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HOW CRISIS AND RELATIONSHIP LEAD TO FAITH OWNERSHIP

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY
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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
MAY 2017

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ABSTRACT

College is often the time when students are asking questions about their identity and worldview. These questions are brought on by conflicting authority figures and institutions while experiencing a location change and significant transition. The painful circumstances within someone's life can also play a significant role in a student attempting to resolve tension and make sense of previously unchallenged belief systems. The question this project engaged is how college students take ownership of their faith. The methodology for the project was mixed methods with a qualitative emphasis. The research instruments utilized were the Faith Development Scale, an online open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured focus groups. The study sample included 92 current student leaders from a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university. James Fowler's faith development theory, James Marcia's identity development theory and Marcia Baxter Magolda's self-authorship work were all utilized to develop the open-ended questionnaire. A review of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Romans 12:2 provided the foundation of a biblical and theological understanding of faith as developmental.

The researcher used a grounded theory approach to synthesize and analyze the data, creating categories and subcategories from each stage of the qualitative process in order to arrive at four primary principles for how college students can take ownership of their faith. Students with a mature understanding of their faith were able to see painful experiences as opportunities for faith exploration and faith ownership. The primary painful experiences in the research participants were either a significant loss in one's

family or a significant failure in one's faith community. Students presenting a mature faith were also willing to express anger and doubt honestly when they experienced a painful circumstance. Anger and doubt were honestly engaged with a significant spiritual partner who was willing to listen while encouraging engagement in spiritual disciplines. Spiritual partners were also found to emphasize process oriented relationships where support for one's own development was primary.

DEDICATION

To Michelle. Thank you for choosing me, teaching me, and growing with me.

Who I am is primarily because we are.

INTRODUCTION

James Fowler first posited his stage theory of faith development in 1981, utilizing and building on the work of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and Erik Erikson. The unique theoretical approach of Fowler, especially for young adults transitioning to college, converges well with James Marcia's identity development theory and Marcia Baxter Magolda's self-authorship work. However, the general applicability of Fowler's theory must be explicitly explored for college students in a Christian liberal arts university to better understand how students are taking ownership of their faith. Understanding the principles for how students are moving towards faith maturity would allow collegiate ministries to determine appropriate programming and types of relationships that foster the most growth. Utilizing painful experiences, and the accompanying anger and doubt, is a catalyst for faith exploration. Relationships that openly engage spiritual disciplines and prioritize the need to process one's experiences, beliefs and worldview are foundational for helping a person take ownership of his or her faith.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS
TAKE OWNERSHIP OF FAITH

The Problem and Its Context

Statement of the Problem

Most often people are concerned with the theological beliefs a person claims to have, forgetting that faith ownership and maturity are as important, if not more important, than simply the theological beliefs a person claims. For those who present a mature faith that truly represents values and principles that exemplify the best of their worldview, it is essential that one knows how a person arrived at such a place. The problem this project addressed was identifying how students at a Christian liberal arts institution have progressed in their faith to a place of faith and identity ownership. In response to this problem the researcher (a) examined theological and biblical resources that inform the process of faith development, (b) reviewed the relevant literature relating to faith development, identity development, and self-authorship, (c) conducted an assessment of college students at Bethel University who have taken ownership of their faith by using the Faith Development Scale (FDS), (d) produced an open-ended questionnaire and conducted focus groups for students who scored in the seventy-fifth percentile or better on the FDS regarding their habits and experiences that have led to their level of faith ownership, and (e) analyzed the data to determine trends and patterns, and (f) determined a set of principles and strategies based on those trends and patterns that will help

educators improve their ministry and faith development practices at similar institutions of higher education.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research was limited to the students at a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university who were involved in leadership opportunities, such as: resident assistants, student government, ministry leaders, and diversity club leaders during the 2015-2016 academic school year.

The research was limited to literature pertaining to faith development, spiritual formation, identity development, and self-authorship. Areas such as cognitive development, moral development and behavioral development were not included.

The open-ended questionnaire and focus groups were limited to those students who were in the seventy-fifth percentile or better on the Faith Development Scale.

Assumptions

Four assumptions have shaped the trajectory of this project. The first assumption is that the Bible provides wisdom and examples of a thought-provoking faith that develops over time. Examples of this assumption will be utilized in the second chapter. The second assumption is that humans are not born with a mature understanding of self or faith and instead require development, a process that doesn't necessarily have an end-point. The third assumption is that a person's identity development and faith development can be measured through the use of a quantitative instrument. The use of a quantitative measurement tool has helped categorize the level of faith ownership of the research participants in this project. The fourth assumption is that identity development and faith

development are similar endeavors. A person's faith is characteristically intrinsic to his or her personal identity, making developmental patterns similar.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was to identify the ways in which the Bible has articulated a developmental faith and the need for faith to include critical thinking and the engagement of the mind.

The second subproblem was to utilize recent literature to show that identity development and faith development are similar endeavors, while using self-authorship to articulate the need for the creation of principles for how a student takes ownership of his or her faith.

The third subproblem was to use the FDS as a quantitative assessment to discover which students at Bethel University report a higher global faith development score.

The fourth subproblem was to conduct qualitative research to understand factors contributing to the faith development of those participants with a higher global faith development score. An open-ended questionnaire was used to distinguish important themes and trends using research from identity development theory, self-authorship, and spiritual formation. Focus groups have also been used to further delineate specific principles and trends from the research participants based on the feedback given in the open-ended questionnaire.

The fifth subproblem was to create a set of principles for how faith development can be conducted at a Christian institution of higher education by synthesizing the three primary streams of data: biblical and theological resources, related literature resources, and the field research conducted in this project.

Setting of the Project

Bethel University is one of the leading Christian liberal arts institutions in the country, with a long history of faith formation and academic achievement. The College of Arts and Sciences has an annual enrollment near 2,800 students. This number does not include roughly 3,200 students who are enrolled in the College of Adult and Professional Programs, the Graduate School, Bethel Seminary St. Paul, and Bethel Seminary San Diego. According to the enrollment data found on Bethel's home page, students attending the College of Arts and Sciences for the 2015-16 year were 68.5 percent female and 31.5 percent male.¹ Students attending Bethel come from a wide range of denominational backgrounds including Converge Worldwide (formally Baptist General Conference, the sponsoring denomination of the university), Baptist, Evangelical Free, Methodist, Lutheran, Assemblies of God, Catholic, Christian Missionary Alliance, Covenant, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational, and other Protestant denominations. Bethel falls in the predominantly white category of higher education institutions. About 90 percent of Bethel's students at the College of Arts and Sciences are white, with just more than 10 percent being of minority ethnicities, including: Hispanic, Asian, Black/African American, and two or more races. Similarly, Bethel students predominantly come from Minnesota, with over 2,200 staying in-state for their collegiate experience. The nearest neighboring states (Iowa, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Illinois) are home to over 330 additional students, making Bethel almost completely a mid-western school.

Bethel's culture is often described by faculty, staff, and alumni as a family atmosphere that enriches the student experience beyond the classroom. The residence

¹ Bethel University, "Student Profile," Bethel University, <https://www.bethel.edu/institutional-data-research/institutional-data/databook/student/> (accessed November 14, 2015).

halls and academic buildings are centrally located, maximizing student and faculty/staff contact. The academic buildings are connected, with the Brushaber Commons building located at the heart of campus. Bethel has added buildings and some residence halls, but each has fit the structural context of Bethel's culture – the residence halls are within walking distance of the academic buildings, and the newer common spaces are connected to the original buildings. The newest addition to Bethel, the Anderson Center, is a large office building about a mile from the main campus. This addition poses an interesting challenge to the structure and culture of the university. In the years ahead it will be important to monitor the effect of the use of the Anderson Center on the culture of the university.

Chapel has been the heart of Bethel's student experience. Each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, students, staff and faculty are encouraged to gather together for a time of musical worship and the preaching of God's Word. Attendance at chapel is voluntary, which adds to its place as a center of student and community culture. There is also a rock that sits in the heart of the common area at Bethel. This rock has been a place for students to express themselves and the things they most care about. Finally, freshmen and sophomore students are not allowed to have cars on campus or to live off campus. These two limitations encourage the communal nature of Bethel's campus and the dependence upon Bethel for almost every function of life.

Importance of the Project

Importance of the Project to the Researcher

“Whose script are you living?” This question has been guiding the researcher for nearly seven years. Implied in this question are many ideas, from theological articulations

to personal endeavors. This question has been asked of groups and congregations, of individuals, and of couples. This question has become one of the foundational questions for the researcher in training and articulating the methodological mission of spiritual formation. For over ten years the researcher has been leading and developing discipleship ministries on two college campuses: Lee University (Cleveland, Tennessee) and Bethel University. At first, the ministry of developing small groups for college students on a Christian campus was the attempt to disseminate information. But as the researcher learned more about identity development, moral development, self-authorship, cognitive development and faith development, it became clear that spiritual growth was not something that happened through the transference of knowledge, but through the mindful and courageous journey of exploration and faith ownership.

The professional journey of discipleship ministry creating has mirrored the author's own spiritual journey towards faith ownership. Asking hard questions, reflecting on past experiences, and examining theological arguments have led the researcher to a more reasoned and passionate faith that matches orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Thus, the question, "whose script are you living?" implies both a grounded understanding of what is known with recognition of what must be acted upon.

The personal journey of faith for the researcher has indeed impacted the professional questions and endeavors, not only in the methodological positions of two discipleship ministries, but also in the personal mentoring relationships with college students. The researcher has witnessed firsthand the power of questions, the need for a reasoned and well-articulated faith, and the necessity of a lived experience of grace and discipline.

The researcher hopes to better understand and articulate the specifics of what it means for college students to take ownership of their faith. Mentoring relationships with leaders and students, the methodological decisions of the discipleship program and other faith development venues, and the researcher's own faith development can all be impacted by this research.

Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

Discipleship is at the heart of the ministerial endeavors of the Campus Ministries Office at Bethel University. The common theme around the office is the desire to create a culture of discipleship, where students are passionately engaged in their faith development, openly expressing their praise and adoration for God, and actively pursuing knowledge of who God is. College is the time in a young person's life where identity and worldview are being formed and molded into personal ideals that can shape who they become for the rest of their lives. More than simply transferring certain doctrinal beliefs or dogmas of faith, the hope of Bethel is to create lifelong learners who will continue to grow into Christ-likeness, evaluating and discerning the many turns that living in a complex world can create.

Knowing how college students take ownership of their faith will impact all aspects of spiritual formation on Bethel's campus. It will potentially impact the way in which chapel settings facilitate learning and spiritual challenge. It will enhance and mold the way in which mentoring groups and discipleship ministries are structured. It will possibly impact the way students in the classroom are instructed. Each of these areas contributes to creating a discipleship culture on Bethel's campus. Each of these areas impacts how college students view their identity development and their worldview. And

each of these areas prepares students to live as critical thinking learners in a world that is increasingly chaotic.

Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The prevailing philosophy that emanates from the Church is that if people just knew and believed the correct doctrines or principles then they would understand and incorporate them into their lives. As prevalent as this has been in churches and on Christian college campuses, this idea implies an underlying assumption that truth can be transmitted from person to person like the memorizing of spelling words in grade school. The problem with this assumption is that it seemingly seeks to remove the life of the mind and the discerning work of the Holy Spirit from the development of a person's faith and worldview. Instead of leading a person through a series of questions and circumstances that require contemplation through disequilibrium, the "answers" are readily available, circumventing the actual discovery of truth.

Truth, according to Scripture, is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." This relational dynamic of faith requires more than just transference of knowledge. Instead, the paradigms of faith development and spiritual formation require not simply an aspect of relational tension, but necessitate the personal discovery and life-long journey of crisis and commitment. It is in this tension and this paradigm that the research of this project will speak loudest.

The research done in this project has implications for how the Church views their philosophies for each interaction, both formal and informal, with their congregants. This research will likely impact how Christian college campuses view their methodology for helping students discover and enhance their relational understanding of faith. Finally, this

research could have implications for how learning takes place. The paradigm for most education is the transference of knowledge, when ownership and the internalizing of material and the ability to critically think are the actual goals of education. This research could help create methodologies that extend beyond the realm of spiritual formation and into the educational process.

Project Overview

The research project is divided into six steps, most easily divided into two sections: data streams and principle development. In the next three chapters the researcher has elaborated on three primary data streams: (1) engaging the biblical and theological literature surrounding the themes of the power and importance of engaging the mind and the developmental nature of faith maturity, (2) engaging the current literature related to the study, which includes identity development theory, faith development theory and self-authorship, and (3) conducting a mixed methods approach to the field research by conducting a quantitative assessment of student's faith ownership, followed by a two-part qualitative assessment of how students arrived at their level of faith ownership.

Following the collection of data for the three streams, the researcher has analyzed, synthesized, and created principles for faith development that will be discussed in the subsequent chapters. It is in these final chapters that readers will be able to see how faith ownership happens for students at Bethel. The researcher's principles for faith ownership will provide key insights for further development in the area of spiritual formation and faith development.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS A DEVELOPMENTAL ENDEAVOR

Loving God as the Foundation of Developmental Faith

Taking ownership of one's faith does not happen instantaneously when a person becomes aware of his or her need for faith or begins a faith journey. Instead, ownership of one's faith, or the maturing of one's faith, takes time. The Christian faith is not simply a religion with rules and codes of proper conduct. Instead, the Christian faith is centered on the relational dynamic of a self-giving God who desires to be reconciled with all of creation, including humanity, which God created in his own image. Because relationship is the essence of faith, it becomes necessary for faith to be seen as developmental. As a relationship grows and matures over time, so does a person's faith in relationship to a God who seeks to know and be known. But what are the expressions of this relationship? And how does this relationship progress and grow? To engage these questions and others, the author has chosen to explore the importance of engaging faith with the mind. Joseph A. Fitzmyer understands the mind to be "that aspect of the human being which is considered the seat of intellectual and moral judgment."¹ R. LaMon Brown, in his article "On Loving God with Our Minds," writes that loving God with one's mind is partially accomplished through memory, imagination and reason.² As the seat of intellectual and moral judgment and the space of memory, imagination and reason, one can see the

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible (New York: S.J. Doubleday, 1993), 641.

² R. LaMon Brown, "On Loving God with Our Minds," *The Theological Editor*, 56 (1997): 3.

transformation of the mind as the most important and most necessary endeavor as one takes ownership of faith.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *Shema*, is the foundation for a developmental faith. The liberation of God's people from Egyptian slavery placed the nation of Israel in a position to understand the nature and character of the God who liberates. The words of God, through God's servant Moses, express the desire of God for a relational faith, an intimate knowing between an individual and God. When sacred vulnerability and willful trust come together in the life of an individual, God works to transform a person, who becomes an ambassador for God's kingdom. Ultimately, God desires a relational faith because it is only through the self-giving nature of relational, self-sacrificial love that the kingdom will flourish in the lives and communities of this world. The people of Israel were called to love God with their entire beings (Deut. 6:5). Understanding why God explains love in this manner will provide the foundation for recognizing faith as something that necessitates development in the life of the believer.

Commanded to Love

The *Shema* does not communicate a philosophical view of Israel's belief in a monotheistic religion, though it does exclude any polytheistic concept by calling God one.³ Instead, the *Shema* of Israel is God's command to the people, which impacts the people of Israel's experiences with God, or as William Lasor and others state, "Their faith was the result of experience and not the conclusion of abstract logic."⁴ The *Shema*

³ William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 119.

⁴ Lasor, 119.

became the measuring point or the “plumb line” for Israel’s relationship with God.⁵ Because loving God with one’s whole heart (which primarily emphasizes the mind) is part of this declaration, it is logical to believe that an intentional, developmental approach to faith existed in connection to the experiences of each member of the community.

Patrick D. Miller writes, “The initial function of the *Shema* is to identify the one who for this people will be the center of being and value and to begin to characterize the nature of the relationship between God and people. It also serves to create an identity for this people.”⁶ The *Shema* doesn’t simply begin to explain the types of action which would be deemed appropriate for God’s people; instead, the *Shema* explains the character and relational dynamic of God, who desires relationship with creation. The centrality of this relationship is love. As Telford Work writes, “The love of God is the specific eternal reality from which Israel originates and into which Israel is invited.”⁷

The *Shema*, according to Daniel I. Block, “functioned as Israel’s pledge of allegiance.”⁸ The importance of this pledge is found in the uniqueness of a God who desires covenantal relationship, indicating the approachability of God and the people.⁹ The concept of “love” becomes an important shift or turning point in how humanity relates to God.¹⁰ Block defines love more specifically: “Speaking biblically, ‘love’ is not

⁵ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, ed. James Luther Mays, Interpretation: A Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 98.

⁶ Miller, 98.

⁷ Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, ed. R. R. Reno, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2009), 96.

⁸ Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck, The New Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 186.

⁹ Block, 186.

¹⁰ Block, 188.

merely an emotion, a pleasant disposition toward another person, but covenant commitment demonstrated in actions that seek the interest of the next person.”¹¹ Because the passages of Scripture are calling upon one to love God, it is only appropriate that it be recognized that loving God requires a relationship, which by definition cannot be done in isolation.¹² It is within relationship and not out of personal achievement that one’s faith is grown.

Before one can parse out the meaning of the word “heart” in the *Shema*, it is necessary to understand the importance of God being understood as “one” and the necessity of God demanding “love.” Patrick D. Miller writes that God as one is “ultimate or absolute – the power that undergirds all reality is one and not multiple, faithful and not capricious, a whole and not divided, and therefore capable of purpose and power because this one is not controlled and limited by other forces.”¹³ This all-powerful oneness is only limited when God self-limits in the act of creation.¹⁴ The self-limiting of God in creation, therefore, demands, or commands, love; not because God is dependent upon human love, but as the “ground of existence,” God is “what keeps life from being chaotic and divided beyond the limits of human management.”¹⁵ This is why it is necessary to love God with all of one’s heart, soul and strength; or in other words, “the most important word, therefore, in its character as a demand that shapes our identity is, Love the Lord your God

¹¹ Block, 189.

¹² Gerald R. Cragg, “On Loving God with Our Whole Minds,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1976): 209.

¹³ Miller, 103.

¹⁴ Miller, 103.

¹⁵ Miller, 104.

wholeheartedly, with your whole self, with all your capacity. The oneness of the Lord your God is matched by the oneness and totality of your devotion.”¹⁶

For some, the word “obedience” becomes an acceptable way of understanding the love that God demands from humanity. A. D. H. Mayes writes, “Love of God is an attitude which can be commanded. For Deuteronomy it is virtually synonymous with ‘obedience.’”¹⁷ Duane L. Christenson writes that love of God is a responsible action that the religion of Israel is founded upon.¹⁸ Eugene H. Merrill takes the understanding of love being more than an emotional or sensual connotation in a slightly different direction by calling it “the nature of obligation, of legal demand,” a demand of “unqualified obedience.”¹⁹ For Merrill, the initial command for Israel “to hear,” carries a specific and important appeal beyond merely listening. Merrill writes, “‘To hear,’ in Hebrew lexicography, is tantamount to ‘to obey,’ especially in covenant contexts such as this. That is, to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear him at all.”²⁰

Loving God with the Heart-Mind

The command of God in the *Shema* is to love God with all of one’s heart, with all of one’s soul, and with all of one’s strength. This command becomes particularly intriguing when the Hebrew word for “heart” is investigated more closely. The Hebrew

¹⁶ Miller, 103.

¹⁷ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, New Century Bible (Greenwood, South Carolina: The Attic Press, Inc., 1979), 176.

¹⁸ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, Word Biblical Commentary, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 142..

¹⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary: An exegetical and theological exposition of Holy Scripture (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 164.

²⁰ Merrill, 162.

word *lebab*, which is often translated as “heart,” more fully represents the idea of “heart-mind.”²¹ According to James L. Bruckner, Jesus correctly adds the Greek word *dianoia* (“mind”) with the word *kardia* (“heart”) when translating the *Shema* for the Pharisees.²² These expressions were “attempting to describe a complete representation of a whole person.”²³ Bruckner places a person’s intellect and passions within the *lebab*; and states that “if one’s intellect and passions are divided, one has a weak or confused *lebab*.”²⁴ A healthy *lebab* allows a person to keep God’s commands, consciously choose to follow God, and to be whole or complete in doing so.²⁵

In describing the different uses of the Hebrew word *leb*, Christine Mitchell articulates four categories: “vital center” (physical nature of a person), “affective center” (emotional core), “noetic center” (thoughts, cognition, memory, understanding, wisdom), and “voluntative center” (planning and conceiving).²⁶ Jesus and the authors of the New Testament not only used Deuteronomy 6:4-5, but they did so without subtracting from the original meaning; instead, “Mark and Luke fleshed out the original text by dividing the Hebrew term *leb* into its proper semantic categories of emotion (or feeling) and mind (the intellect).”²⁷ Recognizing the complicated nature of the Hebrew term used in this passage

²¹ James K. Bruckner, “A theological description of human wholeness in Deuteronomy 6,” *Ex Auditu* 21 (2005): 4.

²² Bruckner, 4.

²³ Bruckner, 4.

²⁴ Bruckner, 6.

²⁵ Bruckner, 6.

²⁶ Christine Mitchell, “Heart and Mind in the Hebrew Scriptures,” *Touchstone* 23, no. 1 (2005): 8-9.

²⁷ Merrill, 166.

allows one to not only understand the multifaceted definition of the term and the differences between Deuteronomy 6:5 and the parallel versions in the Synoptic Gospels, but it also emphasizes the importance of mindful love of God, which creates space for a developmental understanding of one's spiritual formation.

Mayes writes that the heart is to be understood as the “seat of man’s intellect and will.”²⁸ Duane L. Christenson, regarding Deuteronomy 6:5, writes that “our love for God is to embrace the whole of our mind, both conscious and unconscious.”²⁹ Christine Mitchell writes that one is “to feel your love for God and also to *think* your love for God. We are commanded not only to love God emotionally, but to love God rationally.”³⁰ Mitchell goes on to write that it is “imperative to know why one loves God.”³¹ The question of why is a critical question at the heart of spiritual formation and faith development. Only with loving God with one’s mind can this question be asked.

Loving God with One’s Mind

Loving God with one’s mind is a frequent refrain within the church, but rarely do leaders spend sufficient time explaining the importance or discussing practical pursuits for how congregants can engage the life of the mind. According to John Piper, the command to love God with all of one’s mind is to “direct our thinking in a certain way; namely, our thinking should be wholly engaged to do all it can to awaken and express the heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things.”³² According to J.P. Moreland, the

²⁸ Mayes, 156.

²⁹ Christensen, 143.

³⁰ Mitchell, 13.

³¹ Mitchell, 13.

³² John Piper, *Think* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 83.

calling of Christ to love God with our heart, soul, strength and mind means that “God is worthy of being loved with every single facet of human personality, not simply with one or two aspects of our nature.”³³ Loving God with one’s mind is an aspect of full devotion. One cannot love completely without engaging the mind.

But a cognitive pursuit of God is not entirely sufficient either. Gerald R. Cragg argues that Christ’s words about how one is to love God is not about a pursuit of intellectualism, but instead calls a person to love God with the entirety of one’s being.³⁴ The difficulty lies not in doing one aspect of love for God well, but being able to love God wholly. The church in North America often vacillates from one predominant type of love to another, or the mode of love depends on a denominational preference. Too often an intellectual pursuit of love for God is ignored. Moreland specifically notes that Jesus intentionally includes an intellectual love for God.³⁵ “If we are to be formed in Christ, we must realize the work of God in our minds and pay attention to what a Christlike mind might look like.”³⁶

Robert E. Dunham, in writing about the importance of engaging our minds in regards to our faith comments that “mindful Christianity can still be a force for redemption, for healing the breaches that divide people, for restoring civility and understanding to our speech and our encounters with those who think differently than we

³³ J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The role of reason in the life of the soul* (Colorado Springs: NAVPRESS, 1997), 50.

³⁴ Cragg, 209.

³⁵ Moreland, 50.

³⁶ Moreland, 22.

do.”³⁷ Concerned for the historical impact of a mindful faith, Dunham writes, “From our roots we have been shaped as a people for whom the life of the mind was an appropriate and faithful venue for stewardship and discipleship.”³⁸ Dunham cautions having an overly emotional passionate heart towards one’s love of God with the importance of loving God with one’s mind: “When passion seems often disconnected from reason, the church needs more than ever to embrace the life of the mind as a form of faithful service to God.”³⁹ It is dangerous to disconnect the heart from the mind (or vice versa) when loving God. Dunham summarizes this idea: “Mindless passion threatens to undo the world. But the life of the mind disconnected from the human heart and soul is empty and devoid of promise.”⁴⁰

To people in ministry who may be struggling with congregations that don’t appreciate the intellectual pursuit of God, Gerald R. Cragg writes, “If Christians seem somnolent it is because they have never been stabbed awake. If you do not love the Lord with all your mind and help others to do so too, you will be failing your people.”⁴¹ There is often a distrust of reason within Christianity. Robert J. McCracken writes that such a distrust of reason creates an unnecessary schism between head and heart, the result of which is “an attempt to fetter free inquiry and to keep belief fixed and static.”⁴²

³⁷ Robert E. Dunham, “Loving God with All Our Minds: A reminder for preachers,” *Journal For Preachers* 34, no. 2 (2011): 19.

³⁸ Dunham, 20.

³⁹ Dunham, 21.

⁴⁰ Dunham, 24.

⁴¹ Cragg, 208.

⁴² Robert J. McCracken, “Let Us Love God with Our Minds,” *Theology Today* 5, no. 4 (1949): 472.

McCracken recognizes that for many the Christian Church has failed because it has not continued to educate or nurture intellectual growth in its followers.⁴³ In many respects people still reflect a faith of their childhood and not a faith that has grown in similar respects as their understanding of other matters in the world – science, mathematics, music, and culture.⁴⁴ But McCracken does not place the blame solely on the shoulders of the clergy, but also on the shoulders of individuals who have settled for a version of faith that any informed, mature follower “would repudiate with even greater finality.”⁴⁵

McCracken compares loving God with one’s mind to “thinking hard,” as a religious duty on the same level as prayer and public worship.⁴⁶ McCracken writes that the authors of the New Testament and the theologians of the second and third centuries used their minds to “commend the Christian faith to the intelligence of their contemporaries.”⁴⁷ He goes on to write that these men “honored the mind as the instrument that apprehends and appropriates truth,” and that they were aware of and shaped the best thinking of their day, becoming the intellectual leaders of their time.⁴⁸ The church would do well to regain its place as a critical thinking community, willing and leading the development of complex intellectual thought instead of protecting the status quo of religious idealism.

⁴³ McCracken, 473.

⁴⁴ McCracken, 473.

⁴⁵ McCracken, 473.

⁴⁶ McCracken, 472.

⁴⁷ McCracken, 472.

⁴⁸ McCracken, 472.

The *Shema* of Israel provides the foundation for a developmental approach to faith because of the relational desire of a covenantal God. By establishing himself as a God who desires and demands love, and as a God who encourages thoughtful engagement, humanity is uniquely invited to mature and grow. Because the desire of God is relational, the responsibility for growth and maturity is mutually entrusted.

Changing the Way We Think

Daniel I. Block writes, “Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 12:1-2. As is true for us, in ancient Israel the truly godly were covenantally committed to him in their inner beings, with their entire bodies, and with all their resources. Paul and Moses are on the same page.”⁴⁹ Being grounded in a relational dynamic frames the setting for both passages. Because relationship is the foundation, it is expected that growth and development occur. Romans 12:2 will continue the work of Deuteronomy 6:5 by encouraging a transformation of one’s mind in the pursuit of loving God well through a sacrificial life and fulfilling God’s will. In order to understand God’s will, to understand how God wants one to live in the world and fulfill one’s calling, Paul initiates this effort by calling upon each one to renew one’s mind. James D. G. Dunn writes, “For Paul spiritual renewal of the people must begin in the inwardness of a person and must include not least the person’s power of thought and reason.”⁵⁰

Theology Becoming Practice

In order to fully appreciate Paul’s command to transform one’s mind by changing the way one thinks, it is necessary to first understand the important transition point that

⁴⁹ Block, 190.

⁵⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 718.

Romans 12:1-2 serves in the letter to the Romans. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, in his commentary on the book of Romans, notes that chapters 12-15 describe an ethic of relationship that exemplifies the theological positions described in chapters 1-11.⁵¹ In many respects, because Paul had never met the people of the Roman church, their conduct (or ethic) towards one another would prove their commitment to Christ as Lord.⁵² In consideration of this, it would stand that Romans 12:1-2 provides the necessary transition between the two endeavors of the letter. Robert H. Mounce, in his introduction to Romans 12:2, notes that transformation away from an earthly model and towards a heavenly model of ethical living, which allows the church to “stand out from the world as a demonstration of God’s intention for the human race,” is an important differentiation to make.⁵³ D. Edmond Hiebert articulates the transition between the first eleven chapters of Romans and the twelfth chapter as a move from the doctrinal section of Romans to the practical section.⁵⁴ He also comments that this transition is “a clear reminder that true Christianity involves both ‘believing’ and ‘behaving’ the gospel.”⁵⁵ Piper, in his book *Think*, places the use of the mind and thinking at the center of knowing God and calls thinking “one of the important ways that we put the fuel of knowledge on the fires of worship and service to

⁵¹ Fitzmyer, 637.

⁵² Fitzmyer, 637-638.

⁵³ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 1995), 232.

⁵⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, “Presentation and Transformation: An Exposition of Romans 12:1-2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151, no. 603 (1994): 309.

⁵⁵ Hiebert, 309.

the world.”⁵⁶ This idea helps show the transition one can see Paul makes in these verses from a theological argument to the practical working out of that theology.

The concept of transformation is clearly at the center of Romans 12:1-2. Christine Ledger, in discussing the power of transformation, frames the hope of Paul in Romans 12:2 to be a transformation of one’s mind to affect each person’s behavior, habits, attitude, lifestyle, structure, rules, and priorities.⁵⁷ Ledger goes on to say that transformation simply of the mind, without transforming one’s actions leads to a false perception of change which can actually damage the ability for real transformation to occur.⁵⁸ Romans 12 begins with Paul’s summary of the gospel being a necessary balance between “personal commitment and divine enabling.”⁵⁹ Cragg articulates the following when discussing how necessary and vital it is to integrate one’s pursuit of knowledge with one’s pursuit of praxis: “When your insights are woven into the substance of your life you begin to discover something of the power of the truth which sets you free.”⁶⁰ The theological convictions of Paul’s letter to the Romans in the first eleven chapters are met with the understanding that a follower of Jesus must personally commit, but also must relationally understand the transformative work of the Spirit in order to know the will of God.

⁵⁶ Piper, 15.

⁵⁷ Christine Ledger, “Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind: Reflections on Romans 12:1-2,” *International Review Of Mission* 80, no. 317 (1991): 71.

⁵⁸ Ledger, 72.

⁵⁹ Dunn, 707.

⁶⁰ Cragg, 209.

The uniqueness of renewing one's mind in Romans 12:2 is not lost on J. P. Moreland, who lists various other articulations of what God could have said (many of which are reflected in church practices today above the intellectual development of believers): "Be transformed by developing close feelings toward God," or "by exercising your will in obeying biblical commands," or "by intensifying your desire for the right things," or "by fellowship and worship."⁶¹ Moreland doesn't downplay the importance of these actions, but instead connects the mindfulness of habits and rationality to the working out or active service that Paul calls believers toward in Romans 12:1.⁶² In recognizing Romans 12:1-2 is the hinge of Paul's theological and practical articulation of the Christian faith, Moreland appropriately reinforces the primary function of one's mind during this critical juncture.⁶³

The Importance of Romans 12:2 for Community

Reading Romans 12:2 can quickly result in one viewing the call to transformation as an individual endeavor between a person and God. But in order for transformation to truly occur, it is necessary to weigh the individual call in light of the communal efforts towards sacrificial transformation. George Smiga, in writing about the occasion for the letter to the Romans, sees Romans 12:1-2 as the first primary request that Paul is making to the people of Rome, to sacrifice their ideas of how the world works for the sake of unity with one another in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the grace of God.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Moreland, 65.

⁶² Moreland, 66.

⁶³ Moreland, 66.

⁶⁴ George Smiga, "Romans 12:1-2 and 15:30-32 and the Occasion of the Letter to the Romans," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1991): 267.

Ledger writes that one's mind is constantly renewed only when he or she is in solidarity of relationship with another person, hearing his or her story and allowing that story to impact who one is in the process of becoming.⁶⁵ Stoessel emphasizes that the renewing of one's mind is not something that happens to a person, but something within which the individual and community are deeply involved.⁶⁶ Robert Jewett also emphasizes that the transformation being encouraged in Romans 12:2 is not merely of individuals, but of communities, and emphasizes the necessity of seeing this transformation in regard to being part of the new creation. He writes, "The transformation Paul has in view here is shaped by the recovery of a realistic appraisal of ethical choices in the light of the converted community's experience of the 'new creation' brought by Christ."⁶⁷

Doug Heidebrecht provides an insightful account of how to understand the phrase, "renewal of the mind" in his article, "The Renewal of Perception: Romans 12:2 and Post Modernism." Heidebrecht writes that the renewing of one's mind is central to becoming part of the new creation and seeing Christ as the head of the body.⁶⁸ The renewing of one's mind is not simply an individual action, but the renewal of an entire communities understanding of God.⁶⁹ Heidebrecht, in connecting this passage with ethics, states, "The postmodern emphasis on the role of community in the shaping of one's values and beliefs finds affinity with the New Testament portrayal of the church. The renewal of the mind is

⁶⁵ Ledger, 72.

⁶⁶ Horace E. Stoessel, "Notes on Romans 12:1-2: The Renewal of the Mind and Internalizing the Truth," *Interpretation* 17, no. 2 (1963): 162.

⁶⁷ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortune Press, 2007), 733.

⁶⁸ Doug Heidebrecht, "The Renewal of Perception: Romans 12:2 and Post Modernism," *Direction* 25, no. 2 (1996): 59.

⁶⁹ Heidebrecht, 60.

a call for a shared perception and testing of God's will. Ethics is a function of the church as a community."⁷⁰

According to Dunn, the transition towards presenting an ethical explanation of the faith is a common necessity of the major religions and philosophies of the first-century Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world because power and powerlessness, as well as mystery (which was frightening and unexpected), were known realities.⁷¹ "Judaism in particular was as much or more a way of life than a system of belief ('faith' = faithfulness)."⁷² It is from this cultural context that Paul starts to express his understanding of a Christ-centered ethic.

Transformed by the Holy Spirit

The expectation of transformation is a two-fold process of renouncing the patterns of this world, while also being renewed in one's mind. The entire process is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hiebert writes about the first part of verse two, condemning unhealthy practices as seen in the world, "Paul's prohibition is directed against a manner of life that does not come from nor is representative of what believers are in their inner being as the regenerated children of God."⁷³ Hiebert goes on to say that continued conformity to the ways of the world, a chosen decision and perspective on how one lives life, is inconsistent with the declaration to live a life of sacrificial worship.⁷⁴ Everett F. Harrison emphasizes that the renunciation and renewal (both found in Romans

⁷⁰ Heidebrecht, 60.

⁷¹ Dunn, 715-716.

⁷² Dunn, 716.

⁷³ Hiebert, 320.

⁷⁴ Hiebert, 319.

12:2) are to be continuous at the same time.⁷⁵ The believer must renounce the patterns of this present age, while also engaging in the renewing process of having a transformed mind. A transformed mind is not simply a human endeavor, but one that requires, even demands, the work of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ The insistence on the work of the Holy Spirit doesn't remove human effort, but recognizes the relational nature of such renewal.

Stoessel characterizes mind-renewal as (1) "under the guidance of and in the power of the Spirit," (2) "within the community of believers, not simply as a private transaction," (3) "a continuing process," and (4) an endeavor that "must lead to practical actions."⁷⁷ Heidebrecht also discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in the renewing of one's mind, clearly stating that a person who is renewing by God's Spirit has the mind of Christ and therefore can know God's will (as the passage seems to make clear).⁷⁸

Dunn offers insight into understanding the type of transformation that can take place in one's life. First, there is the transformation that could be of the world: "Paul in effect recognizes the power of social groups, cultural norms, institutions, and traditions to mold patterns of individual behavior."⁷⁹ But Dunn then points out that "human responsibility is also involved – that the individual can accept or resist such power structures, can acquiesce in or resist such behavior patterning."⁸⁰ Dunn draws on the

⁷⁵ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans—Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 128.

⁷⁶ Harrison, 128.

⁷⁷ Stoessel, 167.

⁷⁸ Heidebrecht, 60.

⁷⁹ Dunn, 712.

⁸⁰ Dunn, 712.

insights of Roy Harrisville, who formulates a helpful differentiation between conform and transform; “‘conform’ refers to a posture or attitude that may be changed at will, whereas ‘form’ at the heart of ‘transformed’ refers to what grows out of necessity from an inward condition.”⁸¹ This differentiation further illustrates the balance between individual effort and divine enabling mentioned above, which helps emphasize the need for one to put to use one’s capacity for growth through critical thinking. Dunn then emphasizes the balance of individual effort and divine enabling within each person by recommending that the balance already exists in each person, a human aspect and a divine aspect.⁸² In many regards, the human aspect is prone to conforming, especially to the patterns of this world. But it is the divine aspect, the Holy Spirit, who moves in harmony with a refocused human will towards transformation. Dunn emphasizes that this contrast reflects the prophetic mission found in the prophets, but here employed to distinguish between a culturally conformed will and a transformed will focused on the will of the divine.⁸³

As Dunn emphasizes, transformation does not simply happen when one focuses on temporal activities of this present age, but Dunn writes that transformation is intimately concerned with the age to come. Emphasizing the two-age structure of Paul’s writing, Douglas J. Moo writes, “Remembering that we belong to the new age Christ inaugurated, we must seek to live out the values of that new age, allowing the Spirit to

⁸¹ Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980, quoted in Dunn, 712.

⁸² Dunn, 714.

⁸³ Dunn, 714.

transform our innermost thoughts and attitudes.”⁸⁴ Mounce emphasizes that transformation through the renewing of one’s mind is not simply taking on the mind of Christ, but is renewing one’s mind by dwelling on things eternal and not things temporal.⁸⁵

The Process of Transformation

Does transformation happen instantly or develop over time? In some regards, Paul seems to be articulating that transformation should happen quickly and that the believer should instantly be different. But the initial turning from following the patterns of this world to the renewal of one’s mind, recognizes, even necessitates, the ongoing nature of transformation. Harrison, in commenting on Romans 12:2, takes note of the verb tense change from verse one to verse two. In Romans 12:2 the use of the present tense emphasizes the “necessity of continual vigilance lest the original decision be vitiated or weakened.”⁸⁶

Although the world and its patterns are often experienced as part of culture making it nearly inevitable for a person to be impacted by them, Hiebert investigates the Greek in the passage to show that each person has responsibility and culpability for their succumbing to the ways of the world and not living a renewed life.⁸⁷ Not only does each person have responsibility for not conforming to the world, but the act of non-conformity to the patterns of the world must persist for a lifetime; meaning that it is a perpetual and

⁸⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, ed. Terry Muck, The NIV Application Commentary: From biblical text...to contemporary life (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 396.

⁸⁵ Mounce, 233.

⁸⁶ Harrison, 128.

⁸⁷ Hiebert, 320.

on-going habit or process.⁸⁸ In the second half of verse two, there is a change in the verb tense that shows the strong transformation that occurs in the life of the renewed person. Hiebert writes that credit for this transformation cannot be given to the individual, but to the work of the Holy Spirit in that person's life.⁸⁹ Hiebert also writes that although the transformation is to the credit of God's Spirit, the continued work of transformation is also the responsibility of the individual:

The second person plural imperative 'be transformed' indicates that believers have the volitional responsibility to maintain the conditions under which God brings about the transformation. Believers are not powerless puppets in their experience of God's work of sanctification; they eagerly desire and aim to promote it in complying with God's directives for Christian living.⁹⁰

Moo calls the "renewing of our minds" a "new orientation in our thinking" which leads to a "new orientation in behavior."⁹¹ Moo specifically emphasizes the developmental nature of having one's mind renewed. Moo writes,

It is a process. The fact that Paul calls on believers to engage in this renewing of the mind shows that it does not automatically happen to us when we believe. God's Spirit comes to reside in us, and he provides a whole new orientation to our thinking. But our thinking itself is not instantaneously changed. The ruts of the old life are not always easy to get out of. Some of our ways of thinking are deeply ingrained, and they will not disappear overnight.⁹²

The foundation of God's desire for a loving relationship is established in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:5, where God emphasizes love through one's heart-mind. This foundation is at the heart of Paul's writing to the people of Rome, where the mind is the

⁸⁸ Hiebert, 320.

⁸⁹ Hiebert, 321.

⁹⁰ Hiebert, 321.

⁹¹ Moo, 395.

⁹² Moo, 398.

necessary place from which relationship must grow and mature as the hinge between one's beliefs and one's actions. For Paul, this wasn't simply an instantaneous endeavor, but a continuous work through the efforts of the individual, within one's community, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith maturity is both relational and developmental. Because it is developmental, utilizing multiple theoretical approaches has provided insight into this process. Because it is relational, the people with whom one partners is of vital concern.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE CONCERNING THE
DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES OF FAITH, IDENTITY AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP

Faith Development: James W. Fowler

How one defines faith will largely determine how one engages and takes ownership of his or her faith. If one sees faith as static, a mystical download of completed spiritual enlightenment, then faith will not only remain fixed, but will be defended as absolute. If one's faith is static or complete, it will also become the measuring line of acceptance for those desiring participation in mutual community.

However, if faith is a process or journey of gaining information from external sources, then faith presents itself as a fluid and developmental endeavor. Faith as process or journey becomes open to the experience of respected individuals or faith as process is open to the vast amounts of doctrinal or theological articulations of development. Faith as process or journey remains respectful and inclusive, at least to the extent that another person has proved responsible with their faith journey.

But there is a third understanding of faith, which closely resembles faith as journey, and that is faith as relationship. Faith as relationship has all the positives of faith as journey, but lacks the critical judgment for qualifying whose expertise is valid. Instead, faith as relationship remains uniquely humble and transformative. Faith as relationship keeps faith as an active participant in one's development. Faith as relationship doesn't get compartmentalized as a fraction of who a person is in the process of becoming but

instead faith as relationship permeates the entire being of a person, making transformation (whether healthy or unhealthy) truly possible. James W. Fowler paraphrases the word “faith:” “‘I trust, I commit myself, I rest my heart upon, I pledge allegiance.’ All of these paraphrases show us that faith is a *verb*; it is an active mode of being and committing, a way of moving into and giving shape to our experiences of life. They also show us that faith is always *relational*; there is always *another* in faith.”¹ Faith as relationship is also supported by Kelly Cartwright, who writes, “The concept of relationship and the process of transcendence seem essential to spiritual development and appear to be necessary components of an integrative theory of this process.”²

If one is able to see faith as relational and therefore requiring another, it stands that faith permeates all aspects of how one arranges himself or herself and others in society. Faith as relationship becomes more than just a system of beliefs, but the lens through which one views spiritual, personal, and communal engagement. Fowler captures the vast nature of faith in writing the following:

Faith, so Niebuhr and Tillich tell us, is a universal human concern. Prior to our being religious or irreligious, before we come to think of ourselves as Catholics, Protestants, Jews or Muslims, we are already engaged with issues of faith. Whether we become nonbelievers, agnostics or atheists, we are concerned with how to put our lives together and with what will make life worth living. Moreover, we look for something to love that loves us, something to value that gives us value, something to honor and respect that has the power to sustain our being.³

¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning* (New York: Harper One, 1981), 16.

² Kelly B. Cartwright, “Cognitive Developmental Theory and Spiritual Development,” *Journal of Adult Development* 8, no. 4 (2001): 216.

³ Fowler, *Stages*, 5.

Faith as relationship may be the desired goal, as it aspires to humbly transform an individual as a member of diverse community, but because faith can often be defined as static or a journey, it stands to reason that people must develop their understanding of faith. James W. Fowler proposes a stage theory of faith development that articulates how a person can reframe and reorient his or her understanding of faith and therefore the lens through which one engages the world, with faith as the primary foundation of one's identity. Fowler summarizes his understanding of faith development well in the following,

Faith, and the development of faith, has a triadic structure. There is the self, there are the primal and significant others in the self's relational matrix, and there is the third center of relational engagement—the ultimate Other, or the center(s) of value and power in one's life structure. The study of the self in faith development perspective, therefore, must attend to the process of the increasingly self-aware construction of that relational matrix and of its change over time. This includes both the self's choices and affinities with others, and with the Holy, and the transformations and changes these relationships undergo—both due to ongoing development and to changes in the content and shape of one's life experiences. Thus I will claim that the structural aspects that constitute the matrix of faith do embrace—or constitute—a theory of the self, as well as a story of the self.⁴

Moving Towards Stage Three

James W. Fowler's theory of faith development has six stages. For the purposes of this project the author will focus primarily on stages three and four, as they are often the stages being engaged during late adolescence and early adulthood. In order to understand how a person progresses to Stage 3, it will be helpful to briefly provide some background on Fowler's theory and an explanation of stages one and two.

⁴ James W. Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges," *International Journal for the Psychology Of Religion* 11, no. 3 (2001): 163-164.

Theoretical Background

Marlene M. Jardine and Henning G. Viljoen recognize the broad developmental approach that Fowler attempts to articulate in his theory. In many respects Fowler seems to focus most strongly on cognitive development, but aspects of social development can also be seen in his theory. Jardine and Viljoen write, “In bringing together important features of several developmental models, namely, those of Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Selman, Fowler has situated faith development squarely within the domain of human developmental processes.”⁵ Fowler seems to value a person’s competence with psychological structures, thinking, feeling, and social processes, when trying to construct how a person connects to ideas of faith.⁶ In the first few stages it appears that cognitive development is guiding a person’s ability to grasp faith. As one matures, the cognitive approach merges with a psychosocial approach.

The cognitive aspect of Fowler’s theory is strongly supported by Cartwright. She argues that Fowler is writing from a Piagetian perspective and that his stages theory follows a similar pattern to that of Piaget.⁷ Cartwright writes, “At each stage, an individual’s understanding of their relation to an External Power transcends their prior understanding by incorporating additional cognitive skills; however, their understanding is also constrained by their current level of cognitive development.”⁸ The interesting

⁵ Marlene M. Jardine and Henning G. Viljoen, “Fowler’s Theory of Faith Development: An evaluative discussion,” *Religious Education* 87, no. 1 (1992): 74.

⁶ Jardine, 75.

⁷ Cartwright, 216.

⁸ Cartwright, 217.

notion that Cartwright addresses is that cognitive development, and faith development, can mature at any point in a person's life as their ability to reason grows.⁹

Stage One and Stage Two

Stage 1 is the Intuitive-Projective stage of faith, most commonly found in children between ages two and six.¹⁰ Early in a child's life, one lacks concrete operational thought, and therefore makes meaning of one's world based on the experiences or perceptions one encounters.¹¹ Interestingly, the experiences and perceptions do not need to be accurate and they can contradict one another, yet the child will still make meaning and trust what they have seen or perceived.¹² The healthy aspect of this stage is that a person develops an imagination, yet the early symbols and representations of faith can stick with a person far into adulthood because of the formative nature of these experiences.¹³

As a child matures he or she will develop concrete operational thought, which will have a profound effect on one's ability to understand transcendent realities. As this happens, a person is moving into the second stage of Fowler's theory, the Mythic-Literal stage of faith.¹⁴ In this stage it becomes necessary to logically align specific beliefs with facts and proofs.¹⁵ Stories become an important aspect of retelling and formulating one's

⁹ Cartwright, 216.

¹⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, 123.

¹¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 123.

¹² Fowler, *Stages*, 129.

¹³ Fowler, *Stages*, 133-134.

¹⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 134.

¹⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, 135.

beliefs about a subject.¹⁶ The egocentrism found in Stage 1 is not lost on the child who matures to Stage 2, instead, it simply becomes a more logical and rational articulation.¹⁷ The egocentrism in Stage 2 is understood to be a very naïve approach because the child believes he or she is capable of full understanding. Problems arise for a person in Stage 2 when the stories he or she has created don't make sense anymore and a person realizes there might be questions that do not readily have an answer.¹⁸

Synthetic-Conventional Faith

Stage Three

The naiveté of Fowler's stage two demands that as a person matures, he or she will inevitably realize that the imaginative solutions to life's more challenging questions no longer hold up. Because the solutions are not readily available, it becomes natural and necessary for a person to turn to trusted others who can shape and mold one's identity and faith; the expectations of trusted others can "help us focus ourselves and assemble our commitments to values."¹⁹ For Fowler, an "individual's faith system is conventional, in that it is seen as everybody's faith system or the faith system of the entire community. And it is synthetic in that it is nonanalytical; it comes as a sort of unified, global wholeness."²⁰

The family is the most immediate external source that a person will turn towards, but there are others from whom the individual will also seek assistance. Religious

¹⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 136.

¹⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 136.

¹⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, 150.

¹⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, 167.

communities, peers, school or work environments, even the media and popular culture become influencers on a person's identity and faith formation.²¹ Fowler writes that the external influencers can be individuals or institutions, "For Stage 3, with its beginnings in adolescence, authority is located externally to the self. It resides in the interpersonally available 'they' or in the certified incumbents of leadership roles in institutions."²²

The pitfall for this stage is that a person can become overly dependent upon the external sources of their faith identity, "subject to what Sharon Parks calls the 'tyranny of the they.'"²³ It may seem like a person has made objective decisions about his or her chosen path and the external sources charged with the most influence, and he or she may feel very strongly about these decisions, but "a truer reading is that their values and self-images, mediated by the significant others in their lives, have largely chosen them."²⁴ The question for a person in this stage isn't whether or not he or she can articulate an argument or defend a position on a specific and possibly even complicated subject. Instead, the issue is whether or not the person has questioned the external source itself. "A person in Stage 3 is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection."²⁵ The researchers' personal story of identity and faith formation bears out this reality, as does the researchers own professional work with students at multiple Christian liberal arts

²¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²² Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²³ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, 161.

universities. Arguments are readily made and emotionally defended, but when questioned about the foundation of the argument, the disequilibrium quickly presents itself. The danger is when, as Fowler helpfully writes, “The expectations and evaluations of others can be so compellingly internalized (and sacralized) that later autonomy of judgment and action can be jeopardized.”²⁶

Fowler’s research revealed that many adults – both men and women – presented patterns most consistent with Synthetic-Conventional faith.²⁷ “For some adults the forming of identity and faith in Stage 3 is open-ended and clearly anticipates a transition, in the late teens or early twenties, to Stage 4. But for others it becomes a longlasting or permanently equilibrated style of identity and faith.”²⁸ The potential permanency of Stage 3 is not something that merely happens to a person. When faced with an opportunity to “encounter and respond to situations or contexts that lead to critical reflection on their value system” some people “resist or avoid these invitations to awareness of and a more conscious responsibility for their beliefs and values. They reaffirm their reliance on external authority and their commitments to their particular values and images of which they are aware.”²⁹ Religious institutions are one of the places where this reaffirmation and reliance on external authority is prevalent.³⁰ Fowler would even argue that religious institutions “work best” if the institution is populated by a majority of people in Stage 3.³¹

²⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

²⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

²⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, 161.

²⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 162.

³⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, 164.

³¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 164.

Additionally, people are capable of growth without transitioning from one stage to another. Louis Hoffman writes, “It is quite possible for individuals to enhance their spirituality within a stage without progressing toward the next stage of development. For instance, one can strengthen one’s beliefs, increase one’s knowledge, and deepen one’s spiritual community within a developmental stage.”³² This type of growth often happens within Stage 3, potentially solidifying one’s reliance upon external sources of faith because growth has occurred.

Transition

As was noted above, for some the movement to the Synthetic- Conventional stage of faith formation remains “open-ended and clearly anticipates a transition.”³³ For others, the movement to the Synthetic-Conventional stage could become the permanent place of identity and faith congruence. There are specific factors that can lead towards a transition. Some of these factors are anticipated, cultivated, and even sought by those who enter Stage 3 with a sense of open-mindedness. For others, possibly those who are susceptible to permanently identifying with Stage 3, these factors can be so severe that they seemingly force transition. But at all times, it is the person who must engage and enter into the tension of transition.

Fowler describes the circumstances for transition well,

It is significant when persons at Stage 3 encounter and respond to situations or contexts that lead to critical reflection on their tacit value systems. Under such circumstances they begin the transition to Stage 4’s *explicit* system. A new quality

³² Louis Hoffman, “Religious Experience, Development, and Diversity,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 5/6 (2012): 1027.

³³ Fowler, *Stages*, 161.

of choice and personal responsibility for their values and for their membership in the communities that bear them becomes possible.³⁴

Cartwright offers a similar expression for when a transition is ready to occur. She writes, “When individuals are faced with circumstances that are not consistent with their current conception of the world, they must look beyond their own constructions of reality to ‘make sense’ of the available information.”³⁵

A person who is ready for potential transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 must be willing to take ownership of their value systems and choices, as well as for their reasons for membership in the various communities and relationships that influence one’s identity and faith. It is the person who is unwilling to question the value system and the reasons for their membership in various communities that often fails to recognize the unique circumstances that could allow for transition.

Fowler writes a helpful list of factors that often contribute to stage transition,

Factors contributing to the breakdown of Stage 3 and to readiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources, marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable; the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one’s beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how ‘relative’ they are to one’s particular group or background.³⁶

In each of these factors, something external has happened to a person; trusted external sources differ, policies change, an experience affects how one views or forms his or her values. In many cases, these factors are unforeseen and could be considered traumatic.

One of the more common and foreseeable factors is leaving home. “Frequently the

³⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 162.

³⁵ Cartwright, 217.

³⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

experience of ‘leaving home’ – emotionally or physically, or both – precipitates the kind of examination of self, background, and life-guiding values that gives rise to stage transition.”³⁷ The transition to college is one such “leaving home” or experience that can cause introspection of one’s identity or faith.³⁸

One of the limiting factors for transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 is the severity of the ideology that is held by the external source from which a person must push away or question.³⁹ Some groups are more severe than others, making transition, even despite the factors being present, difficult. For instance, religious affiliation is a strong ideology that often can be reinforced by attendance at a church or place of worship similar to what a person experienced at a young age. Louis Hoffman writes, “In some instances individuals are socialized to stay at the earlier stages of development. Particular spiritual and religious communities may adhere to various religious values that are more consistent with the earlier stages of faith; therefore, members of this community are implicitly encouraged to stay at these earlier stages of development.”⁴⁰

Kristin Paredes-Collins and Christopher S. Collins have studied the faith development of non-white students at predominantly white evangelical schools and found that, “evangelical institutions intentionally engage students in spiritual growth and development, but lack emphasis on promoting a diverse learning community.”⁴¹ They

³⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

³⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

³⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

⁴⁰ Hoffman, 1027.

⁴¹ Kristin Paredes-Collins and Christopher S. Collins, “The Intersection of Race and Spirituality: Underrepresented Students’ Spiritual Development at Predominantly White Evangelical Colleges,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 20, no. 1 (2011): 74.

also found that for many students (namely the white students) their commitment to their religion was more closely aligned with following specific doctrine or following the rules and that they did not show a desire for expressing an ethic of caring.⁴² In essence, Paredes-Collins and Collins found that students at predominantly white evangelical schools were not living into the faith they were professing, which could have resulted from a lack of diversity being introduced to the majority culture students. Additionally, a lack of exposure to a diverse learning community would negatively affect majority culture students from growth and maturity.

Sometimes the factors are present, but the new external source is so powerful that one fails to use the factors as an opportunity for transition to the Individuative-Reflective stage, and instead remains fixed in Stage 3. This happens frequently with college students who join a fraternity or sorority. “Social fraternities or sororities in colleges often represent conventional ideological communities that in effect substitute one family group for another, making any genuinely individuative move as regards identity and outlook difficult.”⁴³ Marriage, especially at a younger age, has a similar affect. “Marriage, for many young men and women, can serve to create a new Synthetic-Conventional ethos and because the couple are playing adult roles they are able, at least for a time, to evade the challenges of the individuative transition.”⁴⁴ In each of these scenarios, the severity of the ideological position of the external sources is so strong that transition is difficult. Fowler summarizes the difficulty surrounding this transition:

⁴² Paredes-Collins and Collins, 91.

⁴³ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

⁴⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

As a substitute for the struggles of normal ego development, or as a response to trauma or overwhelming disruption or loss, or as a condition of membership in an ideologically defined group, such persons internalize a set of rigid beliefs, taboos, and prescribed patterns of thought and action. Emotional rigidity combines with a legalistic spirit, oriented to a seemingly sure source of ideological truth. The locus of authority rests in a leader, a creed, or an ideology that may be externalized or internalized, and in the latter case, giving the misleading appearance of autonomy.⁴⁵

Individuative-Reflective Faith

Those who utilize the circumstances and factors of their life must take a necessary step for Stage 4 to become a reality. Fowler writes that, “For a genuine move to Stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority. The ‘tyranny of the they’ – or the potential for it – must be undermined. There must be a relocation of authority within the self.”⁴⁶ The interruption of reliance creates the space for the authority within the self. It is impossible for someone to move to Stage 4 without interruption. As was articulated above, in many cases the factors are almost exclusively external, but it is the questioning of the external sources because of the circumstances or factors that propels someone into a space where one’s own intrapersonal voice and direction can be grasped and cultivated.

Fowler clearly articulates the two prominent features within Stage 4. “The two essential features of the emergence of Stage 4 are the critical distancing from one’s previous assumptive value system and the emergence of an executive ego. When and as these occur a person is forming a new identity, which he or she expresses and actualizes by the choice of personal and group affiliations and the shaping of a ‘lifestyle.’”⁴⁷ In

⁴⁵ Fowler, “Postmodern,” 170.

⁴⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

many respects, Fowler encourages a person to critically think and distance oneself from one's previously held values or beliefs, in order to evaluate and create. The distancing allows space for a person's executive ego to form and cultivate authority within the self for decisions that impact one's values and actions.

For Fowler, this movement towards an executive ego that helps express the authority within does not simply mean that one entirely moves away from the values and commitments that had been important during the Synthetic-Conventional stage. Instead, Fowler writes, "While others and their judgments will remain important to the Individuative-Reflective person, their expectations, advice and counsel will be submitted to an internal panel of experts who reserve the right to choose and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices."⁴⁸ The "internal panel of experts" or the executive ego does not instantly replace one set of external sources or influences for another set. This is not a realignment with new values simply for the sake of being different. Instead, the values expressed during the Synthetic-Conventional stage are questioned and examined, scrutinized by the individual himself or herself. In essence, the internal process of reviewing one's potentially competing values could result in similar affiliations and external influences. Change of values and relationships are not the desired end, change of ownership and final source are the desired end. As the circumstances and factors that lead to the transition are external to the person, the results of Stage 4 are an internal locus of control for one's values.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

One of the difficulties found within Stage 4 is that many people are not able to complete one of the two steps towards internal control. Instead, some people seem capable of only one step. Writes Fowler,

We find that sometimes many persons complete half of this double movement, but do not complete the other. They come face to face with the relativity of their perspectives and those of others to their life experience. But they fail to interrupt their reliance on external sources of authority – and may even strengthen their reliance upon them – in order to cope with this relativity.⁴⁹

Recognizing that one's external sources may conflict with one another is important, but it must lead to the formation of the executive ego. Without doing so a person will never fully reach or flourish in Stage 4.

A person, who has reached Stage 4 and has embraced their own executive ego, has the ability to evaluate individuals and institutions for the value that the individual or institutions provide. Fowler writes that a person operating within Stage 4 is “aware that the self has an ideology that it has formed and re-formed over time, works at apprehending other persons in terms of their personal qualities as well as taking into account the determinative shape of their ideologies and the group experiences that fund them.”⁵⁰ It is this “taking into account” that exemplifies the intention of Stage 4 in contrast to Stage 3.

Journeying Beyond Stage Four

The creation of an executive ego in the face of overwhelming pressure to conform is a major step towards faith maturity. Fowler articulates that for many people Stage 4 is

⁴⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

⁵⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, 180.

either never achieved or can take until middle-age.⁵¹ But Stage 4 does not equate to the highest form of faith maturity according to Fowler. Initially, the formation of identity and the clarity of ideology are positive steps, but these strengths can quickly turn into areas of weakness and vulnerabilities.⁵² A person in Stage 4 adopts what Fowler calls a “second narcissism,” wherein an individual believes that he or she, because of the journey he or she has endured and because of the executive ego that has been created, has arrived at the essential understanding of one’s faith tradition and demands that others come to the same conclusions.⁵³

It is the contention of the researcher that many people can achieve a Stage 4 faith, but because the second narcissism is so strong, one can either remain fixed in one’s mindset and belief system, or when contradictions arise, he or she finds external sources that also project a similar belief system. The newly acquired external sources can often cause a person to slip back into a Stage 3 pattern of faith. This view necessitates the question of whether or not a person actually achieved a Stage 4 faith. Instead, it may be that a person simply took a prolonged time to switch external sources. The researcher would argue that many start the journey into a self-reflective faith where one establishes an executive ego, but due to the reasons soon to be mentioned, does not allow Stage 4 to be a transitional stage, and therefore moves back to a more permanent and comfortable stage.

⁵¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 182.

⁵² Fowler, *Stages*, 182.

⁵³ Fowler, *Stages*, 182-183.

There are two possible, but equally inevitable, outcomes for a person in Stage 4. Either a person will recognize the internal tension that can arise due to a limited ability to understand truth fully, or a person will be externally confronted by other symbols, traditions, or myths that will threaten the narcissism of Stage 4.⁵⁴ In each case a person must either retreat to a more comfortable faith or move forward into the ambiguity of a dialectical understanding of faith.⁵⁵

The names that Fowler gives Stages 5 and 6 are Conjunctive Faith and Universalizing Faith, respectively.⁵⁶ The simple understanding of Stage 5 is that a person recognizes the need to limit one's understanding of faith to one's own experiences, while remaining open and accepting of another's experiences.⁵⁷ The naïve approach of Stage 4 falls away and a person seeks to find value in another's faith journey. Cartwright writes, "Once individuals can step away from and out of the culturally transmitted views that have constrained them, they are able to consider those views as potential alternatives rather than absolute truth."⁵⁸ Cartwright is explaining the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 5, through Stage 4. It is a move away from "culturally transmitted views" (Stage 3) and towards views that are "potential alternatives" (Stage 5), instead of views that are "absolute truth" (Stage 4).

The difficulty of Stage 5 is that it does not have an easy landing spot; it is hard to explain the parameters. In essence, it is easier to explain through analogy or experience

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 183.

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages*, 183.

⁵⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 184, 199.

⁵⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 185.

⁵⁸ Cartwright, 218.

than it is through logic. Fowler attempts to explain the parameters: “Conjunctive faith suspects that things are organically related to each other; it attends to the pattern of interrelatedness in things, trying to avoid force-fitting to its own prior mind set.”⁵⁹

Hoffman writes about this well: “The paradoxical nature of the higher stages of development frequently entail a quality of deep conviction despite being less dependent upon the correctness of belief and being less tied to specific beliefs.”⁶⁰ The ambiguity of specific beliefs by embracing paradox and the willingness to openly respect others makes a Conjunctive faith both beautiful and highly rare.

Stage 5 in many regards is the final stage of cognitive faith development. But Fowler theorizes that there must be an additional stage, one that ultimately embodies the transformation being echoed in Stage 5.⁶¹ Fowler calls this stage, “Universalizing Faith.” Stage 6 is the rarest form of faith.⁶² It is not a cognitively held stage, but an embodied stage of faith. It is reserved for people who do not simply recognize the need for transformation, but actualize the transformative nature of one’s beliefs.⁶³ Fowler writes, “Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist *incarnation*—a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions.”⁶⁴

What is the goal of faith development? Is the goal to arrive at Stage 6? The definition of Stage 6 would imply that Stage 6 is not something one can arrive at, but

⁵⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 185.

⁶⁰ Hoffman, 1028.

⁶¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 198.

⁶² Fowler, *Stages*, 200.

⁶³ Fowler, *Stages*, 199.

⁶⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 200.

simply embody. In many regards, although much of Fowler's work can be characterized as a parallel of cognitive development, the embodied nature of faith is what sets it apart as a way to understand one's self. Faith as relationship has the power to transform. When understood through the lens of faith as relationship, the actualizing definition of Fowler's Stage 6 comes to life. Faith as relationship also requires that one remains open in all stages of one's development. To develop is to remain open to the possibility of change and growth. This is true in all forms of development, including identity development.

Identity Development: James E. Marcia

The simplest of questions about one's identity and worldview can be the catalyst for a lifetime of frustration, discovery and joy. Faith development is synonymous with identity development. The forming of one's faith as the core relational component of one's self that guides all aspects of one's life is a journey of self-discovery as Fowler articulates.⁶⁵ Looking at identity development theory, and specifically the work of James E. Marcia, will allow one to understand from a theoretical perspective how closely linked the two journeys have become. In doing so it will become not only plausible but expected that one uses identity development theory to learn more about faith development.

Identity development theory has a rich history. Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory heavily impacted the direction of Marcia's identity research.⁶⁶ Marcia's identity development theory also utilizes the work of Piaget, namely the principles of assimilation, disequilibrium, and accommodation.⁶⁷ Marcia presents a model of identity

⁶⁵ Fowler, "Postmodern," 163-164.

⁶⁶ James E. Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (1966): 551.

⁶⁷ James E. Marcia and Ruthellen Josselson, "Eriksonian Personality Research and Its Implications for Psychotherapy," *Journal of Personality* 81, no. 6 (2013): 619.

formation that has four identity statuses, which are based or predicated on the level of engagement one has with two factors, crisis (or exploration) and commitment.⁶⁸ A summary of the identity development theory of Marcia is described in this way, “The emphasis of this theory is on the process through which identity is developed; identity is not necessarily viewed as occurring in stages. It assumes that commitments may be manifest even though we cannot see the identity structure. It also assumes that identity can exist even though we do not see the commitments we have made.”⁶⁹ Marcia’s identity development model is in Figure 3.1.

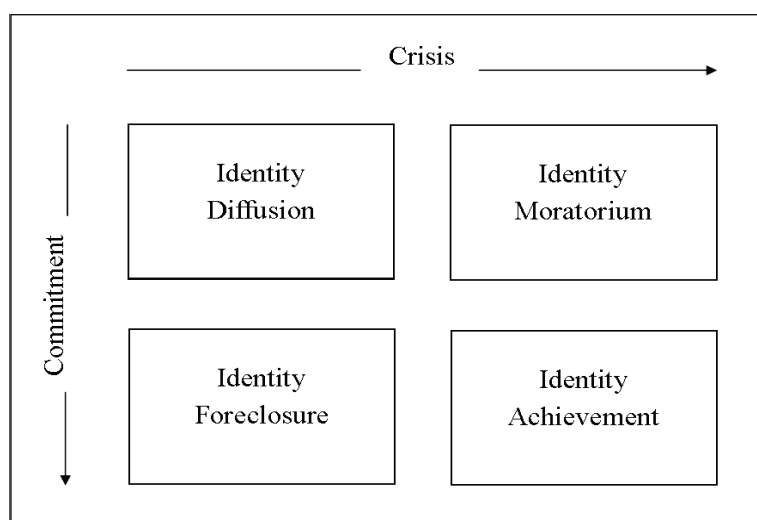


Figure 3.1. James E. Marcia’s Identity Development Model.

The process of identity formation has reaching implications. Marcia writes,

The four identity statuses are based on the dual criteria of exploration (active search among alternatives) and commitment (demonstrated investment) in important life areas including occupational choice, ideology (religious and political beliefs), and ideas about relationships (sexuality, sex roles, etc.).⁷⁰

The area of ideology is specifically of interest for this project.

⁶⁸ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 551.

⁶⁹ ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, “Theoretical Frameworks of Identity Development Theory: Foundational Theories.” *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report* 29, no. 6 (2002): 11.

⁷⁰ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 619-620.

Questions about one's identity and the formation of a consistent personal narrative do not happen in early childhood. Marcia writes,

Issues of identity first become predominant at late adolescence because this is when the necessary physiological, cognitive, and social expectational factors are present. Societies expect, and adolescents expect of themselves, that the young person will make occupational and ideological commitments that will bridge the gap between dependent childhood and mutually interdependent adulthood.⁷¹

It is this phase of development that impacts the research being conducted in this project.

Identity Diffusion

The first identity status that Marcia describes is Identity Diffusion. "Although there are varieties of Identity Diffusion, they have in common a lack of commitment and meaningful exploration."⁷² For many, there is not a pursuit of difference, which would instigate meaningful exploration, and there is also not a significant amount of difference or crisis happening in one's life that would cause the type of questions and longing that one finds with those in Moratorium. Meaningful exploration can be a personally explored desire or it can be the result of circumstances that happen to a person.

In describing how adolescents and teens experience Identity Diffusion, Marcia writes, "Young people in states of Identity Diffusion find it impossible to locate themselves meaningfully in a social matrix and may drift from one endeavor to another, unable to integrate a sense of purposefulness or coherence."⁷³ Unfortunately, those who find themselves in identity diffusion are susceptible to many different persuasions, some of which have unhealthy consequences. It should also be noted that for many the journey

⁷¹ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 619.

⁷² Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 621.

⁷³ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 621.

away from identity diffusion is often a highly committed indoctrinated belief system, which results in foreclosure. In light of identity achievement, with its focus on self-determination, foreclosure can seem like a dangerous or warped status. But for someone meandering through identity diffusion, foreclosure may be life-saving given the other options that vie for a person's attention and commitment.

Identity diffusion has many different causes. Some of these causes can be internal to the person. In other cases the cause may be the environment in which one is supposed to develop a sense of identity. Marcia writes,

Identity diffusion is often experienced as a sense of meaninglessness, as the individual is unable to find a place in an ordered universe. These deficits may be the result of objectively inadequate facilitating environments or some constitutional deficiencies which interfere with attachment, bonding, and the formation of internal representations.⁷⁴

For the purposes of this project, the cause of most concern is the environments that should facilitate one's identity formation. These are the factors that are influenced by and at times under the control of external sources and influencers. Knowing how these environments contribute to identity formation is foundational for the development of healthy spiritual formation practices.

Identity Foreclosure

When a person is presented with or searches out an ideology that confirms his or her thinking, the result is often a sense of foreclosure around that position. In Foreclosure, a person is deepening his or her understanding of self in relation to people and institutions that agree with one's desired identity. Foreclosures are not people who

⁷⁴ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 621.

are searching for difference through meaningful exploration.⁷⁵ Crisis and difference have yet to either be pursued or happened upon a person who identifies with the foreclosed status.

Many people do not arrive in the foreclosed status through an objective process of exploration. Instead, Marcia writes, “Foreclosures are strongly committed to their identity positions, but they have adopted unquestioningly beliefs and values that have been bestowed upon them by authority figures.”⁷⁶ A person who experiences foreclosure is understood to hold onto social or family norms without questioning them.⁷⁷ Marcia adds, “While Foreclosures’ self-esteem may sometimes be brittle, it is firmly embedded in whatever belief system or set of goals they have carried forth from childhood.”⁷⁸ Many of the young people in Christian higher education could tell a story similar to that of a foreclosed person. The values and principles of their identity were handed to them through parents and trusted authorities within a religious setting, which engendered trust and reliance upon such values.

Marcia summarizes foreclosed people well when he writes,

In interviews, foreclosures impress one as being firm in their beliefs and certain of their life directions. However, they usually do not locate the source of these commitments as issuing from themselves. Rather, they tend to ascribe who they are now rather directly to influences from the past. One gets a certain sense of rigidity and brittleness about them; they are reluctant to consider seriously alternatives to their current positions.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 552.

⁷⁶ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁷⁷ ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 11.

⁷⁸ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁷⁹ James E. Marcia, “Education, Identity and iClass: From education to psychosocial development,” *Policy Futures in Education* vol. 7 no. 6 (December 2009): 672.

It is not easy to attempt to change or challenge a person who is deeply rooted in a foreclosed position. Most objections only cause further distancing and retreat into safe spaces or safe relationships that reinforce commonly held narratives. For people in the Foreclosure phase of identity development “their wish is usually to change external conditions rather than themselves.”⁸⁰ Not only could a challenge push a foreclosed person deeper into the proverbial corner,⁸¹ but a significant challenge could also push someone into an unhealthy place of despair. Marcia writes, “When attempting to challenge a Foreclosure’s entrenched position, it is important to proceed gently and cautiously. A too-abrupt disequilibrium can leave the patient with no internal standards for positive self-evaluation and, hence, empty and despairing.”⁸² This space of tension and disequilibrium is not in and of itself bad. The problem is that a person could move towards hopelessness, where identity is being negated. The goal in challenging a person is for that person to engage meaningful exploration that can eventually produce Identity Achievement.

Identity Moratorium

Meaningful exploration and the willingness to engage difference can lead to the identity status of Moratorium. A person can find himself or herself in this status for many reasons. One reason could be a self-inflicted cause; he or she starts to question the nature or value of their chosen identity. Another reason could be a tension between trusted authority figures (people or institutions). When the tension becomes prevalent, the person can find himself or herself unsure of what to believe or where to place trust. Finally, a

⁸⁰ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁸¹ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 552.

⁸² Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 621.

third reason is that life circumstances could force or necessitate questions and disequilibrium. The failure of a person, a relationship, or an institution can cause one to meaningfully explore his or her identity. Ultimately, a person in Moratorium is in the process of finding a compromise between many influences, namely, authority figures (parents especially), societal expectations, and oneself.⁸³

In this status a person is questioning their commitments, which includes one's values and the relationships (with individuals and institutions) that have shaped those values. Marcia writes,

People in the Moratorium status are currently in an identity crisis. They are struggling to find positions to commit to. For people in the Moratorium status, guilt and anxiety can become so overwhelming that the clear thinking necessary to exploration becomes clouded or blocked. Or the young person in a Moratorium phase may become stuck and despairing of ever finding a social choice that 'feels right.'⁸⁴

When engaging a person who finds himself or herself in this space, it is imperative to come alongside and not simply attempt to solve the question at hand. A person in Moratorium has been facing significant questions about his or her commitment to certain authority structures and people and could easily slip back into reliance upon an authority structure as opposed to moving towards an internal sense of identity formation. In writing about how a therapist can assist someone in the status of Moratorium, Marcia writes, "Although the presence of excessive guilt, anxiety, or depression within the Moratorium group may signal pathological processes at work, some internal struggle that creates these affects is developmentally necessary and should be validated, not 'solved' by the

⁸³ Marcia, "Development and Validation," 552.

⁸⁴ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 620.

therapist.”⁸⁵ The first step toward engaging with a person in Moratorium is to validate his or her struggle, to honor the space in which the question or disequilibrium has become a reality. The second step is to refrain from solving and instead become a fellow explorer within the disequilibrium. Marcia goes on to write, “It is a challenge to sit through the obvious pain these persons experience and not try to intervene. But the last thing individuals in a Moratorium phase need is an overly ‘helpful’ therapist. They are undergoing a meaningful, though uncomfortable, crisis which the thoughtful therapist can help them to contain and explore.”⁸⁶

In order for a person to move through Moratorium, one must learn to trust his or her internal voice. External authority structures or people are no longer able to provide the stability needed to arrive at equilibrium, and therefore the person must look inside himself or herself. Marcia writes, “The process of identity formation requires sufficient personality structuralization and management of internal conflict for the individual to be able to attempt joining the self to a larger purpose.”⁸⁷

Identity Achievement

A person reaches Identity Achievement when he or she “has experienced a crisis period and is committed to an occupation and ideology.”⁸⁸ The evaluation of one’s ideological beliefs and the ability to come to a place of congruence allows the person to

¹⁷⁸ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁸⁶ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁸⁷ Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

⁸⁸ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 551.

act confidently.⁸⁹ It is this step of acting confidently that Marcia finds particularly important as identity development theory is closely aligned with psychosocial theory.⁹⁰

Identity Achievement is also concerned with how one learns to think and process. “Advanced identity formation is associated with advanced reasoning ability. It seems that adolescents and adults who can take multiple perspectives on themselves and others also have a firmer and more flexible sense of who they are.”⁹¹ The ability to analyze and synthesize information allows one the space to journey through crisis and disequilibrium while staying connected to important commitments.

The crises and questions that can arise in a person’s life can often lead to times of anxiety and debilitating worry. The ability to rationalize and name the fear, as well as trust one’s own capabilities, is essential as one moves towards Identity Achievement. Marcia writes, “An Identity Achieved individual is reasonably integrated and self-aware, possessing an inner world and a sense of self, having adequate defenses against overwhelming anxiety.”⁹² A person who is capable of handling the inevitable tensions of life without retreating to institutional or externally sourced safe spaces is exemplifying the type of internal self-reliance that characterizes a clear and thoughtful understanding of one’s identity.

⁸⁹ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 551.

⁹⁰ Marcia, “Development and Validation,” 551.

⁹¹ James E. Marcia “Treading Fearlessly: A Commentary on Personal Persistence, Identity Development, and Suicide,” *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 68, no. 2 (2003): 133.

⁹² Marcia and Josselson, “Eriksonian,” 620.

Self-Authorship: Marcia B. Baxter Magolda

As intricately and synonymously as faith development and identity development seem to be, self-authorship equally helps one define and articulate the journey towards ownership. From the recognition of dependence upon external sources, through the shadowlands of pain and mystery, with the help of integral partnerships, one is able to discover and rely upon an internal voice.⁹³ This is the journey of self-authorship. And it is this journey that helps provide language and direction as one seeks to understand the process towards faith ownership.

The complexities of faith development are mirrored in the development of one's identity and in the process towards self-authorship. Terry M. Wildman captures the complex nature of development well when he writes, "Part of the mystery of learning is the question of how we move from relatively naive, shallow, or incorrect representations to scripts and schemas that are more complex and suitable for the world yet to be discovered. It turns out this is very much the developmental mystery faced along the route to self-authorship."⁹⁴

Marcia B. Baxter Magolda has given definition to the concept of self-authorship. Her work has strongly impacted how researchers understand how individuals are able to move toward trusting one's internal voice as opposed to the dominating voices of trusted others. Baxter Magolda comments about participants moving from authority-dependence to self-authorship, writing, "Self-authorship requires their willingness to take increased

⁹³ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, *Authoring Your Life: Developing an internal voice to navigate life's challenges* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), 6.

⁹⁴ Terry M. Wildman, "Taking Seriously the Intellectual Growth of Students: Accommodations for self-authorship," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 109 (2007): 21.

responsibility for the journey, and a willingness on the part of their partners to move into a supporting role.”⁹⁵ One of the unique aspects of self-authorship, in contrast to faith development and identity development, is the open acknowledgment of partnerships in a favorable light. Although self-authorship is the ultimate goal, it is clear that self-authorship does not happen independent of others. Baxter Magolda writes, “[Self-authorship] also requires interdependence with other people to gain access to other perspectives without being consumed by them. As a result, self-authorship is more than a skill; it is a way of making meaning of one’s experience.”⁹⁶

External Influence

For her study on self-authorship, Baxter Magolda found that the participants “entered college heavily reliant on external authorities for what to believe, how to learn, how to define themselves, and how to build relationships with others. They made decisions based on what they thought others expected of them rather than on self-determined criteria.”⁹⁷ Many of the students that Baxter Magolda worked with followed formulas for their success and lacked exposure to diverse perspectives, limiting their ability to think critically for themselves.⁹⁸ When pushed, they also had a hard time articulating their own values, beliefs and identity.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

⁹⁶ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, “Developing Self-Authorship in Graduate School,” *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 101 (1998): 41.

⁹⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 6.

⁹⁸ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, *Making Their Own Way: Narratives for transforming higher education to promote self-development* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus, 2001), 71-72.

⁹⁹ Baxter Magolda, *Making*, 71-72.

Anne Laughlin and Elizabeth G. Creamer also discuss the reliance upon formulas for forming meaning. They write, “Individuals early in the developmental journey, who make meaning based on external formulas, would be expected to seek answers from authority and to uncritically follow the advice of others perceived to know the right course of action.”¹⁰⁰ It is the uncritical nature of accepting direction that becomes most concerning when one desires to see another grow in maturity and ownership of one’s decisions.

The landscape of higher education has not been conducive to the type of development that self-authorship would ascribe to for a young person. Instead of cultivating an internal locus of authority, much of higher education methodology seems to cultivate quite the opposite. Baxter Magolda, in writing about the specificity of education, said,

Many participants reported that in their secondary schools, and sometimes in college, knowledge was portrayed as something students acquired from teachers. Learners were viewed as receptacles of this knowledge rather than active partners in learning. As a result, learners had no idea that they should use their internal voices to form their beliefs.¹⁰¹

But it is not simply the methods being used (such as a knowledge acquisition methodology); instead, there is a dependence upon the people in authority to provide the correct answers. Baxter Magolda found through her research that “as college seniors, 80 percent of the group still relied heavily on external authorities to decide what to believe.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Laughlin and Elizabeth G. Creamer, “Engaging Differences: Self-Authorship and the decision-making process,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 109 (2007): 44.

¹⁰¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 275.

Most of them left college believing that following the plans they had acquired from authorities would yield success in adult life.”¹⁰²

College environments do not often offer students the necessary guidance or skill development to enhance their trust in their internal voice, which only reinforces the need to rely on external formulas.¹⁰³ Peggy Meszaros frames the problem within higher education thusly: “What is missing in all the calls for more accountability for students’ intellectual growth is an understanding of a theoretical context for developmental transformations and a model for implementing the teaching and learning process that fosters growth.”¹⁰⁴ The problem in higher education is not in a lack of intellectual preparation for students, but in not creating environments that actually encourage internal growth through challenge and support. Instead, educational settings, like the family and work environments inhibit people’s growth toward an internal voice.¹⁰⁵

Baxter Magolda helpfully reappropriates the necessary transformation needed to move past an externally driven identity. Instead of simply consuming information or working on a skill, Baxter Magolda acknowledges that a transformation of how people view “knowledge, their identity, and their relations with others” is the only way to move towards self-authorship.¹⁰⁶ Laughlin and Creamer provide an important factor when initiating the journey towards self-authorship. They write, “A key feature of self-authored

¹⁰² Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 6.

¹⁰³ Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, “Self-Authorship: The foundation for twenty-first-century education,” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 109 (2007): 70.

¹⁰⁴ Peggy S. Meszaros, “The Journey of Self-Authorship: Why is it necessary?” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 109 (2007): 6.

¹⁰⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 324.

¹⁰⁶ Baxter Magolda, “Self-Authorship,” 69.

decisions is the willingness to engage diverse viewpoints without losing perspective of one's own values and beliefs."¹⁰⁷ Laughlin and Creamer also emphasize that the values and beliefs that one holds are internally defined.¹⁰⁸ This ability to entertain diverse viewpoints without abandoning the inherited or established perspectives is not only necessary, but will more than likely come with some tension. It is in the tension that growth and transformation have room to take root.

Shadowlands and Pain

The participants in Baxter Magolda's research came to a crossroads when faced with the option to continue their journey as others had envisioned or to continue their journey by way of their own vision and expectation. When this crossroads took place a type of crisis or "pain" forced individuals to halt their journey to discern appropriate next steps.¹⁰⁹ When participants in Baxter Magolda's research articulated having trouble listening to their internal voice or were sidetracked in developing this habit, they were said to enter a place called the "shadowlands."¹¹⁰

The journey through pain and through the shadowlands is not only a positive step, but it is a normal place for those hoping to develop trust in their internal voice.¹¹¹ In some regards, the negative connotation of pain or a shadowland prevents or hinders development. Instead, disequilibrium, pain, doubt, questions, and the shadowlands need to be reinforced as normal and developmentally appropriate.

¹⁰⁷ Laughlin and Creamer, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Laughlin and Creamer, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 6.

¹¹¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 8.

A study of liberal arts college students found that students who progressed further along the self-authorship journey were more likely to have experiences of dissonance and discrepancies between what they had previously held as true and what they were recently being exposed.¹¹² “Faculty and staff expected students to question authority, learn how to critique information, craft their own views, and take personal responsibility in academic work, leadership roles, and personal relationships.”¹¹³ Students found support through these discrepancies when faculty and other influencers provided scaffolding, allowing them to engage in critical analysis.¹¹⁴ Within their study, Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda identified six major themes that contributed to students’ ability to move further along the journey of self-authorship. Two of the major themes directly relate to the research being done in this project. The first major theme was the necessity to “belong to a major source of support.”¹¹⁵ This support system looked different for each participant, but the major tenants of the support source were that the student felt the ability to explore their identity and meaning making.¹¹⁶ Peers, more than any other group or personal connection, were the most influential support system.¹¹⁷

The second major theme which directly relates to the research being done in this project was the “exposure to tragedy of intense personal challenge that required shifting

¹¹² James P. Barber, Patricia M. King, Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, “Long Strides on the Journey Toward Self-Authorship: Substantial Developmental Shifts in College Students’ Meaning Making,” *Journal Of Higher Education* 84, no. 6 (2013): 878.

¹¹³ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 878.

¹¹⁴ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 879.

¹¹⁵ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 882.

¹¹⁶ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 882.

¹¹⁷ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 882.

perspectives.”¹¹⁸ The authors of this study reported that a death in the family, a significant diagnosis of an illness such as cancer, or the breakup of a significant personal relationship were the most likely to contribute to introspection that caused a change in how one articulated their worldview.¹¹⁹

For the participants in Baxter Magolda’s research three experiences prompted the development of self-authorship: “some kind of ‘pain’ or experience of cognitive dissonance that prompted them to reevaluate their lives or beliefs, gaining perspective on the cause of the pain through this reevaluation, and having good partners (or internal support) for thinking through their issues.”¹²⁰ In each of these experiences it is clear that pain and the shadowlands is a necessary and developmentally appropriate step. It is also clear that one never can traverse these significant moments in life alone.

Partnerships

All of us become overwhelmed when our challenges far outweigh our support systems. We also become complacent when our support systems outweigh our challenges. When we are challenged, yet have sufficient support to face our challenges, we are able to grow and reframe our beliefs, identities, and relationships in more complex ways.¹²¹

For Baxter Magolda, support is often the primary function that quality partners inhabit in people’s lives, but introducing challenge is a vital part of partnership that cannot be left out.¹²² There is a healthy balance or tension when it comes to creating dynamic partnership as a person is on a journey towards self-authorship.

¹¹⁸ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 884.

¹¹⁹ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 884.

¹²⁰ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 216.

¹²¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 215.

¹²² Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

The importance of support cannot be overstated. At first a person is fragile, struggling to trust his or her internal voice, making a supportive partner necessary as a person's internal voice must be cultivated and not forced.¹²³ Baxter Magolda writes about people supporting those on the journey to self-authorship,

You can help others learn to trust their internal voices (the first part of self-authoring one's life) by creating circumstances that help them build confidence in their internal voices and supporting them in learning to control their reactions to reality. To support those who are building an internal foundation (the second part of authoring one's life), you can offer guidance for creating a philosophy for managing their reaction to reality, support integration of aspects of their identity, and offer feedback that helps them refine their internal foundation.¹²⁴

Helpful partners, according to Baxter Magolda's research, also supported the development of self-authorship by expressing respect for the person's feelings and thoughts, which affirmed the developing internal voice. A helpful partner also cultivated an atmosphere where experiences were opportunities for growth and learning for both people.¹²⁵

Challenging people in their journey towards self-authorship is the second, but equally important, quality with which a partner must engage. It is the duty of a respected partner to point one's attention to the "complexity of their work and life decisions, and discouraging simplistic solutions."¹²⁶ Instead, it is imperative to encourage people to listen to their own voice in deciding how to live their life, which will result in developing their personal authority and encourage a person to share their expertise with others.¹²⁷

¹²³ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

¹²⁴ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

¹²⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 251.

¹²⁶ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 251.

¹²⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 251.

For those who had a difficult time transitioning from trusting the external voices in one's life to trusting his or her own internal voice, according to Baxter Magolda's research, it depended "in large part on the quality of company available for the journey."¹²⁸ Participants in Baxter Magolda's research who struggled to develop an internal authority found that "significant people in their lives often tried to solve their problems rather than listen to how they felt about them."¹²⁹

The participants in Baxter Magolda's research who developed an internal authority were often "fortunate to find supervisors, colleagues, friends, and family who could serve as good company for the process of using their own hands and voices to shape who they are."¹³⁰ Participants reported feeling most supported when their partners had respect for their feelings and thoughts, participated in helping them sort through the experiences of their life, and were a collaborator in the problem solving efforts.¹³¹

When making decisions about their career choices, the participants in Laughlin and Creamer's study, valued the care and concern exhibited by the people they were engaging (namely parents or significant others), not simply the level of expertise held by the people they were engaging.¹³² This seems to imply that the strength of the relationship, how well a person was known, was more impactful than whether or not the person being consulted had specific insight or expertise. Laughlin and Creamer, based on their study of college-age women who are in the process of making career decisions,

¹²⁸ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 8.

¹²⁹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 11.

¹³⁰ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 11.

¹³¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 12.

¹³² Laughlin and Creamer, 47.

suggest that those attempting to help a college student make important life decisions focus their attention on the “process students use to make important personal decisions,” which will be an “effective way to open communication about developmental growth.”¹³³

The necessity of healthy partnership, as a means towards self-authorship, extends into the classrooms at colleges and universities. In discussing the intersection of intellectual education and the possibility (or necessity) of recognizing the need for self-authorship, Wildman writes,

The transmission or dissemination models typically used to convey knowledge allow faculty members to enact a relatively safe technical practice, drawing as necessary from research and theory (behavioral and cognitive) showing how knowledge and skill development best proceeds. The addition of student development goals to the mix creates levels of uncertainty and instability that essentially require a reframing of what it means to engage in professional instructional practice. Faculty members will now be thrust into a reflective mode that is inventive in nature, decidedly nontechnical, and ultimately disruptive to the bureaucratic systems that were designed to nurture the standard technical practice.¹³⁴

In essence, knowing that the research on self-authorship seemingly demands that students take ownership of their internal sense of authority in order to properly and responsibly enact what they know, educators must rethink and reimagine their instructional practices. Instead of presenting information from a hierarchical perspective, educators must learn to come alongside learners to encourage critical thinking, processing and ownership of ideas.

Peer leadership is an important aspect of collegiate life. But as one comes alongside fellow students, it is important to lead well and not simply try to become another person’s external source. Baxter Magolda specifically addresses this warning,

¹³³ Laughlin and Creamer, 50.

¹³⁴ Wildman, 17.

As a peer, it is important to resist giving advice or turning the conversation to your concerns. Focus instead on drawing your friend's concerns and asking questions to help her or him clarify what is really at issue in a particular situation. Offering expertise that you have is appropriate as long as it does not eclipse your peer's own voice.¹³⁵

The mutuality and equality of the relationship need to be enforced more than the expertise of one's knowledge. In order to create dynamic experiences, higher education professionals need to train their student leaders well, otherwise they will not foster environments where their peers can recognize and live from their internal voice.

According to Baxter Magolda, developmental environments offer three things: confirmation, contradiction, and continuity.

Confirmation provides support for the person's current meaning making and "holds on" to the person as he or she is. Contradiction challenges the person's current meaning making and "let's go," as she or he moves to a new structure. Continuity "stays with" the person as he or she reintegrates the previous self into a new self.¹³⁶

It is important to recognize the presence of challenge and support in the midst of the continuing relationship. A partner who can balance well the tension of challenge and support will provide the best hope for a person to develop his or her internal voice.

Internal Voice

The journey toward self-authorship is not complete once a person is able to internalize his or her decision making and differentiate between an external influence and his or her own internal voice. In order to actualize self-authorship, one must concretize his or her internal commitments which will lead to creating an internal foundation or philosophy. It is out of this internal philosophy that the internal voice will have the

¹³⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 272.

¹³⁶ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 344.

strength and capacity to stand up to the external voices and influences that will continue to attempt control over the individual's mindset.

Once a person has established the ability to recognize his or her internal voice, it is necessary to understand how one creates an internal commitment. In Baxter Magolda's research, one of the significant differences between a person who trusts their internal voice and someone who does not was shown to be that for the person who trusted their internal voice it was important to acknowledge that situations or realities in life were typically out of the person's control, but the person's reaction to the reality or situation was within the person's control.¹³⁷ Learning what is controllable is the starting point to building an internal foundation. Without understanding this difference, the journey towards self-authorship can become defeating, giving power back to the external sources and formulas.

After learning to trust one's internal voice, the next step towards self-authorship is building an internal foundation, which includes using one's internal voice "to make internal commitments and shape them into a philosophy or a framework – an internal framework – to guide them in responding to reality."¹³⁸ For participants in Baxter Magolda's research, creating an internal philosophy that helps one respond to reality included examining how one "had organized their lives and rethinking attitudes or behaviors that conflicted with their internal voices."¹³⁹ In essence, the journey toward self-authorship must become a discipline or practice; it is not simply an achieved position

¹³⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 8.

¹³⁸ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 8.

¹³⁹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 8.

of superior knowledge. Instead, a person who is journeying toward self-authorship understands and potentially redefines the nature of knowledge. Baxter Magolda writes, “Self-authorship requires complex assumptions about the nature of knowledge, namely that knowledge is constructed in a context based on relevant evidence, that evaluating evidence is necessary to decide what to believe, and that each individual has the capacity to make such decisions.”¹⁴⁰

Self-authorship becomes cyclical in nature. One develops the ability to trust his or her internal voice. Then a person reinforces this ability by continuing to practice the discipline of examining perspectives and engaging new ideas that could threaten a person’s equilibrium. This discipline allows a person to build a stronger sense of commitment to one’s internal voice, which then strengthens his or her internal foundation or philosophy. The philosophy or foundation being established is not a foundation about a certain type of knowledge or worldview. Instead, this foundation is that one’s internal voice can be trusted and relied upon to discern what types of commitments and decisions a person should make (as opposed to simply trusting external sources or external formulas). Therefore, at the core of a self-authored person is the ability to change. But change is not whimsical because of external persuasion; change is possible because one is grounded in one’s ability to critically examine perspectives against previously held perspectives. Thus, by practicing the discipline of engaging diverse perspectives, a person is able to grow and mature. Baxter Magolda summarizes this concept by recognizing that

¹⁴⁰ Baxter Magolda, “Developing,” 41.

a self-authored person is “open to the possibility of further reconstruction because participants had the internal security to see reconstruction as positive and exciting.”¹⁴¹

Synthesis of Theories

Faith development, identity development and self-authorship form the basis for this project’s pursuit of faith ownership. In order to understand how a college student in a Christian liberal arts institution takes ownership of his or her faith, it is imperative that one not simply rely on one theoretical perspective, but engage multiple perspectives that allow for a congruence of thought on the developmental nature of persons. The theories of Fowler, Marcia, and Baxter Magolda provide a well-rounded look into the formation of a person’s identity, with common themes that have impacted the field research, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In each of the theories, crisis, disequilibrium, and pain have been a necessary component of the ownership journey. Additionally, appropriate partnerships have been instrumental in a person formulating one’s sense of ownership.

The Importance of Crisis, Disequilibrium, and Pain

In the preceding sections, it was clear that each of the theorists wrote about the necessity of crisis, disequilibrium, and pain. Articulating the types of crisis, disequilibrium, and pain that people who take ownership of their faith is an important aspect of this project. But it is important to emphasize how each of the theorists ground their theory in the necessity of these experiences or tensions.

James W. Fowler acknowledged that the transition between Stage 3 and Stage 4 of his faith development theory was rooted in the disequilibrium of a person having to

¹⁴¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 328.

contend either with divergent external sources and institutions or because a person experienced a de-centering of one's foundation (including the physical act of moving or becoming independent). Whether an existential crisis of differing worldviews from trusted sources, or the physical crisis of moving away from "home;" a person transitions to Stage 4 when placed in a position to experience the pain of being forced to own the next stage of one's growth by establishing an executive ego.

James E. Marcia places crisis as an integral component to the creation of his theoretical model. Without crisis or disequilibrium a person cannot establish a sense of Identity Achievement. The very nature of experiencing a crisis, even without having a foundational set of commitments, is a key status in the identity formation process. Experiencing Moratorium, though potentially unsettling, creates the capacity for Identity Achievement. Conversely, a lack of crisis and disequilibrium, according to Marcia, places one in either a Diffused status or a Foreclosed status. Although not abnormal or developmentally stunted, the place of Diffusion or Foreclosure is in need of crisis to move towards a more mature perspective on one's identity.

The pain of the shadowlands is a central and necessary component of Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory. Without pain or disequilibrium, a person would lack the capacity to hold in tension the differing external influences or formulas that shape one's existence. Without acknowledging this tension and learning to name it (by embracing the pain), it is impossible to establish a commitment to one's internal voice. Once established and recognized, a person's internal voice becomes the ground for future endeavors into tension and disequilibrium. Pain can still exist, but instead of being the

reality most feared, it becomes something one can embrace because it leads to further maturity in one's thinking and understanding of self.

The Importance of Partnership

In each of the three theorists discussed above, the connection to other people played a significant role in the success or hindrance of ownership. In all three theories, young people form the basis of their faith or their identity primarily based on the people closest to them or the institutions and formulas being represented by those closest to them. Even in the best cases, the connection to these people can limit one's ability to grow and take ownership of one's faith or identity because one comes to rely upon the people or formulas. In all three of these theories, we also saw that part of the transition to a more mature stage or a more internally driven identity was when other people or institutions entered a person's life. The diversity of thought or formula caused tension that would possibly lead to the type of crisis, disequilibrium, or pain that was necessary for growth.

Fowler saw that the challenge for people moving from Stage 3 to Stage 4 had less to do with not listening or engaging with specific people, but reframing who the final decision maker would become. In Stage 3, the person often lets others have the final word on what decisions need to be made. However, in Stage 4, the person trusts his or her executive ego to make decisions, while still respecting and engaging significant partners. It is important that a person continue to develop relationships, especially with those who come from diverse backgrounds, in order for true ownership to be grasped.

Partnerships are the key component to creating healthy commitments for Marcia. Without quality commitments, a person who experiences crisis and disequilibrium would

remain in a place of Identity Moratorium and not come to a place of Identity Achievement. It is important to note that often the partners one chooses to help make commitments can do so in ways that avoid hard questions and disequilibrium, thus keeping a person in Identity Foreclosure. But this only emphasizes the need to create relationships with individuals who can provide the space necessary to journey through crisis and disequilibrium while helping one remain committed to one's internal voice.

Baxter Magolda emphasizes partnerships in a similar manner to Marcia. The necessity of finding quality partners, whether in the classroom or in peer relationships, is necessary for forming internal commitments that can become an internal philosophy or foundation. Partnerships allow one the space to process one's shadowland or one's pain, instead of seeking to solve one's pain. Partners create opportunities for a person to struggle well and to struggle through, instead of patching over a struggle with an unexamined formula that does not enhance a person's internal philosophy.

Fowler, Marcia and Baxter Magolda provide the necessary foundation for one to explore how a person takes ownership of his or her faith. The commonalities within their respective theoretical frameworks help clarify the direction of future research. The goal of the field research will be discovering the types of crisis and disequilibrium as well as the types of commitments necessary for faith ownership.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Faith development and specifically faith ownership is a process. The biblical mandate to love God with all of one's heart-mind embraces and prioritizes such a process. The insistence on transforming one's mind in order to enact the type of embodied hope discussed in Scripture also emphasizes the process of faith ownership. The literature of faith development theory, identity development theory, and self-authorship all point to an unfolding progression towards autonomy and healthy intrapersonal and interpersonal development. It is within these theories that one can see the type of important, difficult, and ongoing work necessary for faith ownership to occur.

The combination of these theories points to the larger process of faith ownership. Theoretically one can understand how experiencing times of crisis and disequilibrium, coupled with impactful relationships and a commitment to one's values can move someone towards developing a healthy executive ego and self-authoring his or her future. But is this actually how the process of faith ownership progresses for college students that identify with a mature sense of faith? Do the same factors of crisis and commitment help shape the foundation of one's understanding and actualization of faith? Specifically, are there certain types of crises and commitments that have more relevance or importance for a student in the midst of this process? In order to respond to these questions and the process orientated nature of this field, it became necessary to utilize a grounded-theory approach to the field research. Essentially, the research itself needed to be flexible and

moldable to adapt to the findings as they were being produced in order to accurately understand the nature of the participants' experiences.

It was also necessary to use a mixed-methods approach for the field research. This approach allowed the researcher to accurately move beyond simply ascertaining *what* level of faith maturity one self-assessed, towards understanding *how* a person progressed to that place. Understanding the methodology used for this research and the implementation of that methodology for this project, will allow one to best understand how the researcher concluded with the principles and themes for faith ownership being proposed in this project.

Study Design and Research Method

Grounded-Theory

Utilizing three different theoretical approaches for faith and identity development meant that the researcher couldn't simply conduct a linear study on a new subset of participants based on a verified measurement tool. Instead, a grounded-theory approach to the field research provided the flexibility necessary to refine the findings as a set of principles emerged from the research. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that inductively distills information from participants through a series of data collection efforts and comparisons.¹ A researcher utilizing a grounded theory methodology should not have preconceived notions about his or her research, but should allow the stories of participants to form the direction of the research.² Initially, the

¹ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 23.

² Tahereh Najafi Ghezeljeh and Azita Emami, "Grounded Theory: Methodology and Philosophical Perspective," *Nurse Researcher* 17 (2009): 15.

researcher should analyze the data in comparison with other data, but should progress to comparing categories of data with other categories of data.³ Grounded theory is both a refining process that sifts through data to find important themes, and a congruent process that seeks to discover consistencies within data that point towards a larger pattern. Strauss and Corbin write, “Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.”⁴ Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz have advanced the field of grounded theory and write,

The Grounded Theory Method builds empirical checks into the analytic process and leads researchers to examine all possible theoretical explanations for their empirical findings. The iterative process of moving back and forth between empirical data and emerging analysis makes the collection of data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical.

Grounded theory was first utilized by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in 1965 when they studied hospital patients and medical personnel’s awareness of dying and the interactions during the process of death. From their study, a new qualitative theoretical approach to research emerged that allowed for stories and experiences to influence the creation of theory, not simply test previously constructed theory.⁵ In 1967, Glaser and Strauss wrote *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which detailed the

³ Ghezeljeh and Emami, 15.

⁴ Strauss and Corbin, 23.

⁵ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *Awareness of Dying* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), 259.

sociological principles of grounded theory as a viable and reliable form of theoretical development, to be utilized by social scientists and researchers.⁶

Glaser and Strauss, and later Strauss and Juliet Corbin, listed four components necessary within a grounded theory approach. First, the data being researched must fit within the substantive area of the intended topic of study.⁷ Second, those involved with the research and those who practice within the specific area of study should be able to understand and comprehend the research.⁸ Third, the results of the research project should have a generality to them, which allows for others within the field to see relevant connections to other aspects or applications within that area of study.⁹ Fourth, there needs to be a sense of control with the specifics of the study that relate specifically to the phenomenon being studied.¹⁰

A grounded theory approach requires a sense of flexibility, understanding that the data collection and analysis process will likely change the course of the investigation.¹¹ The researcher's job within a grounded theory approach is to let the results emerge from the data and the categories of data that are being derived. To do this well a researcher needs to have a certain level of connection to the area of study, but must also have a

⁶ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 3.

⁷ Glaser and Strauss, *Awareness*, 260.

⁸ Glaser and Strauss, *Awareness*, 262.

⁹ Strauss and Corbin, 23.

¹⁰ Strauss and Corbin, 23.

¹¹ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2016), 256.

degree of distance from the known or theorized results so as to remain as objective as possible, letting the data collection and analysis inform the direction of the study. Experts on grounded theory have differing opinions about how closely a researcher should familiarize himself or herself with previous findings related to the area of study being researched.¹² Too much knowledge could limit a researcher's ability to remain open-minded about the data being collected and analyzed. More knowledge, however, could allow a researcher to think clearly and insightfully about the data being collected.¹³

For the purposes of this research project, the author was familiar with the theories of Fowler, Marcia and Baxter Magolda, which allowed for clarity in discerning how best to create the open-ended questionnaire. But the author refrained from forming specific hypotheses about what might be found.¹⁴ Instead, it was the priority of the author to allow the data collection and analysis to clearly communicate the story of the participants so as to create a well-defined set of principles.

Research Method

The goal of this research project was to create a set of principles that articulate how a college student at a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university can take ownership of his or her faith. In order to study how this is possible, the researcher used a mixed-method with both quantitative and qualitative features. First, the researcher utilized a quantitative method to determine the faith maturity of participants. Second, the researcher utilized a qualitative method to investigate the possible patterns found within a

¹² Leedy and Ormrod, 256.

¹³ Leedy and Ormrod, 257.

¹⁴ Leedy and Ormrod, 257.

group of participants who had a higher faith maturity score. This “two-phase design” clearly separates the two methods from one another,¹⁵ while maintaining that both are complementary aspects for gaining the most accurate results.¹⁶ Another name for this type of mixed-methods approach is “multiphase iterative design” – early phases of data collection are utilized or built upon by later phases of data collection, with the different phases having different methods for data collection.¹⁷

Research Instruments

Faith Development Scale

The first phase of the research project was the quantitative phase, which utilized an established faith maturity measurement tool, the *Faith Development Scale* (FDS). This survey allowed the researcher to differentiate between students who self-assessed a mature understanding of faith with those who self-assessed a more dependent understanding of faith.

The FDS was developed by Gary K. Leak, Anne A. Loucks, and Patricia Bowlin, who sought to create a global measure that would align with Fowler’s stages of faith development.¹⁸ The global measure was designed to provide an overall index for where a

¹⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 177.

¹⁶ David Silverman and Amir Marvasti, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 57.

¹⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, 313.

¹⁸ Gary L. Leak, Anne A. Loucks and Patricia Bowlin, “Development and Initial Validation of an Objective Measure of Faith Development,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1999), 107.

person was identifying within Fowler's stages, not provide specificity within each stage or determine movement between stages.¹⁹ Leak et al. conducted five initial studies, testing the FDS for validity and reliability. In the course of their studies they deleted five items of the original 13 point scale that did not meet standards.²⁰ In the first study, they tested the FDS in relation to Fowler's stages of faith, religious maturity, religious motivation, religion as quest, and social desirability.²¹ The second study tested the FDS in correlation to personality traits, while also reinforcing validity by utilizing a different methodological approach.²² In the third and fourth studies, Leak et al. had a different demographic of participants use the FDS. The initial studies utilized students at a catholic university. In the third and fourth studies students at a public university and at conservative churches respectively took the FDS.²³ Finally, a longitudinal study with a cross-sectional design was created to further assess the validity and reliability of the measure. In this study, Leak et al. compared the results between college seniors and college freshmen, postulating that maturation would occur due to growth during the developmental years of college.²⁴ In each of their studies the FDS was found to be valid

¹⁹ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 107.

²⁰ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 108.

²¹ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 109-112.

²² Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 114.

²³ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 118-119.

²⁴ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 120.

and reliable.²⁵ Leak would later test the FDS in regards to factorial validity, and again found the FDS to be a valid measurement of faith development.²⁶

In writing about various faith development measurement tools, Heinz Streib found the FDS to be a valid measurement, maintaining that it “would be well-suited for research with larger samples in respect to time limitations.”²⁷ However, Streib is critical of the ability of the FDS to be an accurate faith development measure for populations outside of a Christian context.²⁸ Although Streib’s critique may put into question the *global* aspect of the FDS, the endorsement of validity and reliability for larger samples in a Christian context support the use of the FDS for this research project.

Stephen Parker has also evaluated faith development measurements for their validity and reliability, especially in regards to their connection to Fowler’s stage theory. Parker found that the FDS was a reliable and valid measurement tool that could be used for research.²⁹ However, Parker also commented that the FDS did not accurately correlate specific scores to specific stages within Fowler’s theory.³⁰ Therefore, it would not be

²⁵ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 121.

²⁶ Gary K. Leak, “Factorial Validity of the Faith Development Scale,” *International Journal of the Psychology of Religion* 18, no. 2 (2008), 129.

²⁷ Heinz Streib, “Faith Development Research at Twenty Years,” in *Developing a Public Faith: New Directions in Practical Theology: Essays in honor of James W. Fowler*, edited by Richard R. Osmer and Fredrich L. Schweitzer, 29, (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003).

²⁸ Streib, 29.

²⁹ Stephen Parker, “Measuring Faith Development,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 4 (2006): 344.

³⁰ Parker, 344.

valid to utilize the FDS to measure a person's placement within Fowler's stage theory, but it would be valid to use the FDS to test faith maturity.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

The qualitative section of the mixed-method approach began with an open-ended questionnaire that sought to understand themes from those participants who had a higher global faith maturity score on the FDS. Creating the open-ended questionnaire required an understanding of the three developmental theories being utilized in this project, while not writing questions that were prescriptive of assumed responses. The researcher utilized general themes found within the three developmental theories and created questions that allowed the participants the freedom to share aspects of their story.

Focus Groups

Once the open-ended questionnaire had been administered, the data collected and categorized into themes, the researcher utilized the themes for the second phase of the qualitative section, focus groups. The semi-structured focus groups used standardized open-ended questions and served to define and specify the findings in greater detail. The synthesis of data collection after the open-ended questionnaire provided specificity for the types of questions that needed to be asked. The grounded-theory methodology allowed for the researcher to utilize the categories of data to narrow the scope of the questions, while still remaining open to the differentiations within each participant's story. After the collection of data from the focus groups the researcher again analyzed the data and categorized the findings into themes. These themes allowed the researcher to clearly and specifically determine principles for faith ownership.

Data Collection

Faith Development Scale

Creating the Assessment

Once the researcher found the FDS measurement tool and ascertained its validity and reliability, steps were taken to adapt it into an electronic form that could be easily given to a large group of potential participants. The researcher utilized Qualtrics, an electronic survey and assessment generator. Through this program the researcher created a consent form, gathered demographic information, recreated the FDS, and invited further participation in the research project for participants who scored at a determined threshold. The items in the FDS remained exactly as written in the original measurement tool.³¹

Determining Participants

The researcher contacted colleagues who oversaw student leadership programs and ministries within the offices of Campus Ministries and Student Life. These colleagues were able to provide email lists of their student leaders. The students were from residence life, student government, student activities, international student organizations, and discipleship ministries. All of the students were in a leadership capacity at the time of their invitation. Altogether, there were 210 student leaders invited to participate in the quantitative FDS. Students were given two weeks to finish the FDS. Prior to the deadline, two reminder emails were sent to participants who had not completed the FDS. After the two weeks were completed 117 student leaders had started the FDS with 92 completing the survey.

³¹ Leak, Loucks and Bowlin, 124.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Creating the Questionnaire

The open-ended questionnaire consisted of seven items that were based on the three developmental theories: Fowler's faith development theory, Marcia's identity development theory, and Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory (see Appendix). The goal of the questions was to allow each participant to share their story in an authentic way, while refraining from leading the participants towards desired or presupposed responses. The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and administered via email for participants who indicated six or more mature responses on the eight item FDS survey. The following are the items on the open-ended questionnaire with the requisite connections to the developmental theories:

Item 1: Please describe 3-5 turning points (both positive and/or negative) that have shaped your faith as you currently understand it.³²

Item 2: What resources have helped strengthen your ability to listen to, cultivate and trust your internal voice in regards to your beliefs?³³

Item 3: When faced with new ideas, tensions, or expectations, how have you sorted through these to create meaning for yourself?³⁴

Item 4: Who can you identify as a supportive partner(s) in your faith journey? List them here, along with the reason(s) why you identified them as a supportive partner?³⁵

Item 5: Please describe a painful experience and how that experience shaped your faith journey?³⁶

³² Baxter Magolda, 314; Fowler, 173.

³³ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 316; Fowler, *Stages*, 172.

³⁴ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 317; Fowler, *Stages*, 173; Marcia, "Development and Validation," 551.

³⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 319; Marcia, "Development and Validation," 552.

³⁶ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 315; Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

Item 6: What activities or habits have helped you maintain a sense of commitment to your faith journey?³⁷

Item 7: How have you navigated experiences with people you love and respect but with whom you find yourself disagreeing?³⁸

Determining Participants

The FDS survey was comprised of eight items, offering two statements from which participants were asked to choose a statement that best identified with them at the time of their participation. For each item there was a statement that represented a mature faith identity and a statement that represented a less mature faith identity. Students who scored six or more mature responses were given the opportunity to participate in the qualitative section of the research project. Of the 92 student leaders who took the FDS, 27 provided responses that were at or above six mature indicators. These students were sent an invitation to participate in the second phase of the research project by filling out the open-ended questionnaire, using the same email addresses provided for the FDS.

Implementing the Questionnaire

The researcher provided a two week time period to complete the open-ended questionnaire. During the two week period the researcher sent four email reminders to those who had yet to complete the survey. Upon consultation with the researcher's advisor, the open-ended questionnaire was kept open for an additional week, in the hope of gaining more participation. At the end of the three week period, 14 students had participated in the second phase of the research project.

³⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 318; Marcia, "Development and Validation," 551.

³⁸ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 314; Fowler, *Stages*, 182; Marcia, "Development and Validation,"

Analyzing the Initial Results

Each of the seven items from the open-ended questionnaire was analyzed, synthesizing and categorizing the collected data into various themes and trends. For each item the researcher coded and counted the responses, utilizing a key for the coding process. Upon completion of the coding and counting process the responses were categorized to delineate trends and themes.

Focus Groups

Creating the Group Questions

Once the responses to the open-ended questionnaire were categorized into themes and trends, the researcher determined questions that would allow participants to further examine the initial findings of the research project. For a couple items on the open-ended questionnaire there were not any discernable themes or trends that initially stood out. Therefore, the researcher proposed similar questions in the focus group setting to see if new trends or themes emerged. For other items there were clear categories emerging from the data. In these instances the participants in the focus groups were asked to further explore or explain their responses. The questions were posed in such a way as to evaluate or define the initial findings of the research project.

Conducting the Focus Groups

The students who participated in the open-ended questionnaire were invited to participate in the final phase of the research project. Nine of the 14 were able to participate in one of two focus groups, with one student able to conduct an additional one-on-one session with the researcher. The same questions were asked during each focus group session. Each student was made aware of the consent form and the resources

available to them should any of their responses or the conversations during the focus group have an effect on their emotional, spiritual or psychological health. The focus groups were recorded with two devices with the consent of the participants. The researcher provided a gift card for each participant who completed the final phase of the research project.

In review, the researcher employed a mixed-methods study design with priority placed upon the qualitative data. The research instruments included the FDS, an online open-ended questionnaire, and focus groups. The recruitment strategy consisted of generating an email list of student leaders from the departments of Campus Ministries and Student Life. Ninety-two student leaders participated in the quantitative portion of the research project. Twenty-seven students were invited to participate in the open-ended questionnaire. Fourteen students completed the open-ended questionnaire and were subsequently invited to participate in a focus group. Eight students participated in a focus group session. The data analysis involved descriptive coding of themes into categories and sub-categories for each of the qualitative portions of the research project.

The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before proceeding with the study. The IRB “seeks to ensure the respectful and ethical treatment of human participants in research.”³⁹ The researcher completed research ethics training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI).⁴⁰ The researcher also submitted the Informed Consent Form and the research instrument questions.

³⁹ Bethel University, “Institutional Review Board,” Bethel University, <http://www.bethel.edu/academics/irb/> (accessed February 29, 2016).

⁴⁰ Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, “Home Page,” <https://www.citiprogram.org/> (accessed March 14, 2016).

CHAPTER FIVE: PROJECT ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The open-ended questionnaire and the subsequent focus groups provided the researcher with a significant amount of data. The open-ended questionnaire had seven items, while each focus group had five questions from which data was generated. With grounded theory as the methodological approach, the researcher utilized the findings of the open-ended questionnaire to generate the questions for the focus groups. Also, because of the grounded theory approach, the findings in the open-ended questionnaire were intentionally limited as the focus groups were able to more specifically engage items that may have lacked specificity. Looking at the analysis of the data from each item or question will allow one to understand the findings from each stage of the field research.

Faith Development Scale

Analysis

An invitation to the FDS was sent to 210 student leaders. While 117 students started the FDS, 92 completed the survey. The results of the survey were organized by the researcher to determine potential qualitative participants. The FDS suggests that individuals with a higher global score have a higher level of faith maturity. Table 5.1 indicates the number of respondents for each FDS global score. The score out of 8 represents the number of mature responses indicated by each participant.

Table 5.1: Number of respondents for each FDS score.

FDS Score	Number of Respondents
0 out of 8	1
1 out of 8	2
2 out of 8	7
3 out of 8	8
4 out of 8	13
5 out of 8	15
6 out of 8	14
7 out of 8	21
8 out of 8	11

The majority of student leaders who completed the FDS indicated a mature response for more than half of the items on the survey. The researcher determined to utilize those who scored a 6 out of 8 or better on the FDS survey for the qualitative aspects of the research project. Additionally, as part of the online FDS survey, the researcher asked participants to indicate whether or not they would like to be involved in future aspects of the research project. Of the 46 individuals who scored a 6 out of 8 or better on the FDS, 27 indicated their willingness to participate in the qualitative process of the research project.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

The open-ended questionnaire was completed by fourteen individuals who scored a six out of eight or better on the FDS. Ten of the fourteen were female, four were male.

Analysis

Item One: Turning points that have shaped one's faith journey

Participants were asked to list three to five "turning points" that have shaped their faith. The list of responses encouraged participants to view potential turning points as both positive and negative. Each turning point was coded and counted to create data points. From the fourteen participants, 39 turning points were reported. In some participants' responses similar turning points were mentioned, such as being influenced

by friends and asking hard questions. Table 5.2 shows the different types of turning points that participants listed with the frequency of each response.

Table 5.2: Turning points that have shaped one's faith journey.

Type of Turning Point	Number of Occurrences
Going to college	7
Influence of friends	4
Emotional encounter with God	3
Traveling outside of the country	2
Asking hard questions	2
Having negative faith influences	2
Impact of home faith environment	2
Learning to forgive someone	2
Parent's divorced	2
Peer group changed	1
Reading the Bible	1
Going to high school	1
Parent's beliefs shifted	1
Participation in specific college class	1
Spiritual relationship with high school teacher	1
Break-up with significant other	1
Being baptized in the Holy Spirit	1
Making poor decisions	1
Parent lost a job	1
Friend committed suicide	1
Struggled with an eating disorder	1
Helping with a ministry	1

Going to college was the most common turning point, included by half of the participants, followed closely by the influence of friends and emotional encounters with God. Twelve of the 39 turning points were connected to a change in physical location. Thirty-two of the 39 turning points were due to a connection with another person (either the turning point included the participant being effected by another person or the participant was engaging with another person), while only seven turning points were internal or personal. Peers were mentioned in a person's turning point on 20 of the 39 responses. Parents or adult mentors were only mentioned on five occasions. On only six occasions was a spiritual discipline mentioned. Of the 39 turning points, eleven were negative, with the remaining 28 being positive or neutral.

Item Two: Resources that have strengthened one's internal voice

The second item on the open-ended questionnaire asked participants to list resources that have strengthened their ability to listen to, cultivate, and trust their internal voice in regards to beliefs that one holds. No examples were given. Participants were not given a minimum or maximum number of resources, and were not asked to weigh the resources on the level of importance or impact. Table 5.3 shows the list of resources and the frequency of each response.

Table 5.3: Resources that have helped strengthen one's internal voice in regards to beliefs.

Resource	Number of Occurrences
Bible	5
Friends	4
Mentor	4
Family	4
Prayer	4
Dialogue with other people	3
Internal sense	3
Book	3
Church or chapel service	3
Mom	2
Speaker	2
College class	2
Holy Spirit	2
Significant other	1
Leading a small group	1
Professor	1
Resident Assistant	1
Silence	1

There were 46 total resources listed. The Bible was the most frequently mentioned resource with five of the fourteen respondents including it. However, due to the large variety of resources listed and the lack of specificity of some responses, it became necessary to batch the responses into categories. Table 5.4 lists the types of resources into two categories, while providing sub-categories within each of the two main categories.

Table 5.4: Categories and sub-categories of resources that have helped strengthen one's internal voice in regards to beliefs.

Category (total occurrences)	Sub-Category (total occurrences)	Resource	Number of Occurrences
Relationship (21)	Conversation with Peer (9)	Friends	4
		Dialogue with other people	3
		Significant other	1
		Leading a small group	1
	Mentor (6)	Mentor	4
		Professor	1
	Resident Assistant	1	
	Family Member (6)	Family	4
		Mom	2
Spiritual Disciplines (25)	Contemplation (10)	Prayer	4
		Internal sense	3
		Holy Spirit ²	1
	Reading (8)	Bible	5
		Book	3
	Formal Speaking (7)	Church or chapel service	3
Speaker		2	
College class		2	

A relational connection to another person and spiritual disciplines emerged as the two main categories for separating the data. Within each of the main categories the data was divided into sub-categories to specify the types of responses. In the relational category responses were placed in sub-categories connected to their peers, an adult mentor, and someone from their family. In the spiritual discipline category responses were placed in sub-categories representing contemplative practices, reading, and formal speaking engagements (such as church attendance or going to a college class). Of the 46 total resources listed, 25 were placed in the spiritual disciplines category and 21 in the relationship category. Within each sub-category, there wasn't a significant difference between any types of response from the other responses.

Item Three: Making meaning when faced with new tensions

For the third item on the open-ended questionnaire participants were asked how they have sorted through new ideas, tensions or experiences in order to create meaning for themselves. Table 5.5 shows the types of efforts participants have used to create meaning with the frequency of each response.

Table 5.5: How to sort through new experiences in order to create meaning.

Type of Effort	Number of Occurrences
Talk to friends	7
Look to internal beliefs	6
Keep an open mind	5
Talk to family	4
Evaluate Jesus' response	3
Consult the Bible	3
Seek to understand others	3
Talk to a mentor	2
Seek reconciliation	2
Discuss differences	2
Stay positive	2
Pray	1
See situation as an opportunity	1

Half of the respondents said that they would talk to a friend or a group of friends about their new experience or tension. Almost half of the respondents mentioned that they would look internally or trust their internal sense in knowing how to make meaning of the new experience or tension. Specifically consulting the Bible was only mentioned on three occasions. Because of the variety of responses and the different types of responses, the researcher categorized the data two different ways. In Table 5.6 the types of effort for meaning making have been given category headings based on the type of effort.

Table 5.6: How to sort through new experiences to create meaning.

Category	Sub-Category (total occurrences)		Number of Occurrences
Type of Effort	Seeking Further Understanding (15)	Keep an open mind	5
		Seek to understand others	3
		Seek reconciliation	2
		Discuss differences	2
		Stay positive	2
		See situation as an opportunity	1
	Consult a Trusted Person (13)	Talk to friends	7
		Talk to family	4
		Talk to a mentor	2
Engage a Spiritual Discipline	Look to internal beliefs	6	
	Evaluate Jesus' response	3	
	Consult the Bible	3	
	Pray	1	

There were 41 different responses given. The different types of efforts for meaning making were spread proportionally between three distinct categories: those who were seeking further understanding on the specific tension or experience (15), those who consulted another person about the new experience or tension (13), and those who engaged a spiritual discipline (13).

The information was then re-categorized by whether or not the type of effort was relational or not in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: How to sort through new experiences to create meaning. Relational Effort.

Category	Sub-Category		Number of Occurrences
Relational Effort	Connect Deeper with Someone (28)	Talk to friends	7
		Keep an open mind	5
		Talk to family	4
		Seek to understand others	3
		Talk to a mentor	2
		Seek reconciliation	2
		Discuss differences	2
		Stay positive	2
		See situation as an opportunity	1
	Individual Effort (13)	Look to internal beliefs	6
		Evaluate Jesus' response	3
		Consult the Bible	3
		Pray	1

When attempting to make meaning of a new idea, tension or experience, respondents looked to connect deeper with another person on 28 or the 41 responses. Thirteen responses were connected to a person's individual effort. It should be noted that three of the 28 responses in the "connect deeper with someone else" category may be ill-suited for this categorical alignment (stay positive and see situation as an opportunity) because they don't accurately fit in either category being utilized. With this in mind, connection with another person still has a significant advantage over an individual effort.

Item Four: Spiritual partners and why they were significant

The fourth item on the open-ended questionnaire was actually two questions in one item. The first aspect of item four asked participants to list the significant partners on one's faith journey. Participants were not given a minimum or maximum number of partners, nor were participants asked to weigh the significance between one partner and another. Table 5.8 is a list of the significant partners that participants have had on their faith journey, categorized by the type of partner.

Table 5.8: Partners on a person's faith journey.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Partner	Number of Occurrences
Peer (19)	College peer	13
	Significant other	4
	Friend from home	2
Family (16)	Parent	12
	Sibling	4
Adult Mentor (8)	High school youth pastor	2
	Missions team	2
	High school teacher	1
	Pastor	1
	College professor	1
	Mentor	1
No Partner (1)	Did not prefer a partner	1

The participants in the open-ended questionnaire generated 43 total significant partners. One participant preferred not to utilize a mentor because of past painful experiences when opening up to a trusted spiritual partner. The types of significant

partner were categorized into three groups: peers, family, and adult mentor. The people on one's mission team were mentioned by participants on two occasions. Mission's teams are generally comprised of peers, but are typically led by a more seasoned or experienced adult. Because the adult leader provides the direction and helps facilitate the environment on the mission trip, the responses were categorized in the adult mentor section. However, it is possible that the most impactful relationship on a mission trip was with one's peers who are being affected in similar ways by the experience, so it is possible these responses could be placed in the peer category.

Peers were the strongest significant partner with 19 total responses. Within the peer category, a person from one's college (either individual friend or group of friends) was mentioned the most frequently, with 13 total responses. Parents were the most frequently mentioned family member, on 12 of the 16 responses. Adult mentors did not have a significant response within that category.

The second question asked within item four was why the significant partners were understood to be significant. The responses were categorized by the researcher in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9: Reasons why partners were significant.

Category (total occurrences)	Specific Reasons	Number of Occurrences
Provided Space to Process (62)	Provides encouragement/ support	21
	Available for questions	14
	Challenging	8
	Offer a unique perspective	6
	Accountability	5
	Model vulnerability	4
	Connect to daily living	3
	Trustworthy	1
Provided Specific Direction (32)	Offers prayer	8
	Respected the longevity of faith	6
	Have a similar faith journey	5
	Confident in beliefs	4
	Provides direction	3
	Have a perseverant faith	2
	Inspirational	2
	Provides knowledge	2

There were 94 reasons why participants found significance in the partners listed.

The most frequently mentioned responses were that a significant partner provided encouragement and support (21 occasions) and that a significant partner was available for questions (14 occasions). The researcher placed responses in one of two categories: responses that indicated the significant partner provided space for one to process (62 responses) and responses that indicated the significant partner provided specific direction (32 responses). The category of being provided space to process was determined by the researcher answering the question: Would the participant feel known by the significant partners interaction? The category of providing specific direction was determined by the researcher answering the question: Would the participant need to be vulnerable in this interaction? (In order to offer prayer, one typically needs to be vulnerable. But often prayer can be used to communicate direction or values instead of simply validating one's struggle; thus it was placed in the specific direction category. If prayer were to be moved to the process category, the frequency of responses would be divided 70/24.)

Item Five: Painful experiences that have shaped one's faith journey

The fifth item on the open-ended questionnaire is similar to the fourth in that it essentially asks two questions of each participant. The first aspect of item five asked respondents to describe a painful experience that shaped one's faith. The types of experiences and the frequency of such an experience are listed in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10: Types of painful experiences that influenced faith journey.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Experience	Number of Occurrences
Painful Experience in Faith Community (6)	Broken trust by spiritual authority	2
	Bullied by Christians at young age	1
	Wasn't considered a 'good' Christian	1
	Judged by 'dysfunctional' church	1
	Missionary family not welcomed home	1
Painful Experience in Family (5)	Person close died or committed suicide	4
	Parents divorced	1
	Relationship with significant other ended	1
Painful Experience Personally (2)	Struggled with eating disorder	1
	Wrestled with one's identity	1

The first aspect of item five is reminiscent of the first item (significant turning points in one's faith journey), except these instances are focused specifically on the painful experiences; which represented less than a third of the turning points in item one. The researcher separated the data into three categories: painful experiences that originated in one's faith community, painful experiences that originated in one's family, and painful experiences that originated because of an intrapersonal situation. The most common painful experience was the death of someone close to the participant, which was reported on four occasions. Parents were only mentioned negatively in one response. A failure in one's faith community was the strongest category, but had a variety of expressions.

The second aspect of item five was how a painful experience shaped one's faith journey. Table 5.11 lists the type of reactions that were expressed by participants and the number of times those reactions occurred.

Table 5.11: How a painful experience shaped one's faith journey.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Reaction	Number of Occurrences
Positive Reaction (17)	Felt God's presence	5
	Forced to own faith	3
	Provided a new community	2
	Able to connect with others	1
	Connected peers	1
	Received healing	1
	Recognized need for forgiveness	1
	Engaged Bible	1
	Closer family relationships	1
	Grew stronger in beliefs	1
Negative Reaction (16)	Questioned God	3
	Home church not safe place	3
	Questioned authority	2
	Distrust of people with answers	2
	Family struggles	2
	Poor self-image	2
	Felt judged	1
	Questioned identity	1

The responses to the second aspect of item five were divided into two categories: positive reactions and negative reactions. There were 33 overall reactions to the various painful experiences. The reactions were almost equally distributed between the two categories. Feeling God's presence had the most occurrences with five people mentioning this reaction. The reactions were not weighted by respondents. With thirteen painful experiences listed in the first part of item five and 33 reactions to those experiences, there were close to three reactions on average per painful experience. This data is not able to tell us which reactions are more significant than others.

Item Six: Disciplines and habits that have shaped one's faith journey

The sixth open-ended questionnaire item focused on the specific disciplines, habits and activities that participants engage in to help maintain and shape one's

commitment to one's faith journey. This question is similar to the second item (what resources have strengthened your ability to trust your internal voice), but focuses on the disciplines and habits that shape faith or maintain faith. Table 5.12 provides two categories of responses while listing the responses and the frequency of each item.

Table 5.12: Types of activities, habits, or disciplines that help maintain commitment.

Category (total occurrences)	Specific Items	Number of Occurrences
Intrapersonal (24)	Prayer	7
	Reading the Bible	5
	Reading Christian books	3
	Listening to Christian music	3
	Studying	2
	Utilizing a devotional app	2
	Times of solitude	1
	Journaling	1
Interpersonal (18)	Dialogue with others	8
	Going to church or chapel	7
	Small group meetings	2
	Serving others	1

In total, there were 42 specific activities, habits or disciplines that participants engage in that help shape or maintain one's faith. The most frequent response was dialoguing with others (eight occurrences), which was followed closely by the three traditional spiritual disciplines of prayer (seven occurrences), going to church or chapel (seven occurrences), and reading the Bible (five occurrences). Dividing the responses into categories of intrapersonal and interpersonal did little to differentiate the items, as each was well represented (24 and 18 respectively).

Item Seven: Navigating experiences of disagreement with people one loves and respect

The final open-ended questionnaire item dealt with how participants navigated experiences of disagreement with people one loves and respects. The focus of this question is the different forms of resiliency with which the participants engage. Table 5.13 lists the different responses and the frequency of each response.

Table 5.13: How a person has navigated disagreements with people one respects.

Types of Response	Number of Occurrences
Was willing to disagree	8
Stayed committed to the relationship	6
Shared one's own beliefs	5
Remained open-minded	4
Found it hard to share differences	3
Sought understanding	2
Kept Jesus Christ central in relationship	2
Won't bring up subject anymore	2
Backed away from the relationship	2
Asked questions	1
Incorporated into one's own faith	1
Remained committed to faith	1
Prayed	1
Listened for guidance from Holy Spirit	1
Remained calm	1

There were 40 total responses to item seven. The most frequent response (eight occurrences) was that participants were willing to disagree with the person they were at odds with, instead of not engaging the issue. The four most frequent responses all had to do with remaining in dialogue with the person with whom the participant disagreed.

Table 5.14 categorizes the responses to further show the relational nature of participants' responses.

Table 5.14: Categories for how a person navigated disagreements with people one respects.

Category (total occurrences)	Types of Response	Number of Occurrences
Positive Response towards Relationship (28)	Was willing to disagree	8
	Stayed committed to the relationship	6
	Shared one's own beliefs	5
	Remained open-minded	4
	Sought understanding	2
	Kept Jesus Christ central in relationship	2
	Asked questions	1
	Found it hard to share disagreement	3
Negative Response toward Relationship (7)	Won't bring up subject anymore	2
	Backed away from the relationship	2
	Incorporated into one's own faith	1
Internal Response (5)	Remained committed to faith	1
	Prayed	1
	Listened for guidance from Holy Spirit	1
	Remained calm	1
		1

Overwhelmingly, respondents were willing to stay positive and engaged in the disagreement with the person with whom they loved and respected; of the 40 responses, 28 responses were positive towards engagement. Only seven of the 40 responses were negative.

Findings

The data provided through the open-ended questionnaire indicated that participants with a mature understanding of one's faith have experienced significant life-turns that are generally framed in a positive way. However, when asked specifically about location changes or transitions, respondents frequently associated those situations with negative emotions or negative reactions.

The data also indicated that respondents valued relationships and spiritual disciplines equally in regards to one's faith development. Although there seems to be an equality to these resources, relationships were equally emphasized even when the question had a bias towards spiritual disciplines. In regards to the relationships that participants had with a spiritual partner, the data indicated that the most impactful aspect of their relationship was that spiritual partners provided respondents with space to process one's faith and didn't simply give spiritual direction.

Focus Groups

The researcher conducted two focus groups with four participants in each group. The focus groups lasted roughly one hour and engaged in specific questions that were designed to either clarify themes found in the open-ended questionnaire or to explore certain themes at a deeper level. Both focus groups were asked the same questions, with slight variation in how a question was asked.

Analysis

Question One: How has loss or a failure in one's faith community affected one's faith?

The open-ended questionnaire indicated that loss or a failure in one's faith community had a significant impact on one's faith journey. The first question for each focus group was to understand how such a loss or a failure affected a person and how that affect impacted one's faith journey. Table 5.15 shows how participants responded along with the frequency of each response. The responses have also been categorized by the type of response.

Table 5.15: The effect of loss or faith community failure on one's faith journey.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Effect	Number of Occurrences
Negative Reaction (18)	Become angry, bitter or cynical	5
	Disengage from spiritual disciplines	3
	Question validity of community	3
	Feel disillusioned	2
	Question God	2
	Feel confused	1
	Feel sad	1
	Sought affirmation outside of faith community	1
	Positive Reaction (4)	Re-engage faith
	Activate faith through good works	1

Becoming angry, bitter or cynical was the most frequent response of participants with five out of eight participants indicating such a response. Three of the eight participants disengaged from spiritual disciplines. Three of eight significantly questioned the validity of their faith community. And positively, three of the eight re-engaged their faith in a more passionate way. When describing how a loss or a failure within one's faith community affected one's faith development, the initial response by the participants was overwhelmingly negative. Some indicated how they were able to move past the negative

response, but the vast majority of responses indicated a season of hardship with how they had originally constructed meaning in their faith journey.

One participant's comments summarize the theme of this question well when speaking about the death of a loved one, "I got very bitter and angry, just really stopped caring about my spiritual life; stopped doing my devotions. I didn't really pray anymore, and I would try to put on this happy face that everything was fine, but I became really cynical." The following is from a participant who had experienced failures within the faith community, "If someone comes off and tells me immediately that they are a Christian, I automatically put up a wall and I don't have a trust for them because of that; because of the fact that I've been hurt by people who call themselves Christians, and then act so differently." Another participant's comments highlight the positive reaction, though it is still filled with tension when speaking about being hurt by her home church, "I think for me it has just led me closer and closer to the Lord. Church is still a struggle I'm trying to work through."

Question Two: How does a location change or a transition deepen ownership of faith?

One of the significant turning points that was expressed in item one of the open-ended questionnaire dealt with a location change or a transition affecting one's faith. For the second question of the focus groups the hope was to delve further into how a location change or a transition affected one's faith. Table 5.16 provides the responses of participants and the frequency of each response. There were 23 total responses, with each participant providing between two and three responses each.

Table 5.16: The effect of a location change on one's faith.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Effect	Number of Occurrences
Negative Initial Response (11)	Disagreed with parents or home church	6
	Questioned one's faith	4
	Disillusioned with the church in the US	1
Positive Initial Response (7)	Trusted in God	3
	Learned about other denominations or theology	2
	Found acceptance	1
	Lived a more active faith	1
Internalized Initial Response (5)	Depended on oneself	3
	Experienced independence	2

Similar to the responses for the first question, the general reaction to a location change or a transition was initially negative. The positive aspects of a location change or transition were more closely balanced with the negative aspects, especially if one were to interpret the internalized responses as positive experiences. Six of the eight respondents mentioned that a location change or a transition caused tension or disagreement with one's parents or one's home church. In most instances, the participants were speaking about a transition to college. Four the eight participants found themselves questioning their faith.

During the first focus group, a participant commented about the transition to college; he said, "I went to the same church while growing up. So I came to Bethel and found that I kind of thought that all Christians had the same thoughts. I realized that wasn't true at all. I kind of disagree with what my church said at home. And actually I agree with this." In a similar instance during the second focus group, a respondent said, "I think the transition into college was something that made me realize that my faith does have to be my own at some point. I think that there are things that I would disagree with as far as my church at home and even some of the things my parents believe. I think my faith looks a bit different." When speaking about her parent's divorce and the selling of her family home after her high school graduation, one respondent said, "Because the

whole past has been gone and we sold the house and everything, and the door seemed to be closed, I had to find elsewhere to go develop. So I think spiritually that made me realize that no longer do I have my parent's faith to lean on." In a positive way, a participant in the second focus group summarized the effect of her transition well when she said, "Being surrounded by Christians has been good for me. To see all the different exposures and different opinions has been very beneficial for me, making my faith my own."

Question Three: How does processing with a spiritual partner make a difference in one's faith development?

The open-ended questionnaire data suggested that participants valued having spiritual partners who allowed space for one to process. For the focus group sessions the goal was to understand why processing was effective for spiritual formation. For the third focus group question, the researcher asked how processing with a significant partner made a difference in one's faith development. Table 5.17 lists the different types of effects that a processing partner had on a participant and the frequency of those effects. There were 22 different responses from the focus group participants.

Table 5.17: The effect of a spiritual partner who allows for processing to happen.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Effect	Number of Occurrences
Listening Emphasis (12)	Allowed one to think out loud	4
	Current situation was validated	3
	Was allowed to struggle	2
	Was allowed to grow	2
	Experienced freedom	1
Speaking Emphasis (9)	Received feedback	3
	Was offered a new perspective	3
	Didn't succumb to the internal lies	2
	Offered prayer	1
No Spiritual Partner (1)	Was self-reliant	1

The responses for question three of the focus groups were categorized into two groups, one with a listening emphasis and another with a speaking emphasis. It is not

surprising that a listening emphasis is the more dominant response when the question is framed by the idea of being given space to process. In contrast, the number of responses that emphasized a spiritual partners' willingness to speak were almost at a similar frequency. The most common response about how processing was helpful for one's faith development was that significant spiritual partners allowed one to think out loud, with one respondent calling herself a verbal processor.

One respondent summarized the helpful interaction with her spiritual partner well when she said, "I think the most important thing, most valuable thing, she has done for me is that she always asks why. Why do you think that? Why do you see God this way?" Another respondent from the first focus group emphasized receiving an outside perspective on an issue when he said, "I think that it's really important to have someone who's there to process things with because it adds a new perspective." This comment was followed by someone who said, "A big thing for me is even saying lies out loud." She followed this comment up by discussing how just having someone there to hear her process was helpful because she was able to hear herself differently.

Question Four: How does processing with a spiritual partner differ from receiving direction?

Not only did the data from open-ended questionnaire emphasize the importance of processing with a spiritual partner, it was contrasted with receiving direction. The open-ended questionnaire did not specifically contrast the two ideas; therefore, in the focus groups the researcher chose to directly address the differences between being able to process and receiving direction. The results in Table 5.18 represent participants' views on

the strengths or weaknesses (the types of effect) for both being given space to process and receiving direction from a spiritual partner.

Table 5.18: The difference between processing and direction from a spiritual partner.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Effect	Number of Occurrences
Process (21)	Was able to grow	5
	Was able to learn new things	4
	Was able to be vulnerable and honest	3
	Brought things to the light	3
	Took away Satan's power	2
	Allowed one to think for oneself	2
	Led to evangelism	1
	Was encouraging	1
	Direction (10)	Didn't help during adversity
Thinking was done for you		2
Caused a wall to go up		2
Had judgment attached		1
Person expressed bias		1

Respondents to the fourth question of the focus groups were overwhelmingly supportive of processing as a means of spiritual growth. Not only were 21 of the 31 responses focused on the positive nature of being provided space to process, but each of the ten instances where being given direction was mentioned were all in a negative context. Five of the eight respondents said that being allowed to process provided space for one to grow, with four of the eight participants saying that processing allowed one to learn new things. In speaking about receiving direction from a spiritual partner, four of the eight said that receiving direction was unhelpful during times of adversity.

The strongest language of the focus groups was used to describe the type of frustration experienced in direction receiving situations. After the death of her cousin, one respondent was told that she just needed to pray more and do her devotionals. She talked about how that type of spiritual direction was hurtful and said, "There was this spiritual channel within me that was blocked, and no amount of devotions was going to fix it." Another participant described going through a difficult season and having a hard time with the spiritual direction being given because it didn't acknowledge the feelings

behind the behaviors. She said, “Someone just telling you what to do is not going to change the fact that you’re feeling something, and it’s not going to necessarily go away. I think that processing allows you to release those feelings.”

The willingness to process with someone was positively captured when a respondent said, “I think for me processing is when I know the other person is open to options about how the outcome is going to look.” Another participant said, “I think that’s the big difference (between being given direction and having space to process), if people have their minds open or not.” In the second focus group a person responded to the fourth question by saying, “I think for me the biggest thing is that process allows for progress to take place.”

Question Five: Which resources – relationships or spiritual disciplines – have had a greater impact on your faith journey?

Item two of the open-ended questionnaire asked respondents to name the resources that have helped shape one’s faith development, and item six asked about different disciplines, habits or activities that have helped maintain one’s faith. In both instances responses were similarly dispersed between spiritual disciplines and connecting with others. In item two the emphasis was on relationships, but in item six the emphasis was on the intrapersonal nature of the disciplines. The fifth question of the focus groups hoped to ascertain where participants were placing the emphasis between these two resources of faith development. Table 5.19 lists the responses of the participants in three categories: an emphasis on relationships, an emphasis on spiritual disciplines, and the necessity of both.

Table 5.19: Greater impact on faith development: relationships or spiritual disciplines.

Category (total occurrences)	Type of Resource	Number of Occurrences
Emphasis on Relationships (6)	Relationships are more important	4
	Relationships enhance spiritual disciplines	2
Necessity of Both (5)	Need both	3
	Should be done together	2
Emphasis on Spiritual Disciplines (2)	Spiritual disciplines are more important	2
Non-Specific Response (3)	Depends on the person which one is emphasized	1
	Depends on the season a person is in	1
	Neither is helpful	1

An emphasis on relationships or the necessity of having both aspects was more positively spoken of in contrast with just an emphasis on spiritual disciplines. The most common response from half of the focus group participants was that relationships were more important than spiritual disciplines. On two occasions respondents said that their relationships enhanced their willingness to engage in spiritual disciplines. Most interestingly were the comments about the necessity of having both. In most instances, the participants discussed the complementary nature of one towards the other.

One respondent summarized the emphasis on relationships well when she said, “Reading the Bible by myself and trying to understand it alone is not going to be as powerful as when I’m with a person and we are reading it together.” In a similar way, one of the respondents from the first focus group, who grew up in a missionary family overseas, said, “I think those things should be together. I think it’s also very American of us to separate these two things. We are not as community oriented as other cultures.” A participant from the second focus group explained her reason for gravitating to the relational aspect of things when she said, “I’m an extrovert, a verbal processor, so to actually understand how I’m feeling and where I’m at and what I’m thinking, I have to

talk and talk until I finally get to that, ‘Oh that’s it, that’s what I’m feeling.’ And obviously, that doesn’t happen as easily when I’m just reading the Bible.”

Findings

The data from the focus groups was consistent with the data from the open-ended questionnaire in regards to participants’ negative reaction to painful experiences and times of transition or location change. Participants indicated that the negative reactions often fueled one’s faith development. Additionally, the data from the focus groups supported the data that relationships were more positively regarded when one was given space to process and not simply given spiritual direction.

Finally, the data indicated that participants differentiated between relationships and spiritual disciplines in regards to helpful resources for one’s faith development. Instead of seeing the two resources as equally important, participants emphasized relationships, especially as a reason to engage in the spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER SIX: PROJECT DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

The qualitative field research, which consisted of an open-ended questionnaire and two focus groups, produced data that was analyzed and categorized to thematically develop principles for how college students at a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university were taking ownership of their faith. The open-ended questionnaire indicated that individuals who scored a six out of eight or greater on the FDS experienced difficult life turns, which were met by a period of negative reactions and emotions. The questionnaire also indicated that when asked to explain why a significant partner was helpful for faith development, the significant partners who allowed a person to process his or her experiences, beliefs, and feelings were most beneficial. The focus groups confirmed and clarified much of the data generated in the open-ended questionnaire, while enhancing the necessity of relationships for one's faith development. The research completed for this project and the subsequent principles generated support and extend the research conducted for the Biblical and Theological Foundation and the Review of Related Literature, and are discussed below.

The research project had areas of strength and weakness; first in the design itself and then secondly in the implementation of the project. An evaluation of the research project with suggestions for future improvement follows the discussion of the research findings.

Discussion

Engaging Crisis and Pain

The first principle generated from the research project is that for students who are presenting a more mature understanding of one's faith *a painful experience is a catalyst for faith exploration and ownership*. The student leaders who participated in the qualitative portions of the research project indicated two specific categories of painful experiences that impacted their faith development: failures within one's faith community and loss within one's family. Although when asked about significant life turns on the open-ended questionnaire negative or painful experiences accounted for less than one-third of the experiences listed, each of the eight focus group participants could vividly recount how a painful experience had been the catalyst for his or her faith development.

The two categories of painful experiences are of note for the researcher. The loss of a loved one, especially someone at a young age, and the ending of a parent's marriage are the types of losses that one doesn't expect at an early age. These are the types of losses that would make a person question the nature of a loving and good God. These are also the types of losses, especially the divorce of one's parents, which would make a person question one's identity and purpose. A failure within one's faith community is of similar interest as it also represents an unexpected questioning or doubt in the structures and relationships that give one's faith meaning and substance. Each of the participants in the focus groups who described such a failure were speaking like it was the death of something sacred.

Painful experiences are a catalyst for belief. In the above study of the *Shema*, the faith of Israel was described as "the result of experience and not the conclusion of

abstract logic.”¹ The rescuing of God’s people and the giving of God’s Law were understood as loving in light of the degrading and marginalizing Egyptian oppression. In every telling of God’s story with Israel, it begins with a God who rescued from slavery. Painful experience was the catalyst for relationship and faith in a God who entered a lived reality and not a philosophical vacuum.

The *Shema* was also the foundation of one’s identity in relation to God and the community.² The nature of a painful experience calls into question one’s identity and to whom one is ascribing and inferring worth. The participants in the qualitative portion of this research project all discussed how their painful experiences demanded a questioning of one’s relationship with God, and in some instances one’s faith community. The *Shema* requires that one commit to a relationship with a loving God.³ It is natural that after a sudden or unexpected loss or the failure of one’s faith community, one would question the nature of a loving God. The participants also described their faith journey as perseverant, which would show a commitment to God, despite the pain experienced. The concept of love in the *Shema* is not simply an emotional experience, but a covenantal commitment expressed through one’s actions.⁴

A painful experience as a catalyst for faith ownership is at the heart of Fowler’s transition from a Stage 3 expression of one’s faith to a Stage 4 expression. Painful experiences upset one’s current conceptualization of the world and how it makes sense,

¹ Lasor, 119.

² Miller, 98.

³ Cragg, 209.

⁴ Block, 189.

causing one to form a new reality that incorporates the new circumstances.⁵ Regarding the failures of one's faith community, Fowler writes that contradictions between one's authority structures is one of the main factors that leads to stage transition.⁶

A transition to college was understood as a significant life turn by many of the participants in the open-ended questionnaire. And although not specifically linked to a painful experience, a transition to college was discussed in the focus groups as a turning point that caused tension between one's parents and in some instances one's home church. Such a location change or transition is one of the specific "leaving home" experiences that Fowler discusses as a transitional moment for one's faith ownership.⁷ The participants in the focus groups also discussed how their transition to college exposed them to different denominations and theologies, which caused tension with one's previously held beliefs. This is an important factor as Hoffman writes that for some their religious environment doesn't encourage exploration, keeping people at an earlier stage of faith.⁸ The exposure to different denominations and theologies is also of particular note as Parades-Collins and Collins found that often students (especially white students, which comprised all of the focus group participants) lack exposure to diverse communities at predominantly white evangelical schools.⁹ Positively, Baxter Magolda, Barber and King

⁵ Cartwright, 217.

⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

⁷ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

⁸ Hoffman, 1027.

⁹ Parades-Collins and Collins, 74.

found that students who were exposed to difference and discrepancies were more likely to trust their internal voice.¹⁰

Participants in the open-ended questionnaire described their painful experience as causing an internal questioning of one's identity and worldview. Articulating how a person arrives at Identity Achievement, Marcia writes that a person must manage internal conflict as one attempts to join oneself to a larger sense of purpose and meaning.¹¹ Marcia's Identity Moratorium status is contingent upon a person engaging crisis, often through the failure of one's known authority structures (either individuals or institutions).¹² A major theme of Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda's research indicated that a death in the family or the breakup of a significant relationship significantly contributed to introspection of one's worldview.¹³ The loss of a loved one or the failure of one's faith community often forces a person to view their trusted authority figures (including God) as complex, as a person can no longer see them in the simplistic light of perfection. The ability to see others and oneself as capable of multiple perspectives is seemingly a prerequisite for a stronger grasp on one's identity.¹⁴

Willing to be Angry

The second principle generated from the research project is that for students who have taken ownership of their faith *anger and doubt must be willingly explored*. During each focus group conversation when discussing painful experiences that led to faith

¹⁰ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 878.

¹¹ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 620.

¹² Marcia, "Development and Validation," 552.

¹³ Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda, 884.

¹⁴ Marcia, "Treading," 133.

ownership participants clearly expressed feelings of anger, bitterness and cynicism. Half of the responses in the open-ended questionnaire about how a painful experience leads to faith ownership were negative. Participants discussed how a spiritual partner validated one's feelings and one's questions. Significant partners also remained open-minded, allowing participants to think out loud. One participant in the second focus group spoke about being allowed to say lies out loud, which exposed the lies and led to freedom.

Moreland, in writing about the concept of loving God with all of one's heart, explains that emotions were understood to be one aspect of love, but not the entirety of loving God.¹⁵ Too often love of God can be framed in one context or another. In some instances love of God is emotional; in other circles love of God is intellectual. Cragg writes that loving God with one's heart-mind requires a person to love God with the entirety of one's being.¹⁶ The emotional expressions of one's faith journey, through painful experiences and periods of doubt and crisis, are not the entirety of one's relationship, but are necessary for full devotion. Dunham summarizes the balance of loving God with all aspects of one's being, writing, "Mindless passion threatens to undo the world. But the life of the mind disconnected from the human heart and soul is empty and devoid of promise."¹⁷ A willful exploration of one's anger and doubt is an expression of the fullness of how one is called to relationally engage God.

Connected to the willful exploration of anger and doubt is the belief that exploration will lead one to wholeness. Participants framed the majority of their

¹⁵ Moreland, 50.

¹⁶ Cragg, 209.

¹⁷ Dunham, 24.

significant life turns in positive terms. In the open-ended questionnaire a dominant posture of participants was a positive outlook on relationships that experienced disagreements or tensions. This type of optimistic mindset, even in the midst of painful experiences and in the midst of emotional turmoil, allows for one to overcome hardship and form new constructs of meaning and purpose. Harrisville differentiated the ideas of “conform” and “form” found in Romans 12:2. For those who were being transformed by the Holy Spirit there was an internal condition, while those who were conforming to the patterns of the world there was an inconsistency in one’s willfulness.¹⁸

Fowler underscores the necessity of a willful exploration of one’s worldview and identity in order for faith ownership to occur. In describing the conditions for transition to Stage 4, Fowler emphasizes the emotional impact that loss or trauma can have on an individual.¹⁹ These types of experiences can either be a catalyst for faith exploration and ownership or lead a person to solidify one’s commitment to external sources.²⁰ Each of the focus group participants discussed the journey through anger as a necessary process that provided meaning for one’s identity and faith.

For some people who face tension or difference in their trusted external authority sources, instead of creating an executive ego that becomes the primary voice in one’s ability to make meaning, they strengthen their reliance upon external sources.²¹ This inability to move beyond reliance upon external sources may indicate an unwillingness to engage the emotional impact or disillusionment caused by a painful experience. The

¹⁸ Harrisville, quoted in Dunn, 712.

¹⁹ Fowler, “Postmodern,” 170.

²⁰ Fowler, “Postmodern,” 170.

²¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

participants in the open-ended questionnaire and the focus groups all indicated persistence in one's growth and development, a willingness to engage hard emotions.

For Marcia, challenging individuals who identify with a Foreclosed status of identity formation can not only cause one to feel backed into a corner and defensive, but can cause despair.²² The problem with this type of emotional reaction to a challenge is that instead of the hoped for movement towards Identity Moratorium or Identity Achievement, despair can lead towards a sense of hopelessness. Those who identified a mature faith were perseverant when strong challenges occurred, willing to face the emotional anger engendered by doubt and disillusionment.

Baxter Magolda emphasizes the necessity of peer relationships for one's journey through the "shadowlands" or through painful experiences.²³ The key components within one's peer relationships, according to Baxter Magolda, are: confirmation, contradiction and continuity.²⁴ These components validate one's emotions and provide the necessary space to process how one is making sense of new realities and painful experiences. Anger, bitterness and cynicism are normalized emotions when painful experiences have taken place. A trusted peer should provide confirmation of one's feelings and continuity of relationship through a difficult season.

Desiring Relationships and the Spiritual Disciplines

A trusting relationship with a peer is an example of the third principle generated from the research; faith ownership is made possible when *engaging in supportive*

²² Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 621.

²³ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 272.

²⁴ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 344.

community which encourages growth through spiritual disciplines. The open-ended questionnaire asked participants to list resources used to enhance one's internal voice. The responses were equally distributed between connecting with others relationally and engaging a spiritual discipline. When these responses were explored during the focus groups a clear emphasis was placed on relationships, but still acknowledged the vital role of spiritual disciplines. Participants generally agreed that the spiritual disciplines were more powerful or impactful when engaged with one's community. When asked about habits or activities that helped one maintain one's faith commitment, respondents were again nearly equally supportive of interpersonal and intrapersonal activities, with a slight emphasis on the intrapersonal aspects, such as prayer and reading the Bible.

Interestingly, when describing how one took ownership of one's faith after a painful experience, respondents all agreed that growth took place because of supportive relationships, yet their initial moment of clarity or their breakthrough was often described as an independent experience with God. The experience with God wasn't simply internalized, but shared with a trusted mentor or friend. Relationships and spiritual disciplines therefore seem to be tied to one another in a delicate balance. The emphasis remains on relationships because participants agreed that lasting change and growth occurred when able to process major life turns and the questions within one's faith journey.

God created humans as relational beings that desire love and community. The foundation of the nation of Israel was built upon this love, as articulated through the *Shema*.²⁵ Daniel I. Block describes the uniqueness of God's approachability towards his

²⁵ Work, 96.

people when God establishes a covenantal relationship.²⁶ The *Shema* is God's clear calling for humanity to love God with the entirety of one's being, in order to be whole and holy. The concept of love can only be done through self-giving relationship that refuses to remain in isolation.²⁷ Patrick Miller describes the necessity of relationship with God when he writes that God is "what keeps life from being chaotic and divided beyond the limits of human management."²⁸

Unity within one's community is an extension of one's love for God. In Paul's letter to the people of Rome he calls upon them to be unified around the Gospel of Jesus Christ above all things, including how they had previously understood the world.²⁹ A supportive and unified community was essential to practice the type of theology that the earlier portions of Paul's letter articulated.

A relationship with God as the foundation for one's being and relationship with one's community starts with love. However, love is a complicated concept that incorporates more than just emotion, but intellect and logic as well.³⁰ Christine Mitchell emphasizes that it is important for one to know why one is in relationship to God.³¹ Therefore, study and discipline are necessary for growth and maturity. Without study and

²⁶ Block, 186.

²⁷ Cragg, 209.

²⁸ Miller, 104.

²⁹ Smiga, 267.

³⁰ Mitchell, 13.

³¹ Mitchell, 13.

mindful exploration faith can become stagnant for an individual, and also for a community if not led from a place of thoughtful engagement.³²

Study and mindful exploration are necessary for growth in one's faith development. Fowler writes that one of the factors leading to Stage 4 is an "encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how 'relative' they are to one's particular group or background."³³ Tensions and conflict between trusted authority figures is also a contributing factor to stage transition.³⁴ Marcia also emphasizes these two factors when describing the transition from a Foreclosed identity status to a Moratorium identity status.³⁵ Both of these factors emphasize the necessity of relationships and engagement of spiritual disciplines for growth.

Relationships can also hinder one's growth as they emphasize conformity to group norms or institutional ideologies that lessen one's willingness to think critically. Fowler cautions young adults leaving home for college who might find themselves conforming to a sorority or a fraternity because those groups can hinder one's pursuit of identity formation.³⁶ Baxter Magolda also cautions the blind trust a person can put in an external authority figure, trusting in the formulas of others and not thinking critically for oneself.³⁷ She also is critical of the educational methodology found in many secondary

³² McCracken, 472.

³³ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

³⁴ Fowler, *Stages*, 173.

³⁵ Marcia, "Development and Validation," 552.

³⁶ Fowler, *Stages*, 178.

³⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Making*, 71-72.

schools and universities that limit the trust one is to have in one's internal voice.³⁸ Therefore, relationships that support one's exploration of spiritual disciplines or the reasons why someone believes are vital for a mature understanding of one's faith.

Partnerships are a unique emphasis for Baxter Magolda's self-authorship.³⁹ Fowler and Marcia seem to tolerate the role of a trusted partner and the role of one's community, whereas Baxter Magolda emphasizes the importance and necessity of partnership for one's development. She writes about the "skill" of self-authorship as it balances the necessity of finding and trusting one's internal voice while learning to become interdependent with trusted partners.⁴⁰ Partners can help build a person's internal foundation by creating circumstances that build a person's confidence.⁴¹

The journey towards self-authorship incorporates all facets of a person's development. Baxter Magolda writes that transformation of how people view "knowledge, their identity, and their relations with others" is the only way to move towards self-authorship.⁴² Relationships that emphasize and encourage development through spiritual disciplines exemplify the type of healthy partnership for which Baxter Magolda strongly advocates.

Processing Leads to Ownership

The fourth principle generated from the research is that for participants who had an FDS score of 6 out of 8 or higher their *relationships focused on processing one's*

³⁸ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 275.

³⁹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

⁴⁰ Baxter Magolda, "Developing," 41.

⁴¹ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

⁴² Baxter Magolda, "Self-Authorship," 69.

experiences, feelings, and beliefs. The open-ended questionnaire indicated that participants strongly valued relationships when asked about resources that impacted one's trust in one's internal voice. Most frequently noted were the relationships one had with a peer. When asked how one created meaning after experiencing something new, participants were overwhelmingly likely to connect deeper with another person about what they had encountered, as opposed to internally exploring how to make meaning of the new experience. The strongest indicator on the open-ended questionnaire about the necessity of processing one's experiences, feelings, and beliefs was the fourth item about significant partners on one's faith journey. Peers were again the most frequently mentioned partner, with a family member a close second. But when asked why a significant partner had made an impact on one's faith journey, a partner's willingness to process was significantly more impactful than a person willing to give specific direction. Additionally indicated on the open-ended questionnaire, when asked how one navigated a disagreement with a person one loves and respects, the willingness to disagree, the desire to share one's own beliefs, and the commitment to staying open-minded were three of the top four responses. In all, participants were four times more likely to stay positive about the relationship and engage in continued dialogue as opposed to becoming negative and shutting down communication with the other person.

Initially the focus groups seemed to balance participants' appreciation for process with one's appreciation for specific direction. When asked why a process oriented relationship was impactful, nearly half of the responses indicated a significant partner that was willing to speak into one's life, as opposed to a significant partner who was willing to listen. But when pressed in the focus groups to differentiate between a process

oriented relationship and a relationship that provided specific direction, participants didn't have a single positive thing to say about relationships that were specifically direction oriented. Participants commented on numerous occasions about how direction oriented relationships were actually harmful when facing adversity, pushing people further away from engaging spiritual disciplines. However, in regards to process oriented relationships the most common responses were that significant partners provided space for one to grow, learn new things, and be vulnerable.

Loving God with one's mind is easily viewed as an individual effort. But a thorough study of how one loves with one's mind reveals the necessity of loving in community, as was discussed above. Jewell contextualizes Romans 12 by reminding readers that the desired renewal is for a community and not simply individuals.⁴³ The specific nature of the type of community necessary for growth and identity formation are relationships where process is utilized. Ledger writes that renewing one's mind happens on a consistent basis when a person is in solidarity with another, hearing a person's stories and experiences and allows those moments to enhance one's own process of identity formation.⁴⁴

When a person moves from conforming to the patterns of this world and allows him or her to be transformed by the renewing of one's mind, the language emphasizes a process oriented experience. Although the Holy Spirit is intimately and necessarily connected to one's transformation, each person is expected to be an active participant in

⁴³ Jewett, 733.

⁴⁴ Ledger, 72.

the on-going nature of transformation.⁴⁵ Paul is calling upon each person, in the context of community, to no longer conform, but to actively participate in God's renewal.⁴⁶ Heibert investigates the verb tense of Romans 12:2 in order to emphasize the process oriented nature of transformation.⁴⁷ The hope for humanity is a communal experience of process orientated relationships that continue an on-going work of God's Spirit to transform individuals and communities.

Stage 5 of Fowler's faith stages is the clearest space where one comes to honor and respect the perspectives of others. How one relates to others is consistently embedded in the stage development of Fowler's theory. At first, trusted others are unquestioned and dominant.⁴⁸ As one matures and is exposed to more ideas and additional significant partners, trusted others cause tension and force one to develop an executive ego.⁴⁹ But as the executive ego develops an unhealthy narcissism, one is required to again face the limits of one's own understanding of the world and one's way of making meaning.⁵⁰ In entering the ambiguity of how people from diverse experiences make meaning, a person becomes open and accepting of the perspectives and values of others.⁵¹ Because Stage 5

⁴⁵ Harrison, 128.

⁴⁶ Heibert, 320.

⁴⁷ Heibert, 321.

⁴⁸ Fowler, *Stages*, 154.

⁴⁹ Fowler, *Stages*, 179.

⁵⁰ Fowler, *Stages*, 183.

⁵¹ Fowler, *Stages*, 185.

lacks a specific objective definition and is more experiential, the need for process is paramount.⁵²

Processing one's experiences, especially one's tensions with external authority figures and institutions, lies at the heart of Marcia's identity status of Moratorium. In writing about a therapist's approach to helping someone in Moratorium, Marcia encourages the therapist to first validate the current experiences and feelings of the individual, and not simply try to solve or resolve the individual's situation for him or her.⁵³ Secondly, Marcia writes that one should help a person experiencing disequilibrium by thoughtfully exploring the disequilibrium with the individual.⁵⁴ Identity Achievement can only be arrived at when one is able to process through the experiences and feelings that are causing disequilibrium and crisis.

Baxter Magolda writes that for those experiencing crisis it is necessary to initially offer support that validates the building of one's internal foundation.⁵⁵ Additionally, a significant partner doesn't simply view another's experiences as the other person's opportunity to grow, but recognizes the mutual opportunity for learning to take place.⁵⁶ Finally, in a study done by Baxter Magolda, participants who had the strongest sense of their internal voice were those who had the strongest support. The support participants

⁵² Hoffman, 1028.

³²⁷ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 620.

⁵⁴ Marcia and Josselson, "Eriksonian," 620.

⁵⁵ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 250.

⁵⁶ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 251.

received was validating of one's feelings, supportive of one's processing through experiences, and a collaborator in one's problem solving efforts.⁵⁷

The four principles generated from the field research are supported by the Biblical and Theological Foundation and the Review of Related Literature. The four principles build upon one another creating an interdependent thematic series. When helping another take ownership of one's worldview, belief system or identity, these principles should be considered:

1. Painful experiences are a catalyst for faith exploration and ownership
2. Anger and doubt must be willingly engaged
3. Supportive communities which encourage growth through spiritual disciplines are the best resource
4. Relationships which focus on processing one's experiences, feelings and beliefs are developmentally responsible

Evaluation

Research Project Design Strengths

Every research project is an effort in improvement. But a quality project will provide specific areas of strength that validate the findings and create a foundation for future study. The design of this research project had areas of improvement and areas of strength, both of which are important for future research endeavors. The main strengths of this research project were the utilization of the FDS survey for the quantitative portion of the mixed-methods approach, the connection between the open-ended questionnaire and the related literature, and the funneling of students through a three-step research process.

The FDS is not a valid instrument for predicting which specific stage of faith a person finds oneself identifying with at the time one takes the FDS or how one is moving

⁵⁷ Baxter Magolda, *Authoring*, 12.

between specific stages. Instead, the strength of the FDS is to compare large groups of individuals to one another, determining which individuals are indicating a more mature understanding of one's faith. This was precisely how the FDS was utilized for this research project. The reliability of the quantitative portion of the study was not only high, but gave the researcher confidence moving into the later stages of qualitative assessment.

The second area of design strength for this research project was the connection between the open-ended questionnaire and the three developmental theories utilized. The researcher understood each theory well enough to know the general themes, while remaining distant enough to stay open to emerging principles during the phase of field research, which was completed before the completion of the Review of Related Literature. Each question of the open-ended questionnaire was connected to two or three of the developmental theories utilized. Additionally, the questions on the open-ended questionnaire were connected specifically to the primary theorists of each developmental theory. This provided depth and consistency between the questionnaire and the related literature, which allowed the researcher to not only connect the data to the related literature but allow import principles to emerge from the data that could expand or build upon the developmental theories.

Through the three-step research process of FDS quantitative survey, qualitative open-ended questionnaire, and semi-formal focus groups, information was funneled and explored. The utilization of a consistent group of student leaders through each of the three phases allowed for the researcher to clarify and provide depth to the different categories generated through the data collection process. Through this process sub-categories were created and more refined principles emerged from the data.

Research Project Design Weaknesses

Time constraints and specificity of research can limit one's ability to comprehensively explore a topic. Therefore, it is important to honestly acknowledge the weaknesses of a research project so that future endeavors can develop and possibly augment the principles generated. The most glaring weaknesses of this project from a design perspective are that it didn't incorporate qualitative participants who scored lower than six out of eight on the FDS, the qualitative categories, sub-categories and principles weren't evaluated against a similar demographic of participants who didn't participate in each level of research, and the open-ended questionnaire didn't take into consideration specific themes from the Biblical and Theological Foundation.

The principles generated in this research project were developed through the data collection process and compared to the findings in the Biblical and Theological Foundation and the Review of Related Literature. But they were not compared to any assessment or exploration of students who registered an FDS score of less than six out of eight. This comparison would have either placed into question the validity of the principles being generated, or solidified their reliability. Future research efforts would do well to include a larger spectrum of faith maturity.

The second weakness of this research project was that it didn't incorporate enough qualitative participants in order to compare findings between differing groups of students. The principles generated from this project could have been refined had there been enough participants to evaluate the primary research participants' categories and sub-categories. Instead, the researcher was only able to funnel the data through a consistent group of participants. The funneling of data was a strength of the project, but

could have been refined with more participants incorporated into the process at a different vantage point.

The Biblical and Theological Foundation was intimately connected to the principles generated from the data, but the questions on the open-ended questionnaire didn't specifically incorporate themes from that Foundation. The data generated could have related better and could have been more devotionally driven had the themes from the Biblical and Theological Foundation been taken into consideration.

Implementation Strengths and Weaknesses

The design of the research project had areas of strength and weakness, which provide a helpful foundation for future research. The implementation of the research project also had its areas of strength and weakness. The strengths of the implementation were that the timing between the field research and writing the Review of Related Literature allowed the researcher to remain connected to the data while not creating presumptive conclusions, and that the researcher had access to the participants in such a way to conduct a grounded theory methodological approach. The weaknesses of the project's implementation were that the field research was conducted at the end of the university school year, which limited students' availability, and that the coding and counting of the qualitative data was only conducted by the researcher and did not use any third party evaluators.

The field research was completed shortly after the project was approved. The timing of the research allowed the researcher to remain open to the categories, sub-categories and emerging principles as they were generated during the data collection phase of the project. Once the field research was completed, the researcher conducted a

thorough review of the biblical and theological foundation and then a review of the related literature, which was connected to the questions utilized for the open-ended questionnaire. The order of these data collection phases helped validate the findings of the field research.

Utilizing a grounded theory methodological approach to the field research required flexibility with one's participants. Having available access to participants and convenient locations for focus groups allowed the researcher to move fluidly from one aspect of the field research to another. With student leaders' limited availability at the end of the university school year, accessibility was essential for completion with a consistent group of participants.

Although accessibility allowed the researcher to complete the project in a timely manner, the timing of the field research at the end of the university school year hampered the level of involvement. One of the design flaws mentioned above was not including additional participants who scored highly on the FDS but were not part of the open-ended questionnaire. Although this was not something originally considered by the researcher, the limited availability of participants due to the timing of the school year would have prevented such a process. The number of open-ended questionnaire participants could also have been increased had the project been implemented at a different time in the school year.

The research findings from both qualitative phases of the field research needed to be coded and counted in order to create categories, sub-categories and the principles. The researcher would have enhanced the specificity and validity of the research had other evaluators been invited to code and count the responses. The triangulation of the results

would have been another form of data collection that could have influenced the questions asked during the focus groups and could have influenced the principles generated through the final synthesis and analysis of the data.

The design and implementation of the research project provided a quality foundation for the principles generated. The design and implementation utilized the FDS in the most accurate way, formatted the project to best fit grounded theory, and connected well to the related literature. However, the design and implementation also had areas of improvement, which if acted upon will potentially enhance and validate the findings of this research project. Conducting the field research early in the school year or early in the spring semester would provide more participants, improving on the amount of qualitative participants, allowing the researcher to evaluate the categories and principles being generated from different points of reference.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PROJECT REFLECTION

Dedication to this project amidst long hours of data consumption, data analysis, and data synthesis, have led to a place of reflection and processing. In one sense the journey felt like it was coming to a point of closure and completion; but in another sense the journey seems to only have just begun. This project has produced specific principles that have affected the professional responsibilities and personal faith journey of the researcher, but the process itself has provided clarity around the researcher's calling and ministry. Additionally, the research done for this project has created a natural foundation for future research possibilities, some of which the researcher envisions exploring.

Personal Growth

The Principles

The four principles generated from this research project have had a profound impact on the researcher. In some regard these principles seem simple and obvious, ideas that have been known intuitively by the researcher for many years. But when organically discovered through the process of grounded theory, the principles have become clearer and therefore more evaluative. Once they became evaluative, the principles were easier to identify in practice and it became easier to evidence their lack. The professional responsibilities and the personal faith journey of the researcher were both impacted by the development of these four principles:

1. Painful experiences are a catalyst for faith exploration and ownership
2. Anger and doubt must be willingly engaged

3. Supportive communities which encourage growth through spiritual disciplines are the best resource
4. Relationships which focus on processing one's experiences, feelings and beliefs are developmentally responsible

Professional Responsibilities

As a campus pastor at a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university, the researcher is consistently in relationship with students similar to those who participated in the research project. The primary responsibilities of the researcher are to develop and train leaders for the university discipleship program and to help provide vision and leadership during chapel settings. The researcher is also asked to make himself available for student concerns as they arise. Additionally, the researcher is an adjunct faculty member, working with first-year students and students with intellectual disabilities. These four distinct roles provide multiple opportunities and a variety of venues for interaction with students reflecting on and processing a myriad of faith and identity experiences.

One of the most consistent barriers to a student's spiritual health is the feeling of shame and isolation around painful and often self-inflicted experiences. Pain and crisis are experienced by each person to varying degrees. Students often feel shame and isolation because they don't recognize the normalcy of their experiences. In recognizing the need to help students utilize painful experiences for faith ownership, the researcher has first attempted to normalize the painful experience, creating an interconnectivity to others away from isolation and shame. This has taken place in all four settings – training discipleship leaders on how to lead others while experiencing one's own crisis of faith, creating chapel experiences that name and normalize painful experiences, processing one-on-one with students seeking personal help, and facilitating classroom discussions or assignments that confront fears and allow students to share one's story.

When normalizing one's experience it becomes necessary to quickly normalize one's emotional reaction to the pain or shame. Willingly engaging anger and bitterness as a means to faith ownership requires that one create a safe space for those emotions to be expressed. The researcher has often sat with students who have been afraid to feel deeply. Their faith community has taught them to mask certain socially unacceptable emotions or there is shame attached to feeling certain emotions, putting into question God's acceptance and love. The researcher has sought to embrace the honesty of one's emotions, while processing one's actions once the emotions have been named and clarified. The most common place for such an interaction is during one-on-one settings with a student seeking pastoral help; but the researcher has also incorporated this theme into chapel presentations and in the classroom.

One of the most consistent expressions of the Christian faith that the researcher engages with when speaking to students is a rules oriented faith, one in which the presentation of the Gospel is about what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. Too often the spiritual disciplines, namely prayer, reading one's Bible, and going to church or chapel, have become the key expectations from which one measures the success or failure of one's relationship to God. In many cases, the emotional energy around these expectations is what qualifies as healthy or unhealthy. Thus, community has become the strongest emphasis of the researcher's ministry and encouragement for others. Connecting with others through humble vulnerability and active listening are the means by which one can grow and develop, while combatting a rules oriented faith. The discipleship ministry no longer has a philosophy of peer leaders teaching or instructing, but instead leaders are expected to create quality questions that invite others to share their

experience and their understanding of God's Word. Chapel settings are not simply transmissions of "God's truth found in Scripture," but are becoming spaces to explore the depths and tensions found within Scripture and ask questions about how God's Word applies to how one is living in community. The hope of the classroom is as a safe space to process one's learning and experiences, where any question is valid as a means to learning. During individual settings the researcher often asks about one's understanding of Scripture and the message one has been given through one's faith tradition. Finally, the researcher has challenged groups and individuals to explore a variety of spiritual disciplines, beyond the limited number that has often been the extent of one's experience; always encouraging the subsequent processing of one's experiences with new disciplines in trusted community.

Processing one's experience and one's faith journey has been a consistent theme of the researcher's interaction with students in all four settings. Growth and maturity are not simply for the student reaching out one-on-one to a campus pastor, a group of student leaders at a training session, a classroom of students, or the student body during chapel. Growth and maturity are for the researcher as well. The only way to know how to best help a student develop in his or her faith or take ownership of his or her identity is to become a learner. The researcher has sought to create space for processing in order to learn and grow personally; and in that growth better train, instruct, normalize, teach, and most importantly, listen.

Personal Faith Journey

The study of faith development, identity development, and self-authorship led to much introspection and interpersonal processing for the researcher. Where the researcher

was depending on others, where the researcher was trusting in one's own executive ego, and where the researcher was validating and honoring the stories of others, all became regular components of the researcher's internal processing. Regularly the researcher recognized the need for disequilibrium and hard questions so as to move away from a Foreclosed identity status. And most importantly, reconnecting with quality partners willing to ask hard questions was life-saving and life-giving for the researcher. The principles generated from the field research have each impacted the necessary generosity of the researcher toward his own story.

Moving from early adulthood into adulthood while being married to an independent, strong-willed woman created marital tension and hardship that forced the researcher into difficult questions about identity. Although these experiences took place a number of years ago, the residue and processing has not subsided, and the learning has not stopped. The research for this project reinforced the necessity of embracing those hard experiences and journeying through them. It was often easier to ignore the pain and mask over it. But sitting in those memories and the lingering tension of those experiences has proved vital for the health of the researcher's marriage and sense of identity.

As was the case for the participants in this research project, the researcher recognized the need to be angry, bitter, and frustrated with aspects of one's own experiences. The honesty of the emotions allowed for vulnerability and transparency to be more consistent expressions in contrast to playacting and placating over the difficult conversations and emotions experienced. Honesty and vulnerability were susceptible and risky places where pain could be experienced in even deeper forms. But honesty and vulnerability were also risky places where love could be experienced in ways too

overwhelming to capture in words. The researcher found that by journeying through the painful experiences and engaging with the honesty of one's emotions, hope and love were given root.

As relationships have developed and transparency has become more consistent, the researcher has been challenged to find healthy pathways towards God. For many years the more traditional spiritual disciplines Bible reading and prayer had been neglected. Church and chapel attendance were consistent, but more as either obligatory experiences or as functions of one's profession. However, quality relationships with trusted friends have reinvigorated a desire for spiritual health. The process towards spiritual health and engagement has been slow and not without missteps; but the consistency of accepting and supportive community has made the journey possible.

“What are you doing when you are at your best?” This question was asked of the researcher in the midst of a vulnerable and authentic exchange between two friends who were taking their friendship to new levels of honesty. This question was also asked in the midst of the researcher's studying and digesting of Fowler, Marcia and Baxter Magolda. The irony of the moment was almost too much; but the deep introspection forced by such a question created a trajectory for the researcher. In what was starting to become a downward spiral, kept from community because of shame, was now becoming the catalyst for growth and transformation. The willingness of the researcher's friend to process and not simply solve the problem at hand meant that the researcher was able to maintain power to change and maintain an openness to be transformed.

The Process

The process of completing this research project has required perseverance and sacrifice. But this process has also required love and hope. The career of the researcher was at a crossroads when the doctoral degree was started almost four years ago. As is the case with others, life changed and shifted while the degree was pursued. Professionally, some doors were opened and other doors were closed.

The prospect of becoming faculty in a Christian Ministries department at a Christian liberal arts university was a hoped for goal at the time of commencing the degree program. The process of completing this research project has confirmed that this professional trajectory may be compelling in some iterations, but is more than likely not the career path that would fit best with the researcher's strengths at this time. Although capable of doing quantitative and qualitative research, the researcher recognizes the personal sacrifices required of a person committing time and energy to research development on a consistent basis. These sacrifices and the perseverance needed to complete such studies is not an area that the researcher anticipates pouring extended amounts of energy or time.

The persistence required of this research project was made possible due to the stories of students met through this process and the stories of students who will be affected by this research project. The vulnerability and honesty shared by the participants in the open-ended questionnaire and the focus groups allowed the researcher to produce the principles generated from data. The openness of these students was inspirational, and energized the researcher to tell their story through the completion of this project. Without their transparency and trust this research would not be possible. This type of trust and

willingness to take ownership of one's faith is what inspires the researcher and is the type of work the researcher hopes to impact.

The principles generated from this project have the opportunity to impact other students as they seek trusting relationships in which to share their story. The fear of these stories being met with unlooked-for direction, judgment, or shame is a driving force behind the completion of this project. The hope of these stories being met with openness, better questions, and a teachable spirit are also an impetus moving this project towards completion. Hearing the stories of students and hearing the ways in which they have felt burdened by others' perspective on their story confirm the researcher's desire to be a transformative agent in the contemporary church. This process has solidified the researcher's desire through speaking, writing, listening, and creating to affect meaningful growth in the church for the next generation of leaders.

Future Research Possibilities

Impact of Emotions

The open-ended questionnaire produced categories of information about how individuals dealt with painful experiences and how individuals experienced tension with others. Often emotions, specifically anger, were at the center of people's stories. Additionally, emotional experiences with God after a painful experience were a minor but consistent theme. The focus groups also engaged the impact or necessity of emotions. Questions were asked about one's emotional connection to God and one's emotional connection to others and how those connections to others impacted one's faith development. The data generated by these questions was inconclusive. A more specific and exhaustive study of the emotional impact of spiritual experiences or the role of

significant partners emotions in one's faith development may produce results that could build on the principles already developed in this research project.

Gender Specific Principles

The principles generated from the field research were inclusive of both females and males. The reviews of faith development theory, identity development theory, and self-authorship did not distinguish any differences between how males and females develop or grow or self-author differently from one another. There was not an indication from the qualitative open-ended questionnaire or the focus groups to suggest that a strictly male sampling or a strictly female sampling would have produced different results. However, knowing that relationships are the key component to developing a mature faith, there are many aspects of these developmental relationships yet to process and examine. It is possible that a gender specific study or a study that separates the results according to gender, while delving more deeply into the types of relationships that impact faith ownership may reveal gender specific principles.

The results of a gender specific study would greatly enhance the efforts of the church and other related ministries efforts to disciple men and women. If the results reveal gender specific principles, those could be readily applied to the training efforts of discipleship leaders. The implications may be even more necessary and impactful if the results are inconclusive or reveal that there is not a difference in the faith ownership journey of males and females. In many denominations and traditions males and females are engaged differently, which may actually be a misconception of how faith development is done well. Only a more in-depth study of how relationships impact each gender towards faith ownership can determine how it could impact discipleship efforts.

Post-Collegiate Faith Maturity

Fowler's faith development theory indicated that Stage 4 is often possible for a person upon entering into a collegiate experience because the change of location and newly competing external influences cause a person to form an executive ego. But for some, the executive ego is not formed during their college experience. Oftentimes the challenges to one's worldview are either so stark that one retreats more firmly to a set of externally defined authority figures or institutional structures, or the experiences of college are not severe enough and one is able to remain engrained in an authority driven pattern of faith practice. Therefore, college students leave at a stage of faith similar to that of which they arrived.

Painful experiences and new relationships can spark questions about one's worldview and one's identity at any age in one's life. A study of adults who indicate taking ownership of one's faith at a later stage in life may contrast or compliment well with the results of this research project. Peers and family were the most dominant sources of relational partnering found in the field research with college students. For adults taking ownership later in life, the principles may be consistent, but the partners or the processes may change.

Denominational and Theological Differences

The three developmental theories utilized for this research project do not limit to one specific denomination, people group, or socioeconomic status. Yet, the ability to mature in one's faith and take ownership of one's worldview is often contingent upon the strength of one's internal voice or executive ego and the receptivity one has towards others. Different denominational values and different theological articulations may place

more value in these areas than others. Examining the doctrines and core values of different denominations and replicating a similar qualitative study of faith ownership may build upon the principles generated in this study.

Theological streams often emphasize different values of openness and generosity. Conducting a study of individuals with a mature sense of faith from different theological backgrounds may produce important results. Simply comparing the quantitative results of the FDS with people from different denominational or theological streams may generate impactful data.

Conclusion

Faith as relationship has been a guiding and consistent theme throughout this project. The field research emphasized the necessity of process oriented relationships. The Biblical and Theological Foundation declared a God of transformational love, only experienced through self-giving relationship. The Review of Related Literature recognized the complicated nature of relationships and the role relationships play in one's development. For the researcher, relationships were the catalyst for professional engagement and the redemption of personal growth. Faith as relationship, filled with hope, wonder, beauty, struggle, tension, pain, and developed through a willingness to process is the final principle. But it is also just the beginning.

APPENDIX

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Title of Research: Owning Your Faith and How It Happens

Principle Researcher: Jason Steffenhagen

Research Phase 2: Open-Ended Questionnaire

As was stated in the *Consent to Participate in a Research Study*, you have been selected for the second phase of the research process. In this phase you will be asked seven open-ended questions. Your responses to these questions will be known only by the researcher. Any use of your responses in written form will be done so without use of your name or any identifying characteristics. Upon completion, all responses will be coded and counted by the researcher to help formulate faith development principles and themes. The principles generated will then be reviewed by 12 selected participants who will discuss the themes in a focus group to further analyze and refine the theory and principles for how college students take ownership of their faith.

If you would like to receive a copy of the *Consent to Participate in a Research Study*, please email Jason Steffenhagen (stejas@bethel.edu).

Demographic Items

Name
Email Address
Cell Phone Number

Open-Ended Questions

(Please feel free to fully express your thoughts in each response. The more clearly you articulate your response, the easier it will be to discern principles and themes.)

1. Please describe 3-5 turning points (both positive and/or negative) that have shaped your faith as you currently understand it.
2. What resources have helped strengthen your ability to listen to, cultivate and trust your internal voice in regards to your beliefs?

3. When faced with new ideas, tensions, or expectations, how have you sorted through these to create meaning for yourself?
4. Who can you identify as a supportive partner(s) in your faith journey? List them here, along with the reason(s) why you identified them as a supportive partner?
5. Please describe a painful experience and how that experience shaped your faith journey?
6. What activities, habits, or disciplines have helped you maintain a sense of commitment to your faith journey?
7. How have you navigated experiences with people you love and respect but with whom you find yourself disagreeing?

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