ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the byproduct of the thoughtful questions and invaluable suggestions of many individuals. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Rodney Sturdivant, for his constant support and guidance. His joyful curiosity and consistent availability have spurred on this work in a natural and gracious way. I would also like to thank Dr. Wilson Law for his thorough corrections and intentional questions. His high standard shows a deep respect for education, research, and my academic development. I am grateful to Dr. Joshua Patrick for serving on my committee and always being available to answer my questions.

The seed of this research was planted during a thoughtful and intentional conversation with my parents. I am indebted to their loving support and example. I also wish to thank the many friends and family members who expressed support and interest. These conversations produced several discoveries and corrections, but, more importantly, so much joy. My wife, Sarah, deserves the utmost praise for rigorously reading this thesis in its entirety. She has celebrated me at each step and has been an anchor throughout this process.

Lastly, I wish to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He not only sustains the vast and beautiful world that we are free to discover, but also grounds me with a purpose beyond academic pursuit.