance of this shift, and its impact upon the business environment, is woefully lacking. A Christian is commonly defined as “one who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ” or an even deeper commitment as a “disciple” of Christ and yet research shows many who profess to be Christians do not necessarily display a belief in Christ Jesus much less His teachings or discipleship (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; NKJV, 1982, Acts 11:26).

These disparities may simply be a part of the character maturation process through which beliefs become moral convictions and a further subset then form moral imperatives which typically inspire individual activism and life shaping perspectives akin to a worldview choice (Skitka et al., 2021). This maturation process is central to the problem to be studied and the digital age alteration to this process is equally critical to explore. Some suggest Americans live in the digital age but remain digitally naïve to the seismic significance of this cultural shift or the existential threat it represents to their human spirituality (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Paulus et al., 2019). The problem addressed is this insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age and the findings provide critical insights to secular worldview minded as to the biblical worldview minded business leaders.

## Concepts

Literature review documents digital age character maturation as distinctively different from its pre-digital age predecessor because it is conducted with far more participants, in more public spaces, with a far more pluralistic set of perspectives to consider, and blends these two secular digital age factors into a character shaping process that may already be susceptible to consensus driven pressure (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McClure, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021). This more pluralistic base of participation blended with some perceived pressure to conform is a sizable alteration to the previously more privatized path in determining an individualized framework for right and wrong, good and evil, and one's worldview for finding truth and wisdom (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; NKJV, 1982, John 3:19; Paulus et al., 2019).

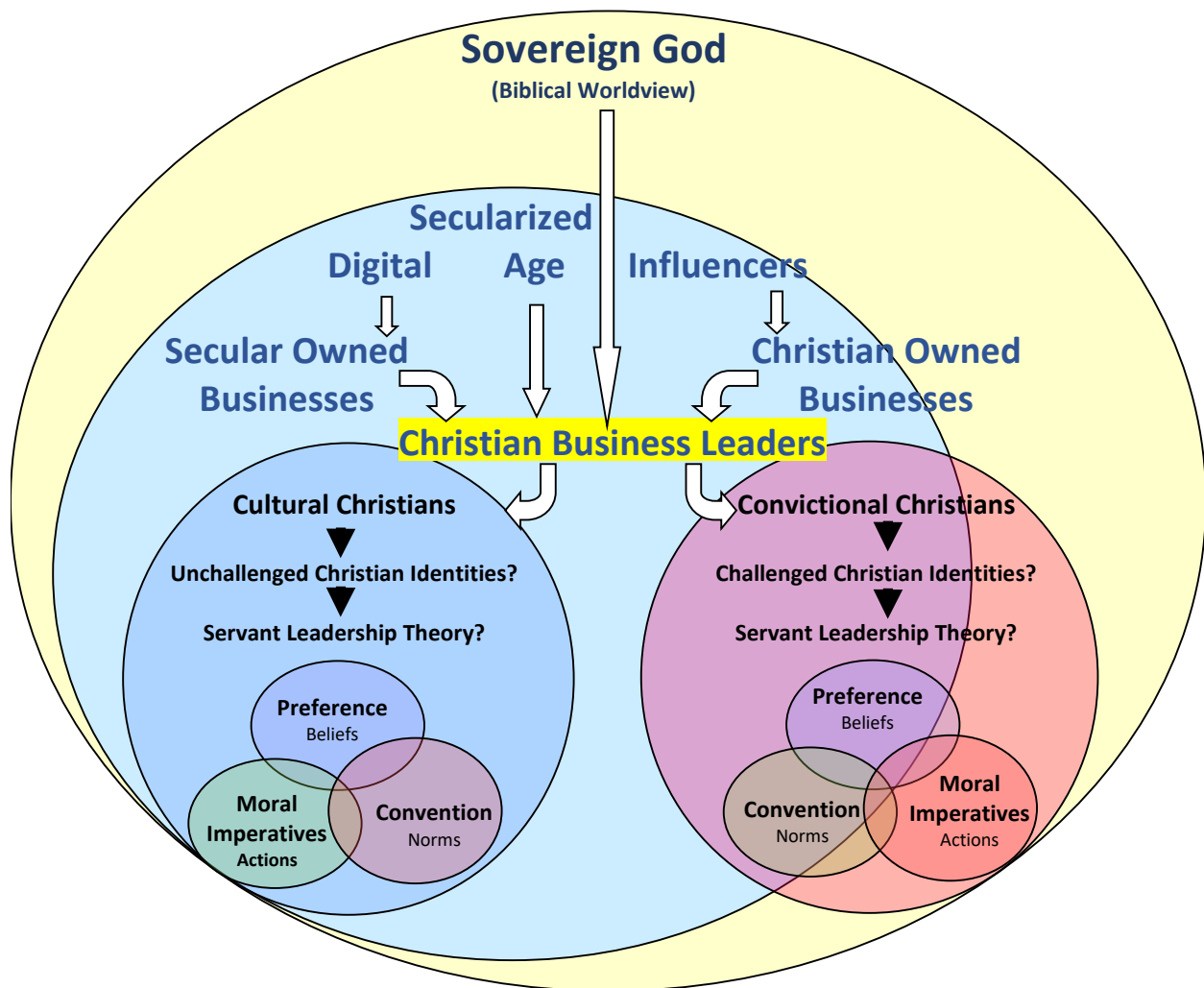
Methodological and data triangulation do indicate these shifts in the individual character development process blended with hyperconnected hybrid personalities has altered nominal Christians into nones (Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019). Methodological and data triangulation also show Christian character challenges can be better understood when Christian focused research is shaped to minimize the participation of nominal Christians. For these reasons, the concepts studied in this research were among Christians who differ not about the value of faith in Christ, but rather about how a secularized culture should influence the practice of their faith (Brautigam, 2019; Jackelen, 2021; Jensen, 2023; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

Figure 3 is a Chapter 2 expanded version of the Chapter 1 conceptual framework. It contains all the components of the original while also depicting this study's focus upon two groups of Christians which differ upon how one's Christian faith should be displayed in a secularized culture. Skitka et al.'s (2021) insight into individual character are used as a metric to

assess moral imperatives, since only God can accurately assess any individual’s heart. The participants all self-define the moral imperatives that most drive their faith at work while also contributing to standardized survey data similar to what sharpened the Ecklund et al. (2020) research. The intent of the two concepts includes the acknowledgement of their differences and portrays these differences within the context they perceive. The two concepts are thus ones of assignment or alignment not judgment or assessment.

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual Framework with Digital Age Character Maturation*



***Concept One - Convictional Christians Identity Primarily in Christ***

Convictional Christians are typically identified as believers in Christ, evangelistic, and reliant upon the living and active power of God’s Spirit to speak through the inspired word of God to work in and through their individual lives (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Joshua 1:8; Luke 21:33; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Thompson, 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). They typically, but not always, also believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible (Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). These fundamental truths work together to continue to mature Christian character toward an identity in Christ (Brautigam, 2019; Lohrmann, 2021). While these beliefs typically mature Christian character in ways and experiences to produce moral imperatives reflecting their aspirational Christ-like identity, it is important to note that a convictional Christian who does not believe in Bible inerrancy will form a set of moral imperatives and actions that do not align with a majority of the convictional Christian grouping (Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

**God as Creator, Not Just a Concept.** Many secular minded individuals refer to god as an unsupported concept or belief in the head of some, and do not have any moral imperative motivation to live for someone else’s flawed or unprovable belief (Beltramini, 2019; Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Miller, 2021; Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023). Meanwhile, when a committed Christian speaks of God, they refer to the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord over all they know and in whom they place sizable moral imperatives (Beltramini, 2019; Brautigam, 2019; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). While a theist, by definition, believes in a transcendent and immanent Creator, a Christian theist believes this transcendent Creator immanently became flesh and lived among us as Christ Jesus who by mercy and grace offers



those who believe in Him an eternal life with Him (Brautigam, 2019; Ficek, 2021; Jensen, 2023; NKJV, 1982, John 1).

For a Christian, their Christian education throughout one's life on earth is formational, not informational, to guide and mature them to an identity based solely in Christ (Brautigam, 2019; Lohrmann, 2021; Paulus et al., 2019). A post-reformation believer recognizes there exists no mediator priest apart from Christ and every individual will, one day, stand directly before the Lord (Lohrmann, 2021; NKJV, 1982, 1 Timothy 2:5). On that day, the human tendency to belittle sins and downplay the gravity of offending the holy God will be as unacceptable as self-reliance, self-complacency, and self-confidence in our personal identities (Brautigam, 2019; Lohrmann, 2021). This recognition of a sick heart quite capable of performing self-centered things and accountable to one's Creator should not leave a committed believer passive or catatonic, but rather arouse humility and an active, responsive thankfulness for the mercy and grace extended by our Lord and Savior (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 17:5-10). A character matured by the Spirit of God through the Word of God will find its identity solely in Christ and be equipped to fulfill the good works God intends, weed out competing distractions, and bear fruit as a natural product of abiding in Christ rather than the world (Brautigam, 2019; Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Mark 4:26-29; John 14:26; 15:7; Ephesians 2:10; Romans 8:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

**Spiritual Liturgies to Produce Digital Wisdom.** In the digital age this type of Christian character maturation requires one to replace digital naivete for digital wisdom and trade cultural liturgies for spiritual liturgies (Paulus et al., 2019). Digital naivete includes the belief that digital technologies are morally neutral and irrelevant to the theological meaning of humanity (Paulus et al., 2019). Christians need to recognize the habitual reliance they are accepting with digital age

technologies and the existential risk they introduce to human spirituality (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ficek, 2021). When individuals pause and reflect upon the volume of digital technologies integrated into their existence in the digital age, they begin to grasp the concept of the existential risk to their humanity as they consider shifting from homo-sapiens to techno-sapiens, beings more and more defined and influenced by technology (Bingaman, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). When individuals grasp the significance of digital age influencers and choose to trade cultural liturgies set upon developing techno-sapiens habits, for spiritual liturgies set upon a digitally wise management of digital age technologies, then the existential risk can become an existential opportunity as a maturing Christian character leverages digital age technologies for Godly purposes rather than self-expressive ends (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Christian Portrayed Hybrid Identities.** Maturing in Christ in the digital age takes place before a broader audience than in pre-digital age life and since 2018, the audience is predominantly secular (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The heightened behavioral visibility, accompanied by a digital age hybrid identity, makes every maturing Christian identity an exilic disciple in their secular world (Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This creates a maturing character challenge for Christians as each must choose how to publicly portray themselves and the beliefs, moral convictions, and moral imperatives recognizing those choices may display incongruity with the secular world or one's Christian acquaintances and rarely please both (Bingaman, 2023; Brailey & Parker, 2020; Culton, 2022; Garrett, 2022; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). This represents a two-edged sword producing broader opportunity for digital age testimony but can just as quickly produce condemnation for the individual and all Christians when poor digital age

choices are put on display for all to see (Bingaman, 2023; Ficek, 2021; Garrett, 2022; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Digital Age Display of the Faith-Works Connection.** Typical biblical worldview-based research incorporates a series of quantitative measures to discern some distinctions between nominal Christians and a noticeably more committed Christian. These researchers show the volume of committed Christians have remained relatively stable across the 30-year digital age onset (Barwegen, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Church splitting type distinctions do exist between convictional Christians, typically around the inerrancy of the Bible (Jensen, 2023). Those who say the Bible has error and thus lesser amounts of absolute truth, can claim greater latitude to embrace sexual orientation, gender identity, gender equity, or other culture fueled priorities (Archer & Archer, 2019; Jackelen, 2021; Jensen, 2023; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

When the Bible is viewed as a good book but not inerrant, it begins to compete with other good books for attention and ample research reveals the digital native generation struggles in Christian character maturation in part because the Bible means nothing more to them than one of many other New York Times bestsellers (Bingaman, 2020; Brailey & Parker, 2020; Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Culton, 2022; Granic et al., 2020; Paulus et al., 2019; Starr et al., 2019). Digital age Christian business leaders have employees with this challenge on their team. Concept one says their success or failure in leading and maturing as a Christian business leader rests upon whether they continue to mature their identity in Christ, including mentoring or modeling, even when it may move them away from a more socially acceptable digital age individualized form of expressive individualism.

*Concept Two – Cultural Christians Identity Primarily in Culture*

Bible inerrancy remains in a moral imperative category for most convictional Christians and may be the first thing questioned by Christians who are seeking a path to keep their Christian identity while more fully embracing cultural change (Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021). However, when one concludes the Bible has errors, it impacts its authority to speak with cross-generational absolutes and thus reduces it to, at best, a good book with some proven viewpoints (Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021). Concept Two includes Christians who live by moral imperatives which have a greater alignment with culture. A cultural Christian sees the Bible as more limited in the range of absolute truth useful in today's culture and thus Christianity in culture should join in the culture to best influence it.

**Cultural Shifts Counter to Biblical Teachings.** Cultural support for same-sex marriage, LGBTQ rights, sexual-orientation, gender orientation laws, varying positions regarding when in utero human life begins, or when it is acceptable to terminate pregnancies, all call into question potentially applicable biblical texts. If one ascribes the Bible to be inspired, inerrant, and thus filled with absolute truth these accepted cultural norms run counter to Christian theology; however, if the Bible contains errors or, at best, only relative truth, one's reliance upon it shifts greatly (Ficek, 2021; Guth, 2022; Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021). If a workplace environment issue is raised relates to one of these topics, then the Christian business leader's moral imperatives and chosen actions tend to reflect a rooting in either convictional Christian or cultural Christian groupings.

A variety of Bible inspiration and inerrancy alternatives are commonly offered as more logical in the secular culture. If a Christian business leader believes the original authors of the

Bible were not inspired by God in their writing or did not capture an inerrant word from God in their writing, then those respective books of the Bible become less helpful to them in diagnosing issues or resolving challenges because every word of Scripture is not inspired by God and not necessarily profitable for teaching, reproof, correction or training in righteousness (Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, NKJV, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Since both creationism and evolutionary explanations of our origin have critical pieces of tangible evidence lacking; if the Bible is no longer possessing any new insight the evolutionists are left unchallenged and the Genesis account, including the creation of man in the Garden of Eden becomes nothing more than a made-up story (Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021).

If the Bible is actually a collection of fables, stories, and legends of things from the past then the New Testament of Christ Jesus miracles, death, resurrection and life-giving purpose are all called into question, and its love and compassion theme becomes a humanistic thought rather than the intent of an immanent, sovereign, Creator and God (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Ficek, 2021; Massey, 2021c). If the Bible and Christ Jesus are reduced to this, then the popularity of morally therapeutic deism and other forms of deism or agnostic humanism become as popular (Barwegen, 2019; Brailey & Parker, 2020; Culton, 2022; Granic et al., 2020; Setran, 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022).

**Pluralistic Perspectives Part of Digital Age Character Maturation.** McClure (2020) concluded the probability of individuals shifting into the no religious affiliation (none) category was directly related to the amount of time they spent absorbing pluralistic views from internet use. The study revealed the mean response regarding each participant's frequency of reading a sacred text was "several times a year" while the mean time spent on the internet was "1 to 3 hours" a day (McClure, 2020, p. 469). These types of digital age liturgies applied across critical

years of maturation, especially true during young adulthood, make it obvious to see how culture is shaping beliefs and moral imperative development in digital natives who typically spend more time on the internet (Barwegen, 2019; Brailey & Parker, 2020; Culton, 2022; Granic et al., 2020; Ochoa, 2022; Paulus et al., 2019). While Christian business leaders may not fall into this young adulthood category, they most certainly have some in this category in the workforce who are either closely watching their actions or may even be among those raising issues for the Christian business leader to resolve.

If workplace challenges are also handled by a Christian business leader who thinks the Bible has errors, than their conclusions on the critical issues and moral imperatives used to shape the way ahead may reflect a more culturally acceptable path; but may also fail to address the biblical principles at the root of the problem (Culton, 2022; Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Ochoa, 2022). Some researchers believe biblical teachings on hell, including those from Christ Jesus, as outdated and injurious to the love and compassion themes Christian's should portray so they should be matured to address today's culture (Jensen, 2023; Launonen, 2022; Massey, 2021c; Starr et al., 2019). These types of choices portray the Bible more as a dated book either needing a more current interpretation or irrelevant to today's society in favor of pursuing a more idealistic form of pluralistic deism (Barwegen, 2019; Culton, 2022; Jackelen, 2021; McDade, 2019; Setran, 2020). If one chooses to believe the Bible is not unique, not sufficiently important to be read, but rather just one among many alleged sacred texts from various faiths, then the practice of a dualistic faith or civil religion which keeps faith out of the public space becomes a socially justified path forward (McDade, 2019).

**With No Bible, Culture's Relative Truth is More Welcomed.** These sequential steps into religious indifferentism and away from the convictional Christian biblical worldview have

implications for determinations of right and wrong, good and evil, and appropriate paths to resolve workplace challenges (Bingaman, 2023; Brautigam, 2019; Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982; Romans 1:20-32; Skitka et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). Alternative paths taken produce different life experiences which then generate differing sets of moral imperatives, more shaped by culture than by a Christ centered identity and most certainly represent different types of soil (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8; Skitka et al., 2021). Those who choose to discard the Bible as dated, only relevant to the cultures in which respective content was written, or otherwise untrustworthy limit the ability of the Bible to speak to today's culture.

### ***The Christian Character Maturation of Beliefs to Moral Imperatives***

The Figure 3 conceptual framework depicts two groups of Christians interfacing with a secularized digital age culture. Theoretically, the nominal Christians are not depicted because they have become nones. The cultural Christians and the convictional Christians both assert to be biblical Christians personifying the best aspects of Christ Jesus. Their approaches are distinctive enough to be presented as a multiple case study. Both seek to be a testimony to a secularized society, but their approaches reflect distinctive choices, reflecting distinctive conclusions on how best to respond to a secularized society. Their common challenge as a biblical Christian is to be a disciple of Christ.

Two researchers, one Christian and the other secular, aspire to live, speak out, and act for the truth but their actions show juxtaposed perspectives of truth with one asserting truth is eternal and absolute, while the other says truth is relative and changing across time and place (Brautigam, 2019; Miller, 2021). Both speak their absolute *parrhesia* truth but only one chooses this modifying term for bold freedom in speech; and the one claiming the absolute importance of *parrhesia* truth is the one also asserting that all truth is relative and changing across time and

place (Brautigam, 2019; Miller, 2021). These two pieces of peer-reviewed research serve as examples of variant worldviews in which each researcher reflects upon how beliefs mature into moral convictions and with further maturation form moral imperatives around which they choose to shape their life and actions driven by a very distinct set of Christian or secular focused moral imperatives (NKJV, 1982, John 6:63; Romans 8:6, 13-14; Trentham, 2019a).

These two inversely related examples represent similar challenges Christian business leaders are facing in their secularized workplace environments (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019). Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) lamented the polarization of political viewpoints from 2004 to 2017, when the digital age progressed from its first decade and into its third, and yet finding common ground from two distinctly different sets of moral imperatives between Brautigam and Miller may be an insurmountable challenge, especially as it comes to how best to truthfully teach about truth (Brautigam, 2019; Miller, 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Trentham, 2019a).

The secular worldview, with its humanistic perspective, sees these simply as different beliefs stretching into different lifestyles sometimes discussed as right or wrong; but those with a biblical worldview sees something very different, for they see light and darkness as well as spiritual life and death (Beltramini, 2019; NKJV, 1982, John 3:19). Christ Jesus said, “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” and He also said, “this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (NKJV, 1982, John 12:47; John 3:19; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). A Christian business leader has a character challenge to remain light in a world of growing darkness while not acting as a judge and issuing condemnations reserved solely for the ultimate Judge to decree (NKJV, 1982, Genesis 18:25; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Christian business leaders who can



mature through their workplace challenge while continuing to represent light without slipping into judgement can make a difference in this time and place (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

A Christian business leader in today's secular environment exists in conditions similar to the business leaders Christ Jesus spoke about in a parable regarding a nobleman's 10 servants (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:11-27; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The nobleman equipped each of the servants with financing and then told them "Do business till I come" (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:13). However, these business leaders were working in a land where the nobleman was not welcome and would not be accepted as a ruler (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:14). At least two of the 10 business leaders in Christ's parable were praised and rewarded, but not all were successful in conducting their master's business in the unwelcoming land (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:19-24; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

In a similar way Christian business leaders in the secularized digital age are called to choose how to serve in a place where their Master is unwelcomed. Paul reminds followers of Christ to keep their eyes upon the unseen eternal things rather than temporal things right before them (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 4:18; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). He goes on to remind Christians they live in a temporal earthly house now but have an eternal house in heaven (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:1). The author of Hebrews builds on this concept by comparing Christians to a type of dual-citizen with an eternal country citizenry in heaven but a temporary national citizenry on earth, and this dual-citizenry requires one to serve and work in time knowing their eternal citizenry should always guide their actions and reassure their faith (NKJV, 1982, Hebrews 11:14-16). The secular consensus that existed in the Luke 19 parable and surrounded the Hebrews 11 faithful was also predominant in Sodom where the

population “ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built” until the city was destroyed (NKJV, 1982, Genesis 18:20; Luke 18:28; John 4:23-24).

The moral imperatives upon which one chooses to base their character and chooses as guides to their life actions are not issued or forced upon an individual, nor are they decided in a day, but rather they are the product of a series of choices, habits, experiences, and the character maturation that is the product of these choices (NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 17:5-10; Proverbs 2:6-8; Romans 8:5-6; 12:2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Paulus et al., 2019; Skitka et al., 2021). Two distinct sets of moral imperatives are depicted in Figure 3 with one primarily the product of secular minded choices and the second the product of Christ centered choices and what follows explains how they form.

### *Summary of the Concepts*

The two concepts address two varied paths, and a variety of soil types, for Christian character maturation. Leadership roles call for character development and how a Christian business leader leads through secular workplace challenges directly reflects a stage of maturing character growth. This research is shaped to document, not judge, each Christian business leader’s character challenged maturation. The two concepts reflect character maturation and each participant contributed how they perceived their actions to be Christ-like. The two concepts portray distinctively different reliance upon the Bible and its applicability to the cultural challenges of the day. Christian business leaders face character challenges in their leadership positions and these issues are a part of the workplace crises they are routinely asked to resolve.

### **Theory**

Servant leadership is an approach which has been widely accepted in both Christian and secular workplace environments (Bragger et al., 2021). Servant leadership could support both a

convictional Christian leader and a cultural Christian leader; however, the employment approach may have some distinctions based upon how the leader diagnoses and chooses to resolve a workplace challenge. These issues are directly pertinent to the Christian character challenge focused research and related to any shifting attitudes driven by a secularized workplace challenges and the leader's need to resolve them.

### ***Servant Leadership Theory***

The servant leadership theory has been proven effective as a transformational leadership approach which is broadly accepted in both Christian and pluralistic organizations because of its effectiveness in maintaining morality and training future servant leaders (Bragger et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019; James & Priyadarshini, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). The theory certainly has Judeo-Christian roots, but shares sufficient common grace revealed principles that it is acceptable with individuals from other world religions as well as secular minded employees (Bragger et al., 2021; Trentham, 2019b). One of its greatest advantages is the reproductive nature of its employment, which is leaders who model servant leadership typically create a mutual altruistic relationship between organizational leaders and workers thus enhancing relationships and productivity in a workplace (Bragger et al., 2021). This fostering of moral priorities makes the servant leadership approach stand-out in transformational leadership styles (Bragger et al., 2021).

Skitka et al. (2021) provided insights into how moral imperatives are shaped and modified through cognitive challenges generated in life experiences as a part of character maturation. Secular and Christian researchers recognize this aspect of character development but draw different conclusions regarding the optimal paths to resolve it (Bragger et al., 2021; Brautigam, 2019; Culton, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Setran, 2020). Figure 2 displays how attitudes regarding moral imperatives are distinct in an individual's character and Figure 3

displays how these distinctions can produce widely disparate decisions depending upon the primary factors and priorities influencing the business leader.

In practice, the moral imperatives resident within a cultural Christian's and convictional Christian's character may assess the workplace challenge with disparate standards and direct actions which are equally disparate in direction. A cultural Christian leader may choose to implement a servant leadership style which replicates a form of deism like morally therapeutic deism or some other secular based practice of dualistic faith; while a convictional Christian leader may draw different conclusions and resolution steps (Bingaman, 2023; Culton, 2022; McDade, 2019; Setran, 2020).

### *Summary of Theory*

This study is not attempting to further research the servant leadership theory. Rather the theory, blended with an understanding of how attitudes are shaped and changed in leaders and workers, may be of some assistance to Christian business leaders as they work to resolve the character challenges they face in their secularized workplace. The study does capture some data on how this theory played in their thinking, including situations where a Christian business leader chose to shift from an integrated faith to a more civil faith practice in the workplace as a product of the secular culture generated challenge.

### **Constructs**

The supervision of people and processes to effectively produce a product always includes some disparities in perspective requiring a leader to resolve the challenge at hand (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022). For this reason, it is readily acknowledged that every business leader faces challenges and some of which require them to draw upon their own set of moral imperatives to resolve the challenge. The point of these constructs is to suggest that in a secular culture, it is the

Christian business leader whose character is most challenged because their identity is based in Christ. The same logic applies that a secular based identity faces fewer challenges in a secular based society; therefore, cultural Christian identities are, on a relative scale, unchallenged or less consequentially as challenged as their Christian counterparts.

Christian leaders potentially face character challenges simply from the promotion to a leadership role. If the Christian leader is among the soil types where the seed planted by the Sower is being challenged by weeds, than this leader's first character challenge will be discerning if they are shifting loyalties from God who allowed them to assume the leadership role and their appreciation for the prestige the role provides them (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:11-15; 1 Samuel 15:17-19). Most leaders realize their success or failure to resolve the conflicts they face in their current leadership role will most likely directly impact their future opportunity and this common grace principle has spiritual truth evident in the parables Christ Jesus taught about business leaders and sowing seed (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022; NKJV, 1982, Luke 8:11-15; Luke 19:11-26; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). The two constructs being considered are described next.

### ***Challenged Christian Identities***

Given the consensus of the American culture is secular, literature review shows a secular worldview-based perspective of Christian business leaders produces greater scrutiny of their actions than their secular counterparts (Dick, 2021; McClure, 2020; Murray, 2019b). There may be some distinction in the latitude a Christian business leader may display in a Christian owned corporations as compared to a secular owned corporation; however, in both workplaces secular worldview individuals have legal rights which the Christian business leader cannot violate (Nelson, 2019).

An overly generalized Christian label has been used to denounce Christians and suggest them to be overzealous about their faith in public spaces, while the same level of research is not leveled regarding secular minded individuals (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Damper, 2022a, 2022b; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023; Nelson, 2019). An overly generalized Christian label has been used to denounce Christians regarding the Bible as containing absolute truth, including truths applicable in today's culture (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023; Nelson, 2019; Perry, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2021; Perry, Whitehead, & Grubbs, 2021). Christians are labeled as selfish racists, nationalists, and hypocrites (Perry, Cobb, Whitehead, et al., 2022; Perry, Whitehead, & Grubbs, 2021). The global availability of such critique potentially places a Christian leader in a defensive position from which they must prove they do not possess such broadly labeled negative qualities.

Those Christians who believe the Bible contains errors may add to the challenges convictional Christians sense by suggesting the Bible has limited ability to provide guidance for application in today's secular culture (Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). These may join others in suggesting convictional Christians to be too narrow minded, overly involved in politics, or apocalyptic (Duff, 2021; Furse, 2022; Polizzi & Harrison, 2022; Upenieks, 2022). Some of these suggest convictional Christians practicing their integrated faith in the workplace need to have their speech limited (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Cortina et al., 2019; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021).

The Bible teaches that God does directly challenge individuals to mature their character by helping them weed out worldliness and selfishness to allow His seed to grow and produce fruit (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 17:9-10; John 15:5-8; Psalm 51:6; Romans 8:14; Paulus et al., 2019; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). The spiritual opponents combating this Godly

maturation come in many forms both from without and within (Brautigam, 2019; Dick, 2021; NKJV, 1982, 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 8:28). However, a convictional Christian business leader can know their heavenly citizenship is secure and prayerfully place the eternal moral imperatives ahead of any temporal home challenges to the same (Ficek, 2021; NKJV, 1982, Hebrews 11:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:12).

### *Unchallenged Christian Identities*

All leaders struggled with character challenging crises as a part of their leadership role; however, as addressed in the first construct, if one's moral imperatives differ from that of their business culture or the society in which they serve, the character challenges will typically be greater (Knudsen & Larsson, 2022; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This second construct addresses the Christian leader whose identity is aligned more closely with the secular culture than with their convictional Christian counterparts. Identifying a point of consensus to resolve a faith-based challenge in the workplace does not necessarily reflect weakness in faith but certainly involves some private personal struggles before deciding how one can publicly move forward (Baumgartner & Morgan, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Indeed, finding a point of consensus may reflect higher levels of spiritual preparation as found in other studies (Ecklund et al., 2020).

Christian business leaders who identify workplace solutions which are satisfactory to their secular workers can reflect both biblical wisdom on display or shifting moral imperatives and it is not for this researcher to judge their convictions or actions, but rather only to gain insight into their thinking (Ecklund et al., 2020; Setran, 2020). Solutions of this nature may be viewed by those with a secular worldview as a valid practice of civil religion by a Christian business leader (McDade, 2019). This research deepens the understanding of this gap by

documenting the findings which provided this degree of calm and glean insights into the moral imperatives which derived it.

### ***Summary of Constructs***

Assessing gathered data from the participants informs the validity of these constructs. The constructs are not intended to infer approval or judgment of the moral imperatives in play but rather solely to document what is seen and spoken. They also provide some degree of validation to other studies which suggest Christian business leaders are struggling to resolve faith at work related issues in the secularized digital age (Ecklund et al., 2020). The data collected and assessed through these constructs also provided insight into the convictional and secular modifiers for the Christian labeling of the business leader. Limited quantitative data were gathered from each qualitative research participant allowing for comparison of this qualitative research with the earlier triangulating quantitative studies (Ecklund et al., 2020; McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

### **Related Studies**

Several quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies have been conducted and provided findings regarding the impacts of the secularized digital age upon character development and maturation to include the challenges which are a part of this process. Some address digital age transformation of the workplace which has created sizable leadership challenges. Others are more focused on the character challenges driven by digital age emancipating choices. All address some facet of character challenges business leaders face in the digital age, including some those working for them may be experiencing. Some of the studies touch upon the additional transformational layer of workplace secularization which Christian



leaders must manage on top of the others. Through methodological and data triangulation methods these findings help inform findings from this qualitative research effort.

***McClure (2020)***

McClure (2020) contained quantitative research documenting the steady growth of nones in America and the statistically significant linkage between internet use and a gravitation toward pluralism and away from multiple forms of religious practices. The study participants on average invested 1 to 3 hours a day on the internet but chose to read a *sacred text* only a few times every year. These findings, and others like them, are summarized as what the digital age is allowing Americans to do to themselves. Bingaman (2020) and Paulus et al. (2019) clearly stated their conclusions that digital age technologies are not morally neutral, and that most all digital natives and digital immigrants are naïve to the impacts internet use is having upon them. Bingaman (2020) suggested the digital age and hyperconnectivity are an existential threat to human spirituality. Brubaker (2020) provided a secularistic view of internet use and hyperconnectivity but draws similar conclusions regarding techno-sapiens being controlled by technology rather than choosing to control the technology in their lives. The quantitative McClure (2020) research showed a broad trend but falls short in the granular understanding provided by the qualitative research.

***Ecklund et al. (2020)***

This mixed method research includes quantitative analysis from a nation-wide survey of faith in the workplace blended with a set of qualitative interviews to provide a more granular understanding of the challenges individuals of faith confronted in their secularized digital age workplaces. The quantitative portion of the mixed methods study summarized inputs from over 13,000 quantitative participants which provides a layer of understanding not available in the

McClure (2020) research. The quantitative products included several religious practice related questions which provide an enhanced quantitative understanding of those who are seeking to practice their faith in the workplace, the types of challenges they are facing, and the relative value they place in their faith to work through their secularized digital age workplace challenges.

The qualitative portion of this study is study also provided very helpful granularity into each participant's practice of their faith. Both the quantitative and qualitative data are reflective of the nominal Christian disparity from the convictional Christian raised in Stetzer and MacDonald (2020). The study's findings displayed a broad range of Christian practices spanning from a more culturally sensitive civil religion practiced by a culturally influenced Christian, to the integrated faith practices of the convictional Christian. The qualitative data also clearly depicts an existing research gap in how best to integrate faith in the secular workplace and how churches can assist Christian business workers in this character maturation. Similar conclusions are captured in smaller qualitative samples as well.

### ***Culton (2022)***

This small sample size qualitative research reflects the character maturation of college age students attending a denominational college. The study findings present much similarity to the McClure (2020) drifted toward secularism especially among digital natives. The researcher found the cultural influence as a strong factor influencing the beliefs and attitudes of the participants who were, for most, on their own for the first time in their lives. In one particular case, a participant feigned a denominational belief simply to enjoy the social benefits associated, having concluded life would be lonelier if a non-belief position were chosen while attending the denominational school. The researcher also noted the increasing presence of moralistic therapeutic deism offered as a replacement to an alignment with a particular faith or

denomination. Among the conclusions drawn from this small sampling are these participants, as a part of a postmodern culture, are embracing great upheaval, experimentation, and the dearth of absolutes.

***Reyes et al. (2021)***

This mixed methods study reported on character changing maturation described as Christian deconversion. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods produced two key factors in a *deconversion* decision: the belief that the church is out of touch with the individual's life, and the church is out of step with society regarding same-sex marriages. The researchers caveat their findings acknowledging they do not intend to imply the deconverted participants were at any time ever converted "committed Christians" (Reyes et al., 2021, p. 204). Their data analysis shows a Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) like split between cultural Christians who may choose deconversion and convictional Christians who continue to practice their faith through regular church attendance and faith in Christ. Their quantitative analysis reflected findings similar to Ecklund et al. (2020) by revealing a relationship between church attendance and a continued faith in Christ with the opposite also being true. The Skitka et al. (2021) grouping of attitudes and the Figure 2 depiction of disparate moral imperatives is in part reflected in these findings. Among the limitations, the researchers acknowledged participants self-defined themselves as Christians and even as committed Christians yet noted that their actions did not always align with their chosen descriptors and as such they may "had never been deconverted" because they were never converted in the first place (Reyes et al., 2021, p. 218).

***Starr et al. (2019)***

This qualitative study documented character maturation by documenting the use of the internet to facilitate a deconversion, a process the researchers called *extimonies*. The researchers

conducted the data mining of 2,181 extimonies to choose 60 written extimonies upon which qualitative content analysis was conducted. The 60 chosen were predominantly decisions to place their beliefs in an agnostic or atheistic belief structure rather than any form of theism. The 60 cases provide some qualitative examples of the McClure (2020) shift to secularism enabled by internet use. Several of the participants identified the breadth of internet access enabled them to study a wide range of alternatives while also noting a wide range of objections to and arguments against biblical principles. The internet forum allowed them a discrete place to research logical fallacies, logical reasoning, cognitive biases, and weigh these against Christian scripture and apologetics. Many attested to how doubts became skepticism and a pursuit of alternatives. The researchers acknowledge the deconversion of nominal Christians but suggest their findings call for more research to assess if even the highly committed Christian is gradually progressing toward secularization with the assistance of the internet.

***Stetzer and MacDonald (2020)***

This research paper is a concise summary of a book which contains even greater volumes of the background materials summarized in the research paper. The quantitative summary regarding a steady volume of convictional Christians is summarized in Ecklund et al. (2020) and the conclusion that nominal Christians are the primary group feeding the growth of nones is supported by McClure (2020). The challenge for Christians to rigorously maintain true to their moral imperatives while also not forgetting Christian charity is far easier stated than completed but useful, nonetheless.

***Budde et al. (2022)***

This multiple case study utilized a Kotter transformation framework to assemble a listing of managerial competencies and practices needed to lead an effective transformation of an

organization in the digital age. The research included a review of how the 3-Ds have transformed the business workplace and then focused upon the managerial adjustments needed to effectively manage Industry 4.0, digitalization, and a smart factory. The multiple case analysis included an in-depth analysis of multiple organizations followed by a cross-cased analysis to develop themes and findings. The organizations assessed ranged from a wood processing facility to a plant manufacturing miniature electronic components. On-site plant tours combined with a series of leadership interviews at each of the eight facilities. When all data had been collected, a cross-case analysis was completed. While the research was very focused upon digital age leadership challenges, it makes no mention of the secularization layer of transformation nor any reference to how this might impact Christian business leaders.

***Pfister and Lehmann (2023)***

This multiple case research documented the success of eight small and medium sized German enterprises in digital age transformation. The study provides ample research into the return-on-investment benefits to digital age transformation as well as the barriers to change within the organization. The barriers primarily centered upon challenges with employees reticence to change and concerns about obsolescence resulting from the digital upgrades in processes. There is no mention of the secularization layer of transformation or how this could further complicate the people challenges identified.

***Kazim (2019)***

This multiple case study specifically focused upon the leadership problems associated with completing a complex digital age transformation in hospitality, healthcare, pharmaceutical, and banking enterprises in French headquartered workplaces. Although each individual case had distinct differences from the others, the research leveraged cross-case analysis to identify optimal

leadership styles, characteristics, and character traits which enable a successful digital transformation. Interestingly, the study cited the biggest enemy for change was “organizational and individual indolence...that block change processes” (Kazim, 2019, p. 26).

### ***Summary of Related Studies***

The multiple case studies show how disparate perspectives can be coalesced to deliver transferable findings. All these studies provide a good source for methodological and data method triangulation which is useful in shaping the planned qualitative research. While a Christian business leader focus is lacking from most, the character challenges driven by maturation in the secularized digital age is a common theme. The key quantitative themes drawn from McClure (2020) and Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) are blended with the qualitative insights gleaned from the mixed-methods efforts of Ecklund et al. (2020) and Reyes et al. (2021). The qualitative deconversion and extimony research may parallel the Christian character challenges of business leaders in their secularized workplace environments and the Ecklund et al. (2020) call for greater attention to faith at work support from church homes may as well (Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019).

### **Anticipated Themes**

After completing this literature review in earnest, the gap in understanding is even more starkly apparent. The overarching theme is that Christian business leaders are facing sizable character challenges in the secularized digital age. These subset character challenges included: (a) the difficulty for someone possessing an secular worldview to comprehend the depth of moral imperative conviction a biblical worldview leader must face in the midst of a secularized cultural shift of seismic proportions, (b) the Christian character identity maturation challenge which attempts to maintain the rigor of biblical truth while employing it with the epitome of Christ-like

charity and give no indication of judging anyone, (c) the challenge of developing consensus while ensuring one is not slipping into a practice of civil religion, (d) a concern that an absence of challenge may indicate moral compromise rather than wisdom; and, perhaps most of all, and (e) a sense of peace that plans to resolve character challenges are reflective of prayerful insights from God for good, and not passive acceptance of self-rationalized moral decay promulgating or enabling evil.

### **Summary of Chapter 2 and Transition**

Christian business leaders are biblical dual citizens with an eternal home in heaven and a God-ordained purpose on earth. Thus, they exist in a temporal home and country but are, to varying degrees, to be optimally guided to steward this life in accordance with eternal moral imperatives rather than temporal counterfeits. Christian business leaders, like all Christians, face Christian character maturation challenges as a part of life. However, any leader's challenges must be resolved in even more public ways due to their appointed roles in the secularized digital age. The digital age behavioral visibility and the leader's hybrid identity can pose both a risk and opportunity for Christian testimony which must be wisely managed with maturity and integrity. The rapid sociological shift to secularism has placed Christian business leaders in a minority position where their biblical worldview is questioned and even critiqued by the majority secular worldview superiors, subordinates, and even the public at large. Convictional Christian business leaders must recognize this critical view of their performance may be judged by others who see no distinction between a nominal Christian's actions and those of a convictional Christian.

The Christian business leader needs to understand how beliefs mature into moral imperatives so they can understand their own character maturation challenges as well as have insight into the same challenges occurring within the workplace. These insights may help the

Christian business leader address the challenges at hand in a more Christ-like fashion. Christian business leaders who seek to abide in biblical truth will find their identities matured more into a Christ-like identity. Conversely, when a Christian business leader sense they have more in common with the secular culture than they do with the convictional Christian, they may want to pause to see which has moved away from the biblical principles they hold to be most pertinent moral imperatives in play. Christian business leaders may become more discerning of character maturation by understanding the domain theory of attitudes and more astute in resolving workplace challenges by putting actions into play through servant leadership principles. The chapter concluded with a summary of the anticipated themes drawn from the data collected and analysis performed with perhaps the most critical being a Christian business leader's prayerful conclusion and peace that the actions being taken to resolve challenges are the Spirit empowered actions for good rather than self-rationalized omissions or, even worse, substitutes promulgating or enabling evil.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology used in the research. This includes a review of the role of the researcher actions to be taken and the methods of bracketing which was employed to avoid injection of personal bias. The chapter also addresses the intent of conducting the flexible design multiple case study through qualitative methods and the appropriateness of this approach to achieve the overall intended purpose and best address the problem to be studied. Finally, the chapter includes another review of the quantitative data intended for use as the triangulation upon which the qualitative study is founded.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

With the foundation of the proposed research now established in prior chapters, this chapter shifts to the explanation of the proposed methods to accomplish the research. This includes a thorough discussion of the role of the qualitative researcher in effectively accomplishing the research, conducting the analysis, and accurately documenting the findings while ensuring all remain free from bias, questionable subjectivity, or unwarranted conclusions. The chapter also includes an explanation for the methods to be used, specifically the appropriateness of the flexible design, multiple case, qualitative approach as the optimal approach for this research. It describes the desired participants for the research and how they were purposely sought and sampled. The chapter addresses the methodical rigor diligently followed for data from collection, through organization, and analysis. It documents how this same methodological rigor thus substantiates the reliability and validity desired for the research product while addressing ethical concerns throughout the planning and execution of the study.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this flexible design multiple case study is to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today's secularized digital age while producing credible themes and transferable findings which inform future efforts to fill this gap. The research shows why the rapidly onsetting cultural shift toward secularism causes individual identity challenges within each Christian business leader. The biblical worldview framing of the research clarifies how each business leader's Christian identity relates to the character challenges they see in the secularized digital age environment in which they work. Furthermore, the research displays how the individual perspective (beliefs) connects to chosen group level actions (behavior). Finally, the research explores any

organizational influence which may have had a shaping effect upon the Christian business leader's perceived character challenges or freedom of action.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of any researcher is to conduct open-minded research and accurately document findings without allowing confirmation bias, negativity bias, or any other form of insufficient analysis to shape their research product (Barwegen, 2019). The role of the researcher clearly includes conducting credible, valid, and complete research to properly resolve a knowledge gap (Barwegen, 2019). Qualitative researchers have distinct challenges from quantitative researchers because their work requires interface with participants rather than survey data, and this demands their ability to build and maintain the mutual trust essential to transparency with each participant (Crick, 2021; Pope, 2020). Since many qualitative researchers also leverage quantitative research in anchoring their efforts, a researcher should be familiar with accepted procedures to ensure validity of both types of research as well as the avoidance of common flaws in research which undermine their respective or combined products (Barwegen, 2019; Crick, 2021).

### ***Actions The Researcher Took While Conducting the Study***

This section addresses the methodological rigor the researcher employed to produce a credible, valid, and complete research product. These steps included the establishment of rapport with participants, the building of rapport into trust by ensuring them appropriate visibility into the data collection while displaying the responsible overall handling of it. Once established, the researcher continued to enhance participant trust and research credibility by incorporating all participant contributions, documenting reflexivity, and displaying this mindfulness with continuous bracketing practices applied throughout the study.

**Establishing Rapport and Maintaining Participant Trust.** The effectiveness of this research hinged on a variety of factors, but few were more essential than establishing and maintaining trust between the researcher and the participants. Without a foundation of trust, there could be no transparency in data collection and no new insights into the understanding gap. Participants wanted to sense their inputs were of value and would be fairly represented within the research, so the researcher was intentional in communicating and deliberately displaying this commitment to each participant while ensuring they saw the commitment in action as the research was conducted (Pope, 2020). This trust helped build rapport which enhanced participant transparency and mutual learning (Pope, 2020). Rapport and mutual trust were especially important when discussing beliefs and attitudes in inter-faith dialogues (Pope, 2020). These attributes, nurtured throughout the course of the study, optimized insights into the gaps upon which the research was focused (Pope, 2020).

The researcher further enhanced rapport by ensuring anonymity in data collection, transcription, and reporting, and allowing each participant to see these applied efforts through participatory review and feedback (Barwegen, 2019; Pope, 2020). Throughout the course of this study the researcher ensured a positive correlation between what was captured in writing and its alignment with what was intended by the participant in the interview sessions (Barwegen, 2019). Where appropriate, the researcher maintained participant colloquialisms and verbatim statements to ensure the participant's intent was accurately emphasized in the written text (Barwegen, 2019; Crick, 2021; Rowlands, 2021).

When team research is conducted, the coding of the transcripts can be completed by multiple researchers who then compare their independently created notes to ensure a common understanding of the participant's intent (Ecklund et al., 2020). When only one researcher is

involved, analysis software products can be compared to manual coding to validate researcher technique (Bayne et al., 2020; Pope, 2020). NVivo software was employed to assist in the coding analysis.

Trust and rapport did motivate eight participants to practice their own reflexivity and growth thus further their contributions toward the research (Pope, 2020). While this level of participation did not reach a co-researcher level, it did extend beyond the average participant and enabled an even greater robust analysis (Pope, 2020). Trust and rapport must be bilaterally practiced, so when participants sought to contribute beyond initial data gathering, the researcher responsively adjusted plans to ensure all trust and rapport extended was appropriately reciprocated (Pope, 2020).

**Data Use and Management.** A researcher had data management responsibilities beyond these trust and rapport related steps (Barwegen, 2019; Pope, 2020). The researcher was keenly aware of properly leveraging quantitative data to assist in the qualitative research by recognizing the limited amount of purposively sampled quantitative data collected could not be used to capture descriptive and inferential data (Barwegen, 2019). Given a focused cross-section of population was surveyed and a limited amount of survey data were incorporated into this qualitative study the researcher exercised appropriate caution not to make speculative claims from limited data collections (Faries et al., 2020). The researcher recognized such limited sample size data collection could not provide inferential or causal conclusions (Barwegen, 2019; Jeffries et al., 2019). The limited data collection was useful for informing theory, and drawing generalizations to guide future research but was not mishandled to represent more (Barwegen, 2019; Faries et al., 2020).

**Reflexivity.** A key role of every qualitative researcher is a reflexive writing exercise to openly acknowledge any bias one may possess as a product of their personal experiences and background (Barwegen, 2019). Reflexively identifying one's perspective up front enables both fellow researchers and consumers of the research to make their own assessment if the self-identified perspectives negatively impacted the validity of the reported findings (Barwegen, 2019). In this Christian business leader focused study, the researcher made every effort to gain and maintain trust and rapport with all the participants in order to enable transparency, while simultaneously maintaining a biblical worldview transparency.

A challenging aspect of reflexivity in the secular digital age is properly capturing the researcher's biblical worldview without it being misinterpreted as judgmentalism, confirmation bias, negativity bias, or other form of close-mindedness (Barwegen, 2019; Bayne et al., 2020; Pope, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Managing these challenges required a great deal of up front planning as well as careful execution throughout the research (Allen & Fry, 2019; Bayne et al., 2020; Pope, 2020). When it comes to faith-related studies, poorly communicated biblical worldview reflexivity could have been easily misinterpreted and produced sizable, related research consequences (Allen & Fry, 2019; Bayne et al., 2020; Pope, 2020).

**Researching from a Biblical Worldview.** This researcher believes every Christian is called to glorify God through the stewardship of the life He gives and sustains in us (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Ephesians 2:10). This researcher believes the Bible to be the inerrant word of God filled with universal truth applicable for all people across all time (Brautigam, 2019; NKJV, 1982, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). At no time in the research did these beliefs translate into hateful opposition of secular minded thinking, judgmentalism for those with lesser forms of conviction, nor acquiescence from a Godly calling to live lifestyles of integrated faith (Lourdunathan, 2022;

NKJV, 1982, James 1:22; 2:18-19; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This research provides insights into how Christian business leaders of similar and varying convictions are striving to address their respective character challenges in their respective secularized workplaces and in a manner they believe to be God-honoring. It would not have produced these results if participants misperceived the researcher's reflexivity position as one which was judging them or would not fairly represent the convictions they shared (Pope, 2020). Ensuring it was not misperceived through questioning, non-verbal body language, or documentation was essential to maintaining the trust, rapport, and transparency essential for a productive research effort; and all of these matters were diligently practiced through bracketing.

### ***Bracketing***

The nature of conducting research into Christian business leaders employed in a secularized digital age workplace while maintaining a biblical worldview, is a critical topic to be addressed through both reflexivity and bracketing. One faith-based clinical practice researcher acknowledged the importance of bracketing in one's investigative research but suggested it should be set aside when working with a participant to consider treatment steps (McWhorter, 2019). Similar needs for bifurcation were identified between Christian counselors and their mentors, between conservative Christian counselors and their lesbian and gay clients, between Christian coaches and the topic of spiritual development with the executives they may be coaching (Allen & Fry, 2019; Bayne et al., 2020; Scott, 2020). Although counseling and coaching are distinct from academic research, this mental bracketing of the researcher's worldview while engaging with others who may not share the same worldview was instructive for academic research as well (Trentham, 2019a, 2019b).

Bracketing techniques ensured the researcher's reflexive thoughts were kept separate from the participant's inputs, during collection and processing, by properly acknowledging them before or early in the research effort and then keeping them in check throughout the research (Trenta et al., 2021). While one researcher assessed her honest bracketing undermined her ability to conduct her research; most concur it is an essential element for validity in qualitative research (Barwegen, 2019; Gregory, 2019). One researcher suggested optimal data collection can be achieved when applying bracketing as a form of stage like acting, to ensure each participant perceives an independent researcher rather than a biased one (Collins & Stockton, 2022). Other researchers say they keep their research purpose in the forefront of their mind and always remember it is far more critical to gather the inputs of the participant than to interrupt the data collection to share the thoughts of the researcher (Bayne et al., 2020). Always be ready to listen and to *gather* data (Bayne et al., 2020; Pope, 2020).

From all participant indications, and the degree to which all transparently shared, the researcher was able to maintain the rapport, trust, and transparency goal throughout the research by employing proper tactics and ensuring none of these were violated. The researcher effectively separated personal perspectives from the inquisitive researching role portrayed before all participants (Collins & Stockton, 2022). This level of bracketing required thorough preparation on the part of the researcher in considering the acting role needed for each interview as well as concentration to maintain that role throughout when interfacing with the participant (Collins & Stockton, 2022). Pope (2020) adjusted her research framework to proactively incorporate a section specifically confronting stereotypes and misconceptions from each of the disparate groups participating in the inter-faith dialogue.

This effort increased transparency, the depth of the dialogue, and enhanced the related findings (Pope, 2020). This research incorporated similar real-time adjustments as participant's wanted to transparently discuss topics beyond are adjacent to the prepared interview questions. These excursions were incorporated into the draft transcripts provided to each participant for member checking. Each participant determined if they felt the excursions detracted or added to their original intent and, thus, had the final say in their incorporation into the member checked approved transcript used for this research.

Whether acting or simply trying to respectfully engage a dialogue reflecting mutual trust and rapport, all agree bracketing includes a diligent effort to identify, track, and actively control the researcher's personal perspective and demeanor throughout the research. These practiced efforts ensured all the researcher's thoughts did not comingle, taint, or otherwise shape or inhibit the intent of the participant input (McWhorter, 2019; Pope, 2020; Trenta et al., 2021). All agree this must be continually practiced throughout the research if the participants inputs are to be heard and documented with the integrity of the original intent, and then appropriately generalized to produce transferable findings (Pope, 2020; Sneed et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021).

### ***Summary of Role of the Researcher***

The purpose of this research is intended to address a gap in understanding regarding Christian business leader character challenges by documenting their perspectives on the problem being studied, garnering their feedback to ensure their intent is properly captured, then allowing them to contribute further if they desire to share their perspective regarding emerging themes. The degree to which the participants desired to display transparency hinged upon the establishment of rapport and the maintenance of mutual trust between the researcher and the study's participants. The researcher took several deliberate steps to gain participant trust by



ensuring they knew the importance of their transparent inputs as well as the assurance that all data gathered would be securely maintained and reported with anonymity. The researcher responsively allowed each participant ample opportunity to validate their intent was properly captured in the transcription of member checked interviews, and in the assembling of multiple anonymous interviews into generalized themes and findings. The researcher reflexively documented a biblical worldview perspective while striving to ensure it remained appropriately bracketed to not be misconstrued in this particularly sensitive inter-faith research effort.

### **Research Methodology**

As stated in the previous chapter, this study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a multiple case study was used. This section reviews and expands upon the earlier descriptions. Additional information is incorporated to document some of the single case, multiple case, and mixed methods studies which are pertinent to the shaping of this research effort. It summarized why a flexible design multiple case study was best suited for this research effort.

### ***Discussion of Flexible Design***

Given this study was shaped to explore a why and how research gap, a qualitative case study provided the best opportunity to gather in-depth understanding and insights not captured by the other design methods (Ecklund et al., 2020; Guenther & Falk, 2019; Guth, 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019; McGhee, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021). Understanding why some self-identifying Christians maintain a secularized worldview; why other self-identifying Christians believe the Bible to contain a sizeable amount of dated writings relevant only to the cultures in which they were written; and still others believe the Bible to contain universal truths as applicable in today's culture as in the days it was written, are all questions only answered through a flexible design

qualitative research (Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; Falk & Guenther, 2021; Reyes et al., 2021; Soukup & Glader, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). How these distinctions generate and are related to Christian character challenges each participant experiences in the secular workplace, is also a question requiring a flexible design approach (Beltramini, 2019; Bingaman, 2023; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019).

Fixed research tells medical doctors broad conclusions regarding treatment plans, but it is qualitative research which reveals granular data needed for the development of new theory and the furtherance of research to solidify even deeper granularly proven treatment plans (Jeffries et al., 2019). Fixed design is best for a detailed quantitative analysis of complex problems to assist in the identification of primary factors and potentially prove inferential or causal factor theories through tightly controlled experimentation and regression analysis (Jeffries et al., 2019). Fixed design applied to complex problems can provide a generalized top-down understanding of the problem being studied (Clark et al., 2022; Jeffries et al., 2019).

In the digital age, fixed research has shown a transformational shift toward secularism in America (McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). It has inferentially aligned this with nominal Christians who have chosen to self-identify as nones. However, it has not and cannot detect why or how this alteration in belief occurred or the why and how of the disparities between convictional Christians who believe in universal biblical truths, cultural Christians who do not, and how the digital age has challenged both groups in living out their beliefs (Barwegen, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This research reflects a flexible design approach to address the why and how questions related to convictional and cultural Christian business leader character challenges in the secularized digital age workplace.

### *Discussion of Multiple Case Study*

Multiple case studies are very good in capturing seemingly contrary perspectives to find common themes which provide transferable findings with broader applicability and usefulness (Peters et al., 2020). Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) documented a wide range of perspectives among self-identifying Christians. A single case study into either the beliefs of cultural Christians or convictional Christians could provide deep granular understanding into the bounded case for either of these groups; however, would be insufficient in identifying any transferability in themes or findings to anything beyond those single case boundaries (Culton, 2022; Hoorani et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). A multiple case study looking at both cultural Christians and convictional Christians did reveal themes and findings single case studies into either would not have produced (Culton, 2022; Hoorani et al., 2019).

One researcher displayed this beneficial aspect of multiple case study when looking for opportunities to enhance business related to healthcare provision (Peters et al., 2020). The perspectives of what needed improvement from the health-care provider perspective differed greatly from what patients perceived as most critical (Peters et al., 2020). By collecting each group as individual cases and then conducting a multiple case comparison, the researchers were able to develop a range of themes and findings useful for both the healthcare business providers and the patients receiving the care (Peters et al., 2020).

Multiple case studies provided similar beneficial findings when assessing digital age transformation challenges among small and medium sized enterprises in Germany (Pfister & Lehmann, 2023). This multiple case study included research into organizations with a wide variance of products and successfully documented the digital age transformation benefits and challenges each faced. The resulting multiple case product provided methodologically sound,

transferable themes and findings (Pfister & Lehmann, 2023). Kazim (2019) applied a similar approach assessing digital age transformation among French businesses as did Budde et al. (2022) with a group of manufacturing organizations. A multiple case study approach is best suited to produce generalizable themes and transferable findings of both cultural and convictional Christian business leaders to inform the understanding gap (Hoorani et al., 2019).

### ***Discussion of Method for Triangulation***

Triangulation is a method of systematically comparing findings from a variety of data collection methods for the purpose of enhancing one's confidence in the validity of the conclusions drawn (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). An overview of the four types of triangulation was provided in Chapter 1. The two types to be used in this research were the methodological and the data forms of triangulation with the goal to provide validity and enhanced confidence in the research. For reasons explained in Chapter 1, the investigator and theoretical types were beyond the scope of this research effort. A brief review of the triangulation types intended for use in this research are provided next along with examples of how they were applied. All reflect the appropriateness of a flexible design multiple case study with qualitative methods to address the why and how shaped questions in this research effort.

**Methodological.** Triangulating data across methods is exemplified with the comparison of data gathered from quantitative with data gathered from qualitative (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). It was also displayed by comparing data gathered in interviews with data gathered by surveys or some other form of data gathering means (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). The methodological type of data triangulation is clearly displayed in the quantitative and qualitative research addressed in the literature review preparation for this research. It was also applied with comparisons between research documented

in the literature review and that collected from participants in this study (Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020; Falk & Guenther, 2021; McClure, 2020; Ochoa, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Data.** This type of triangulation includes the comparison of data from multiple sources (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). This is distinct from the methodological, because it includes a variety of researchers, people, or stakeholders (Campbell, Goodman-Williams, Feeney, et al., 2020). Data triangulation was used in this research to help validate the digital age shift toward secularism, the disparity between secular and Christian researchers regarding the importance and implications of this shift, the distinctions between committed Christians and nominal Christians, the distinctions between cultural Christian leaders and convictional Christian leaders, and the similarities between cultural Christian leaders and convictional Christian leaders (Ecklund et al., 2020; McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Walker & Vegter, 2023). It was also useful in comparing qualitative interview data gathered with qualitative data points from literature review, but only with the cautions of qualitative data reuse in mind (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Ochoa, 2022; Poth, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019).

### ***Summary of Methodology***

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a multiple case study was used. One case focused upon the character challenges of convictional Christian business leaders and a second case focused upon the character challenges of cultural Christian business leaders. This approach was best suited to address the why and how questions posed in the research questions guiding the study. This approach aligned well with the problem to be studied and the purpose of the study. This approach was also best suited to triangulate,

through both methodological and data approaches, thus linking existing research to this research and in so doing, fill some of this research gap and provide transferable themes and theory to guide future research.

### **Participants**

The problem studied centered upon a biblical worldview, bottoms-up, qualitative research of Christian business leaders in their secularized digital age workplace. Eligible participants were therefore drawn from the primary actor in this research, the Christian business leader. In an effort to provide results which can be related to the overall population, sufficient participants were interviewed to reach saturation for both cases. This was estimated to be 25 to 30 interviews (Liberty University School of Business, 2023). The following paragraphs explain additional qualifiers applied for this research into this primary actor group as well as the rationale for their existence. The additional qualifiers for all participants, thoroughly addressed in previous chapters, include working in America, coming from an active convictional or cultural Christian practice as revealed by some home church alignment, and having experienced a Christian business leadership role at some point in the secularized digital age.

#### ***Christian Business Leaders Serving in America and in a Home Church***

Eligible participants must first be working and living in America (McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This requirement is driven by the relatively unique American blending of a ubiquitous world wide web, high economic development of business environment, Constitutional freedoms, and the shifting cultural influence (McClure, 2020). Eligibility also requires individuals who profess to be Christians and readily align with a church home (Culton, 2022; Ecklund et al., 2020). This requirement is essential to ensure contributing participants are somewhat active in the practice of their cultural or convictional Christian faith. It also provided a

method to prevent nominal Christian participation. Individuals fitting these eligibility requirements were drawn from anywhere across the United States.

*Christian Business Leaders Serving in the Secularized Digital Age*

Eligible participants had to be Christians who are or have experienced secularized digital age leadership responsibilities. This requirement is essential to properly assess the distinctive nature of digital age leadership as identified in secular and Christian based research (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; Skitka et al., 2021). Additionally, this requirement is essential to identify Christian leaders who have had to consider how to apply Christian principles when such are a minority position in a secular society (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; McClure, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). These qualities do not readily align with a particular age bracket since Christian business leaders could be drawn from all generations if they have some leadership experiences in the digital age. Once again, these participants were drawn from across the U.S. population.

This research represents a biblical worldview exploratory effort into American Christian business leader decision making. It recognizes their convictional or cultural faith-based decision-making as highly visible and may or may not be popular in today's secularized digital age or their secularized workplace. These potential implications generate a degree of character challenges which can only be discovered through a bottoms-up subjectively focused research effort. The effort included qualitative data gathered from business leaders who self-identify as Christian and have, or have had, a leadership role at some point in the 21st century secularized digital age workplace. The next section expands upon these basics.

## **Population and Sampling**

This section starts with a discussion of the characteristics of the secularized digital age American Christian business leader population and the size of this eligible population. It then shifts to discuss the approach taken to sample the participants from within it. The sampling discussion addresses sampling method, frame, size, and saturation. The summary captures the essence of the sampling effort used for this research.

### ***Discussion of the Population***

Each descriptive modifier of the eligible secularized digital age Christian business leader population brings a distinctive facet shaping this group and was in part defined in the previous participant paragraphs. A few additional characteristics are added in this section to properly describe the eligible population from which the participants were sampled. The rationale regarding each additional modifier is included to describe and properly quantify the population targeted for this research.

**Christian.** This research was shaped to follow precedents established in previous research by focusing upon cultural and convictional Christian business leaders who are sufficiently active in the practice of their faith that they declare a home church (Barwegen, 2019; Bingaman, 2020; Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Research shows convictional Christians come in larger numbers from evangelical churches while cultural Christians typically come from other Protestant and congregational denominations (Barwegen, 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). This study leveraged this insight as a method to develop an initial estimated balance in the volume of cultural and convictional Christians incorporated into the research. While this study follows precedent set by other Christian researchers by striving to limit nominal Christian



participation, it nevertheless allowed each Christian to self-define what the modifying term means and how it applied to their respective faith at work challenge (Ecklund et al., 2020). Since faith at work challenges can occur in secular or Christian owned workplaces, Christian business leaders were sought from a wide range of for profit, non-profit, and government business leadership roles. Prospective self-identified Christian participants who displayed interest in being a part of this research included Catholics, Presbyterian, Anglican, and non-denominational church homes.

**Leaders.** The eligible population for this research included Christian business leaders possessing supervisory responsibilities as well as those Christian business leaders who have decision-making responsibilities producing organizational impacts beyond themselves even without directly supervising (Bragger et al., 2021; Green & Timmerman, 2021). All these digital age Christian business leaders face the same digital age visibility scrutiny of their decision-making and thus qualify for this research. Additionally, this research incorporated Christian business leaders who work for secular supervisors as well as those who work for Christian supervisors. Prospective business leader participants who showed interest in being a part of this research included small business owners, Fortune 500 business leaders, business leaders working in secular organizations, business leaders working in Christian owned organizations, and business leaders in non-profit organizations.

**Size of the Population.** Over the 3 years of study leading to this initiative, the researcher has met at least 200 Christian business leaders who have voiced interest in this topic. From this group, the researcher had over 40 prospective participants who had, in the last 6 months, voiced interest combined with a willingness to contribute to the research and several of them also said they had other acquaintances who would also wish to participate. All 200 represented self-

identified Christian business leaders from a wide range of church homes working in a wide range of business environments including large for-profit, small for profit, Christian owned for profit, secular owned for-profit, and non-profit entities. Each prospective Christian business leader participant had the potential to add their own faith at work version of character challenges they face in the secularized digital age including the influences of secular business owners, Christian business owners, and secular digital age influencers upon their moral imperatives and chosen methods to resolve the workplace environmental challenges they face. This research sought to interview sufficient voluntary participants to reach sampling saturation for the multiple case study which was a number forecasted to be in the range of 25-30 participants; therefore, the researcher focused in upon the 40 who had most recently recertified their continued willingness to participate.

### *Discussion of Sampling*

This discussion includes an overview of probability and non-probability sampling methods. It discusses the various types of non-probability sampling commonly used for qualitative studies and those best suited for this study as well as the rationale for these conclusions. It includes a sample frame, discusses the importance of it being properly shaped, and provides an example of the one shaped for this research. It then addresses a variety of ways to identify sample saturation and the forecasted sample size required to reach this point. Finally, it includes the path used to gain access to this volume of eligible participants needed to complete the desired sampling to saturation.

**Probability Sampling.** This type of sampling is typically aligned with quantitative research with an overall goal of achieving a representative grasp of the target population through the unbiased sampling of a limited subset (Stratton, 2021). It is employed when sampling an

entire population is infeasible (Stratton, 2021). Methods of probability sampling include simple random, cluster random, stratified random, and systematic sampling (Stratton, 2021). All these forms of probability sampling limit researcher bias and provide an avenue to deepen the researcher's understanding of the target population by engaging a randomly selected subset of it (Stratton, 2021). Quantitative research through probability sampling can typically deliver descriptive data and inferential data about target populations but not the bottom-up insights into why or how a particular event is occurring and this is where non-probability sampling is better suited (Barwegen, 2019).

**Purposive Non-Probability Sampling.** Random sampling is rarely of value in qualitative study because the randomness works counter to the focus a qualitative researcher more commonly seeks to apply (Barwegen, 2019). Purposive sampling is commonly used by qualitative researchers and is far more effective in gathering the desired focused research (Barwegen, 2019). While purposive sampling enhances the probability of collecting information pertinent to the research, it also risks inducing researcher bias (Stratton, 2021). For these reasons purposive non-probability sampling, and all other forms of non-probability sampling, place some limits upon the researcher regarding the overall transferability of the themes and findings to the general population (Stratton, 2021). Researchers purposefully sample by directly inviting and selecting their desired participants (Stratton, 2021).

**Convenience Non-Probability Sampling.** In this form of non-probability sampling a researcher selects participants based upon availability at a particular time or location (Stratton, 2021). A researcher can select a targeted area for research then announce the opportunity for prospective participants to join in a study and then allow participants to volunteer to become a part of the study (Stratton, 2021). Convenience sampling is inexpensive and efficient but prone

to personal bias compounded by selection bias among those who chose to participate and those who chose not to participate (Stratton, 2021).

**Quota Non-Probability Sampling.** Quota sampling involves a researcher employing a strategy to sample groups in proportions equitable to the generalized population. Properly conducted quota sampling allows a researcher to compare relationships between the groups selected (Stratton, 2021). Purposive sampling combined with quota sampling allows a researcher to collect insights to best fit within the desired study (Stratton, 2021). In quota sampling a researcher monitors each desired category to ensure sufficient quota representation is achieved.

**Snowball Non-Probability Sampling.** Snowball sampling is the method in which selected participants in the study are chosen by the researcher to recommend other prospective participants (Barwegen, 2019; Stratton, 2021). A researcher can employ snowball sampling with the most socially connected participants to help address gaps in collection (Stratton, 2021). Snowball sampling can be continued until a researcher determines theme or information saturation is achieved (Stratton, 2021). Snowball sampling can be very effective in helping address any quota imbalance challenges discovered in data collection.

**Sampling Method.** Given this research represents an exploratory qualitative effort and was seeking analytical and descriptive findings about Christian business leaders, the purposive form of non-probability sampling was employed (Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, et al., 2020; Chai et al., 2021). Given the study is shaped to sample both cultural Christian business leaders and convictional Christian business leaders, the researcher applied a blending of purposive, quota, and snowball sampling to gather a representative sampling of both (Barwegen, 2019; Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, et al., 2020). The researcher applied purposive sampling of voluntary participants in both groups and then employed a quota shaped form of snowball sampling as

needed to address shortfalls in participants from either group. As the interviews continued and member checked transcripts were reviewed and coded, the researcher paid special attention to quota sampling to keep the case interviews in relative balance until data saturation was achieved for both the cultural Christian business leader and convictional Christian business leader groups.

**Sample Frame.** A sample frame can simply be a listing of names with phone numbers and emails, or as in dentistry research, a compilation of representative images (Chai et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2020). However, sample frames must be appropriately shaped to ensure the researcher does not induce a sampling error as an unintentional product of omitting some critical aspect of the sample which must be captured to properly address the research (Lo et al., 2020; Stratton, 2021). This research established a sample frame with all the essential elements required for each prospective participant as well as the appropriate blending of participants needed to avoid sampling error (Lo et al., 2020).

This research was shaped to ensure the perspectives of both convictional Christian business leaders and cultural Christian business leaders were incorporated since both face secularized digital age character challenges, albeit of perhaps differing forms (Barwegen, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Shaping the sample frame in this way helped avoid findings flawed by collection omission error (Lo et al., 2020). Figure 4 represents the sample frame used for this research. Each column contributed to properly shaping the desired initial quota sizing while also informing purposeful adjustments needed as interviews were collected and member checked transcripts were analyzed for their belief-behavior categorization.

The researcher had assembled all the names, phone numbers, and emails of prospective participants who had voiced a willingness to be a part of this research on a prospective participant listing. Once the research proposal was approved by the IRB and administrative

reviewer the researcher contacted prospective participants to solidify their desire to join in this research effort. Appendix A was used as an official introductory letter to the participants and was sent with a copy of Appendix B so each prospective participant understood the plan for the interviews. Once they confirmed their interest, the IRB approved consent form (Appendix C) was provided and completed before an interview was conducted. In the weeks prior to the IRB approval the researcher confirmed a willingness to participate from 17 of the 40 prospective participants, including seven who have sizable enough social connections to provide snowball candidates as well.

**Figure 4**

*Sample Framework*

	Name	Identifies As Christian	Church Home	21 <sup>st</sup> Cent. Leader	Willing to Participate	Phone #	Email	Cult. Or Conv.
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
~								
30								

**Desired Sample and Sample Size.** This biblical worldview research into the insufficient cultural understanding of Christian business leader character challenges in the secularized digital age captured the story of Christian business leaders who view the seismic cultural shift toward secularization from a range of differing perspectives. Seventeen Christian business leaders signed up to contribute immediately after receiving the outreach materials and seven of the 17 were able to identify others to participate as well. Therefore, obtaining the anticipated group of 25 to 30 was not a challenge once IRB and administrative review of the research was obtained.

This research required the incorporation of both convictional Christian business leader perspectives and those of cultural Christian business leaders. The latter were essential to assess if their beliefs were so impacted by the secular majority that their beliefs reflected some shifting towards a more deistic, or secularistic structure which displays as a civil faith potentially enroute to becoming a none (McDade, 2019; McGhee, 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019). The research portrayed that all Christian business leaders recognized the seismic shift, weighed their various options in light of this, and chose how to lead through their individual challenges with the awareness their chosen moral foundation would be scrutinized (NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 29:12-13; Proverbs 1:28-29). This full range of Christian perspectives was gathered until achieving saturation for both the convictional Christian and cultural Christian leader cases.

**Sample Size Saturation.** The overarching purpose of undertaking research was to fill a gap in understanding by delivering credible findings. Achieving sample saturation is considered a non-negotiable requirement for research rigor (Chitac, 2022). A sample size short of achieving saturation represents either a need for ongoing research or an insufficiently limited research initiative (Daher, 2023). The gold standard for qualitative research and rigor resides in achieving data saturation (Chitac, 2022). There is a distinction between declaring data saturation and achieving the same by the display of the evidence (Chitac, 2022; Daher, 2023). Declaring data saturation after a set number of interviews would have represented a flaw in analyzing what data saturation truly reflects or represents for the research undertaken (Chitac, 2022; Daher, 2023). Declarations of data saturation without supporting evidence undermine the rigor of the research and insert speculation which undermines the credibility of the findings (Chitac, 2022; Daher, 2023). For all of these reasons, it was an absolute priority for the researcher to document the

anticipated evidence of data saturation and to measure against these standards before declaring it to have been achieved. The next section expands on how this was accomplished in this study.

Saturation is typically described as achieved when further participation fails to raise new information, new themes, or new categories of thought not previously addressed (Daher, 2023). Four potential models of saturation could be employed to determine its achievement (Daher, 2023). The first of four, the theoretical model, measures saturation as achieved when there remains no evidence that new theoretical categories need to be added to the research conceptual framework (Daher, 2023). A second approach, the inductive thematic model, looks for the emergence of new codes or themes arising from the participant interviews or surveys, and when none are being discovered the saturation point has been achieved (Daher, 2023). A third approach, the a priori thematic model, says saturation is achieved when the codes and themes already evident from the aggregated data capture are fully exemplified by this existing data (Daher, 2023). The fourth model is simply a data saturation state in which a newly acquired data sample has nothing to add to the aggregated samples already collected (Daher, 2023).

A methodological rigorous approach addressing the achievement of data saturation requires a data capture plan documenting the hybrid set of metrics needed to measure it and a method of employment documenting how the researcher knows they have arrived (Daher, 2023). Figure 5 is the hybrid matrix of metrics used to determine when data saturation had been achieved. It represents a combination of the Daher (2023) methods combined with the documentation of how it would be employed during the data capture phase of the planned research. The primary themes documented in the results were in draft form after 16 interviews and were indicating saturation by the 20th interview. Interviews 21 through 25 did not produce any changes in any category on Figure 5 so saturation was declared after the 25th interview.



**Figure 5**

*Hybrid Matrix of Metrics Reflecting Data Saturation*

Model Type	Metric Measured	Interview w/ Achievement Displayed
Theoretical Saturation	Convictional Christians Cultural Christians No new theoretical categories needed	Achieved by interview 13
Inductive Thematic	Codes or themes associated with Cultural and Convictional Christian groupings. Examples may include: Christian identity in Christ or self; ultimate leader as Christ or an organizational supervisor; relative importance of the Bible and principles flowing from it; Conscience rooted in Spirit of God or self-generated conclusions; most influential sources in decision-making. No new codes or themes needed	Achieved by interview 16
A Priori Thematic	New digital age factors driving paths to “deconversion” or biblical unfruitfulness. Identified codes & themes sufficiently represented in data gathered	Achieved by interview 16
Data Saturation	Additional data gathered is not adding further insights	Achieved by interview 20 and validated by 25
<p>Implementation Plan: The a priori estimate of 25-30 interviews represents an academic averaging estimate and is not associated with the achievement of data saturation for this research. However, after 20 interviews are completed, the researcher took note of the data gathered as related to these four models. Specifically, a note will be made of the coding template and data library after interview 20. Each subsequent interview was then assessed to see if it represented the potential achievement of data saturation. If nothing new has been added from the perspective of any of these four models during interviews 20-25 or beyond, the achievement of data saturation will be evident. However, if interviews 20-25 present new data for any of the models, the researcher will assess what additional purposeful participants may be needed to address the new insight.</p>		

Figure 5 represents the methodological rigor approach to achieving data saturation during the data capture phase of research. The approach ensured the upfront declaration of what would document saturation in the research. The declaration specifies what the finish line would be, why the finish line was sufficient for the research, and how the researcher would know when the

finish line has been crossed (Daher, 2023). This up-front analysis as depicted in Figure 5 with its associated implementation notes meets the methodological rigor requirement and was implemented for this research (Daher, 2023). Some anticipated specifics were included for this research initiative.

Given the saturation determination precedes the analysis of data, it was critically important to have this standard clearly set to ensure data saturation was not prematurely declared and the data analysis initiated prematurely (Daher, 2023). Premature initiation of data analysis accompanied with insufficient data collection, can only lead to flawed understanding with each case and in cross-case assessments due to potential omissions in data gathering (Lo et al., 2020). Figure 5 prevented this from happening.

**Gaining Access to Sample.** In this effort, a purposive approach blended with quota shaped snowball sampling was used. The researcher considered this research topic across the three 3 of study leading to this dissertation effort. Casual conversations across this time produced over 20 prospective participants who had voiced some interest in joining in this research initiative, of which 40 had recently confirmed their interest. Seventeen of the 40 confirmed their willingness to participate in the weeks just before IRB approval had been received. Once IRB and administrative review approval was received, the researcher utilized the IRB approved versions of Appendix A and Appendix B to directly all 40 to see if they remained sufficiently interested. Seventeen responded immediately, and were provided with the IRB approved version of Appendix C. Once a consent form was received, they were provided with an additional copy of Appendix B and an interview date was set.

The Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) trend lines provided some indicators that convictional Christians may be found among those in Evangelical denominations while cultural Christians

may come from other congregational church groups. Based upon this assessment and the researcher's familiarity with the church homes of the prospective participants, the researcher forecasted an equitable balance between cultural Christian business leaders and convictional Christian business leaders in the initial outreach. As data were analyzed from member checked transcripts, the researcher considered the quota requirements and pursued additional candidates through the snowball sampling recommendations from the participants. This process continued until data saturation was achieved for both cases being considered.

### ***Summary of Population and Sampling***

This section has addressed the population and sampling plan for the research conducted. The discussion included a description of the population at large as well as the eligible participant sample. Detailed descriptions of the characteristics of the eligible participant were provided. The discussion of sampling method included an example of the sample frame and a description of the desired sample size including specifics regarding how data saturation would be and was recognized, achieved, and documented. The researcher's plan to gain access to the sample was addressed as well as some background on the prospective participants who received outreach materials once the research proposal had been approved through the IRB and the administrative review had been completed.

### **Data Collection and Organization**

The quality of research is a direct product of the rigor of the research, and both are intrinsically linked to ethical considerations executed throughout the collection, organization, and analysis of data (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Harrison et al., 2020). This section addresses how this research effort complied with rigorous methodologies to handle data collection, organization, and analysis with the goal of ensuring ethical research. Rigorous documented

methodologies provided visible and accessible data trails linking data from collection to conclusion and from the discovery of emergent ideas through findings and into factually supported themes. Rigorous methodologies created evidence trails which enhanced the ethical soundness, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the research (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Harrison et al., 2020). This section details these linkages which guided this effort.

### ***Data Collection***

The data collection for this research was approved by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was not just a gate to pass through enroute to the research but was the first of many methodological rigors employed to ensure the ethical use of data from collection to conclusion (Harrison et al., 2020; Poth, 2019). Appendix A depicts a participation letter shaped to ensure ethically sound principles were applied with the proper approach to informing prospective participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and their rights throughout the research, which is the first step of data collection (Poth, 2019).

A non-probability, purposeful sampling approach was taken to identify prospective participants who best fit the aims and objectives of the Christian business leader focus (Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, et al., 2020; Stratton, 2021). The most sizable amount of data collected was a combination of the observational and recorded collections compiled from the recordings and journal notes coming from these interviews. Additional observational and recorded data were gathered when participants reviewed and approved transcripts of the interviews. All participants also had the opportunity to provide clarifying questions and to voluntarily participate in follow-up interviews. Finally, observational and recorded data were gathered from participant feedback leading up to the voluntary group session where initial findings were introduced to all participants, and their comments incorporated.

The purposeful pursuit of voluntary participants was intentionally shaped to include a wide range of self-identified Christian business leaders coming from a wide variety of Judeo-Christian church backgrounds. The Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) nomenclature of convictional Christians and cultural Christians formed the target groups; however, the definitions utilized in that research did not directly parallel those in this broader study. Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) generalizes cultural Christians among those who “think and poll like secular people while still keeping the label Christian attached to them” (p. 170). They suggest this group is on an eventual path toward “becoming nones” (Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020, p. 170). Other researchers suggest similar trending paths toward noneship by qualitatively analyzing their journeys toward extimonies and deconversions (Reyes et al., 2021; Starr et al., 2019).

Given this research represented only a snapshot view of the cultural Christians participants, it could not track trend lines on any participant. Instead, each participant provided qualitative data explaining how they see their Christian identity fitting in today’s secularized digital age workplace which could then be compared to a similar snapshot data view into the convictional Christian business leader participants. The multiple case comparison revealed differing sets of moral imperatives guiding each group’s steps. For example, virtually all Christians believe the Bible to be an important book containing biblical principles to guide our lifestyles; however, this similarity between Christians contrasts greatly with the belief in its inerrancy, the degree to which one believes the Spirit of God speaks in and through it, an individual’s ability to understand it, or the need of a pastor / priest to interpret it’s teachings for each of us (Jackelen, 2021; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; McDade, 2019; NKJV, 1982, Hebrews 4:12-13; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b; Unsworth & Ecklund, 2021).

The data collection effort included purposeful efforts to identify a range of Christian business leaders who see the secularized digital age workplace differently, and then to exhibit rapport and respect sufficient to document their perspective in a manner reflecting the purest form of their original intent and not the researcher's bias regarding their collected thoughts (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). The one-on-one private interview optimized the potential for garnering this transparent data from each participant. The participant's opportunity to review the recorded transcript combined with the employment of NVivo qualitative analysis software provided appropriate methodological rigor in data from initial collection to conclusion.

Interview questions were shaped to gather data along these lines from both cultural and convictional Christians. As each participant completed the initial interview, recordings were transformed into anonymous transcripts and provided to the participant to ensure they confirmed their intent was properly captured. The approved anonymous contributions were reviewed many times by the researcher, coded, and then considered for grouping into either convictional or cultural categories with each category forming a case in this multiple case research. The products were then placed into a comparative multiple case comparison highlighting themes of similarities, differences, and relations between the two cases (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). Multiple case studies include a purposeful selection of comparable cases.

However, to be effective the Figure 5 matrix for data saturation had to be achieved with each case for the cross-case analysis to produce credible results. A back-and-forth assessment combined with innumerable reviews of the participant approved transcripts and snowball sampling ensured additional participants were being added where needed. There were appearances of saturation after interview 16, so the final nine interviews were closely monitored to meet the desired quota balance while closely monitoring for any evidentiary trails revealing

new insights. Figure 5 indications of saturation were confirmed by interview 20 so the final five interviews followed the methodological plan for confirming saturation. The multiple ongoing processes continued until indications of saturation, per the matrix, could be declared after interview number 25. By this time, the member checked transcripts revealed and even balance between the cases being studied. The overall goal was to ensure the interviews continued until the collected data made evident that data saturation has been achieved for both cases being considered. This was essential in order to ensure data analysis would be sufficient to describe multi-case similarities, differences, and relations as well as the transferability of the findings (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Hoorani et al., 2019).

Chapter 2's literature review documents sufficient research to identify at least two distinctive groupings of cultural Christians and convictional Christians, both of which facing faith at work character challenging situations of sufficient size that they are seeking, but not always receiving, support from their church leadership (Ecklund et al., 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). These two distinctive groupings represent distinctive cases around which this multiple case research effort oriented. Methodological rigor requires a sufficient sampling of both groups to complete a multiple case comparison between groups. The sampling sufficiency was pre-set by Figure 5 and determined by implementing its hybrid matrix of researcher assessments to determine when saturation was achieved and no further participants were needed.

Among the definitions of saturation was the point at which no new emerging ideas were being revealed. Given methodological sources suggest the number of qualitative interviews needed to achieve saturation for a single case study to be something between 1 and 15 (Chitac, 2022), an a priori estimate was made that 25-30 qualitative interviews would be needed to reach saturation for this research (Chitac, 2022). However, methodological rigor requires such an a

priori estimate be used merely as the starting point from which a researcher begins a back-and-forth review of the data to determine if the point of saturation has been achieved per Figure 5 (Daher, 2023). The gold standard for declaring saturation has been achieved is not based upon a single metric of participants interviewed, and certainly not with a preestablished number of participants interviewed; but rather it would be the product of a researcher's ongoing triangulation across "hybrid forms of saturation to build credible argument for data saturation" (Chitac, 2022, p. 32). This was the approach implemented for this research.

In this research, a minimum of 20 participants would be interviewed before the researcher began the back-and-forth assessment of a hybrid set of metrics testing for saturation while assessing the contributions of participants 25-30 (Chitac, 2022). The hybrid set of metrics documented in Figure 5 was validated for both the cultural Christian case and the convictional Christian case. Additionally, data analysis showed a reasonable was maintained between cultural and convictional Christian case groupings. If new ideas, codes, or themes, relevant to the problem being studied, had continued to emerge, data saturation would not have been achieved and the number of participants contributing would be purposefully expanded up to the IRB approved maximum of 40 participants or until the hybrid matrix of assessment was met.

**Member Checking.** Member checking is terminology used to describe the gathering of participant feedback (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking remained a priority for ensuring validity and trustworthiness of the data collection (Motulsky, 2021). Additionally, it displayed transparency in the research which furthered the trust and rapport established with each participant who validated their inputs as being true to their original intent (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking represents methodological rigor confirming the data collection from all



participants which subsequently enhanced the credibility of conclusions drawn when comparisons are made between disparate groupings of members.

In this study, member checking ensured the reliability and validity of each participant's anonymous transcript which then added reliability and validity to any conclusions drawn when comparing cultural and convictional Christian cases. Building rapport and mutual respect between the participants and the researcher was essential to transparency in communications (Poth, 2019). Methodological rigor which calls for protocols ensuring the ethical treatment of voluntary participants ensured this mutual trust and respect remained an ever-present part of the researcher – participant relationship from the beginning (Poth, 2019).

Appendix A reflects this first step in establishing rapport and displaying respect for each participant by documenting the methodological rigor to be utilized in the gathering of prospective participants. It ensured each prospective participant was aware of the voluntary opportunity nature of each of the voluntary research effort events. It ensured each knew their inputs were greatly valued and needed. It was also designed to ensure they knew the data gathered would be responsibly managed throughout the effort. Sharing the anonymous transcripts in a timely manner provided methodological evidence the written protocol promises would be followed and at least appeared to encourage further voluntary participation (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Poth, 2019). All these protocols in methodological rigor enhanced the researcher – participant relationship and improved the research rigor by ensuring the ethically wise collection and use of the data gathered (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Poth, 2019).

**Follow-up Interviews.** The level of transparency in the initial interviews was impeccable and most of these sessions went over an hour and incorporated conversations beyond the 10 interview questions. This level of initial contribution mitigated much of the need for follow-up

interviews. Nevertheless, all the same steps were applied for the follow-up interviews which were offered to each participant. When each voluntary participant verified their initial interview transcript properly reflected the original intent of their statements, they were informed of voluntary follow-up interviews as their time allowed. All 25 participants were offered a follow-up interview; however, only eight of the 25 were able to make time for it. All participants received a copy of the initial themes and findings and were offered an opportunity for a personalized or group session briefing on them. All inputs from these additional participant interfaces were incorporated into the research findings.

### ***Instruments***

This section addresses the instruments of data collection used for this research. They included a simple series of questions to gather demographic information on each participant before each interview was conducted. They included observations and recordings from one-on-one private semi-structured interviews and additional participant interfaces. Appendices A and B provide additional details regarding how each participant was made aware of these instruments of data collection. No survey or archival data were gathered.

**Demographic Data Gathering Questions.** Appendix B reflects the demographic related data each prospective participant provided before completing the interview. This data were gathered to inform subsequent triangulation purposes. It informed key themes and findings of participants within this study. However, it remained insufficient to draw broader conclusions beyond this study due to potential quantitative sampling error issues related to the purposive approach to identifying participants (Barwegen, 2019).

**Interview Guides.** Appendix A reflects how a prospective participant was made aware of the research details along with the breadth of their potential involvement. It ensured they were

aware of the voluntary nature of their involvement and their ability to opt in or out of any aspect of the 1 to 4 hours of voluntary participatory input. They were clearly informed of Liberty University as the school sponsor, a biblical worldview nature of the exploratory effort into American Christian business leader decision making, and the intent to publish all findings through Liberty University with absolute anonymity to all participant contributing.

Appendix B details the demographic data gathering questions and the 10 interview questions each participant would be asked to answer. Since most of the participants wanted to consider their responses beforehand, the interview guide and questions were provided well in advance (days to weeks) of the interview sessions. The intent was to allow each busy business leader ample time to prayerfully consider their responses which ensured a deeper level of consideration than if they were providing an immediate response to a question just posed seconds prior. Each question was shaped in light of where it might contribute to the research questions or the Figure 3 version of the research conceptual framework.

While none of the 10 questions directly address one of the research questions, the cumulative responses provide insights into all the research questions. Four of the questions were used to understand a participant's core beliefs while the six other questions reflected more how these beliefs translated into behavior. When taken as a whole the beliefs clearly aligned with the behavior while the behavior also helped clarify the intent of the stated beliefs. The questions also helped in understanding each participant from an individual (question one), group (question two), and environmental (question three) level.

Question 1 in the interview is: Given you have self-identified as a *Christian*, what does the term mean to you personally? The reply to this question provided the first indication of where the participant identity fits between the cultural and convictional Christian. The response also

reflected a degree to which an individual aligns with their church home in doctrinal confession of Christ. The question allows the participant complete latitude to describe the term Christian in whatever words they choose which can also then potentially inform any follow-up interview. Responses to this question did not fit precisely into any of the research questions; but did, when blended with other responses, provide additional insights into any of the research questions. For example, how a participant chose to define the term Christian clearly indicated a convictional or cultural leaning which informed a degree to which the secularized culture may have been influencing the participant at the identity and character challenging level.

Interview question 2 asks: Is your Christian faith a part of your workplace identity, for example do you (or did you) think of yourself as a business leader or a Christian business leader and why? The replies drills deeper into the individual's moral imperatives by asking about identity. If a business leader who self-identifies as a Christian does not identify as a Christian business leader, they are at least indicating a belief in practicing civil faith and may see this as a culturally acceptable civil religion (McDade, 2019). If one's business leader identity is synonymous with the Christian modifier, the replies to the remaining questions typically revealed a similar alignment and if they do not, then this may inform follow-up interview questions. A reply in either direction provided additional indications of where the participant's moral imperatives were based. Replies to this question, blended with knowledge of where they work, informed research question two and three.

Interview question 3 explored this Christian business identity further by asking: When you consider the leader you report to as well as those you lead, do you think there are different expectations for, or demands upon, a Christian business leader as compared to a business leader? A Christian's moral imperative convictions regarding God's immanence in an individual's life

could have been revealed in the replies to this question (Bingaman, 2020; Brautigam, 2019; McDade, 2019; McGhee, 2019; Miller, 2021). Lesser degrees of conviction regarding the immanence of the Creator could have also been reflected in references to leaders in simply worldly terms while higher degrees of convictional immanence would have been reflected in seeing the sovereign God as the ultimate leader (Brautigam, 2019; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). A Christian who acknowledges God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord over all we know differs greatly from a Christian who sees God as something slightly larger than a concept (Beltramini, 2019). When questions of a leader are raised this distinction could have been exposed and the Figure 3 difference between the ultimate environment of a Sovereign God or Secularized digital age influencers surrounding us all becomes more apparent. Replies to this question inform research question one.

Question 4 asks: In the digital age we all have some form of hybrid persona, a combination of our hyperconnected always-on(line) and in-person presence. How does your hybrid persona impact you as a Christian business leader? This question subtly drew out the Christian leader's thoughts about hybrid personalities (Brubaker, 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). The replies addressed each participant's sense of the volume of daily time an individual invests always-on(line) and the primary sites of hybrid personality investment. The question also led to discussions about digital age devices and the time-consuming nature these have in the digital age. The question also reflected a distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants. It also provided further insights into the basis for moral imperatives in each participant's life. These replies address research questions one and two.

Question 5 shifts from the refining insight into each participant's self-identification as a Christian into the related line of question regarding how this self-identification is being received

in today's secularized digital age workplace. Question 5 asks: Research has shown the digital age has not only changed the way we work in the workplace, but also linked to the transformational shift towards secularism in America. Do you sense any environmental pressures, societal or work-based, to keep your Christian identity to yourself? If yes, can you give an example; or if not, can you explain why? This question provided insights into how each participant perceived the secularized digital age impacting their Christian character. It also provided insights into challenges they were facing in their particular workplace environment. The yes or no replies were always followed with examples which provided further insights into the moral imperatives each participant sensed to be most challenged by their secularized work environment. Question 5 replies address research questions two and three.

Question 6 keeps to this line of inquiry by asking: Can you describe any work-related challenge which may trouble the conscience of a Christian business leader but may not even be noted by a secular business leader? The Christian business leader's reply reveals a degree to which they have seen differences between Christian business leaders and business leaders and considered where they individually align on that range of convictions. Their replies acknowledged an area they were presently confronting or had confronted in the past. Question 5 and 6 began to address if the participant was sensing character challenges as a by-product of their Christian identity and how they might be addressing this. These questions both address facets of research questions two and three.

Question 7 drew out further distinctions between a cultural and convictional Christian. It asks: Some Christians suggest the Bible and the church are out of date with today's culture and many have stated this as the primary reason they choose no church affiliation. Some suggest Constitutional Amendments regarding Freedom of speech and religion should be restricted to

help society embrace today's cultural perspective on sexual orientation and gender identity policies. Have you had any secularized digital age-related challenges like this in the workplace today? If yes, can you explain them and how you are leading through them?

Research shows a wide range of Christian convictions regarding the inerrancy of the Bible as we possess it today (Barwegen, 2019; Massey, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). There is some alignment between these doctrinal positions and the degree to which differing denominations encourage their members to individually read or study the Bible. As a result, many self-identified Christians have moral imperatives shaped by the aspects of the Bible in which they profess belief, or which their denomination emphasizes, or simply by the cultural environment around them. Where each Christian business leader aligned along this convictional – cultural Christian spectrum was directly reflected with the degree to which the Bible was an influencing factor in their decision making. Question 7 replies informed research question one.

The replies to Question 7 were further expanded upon with replies to Question 8 which asks: Christians are divided regarding the importance of the Bible and the criticality of reading it routinely. How do you believe the Bible should affect your actions, behavior, and leadership as a (Christian) business leader in the secularized workplace environment? Replies reflected core beliefs on par with question one. The question at times reflected the participant's church home's perspective on this issue. The question revealed the degree to which each participant sensed a level of personal conviction regarding the authority of God as revealed through the Bible for their individual life.

The question showed again reflected the linkages between each individual's beliefs regarding the Bible and their readiness to rely upon it or derive their own sense of moral imperatives apart from it. Convictional Christians participants chose to have it guide their lives

while cultural Christians felt only parts of the biblical principles within it are pertinent in today's digital age culture. This question helped each participant hone in on their identity as cultural or convictional Christian. These replies informed research questions 1 and 2.

Question 9 asks: Would you have any loving Christian advice for those with different convictions? This question had many revealing facets within it and provided insight simply in the direction the participant chose to take with their reply. It provided an interesting opportunity for each participant to reflect upon and display their level of confidence in their own stance by the degree to which they are ready to suggest improvements to others. If advice was offered, the shape of the advice was also informative. Question 9 replies primarily addressed research question 2.

Question 10 concludes the initial interview by asking: As you seek discernment to resolve character challenges in the secularized digital age workplace, what would you say are the most influential sources you lean on? The question represents a subtle way for each participant to provide some insights into how they build and maintain their moral foundation. Transparent answers to this question offered insights into how much a secularized culture is influencing the Christian business leader. This question was saved for last because it was given as the full hour time limit was being approached. All participants made time to answer all 10 questions and interviews filled or exceeded the planned one-hour block. These replies provided insights into research question one.

**Surveys.** No survey data were gathered as a part of this research. Although surveys were extremely useful for triangulation in other related research efforts, the purposeful way participants were sought after for this research precluded the need for any survey screening mechanism. While surveys could always provide additional insights, their anticipated



contribution to a Christian business leader's moral imperative foundation would be minimal so the voluntary time provided is better utilized answering interview questions.

**Archive Data.** No archival data were retrieved for this study. No web searches were conducted on participants.

### ***Data Organization***

As stated up front, the quality of research was a direct product of the methodological rigor of the research and both were founded upon ethical considerations regarding of the management of data from collection to conclusion (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Harrison et al., 2020). The linkages between collection, organization, and analysis were seamless with ethical considerations incorporated throughout in an effort to maintain the rapport and trust between the researcher and participant as well as preclude any liability issues resulting from an inadvertent disclosure (Poth, 2019). This section provides details regarding how this was accomplished in this research.

**Overview.** Institutional review boards approve a methodologically sound plan for data management before research is approved because a shortfall in methodological rigor in planning can lead to a violation in promised anonymity in execution, or an institutionally discrediting flaw in data collection, or flaws in analysis (Poth, 2019). However, once the plan is approved, a researcher must ensure absolute adherence to the methodological rigor within the plan, or similar challenges arise due to these missteps. The researcher followed the IRB approved plan from collection through conclusion.

Data organization is essential for all phases of the research effort. In broad terms, the collected data comes in structured, semi-structured, and unstructured formats (Benjamin et al., 2024). Benjamin et al. (2024) cited the challenges of blending data collection from automated

systems within America's water and sewage systems, those of regulatory requirements guiding such systems, and humans seeking to glean insights from the blended data; with their primary point being if these three types of data are not somehow organized and managed all the value available from these sophisticated monitoring systems is lost. In a very similar manner, top-down quantitative research can be greatly enhanced when blended with bottom-up qualitative research as long as data is managed with ethical methodological rigor (Jeffries et al., 2019; Nazari & Musilek, 2023).

One set of researchers propose a FAIR solution, suggesting all data must be findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable in order to be useful in research (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). The FAIR acronym represents a method to provide a data evidence trail showing both the reliability of the data and the validity of the finding or theme the researcher asserts the data to portray (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). Qualitative research provides rich details but without a data organization plan a researcher has no ability to display the findings or themes as anything more than bias, so the FAIR approach is appropriate and essential for this research effort.

**Appropriate Process for This Research Project.** These paragraphs use the FAIR approach to describe the data organization plan for this research project.

*Findable* data represents data files which can be found through common search tools or reside in a file with a persistent identifier (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). In practice, this requires a data filing system and a data dictionary to describe how the files are organized as well as what contents reside within each file (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). The data filing system for this research was shaped for a research project which starts with this dissertation project then continues for years after the dissertation. For security reasons, all data were stored on a

removable hard drive which in its dormant state remained in a secure location and detached from the internet.

The hard drive will have a series of folders representing multiple years of effort. Each year's folder will contain at least three files. The first file will be for temporary collections such as raw attributable data provided directly from the participant interviews. These files are intended for temporary storage because they represent a potentially attributable source of data. Once a participant has confirmed the interview transcript maintained the original intent of their contribution the respective temporary file was deleted. The member approved transcripts were kept in the second file, a permanent file for participant contributions in that year.

A second file will contain both the member checked transcript from each participant and a twin file containing a combination of the researcher applied coding and bracketed markups incorporated. This set of transcript files will be maintained for each participant contributing to the research. A third file will contain summaries assembled as a product of the collection efforts from that year. Each subsequent year of research will have its own folder with a minimum of these three files. A secondary removable hard drive will occasionally be made to duplicate the primary removable hard drive to ensure backup capability should something happen to the primary.

The researcher maintained a hard copy file containing the first and last names of all contributing participants along with their assigned randomized numerical code name. These two elements were used to track the contribution each participant made to the transcript file. The participant's name was recorded only on this hard copy listing along with the randomized numerical code name. The data files only contained the numerical code names and had no other

identifiable names within them. The name and code name list remained in hard copy only and maintained in a secure place.

The researcher also printed out all the transcripts and annotated these with the randomized numerical code only. The hard copy transcripts have pen and ink coding added in the margins and were also maintained on file in a secure place. The only way these hard copy transcripts can be linked to the participants is by cross-referencing the name-code list which is maintained separately along with all the signed permission slips from each participant.

Each participant member checked transcript, digitized or hard copy, has solely an eight digit randomly generated numerical name. Therefore, these transcripts cannot be linked back to the participant without the separately maintained and securely stored name-code hard copy file. Following the eight-digit code for each participant file is a standardized naming convention with the letter F used for the first interview, the letter S used for a second interview, and the letter T used if a third interview, used as needed. Finally, after the eight-digit number and one letter annotation to designate any researcher assessment regarding the placement of the participant on the spectrum from strongly convictional to strongly cultural Christian case grouping.

The third file in each year contains data summaries also using a similar numerical and lettering designation standard. All additional lettering and coding definitions are documented in the data or coding dictionaries. This annual file system approach ensures all the data collected for this initial dissertation is findable and can be easily blended with additional research conducted in the future.

*Accessible* data describes data that is discoverable and retrievable (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). A key aspect of this attribute is a standardized naming convention for the folders and files as described in the previous paragraph. The proposed system makes files easily retrievable by

year, by dates, by interview types, by analysis types, or by construct types. The views of any anonymous participant can be anonymously extracted by using their randomly assigned eight-digit code. Several other sorts are easily accessible and retrievable through this filing system and naming convention. Additionally, this research effort also incorporates the NVivo qualitative analysis software products.

*Interoperable* data represents the ability to compare one data set to a comparable data set (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). The folder organization plan and file naming convention described for this research allows individual interview comparison in a categorical case, and even more importantly, a cross-case comparison between the convictional Christian cases and the cultural Christian cases (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). Additionally, interoperability is also displayed in both methodological and data triangulation efforts.

Finally, *reusable* data is provenance information (Arpin & Kambesis, 2022). This term for data drawn from its original source perfectly aligns with the methodological rigor standard for qualitative data use (Poth, 2019). It also applies to data reuse which translates into ensuring all reused data came from methodologically sound sources before employing it as part of one's research (Poth, 2019). These principles of reusable data are applied in this research through the standardized annual folder organization and file naming convention plan.

The researcher's challenge is thus to acquire the data in a methodologically ethical manner, compile and organize the collected data in a secure and logical manner, and then standardize the data so that it can inform analysis (Benjamin et al., 2024). This researcher intends to apply the FAIR principles as described above and outlined in Appendix A and Appendix B with the intent of continuing research into this topic beyond the dissertation completion. This topic is also addressed in the following sections.

### ***Summary of Data Collection and Organization***

This research incorporated best practice rigorous methodologies from the purposeful invitation of participants through the analysis of the data they provided. These rigorous methodologies were intrinsically linked to ethical considerations appropriate for data collection and organization and made evident in the approaches outlined here. Appendix A addresses the ethically sound manner participants were purposefully invited. Appendix B provides the manner in which a ten-question interview was conducted and the rationale for each question as it pertains to the problem to be researched. Appropriate rapport and respect for all participants was displayed through member checking and the extension of opportunity for each to personally gauge their level of their voluntary contribution from one to four hours. Ethically responsible data organization was incorporated through member checking on multiple occasions throughout the research and in a data organization plan which optimizes the FAIR aspects of useful data while ensuring appropriate data security and the anonymity of participants. The purposeful sampling of participants was implemented until saturation was achieved. The declaration of saturation was not simply made when arriving at the a priori forecasted number of participants but rather was documented through the use of a hybrid matrix of factors designed to properly indicate its accomplishment.

### **Summary of Chapter 3 and Transition**

The purpose of this flexible design multiple case study was to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today's secularized digital age. The role of a qualitative researcher demands an extensive interface with participants. The role of the researcher also involves extensive handling of the data collection. For all these reasons, the number one role of the researcher was to implement

methodological rigor in all aspects of data collection, management, analysis, and reporting which included the appropriate treatment of participants throughout. Implementing methodological rigor ensured ethical conduct as a constant throughout the research. Methodological rigor also ensured reliable and valid research because it represents the gold standard for qualitative research. An additional role for this research was the incorporation of a biblical worldview as well as the appropriate reflexivity and bracketing to ensure all participants saw only a researcher of integrity seeking to properly capture the truest intent of their inputs and to represent these responsibly and accurately in the research product while ensuring anonymity to all contributors.

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a multiple case was used. The approach was best suited in addressing the why and how questions posed in the studied problem and the purpose of the study. The approach was best suited for methodological and data triangulation of data gathered and analyzed.

The multiple case approach deepened the understanding of both cultural and convictional Christian business leaders and provided transferable themes to guide theory in future research. American Christian business leaders were the purposefully identified participants in this research. They were purposefully selected from differing denominations in an effort to achieve data saturation for both a cultural Christian case and a convictional Christian case. Snowballing sampling was also leveraged as needed to achieve the desired quota sampling for each case considered. A hybrid matrix of metrics was designed and implemented for the assessment of achieving saturation. Only when all matrix identified factors had been satisfied and at least 25 interviews had been completed did sampling stop and data analysis begin. The data collection and data organization plans were also founded upon rigorous methodologies with intrinsic ethical principles. The organization plan implemented best practices for findable, accessible,

interoperable, and reusable data while also ensuring secure storage and anonymity for all contributors. File systems have been arranged to support a multi-year research project with this dissertation effort only representing the beginning of it. Methodological rigor has been and will remain the central theme of the plan.

Chapter 4 contains the data analysis of the completed field study. The analysis of data gathered from initial interviews, follow-up interviews, group session, journal notes, and observations were appropriately coded then assembled into groupings of coded to inform themes. The NVivo qualitative software analysis tool was leveraged to assist the researcher in coding and theme development as well as ensuring appropriate bracketing and reflexivity mindfulness. Theme development produced initial interpretations which were solidified through the documentation of data evidence trails. Data visualization was leveraged to ensure complex concepts were concisely communicated. Methodological and data triangulation was evidenced throughout and played a role in confirming the data evidence trails needed to ensure methodological rigor. Convergent, complementary, and divergent triangulation was documented as a part of the summary and contributed to transferable themes and findings.

The methodological rigor used for this research and documented in Chapter 4 is an example of the gold standard for reliability, validity, and the ethical assurance in the conduct of all research from data capture, through data organization, data management, and data analysis. The methodological rigor produced a reliable and repeatable, construct valid, internally valid, and externally valid research product. In sum, Chapter 4 provides the credible insights to fill a secularized digital age gap in understanding about Christian business leader character challenges and includes transferable findings of use for all Christian business leaders and future research conducted in this field of query.



## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

This chapter begins with a comprehensive overview of the study conducted. It then addresses the analysis of the data gathered from the research. It concludes by describing the results of the data analysis.

### **Overview of the Study**

This overview provides a comprehensive documentation of the rationale behind the research, the conduct of the field study, and the gap filling results of the research.

### ***Background to the Problem Studied***

In the pre-digital age year of 1965, business and belief structures were radically different. There were no personal computers, no virtual meetings, no big data, and America had a Christian consensus; almost the inverse of what is seen in the secularized digital age of 2024 (Lo, 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The problem addressed has these two intrinsically linked roots impacting the business world: what the digital age has done *for* us, and what the digital age is doing *to* us (McClure, 2020). The former is widely researched, the latter a research gap this study has focused upon.

### ***Literature Review***

The literature review revealed a sizable gap in understanding regarding how Christian business leaders were tackling the challenges of their secularized digital age workplaces (McClure, 2020; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). Several sizable quantitative studies have shown Christian workers struggle in their secularized digital age workplaces (Ecklund et al., 2020). These studies document Christian worker frustrations with feeling ill-prepared to appropriately handle the Christian character challenges they face in their secularized digital age workplaces (Ecklund et al., 2020). No existing research documents how Christian business leaders have been

tackling these character challenges while an abundance of secular based research demeans Christian business workers and leaders for their flawed and dated thinking (Cortina et al., 2019; Dick, 2021; Furse, 2022; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021; McDade, 2019; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023; Walker & Vegter, 2023).

This field study was shaped with methodological rigor to fill this gap. Its transparent, credible, reliable, and valid research documented by evidentiary findings informs Christian workers and business leaders by providing granular insights into the character challenges they faced in the secularized digital age workplace. It addresses all aspects of the problem statement and provides evidentiary supported answers to all the research questions.

### ***The Problem***

The problem addressed by this research was insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. This study showed American Christian business leaders are insufficiently prepared to address the character challenges they face in the secularized digital age workplace (Ecklund et al., 2020). A “seismic” cultural lurch toward secularism has occurred in America leaving many Christians, including Christian business leaders, digitally naïve and in need of digital age wisdom to lead in a secularized workplace (Bingaman, 2020, p. 292; Bingaman, 2023; Ficek, 2021; McClure, 2020). This flexible design multiple case study provided primarily convergent findings to prior researchers by documenting, in more granular form, how the rapidly onsetting digital age cultural shift toward secularism is causing Christian business leader character challenges. This study also produced credible themes and transferable findings, with evidentiary trails, to inform Christian workers and Christian business leaders while furthering efforts to fill this gap.

### ***The Approved Field Study***

After receiving the IRB approval, the field study was initiated with an outreach to 38 prospective Christian business leader participants. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to find Christian business leaders who were anticipated to fall into the construct categories of convictional Christians and cultural Christians. Snowball non-probability sampling was also employed to ensure adequate representation for both case study groups. The field research continued until the methodologically derived points of saturation were achieved in accordance with the Chapter 3 descriptions and as approved by the IRB. Research results were founded upon evidentiary trails linked back to each participant's member checked transcripts.

### ***Participant Contributions and Theme Development***

Thirty-five of the 38 prospective participants were willing to participate, so all were scheduled for interviews as their schedules permitted. Before any interview was conducted, each participant had received all the IRB approved study materials including the interview guide and questions. All the participants had days to weeks to review the interview questions before contributing to the research effort.

Typically, within days of completing each interview, a transcript was provided to the participant to be member checked. The researcher took journal notes for both the 12 in person interviews and the 13 teleconference interviews. He began extensive reviews of these notes and every transcript as soon as each participant confirmed its accuracy. Twenty interviews were completed within a month of receiving IRB approval and by this time, the researcher had already initiated a list of emergent ideas and begun the process of assembling and expanding a code book designed to assess both case study groups accompanied by the initial development of themes for

both groups. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed and as participants volunteered their time.

In each initial interview the participant answered 10 questions. Four of the 10 provided data which gave insight into the core beliefs of each Christian business leader. The remaining six questions addressed aspects of Christian business leader behavior. In all cases, the beliefs could be seen on display with the behavior while the behavior served to clarify the statements of belief. Taken in whole, the aggregated data from each interview provided a fairly good understanding of the beliefs – behavior blending for each Christian business leader participant as they reflected upon how they managed the character challenges faced in their secularized workplaces.

The aggregated data were used for coding which naturally assembled into evidentiary trails. These evidentiary trails revealed an evenly distributed spectrum of Christian business leaders spanning from strongly cultural Christian to strongly convictional Christian including five in the middle possessing a mix of both. The pre-established, IRB approved methodological description for data saturation was applied and was achieved after 25 interviews.

The 25 business leaders all self-identified as Christians with a church home. They ranged in age from their thirties to their 70s and came from 10 different states. These included Idaho, South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, and Maryland. Most had over a decade of business leader experience. All had experience as 21st century business leaders and the majority held business leadership roles prior to 2001 as well. Only one participant considered himself retired. The average participant business leader experience level was over 27 years. All readily identified their church home and a handful had been in their current church home for over a decade. The majority of the participants attended

non-denominational or Protestant churches, but the contributors also included members of the Catholic church.

The field study was conducted in compliance with the methodological practices described in Chapter 3 and approved by the IRB. Several useful themes and findings were identified for each case. In addition, the combined multiple case field research provided opportunity to compare and contrast Christian business leader character challenges from both cases. Findings also included the distinctions between Christian business leaders employed in secular owned organizations as compared to those employed in Christian owned organizations.

### ***Results of Research***

Extensive review of the member checked interview transcripts produced emerging ideas, themes, and associated codes for the convictional Christian business leader case study and for the cultural Christian business leader case study. The distinctive coding for each case developed into themes for the respective case. The comparison of the cases allowed for the development of study themes built around both the distinctions and the commonalities between the Christian business leader participants.

All the data analysis has evidentiary trails back to the member checked transcripts which were reviewed multiple times by the researcher and also through NVivo software. The bookend approach based upon the distinctions in belief and behavior, followed other proven research which gathered disparate perspectives (Harrison et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021). Figure 11 reflects the primary coding categories utilized for overarching themes of distinction and Figure 12 reflects a word description of the same coding categories associated with the multiple case study. Figure 14 provides a thematic view of the Christian business leaders by displaying the primary character challenge each one faced in their workplace.

The distinctiveness of the 25 Christian business leader participants was made evident by both their expressed beliefs and the linked behavior displayed as they addressed workplace character challenges. These distinctions form the basis of the practical implications of the study. Despite these noted differences, the majority of Christian business leaders did reflect at least three areas of commonality. These character challenging commonalities among nearly all Christian business leaders form the basis of the theoretical implications of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher ensured methodological rigor in the research by following the process documented for and approved by the IRB. The data analysis includes evidence linkages for all reported findings thus solidifying their credibility (Chitac, 2022). This section details how purposive and snowball sampling was employed until Figure 5 described point of saturation. It then addresses the data analytic steps taken to identify emergent ideas, coding, interpretation, and triangulation to produce a “gold standard” and “guarantor of qualitative rigor” in the themes and findings (Chitac, 2022, p. 30). Given these IRB approved steps were followed throughout the field study execution, the methodological rigor attributes of transparency, credibility, reliability, comparability, and reflexivity are apparent (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

### ***Emergent Ideas***

All the *emergent ideas* were the collective product of the participants combined with the coalescing effort on the part of the researcher. Each of the Christian business leaders transparently shared, then reviewed their interview inputs to ensure proper documentation of their intended responses regarding the character challenges each faced in the secularized digital age (Motulsky, 2021). Most of the Christian business leaders volunteered additional stories to amplify their responses to the 10 question semi-structured interviews. The researcher created all

the draft transcripts, had them member checked and then, through the process of several reviews, began to sort them to see how they fit into the broader research question focused effort as well as how they compared to one and other (Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, et al., 2020; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). The emerging ideas were documented in field notes, journal notes, and then in manual transcript reviews. Special attention was given to segregating initial thought ownership, through methodological documentation, including bracketing, to ensure reliable and valid research (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Motulsky, 2021; Trenta et al., 2021).

Coding was considered and applied with special care to ensure researcher thoughts, once again, remained distinctive from participant contributions through the use of bracketing (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Motulsky, 2021; Trenta et al., 2021). The coding was loaded into the NVivo software to provide NVivo validation of the researcher's initial thought grouping. Additionally, the Microsoft Word functions which perform document word count were also leveraged to supply data totaling for some figures.

All participants were provided with an opportunity to participate in follow-up question sessions. Seven of the 25 participants participated in extended follow-up sessions at which they reviewed the initial draft of themes and findings then provided inputs and asked questions. All participants were provided a 22-page initial themes and findings product then invited to provide input, ask questions, and to participate in a group session at which the researcher provided an overview of the research effort accompanied by a briefing on the initial themes and findings product. This robust approach was well received, and all participant inputs were included to improve the final research products.

Collectively, these steps kept the participants involved in the process and comfortably confident their voices were being heard, documented, and properly assembled into the final

product. The multiple case study themes and findings address both the distinctiveness of the individual case perspectives as well as the commonalities between the cultural and convictional Christians (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Motulsky, 2021; Trenta et al., 2021).

The researcher ensured each participant understood the priority in each exchange was to gather their thoughts rather than hearing the researcher share his. This was intentionally briefed to ensure each participant did not misconstrue researcher silence for disinterest in their inputs. On some occasions the researcher did ask for the participants to expand on a particular input. In these instances, the researcher's primary injection into the interview is documented with brackets in the transcript. Beyond the use of bracketing, the researcher remained ever mindful of reflexively removing personal bias and ensuring a digital audit trail remained evident from the initial data collection through the extensive transcript reviews, the memoing of emergent ideas, theme development, and data analysis. Throughout these processes the researcher was careful to keep the participant inputs distinct from researcher inputs so as to maintain the methodologically sound evidenced based research documented in Chapter 3 and approved by the IRB (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

In sum, both the participants and the researcher have contributed to the source of these emerging ideas while remaining recognizably distinct. The participants transparently shared and confirmed the accuracy of their input in the final transcripts. The researcher consumed the data through multiple reviews of the transcripts and the accompanying intra and inter case assessments leading to coding themes. The final details were then further validated by NVivo software and produced as evidence trails in several of the incorporated data charts.



### *Coding Themes*

This research followed the accepted methodological practice of grouping similar emergent ideas to form useful data codes, and then blending linked codes to form data linked themes (Harrison et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021). In a manner similar to a multiple case study gathering distinctively different perspectives from patients and health care providers, this research gathered some widely disparate perspectives of cultural Christian business leaders as compared to convictional Christian business leaders (Trenta et al., 2021). In brief, the root of the distinctions between the Christian business leaders began in their self-definition of the meaning of Christian. In general, the strongest forms of cultural Christian participants voiced a belief in Christ but perceived only parts of the Bible to be pertinent in today's workplace environment. In contrast the strongest forms of convictional Christians voiced faith in Christ as their Lord and Christ as their Savior. The convictional Christians called the Bible the word of God and the source of truth.

The wide disparity between these bookend groups was clearly associated with logical life practices as Christian business leaders. Each bookend group displayed their respective faiths when assessing their individual moral imperatives driving the way they chose to manage workplace challenges. These distinctive qualities were the genesis of the coding to assess each of the participant transcripts and produced a disparity similar to the patients and health care providers in the COVID-19 multiple case study (Peters et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021). This approach also paralleled the methodological rigor followed in Harrison et al. (2020) which assembled emerging ideas by assessing a range of subject matter perspectives then grouping them into low, medium, and high categories.

In sum, the coding themes broke the participants into a group of five strong cultural Christian business leaders plus a group of five strong convictional Christian business leaders. These bookend groups were each assigned a distinctive set of codes. These two bookend groups were the genesis of the two cases in the multiple case study. With the distinctive bookends established, the remaining participants clearly showed some mix of the two. The 15 in the middle, each had a unique coding blend which led to their placement across the spectrum of inputs. In the end, the data analysis and evidentiary trails showed 10 participants identified primarily as cultural Christian business leaders, 10 participants identified as convictional Christian business leaders, and five participants displayed a mix of the two in the middle. As the data were collected, this approach showed signs of data saturation at 20 participants which met all the Figure 5 data saturation criteria by the time 25 participants had contributed.

### *Interpretations*

Cwiklicki and Pilch (2021) documented substantial added value from multiple case studies and this research has been shaped and conducted in pursuit of those benefits. The bookend approach formed the initial framework for a cultural Christian case and its distinctive convictional Christian counterpart and replicated the approach used in Harrison et al. (2020), Peters et al. (2020), and Trenta et al. (2021) which gathered disparate perspectives to assess both the distinctions and the commonalities. This broader research enables a wider range of interpretation, evidentiary documentation of a wider range of views, greater ability to conduct comparisons, and greater breadth of applicability for themes and findings (Falk & Guenther, 2021).

The interpretation of the coding themes began through multiple reviews of the transcripts accompanied with identifying what appeared to be the bookend examples of the strongest

cultural Christians and the strongest convictional Christians. Given that moral imperatives are the subset of beliefs which most typically drive character challenging resolutions, the participants' transparent reflections upon what it meant to them to be Christian (question 1) contributed sizably to this initial emergent idea and theme development (Skitka et al., 2021).

With a persistent attention to reflexivity in both the interviews, transcript reviews, and documentation, the researcher noted a particular group of strong convictional Christians who recognized Christ as Lord, Christ as Savior, and as the generous distributor of large volumes of grace upon mankind. These core convictions were associated with a deeper level of commitment to become Christlike. Most convictional Christians summarized their identity in Christ and their desire, and responsibility, to become more Christlike, especially as Christian business leaders. All participants member checked their transcripts to ensure their original intent was maintained in the documentation and it remained bias free through the researcher's compilation role (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

The bookend group of cultural Christians never mentioned Christ as Lord or Christ as Savior. Most self-described their Christianity in terms of a belief in the teachings of the Bible, a belief in Christ, or a belief in life after death. When convictional Christians mentioned Christ as Savior it was accompanied with a sense of gratitude. When convictional Christians mentioned Christ as Lord it was accompanied with a sense of the need for servitude, obedience, or responsibility to an authoritative Lord. The absence of these descriptive terms with cultural Christians was not solely one of omitted words but also reflective of the absence of expressions of gratitude, the need for obedience, or the recognition of an authority figure. Once again, all the transcripts were member checked to ensure the participant's original intent was captured and

remained bias free; so, the absence of these words throughout the ten-question interview does appear to indicate the absence of these core beliefs (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

This distinctiveness with these core beliefs as Christians form a solid foundation for this multiple case study focused upon how these Christians displayed their faith as Christian business leaders tackling character challenges in their respective workplaces (Falk & Guenther, 2021; Trenta et al., 2021). The linkage between these documented core belief distinctions and the moral imperatives used by the Christian business leaders has also been methodologically tracked to provide credible evidence trails further described in the data analysis section (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). The initial themes were discovered in this manner and became the cornerstone for coding, grouping of codes, linkages between belief and behavior and the beginning of the evidence trail used to assemble the multiple case distinctive coding and subsequent analysis of all participants (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

### ***Data Representation***

Visualizing data are a critically important way to discover and display trends, associations between concepts and data gathered, provide a greater understanding of explored ideas, or evidence of themes (Gottfried et al., 2021). Figure 6 consolidates 25 participant transcripts into a simple message at the core of the problem to be studied. Several additional figures are a part of the data analysis section because they communicate the key concepts gleaned from over 300 pages of member checked transcripts and an equitable number of hours reviewing and digesting the volumes of data to derive themes and findings. Those added in this chapter coalesce vast amounts of data into a single map easing the consumption of the concepts being researched. Figure 3 is the conceptual framework for this study and data gathered from these interviews do confirm and document the role of all of the Chapter 2 descriptions of actors,

concepts, and other elements related to the research. The figures also represent the methodologically rigorous data evidence trails essential for reliable and valid research (Chitac, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Motulsky, 2021; Trenta et al., 2021).

The graphically portrayed data also displays the evidence in a convincing manner which communicates in interesting ways voluminous words do not (Gottfried et al., 2021). Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) portrayed an easy to grasp summary of quantitative data gathered across 50 years that displayed an accurate depiction of 50 years of history but does little to focus in upon the more granular qualitative efforts in this research. This research maps the individual data which is a mere speck in a 50-year summary. This research provides a far more detailed look into the distinctions between and the similarities of the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) cultural Christians and convictional Christians as they serve in their business leader capacity in workplaces. Analyzed data is depicted to reflect both the similarities and distinctions as they were revealed through coding. The analysis of individual codes and coding groups (expanded versions of Figure 6) are included to reflect themes and document findings. All this data combines to create a data filled version of the elements of Figure 3 with evidence trails rooted in the participant transcripts (Gottfried et al., 2021).

The digital age has transformed the business world and quantitative data maps this very clearly, but broad policy guided only by macro-level understanding generates unintended consequences upon the speck sized small business owners (Watson, 2022). This qualitative multiple case study reveals those granular specks in a way that helps inform broad policy originally designed from only the macro maps (Watson, 2022). What Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) have mapped lacks the individualized qualitative insights this research provides, and data visualization is certainly a part of the product. A data expanded version of the elements captured

in Figure 3 conceptual depiction is what follows. It is what has been concisely shared with all the participants in appreciation for their transparent contribution, reflective of their trust, to the final product (Pope, 2020).

### *Analysis for Triangulation*

The research has produced several examples of data and methodological triangulation. These include convergent, complementary, and divergent methods associated with both of the overarching types. This section provides an overview of the methods and examples of how they were seen from data gathered from participant demographic data questions, interviews, follow-up interviews, journal notes, and notes or observations from the group briefing session.

Data triangulation references the process of collecting data from different data sources with their distinctions based in time, location, or person (Stamenkov, 2023). Methodological triangulation references the comparison of data, results or findings derived from different methods. When these forms of triangulation are applied, they may reveal convergent, divergent, or complementary results (Stamenkov, 2023). Data convergent triangulation could be different sources of data producing convergent results (Stamenkov, 2023). Methodological convergent triangulation could be quantitative studies reflected in qualitative studies. Data divergent triangulation would be different sources of data reflecting divergent outcomes (Stamenkov, 2023). Methodological divergent triangulation could be qualitative analysis which diverge from quantitative research. Complementary triangulation reflects results which are convergent but additive in nature (Stamenkov, 2023). Data complementary triangulation could be different data research which produce parallel findings but with slight variances between them. Methodological complementary triangulation can often be seen when qualitative research provides nuanced

distinctions or additional clarity quantitative research did not see. Convergent, divergent, and complementary triangulation was found in this study in both data and methodological forms.

This research gathered a small amount of quantitative demographic data on each of the participants. They ranged in age from their 30s to their 70s and came from 10 different states. These included Idaho, South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, and Maryland. Most had over a decade of business leader experience. The majority held business leadership roles in both the 20th and 21st century but only one participant considered himself retired. All had been in their current church homes for over a year and a handful had been in their current church home for over a decade. The majority of the participants attended non-denominational or Protestant churches, but the contributors also included members of the Catholic church.

Large volumes of qualitative data were gathered from initial purposeful sampling introductions and discussions, interviews, follow-up interviews, the interface needed to develop and finalize a member checked transcript, and the opportunity all had to read through the initial findings and themes then provide their questions and comments live through an online researcher led presentation or privately through emails or phone calls. Bracketed notes were gathered in journals and hard copy transcript coding and the initial emergent idea, coding themes, and interpretation steps leading into the more thorough data analysis. These efforts led to the following examples of analysis for triangulation.

This field study produced qualitative data which converges and complements McClure (2020) and Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) thus reflecting methodological convergent and methodological complementary results. Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) showed a relatively stable percentage of Americans as convictional Christians spanning across 50 years. Starr et al.

(2019) shows a methodological divergent finding that some committed Christians are deconverting or declaring extimonies to reverse their prior Christian testimony. Given this research was a qualitative snapshot into the participants current beliefs and behavior, it does not offer any triangulation findings with Starr et al. (2019) but does provide complementary methodological findings with Stetzer and MacDonald (2020).

The quantitative aspects of Ecklund et al. (2020), a mixed-methods research effort, provided data complementary triangulation with Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) in that it revealed insights into what a convictional Christian might look like. It also showed convictional Christians reported they did have character challenges within their faith at work environment as well as their faith helped them work through those character challenges more effectively. This study reflected methodological convergent triangulation with the Ecklund et al. (2020) research by documenting the Christian business leader character challenges similar to those of business workers in the secularized digital age workplace. Additionally, the convictional Christian business leaders showed greater resilience in handling their secularized workplace generated character challenges just as Ecklund et al. (2020) noted for those Christian workers who practiced their faith more robustly (e.g., attendance at church, regularity in reading the Bible).

Ecklund et al. (2020) recognized a wide range of responses from Christian worker groups and focused upon what the individuals wanted their church to do to help. This multi-case study has a similar self-identified Christians with some religious practices in place as a starting point but diverges from Ecklund et al. (2020) by seeking to understand what the Christian leader is personally doing to resolve these challenges rather than asking their church to do.

Reyes et al. (2021) identified two factors as prevalent in the deconversion rationale as anti-homosexual attitude within the church and a slightly broader sense that the church is out of



touch with society. This research represents both methodological convergence and methodological complementary findings. This research only provides one data point in time so does not address the deconversion process described in Reyes et al. (2021); however, the concerns raised in the study were also reflected in this research. Almost all Christian business leaders felt the deconversion factors Reyes et al. (2021) identified do represent challenges faced in today's workplace. However, cultural Christians disagreed with convictional Christians on which biblical principles were most appropriate when addressing the workplace challenge. Whether either Christian business leader solution set leads to a deconversion is beyond what this research accomplished but some convergence and complementary findings were produced, nonetheless.

Data collection and analysis also provide methodological triangulation with McDade's (2019) research which shows a gradual shifting away from integrated faith toward a form of civil faith and aligning with his research of European trends toward civil religion over the past several decades. Data convergent triangulation was displayed with Brubaker (2020) as many participants acknowledged the initial emancipating effects of digital age devices are actually becoming enslaving. Many Christian business leaders commented on the intentionality required to conduct important and difficult conversations with employees in person or in proactive effort to avoid the miscommunications they believe occur daily as a product of misread individual texts, group chats, emails, and a lack of personal interface due to the pace of the workplace (Bingaman, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019). This research reflects data convergence or data complementary triangulation with all of these researchers.

Brubaker (2020) addressed the implications of hyperconnectivity and a hyper-saturated self, and Calvo (2020) addressed how smart cities and artificial intelligence are accelerating the

digital age hyperconnectivity trajectory. This study has produced data convergence with these findings. Some Christian researchers have recognized the need to disconnect to maintain one's human spirituality (Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Lomberg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Paulus et al., 2019). The Christian business leader participants certainly confirmed this need, but the behavior has not necessarily followed the voiced belief.

Brubaker (2020) acknowledged a problematic path for the hyperconnected and hyper-saturated self but suggests the problem is not individual choice, but rather addictive technology. Others acknowledge Christian challenges with digital age secularization and say it is either an existential threat to human spirituality or an existential opportunity to revive human spirituality (Bingaman, 2020). The data gathered were insufficient to reveal an addiction or confirm a belief in an existential threat, but it did clearly show existing thoughts which could lead toward such conclusions. These issues align with the character challenges Christian business leaders identified and are reflective of the foundational moral imperative choices they are making. It is noteworthy to say this aspect of denying or accepting the personal choice responsibility for the character challenges one faces is a critical piece of data convergence or data divergence sought in this research but only clearly communicated in the bookend cases.

This biblical worldview perspective reflects the binary worldview approach of Trentham (2019a, 2019b) but the field study revealed a more granular view of a biblical worldview among Christians which seems to be glossed over in Trentham. This dissertation effort was designed to form data convergence with this research and methodological complementary triangulation with the McClure (2020) and Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) documentation of the secularized digital age. It has delivered on this front and does inform a gap in understanding by providing a far more granular, bottoms up, view of American Christian business leader character challenges.

Cwiklicki and Pilch (2021) espoused the great value of multiple case study design applied with methodological rigor. They make the case the multiple case approach optimizes the opportunity to make comparisons and identify dissimilarities between participants in both cases (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). The multiple case study approach applied all these principles and produced evidentiary trails which provide a greater transferability of rigorous findings (Hoorani et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2020).

Kanygin and Koretckaia (2021) stated that data analysis software, like NVivo, has improved qualitative data analysis. They draw these conclusions in part because researchers assisted by data analysis software can credibly manage larger volumes of data analysis because of automated analysis this software provides (Kanygin & Koretckaia, 2021). More specifically, they make the case that researchers can more accurately analyze large volumes of data by ensuring the logic employed in traditional coding models (TCM) is equally applied across the entire data collection. Indeed, they argue that if computer aided analysis were programed to conduct further data analysis by the researching team, even further advancements would be realized (Kanygin & Koretckaia, 2021). The research leveraged NVivo software. However, given the researcher was a new user of NVivo, the software's potential was not fully leveraged.

### ***Summary of Data Analysis***

Methodological rigor remained an overarching theme for data analysis just as it was for the data collection and organization. A shortfall in methodological rigor in any of these aspects would have broken the custody chain in evidence and created flaws in maintaining the data evidence chain needed for reliable and valid research. Emphasis was placed upon drawing out emerging ideas from interviews, grouping these ideas into interoperable data codes, then blending code groupings found in the initial analysis into themes. Themes produced

interpretations and these findings have then been captured in figures, graphs, and tables to concisely simplify the complex problem being studied. The written text amplified by the data filled figures and graphs display the desired methodological rigor by clearly presenting every evidence chain linking back to the raw data from which has been produced. Data have also been analyzed for triangulation with the formerly accomplished literature review further complemented by additional research to further refine key points in the findings. The product is a methodologically sound and rigorous multi-case study producing new insights, from a biblical worldview, to fill an existing gap in understanding.

### **Reliability and Validity Plan**

Methodological rigor produces research, which is transparent, credible, reliable, and comparable (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). All of these make reliability and validity assessments straightforward. Methodological rigor is in itself a basis for reliability and validity as it is commonly assessed as a critical part of these criterion (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). Various forms of reliability and validity assessments have been applied and are further discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### ***Reliability***

Methodological rigor guarantees sufficient details in descriptions and process that enables other researchers to see the thoroughness of the approach and replicate it as needed (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). This is the transparency aspect of methodological rigor. Methodological rigor ensures data is gathered which supports the research propositions while also providing data opposite to the propositions (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). This allows consumers to consider for themselves the credibility of the research. Methodological rigor institutes approaches to reflexivity and comparability which enhance the reviewer's confidence the research is not overly

influenced by a researcher's bias and maintains the integrity of findings (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). These methodological rigor contributions contribute toward the transferability of the study findings. In sum, this level of applied methodological rigor is reflective of research which could be replicated and is thus reliable in form and content and has been applied in this research (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

### ***Validity***

Given the methodological rigor approach just reviewed, validity is assessed from a construct, internal, and external framework (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). Construct validity assesses the correctness of the research construct in regard to the operationalization of the models and measures employed (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). Construct validity is present if the research design is fully supported by the literature review and if the data collection plan is properly targeted towards the gap in knowledge it describes (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). The literature review documents at least two major groupings of Christians but does not reflect how these might fit in a faith at work case. The literature review identifies Christian character challenges and asks them what their church should do about it (Ecklund et al., 2020). This research has focused upon Christian character challenges and asked the Christian leader what they are doing about it. Literature review does not discuss the moral imperatives of Christian leaders nor assess similarities and distinctions between cultural and convictional Christians. This study has Construct validity in design because it reflects existing constructs identified in existing research and proposes an approach for data collection to address a gap in understanding.

The multiple case study approach also represents internal validity with a data analysis plan assembled to triangulate between existing research findings gleaned from the literature review with the research produced data analysis insights (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021). A second

aspect of internal validity was in the sufficiency of the data collection. The *a priori* estimate of 30 participants was established along with a plan to begin a back-and-forth assessment protocol after participant number 25 inputs are assessed. The back-and-forth protocol required the researcher to assess the achievement of saturation utilizing a hybrid matrix blending which included: methodological or data triangulation, the discovery of new information, requirement for new codes, or new emerging themes with each additional participant. The researcher saw indications of data saturation after 20 interviews so implemented a data saturation assessment with every subsequent interview until completing 25. After completing a Figure 5 data saturation assessment of the 25th interview, data saturation was declared and the interview process stopped.

The research was executed in accordance with the methodological rigor described in Chapter 3 and approved by the IRB. This has then served to produce construct validity and internal validity proven with data evidenced trails clearly present. External validity, the assessment of the generalizations made from the study, is present because the researcher has not overstated the applicability of the findings developed from this qualitative multiple case study (Barwegen, 2019; Culton, 2022; Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021).

### ***Bracketing***

Quantitative research involves the minimization of human contact in data analysis while qualitative studies require the researcher remain immersed in the data analysis and play a primary role in capturing, reporting, analyzing, and documenting findings gleaned from data collection (Crick, 2021). For these reasons alone a qualitative researcher can be perceived as their own worst enemy if they do not remain astutely aware of their need for bracketing and other common flaws in qualitative research (Crick, 2021). Ample room exists for personal bias to serve as an undesirable filter in any of these aspects of research. Methodological rigor resolves

many of the potential shortfalls and some of these present themselves as forms of bracketing. Trenta et al. (2021) said reflexive thoughts need to be kept separate from participant's inputs throughout the process and that intended methods on the manner in which a researcher will do this should be stated up front or early in the research. This research document incorporates an entire section on reflexivity and on the biblical worldview. It also incorporates the implications of these on the study by specifically stating the research goal is to portray a biblical worldview perspective of the problem statement.

Most secular researchers treat God as a concept among many concepts, a god among gods (Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023; Nelson, 2019; Perry, McElroy, Schnabel, et al., 2022; Upenieks, 2022). A study of this problem from a secular perspective would reduce a sovereign God to a concept of god to be compared to other concepts the human race holds in their heads (Beltramini, 2019). A study of this problem from a secular perspective would most likely not include an all-encompassing Sovereign God circle surrounding the entire problem to be considered. This framework for the research is incorporated through methodological rigor but must also be bracketed as the researcher interviews participants who self-identify as Christians but may not see the immanent nature of God in such a pervasive manner. Pope (2020) focused upon allowing participants to contribute their perspectives while intentionally bracketing her own. Collins and Stockton (2022) said the researcher should play act the inquirer role before every participant. Bayne et al. (2020) similarly recommended the researcher keep the participant preeminent in mind when conducting the interview and always remembering the most beneficial interview outcome is to capture the perspectives of the participant and not those of the researcher. This researcher put all these research proven principles into play when conducting the field study. This researcher has applied all these techniques in an effort to fill the gap of

understanding with the contributions from participants plus any data evidenced themes revealed through the methodological rigor of the data analysis.

Barwegen (2019) said bracketing in planning and execution of research is essential to ensure the validity of the research. Crick (2021) recommended researchers should recognize their familiarity with the material will help them see themes and subthemes and they should keep journal notes on these. Themes can even be designated numerically with subthemes represented in letters and all should be tracked and updated in a codebook (Crick, 2021). In this research manual coding was the primary means applied as interviews were being conducted and some of the foundational interpretation about the book end cases was being crafted. The analytic software was then utilized to confirm what the researcher believed he saw. The evidence trails produced are the product of both.

Pope (2020) countered perceived bias through open conversations in an inter-faith dialogue research effort. This research included voluntary events allowing participant feedback on the accuracy of their sanitized transcript and providing additional inputs through a follow-up interview or in the form of feedback when hearing a briefing on the initial findings. The ability of each participant to provide transparent inputs and subsequently validate these inputs ensures appropriate bracketing is applied in the data gathering stage. This approach proved valid in this research. All the participants approved of the way they were treated and the level of involvement they were able to have in the overall themes and findings product.

The methodological hybrid form of achieving saturation ensures all potential areas in both of the cases were pursued to saturation. Following this rigor and documenting its accomplishment displays bracketing is being effectively applied. When all this methodological



rigor was put into play in a multiple case study shaped effort, the bracketing ensured bias never entered findings were displayed which all have data evidence trails available for all to see.

### ***Summary of Reliability and Validity***

This methodologically rigorous approach documented in Chapter 3 and approved by the IRB contained all the needed details to optimize the potential for construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. The approved approach was precisely what was executed in the research. The approach provided a priori estimate of the number of participants needed and a hybrid matrix Figure 5 described when saturation would be achieved. All was executed according to the approved approach and thus delivered on the desired products.

### **Ethical Assurances**

Methodical rigor in research is the optimal way to address ethical issues throughout the research initiative and the optimal path to produce high quality research (Cwiklicki & Pilch, 2021; Poth, 2019). The methodological rigor described in previous paragraphs and executed in the research represents the sound ethical assurance behind this research. Adding to this, is the reflexivity aspect regarding how this Christian researcher would never want anyone to question the ethics of this research in any way or at any time because it would be dishonoring to the God the research is intended to honor. To ensure a novice researcher has adequately addressed this issue, the methodological rigorous research plan was approved by the Liberty University IRB, and it was precisely followed in the execution of the field research.

### **Results**

The field research precisely followed the processes approved by the IRB. Thirty-eight prospective participants were invited to be part of the research and only three declined. The

remaining 35 voiced interest and were scheduled for interviews as their schedules permitted. The first interview was conducted 4 days after IRB approval had been received.

Typically, within days of completing each interview, a transcript was provided to the participant to be member checked. The researcher took journal notes for both the 12 in person interviews and the 13 teleconference interviews. He began extensive reviews of these notes and every transcript as soon as each participant confirmed its accuracy. Twenty interviews were completed within a month of receiving IRB approval and by this time, the researcher had already initiated a list of emergent ideas and begun the process of expanding a code book accompanied by the grouping of codes to create themes. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed and as participants volunteered their time. This section describes how participant contributions were organized, reviewed extensively for emergent ideas, coded, and coalesced for the development of themes, assessed, and interpreted to produce evidentiary data for visualization and the support of themes and findings.

### ***Themes Discovered***

One participant commented relatively early in the interview process: “you can’t change a person’s behavior without changing their beliefs.” The connection between behavior and belief seems obvious, but the comment resonated to the point that it served as an emergent idea and a new approach to discovering the themes from the field research. The initial pursuit of discovering themes focused on comparing the behavior of the Christian business leaders; however, this comment was the spark to begin again by assessing distinctions in beliefs which drove the behavior. A deliberate shift was made to look for themes in the core beliefs motivating these Christian business leaders. The adjustment in approach immediately proved valuable.

The behavioral themes approach failed because the Christian business leaders worked in a wide range of organizational environments. Six participants were business leaders in secular government roles. Nine were leaders in secular companies ranging from legal to engineering to high technology. Ten worked in Christian organizations or for Christian bosses. The participants came from 10 different states, each with different cultures. The dissimilarities in the workplace environment injected so many variables that it made discovering behavior themes a most difficult task. However, when assessing the noted distinctions in each participant's stated Christian beliefs, the themes became readily apparent.

Four interview questions played a primary role in discovering the themes for this research. The first interview question allowed each participant to describe what the term "Christian" personally meant to them. The answers were broader than anticipated but roughly fit into the convictional Christian business leader and cultural Christian business leader concept upon which this research is focused. As the interviews proceeded the bookend approach became ever clearer simply by assessing the responses to interview question one and how those thoughts were emphasized and further detailed through the remainder of each interview.

As the interview process passed the a priori forecasted halfway mark, six of the 10 strongest convictional Christians and six of the 10 strongest cultural Christians had provided inputs. The distinctions in beliefs between these 12 interviews were readily apparent and the belief - behavioral linkages, in tackling workplace character challenges, also became apparent. By the time the 20th interview was completed the emergent ideas were beginning to be translated into coding and initial indications showed data saturation was approaching.

Question eight allowed each participant to further expound on their perspective of the Bible and the relevance of it in today's secularized workplace. The question eight responses

positively aligned with the question one responses and further solidified the emergent ideas and distinctive coding created to highlight the distinctiveness between a convictional Christian business leader and the cultural Christian business leader.

Cultural Christian business leaders commonly referenced the Bible as an important book while offering caveats regarding its applicability to resolving character challenges in a secularized workplace. Meanwhile, the convictional Christian business leaders uniformly had a much higher regard for the Bible including calling it the “word of God” and “the source of all truth.” Convictional Christian business leaders emphasized the importance of reading the Bible regularly while cultural Christians primarily stated they did not regularly read the Bible.

A participant’s reply to question 8 also always aligned with their replies to question 1. The bookend convictional Christian business leaders who recognized Christ as their Savior and their Lord also expressed a sense of gratefulness accompanied by a duty or calling to serve their authoritative Lord. These core beliefs aligned with their views that the Bible was the revealed word of God and filled with the eternal truths they needed to perform as a Christian business leader. Meanwhile, the absence of these descriptive terms in the cultural Christian business leaders replies to question one aligned with their lesser view of the Bible and more limited reliance upon it.

Question 2 and Question 10 added further refinement to the positioning of each individual as they declared the degree to which they felt accountability as a Christian business leader vice as a business leader. All the convictional Christian business leaders identified themselves as Christian business leaders. In comparison, only half of the cultural Christian business leaders did so. In a similar way, 14 of the 15 convictional Christian business leaders mentioned the Bible as a key source they lean upon to resolve the character challenges they face

in the secularized workplace. Only one of the 10 cultural Christian business leaders included the Bible as a key source to resolve character challenges.

The emergent ideas of assessing belief rather than behavior then drawing distinctions in beliefs between convictional and cultural Christian business leaders were at the core of developing distinctive coding which then produced the discovered themes. The groups of distinctive codes for cultural Christian business leaders and for convictional Christian business leaders created the evidentiary trail reflected in the developed themes. These evidentiary trails are rooted in the participant replies to interview questions 1, 2, 8, and 10. The remaining six questions addressed each participant’s chosen behavior which, as suggested up front, closely aligned with the beliefs described by the first four questions.

The interpretation of initial bookend coding is depicted in Figure 6. These initial themes helped guide both the initial codes as well as the subsequent grouping of codes to form themes which then guided the multiple case analysis. These steps replicate the work of previous researchers who similarly sought to manage a wide set of disparate inputs to find both themes for distinction and commonality (Harrison et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021).

**Figure 6**

*Coding of Core Christian Beliefs for Bookend Participants*

Term	Code	Co1	Co2	Co3	Co4	Co5	Cu1	Cu2	Cu3	Cu4	Cu5
Christ my Savior	CS	3	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Christ my Lord	CL	6	3	2	6	2	0	0	0	0	0
God's Grace	GG	3	2	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Read Bible Regularly	RBR	6	2	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	0
Do Not Read Bible Regularly	DRBR	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	1	1

Co = Convictional    Cu = Cultural    Number of times mentioned in participant interview.

**Convictional Christian Business Leader Bookend.** The convictional Christian business leader bookend expressed a great deal of gratitude for Christ the Savior which had impact upon their business leader performance. Co2 said:

I acknowledge that in receiving this gift from Christ and in resting in my hopes in Jesus that there are behavioral changes that would come out as a result of that relationship which give evidence that the life of Christ, the light of Christ, and the love of Christ would be expressed wherever I am.

He personally relied upon and heartily recommended all Christian business leaders consider Daniel and Paul as biblical examples on how to do business in today's secularized society. Co5 added that all his work as a Christian business leader flowed "out of a heart of gratitude for what God has done." He emphasized how Christian business leaders should be exemplary workers out of gratitude and not the goal to earn merit for self. He added, "grace is not opposed to hard work, grace is opposed to merit."

All the bookend convictional Christian business leaders said their identity was consumed in Christ and their service as a Christian business leader was to bring glory to God. Co3 added:

There is no way this business would have flourished the way it has if Jesus had not been along side of me helping me make decisions and smacking me up the side of my head when I started to go the wrong way.

All acknowledged the Bible to be the word of God and felt it contained truth to help them with every workplace challenge they faced. Co3 said: "I don't care what you are up against...there is not an issue...in life or in business that you can't find guidance to deal with in the Bible. It's there! You may have to look for it...but it's there!"

The bookend convictional Christian business leaders displayed a blend of gratitude for their Savior, a sense of duty to display Christlike character in the workplace, and a sense of responsibility to the authority of the Bible as the revealed word of their Lord. All of these core beliefs impacted their behavior as Christian business leaders.

These core beliefs were, for the most part, homogenously displayed for all the convictional Christian business leader participants. The CEOs and senior leaders from among the convictional Christian business leaders clearly sensed more latitude than their younger counterparts with the latter sensing the same convictions but feeling they had less latitude to implement workplace changes they may have thought appropriate. Nevertheless, the Figure 7 coding values show a fairly homogenous flow of values from the original five through the next group of five which form the foundation of the convictional Christian business leader case.

This expanded group included eight men and two women ranging in age from their thirties to their 70s and living in New Mexico, Colorado, Idaho, Maryland, Virginia, and Texas. Two were Christian business owners and CEOs of their respective retail organizations. Two were Christian business owners and CEOs of their respective service organizations. One was a leader in a secular State university. One was a senior leader in a U.S. government position. One was the youngest participant and a project manager working for a Christian owner. Two were senior leaders in Christian organizations and one was a retired General officer who served for over 30 years in the military and then for another 6 years in a senior civilian business leader in the U.S. government.

**Figure 7**

*The Convictional Christian Business Leader Bookend*

		Co1	Co2	Co3	Co4	Co5	Co6	Co7	Co8	Co9	Co10
Christ my Savior	CS	3	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	1	1
Christ my Lord	CL	6	3	2	6	2	2	1	6	1	1
God's Grace	GG	3	2	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Read Bible Regularly	RBR	6	2	4	2	7	17	1	12	2	1
Do Not Read Bible Regularly	DRBR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Cultural Christian Business Leader Bookend.** This group of Christian business leaders included eight men and two women ranging in age from their forties to their sixties. Two are highly successful lawyers with one in North Carolina and the other based in Virginia. Two are senior leaders, based in Virginia, working in a sizable secular digital age technology corporation. Two are business leaders working for the government with one in Virginia and the other in Texas. One is a secular organization CEO living in both Florida and Virginia. One works for a Christian organization and lives in Tennessee. One is a senior leader in Northern Virginia real estate and the 10th works for a secular organization in Virginia.

None of these cultural Christian business leaders used the word Savior or Lord when describing what Christian means to them. Six of the 10 do not read the Bible regularly. Cu6 says she prefers to read “my handwritten gospels of only Jesus’ words.” She was uncertain if the Bible was “God’s word or man’s interpretation of God’s word” but continued to read it nonetheless. Cu3 says he tries to live by the 10 Commandments and the example of Jesus while admitting he did not read the Bible regularly. Cu10 said he reads the Bible daily but does not “necessarily believe every word in the Bible is literally true...I’m not a fundamentalist.” Cu5 said:



I believe we Christians have the right values but there are a lot of people that believe different things and I don't want to say I am 100% right because that is saying somebody else is wrong. Honestly, I struggle with that a little bit.

The majority of this bookend expressed similar uncertainties regarding some biblical principles their convictional Christian business leader counterparts readily accepted.

Cultural Christian business leaders typically described “Christian” as a belief in God or a belief in Christ or a belief in the 10 Commandments and the gospels. Cu1 said: “for me Christianity is about this faith in eternal life.” Cu4 said: “being a Christian is being able to forgive and show grace...and not judging a book by its cover.”

Convictional Christian business leader #2 further distinguished convictional from cultural Christians when saying:

accountability to God is to love my employees...not with a sentimental emotional kind of love but in the sense that I would lead them in ways that would give them opportunity to grow, to develop, and to become the people God intends them to be.

Most of the cultural Christian business leaders voiced support for biblical principles to love, but none mentioned an accountability to God to love employees in a way that would help them become the people God intends them to be. Rather, their focus portrayed more of a “civil” faith approach to loving confrontation.

Figure 8 provides the coding values for the fairly homogeneous cultural Christian business leader bookend. While it does not portray the same homogeneity as the convictional Christian coding, it does reflect the core attributes of the cultural Christian business leader case.

**Figure 8**

*The Cultural Christian Business Leader Bookend*

	Cu10	Cu9	Cu8	Cu7	Cu6	Cu5	Cu4	Cu3	Cu2	Cu1
Christ my Savior	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Christ my Lord	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
God's Grace	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Read Bible Reg.	3	3	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Don't Read Bible Reg.	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	2	3

**The Mixed Middle Grouping.** In the middle between these bookend groups was a group of five male participants that leaned more toward the convictional Christian business leader category in the four key questions shaping this coding, but with fewer amplifying remarks regarding their stated beliefs in the other questions. The group consisted of a senior business leader in his forties working in a very high-pressure senior State government position. It included the youngest participant who, in his thirties, is working as a project manager in a Christian organization. Another Christian business leader, in his sixties, and now serving as the CEO of his own Christian organization after over 35 years in public service roles in Texas. The group is rounded out by two Virginia residents. One is in his fifties working for the federal government and the last in his sixties working as a Christian business leader in an engineering firm.

The type of comments which placed these participants in the middle instead of in the cultural Christian business leader bookend grouping was their uniformity in aspiring to serve Christ and their commitment to grow by reading the Bible. None of the participants in this group cited Christ as Lord in their interviews; however, all talked extensively about serving Christ and recognized their own responsibility to actively seek spiritual growth. For this reason, the Christ as Lord annotation was made to their coding. Additionally, all acknowledged the importance of reading the Bible, but two of the five read church provided commentaries rather than the Bible.

That said, some of the answers to the other six questions fell closer to the cultural Christian business leader bookend. These answers are addressed in subsequent paragraphs.

It is important to note the mixed nature of this middle group because it led to two important conclusions. First, that the purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling had delivered on the goal of finding a relative balanced group of both convictional and cultural Christian business leaders. Secondly, the mixed nature of the group in the middle led to the declaration of data saturation. Figure 9 provides the coding values for the middle group which appears to be all convictional Christian business leaders but actually have a far more mixed set of contributions than these initial coding numbers reflect.

**Figure 9**

*Coding for Middle Group of Participants*

	Co11	Co12	Co13	Co14	Co15
Christ my Savior	0	0	0	0	0
Christ my Lord	1	1	1	1	1
God's Grace	0	0	0	0	0
Read Bible Reg.	1	1	10	1	4
Don't Read Bible Reg.	0	0	0	0	0

*Interpretation of the Themes*

**Three Behavioral Themes Connected to Bookend Beliefs.** The distinctiveness of the beliefs between convictional Christian business leaders and the cultural Christian business leaders directly align with their behavioral distinctions in how they chose to handle character challenges in the secularized workplace. Their difference in their beliefs about the origin of the Bible, the importance of studying it, and applying its principles in the workplace were made evident in their shared perspectives regarding three different themes.

**Theme 1: Moral Truth – Constant or Changing.** Convictional Christian business leaders generally believed moral truth remains constant across time and culture while the cultural

Christian business leaders generally expressed the view that moral truth changes across time and culture. The belief distinctions regarding a Christian's identity carried sizable implications into the workplace. Convictional Christian business leaders were generally grateful for Christ their Savior and the grace of God in their lives. This gratitude was matched by their sense of duty to serve Christ their Lord both out of gratitude and respect for His authority over their lives. Both of these beliefs also connected to their sense for the need to grow in Christlikeness by studying the Bible and seeking to apply its principles to resolve character challenges in the workplace.

Co7 simplified these thoughts into what she called a low or high view of Scripture. She said: "If you have a low view of scripture, you don't see it as the word of God that stands forever" and "if you have a high view of scripture then you study it and...submit to it." Co8 extended this high view of scripture by adding "I have to be governed by the convictions of being a Christian...the Lord sanctifies us to use our gifts and talents for His glory." She, like most convictional Christian business leaders, clearly states her sense of purpose has Godly origins. In sum, most all convictional Christian business leaders believe moral truth remains constant across time and culture. Few to none of these equivalent beliefs were made evident by the cultural Christian business leaders.

Cultural Christian business leaders have what Co7 called a "low view of scripture" which generally results in them perceiving the Bible as more of a matter of opinion than as an authoritative document. Most voiced confidence in only a limited portion of the Bible and these beliefs directly related to their general conclusion that moral truth changes with time and culture. When addressing Christian business leader character challenges associated with sexual orientation and gender identity issues (interview question 7), Cu7 said:

I think we are all digging too deep on these things that just don't define who we are...we spend so much time judging other people and...are completely distracted from the crux of the matter—human decency and love...if someone chooses a way to live that is different from how you believe...just love them and reinforce to them that they are wonderfully made by Him.

Cu10 is a senior Christian business leader who serves as a lawyer. He cited a famous Oliver Wendell Holmes quote which is paraphrased as 'my rights end where yours begin' and pointed out how this may be more applicable in the relative truth of our U.S. legal system than the absolute principles found in the Bible. His conclusion, as it pertains to law in America, was moral truth changes.

**Theme 2: Identity - in Self with Christ or in Christ.** As with theme one, theme two is a behavioral extension of the beliefs identified in the preceding bookend discussion. Co12 said he had a "responsibility" to take his faith "outside the walls" of the church and he altered the cotton commercial logo by saying "*Christianity* is the fabric of my life" and that "the business world needs more voices that think about eternity." Co13 said his Christian faith is the "moral compass" for all he does as a Christian business leader. Co5 says "I'm a Christian...that is my identity." Co1 says "Every Christian knows this, that when you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior that becomes your core identity...to try and separate them is only at your detriment." Compare these thoughts to Cu10 who said: "I'm Catholic and that's a different flavor of Christianity...My duty is to show that I'm worthy of whatever talents I was given." Cu4 said: "to me being a Christian, is being able to forgive and show grace." Most convictional Christian business leaders found their identity in Christ while most cultural Christian business leaders found Christianity as an addition or modification to their self-identity.

**Theme 3 – Integrated Faith or “Civil” Faith.** The third behavioral theme growing from the bookend beliefs is the Christian business leader practice of either integrated faith or “civil” faith. The “civil” faith term is a reference to McDade (2019) article regarding the continuing European trend of civil religion which is explicitly post-religious. McDade suggests in the digital age “the Church of Twitter and its sister communion in Facebook have powerful ways of shaming heretics who breach codes of civil religion” (McDade, 2019, p. 227). Cu2, a CEO in a secular company, shared his experience with this potential for shaming:

I evaluate everything that I post with a ‘could somebody use this against me down the road’ question....is this going to come back and label me as homophobic or anti-LGBTQIA...because (as a CEO) I can’t publicly be any of those things.

Cu5, who works for a high-tech company worth over \$200 billion, says: “as much as they say its all about free speech...and we want everyone’s opinion and input...there is no way I could raise a counter belief...I would probably get fired.”

The McDade (2019) pressures are felt by convictional Christian business leaders as well. Co14, a worker in the government, says:

the work environment pressure is so strong to accept it...that...if you speak out against it, you will either be sent to remedial training or you are going to be disciplined...or even worse. So, yes, I feel like I cannot speak up...in the workplace.

These McDade (2019) pressures were more common in secular owned organizations than they were in Christian owned organizations; however, most all participants voiced a heightened awareness to an environmental pressure to practice “civil” faith which they needed to work through to resolve their own Christian character challenge in their respective workplaces.

**One Overarching Theme – Focus in Time or Eternity.** Jensen (2023) is a relatively small qualitative research effort focused upon addressing the cultural differences developing within the Christian church. He sought to highlight the almost mirror image perspectives of evangelical and mainline Protestants by surveying members of the Presbyterian Church (PC) and others in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA; Jensen, 2023). These two branches of Presbyterians formerly split in the 1970s over disputes regarding the deity of Christ and the authority of scripture and they were chosen as the focus of research because the PC by in large represents a culture similar to mainline Protestants and the PCA by in large represents the culture of evangelicals (Jensen, 2023). The study is pertinent because it displays another distinguishing feature between cultural Christian business leaders and their convictional Christian business leader counterparts regarding a focus in time vice a focus upon eternity.

Jensen (2023) asked a series of questions related to the afterlife to three groups in each church. These were youth, adolescents, and adults in equal proportions. Since this research is on Christian business leaders, the Figure 10 numbers reflect the responses gathered from the adults in the Jensen (2023) research. The mirror-like responses to the questions reflects a sizable cultural distinction between the two groups of Christians. The study is cited here because the distinctiveness of these two groups is reflected in the distinctiveness of the cultural Christian business leaders and the convictional Christian business leaders included in this research. Although no field study interview questions were asked about afterlife thoughts, the focus in this world or the next was equally evident in the field study data collection.

**Figure 10**

*Afterlife Study (Jensen, 2023).*

Afterlife Beliefs Study by Lene Arnett Jensen (peer reviewed & published in 2023)		
Presbyterian Church	“Two different cultures”	Presbyterian Church in America
42% - Heaven Only 26% - Don’t know 16% - Heaven or Hell 11% - Death is final	What Happens When We Die?	89% - Heaven or Hell 11% - Don’t know
60% - God, Person’s Behavior 20% - God, Person’s Faith 10% - God, Faith & Other	Who Decides & How?	58% - God, Person’s Faith 37% - God, Faith & Other 0% - God, Person’s Behavior
89% - This World 6% - Afterlife & World 6% - Afterlife	What’s most important...this world or the Afterlife?	59% - Afterlife 41% - Afterlife & World 0% - This World
77% - This World 18% - Afterlife	Which do you think would be your favorite?	79% - Afterlife 16% - This World

In conclusion, emerging ideas came by assessing beliefs instead of behavior. Codes were designed to track these emerging ideas with cultural Christian and convictional Christian participants. The separate coding developed into themes as the approved transcripts were reviewed multiple times and assessment of each participant’s core beliefs was coded primarily from four interview questions and then subsequently assessed against behavior reflected in responses to the other six interview questions. The bookend approach followed other proven research which gathered disparate perspectives to identify both distinctions and commonalities, to produce overarching themes (Harrison et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2020; Trenta et al., 2021). The interpretation of the themes stemming from these core beliefs has included the identification of one overarching theme accompanied by three subordinate themes. Each of these themes have coding variations for the convictional Christian business leader case and for the cultural Christian business leader case. Each set of codes have been grouped to reflect the associated attributes within each theme. Figure 11 reflects the primary and overarching themes associated with the multiple case study. Each theme was matched by coding and codes were grouped to



document the primary theme. This process was followed for the Case 1 Convictional Christian Business Leaders and for the Case 2 Cultural Christian Business Leaders.

**Figure 11**

*Christian Business Leader Cultural and Convictional Bookends*

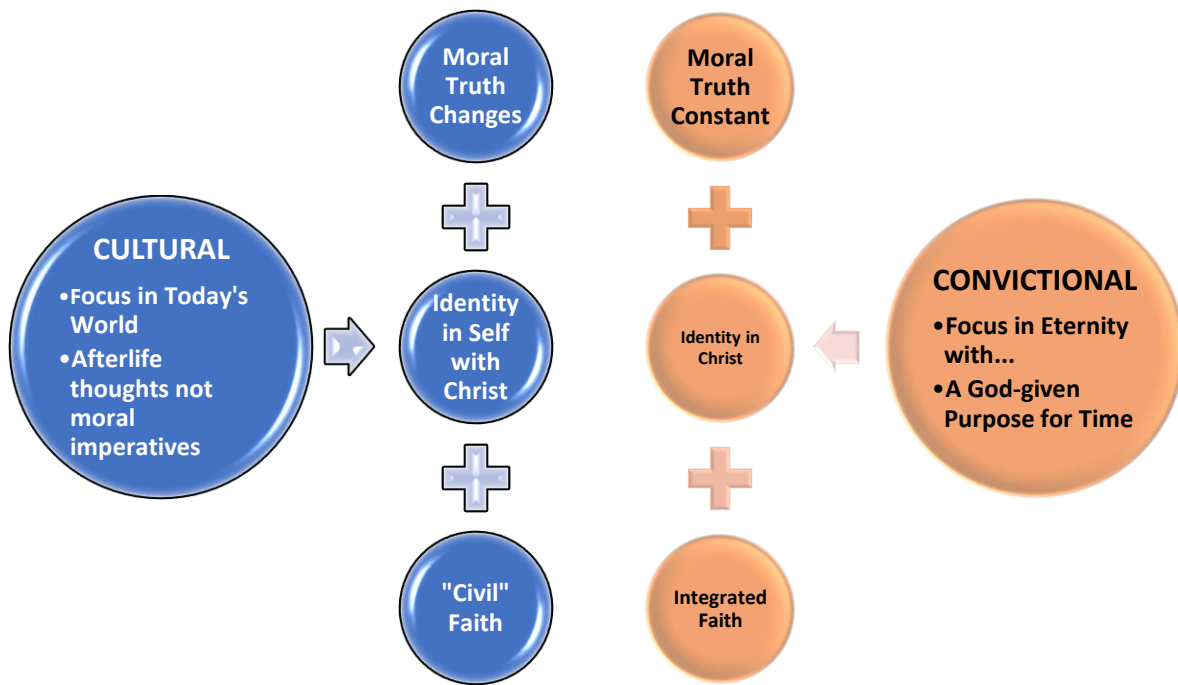


Figure 12 provides an expanded version of the key themes in the form of a word chart. Every line on Figure 12 had an equivalent code in the code book. These were loaded into the NVivo software program and utilized by the researcher as he manually coded each transcript and then supplemented the effort with electronic coding through the NVivo program. The combined process produced methodologically sound evidence trails, a natural flow of participant replies into specific theme categories, and a process by which the researcher could track evidentiary trails and indications of data saturation.

**Figure 12**

*Quick Look Summary of Research Themes and Participants*

<b>The Range of Convictions of 25 Christian Business Leader Participants</b>		
<b>Cultural Christians</b> 5	Cultural Leaning – Mix – Convictional Leaning 5                      5                      5	<b>Convictional Christians</b> 5
<b>Focus Primarily on Today’s World</b>	<b>Unique Blending of Both Perspectives</b>	<b>Focus on Eternity with Purpose in Time</b>
	<b>Moral Imperative internal debates of Christian Business leaders in workplace decision making...</b>	
<b>Moral Truth Changes</b>	The whole Bible...or... Words of Jesus...or... The Commandments & Gospels	<b>Moral Truth Constant</b>
Bible has Some Good Principles		The Word of God
A Source of Truth		The Source of Truth
Sense of Strength in My Truth “Don’t Read Bible Regularly”		Sense of Strength in Bible “Read Bible Regularly”
<b>Identity in Self w/ Christ</b>	God’s involvement in our secularized time & place  Digital Age Relationships Must become more personalized but...	<b>Identity in Christ</b>
My Identity with Christ		Christ my Savior – Gratitude
My Work for Christ		Christ my Lord – Servitude
My Prayers to Christ		God’s Grace – Thankfulness Desire to fulfill God’s purposes
<b>“Civil” Faith</b>	Value of Integrated Faith  Little consensus regarding the applicability of Biblical Principles.	<b>Integrated Faith</b>
My Sense of Calling		Sense of Calling from God
My Sense of Purpose		Sense of Purpose from God
Secular v. Christian Org.		Christian v. Secular Org.

Interview questions 1, 6, 7, and 8 all fed into the overarching perspective of the participant beliefs and the Moral Truth theme. Questions 5, 9, and 10 added to the belief insights and also fed into the Identity theme. Questions 2, 3, 7, and 9 fed into the Integrated v. Civil faith categorization practiced by the participant and reflective of how beliefs connected to behavior. The participant data contributions were not limited to just this manner of analysis but were also

assessed for thematic ideas which appeared beyond the simple coding. Examples of these are the primary character challenge each Christian business leader focused upon which is documented in Figure 14 and also commonalities which appeared across the convictional Christian business leaders and the cultural Christian business leaders which is also discussed later in this section.

Another example of thematic ideas appearing beyond coding are captured in Figure 12. The figure shows a fairly precise breakout of how the participants fit across the range between cultural Christian business leaders and convictional Christian business leaders. The distribution is really very even and was assessed based upon multiple reviews of the transcripts and assessments of the coding values. The internal character challenging debates are summarized in the middle column between the cultural Christian business leader column and the convictional Christian business leader column.

### ***Representation and Visualization of the Data***

This section will provide an extensive series of figures to document the key features of the data collected. These will start with a review of the demographic data of the participants. It also includes a breakdown of many of the Christian business leader character challenges by theme category they best fit into. These character challenges are also dissected based upon whether they occurred in a secular or Christian owned organization.

**Participant Demographic Data.** All the participants were very willing to participate in their hour-long interview and all were very interested and transparent in sharing their perspectives. Most came to the interview having invested some time reviewing the questions beforehand. Some even wrote out their answers ahead of time and then added to them as the interviews were conducted. All were very active Christian business leaders, with only one of the

25 being retired, and so getting the voluntary interviews and follow up voluntary activities scheduled was the most difficult task as the researcher interfaced with the participants.

All the participants appreciated the introductory letter and interview guide handouts. All felt they were well-prepared, ready to contribute, and openly shared their thoughts with great transparency. Nine participants showed a desire to assist beyond their interview inputs and voluntarily made time for an extended review of the draft initial themes and findings report. After the review, they provided their thoughts and questions via an hour-long teleconference session. Their inputs enhanced the product sent to the remaining 17 participants.

Figure 13 is a compilation of demographic data gathered from each of the participants in the beginning of each initial interview. The participants included 21 men and four women. They came from 10 states and had Christian business leadership experiences ranging from 3 years for the youngest participant in his early 30s, to the oldest participant, in his 70s, who is the acting CEO of his own Christian company and has 50 years of experience as a Christian business leader. The average participant experience as a Christian business leader was 27.7 years. Ten of the participants worked in Christian organizations with five of the 10 serving as the CEO of the organization and the other five working for Christian supervisors. Fifteen of the participants work in secular organizations. Seven of the 15 worked in secular organizations with close linkages to government and they expressed additional character challenges in direct association with that linkage. Two of the 15 worked in a nationally known high-tech company and they expressed similar character challenges linked to the high visibility secular shaped profile of this company.

**Figure 13**

*Participant Demographic Data*

	Co1	Co2	Co3	Co4	Co5	Co6	Co7	Co8	Co9	Co10
<b>Age</b>	60s	70s	70s	60s	70s	60s	50s	40s	60s	30s
<b>Years as CBL (and BL)</b>	30	35	40	37	50	35	28	9	30	3
<b>Secular or Christian Org</b>	Sec G	Chr	Chr	Sec G	Chr	Chr	Chr	Sec G	Chr	Chr
<b>Home State</b>	CO	TX	MD	NM	CO	ID	VA	VA	TX	MD
<b>Male or Female</b>	M	M	MD	M	M	M	F	F	M	M

	Cu10	Cu9	Cu8	Cu7	Cu6	Cu5	Cu4	Cu3	Cu2	Cu1
<b>Age</b>	60s	60s	60s	50s	50s	40s	50s	60s	50s	60s
<b>Years as CBL (and BL)</b>	32	28	36	30	14	20	15	30	25	30
<b>Secular or Christian Org</b>	Sec	Sec G	Chr	Sec T	Sec	Sec T	Chr	Sec G	Sec	Sec
<b>Home State</b>	VA	TX	VA	VA	VA	FL	TN	VA	FL	NC
<b>Male or Female</b>	M	M	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	M

	Co11	Co12	Co13	Co14	Co15
<b>Age</b>	60s	60s	40s	50s	40s
<b>Years as CBL (and BL)</b>	34	35	16	40	10
<b>Secular or Christian Org</b>	Sec	Chr	Sec	Sec G	Sec G
<b>Home State</b>	VA	TX	SD	VA	VA
<b>Male or Female</b>	M	M	M	M	M

**25 Participants - Ten Home States – 21 Men and 4 Women – Average CBL Experience = 27.7 years  
10 in Christian Orgs. and 15 in Secular Orgs. (7 in Secular Government, 2 in Secular High Tech)**

**Christian Business Leader Character Challenges and Categorization.** Every participant had several opportunities to discuss character challenges they faced in the secularized workplaces in the form of expectation management (question 3), hybrid persona management (question 4), sensing pressure to keep their Christian identity to themselves (question 5), being asked to participate in a conscience troubling activity (question 6), challenges regarding legal interpretation of rights for LGBTQIA or other sexual orientation / gender identity issues (question 7), or challenges to their application of biblical principles in the workplace (questions 8 and 9). All the participants discussed several character challenges they face in the secularized workplace. On several occasions a leader would talk about a particularly sizable challenge as a part of their responses to multiple questions.

Figure 14 lists a brief description of the primary character challenge each participant raised and offers the theme categories in which the challenge fits. Most of the challenges listed have multiple facets which commonly made them a character challenge in multiple categories. For example, Co12 expresses beliefs that categorize him as a middle group convictional Christian business leader. He worked in public service roles for over 30 years while volunteering to lead a modernization campaign in his local church. The modernization campaign was so successful it has become a model for modernization within the Catholic church. His work leading the initiative has been noticed at the national level and is now a case study example actively being researched at a Catholic University of national status. The participant's role was so sizable that he has created his own Christian non-profit business to advise other church organizations on how they could modernize their facilities in a similar manner. He strongly believes the digital age is robbing people of authentic relationships and is equally convinced the church should be the place to provide these relationships.

The proximity of his home church to a sizable University is shaping the manner in which he thinks this authentic relationship goal should be shaped. His Christian character challenges thus include his moral imperative resolution on moral truth being constant or changing, his moral imperative resolution on his identity being primarily in self or in Christ, and his faith taking the shape of a "civil" faith or an integrated faith. All these complex character challenges are ongoing in real time as he is in high demand to replicate the initial success in 30 other churches stretching across multiple faiths which stereotypically fall in both cultural Christian and convictional Christian categories. Each participant's brief synopsis has at a minimum this level of granularity associated with it.

Five participants did not identify any sizable character challenges but instead portrayed a sense of that their primary challenge was well in hand as long as they continue in their current path. Four of the five either run or work in Christian organizations and are relieved not to be facing the secular workplace challenges they see outside of their organizations. One of the five works in a secular organization and believes his seniority and position provide a level of protection around him. He remains proactively engaged not to generate his own problems but is also comfortably confident he is not confronting any sizable secular problems at this time in his workplace.

One glance at Figure 14 communicates Christian business leaders are facing character challenges in the secularized digital age. It is worth noting that nine participants working closest to government linked agencies or in high visibility secular firms sensed an aggressive push of a secularized agenda for change which they perceived to be undermining and isolating the Christian business leader's ability to speak out without a threat of ramifications. More is written on these topics in the next section.

**Figure 14**

*Christian Business Leader Character Challenges and Categorization*

Code	Org Type	Christian Business Leader Character Challenge Example	Org	Moral	Identity	Faith
Co1	Sec G	Secular Govt accusations of misuse of position to proselytize subordinates - Exonerated after 2-year investigation	X		X	X
Co2	Chr	Asked to develop & deliver transgender policy for nation-wide Christian org	X	X	X	X
Co3	Chr	Discerning & applying biblical principles to deal with secular suppliers and subordinates who do not adhere to Chr. Stds		X	X	X
Co4	Sec G	Interface with digital age secularized students and Christian coaches facing adverse State NCAA Title IX policy next steps	X	X	X	X
Co5	Sec G	Formerly CBL in gov't run university--tasked to expand "faith" offerings as more students became nones.	X	X	X	X
Co6	Chr	Formerly CEO of family company bought out by secular investors...then asked to step aside due to his integrated faith	X		X	X
Co7	Chr	Surrounded by homogeneous group of Christians...biggest challenge is keeping all on true north			X	X
Co8	Sec G	Struggles w/ aggressive gov't workplace policies on LGBTQIA delivered with noncompliance ramification threats	X	X	X	X
Co9	Chr	CEO of multi-faceted farming & real estate corporation in TX--believes he is largely isolated from challenges			X	X
Co10	Chr	Appreciates his Christian boss and is challenged by stark difference when dealing with secular customers		X	X	X
Co11	Sec	Senior CBL in secular firm who believes his age and position provide him sufficient latitude to resolve issues			X	X
Co12	Chr	CBL who believes church should not judge but instead provide a welcoming place for authentic relationship for all		X	X	X
Co13	Sec	CEO of secular nat'l org--government grants are coming with secular policy demands and pressures to display support	X	X	X	X
Co14	Sec G	Struggles w/ aggressive gov't LGBTQIA policies...with noncompliance ramification threats while nearing retirement age	X	X	X	X
Co15	Sec G	Senior CBL role in State government...struggles with harsh political conflicts between CBL boss and secular legislature	X	X	X	X
Cu10	Sec	High profile lawyer who prayerfully recognizes daily conflict between absolute truth & USA's relative truth government	X	X	X	X
Cu9	Sec G	Self-described "born again" Christian who senses he cannot share his faith due to government policies in his workplace	X	X	X	X
Cu8	Chr	Appreciates his Christian boss...struggles with what he sees in the secular world and is glad he is not in the midst of it			X	X
Cu7	Sec T	Works for a Christian boss in a high profile secular big tech firm...previously directed to help a biological male transition	X	X	X	X
Cu6	Sec	Struggles with which biblical principles apply in workplace..."argues with God" about it...dislikes profit motive metrics	X	X	X	X
Cu5	Sec T	CBL working for high profile tech firm w/ aggressive secular policies in the workplace...struggles to discern guiding truth	X	X	X	X
Cu4	Chr	Likes Christian boss & organization...glad to get out of the higher pressure, lower morals, secular workplace				X
Cu3	Sec G	Struggles with government's aggressive policies but also is determining moral truth to guide his way ahead	X	X	X	X
Cu2	Sec	Secular org CEO...parent org directed he embrace LGBTQIA...concerned...but worried he may get fired if he speaks out	X	X	X	X
Cu1	Sec	A Jonah like personality...angry with God...frustrated with shift to secularism & struggles how to deal w/ it	X	X	X	X



**Christian Business Leader Common Character Challenges.** Although they had their differences, the majority of cultural and convictional Christians did find three areas upon which they had agreement. When answering question four about hybrid personas, almost all participants commented upon the leadership challenges of handling digital age devices. They concluded digital age devices actually inhibit personal human interaction and relationship building and make it more difficult to be present, focused in the moment, and fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. Despite the efficiencies digital age devices are supposed to produce, most concluded efforts to communicate through digital age devices alone often led to misunderstandings or incomplete understanding of a challenge at hand. Most felt complex problems could only be addressed appropriately through face-to-face meetings. Co1 quoted one of his former bosses who commonly said: “leadership is an analog skill needed in the digital age.” Another participant complained about his bosses expectations for responsiveness through digital age devices undermined his abilities to interface with those he supervises. Another participant actively resisted sending electronic messages when a face-to-face meeting is more appropriate to ensure effective communication.

Christian business leaders faced character challenges in both secular and Christian owned organizations; however, the most sizable and severe character challenges noted occurred in secular owned organizations. The most serious challenge faced in a Christian organization was when the Christian CEO discovered a subordinate was violating Christian and legal principles in the execution of his role. This could have grown into a far worst challenge had the Christian CEO not provided timely action to resolve it. However, this did not compare in severity to the Christian business leader who underwent severe scrutiny and national level criticism for charges he had abused his position of authority to proselytize subordinates in a secular government run

institution. The accusations provided a negative portrayal of him in national media with no corrections to the story when the accusations were proven false 2 years after they had been levied. Participants in secular organizations shared concern about being fired, silenced, or otherwise ostracized if they did not adjust their practice of faith.

A third commonality among the majority of Christian business leaders was the value of applying biblical principles to help their employees continue to grow and succeed. Although not mentioned by name, the majority of participants shared a perspective regarding the favorability of servant leadership principles in the workplace (Bragger et al., 2021). These commonalities, as well as the bookend distinctiveness, are addressed in greater detail in the next section.

### ***Relationship of the Results***

The field study confirmed today's Christian business leaders do face a dauntingly complex transformational leadership challenge in their respective digital age secularized workplaces (Bingaman, 2020; Brubaker, 2020; McClure, 2020). The research showed how some convictional Christian business leaders worked through their workplace challenges with a biblical worldview while also displaying how cultural Christian business leaders choose moral foundations shaped to better fit the cultural trends of the day. Field research confirmed today's leaders sense a pressure to exercise digital age agility to meet the accelerated pace of the digital age 3-Ds even when it detracts from their personal interactions. The majority argued the digital age is actually inhibiting personal human interaction but were unsure how to address this challenge due to the metrics driving the pace of the workplace.

All participants voiced some concern for the shaping of their virtual presence knowing this composite hybrid identity was highly scrutinized by both secular and Christian superiors, subordinates, and society (Ecklund et al., 2020; Granic et al., 2020; Leonardi & Treem, 2020,

Skitka et al., 2021). Convictional and cultural Christian business leaders each sought their own selective blend of biblical and secular worldviews to tackle workplace challenges knowing their decisions would be met by a majority view founded upon secularized research, and a minority view of research advocating for integrated faith resolutions (Dick, 2021; Ecklund et al., 2020; Furse, 2022; McCorkle & Rodriguez, 2021; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2023; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020; Upenieks, 2022; Walker & Vegter, 2023).

A biblical worldview posits the heart of their character challenges reside in the heart of their identity and the field study did reveal the linkages between Christian identity, conviction, action, and character maturation by following the research questions assessments of each participant's individual, group, and organizational level shaping factors (NKJV, 1982, 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Psalm 139:23-24; Reyes et al., 2021; Skitka et al., 2021; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020). The data analysis was founded on the stated beliefs of bookend cultural Christian business leaders as compared to convictional Christian business leaders. These two bookends formed the multiple case study which compared and contrasted these different belief systems and how they played out as belief connected to behavior.

**Field Study Addressed Each Research Question.** The field study was executed in accordance with the methodological plan approved by the IRB. The results fully addressed each of the research questions. The following paragraphs provide more details on how each question was addressed.

**Research Question One.** The first research question asked: Why do Christian business leaders have an insufficient understanding of the character challenges in the secularized digital age? The subset questions explored linkages to Christian identity and how the character challenges differed between Christian owned versus secular owned businesses. The field study

showed all the participants faced Christian character challenges of some type as a product of the secularism they saw in or associated with their workplace. This was true in both Christian and secular owned business; albeit with some distinctions in the type of character challenges faced in the different cultures. Figure 14 documents these challenges but does not suggest they are the product of the distinction between a secular worldview and a biblical worldview (Trentham, 2019a). It is in this worldview aspect the field study addressed research question one's focus upon an insufficient understanding.

Cu10, a high-profile lawyer who works closely with government agencies, recognized at least some portions of the Bible as representative of “absolute truth” but also acknowledged the American government as being based upon “relative truth.” In stating this he acknowledged a deviation from absolute truth but acknowledged it as part of the cultural shift in America. All the participants in Christian leadership positions which interfaced with government agencies voiced objections to the aggressiveness with which the government is pushing its secular agenda upon others. Yet most felt there was little to nothing they could do about this except leave their leadership role and the job. All did see character challenges, but many perceived them as the shift in culture and none portrayed them as this clash in worldviews.

The field research showed a sizable distinction between the convictional Christian business leaders who primarily saw their identity in Christ. This was distinct from the cultural Christian business leaders who primarily saw their identity in self with Christ added. This distinction was reflected in great similarity to the Jensen (2023) study which revealed a cultural Christian focus as primarily upon this world while the convictional Christian as primarily focused upon eternity, albeit with the recognition of a calling or duty to serve in this time and place. The distinction among self-identified Christians reflects an unaddressed gray zone in the

binary choices made in Trentham (2019a). He suggested the inverse relationship and divergence between secular and biblical worldviews are best recognized by the biblical worldview end in an eternal city of God while the secular end envisions a worldly city apart from God. This distinction in focus was portrayed by convictional Christian business leaders but was not readily apparent among cultural Christian business leaders.

The gray zone distinction between what the field study showed, and the binary worldview description of Trentham (2019a) was also made evident in Jensen (2023) and Launonen (2022). Most cultural Christians reflected more of the Jensen (2023) focus upon this world with little thought about the Trentham (2019a) eternal city. In contrast, most of the convictional Christian business leaders kept in mind the eternal city and strove to live in a Christlike manner with this eternal perspective while leading in this world. Trentham (2019a) says the disparate worldview ends create a natural divergence in values, convictions, purposes, and, at times, the ways to resolve challenges thus creating sizable identity challenges in and choices for Christian business leaders (Ficek, 2021; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). These thoughts were validated amongst the convictional Christian business leaders but not as readily apparent in the cultural Christian business leaders.

Regarding both worldviews, Trentham (2019a, 2019b) concluded common grace provided by God, creates common principles but rarely common conclusions or common approaches toward resolution and this was evident in the field study when reviewing the distinctions in belief and behavior between cultural Christian business leaders and convictional Christian business leaders (NKJV, 1982, John 1:9-12; Romans 1:25; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b). The cultural Christian business leaders were in no way secular in their thinking but were nevertheless distinct from the convictional Christian business leaders. The fact that Cu1 is “angry

with God” or that Cu6 routinely “argues with God” and that both choose not to read the Bible show the character challenge not evident in the Trentham (2019a) binary choice yet nevertheless of Christian character maturation. All of this reflects a deepening of understanding which addresses research question one and its linkages to research question two.

**Research Question Two.** This question asked: how is an individual’s Christian character challenged by the digital age secularized culture? Figure 14 provides the tip of the iceberg look into the participant contributions and clearly display an answer to research question two. Skitka et al. (2021) showed how any individual’s core convictions are a part of the moral imperative category within their belief system. The field research showed participants were being challenged at this moral truth level. Character maturation includes challenges which sequentially refine or reshape moral awareness, moral recognition, moral amplification, to eventually produce moral convictions upon which one typically grounds a choice to act or direct action (Skitka et al., 2021). Digital age research reveals how much of this development had been altered by the digital age (Brubaker, 2020; Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Skitka et al., 2021). The participants in this multiple case study fell into two categories with the cultural Christian business leaders generally concluding moral truth changes across time and culture while the convictional Christian business leaders generally concluding moral truth remains constant and is declared in the Bible. The behavior stemming from these differing beliefs reflected Trentham’s (2019a) common grace brings common principles but rarely common conclusions or common approaches to resolution.

Brubaker (2020) discussed the near-term digital age future which embraces and expands access to artificial intelligence as an era in which life online creates a hyperconnectivity that creates a hypersaturation which necessitates the use of artificial intelligence to filter and manage one’s hyperconnected and hypersaturated self. Co5 commented on this secularized future by

saying when all information is simplified down to these series of binary choices, crafted by secularized artificial thinking, there will be even less respect or reverence for the authority of God or of God's word in an individual's life. These forecasts of trendlines align with the Bingaman (2020, 2023) concerns about the existential threat to human spirituality presented by the digital age and the irreversible nature of the digital age reliance being built into today's society. The field research addressing research question two also amplified the insufficient understanding aspect of research question one and both link to research question three.

**Research Question Three.** The third research question asks: how is the business environment impacted by digital age secularized culture? The subset questions addressed how this impact might be different in a secular owned business as compared to a Christian owned business. The field research was reflective of legal precedent which affords Christian business owners their Constitutional rights and legal protections to run their own businesses consistently with their core beliefs, and that these rights do not readily extend to Christian business leaders working in businesses owned by secular minded individuals (Dick, 2021, Murray, 2019b; Perry, Schnabel, & Grubbs, 2021). The Figure 14 summary showed the character challenges encountered in Christian business organizations were noticeably different than those in a secular organization.

This is perhaps made most evident in that Liberty University approved the field study into Christian business leader character challenges in the secularized digital age when such research would most likely be far more challenged or denied in a secular university. A privately owned Christian organization has this legal latitude. Co6 lived out this principle by praising God for the success of his family business. However, when he chose to allow an investment group to

blend his Christian family business into a secular conglomerate, he was asked to step aside due to the manner in which his integrated faith was consistently on display.

This was also evident when Cu2, Cu3, Co15, Co14, Co13, Co8 and Co1 who all objected to the heavy hand the U.S. government has in aggressively pushing a secular agenda on all businesses who are, in any manner, associated with government contracts or grants. Cu2 said he “hates it...but may be fired if I speak out.” Cu5 made similar comments about his secular high-tech firm and their secularistic workplace agenda. Christians do have both public and private legal rights to practice integrated faith; however, the extent to which these rights can be practiced in the workplace are shaped by the type of workplace and their role within it (Dick, 2021; Murray, 2023; Nelson, 2019).

The field research revealed many of these Christian business leaders working in secular companies find they must comply or face remedial training for their display of insensitivity (Co14), discipline for creating hostility in the workplace (Co8), or worse (Cu2, Co1). The field study showed legal limitations do impact the choices of action available to a Christian business leader and force them to consider the significance of the moral imperative choice before them, the potential choice between their way of life to provide and the integrated faith display of their character convictions, and perhaps even a concern that they may be undesirably slipping into “civil” faith (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019; Murray, 2023; Nelson, 2019). The depth of the character challenge was clearly evident as participants talked about the difficulties of these choices. Co1 endured nearly 2 years of negative social media and criticism that at times was at the national level, while he patiently waited for an investigation to play out and finally exonerate him of all charges.



**The Conceptual Framework.** The field study addressed all the elements of the conceptual framework at least in part. Given the field study was nothing more than a snapshot of the lives of the 25 participants, the full story cannot be known unless further follow-up research is conducted at some point in the future.

**Concepts.** The data collected and analyzed from the field study showed the two concepts as accurate descriptions as individual cases in this multiple case study. Convictional Christian business leader participants described their identities as being one with Christ and by in large had behavior evidencing the stated belief. They all acknowledged Christ as their Lord and voiced a sense of duty or service to honor that authoritative relationship. They all acknowledged the importance of the Bible to guide their lives. The majority also acknowledged Christ as their Savior and discussed the added sense of gratitude for this sacrificial act as well as God's grace in extending salvation to them. These core convictions, or what Skitka et al. (2021) call moral imperatives, were directly linked to their behavior in tackling character challenges they confronted in the secularized workplace. This belief-behavior connection was reflective of a great deal of literature review about convictional Christians which, through this field study, can be extended to convictional Christian business leaders (Brautigam, 2019; Ecklund et al., 2020; Ficek, 2021; Lohrmann, 2021; McDade, 2019; Paulus et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020)

The cultural Christian business leaders did reflect a distinctively different set of beliefs from the convictional Christian business leaders. None of the cultural Christians acknowledged Christ as Savior or Lord and only two mentioned appreciation for the grace of God. When taken in their entirety, the interviews suggested these were not just missing words but something more. By not seeing Christ as Savior, most cultural Christians do not express any appreciation for the sacrifice and suffering of Christ. When not seeing Christ as Lord, most cultural Christians do not

recognize Christ as an authority in their lives nor do they see the Bible as authoritative in their lives. Instead, many cultural Christians see the Bible as a truth among many sources of truth and Christ as a good example among other examples of goodness and kindness. Their distinction in beliefs became evident in their distinctions in behavior as they handled character challenges in their secularized workplaces. The snapshot into their lives did not inform the degree to which the culture is impacting their proclaimed Christian faith. Additional follow-up research would be needed to determine the direction of their character maturation (Barwegen, 2019; Culton, 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Setran, 2020; Soukup & Glader, 2020; Starr et al., 2019; Stetzer & MacDonald, 2020).

**Servant Leadership Theory.** Although not cited by name by any of the participants, the principles of servant leadership theory were cited by most of the participants. A common thought shared by almost all of the participants was that a Christian business leader should definitely reflect their Christian beliefs in the way they lead and care for those that work for them and around them. Cu6 said many disagreements in society are the product of us judging one another too much and that every business leader should “just love and reinforce (any individual) that they are wonderfully made by Him.” Co2 expanded a bit on this thought by saying,

my accountability to God is to love my employees...not with the sentimental emotional kind of love, but in the sense that I would lead them in ways that would give them opportunity to grow and to develop and to become the people that God intends them to be.

Almost all participants suggested ample biblical principle to care for employees and help them grow along the principles within servant leadership theory (Bragger et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020).

**Christian Business Leaders Actor.** The field study provided rich insights into the challenges this actor faces in today's secularized workplace. This qualitative research adds significant depth to quantitative work based purely upon survey data. The snapshot portrayal of the participants revealed where each stood on the day of the interview and not the trendline on how their character is maturing in the secularized digital age. The Christian business leaders did fall neatly into the two concept groups as anticipated. However, their beliefs which motivated their behavior were beyond the binary discussion in Trentham (2019a). They clearly self-identified as Christian but not as clearly as people focused upon and eternal city nor carrying this eternal perspective into their workplace.

**Secularized Digital Age Influencers Actor.** The field study showed this actor to be an unnamed secular senior leader setting policy in a company and directing the implementation in such a way that the Christian business leader participants see little room to maneuver and stay employed (Cu2, Cu5). This actor was also seen in the form of the government cited to be aggressively pushing a secular agenda in a manner which left Christian business leader participants little choice in the workplace (Cu3, Cu9, Co8, Co14, Co15). This actor reflects the deistic or humanistic values some of the cultural Christian business leaders reflected in their interviews (Beane & Viswesvaran, 2019; Bingaman, 2020, 2023; Cortina et al., 2019; Dick, 2021; Furse, 2022; Miller, 2021; Murray, 2019a, 2019b, 2023; Trentham, 2019a; Upenieks, 2022). The cultural Christian business leaders clearly saw God as more than a concept but they also clearly saw God as somewhat less attached to the world because of the difficulties they perceived in knowing and doing His will, in part because they discredited the Bible and choose not to read it regularly (Barwegen, 2019; Beltramini, 2019; Ficek, 2021).

**Christian Owned Business Actor.** The field study did reflect Christians who leverage their first amendment and other legal rights to run their organizations in a God-honoring fashion (Nelson, 2019). The actor was slightly expanded in the field study to also include Christian business leaders serving as supervisors to the Christian business leader participant. Some participants complimented their Christian supervisor as providing them a welcoming environment even in a secular organization (Cu4, Cu7, Co10).

**Challenged Christian Identities Construct.** This construct was proven beyond what was anticipated in the field study. Figure 14 reflected all participants saw character challenges in the secularized digital age (Ecklund et al., 2020; McGhee, 2019). While some participants in Christian organizations sensed lesser challenges than those in secular organization, all Christian business leaders identified character challenges as they interfaced with the secularized digital age within or without the organization where they worked. Some felt challenged in whether moral truth is changing or constant (Cu3, Cu5, Co12) while others struggled with their identity in self instead of in Christ (Co11, Cu10). Co9 said he felt by in large isolated in his line of farming work and real estate in a conservative corner of Texas yet still acknowledged that his society is not immune to the digital age secularism creeping into even their culture. Co9 said:

the digital age dilutes one's faith...it also distracts...in the digital age we have all this information flowing into our heads...a result is your mind can become diluted...and our identity alignment can then diverge from the biblical plumb line...then after days, weeks, months...it leads to discouragement.

When the researcher commented on his 4-Ds (i.e., the digital age dilutes, distracts, diverges, and discourages), Co9 commented on the importance of scripture memory and said, "if you are not rooted, you are diluted. Be rooted...not diluted!"

**Unchallenged Christian Identities Construct.** This construct was not seen in the field study. The researcher anticipated some cultural Christian business leaders who would sense no challenges with today's shift toward secularism. This was not the case. All Christian business leader participants sensed character challenges. This could be the result of the purposeful and snowball sampling producing the 25 participants. While the beliefs of these self-identified Christians were broader than anticipated, all described some relationship with or belief in Christ Jesus. There were not any nominal Christians in this field study. At a minimum, some of the cultural Christian business leaders had character challenges resulting from convictional Christians they thought was too judgmental (Cu6).

**Anticipated Themes.** The overarching anticipated theme that Christian business leaders are facing sizable character challenges in the secularized digital age was proven true in the field study and displayed in Figure 14. One anticipated character challenge subset related to the 'insufficient understanding' aspect of a secular worldview and a biblical worldview. None of the participants raised the worldview topic yet several struggled to understand why the secular shift has been so sudden and so aggressively pushed. These field study results are indicative of an "insufficient understanding" of the Trentham (2019a) binary discussion regarding worldviews and the tension and constant struggle between a person envisioning an eternal city with God vice a worldly city apart from God. The fact that none of the participants raised the conversation to this level is symptomatic that they have not thought about the size of this secular v. biblical worldview challenge.

Three other anticipated character challenge themes revolved around the character challenge of having certainty about how to employ Christlike love without appearing to judge anyone nor slip into the practice of "civil" faith in which you just fail to lovingly confront. The

uncertainty about the prioritization of or applicability of biblical principles to the character challenges in the secularized workplace was symptomatic of this theme. Cu7, a woman serving in a senior human resources role, was asked by her company to help a biological male complete a gender transition. The Christian business leader completed the assignment but said, in reply to question 6, it troubled her conscience. She said, “I did a good job from a company standpoint.” Cu7 said she struggles with the entire pride movement and especially the celebration of pride month. She struggles with the abortion debate. She said:

Abortion is another topic I steer clear of because I think to say that I am pro-life...which is not a popular opinion...and...as a Christian...female...business leader...there are even more expectations about the pressure. Some may say...what then...you’re not advocating for women. So, yes all those diversity topics...being a Christian...puts a whole different twist on them.

Cu7 was among those that said she did not read the Bible regularly. To get informed she said: “I don’t devote a ton of time reading the Bible so reading other’s perspectives helps me form my thoughts and interpretations on various topics...but from a principality standpoint...the Bible is at the core of my decision.”

Cu1, Cu2, Cu3, Cu4, and Cu5 voiced similar thoughts about biblical principles blended with uncertainties about which to follow and as a result choose not to practice any regular reading of the Bible. Cu6 said she reads the Bible regularly but in actuality reads a handwritten manuscript of the “just the words of Jesus” which she thought most helpful. All these were field study indications of the uncertainties these cultural Christian business leaders had about character challenges they faced in the workplace and the usefulness of the Bible to help guide them.

**Unanticipated Themes.** Before the field study the researcher anticipated finding cultural Christian business leaders who were comfortable with the shift to secularism. The anticipated cultural Christian business leader was going to be more nominal in their definition of Christian. The Trentham (2019a) binary discussion of biblical worldview or secular worldview did not open the imagination to a set of Christian business leaders who believe in Jesus but see Him more as a good role model rather than as the Savior, the Lord, or even as the Christ. It was an unanticipated theme to find a group of cultural Christian business leaders who seem sincerely motivated to know Jesus more but struggle to believe in Jesus the Christ, nor personalize the significance of Jesus the Savior in reverence and gratefulness for His death and resurrection. It was an unanticipated theme to find cultural Christian business leaders who acknowledge Jesus but not as Lord Jesus and have little respect for the Bible and the Word become flesh and dwelling among us (NKJV, 1982, John 1:14). It was an unanticipated theme to find this bookend group that are choosing not to abandon Jesus but seem to think their best Christian leadership in today's culture is to shift more toward the secularism in which they find themselves.

**Missing Themes.** A missing theme is how to help the Christian business leaders in the middle which appear to be a Christian business leader version of the Ecklund et al. (2020) research. For the most part, the convictional Christian business leaders rely upon the Bible for wisdom and most look to that source and other Christian leaders to resolve character challenges they encounter in the workplace. However, most of the cultural Christian business leaders, and those in the middle with mixed beliefs, voice concerns but do not trust the Bible to resolve their character challenges in the secularized workplace. A missing theme may be an effort to help these Christian business leaders which would start with recognizing they exist then trying to help them through their choices.

While Trentham's (2019a) binary choice on worldviews is accurate, the granularity of a biblical worldview is what was actually unanticipated and fully encountered in the field study. When this was combined with the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) depiction of digital age polling data which showed virtually no one in the middle, the researcher anticipated cultural Christian business leaders who acted more as nominal Christians and fit into the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) polar opposite to the convictional Christian business leader. The field study revealed a group of cultural Christian business leaders who appear to be the unrecognized people in the middle.

When one participant viewed the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) U-shaped curve which depicted convictional Christians on the far right and the nominal Christians and secular worldview thinkers on the far left, they asked do you actually think the curve is shaped like this...or...do you think the actual shape is a bell curve? This thought blended in a commonality among most of the field study participants mentioned earlier. Most field study participants believe digital age devices actually inhibit personal human interaction and relationship building. Most recognize this inhibits their ability to lead and few of them have any conclusions about how to fix it. This recognition highlighted the digital age challenge of shallowness in relationships due to the hyperconnected always online personalities who do not recognize what the digital age devices are doing to their interactions with others. The shallowness in communications can lead to labeling which can lead to U-shaped charts depicting no one in the middle.

Ecklund et al. (2020) did talk about these Christians struggling with their secularized workplaces and highlights how they need help from their churches to tackle the challenges they face. The field study reveals this challenge is not just among the workers but also among the Christian business leaders. Ecklund et al. (2020) also showed how those who were more



convictional Christian in their actions (e.g., attended church more regularly, read their Bible more frequently) also found many of their workplace challenges were resolved through their Christian faith. The field study showed a group of convictional Christian business leaders who fit this category as well. So, perhaps, the Ecklund et al. (2020) described the people in the middle, but the researcher did not anticipate seeing Ecklund et al. (2020) play out so completely amidst the cultural Christian and convictional Christian business leaders.

**The Literature.** The analysis for triangulation section highlighted how the field study exemplified data and methodological triangulation with the sources leveraged in the Chapter 2 literature review. The most pertinent similarities and differences included the following literature.

This study reflected data convergent triangulation with the Ecklund et al. (2020) research by documenting the Christian character challenges faced in the secularized digital age workplace exists among Christian business leaders. It also aligns with their findings that the more the Christian practices their faith, through regular attendance of church and studying their Bible, the more they will be able to address these secularized workplace challenges. This was evident among the convictional Christian business leaders. However, this study also diverged from Ecklund et al. (2020) by seeking to understand what the Christian leader is personally doing to resolve these challenges rather than asking their church to do.

This study produced extensive qualitative data which converges and complements McClure (2020) and Stetzer and MacDonald (2020), thus reflecting methodological convergent and methodological complementary results. However, it diverged from Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) by highlighting a group of Christians apparently in the middle. Perhaps the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) quantitative data groups these cultural Christian business leaders in with

convictional Christian business leaders. This field study provided some bottoms up details to add granularity to the top-down quantitative viewpoint, across 50 years, provided by Stetzer and MacDonald (2020).

Reyes et al. (2021) identified two factors as prevalent in the deconversion rationale as anti-homosexual attitude within the church and a slightly broader sense that the church is out of touch with society. While several cultural Christian business leader participants echoed some of this sentiment, the snapshot of their perspectives in this field study is insufficient to tell if there is any alignment with Reyes et al. (2021) or Starr et al.'s (2019) research efforts. This could only be assessed through some follow-up research with the same participants at a later date and a deeper understanding of the qualitative studies completed by Reyes et al. (2021) and Starr et al. (2019).

Data collection and analysis also provided methodological complementary triangulation with McDade's (2019) research which shows a gradual shifting away from integrated faith toward a form of civil faith and aligning with his research of European trends toward civil religion over the past several decades. This snapshot field study cannot show trends or gradual shifting, but it did show the practice of "civil" faith among the participants.

Data convergent and complementary triangulation was displayed with several researchers as many participants acknowledged the initial emancipating effects of digital age devices are actually becoming enslaving and that digital age devices demanded more time which took away from their abilities to perform other leadership responsibilities (Bingaman, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019). Many Christian business leaders commented on the intentionality required to conduct important and difficult conversations with employees in person in a proactive effort to avoid the miscommunications they see happening daily as a product of

misread individual texts, group chats, emails, and a lack of personal interface due to the pace of the workplace (Bingaman, 2023; Brubaker, 2020; Paulus et al., 2019).

This research provided complementary data triangulation with the biblical v. secular worldview perspective approach in Trentham (2019a, 2019b). The field study showed participants who self-identified as Christians and stated a belief in the Bible but did not fully embrace the biblical worldview Trentham (2019a) suggested in his binary worldview description. In a similar manner it identified a middle group not acknowledged by the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) documentation of the secularized digital age.

**The Problem.** The problem addressed in this research is insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. The field research addressed all aspects of this problem statement, and the research questions aligned with it. The field study confirmed American Christian business leaders are challenged to address the character challenges they face in the secularized digital age workplace (Ecklund et al., 2020). Many of the participants felt insufficiently equipped to handle the secularized workplace challenges especially when being aggressively pushed upon them by their secular corporation or government officials. Some Christian business leaders were practicing “civil” faith in an effort to avoid the consequences they anticipated if they spoke up about their concerns.

### ***Summary of the Results***

This analysis of data included all interviews, follow-up interviews, group sessions, journal notes, and observations. This data were managed and organized in accordance with the methodological plan detailed in Chapter 3. The researcher turned every interview into a transcript which was member checked for accuracy in maintaining the participant’s original

intent. The researcher read all the transcripts multiple times in order to gather emergent ideas.

The constructs of cultural Christian business leaders and convictional Christian business leaders was validated by the beliefs of the participants as documented in the approved transcripts.

Coding was developed for both cases and the transcripts were again manually reviewed multiple times to annotate coding.

The coding was then reviewed for appropriate grouping to develop themes. This process was replicated with the NVivo qualitative software analysis tool as well. Throughout this process the researcher exerted extra care to ensure appropriate bracketing and reflexivity kept researcher thoughts separate from participant thoughts so as to provide appropriate evidentiary trails based upon participant inputs. The themes, documented by coding in the transcripts, produced initial interpretations and the aggregation of data evidence trails to either confirm the interpretations or reveal their shortfalls.

Data visualization was leveraged to help present complex concepts in a concise manner. Methodological and data triangulation served to provide further validation and add to the methodological rigor of the research. Convergent, complementary, and divergent triangulation was documented as a part of the summary. The methodological rigor of the planned research, approved by the IRB, was followed in execution, and ensures reliability, validity, and the ethical assurance throughout the research from data capture, through data organization, data management, and data analysis. The methodological rigor applied makes this research reliable, repeatable, construct valid, internally valid, and an externally valid research product. The product has created credible insights to fill a secularized digital age gap in understanding about Christian business leader character challenges and produces transferable findings of use to guide future research conducted in this field of query.

**Key Conclusions.** The individual identity of the Christian business leader in the secularized digital age workplace is being challenged at the heart level in a very public way. The central heart level internal debates impacting Christian business leader decision making include choices regarding: their individual perspective as either eternal with a recognition of their duty in time (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:10) or a world centered perspective (Jensen, 2023; Launonen, 2022; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b); a view of moral truth as either a constant (NKJV, 1982, John 1:14; John 14:6) or viewing moral truth as changing to fit the time and culture; their view on their individual identity either in Christ (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 1:21) or in self with Christ as an addition; and finally, how they choose to live out their proclaimed beliefs either in an integrated faith or a “civil” faith (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:9).

The struggles within each Christian business leader heart can best be addressed through authentic relationships; however, almost all the Christian business leader participants acknowledged that the digital age devices so ingrained in their lives actually inhibit personal human interaction and relationship building. They are busy people. Most recognize these digital age challenges inhibit their ability to lead in a Christlike manner but are unsure what to do about it. Finally, there are self-identified Christian business leaders who feel overcome by their secularized workplaces and need help. These in the middle who need help are the missing theme discovered in the field study.

#### **Summary of Chapter 4 and Transition**

Chapter 4 contains the data analysis of the completed field study. The analysis incorporated data gathered from all the researcher’s interfaces with the participants as well as journal notes, and observations. The researcher paid close attention to maintaining methodological rigor in the handling of all data from collection to conclusion per the IRB

approved procedures documented in Chapter 3. The data gathered were analyzed for emerging themes which were coded to create evidentiary trails of findings for both the cultural Christian business leader and convictional Christian business leader cases. The coding and evidentiary trails revealed book end groupings for both the strongly convictional Christian business leaders and the strongly cultural Christian business leaders. The coding and evidentiary trails also showed a relatively even spread of the remaining participants between these two bookend groupings. The NVivo qualitative software analysis tool augmented the researcher's innumerable reviews of the transcripts and journal notes. The researcher ensured appropriate attention was given to bracketing and reflexivity throughout the research effort. Data visualization was leveraged to ensure complex concepts were concisely communicated.

Methodological and data triangulation was evidenced throughout and created the data evidence trails needed to demonstrate the methodological rigor of the research. Convergent, complementary, and divergent triangulation was documented as a part of the summary and contributed to transferable themes and findings. Methodological rigor is the gold standard for reliability, validity, and the ethical assurance in the conduct of all research and is displayed throughout the research effort from data capture, through data organization, data management, and in the data analysis. This methodological rigor produced a reliable and repeatable, construct valid, internally valid, and externally valid research product. All methodological rigor applied in this research was documented in Chapter 4. These efforts worked together to create credible insights to fill a secularized digital age gap in understanding about Christian business leader character challenges and produce transferable findings of use for them and to guide future research conducted in this field of query.

Chapter 5 includes the research conclusions. It documents how the research product provides additions to the body of knowledge in the form of practical implications and theoretical implications. It provides recommendations for further study. It also includes the reflections of the researcher and an overall summary of the study including its conclusions.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

This chapter begins by listing the additions to the body of knowledge provided by this research effort. It describes how these additions provide both practical implications for business practice and theoretical implications informing business theory. It provides recommendations for further study. Finally, it concludes with the reflections of the researcher.

### **Additions to the Body of Knowledge**

This research provides evidentiary documentation of Christian business leader character challenges at a level of granularity previously unseen. It fills a gap in research while also offering some countering findings to a great deal of secular based research which inappropriately draws conclusions about Christians without considering the level of granularity this study offers. This study thus injects a biblical worldview-based perspective carrying both practical implications to improve general business practices and theoretical implications to improve business theory.

### ***Practical Implications***

A secular-minded researcher, with a secular worldview, might easily dismiss the value of this study; however, from a biblical worldview, the most practical implication is an awareness of the character challenges Christian business leaders are indeed facing in the secularized digital age workplace. These challenges are very real, very sizable, and can be successfully navigated. This research provides granular insights into these challenges which provides practical insights for all Christian business leaders. Furthermore, the research identifies the crux issues generating these challenges. These documented insights, with evidentiary trails, have practical implications for all they inform.



This study showed the relatively rapid onset of the secularized digital age has left many Christian business leaders less than prepared for the workplace challenges they face. The secular research which demeans Christian business leaders as out of date with today's culture can further intimidate or inhibit their ability to address their workplace challenges from a biblical worldview. This friction is readily evident in the character challenges they described in this study.

Although detailed more in a later section, it is valuable to note these struggles have many parallels to the exilic disciple efforts in the book of Nehemiah (NKJV, 1982). In just 52 days, a group of exilic Jews rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem while many secular opponents injected many obstacles into their paths (NKJV, 1982, Nehemiah 6:15). As those exilic disciples were affirmed in many practical ways by Nehemiah, these Christian business leaders need to grow in their awareness of these challenges that they might shore up their abilities to effectively serve even in the midst of them. What follows are more exilic disciple challenges accompanied by practical lessons gleaned from this research.

**Christian Business Leader Belief - Behavior Distinctions.** The pre-research literature review portrayed almost a U-shaped spread between convictional Christians and cultural Christians, but the research granularity showed the presence of many in the middle. Some may speculate the purposive sampling used to shape this multiple case study is reflective of a more granular look at what Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) call convictional Christians. However, the evidentiary trail from the participant transcripts does not support this thought. This study revealed a relatively even spread between the two bookends of distinctively different Christian business leaders accompanied by an equally even spread of those with mixed moral imperative

beliefs and behavior. In fact, this study may be more accurately defined as a more granular look at the Trentham (2019a) binary choice between biblical and secular worldviews.

From a practical implication standpoint, this research raises an awareness among all Christian business leaders by first documenting that Christian character challenges in the secularized digital age drill to the core of one's beliefs. Some Christian business leaders did not readily recognize indications of a shift from theism from deism evidenced in their behavior. Secondly, Christian business leaders are feeling isolated and seeking more informed assistance. When only secular research informs the business leader, the leader's perspective is drawn further from a biblical worldview. There is an evident absence of biblical worldview advice for these Christian business leaders. Thirdly, Christian character is far more complex than most secular based research acknowledges. This study makes this evident and can be further extended to better inform those who demean Christians through inappropriately drawing conclusions without considering the level of granularity this research provides. The evidentiary trails from transcripts to themes fall into these three categories.

**Theme 1: Moral Truth – Constant or Changing.** Convictional Christian business leaders generally believed moral truth remains constant across time and culture and can be found in the Bible; while the cultural Christian business leaders generally expressed the view that moral truth changes across time and culture and the Bible needs to be viewed with this lens. All Christian business leaders recognized the character challenges ushered into the workplace by digital age secularism; but in all cases their leadership behaviors in dealing with these challenges were directly linked to their beliefs and their beliefs hinged upon this first theme.

**Theme 2: Identity - in Self with Christ or in Christ.** As with theme one, theme two is a further behavioral extension of the beliefs each participant self-identified. The convictional

Christian business leader's belief in Christ and the Bible was typically expressed in a workplace mindset which reflected a gratefulness to God through service and a sense of duty due to the authority of God and the biblical guidance they believed He provides. The typical convictional Christian perceived their identity in Christ and maintained an eternal perspective on the challenges they faced in their workplace while striving to be faithful to their Lord and Savior in this time and place.

The cultural Christian business leaders voiced a belief in Christ, but this did not always translate into a similar sense of service or duty. Some cultural Christians did reflect a depth of commitment to Christ similar to a convictional Christian but without a similar confidence in the Bible as a pertinent guide for today's culture. These cultural Christians had a wider range of behaviors reflecting a similar range of beliefs. Some cultural Christian business leaders found Christianity to be an addition or modification to their self-identity. These typically displayed even less confidence in the Bible or agreement on which biblical principles applied in the secularized digital age workplace.

**Theme 3 – Integrated Faith or “Civil” Faith.** The third behavioral theme is an amplification of the first two. Each Christian business leader described a belief – behavior character which reflected either integrated faith or “civil” faith. The “civil” faith term is a reference to McDade's (2019) article regarding the continuing European trend of civil religion which is explicitly post-religious. In the digital age “the Church of Twitter and its sister communion in Facebook have powerful ways of shaming heretics who breach codes of civil religion” (McDade, 2019, p. 227). The McDade (2019) pressures are felt by all Christian business leaders. Convictional Christian business leaders voiced these concerns as they anticipated feedback they received for taking action founded upon Christian principles. The

cultural Christians raised McDade-like (2019) pressures as uncertainty about the applicability of biblical principles in the secularized workplace because they might be misunderstood, may cause trouble with secular superiors, or because they simply believed some biblical principles to be out of date with today's culture.

By simply considering these three themes, a Christian business leader can be better prepared to handle the character challenges they will face in their workplace. By reading Nehemiah or other biblical books about exilic disciples, the parallels in character challenges become even clearer still. Performance under pressure is always improved when preparedness has been practiced. This study informs Christian business leaders of the types of character challenges they will face in their secularized workplaces and that level of preparedness can enhance their performance.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

In the same way the practical implications have been drawn from the distinctiveness between the multiple cases, the theoretical implications can be drawn from the commonalities of almost all the participants which happened to solidify around aspects of servant leadership. The majority of the participants concluded three things: (1) some aspects of digital age devices undermine leadership, (2) some aspects of digital age workplaces inhibit relationship building, and (3) digital age devices typically generate more confusion than solutions when used to address more complex challenges. The majority of Christian business leaders agreed something needed to be done to address these challenges and some of them recognized how the principles of servant leadership could address all.

Consider how servant leadership addresses all of these challenges by focusing upon individuals and building relationships rather than focusing purely upon efficiencies gained

through digital age devices. Servant leaders are unique in recognizing and acknowledging individual followers for their unique talents and helping them apply these to the organization's purpose (Bragger et al., 2021). Servant leaders see themselves more as stewards who focus upon the personal development of their subordinates, rather than as a supervisor dictating performance metrics (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leaders recognize how their personal display of moral values encourages others to do the same (Bragger et al., 2021). Servant leaders recognize authentic relationships are nurtured through servant leadership principles applied in the workplace (Lee et al., 2020). Many of the Christian business leaders recognized these servant leadership principles, albeit not by the theory title, and advocated for them in the secularized workplace to overcome the digital age struggles they all collectively agreed upon.

**Some Aspects of Digital Age Devices Undermine Leadership.** Most of the participants commented upon the leadership challenges of handling digital age devices. They concluded the expectation for responsiveness to text messages, emails, group chats, and social media postings can actually undermine their ability to effectively lead. The time required to meet their hybrid persona responsiveness expectations could become so draining that it undermined the Christian leader's ability to truly attend to the people they were responsible to work with and supervise. Some, but not all, outlined how they set guidelines to establish protocol which managed response expectations. Without these proactive steps many recognized their communications with subordinates and peers suffered.

**Some Aspects of Digital Age Workplaces Inhibit Relationship Building.** Several participants stated that digital age devices actually inhibit personal human interaction and relationship building. These also noted that the systemic effect of this was increased difficulty to communicate effectively when more complex workplace issues arose. They commented that

digital age devices make it so easy to send messages to large groups that a leader is tempted to side towards efficiency in messaging rather than effectiveness in communicating. Some also noted a generational challenge to get digital natives off of their digital devices and into actual authentic relationship building.

**Digital Age Devices are Ineffective in Complex Challenges.** Despite the efficiencies digital age devices are supposed to produce, most concluded efforts to communicate through digital age devices alone often led to misunderstandings or incomplete understanding of a challenge at hand. Several commented on the importance of reading body language and adjusting conversations based upon the feedback they were receiving even while speaking. Several noted the significant difference between messaging, teleconferencing, and in person meetings. When it came to leading through the larger challenges most concluded complex problems could only be addressed appropriately through in-person meetings. These also noted that attempts to send messages through other digital age devices often generated more confusion than benefit.

### ***Summary of Additions to the Body of Knowledge***

The research revealed there were no unchallenged Christian business leaders anywhere across the secularized digital age spectrum. The majority of these recognized how the digital age has altered Christian business leadership. The majority recognized the importance of applying Christian leadership principles in the secularized workplace. The disparities between the leaders lay in what Christian principles can be drawn from the Bible and which must be modified to fit today's culture. The disparities between the leaders were also reflected in the sources they leaned upon the most to resolve workplace character challenges. All these distinctions between the leaders were rooted in the beliefs in each business leader who self-identified as Christian. In all cases the beliefs of each leader were displayed in the behavior they chose to display in resolving

the challenges they saw in their respective secularized digital age workplaces. The results of this research contains practical implications to inform all Christian business leaders and theoretical implications regarding the importance of Servant Leadership in today's workplace.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This research can be furthered by deepening it and by broadening it. It can be deepened by simply following the same protocol but in greater volumes. It can be broadened by further exploring one or several distinctions it identified.

The study could be deepened by expanding the number of participants. Such an effort could take another purposive sampling of roughly an equal mix to see if: (a) the relatively smooth spread from cultural Christian business leaders to convictional Christian business leaders remains constant, (b) the three overarching themes of distinction are solidified or expanded, (c) the three commonality themes are solidified or expanded, and (d) to assess if there are any distinctions between the purposive sampling of those who personally knew the researcher as compared to those who are only familiar with the research but not the researcher.

The study could be broadened by considering different multiple case compositions and resulting comparisons. Instead of comparing and contrasting cultural and convictional Christians, a follow-on study could compare Christian business leaders working in government impacted organizations as compared to those less influenced by what many participants noted as the government's assertive push of the secularized agenda. This approach could also be modified to compare and contrast Christian business leaders working in companies who openly push a secularized agenda as compared to those who do not portray themselves in such a way.

**Reflections**

As a 68-year-old man, this researcher clearly sees 50 years of adult life experiences in the past; but also, with equal clarity, an eternity in the future. Some look to time to assemble their sense of purpose; a convictional Christian looks to eternity to discern their calling in time. This 3-year PhD effort, culminated in this research project, is a launching point for a God-ordained ministry with eternal significance empowered by God for this time and place. The God-given human choice is between prayerful participation or missed opportunity.

***Personal & Professional Growth.***

Fifty years of adult life incorporating experiences in 39 countries and living in 30 different homes can make for a full life, but this research effort has expanded it further. Fifty years of growth as a Christian, with the majority of it in a disciplined military environment; can create a blindside to the lives of Christians maturing in less disciplined and structured surroundings. This research effort has clearly revealed a long-suspected blindside.

Christian business leaders span a fairly sizable range of beliefs with an equitably sized range of behavior. All choose to display their belief – behavior in their workplace and chose to share a snapshot glimpse of these choices as participants. Some seemed convinced in their minds, and perhaps even in their hearts, that they were choosing properly. However, many, if not most, expressed a sense of questioning doubt about their choices accompanied by an uncertainty regarding how to derive a more assured direction.

John 14:16, 26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; and Hebrews 4:12-13 (NKJV, 1982) blend together to tell all Christian business leaders the Bible is filled with wisdom and the Spirit of God is ready to become a personal tutor to any who aspire to grow in discernment and mature in Christlikeness. Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV, 1982) communicates an equally powerful biblical



principle that God has a sovereignly designed plan for each Christian business leader in their respective time and place. The exilic disciple plan may not be as visible as Nehemiah's, but it carries the same God designed appropriate fit for the very disciple to whom it is given. Although this researcher has believed these principles for most of these past 50 years, many business leaders question many aspects of them yet continue to self-identify as Christians. As long as this remains their self-proclaimed name, then all fellow Christians should strive to encourage and strengthen each and every one of them (NKJV, 1982, Hebrews 10:24-25).

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV, 1982) is an often-quoted verse containing soothing words that inspire those aspiring to serve: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him." In context this verse is not about a loyal follower. In context this verse is about a follower of God falling into a sin of omission.

The context tells a story about a King in Judah who was known to have a heart loyal to God, yet in his latter days began to trust in himself and others rather than God. The rest of 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV, 1982) which is rarely quoted identifies this King's sin of omission when he trusted in the secular Syrian forces for protection instead of God: "In this you have done foolishly; therefore, from now on you shall have wars." By this point in the King's life, he should have known the importance of keeping his trust in the Lord. Yet, like many Christian business leaders, including the researcher, the temptation to rely upon one's own insights rather than Godly insights (NKJV, 1982, Proverbs 3:5-6) can be insidious in its inception and a rationalized blindside in action.

This PhD pursuit culminating in this research effort highlights the complexities within all Christian business leader lives. It highlights how these complexities are made worse in a

secularized digital age which casts doubt into so many of their hearts about the truthfulness of God and the biblical principles upon which a firm foundation is built. It also reveals how easily one can retreat to a worldly comfortable place and, in so choosing, miss an eternally significant opportunity.

### ***Biblical Perspective***

Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and many others, were examples of exilic disciples. Paul is a New Testament example of an exilic disciple. Some of the Christian business leaders cited the life of Daniel and Paul as instructional to their lives in this secularized digital age. These were true to their faith even when totally submerged in a foreign culture. Christian business leaders in the secularized digital age are called to do the same...to be exilic disciples.

The Bible does not explain the series of events by which King Cyrus became so impressed with the Jewish exiles that he extended an offer for any who were willing to return to Jerusalem and participate in a Babylonian funded rebuilding of the Temple. Something about the exilic Jewish disciples so impressed King Cyrus that he wanted them to rebuild “the house of the Lord God of Israel” and then have the Jewish exiles “offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons” (NKJV, 1982, Ezra 1:3; Ezra 6:10).

What exilic disciple would choose to stay in Babylonia rather than be freed to return to Israel and participate in a prophesied release from captivity (NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 29:10)? It was not the Jewish captives who blended into the Babylonian culture that so inspired this King Cyrus initiative. God worked in his faithful exilic disciples and the King’s heart to derive this plan (NKJV, 1982, Ezra 1:1,5). And so, the faithful exilic disciples chose to play a monumental role in God’s plan to restore Israel after 70 years of captivity (NKJV, 1982, Jeremiah 29:10-13)

while others chose to remain comfortably positioned in their secularized culture. Christian business leaders today have the same challenges and the same choices.

Many of the exilic disciples were highly respected business leaders in their secularized culture. They did not shy away from their faith but rather displayed how their effectiveness transcended culture. Nehemiah was a trusted cupbearer to the king before he transcended the secular culture and became the King's chosen pick to become the Governor of Jerusalem and the leader appointed by the King, and God, to rebuild the walls around the city (NKJV, 1982, Nehemiah 2). Nehemiah faced great opposition in his wall-building tasks from Sanballat and his secular supporters. Sanballat typified today's secularized culture by demeaning the exilic disciples and belittling their efforts to rebuild the wall (NKJV, 1982, Nehemiah 4). Nehemiah and his Old Testament group of Christian business leaders did not cower and retreat from their task; but rather they prayed and continued in their God-ordained work. When Sanballat raised the ante with lies, slanders, and threats of violence; Nehemiah and the other exilic disciples prayed, worked, and prepared for a fight should it come (NKJV, 1982, Nehemiah 5, 6). Christian business leaders have the same choices to retreat or to stay on their God-given task. Christian business leaders have the same choices to stop short because the cost is growing too large; or to trust in God's purpose, plan, and opportunity to participate in something of eternal value.

Ezra and Nehemiah are both tremendous examples of exilic disciples committed to study the "Law of the Lord" and to "practice it" and to "teach it" in the time and place God has ordained for each (NKJV, 1982, Ezra 7:10). Sometime after the 52 days it took to rebuild the walls, Ezra and Nehemiah gathered all the exilic disciples together and their worshipful ceremony concluded with a revival like oath "to walk in God's law...and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord" (NKJV, 1982, Nehemiah 10:29). Today's Christian business

leaders face character challenges in their secularized workplaces and they need the same level of discipline, commitment, and integrity to fulfill God's purposes in their individual time and place.

The individual identity of the Christian business leader in the secularized digital age workplace is being challenged at the heart level in a very public way and each must choose how they will respond to such character changing challenges. It is far easier to bend to and blend with the culture than to stand out as an exilic disciple; but our Lord is calling Christian business leaders to prayerfully discern the distinction and faithfully follow their calling as exilic Christians and as exilic Christian business leaders.

### ***Summary of Reflections***

The central heart level internal debates impacting Christian business leader decision making includes choices regarding: their individual perspective as either eternal with a recognition of their duty in time (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:10) or a world centered perspective (Jensen, 2023; Launonen, 2022; Trentham, 2019a, 2019b); a view of moral truth as either a constant (NKJV, 1982, John 1:14; John 14:6) or viewing moral truth as changing to fit the time and culture; their view on their individual identity either in Christ (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 1:21) or in self with Christ as an addition; and finally, how they choose to live out their proclaimed beliefs either in an integrated faith or a "civil" faith (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:9).

The struggles within each Christian business leader heart can best be addressed through authentic relationships starting with their personal relationship to Christ their Savior and Christ their Lord and then stretching out to include authentic relationships with those God has given them responsibility to lead. The examples of those exilic disciples who have gone before us, brought alive by the Spirit of God working in us, can equip every one of these Christian business

leaders to the fulfillment of their calling. The researcher's role in helping bring this about is yet to be fully revealed by God but will start with prayerful efforts to conduct further research and minister to others with the biblical worldview-based themes, findings, and lessons observed along the way.

### **Summary of Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 provides evidentiary documentation of Christian business leader character challenges at a level of granularity previously unseen. It fills a gap in research while also offering some countering findings to a great deal of secular based research which inappropriately draws conclusions about Christians without considering the level of granularity this study offers. It describes how this gap filling research provides both practical implications for business practice and theoretical implications informing business theory. The practical implications were assembled around the data evidentiary trails which displayed the distinctions between convictional Christian business leaders and the cultural Christian business leaders. The data generated evidentiary trails reflecting the commonalities among most all of the participants which formed a foundation of the findings carrying theoretical implications to improve business theory. The chapter provided recommendations for how this research can be both deepened and broadened through further study. It then concludes with the reflections from the researcher. The research clearly reveals the sizable breadth of Christian business leader character challenges (Figure 14). The research portrays an opportunity for each participant, and the researcher, to fulfill their God-ordained ministry in today's secularized culture by being empowered by God in their respective time and place. The God-given human choice for each is between prayerful participation or missed opportunity.

Christian business leaders span a sizable range of beliefs with an equitably sized range of behavior. All choose their own unique display of their belief– behavior in their workplace. Some seemed convinced in their minds, and perhaps even in their hearts, that they were choosing properly. However, many, if not most, expressed a sense of questioning doubt about their choices accompanied by an uncertainty regarding how to derive a more assured direction accompanied with an openness to gather more insights from this type of research effort.

Some of the Christian business leaders cited the value of studying the lives of Daniel, or Paul, or the other exilic disciples who were required to live out their faith in the midst of a secularized culture. Christian business leaders today have a similar exilic disciple responsibility in the secularized digital age. Their central heart level internal debate includes decision making choices regarding: one’s perspective as either eternal with a recognition of their duty in time (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:10) or a world centered perspective; a view of moral truth as either a constant (NKJV, 1982, John 1:14; John 14:6) or viewing moral truth as changing to fit the time and culture; their view on their individual identity either in Christ (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 1:21) or in self with Christ as an addition; and finally, how they choose to live out their proclaimed beliefs either in an integrated faith or a “civil” faith (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:9). The examples of those exilic disciples who have gone before us, brought alive by the Spirit of God working in us, can equip every one of these Christian business leaders, including the researcher, to the fulfillment of their individualized God-sized calling.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

This final section incorporates a summary of this dissertation effort as captured in the preceding five chapters. It also includes the researcher’s key conclusions drawn from the key results this research produced.

## Study Summary

Chapter 1 included an overview of the problem studied, summarized with brief answers to two questions: what the digital age has done *for* us, and what the digital age is doing *to* us. Concisely stated, the first answer is the transformational change to the entire business environment; and the second answer being the digital age alteration of individual character development and interaction cumulatively resulting in an American consensus shift to secularization. The digital age has transformed all aspects of the business environment including the financial markets which support it. It is the product of the 3Ds, digitization, digitalization, and datafication, all linked to the miniaturization of calculating power described by Moore's law. Virtually endless volumes of research continue to assist digital age business leaders leading their organizations through this transformational digital age shift; however, research is very sparse in describing what the digital age is doing *to* us and the business world workforce.

The digital age datafication of most economically developed world business includes the datafication of many aspects of human life and preferences. The resulting hybrid personal identity behavioral visibility has created an unparalleled opportunity for businesses to personalize outreach and products to precisely fit individual desires. Research into how this individualized level of attention to personal preferences is impacting people is only beginning, but most pertinent to this research effort is the American consensus shift from Christian to secular in 2018 that is linked to the 21st century access to the world wide web in America and the digital age personalization options and pluralism it delivered. More specifically, the problem addressed is the insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges American Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age. Understanding cultural shifts is a challenge for Christian business leaders just as it is for their secular counterparts. Theologically, these two

categories represent inversely related worldviews summarized as Christocentric biblical and anthropocentric secular. These worldviews share common principles exposed from common grace insights but produce sizably different moral imperatives due to the distinctions in their foundations with one worldview seeing the concept of god as nothing more than an individual choice while the Christocentric biblical worldview recognizes God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of all.

The biblical worldview perspective thus becomes essential if a deeper understanding of Christian business leader character challenges is to be grasped. The research questions explore individual, group, and organizational aspects of the character challenges this digital age worldview disparity generates. The questions uncovered character challenges, reflective of character maturation, as Christian leaders worked through workplace crises which demanded they choose between secular or Christian based moral imperatives and then direct action to resolve the workplace challenge amidst a very scrutinizing digital age public eye. The optimal approach to deepen understanding in this research gap is through this flexible design multiple case study with qualitative methods.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review beginning with a biblical worldview portraying Christian business leaders as biblical dual citizens with an eternal home in heaven and a God-ordained purpose on earth. They exist in a temporal home and country but are, to varying degrees, to be optimally guided to steward this life in accordance with eternal moral imperatives rather than temporal counterfeits. Christian business leaders, like all Christians, face Christian character maturation challenges as a part of life. However, any leader's challenges must be resolved in even more public ways due to their appointed roles in the secularized digital age. The



digital age behavioral visibility and the leader's hybrid identity can pose both a risk and opportunity for Christian testimony which must be wisely managed with maturity and integrity.

The rapid sociological shift to secularism has placed Christian business leaders in a minority position where their biblical worldview is questioned and even critiqued by the majority secular worldview superiors, subordinates, and even the public at large. Convictional Christian business leaders must recognize this critical view of their performance may be judged by others who see no distinction between a nominal Christian's actions and those of a convictional Christian. The Christian business leader needs to understand how beliefs mature into moral imperatives so they can understand their own character maturation challenges as well as have insight into the same challenges occurring within the workplace. These insights may help the Christian business leader address the challenges at hand in a more Christ-like fashion. Christian business leaders who seek to abide in biblical truth will find their identities matured more into a Christ-like identity.

Conversely, when a Christian business leader sense they have more in common with the secular culture than they do with the convictional Christian, they may want to pause to see which has moved away from the biblical principles they hold to be most pertinent moral imperatives in play. Christian business leaders may become more discerning of character maturation by understanding the domain theory of attitudes and more astute in resolving workplace challenges by putting actions into play through servant leadership principles. The chapter concluded with a summary of the anticipated themes drawn from the data collected and analysis performed with perhaps the most critical being a Christian business leader's prayerful conclusion and peace that the actions being taken to resolve challenges are the Spirit empowered actions for good rather than self-rationalized omissions or, even worse, substitutes promulgating or enabling evil.

Chapter 3 provided the methodological approach for this research. It started by reviewing the purpose of this flexible design multiple case study was to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today's secularized digital age. It included a review of the role of a qualitative researcher which demanded an extensive interface with participants and an extensive handling of the data collection. For all these reasons, the number one role of the researcher was to implement methodological rigor in all aspects of data collection, management, analysis, and reporting which included the appropriate treatment of participants throughout. Implementing methodological rigor ensured ethical conduct as a constant throughout the research. Methodological rigor also ensured reliable and valid research because it represents the gold standard for qualitative research.

An additional role for this research was the incorporation of a biblical worldview as well as the appropriate reflexivity and bracketing to ensure all participants saw only a researcher of integrity seeking to properly capture the truest intent of their inputs and to represent these responsibly and accurately in the research product while ensuring anonymity to all contributors. This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a multiple case was used. The approach was best suited in addressing the why and how questions posed in the studied problem and the purpose of the study. The approach was best suited for methodological and data triangulation of data gathered and analyzed. The multiple case approach deepened the understanding of both cultural and convictional Christian business leaders and provided transferable themes to guide theory in future research. American Christian business leaders were the purposefully identified participants in this research. They were purposefully selected from differing denominations in an effort to achieve data saturation for both a cultural Christian case and a convictional Christian case.

Snowball sampling was also leveraged as needed to achieve the desired quota sampling for each case considered. A hybrid matrix of metrics was designed and implemented for the assessment of achieving saturation. Only when all matrix identified factors had been satisfied and at least 25 interviews had been completed did sampling stop and data analysis begin. The data collection and data organization plans were also founded upon rigorous methodologies with intrinsic ethical principles. The organization plan implemented best practices for findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable data while also ensuring secure storage and anonymity for all contributors. File systems have been arranged to support a multi-year research project with this dissertation effort only representing the beginning of it. Methodological rigor has been and will remain the central theme of the plan.

Chapter 4 contains the data analysis of the completed field study. The analysis incorporated data gathered from all the researcher's interfaces with the participants as well as journal notes, and observations. The researcher paid close attention to maintaining methodological rigor in the handling of all data from collection to conclusion per the IRB approved procedures documented in Chapter 3. The data gathered was analyzed for emerging themes which were coded to create evidentiary trails of findings for both the cultural Christian business leader and convictional Christian business leader cases. The coding and evidentiary trails revealed book end groupings for both the strongly convictional Christian business leaders and the strongly cultural Christian business leaders. The coding and evidentiary trails also showed a relatively even spread of the remaining participants between these two bookend groupings.

The NVivo qualitative software analysis tool augmented the researcher's innumerable reviews of the transcripts and journal notes. The researcher ensured appropriate attention was

given to bracketing and reflexivity throughout the research effort. Data visualization was leveraged to ensure complex concepts were concisely communicated. Methodological and data triangulation was evidenced throughout and created the data evidence trails needed to demonstrate the methodological rigor of the research. Convergent, complementary, and divergent triangulation was documented as a part of the summary and contributed to transferable themes and findings.

Methodological rigor is the gold standard for reliability, validity, and the ethical assurance in the conduct of all research and is displayed throughout the research effort from data capture, through data organization, data management, and in the data analysis. This methodological rigor produced a reliable and repeatable, construct valid, internally valid, and externally valid research product. All methodological rigor applied in this research was documented in Chapter 4. These efforts worked together to create credible insights to fill a secularized digital age gap in understanding about Christian business leader character challenges and produce transferable findings of use for them and to guide future research conducted in this field of query.

Chapter 5 provides evidentiary documentation of Christian business leader character challenges at a level of granularity previously unseen. It fills a gap in research while also offering some countering findings to a great deal of secular based research which inappropriately draws conclusions about Christians without considering the level of granularity this study offers. It describes how this gap filling research provides both practical implications for business practice and theoretical implications informing business theory. The practical implications were assembled around the data evidentiary trails which displayed the distinctions between convictional Christian business leaders and the cultural Christian business leaders. The data

generated evidentiary trails reflecting the commonalities among most all of the participants formed the foundation of the findings carrying theoretical implications to improve business theory.

The chapter provided recommendations for how this research can be both deepened and broadened through further study. It then concludes with the reflections from the researcher. The research clearly reveals the sizable breadth of Christian business leader character challenges (Figure 14). The research portrays an opportunity for each participant, and the researcher, to fulfill their God-ordained ministry in today's secularized culture by being empowered by God in their respective time and place. The God-given human choice for each is between prayerful participation or missed opportunity. Christian business leaders span a sizable range of beliefs with an equitably sized range of behavior. All choose their own unique display of their belief – behavior in their workplace. Some seemed convinced in their minds, and perhaps even in their hearts, that they were choosing properly. However, many, if not most, expressed a sense of questioning doubt about their choices accompanied by an uncertainty regarding how to derive a more assured direction accompanied with an openness to gather more insights from this type of research effort.

Some of the Christian business leaders cited the value of studying the lives of Daniel, or Paul, or the other exilic disciples who were required to live out their faith in the midst of a secularized culture. Christian business leaders today have a similar exilic disciple responsibility in the secularized digital age. Their central heart level internal debate includes decision making choices regarding: one's perspective as either eternal with a recognition of their duty in time (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:10) or a world centered perspective; a view of moral truth as either a constant (NKJV, 1982, John 1:14; John 14:6) or viewing moral truth as changing

to fit the time and culture; their view on their individual identity either in Christ (NKJV, 1982, Philippians 1:21) or in self with Christ as an addition; and finally, how they choose to live out their proclaimed beliefs either in an integrated faith (NKJV, 1982, 2 Corinthians 5:9) or a “civil” faith. The examples of those exilic disciples who have gone before us, brought alive by the Spirit of God working in us, can equip every one of these Christian business leaders, including the researcher, to the fulfillment of their individualized God-sized calling.

### **Study Conclusions**

The nature of this study was to go beyond a business-related research effort conducted *with* a Biblical worldview, by providing a biblical worldview shaped analysis of American Christian business leaders in a time and place of unparalleled digital age connectivity, transparency, and secularization. Given the insufficient understanding of the Christian business leader character challenge problem being studied, this approach was essential to the research success. Therefore, this summation of the most essential study conclusions must start with two biblical frames of reference incorporated in Chapters 1 and 2.

### ***Biblical Framework***

Christ Jesus taught the parable of the seed and four soil types in Luke 8 and He taught the parable of the 10 servants charged to “do business until I come” in Luke 19 (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:13). At least three of the four soil types can describe the range of Christians encountered in this study. All have received the word of God depicted as the seed in Luke 8. All are choosing what they want to do with the word in their own individual lives today. Luke 19 also applies to the Christian business leaders in this study. All have proclaimed by their own tongues that they are Christians and thus can fit within the 10 servants tasked by their Master to go into a land

where that Master was not welcomed and to “do business until I come” (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19:13).

The remainder of both Luke 8 and Luke 19 reflect eternal perspectives to be drawn from both parables. Some of the Christian business leader participants dismiss much of the Bible because it was written in a different time and for a different culture. Others among the group rely heavily upon the Bible to guide them in their daily work as a Christian business leader. Each participant is making their choices as they do their own forms of business in this time and in this secularized digital age place.

Figure 3 was shaped by the literature review and the problem studied. It portrayed the conceptual framework for this study and was highly accurate in describing what was seen through data analysis, theme development and the evidentiary trails documenting the study results. Roughly 95% of Figure 3 was displayed in the results. The 5% misconception in Figure 3 was in the suggestion that there may be some unchallenged Christian identities. The study results proved this was not the case as all the participants were dealing with Christian business leader character challenges.

These research results inform the Stetzer and MacDonald (2020) top-down descriptions of cultural and convictional Christians with a granularized bottoms-up description of both cultural and convictional Christians. This research informs the Trentham (2019a) description of only two worldviews with a granular representation of a proclaimed biblical worldview. Perhaps some of the participants are actually portraying a form of morally therapeutic deism or they may be considering a reclassification of their proclaimed worldview from biblical to secular (Barwegen, 2019; Culton, 2022; Setran, 2020; Trentham, 2019a; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2022). This research snapshot into the belief-behavior blending of the 25 participants is not sufficient to

forecast trend lines but the results do reveal a wide spread in the Trentham (2019a) binary worldview belief description and a wide spread in the way each participant is displaying behavior by choosing their behavioral paths of conducting business in their workplaces.

One bookend of the Christian business leaders included those who display attributes of morally therapeutic deism or, at a minimum, theists with a lesser view of Christ Jesus and a lesser level of trust in the reliability of the Bible and the principles it espouses. The other bookend voiced belief in Christ Jesus as their Lord, their Savior, and the Creator to whom they owe this life they live on earth and the next one they trust will be in eternity. This end of the Christian business leader spectrum relied heavily upon the Bible because they believed it to be filled with the God revealed principles needed to guide them as Christian business leaders.

Relating back to the Luke 8 parable these bookends display the wayside (or the rocky soil) and the good ground (NKJV, 1982, Luke 8). The research also showed those in the middle who are making daily choices to be choked out by the thorns or to eliminate some of the thorns from their field of business. All are self-proclaimed Christian business leaders doing business until the Master comes (NKJV, 1982, Luke 19). Given this biblical worldview backdrop, the key results are best summarized by looking at how the three primary research questions were addressed in the belief-behavior blending each participant explained which served to shape the Christian business leader character challenge spectrum. Research question one and two primarily addressed participant belief, while research question three primarily addressed the participant behavior resulting from the belief.

### ***Research Question One – Insufficient Understanding***

The first research question and four of the 10 interview questions captured a great deal of participant data regarding their beliefs which shaped their thinking and motivated their behavior.



Summarizing all the details documented in Chapters 4 and 5, their insufficient understanding of their own character challenges fell into three areas. First, many did not fully understand the challenges of their hybrid identity. Many voiced frustrations with the challenges of being present in a conversation or in a moment because of the demands and distractions of digital age devices in their digital age leadership role. Many felt unable to control the expectations for pace and responsiveness while simultaneously attending to the in-person presence needs of subordinates. Combined together they felt these challenges made it very difficult to develop the relationships needed in a workplace to work through the sizable character challenges they encountered.

Secondly, many felt inadequately prepared to handle the behavioral visibility of the digital age especially when it included secular criticism of their decision making from leaders or subordinates. This point was raised when over one-third of the participants voiced frustrations with the aggressive force used by superiors in pushing a secularized agenda upon them which made them uncomfortable as a Christian business leader. Most voiced they had little to no latitude to counter it short of being disciplined for a leadership shortcoming or losing their position. Close to half of the Christian business leaders voiced concerns about sharing their Christian faith in the workplace because they did not want to force their perspective upon subordinates.

Thirdly, many Christian business leaders expressed a need for more Christian based inputs on this topic. They did not state that secular based research dominates the discussion, but the paucity of Christian based research or assistance is what was noted accompanied by ample secularized feedback readily given. This was also noted as the participant's considered secular versus biblical worldviews of the Bible, the applicability of biblical principles in today's workplace, or in the relative importance of their temporal priorities with eternal perspectives.

***Research Question Two – Insufficient Preparation***

The insufficient understanding of Christian business leader character challenges just documented is directly related to the insufficient preparation of the Christian business leaders confronting character challenges in their secularized workplaces. None of the Christian business leaders raised workplace issues they had easily resolved, but all of them raised workplace issues that raised to the level of Christian business leader character challenges. Their Christian character, or their leadership experience, was not challenged by easily resolved issues. The topics listed in Figure 14 were all sizable challenges which demanded each Christian business leader consider the foundation of their moral imperatives to discern the crux issues involved in the challenge and determine the best way forward in handling it. In other words, all identified character challenges they felt less than fully prepared to deal with in today's secularized workplace.

Research questions one and two along with four of the 10 interview questions provided research data which showed the spectrum of belief held by the 25 participants in the research. The majority voiced an insufficient understanding of how to address hybrid identities, behavioral visibility, and the secular dominated environment surrounding the character challenges they faced. This combination of an insufficient understanding of digital age challenges to their character connected to an insufficient preparation of how to address the challenges which was linked to their described behavior.

***Research Question Three – Behavior Aligned with Belief***

Acknowledging the literature review makes it clear that Christian business leaders are a minority in the secularized digital age, each participant was asked how they handled their Christian business leader character challenge while operating as a minority in a secular majority.

The biblical worldview of this research suggests each of these Christian business leaders is called to be an exilic disciple in their respective workplace. Again, without recovering all the findings documented in Chapters 4 and 5, the data evidentiary trails revealed the Christian business leaders working in secularized workplaces had the most pressing difficulties of all because some of their decision-making options were connected to positional risks or perceived threats from secular superiors. All Christian business leaders voiced some behavioral positions on whether morality standards are constant across time or change with time and culture or whether it is best to lead with integrated faith or civil faith. Six of the 10 interview questions informed the behavioral side of the data collection. In all cases belief was evidenced in behavior and behavior clarified the intent of the stated beliefs.

### ***The Research Proven Need for Faith at Work Ministries***

The first required reading book of this PhD program was *Every Good Endeavor* (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012). This book detailed decades of experiential knowledge about exilic disciples ministering to Christian business leaders in the secularized environment of New York City. The book's final chapter is written as a guide for how to lead Christians in displaying integrated faith at work through exquisitely shaped faith at work ministries. Three years ago, this book shaped the core of this researcher's thinking and sparked a wish that it had been read 20 years prior as the researcher worked through his Christian business leader challenges in the military.

Through the course of pursuing this PhD this concept grew thanks to the research of McClure (2020), Stetzer and MacDonald (2020), Ecklund et al. (2020), Barwegen (2019), and Bingaman (2020, 2023). The secular opposition to faith at work became equally evident through Miller (2021), Murray (2019a, 2019b, 2023), Dick (2021), Massey (2021a, 2021b, 2021c), and many more. The challenge Christian business leaders were facing were especially highlighted by

Bingaman (2020, 2023), Ficek (2021), and Paulus et al. (2019). Eventually, over the course of the 2 years of dissertation preliminary coursework, this topic became the problem studied.

The research conducted has methodologically documented the accuracy of Keller and Alsdorf's (2012) call to action. The research conducted has proven virtually all aspects of the conceptual diagram shaped from the literature review. The research has filled a gap in understanding by providing data evidentiary trails revealing 100% of the 25 Christian business leader participants are facing Christian business leader character challenges in their respective workplaces. Finally, the research has clearly portrayed the evident need Christian business leaders have for a similar faith at work ministry to help them resolve Christian character challenges in today's secularized digital age.

### References

- Allen, S., & Fry, L. W. (2019). Spiritual development in executive coaching. *Journal of Management Development, 38*(10), 796–811. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-04-2019-0133>
- Archer, M., & Archer, K. J. (2019). Complementarianism and egalitarianism - Whose side are you leaning on? *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 41*(1), 66–90. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-04101034>
- Arpin, S. M., & Kambesis, P. N. (2022). Exploring best practices in data management: Example from cave and karst research and resource management. *Carbonates and Evaporites, 37*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13146-022-00772-7>
- Barlette, Y., & Baillette, P. (2022). Big data analytics in turbulent contexts: towards organizational change for enhanced agility. *Production Planning & Control, 33*(2-3), 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2020.1810755>
- Barwegen, L. (2019). The value of social science research in Christian education programs. *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry, 16*(3), 495–510. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891319874357>
- Baumgartner, J. N., & Morgan, G. S. (2019). Mindfulness and cognitive depletion shape the relationship between moral conviction and intolerance of dissimilar others. *Studia Psychologica, 61*(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.21909/sp.2019.01.770>
- Bayne, H. B., Harness, L., Kane, B., & Warfield, M. (2020). Christian counselors and affirmative counseling of lesbian and gay clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 99*, 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12354>

- Beane, D. A., & Viswesvaran, C. (2019). Regulating individual expressions of faith: A balancing act for organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 12*, 421–424.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2019.76>
- Beltramini, E. (2019). God and modernity in management studies. A case of theological social theory. *Philosophy of Management, 18*(3), 331–345. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-018-0090-5>
- Benjamin, J., Shoushtarian, F., Fiske, P., Torkzadeh, H., Shaheen, F., Dirks, M., & Roostaei, J. (2024). Data organization matters. *Journal AWWA, 61*–66.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/awwa.2233>
- Bingaman, K. A. (2020). Religious and spiritual experience in the digital age: Unprecedented evolutionary forces. New directions in pastoral theology conference (honoring Lewis Rambo). *Pastoral Psychology, 69*, 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-020-00895-5>
- Bingaman, K. A. (2023). Religion in the digital age: An irreversible process. *Religions, 14*(108).  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010108>
- Bragger, J. D., Alonso, N. A., & D'Amborsio, K. D. (2021). Developing leaders to serve and servants to lead. *Human Resource Development Review, 20*(1), 94–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484320981198>
- Brailey, G. S., & Parker, S. D. (2020). The identity imperative: mentoring as a tool for Christian young adult identity formation. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 25*(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2020.1819775>
- Brautigam, M. (2019). Luther's Heidelberg disputation and identity formation. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology, 58*(1), 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12455>

- Brubaker, R. (2020). Digital hyperconnectivity and the self. *Theory and Society*, *49*, 771–801.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-020-09405-1>
- Budde, L., Benninghaus, C., Hänggi, R., & Friedli, T. (2022). Managerial practices for the digital transformation of manufacturers. *Digital*, *2*(4), 463.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/digital2040025>
- Calvo, P. (2020). The ethics of smart city (EoSC): moral implications of hyperconnectivity, algorithmization and the datafication of urban digital society. *Ethics and Information Technology*, *22*, 141–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-019-09523-0>
- Campbell, R., Goodman-Williams, R., Feeney, H., & Fehler-Cabral, G. (2020). Assessing triangulation across methodologies, methods, and stakeholder groups: The joys, woes, and politics of interpreting convergent and divergent data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *41*(1), 125–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018804195>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *25*(8), 651–661.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17449871209272206>
- Chai, H. H., Gao, S. S., Chen, K. J., Duangthip, D., Lo, E. C., & Chu, C. H. (2021). A concise review on qualitative research in dentistry. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030942>
- Chambers, F., & Sandford, R. (2019). Learning to be human in a digital world: A model of values fluency education for physical education. *Sport, Education, and Society*, *24*(9), 925–938. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2018.151071>

- Chitac, I. M. (2022). The rationale for saturation in qualitative research: when practice informs theory. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 24(1), 29–35.  
[https://seaopenresearch.eu/journals/articles/CMJ2022\\_I1\\_3.pdf](https://seaopenresearch.eu/journals/articles/CMJ2022_I1_3.pdf)
- Clark, A. S., McGranahan, D. A., Geaumont, B. A., Wonkka, C. L., Ott, J. P., & Kreuter, U. P. (2022). Barriers to prescribed fire in the U.S. great plains, Part I: Systematic review of socio-ecological research. *Land*, 11(1521). <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11091521>
- Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. (2022). The theater of qualitative research: The role of the researcher / actor. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221103109>
- Cortina, L. M., Cortina, M. G., & Cortina, J. M. (2019). Regulating rude: Tensions between free speech and civility in academic employment. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 12, 357–375. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2019.63>
- Crick, J. M. (2021). Qualitative research in marketing: what can academics do better? *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(5), 390–429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254x.2020.1743738>
- Culton, K. R. (2022). Shifting identifications among religious and non-religious emerging adults at northeastern U.S. mainstream denominational college. *Religious Education*, 117(4), 283–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0344087.2022.2097986>
- Cwiklicki, M., & Pilch, K. (2021). Multiple case study design: The example of place marketing research. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 17, 50–62.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00159-2>
- Daher, W. (2023). Saturation in qualitative educational technology research. *Education Sciences* 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci3020098>



- Damper, R. I. (2022a). Science and religion in conflict, Part 1: Preliminaries. *Foundations of Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-022-09870-0>
- Damper, R. I. (2022b). Science and religion in conflict, Part 2: Barbour's four models revisited. *Foundations of Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-022-09871-z>
- Davis, J. T., Perry, S. L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2023). Liberty for us, limits for them: Christian nationalism and American's views on citizens' rights. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srac044>
- Dick, H. (2021). Advocating for the right: Alliance Defending Freedom and the rhetoric of Christian persecution. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 29, 375–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-021-09468-0>
- Duff, N. J. (2021). Apocalyptic ethics, end-time Christians, and the storming of the U.S. Capitol. *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 34(4), 467–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468211031365>
- Ecklund, E. H., Daniels, D., & Schneider, R. C. (2020). From secular to sacred: bringing work to church. *Religions*, 11(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090442>
- Eriksen, M., Cooper, K., & Miccolis, A. (2019). On becoming virtuous. *Journal of Management Education*, 43(6), 630–650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562919866885>
- Eva, N., Robin, M., Sendjaya, S., Dierendonck, D. V., & Liden, R. C. (2019). Servant leadership: A systematic review and call for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(1), 111–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2018.07.004>
- Falk, I. H., & Guenther, J. (2021). Designed generalization from qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(3), 1054–1075. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4644>

- Faries, M. D., McClendon, M., & Jones, E. J. (2020). Destroying God's temple? Physical inactivity, poor diet, obesity, and other "sin" behaviors. *Journal of Religious Health, 59*, 522–534. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0368-2>
- Ficek, R. (2021). Christian faith in dialogue with contemporary culture in the personalist thought of John Paul II and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. *Verbum Vitae, 39*(2), 543–569. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.12277>
- Fricke, M. (2019). The knowledge pyramid: the DIKW hierarchy. *Knowledge Organization, 46*(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2019-1-33>
- Furse, T. (2022). Let us go out to the field: apocalyptic thinking in Christian nationalism. *Politics, Religion & Ideology, 23*(3), 306–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2022.2123802>
- Garay-Rondero, C. L., Martinez-Flores, J. L., Smith, N. R., Caballero Morales, S. O., & Aldrette-Malacara, A. (2019). Digital supply chain model in Industry 4.0. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management, 31*(5), 887–933. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMTM-08-2018-0280>
- Garrett, K. N. (2022). Navigating the double-edged sword of moral conviction in politics. *Christian Scholar's Review, 51*(3), 333–351. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/navigating-double-edged-sword-moral-conviction/docview/2708789953/se-2>
- Gerli, P., & Whalley, J. (2021). Fibre to the countryside: a comparison of public and community initiatives tackling the rural digital divide in the UK. *Telecommunications Policy, 45*(10). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102222>

- Gossell, B. M. (2022). Analogies in entrepreneurial communication and strategic communication: Definition, delimitation of research programs and future research. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 16*(2), 134–156.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2021.2015689>
- Gottfried, A., Hartmann, C., & Yates, D. (2021). Mining open government data for business intelligence using data visualization: A two-industry case study. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research, 16*, 1042–1065.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16040059>
- Granic, I., Morita, H., & Scholten, H. (2020). Beyond screen time: identity development in the digital age. *Psychological Inquiry, 31*(3), 195–223.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2020.1820214>
- Green, J., & Timmerman, T. (2021). Are millennials more likely to be abusive supervisors? *S.A.M. Management Journal, 86*(2), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.52770/TBOD4610>
- Gregory, K. (2019). Lessons of a failed study: Lone research, media analysis, and the limitations of bracketing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*, 1–10.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919842450>
- Guenther, J., & Falk, I. H. (2019). Generalising from qualitative research (GDR): A new old approach. *The Qualitative Report, 24*(5), 1012–1033.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/generalising-qualitative-research-gqr-new-old/docview/2230819261/se-2>
- Guth, J. L. (2022). New frontiers of religious freedom? LGBTQ rights versus religious conscience. *Religion, State & Society, 50*(3), 338–355.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2022.208991>

- Hambly, H., & Rajabiun, R. (2021). Rural broadband: Gaps, maps, and challenges. *Telematics and Informatics*, *60*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2021.101565>
- Harrison, R. L., Reilly, T. M., & Creswell, J. W. (2020). Methodological rigor in mixed methods: An application in management studies. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *14*(4), 473–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689819900585>
- He, Q., Meadows, M., Angwin, D., Gomes, E., & Child, J. (2020). Strategic alliance research in the era of digital transformation: Perspectives on future research. *British Journal of Management*, *31*(3), 589–617. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12406>
- Hoorani, B. H., Nair, L. B., & Gilbert, M. (2019). Designing for impact: The effect of rigor and case study design on citations of qualitative case studies in management. *Scientometrics*, *121*, 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-019-03178-w>
- Jackelen, A. (2021). Technology, theology, and spirituality in the digital age. *Zygon*, *56*(1), 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12682>
- James, K. V., & Priyadarshini, R. G. (2021). Responsible leadership: a new paradigm for organizational sustainability. *Management and Labour Studies*, *46*(4), 452–470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/028042X211005325>
- Jeffries, N., Zaslavsky, A. M., Diez Roux, A. V., Creswell, J. W., Palmer, R. C., Gregorich, S. E., Reschovsky, J. D., Graubard, B. I., Choi, K., Pfeiffer, R. M., Zhang, X., & Breen, N. (2019). Methodological approaches to understanding causes of health disparities. *American Journal of Public Health*, *109*(S1), 28–33. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304843>

- Jensen, L. A. (2023). Afterlife beliefs among evangelical and mainline Protestant children, adolescents, and adults: A cultural-developmental study in the U.S. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *15*(1), 94–104. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel10000424>.
- Kanygin, G., & Koretckaia, V. (2021). Analytical coding: Performing qualitative data analysis based on programming principles. *The Qualitative Report*, *26*(2), 316–333. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4342>
- Kaushik, V., & Walsh, C. A. (2019). Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research. *Social Sciences*, *8*(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8090255>
- Kazim, F. A. B. (2019). Digital transformation and leadership style: A multiple case study. *The ISM Journal of International Business*, *3*(1), 24–33. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/digital-transformation-leadership-style-multiple/docview/2335648358/se-2>
- Kegler, M. C., Raskind, I. G., Comeau, D. L., Griffith, D. M., Cooper, H. L. F., & Shelton, R. C. (2019). Study design and use of inquiry frameworks in qualitative research. *Health Education & Behavior*, *46*(1), 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198118795018>
- Keller, T., & Alsdorf, K. L. (2012). *Every good endeavor, connecting your work to God's work*. Viking.
- Knudsen, M., & Larsson, M. (2022). The deep organisation: The organisational view in a public management leadership development programme. *Teaching Public Administration*, *40*(1), 120–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739421013069>
- Krasic, I., Celar, S., & Seremet, Z. (2021). Big data and business intelligence: Research and challenges in telecom industry. *Annals of DAAAM and Proceedings*, *1*, 339–348. <https://doi.org/10.2507/32nd.daaam.proceedings.050>

- Lai, J., & Widmar, N. O. (2021). Revisiting the digital divide in the COVID-19 era. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 43(1), 458–464. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aep.13104>
- Launonen, L. (2022). Hell and the cultural evolution of Christianity. *Theology and Science*, 20(2), 193–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2022.2051251>
- Lee, A., Lyubovnikova, J., Tian, A. W., & Knight, C. (2020). Servant leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, moderation, and mediation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 93(1), 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12265>
- Leonardi, P. M., & Treem, J. W. (2020). Behavioral visibility: A new paradigm for organization studies in the age of digitization, digitalization, and datafication. *Organization Studies*, 41(12), 1601–1625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620970728>
- Liberty University School of Business. (2023). *PhD Dissertation Guide*, 1-97. [https://www.canvas.liberty.edu/courses/107806/pages/phd-dissertation-resources?module\\_item\\_id=43501268](https://www.canvas.liberty.edu/courses/107806/pages/phd-dissertation-resources?module_item_id=43501268).
- Lo, A., Srikuenthiran, S., Miller, E. J., & Habib, K. H. (2020). Impact of multiple sample frames on data quality of household travel surveys: The case of the 2016 transportation tomorrow survey. *Transportation Planning and Technology*, 43(6), 553–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03081060.2020.1780707>
- Lo, A. W. (2021). The financial system red in tooth and claw: 75 years of co-evolving markets and technology. *Financial Analysts Journal*, 77(3), 5–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015198X.2021.1929030>
- Lohrmann, M. J. (2021). Luther's Inocavit sermons (Lent 1522). *Lutheran Quarterly*, 35(4), 444–454. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lut.2021.0090>

- Lomberg, S., & Ytre-Arne, B. (2021). Advancing digital disconnection research: Introduction to the special issue. *The International Journal of Research in New Media Technologies*, 27(6), 1529–1535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565211057518>
- Lourdunathan, A. C. (2022). Intercultural theology competence for an intercultural faith education. *Religions*, 13, 806. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090806>
- Manheim, D., Wiecek, W., Schmit, V., & Morrison, J. (2021). Exploring risks of human challenge trials for COVID-19. *Risk Analysis an International Journal*, 41(5), 710–720. <https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13726>
- Massey, L. F. (2021a). Biblical inerrancy: An anxious reaction to perceived threat. *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, 13(1), 100–120, 342. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/biblical-inerrancy-anxious-reaction-perceived/docview/2536820699/se-2>
- Massey, L. F. (2021b). Biblical inerrancy: an anxious reaction to perceived threat part 2: the Old Testament. *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, 13(2), 66–98, 197. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/biblical-inerrancy-anxious-reaction-perceived/docview/2569706109/se-2>
- Massey, L. F. (2021c). Biblical inerrancy: an anxious reaction to perceived threat part 3: the New Testament. *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, 14(2), 52–86, 136. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/biblical-inerrancy-anxious-reaction-perceived/docview/2702260208/se-2>
- McClure, P. K. (2020). The buffered, technological self: Finding associations between internet use and religiosity. *Social Compass*, 67(3), 461–478. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620922128>

- McCorkle, W., & Rodriguez, S. (2021). When nationalism supersedes belief in religious freedom: An analysis of teacher's beliefs. *Educational Studies*, 57(2), 182–201.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2020.1863802>
- McDade, J. (2019). Ministry in a post-religious society: can we do it at all? *New Blackfriars*, 100, 214–228. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12445>
- McGhee, P. (2019). Integrating Christian spirituality at work: Combining top-down and bottom-up approaches. *Religions*, 10(7), 433. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel100704333>
- McWhorter, M. R. (2019). Balancing value bracketing with the integration of moral values in psychotherapy: Evaluation of a clinical practice from the perspective of Catholic moral theology. *The Linacre Quarterly*, 86(2-3), 207–224.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0024363919856810>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/Christian>
- Miller, P. A. (2021). Tyranny, fear, and parrhesia. Truth in the neoliberal university, or “How do I know I’m not Heidegger?” *Symploke*, 29(1), 179–195.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/tyranny-fear-parrhesia-truth-neoliberal/docview/2599942651/se-2>
- Motulsky, S. L. (2021). Is member checking the gold standard of quality in qualitative research? *American Psychological Association*, 8(3), 389–406. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000215>
- Murray, M. (2019a). Consequential sex: #MeToo, Masterpiece cakeshop, and private sexual regulation. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 113(4), 825–884.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/consequential-sex-metoo-masterpiece-cakeshop/docview/2175246227/se-2>



- Murray, M. (2019b). Inverting animus: Masterpiece cakeshop and the new minorities. *The Supreme Court Review*, 2018(1), 257–298. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703043>
- Murray, M. (2023). Children of men: the Roberts Court’s jurisprudence of masculinity. *Houston Law Review*, 60(4), 799–864.  
[https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01LIBU\\_INST&vid=01LIBU\\_INST:Services&%3Fctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx\\_enc=info:ofi%2Fenc:UTF-8&rft\\_id=info:sid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft\\_val\\_fmt=info:ofi%2Ffmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=Children%20of%20Men:%20The%20Roberts%20Court%27s%20Jurisprudence%20of%20Masculinity&rft.jtitle=Houston%20law%20review&rft.au=Murray,%20Melissa&rft.date=2023-01-01&rft.pub=Houston%20Law%20Review%20Incorporated&rft.issn=0018-6694&rft.volume=60&rft.issue=4&rft.spage=1&rft.externalDBID=NO\\_FULL\\_TEXT&paramdict=en-US](https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/openurl?institution=01LIBU_INST&vid=01LIBU_INST:Services&%3Fctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info:ofi%2Fenc:UTF-8&rft_id=info:sid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi%2Ffmt:kev:mtx:journal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=Children%20of%20Men:%20The%20Roberts%20Court%27s%20Jurisprudence%20of%20Masculinity&rft.jtitle=Houston%20law%20review&rft.au=Murray,%20Melissa&rft.date=2023-01-01&rft.pub=Houston%20Law%20Review%20Incorporated&rft.issn=0018-6694&rft.volume=60&rft.issue=4&rft.spage=1&rft.externalDBID=NO_FULL_TEXT&paramdict=en-US)
- Natow, R. S. (2022). Policy actors’ perceptions of qualitative research in policymaking: The case of higher education rulemaking in the United States. *Evidence & Policy*, 18(1), 109–126. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426420X16047229138089>
- Nazari, Z., & Musilek, P. (2023). Impact of digital transformation on the energy sector: A review. *Algorithms*, 16(211). <https://doi.org/10.3390/a16040211>
- Nelson, J. D. (2019). Corporate disestablishment. *Virginia Law Review*, 105(3), 595–654. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/corporate-disestablishment/docview/2621347261/se-2>
- New King James Version Bible (NKJV). (1982). <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-King-James-Version-NKJV-Bible/>

- Ochoa, M. K. (2022). Life course and emerging adulthood: Protestant women's views on intimate partner violence and divorce. *Social Sciences, 11*, 169.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11040169>
- Omodan, B. I. (2022). A model for selecting theoretical framework through epistemology of research paradigms. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies, 4*(1), 275–285.  
<https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v4i1.1022>
- Pak, J. H., & Eltiti, S. (2023). Integrating theology in teaching quantitative and qualitative research in psychology. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 42*(1), 15–28.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/integrating-theology-teaching-quantitative/docview/2825574882/se-2>
- Paulus, M. J., Baker, B. D., & Langford, M. D. (2019). A framework for digital wisdom in higher education. *Christian Scholar's Review, 49*(1), 43–61.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/framework-digital-wisdom-higher-education/docview/2322611420/se-2>
- Perry, S. L., Cobb, R. J., Whitehead, A. L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2022). Divided by faith (in Christian America): Christian nationalism, race, and divergent perceptions of racial injustice. *Social Forces, 101*(2), 913–942. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab134>
- Perry, S. L., McElroy, E., Schnabel, L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2022). Fill the earth and subdue it: Christian nationalism, ethno-religious threat, and nationalist pronatalism. *Sociological Forum, 37*(4), 995–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12854>
- Perry, S. L., Schnabel, L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2021). Christian nationalism, perceived anti-Christian discrimination, and prioritizing “religious freedom” in the 2020 presidential election. *Nations and Nationalism, 28*, 714–725. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12764>

- Perry, S. L., Whitehead, A. L., & Grubbs, J. B. (2021). Save the economy, liberty, and yourself: Christian nationalism and Americans' views on government COVID-19 restrictions. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, 82(4), 426–446.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sraa047>
- Peters, V. J., Meijboom, B. R., Bunt, J. E., Bok, L. A., Van Steenberg, M. W., Winter, J. P., & Vries, E. (2020). Providing person-centered care for patients with complex healthcare needs: A qualitative study. *PLoS One*, 15(11).  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.024318>
- Pfister, P., & Lehmann, C. (2023). Measuring the success of digital transformation in German SMEs. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 33(1), 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.53703/001c.39679>
- Polizzi, G., & Harrison, T. (2022). Wisdom in the digital age: A conceptual and practical framework for understanding and cultivating cyber-wisdom. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 24(16), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-022-09640-3>
- Pope, E. M. (2020). From participants to co-researchers: Methodological alterations to a qualitative case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(10), 3749–3761.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/participants-co-researchers-methodological/docview/2462684480/se-2>
- Poth, C. (2019). Rigorous and ethical qualitative data reuse: Potential perils and promising practices. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–4.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919868870>

- Prosek, E. A., & Gibson, D. M. (2021). Promoting rigorous research by examining lived experiences: A review of four qualitative traditions. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 99*(2), 167–177. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12364>
- Reyes, N., Yu, C., & Lara, E. (2021). Identifying factors of deconversion from Christianity among American adults: A mixed-methods approach. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 40*(3), 204–223.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/identifying-factors-deconversion-christianity/docview/2644086668/se-2>
- Rowlands, J. (2021). Interviewee transcript review as a tool to improve data quality and participant confidence in sensitive research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211066170>
- Scott, S. (2020). Balancing discipleship and gatekeeping in counselor education. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 39*(2), 104-113.  
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/balancing-discipleship-gatekeeping-counselor/docview/2449674521/se-2>
- Setran, D. (2020). Sowing the story: Narrative identity and emerging adult formation. *Christian Education Journal, 17*(1), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891319899659>
- Skitka, L. J., Hanson, B. E., Morgan, G. S., & Wisneski, D. C. (2021). The psychology of moral conviction. *Annual Review of Psychology, 72*, 347–366. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-063020-030612>
- Sneed, S., Nguyen, C. H., & Eubank, C. L. (2020). An introduction to case study methodology: Single case and multiple case approaches. *International Journal of Adult Education and Technology, 11*(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJAET.2020100101>

- Soukup, P. A., & Glader, P. (2020). A debate between Paul Soukup, SJ, and Paul Glader on how digital culture is affecting media education on religion. *Church, Communication and Culture*, 5(2), 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2020.1765698>
- Stamenkov, G. (2023). Recommendations for improving research quality: Relationships among constructs, verbs in hypotheses, theoretical perspectives, and triangulation. *Quality & Quantity*, 57, 2923–2946. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01461-2>
- Starr, C., Waldo, K., & Kauffman, M. (2019). Digital irreligion: Christian deconversion in an online community. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 58(2), 315–542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12599>
- Stetzer, E., & MacDonald, A. (2020). How can and should we reach and train our future pastors and Christian leaders? *Christian Education Journal*, 17(1), 160–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891320904968>
- Stratton, S. J. (2021). Population research: Convenience sampling strategies. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 36(4), 373–374. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049023x21000649>
- Thompson, M. D. (2021). Warfield on inspiration and inerrancy. *The Reformed Theological Review*, 80(1), 29–48. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAIiREM220430000381&site=ehost-live&scopt=site>
- Trenta, A. M., Ausili, D., Caruso, R., Arrigoni, C., Moro, M., Nania, T., Vellone, E., & Dellafiore, F. (2021). Living with heart failure during the COVID-19 pandemic: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Clinical Nursing Research*, 30(7), 1071–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10547738211016614>

- Trentham, J. D. (2019a). Reading the social sciences theologically (Part 1): Approaching and qualifying models of human development. *Christian Education Journal*, 16(3), 458–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891319885463>
- Trentham, J. D. (2019b). Reading the social sciences theologically (Part 2): Engaging an appropriating models of human development. *Christian Education Journal*, 16(3), 476–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891319882699>
- Unsworth, A., & Ecklund, E. H. (2021). Evangelicals, evolution, and inerrancy: A comparative study of congregational boundary work. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 36(2), 199–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2021.1945752>
- Upenieks, L. (2022). Do beliefs in Christian nationalism predict mental health problems? The role of religious (non)involvement. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 8, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221081641>
- Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uijtdehaage, S., & Young, M. (2020). The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. *Academic Medicine*, 95(7), 989–994. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003075>
- Walentek, D. (2021). Datafication process in the concept of smart cities. *Energies*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en14164861>
- Walker, B., & Vegter, A. (2023). Christ, country, and conspiracies? Christian nationalism biblical literalism, and belief in conspiracy theories. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12836>
- Watson, N. M. (2022). A multiple case study on small and mid-size enterprise managers' lived experiences on the impact of job losses on outsourcing practices. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(8), 1746–1764. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4439>

Wilkins-Laflamme, S. (2022). Digital religion among U.S. and Canadian millennial adults.

*Review of Religious Research*, 64, 225–248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-021-00463-0>

Zekhnini, K., Cherrafi, A., Bouhaddou, I., Benghabrit, Y., & Garza-Reyes, J. (2021). Supply

chain management 4.0: A literature review and research framework. *Benchmarking*,

28(2), 465–501. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-04-2020-0156>

## Appendix A: Participant Letter

### Dear Potential Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the study we discussed. While this research is something I am passionate about, I realize and understand this passion is not equally possessed by all participants. Therefore, please know the decision to participate in, remain in, or withdraw from the research at any time in no way affects my appreciation for you and your willingness to consider this commitment.

I am pursuing a PhD in Organization and Management at Liberty University, which you may know is a private institution emphasizing advanced education from a biblical worldview. Over the past 3 years I have studied a proven linkage between the growth of the world wide web in America and the growth in secularism. While many praise the emancipating effects of digital age hyperconnectivity; some Christian researchers warn the current secularizing trajectory poses an existential threat to human spirituality. Much is written about how digital age technologies have transformed the way we work; but little is written about how they have transformed the way we think, mature, interact, nor why we have chosen to gravitate toward secularism. The problem I am researching is concisely summarized as *insufficient cultural understanding of character challenges Christian business leaders face in the secularized digital age*. My deepest concern about the secularization of America is how it is polarizing its citizens. Research participants must be digital age business leaders who self-identify as Christians.

Participants in my study must be working and living in America, profess to be Christians, readily align with a church home, and have or have had a leadership role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century secularized digital age workplace. If you decide to join the research, I will ask you to participate in the following:

- One on one private interview (60 minutes).
- Interview transcript verification (15 minutes).
- One on one private follow-up interview (30 – 60 minutes).
- You can join in the Initial Themes and Findings Briefing or receive an email version. Both will welcome questions and feedback comments (60 minutes).

To participate, please reply to this email expressing your interest in participating.

A consent document will be provided to you after you have expressed your interest in the study. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to me prior to your interview.

*Kevin J. Kennedy*

Kevin J. Kennedy

PhD Candidate, Liberty University

[xxxxxxxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxxxxxxx@gmail.com)

xxxxxxxxxx



## **Appendix B: Interview Guide, Demographic Questions, and Interview Questions**

This research initiative is shaped to assess how the digital age shift towards secularism is impacting Christian business leaders. Since the world of business is wide, not all Christian business leaders will see the secularization of the world around them in the same way. Your responses to the interview questions are extremely valuable and will be anonymously compiled with those from other participants to produce non-attributional findings including themes and recommendations for further research.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded. Non-attributional recordings allow the session to be reviewed multiple times while looking for trends and drawing conclusions from different perspectives across the swath of digital age Christian business leaders. At the end of each event, you will be offered the choice to participate in subsequent events. Voluntary Event #2 provides you opportunity to review the interview notes and ensure they match your intent. Voluntary Event #3 provides a venue for other questions or thoughts arising after some time has gone by to further consider the topic. Voluntary Event #4 will be a group session through which any participant can hear and comment upon the aggregated findings and themes.

The interview will start with some simple demographic questions and then follow with the 10 interview questions. All the questions have no anticipated, right, or wrong responses and are not intended to be leading in any way. Once again, all responses will remain confidential in the gathering and anonymous in the reporting. Most importantly, a wide range of responses is anticipated so please feel free to provide your uninhibited thoughts. Your transparency and frankness are sincerely appreciated as this is the optimal way to enhance inquiry into unknowns.

**Pre-Interview Demographic Data Questions**

What city do you live in?

How long have you resided in that location?

What decade of your life are you now experiencing?

How long have you been attending your current church?

How many years have you been in business leadership roles?

How many of these business leadership years have been in the 21st century?

**Interview Questions**

**Question #1** – Given you have self-identified as a *Christian*, what does the term mean to you personally?

**Question #2** – Is your Christian faith a part of your workplace identity, for example do you (or did you) think of yourself as a business leader or a Christian business leader and why?

**Question #3** – When you consider the leader you report to as well as those you lead, do you think there are different expectations for, or demands upon, a Christian business leader as compared to a business leader?

**Question #4** – In the digital age we all have some form of hybrid persona, a combination of our hyperconnected always-on(line) and in-person presence. How does your hybrid persona impact you as a Christian business leader?

**Question #5** – Research has shown the digital age has not only changed the way we work in the workplace, but also linked to the transformational shift towards secularism in America. Do you sense any environmental pressures, societal or work-based, to keep your Christian identity to yourself? If yes, can you give an example; or if not, can you explain why?

**Question #6** – Can you describe any work-related challenge which may trouble the conscience of a Christian business leader but may not even be noted by a secular business leader?

**Question #7** – Some Christians suggest the Bible and the church are out of date with today's culture and many have stated this as the primary reason they choose no church affiliation. Some suggest Constitutional Amendments regarding Freedom of speech and religion should be restricted to help society embrace today's cultural perspective on sexual orientation and gender identity policies. Have you had any secularized digital age-related challenges like this in the workplace today? If yes, can you explain them and how you are leading through them?

**Question #8** – Christians are divided regarding the importance of the Bible and the criticality of reading it routinely. How do you believe the Bible should affect your actions, behavior, and leadership as a (Christian) business leader in the secularized workplace environment?

**Question #9** – Would you have any loving Christian advice for those with different convictions?

**Question #10** – As you seek discernment to resolve character challenges in the secularized digital age workplace, what would you say are the most influential sources you lean on?

**FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS** (If participant chooses to participate).

The follow-up interview is a voluntary event. A participant's willingness to be a part of it will show a level of interest beyond what is even anticipated. Therefore, the researcher will shape specific questions for each willing participant. The approach to shaping these questions will be by reviewing those addressed from the initial interview blended with any insights gleaned from the participant's workplace website and their church home website.

### **Appendix C: Participant Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Character Challenges American Christian Business Leaders Face in the Secular Digital Age

**Principal Investigator:** Kevin J. Kennedy, PhD Candidate in Organization and Management at Liberty University.

#### **Key Information about the Research Study**

You are invited to participate in this research. To participate, you must:

- Work and live in America.
- Profess to be a Christian and readily align with a church home.
- Have or have had a leadership role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century secularized digital age workplace.

Things you should know:

- The purpose of this flexible design multiple case study is to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today's secularized digital age while producing credible themes and transferable findings which may inform further efforts to fill this gap. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an individual interview (60 minutes), transcript verification (15 minutes), a follow-up interview (30-60 minutes), and a group themes and findings briefing (60 minutes). Your contributions will remain confidential, and all documentation will ensure the complete confidentiality of all contributors.
- There is minimal risk associated with this research as all the gathered data will be stored off-line and the attributional aspects of it deleted as soon as the sanitized transcripts are completed. We attempt to assuage any potential discomfort regarding personal perspectives shared through interview privacy and confidentiality in the writing.
- You should not expect to receive any direct benefits from participating in this research.
- Taking part in any aspect of this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

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

The purpose of this flexible design multiple case study is to fill a research gap by deepening the understanding of the character challenges Christian business leaders face in today's secularized digital age while producing credible themes and transferable findings which may inform further efforts to fill this gap.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you volunteer, I will ask you to do the following:

- 60 minutes in a private interview with me (questions provided in advance).
- 15 minutes reviewing and approving the transcript produced from the private interview and asking any research related questions you may have developed.
- 30 to 60 minutes in a follow-up private interview.
- 60 minutes in a group session where the initial themes and findings will be briefed and voluntary feedback gathered.

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

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

The research will show Christian business leaders can effectively lead lives of integrated faith even when leading in secularized digital age workplace environments. The research will offset secularized research which heavily emphasizes no more than dualistic faith be practiced by faith-based workers. The research is intended to show that Christian business leaders can be true to their callings without yielding from the Christlike operating ethos all Christians are called to pursue in practice as well as proclaim.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

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

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any contributor. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and his faculty chair will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with coded numbers.
- Interviews will be conducted privately, in locations where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the group themes and findings briefing. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- The researcher will keep all data on a stand-alone hard drive stored in a safe place. Only the researcher and his faculty chair will have access to the stand-alone hard drive. Data will be maintained until the end of the study and at the completion of the study (a minimum of 3 years) it will be destroyed.
- Recordings will be stored temporarily on a password-locked computer and then transferred to a standalone hard drive. Once the participant has reviewed and approved the sanitized transcript, the interview recording will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings while they exist.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study. The group session data will not be destroyed, but any contributions you might have made during the session 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 Kevin J. Kennedy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Kevin at xxx-xxx-xxxx or [xxxxxxx@warriors4wireless.org](mailto:xxxxxxx@warriors4wireless.org). You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Doctor / Reverend Robert Ball, at xxxxxxxx@liberty.edu

**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 the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date