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# SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A SURVEY OF FRESHMEN AT A CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A SURVEY OF FRESHMEN AT A CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

By

BETHANY THOMAS

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the  
College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Education  
in Organizational Leadership

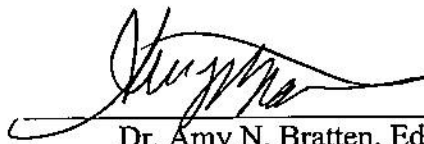
Southeastern University  
February, 2019

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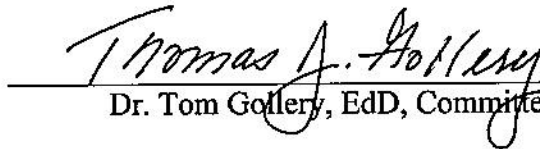
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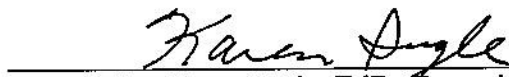
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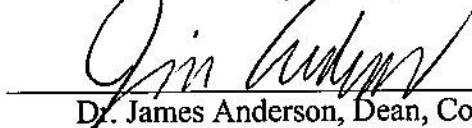
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Dr. Tom Gollery, EdD, Committee Member



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Dr. James Anderson, Dean, College of Education

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my late father Dean Johnson. Although I lost my father in the midst of writing this dissertation, I was determined to push through and make sure that I completed it in his honor. My father was an educator who prided himself on being a lifelong learner and coach. He loved to help others become better versions of themselves and always pushed me to be my best. My dad always taught me to do everything with excellence, to never quit, and to give God the glory. Before he passed, he told me that he could not wait to see me walk across the stage and call me Dr. Daughter.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This endeavor has been something I never thought I would start yet alone complete. This journey has been rewarding both professionally and personally. Never in a million years would I ever imagine that I would complete any type of post-graduate work! I have my entire family to thank for their support, but I would like to extend a special thanks to my husband and my mom. Thank you, Louis Thomas, for your patience with many uncooked dinners, for always calling me Dr. T, and for all the late-night writing sessions. Thank you, Jill Johnson (mom), for pushing me to be my best and for talking to me late at night when I wanted to give up!

I extend thanks to the Leadership Team at Southeastern University for your constant support and encouragement.

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To my Student Development family, I am so grateful for all your encouragement, support, and patience while I completed this endeavor.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to learn what the spiritual formation process is for a student in a Christian higher education institution. In order for a Christian university to help develop a student spiritually, the university must know where the students perceive themselves spiritually upon entering their first year. The data collection instrument used was a survey. The survey was distributed to freshmen students who were entering into their first year of college. There were 704 students enrolled into the first-year course, and during their third week of class, the survey was distributed electronically via email. Of the 704 freshman students, 377 students completed the survey. The survey asked the students questions regarding their spirituality. Survey results were reported anonymously. Analysis of the survey data was completed and used in the results portion of this study. The major finding for the study was that students most enjoy doing daily devotions to better their relationship with the Lord, although many neglect to carve out the time to do so. Additionally, students expressed their desire to figure out what the Lord's purpose for their lives was.

Key Words: spiritual formation; freshman; Christian higher education; purpose; daily devotions; spiritual development; incoming students; spirituality; first year experience

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a report of a quantitative study of the practices of spiritual formation for freshmen in Christian higher education derived from student self-perceptions of spirituality upon enrollment in college. The study was based primarily on the observation of the spiritual formation of students at one of the fastest growing Christian higher education institutions in the United States. One of the factors that determined the need for this study was chapel attendance. Student attendance at campus-based chapel services throughout the year leading up to this study had been relatively low compared to previous years; therefore, it seemed spiritual formation was not a high priority for college students.

The study of an individual's spiritual formation is not tangible; rather, spiritual formation can be measured by the demonstrated spiritual maturity of an individual (Adams, 2009) and through surveys, conversations, and eagerness to be involved in spiritual formation activities such as: chapel services, small groups, and spending personal time studying scripture. The first chapter of the dissertation presents the background of the study, specifies the problem of the study, describes the significance of the study, and presents an overview of the methodology used. The chapter concludes with the limitations from the study along with defining key terms used throughout the study.

### **Background of the Study**

Spiritual formation in higher education is one of the top priorities for Christian institutions (Otto & Harrington, 2016). In an article titled, "Spiritual Formation within Christian Higher Education" written by Patrick Otto and Michael Harrington (2016), the authors wrote, "the spiritual formation of college students is an issue about which all postsecondary Christian

educators should be centrally concerned, and is an area that has gained attention from researchers outside of Christian colleges in recent years” (p. 252). Therefore, Christian university leadership teams must investigate the best practices of developing undergrads’ spirituality.

The makeup of student populations at universities completely changes every four years which can make spiritual formation a challenge for many reasons (Adams, 2009). Spiritual formation can be a challenge because within the four-year rotation of cohorts, students’ spiritual journeys are different from one cohort to the next. Some students may have grown up in the faith – attending church, participating in youth groups, and attending summer church camps – while others may be experiencing Christianity for the first time. Additionally, some students may prefer one style of worship while other students may prefer a completely different style. Because universities host rotating cohorts of students, spiritual formation departments must keep up with the ever-changing demands from students in order to implement research-based best practices of filling the students’ spiritual gaps.

This study sought to identify what practices of spiritual development for freshmen have worked in the past and what spiritual formation practices have not worked in Christian higher education institutions. Because the lack of spirituality in students at Christian institutions of higher education is evident (Horan, 2017), this study also focused on determining students’ perceptions of their levels of spirituality and if there exists a disparity between self-perceived spirituality and the demonstrated behaviors aligned to spirituality. Developing students’ spirituality during the typical four years in undergraduate university life is paramount. Horan’s (2017) study demonstrated that students leave the church altogether once they have graduated college than ever before (Horan, 2017). Since before the 21st century, there has been an increase in discussions regarding spiritual formation in higher education and the impact it has on the

student (Otto & Harrington, 2016). However, “research that promotes spiritual formation as a broad educational aim meant for all students typically defines spiritual formation in broad terms as an individual human development task not connected to religious practice” (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 253). Thus, higher education institutions that are focused on academics as well as Christianity have a responsibility to students and the faith to pour into the spiritual lives of undergraduates during the four year collegiate experience.

Faculty, staff, and administrators working in Christian higher education institutions must understand what spiritual formation is and how to implement best practices for a higher yield of graduates who demonstrate the faith and continue the lifelong journey of spirituality (Horan, 2017). In the early 2000s, the leadership team of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) developed a committee of members from various institutions to determine the role and effectiveness of Christian higher education in the spiritual formation of students. One of the main tasks of this committee was to formulate a cohesive definition of spiritual formation (CCCCU, 2011). According to the committee’s report (2011), “Spiritual formation is integral to Christian higher education—it is the biblically guided process in which people are being transformed into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit within the faith community in order to love and serve God and others” (p. 254).

In his article entitled, “Christian Higher Education Reaching the Whole Person,” Jeynes (2012) wrote that the purpose of Christian higher education institutions is to help strengthen each person as a whole. Treating undergraduate students as whole beings not only places importance on students’ academic performance but also on the students’ character and religious identities (Jeynes, 2012). According to Horan (2017), “Young people with mature spiritual formation are more likely to participate in community service and extra-curricular activities,” and those

students will “exhibit prosocial behaviors, improved self-esteem, self-control, and academic achievement with fewer risk behaviors” (p. 57).

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

The assessment of spiritual formation is a challenge for Christian higher education institutions (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Research has shown that many higher education institutions do not implement annual assessments regarding their spiritual formation process. Many schools will offer their students opportunities to go to chapel or to be a part of a faith-based small group, but few schools outline the “how to” in reference to spiritual formation (Otto & Harrington, 2016). The conceptual framework of this dissertation report was based on the responsibility of Christian higher education institutions to develop deeply-rooted feelings of belonging to a Christian community of believers for all undergraduate students; yet, most institutions do not have a formal plan for assessing incoming students’ perceptions of their level of spirituality, nor do most institutions have a formal plan based on best practices for developing students’ spirituality.

Using a theoretical framework to guide the development of a research study allows for an understanding of the foundation on which the study is built (Grant & Osanloo, 20014). Grant and Osanloo (2014) stated that a theoretical framework “serves as the guide on which to build and support your study, and also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole” (p. 13). Two theories heavily influenced this study, namely faith development theory and experiential learning theory.

Faith development theory was developed by James Fowler (Andrade, 2014). Fowler theorized that individuals grow spiritually in stages and that the concept of faith is different than

the religion with which the individual affiliates (Andrade, 2014). While faith development theory is not housed under a student affairs theory, according to Andrade (2014), faith development theory is applicable to students in higher education. Andrade (2014) stated, “questions regarding faith that people ask themselves revolve around what gives their life meaning and purpose, as well as what their hopes for themselves and their loved ones, are, among others” (para. 2).

Fowler’s faith development theory applied to this study because in the survey administered to first year students, knowing that the Lord has a purpose for their lives was one of the most beneficial parts of the students’ spiritual development. Fowler’s theory aligns to the study’s intent to utilize the four-year rotation in college to spiritually develop undergraduate students at Christian institutions of higher education (Andrade, 2014). One of the main frustrations upon entering the Christian higher education institution was that while the students recognize that the Lord has a purpose for their lives, students reported not knowing how to identify what their purpose is. Thus, a second framework guided this study in conjunction with faith development theory.

Experiential learning theory was developed by David Kolb (Akella, 2010). This theory identifies the many different ways in which individuals process and learn information (Akella, 2010). Akella (2010) stated, “The experiential learning theory model emphasizes a need for learner involvement in all educational activities and addresses the concept of how experience makes learning meaningful” (p. 100). The experiential learning theory recognizes that students learn through a combination of experiences, reasoning, and behavior (Akella, 2010). The experiential learning theory is made up of four learning stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation; thus, students learn best

when they can hear information, reflect on the information, and then retain the information (Akella, 2010).

The theoretical framework of experiential learning applies to this study because students in Christian higher education institutions come from various backgrounds and have various ways in which they learn and process information (Akella, 2010). Therefore, when trying to identify the best ways to help spiritually develop students, the Christian higher education institutions must recognize that what helps one individual grow spiritually will not necessarily help someone else; the institutions of higher education must vary spiritual development experiences to fully immerse students as the learners of spirituality. The items provided in the survey instrument of this study identify what students perceive to be the most enriching and rewarding aspect of spiritual formation and which is the most disappointing and frustrating aspect of spiritual formation.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in the field of spiritual development in Christian institutions of higher education. The findings outlining practices of spiritually developing freshmen prove helpful for faculty, staff, and administrators who are involved Christian higher education in order to build a successful spiritual formation department to reach and develop undergraduate students spiritually. Implementing practices of spiritual development reflects alignment with the mission and vision of most Christian institutions of higher education (CCCU, 2011). This study is significant in developing Christ followers in the four years as undergraduate students as well as staying engaged in the church after graduation.



## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study was to outline the practices of spiritual formation for freshmen in Christian higher education based on student responses to a survey assessing self-perceptions of their levels of spirituality. Most Christian higher education institutions have a spiritual formation emphasis of some sort which involves chapel services, small groups, or discipleship curriculum (Otto & Harrington, 2016); of those institutions, few spiritual formation programs are distinctively outlined showing gains throughout students' four year experiences (Benne, 2001). Thus, there is limited data which proves the best way students grow and develop spiritually.

## **Overview of Methodology**

The study was broadly defined as non-experimental, utilizing a survey research methodology. Data used to address the study's formal research questions and hypotheses were archival in nature. A conveniently accessed, purposive sample consisting of incoming freshmen students at a private university located in the state of Florida represented the study's data source. A total of 328 participants comprised the study's sample, representing 86.8% of the potential pool of eligible participants. The study's data were archived by the university at the outset of the 2018-2019 school year.

## **Research Design**

The study was conducted at a small, Christian, liberal arts higher education institution. The institution has a department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness which assists the university in completing and obtaining all their accreditations, administers all surveys, and helps conduct research in a variety of professional fields represented on the campus. The Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness assisted the department of Spiritual Formation in

developing the necessary questions for the Spiritual Formation survey distributed as the Spiritual Formation's department effort to establish baseline data on incoming freshmen spirituality levels.

The Christian institution where the study was conducted offers a mandatory course for all incoming freshman students called the First Year Experience. The First Year Experience at this particular school is required for all incoming students who are 19 years of age or younger upon registration *and* who have transferred in less than 28 credit hours. The course meets every Monday for the first five weeks of the fall and spring semesters. Each week, a different topic of collegiate life is discussed. Topics include academics, spirituality, and social life. The study was conducted in the spring semester analyzing data collected in the fall semester. The survey was administered and data collected prior to this study; therefore, the data was pre-existing and archived by the university. The research study was determined to be "exempt" by the Institutional Review Board prior to data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

The six research questions were derived from the problem statement in the study.

1. What is the perceived degree of spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian university setting?
2. Six sub-elements of spiritual formation were presented to survey participants. The six sub-elements were: 1. I believe that God has a sense of purpose for my life [*sic*] and I expect Him to use me every day in His work on earth today; 2. I understand my spiritual gifts and use them to serve others; 3. I prioritize my daily devotions and guard that time spent with God; 4. What I learn in my daily devotions affects my attitude and choices throughout the day that follows; 5. I walk in fellowship with the Spirit throughout the day

and constantly surrender my thoughts and desires to Him; and, 6. I'm eager to spend time in God's presence, and I hunger for more of Him in my life.

Which of the six sub-elements of perceived overall spiritual formation was manifested to the greatest degree?

3. Of the six sub-elements of spiritual formation, which represents the most robust correlate of overall student spiritual formation?
4. Considering study participant perceptions of impact of daily devotions, continual surrender of thoughts and desires to God, and desire to spend time in God's presence, which represents the most robust correlate and predictor of study participant overall perception of spiritual formation?
5. What element did study participants indicate to be most challenging or frustrating part of spiritual formation?
6. What element did study participants find to be most rewarding or enriching part of spiritual formation?

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected through the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness during the fall semester. Students were emailed a link to the survey, and participants provided informed consent by proceeding to the survey. Participants responded to survey items electronically. The data was collected and securely stored through the online platform, Survey Monkey. The data was not analyzed immediately. In the spring semester, the researcher analyzed the previously collected and securely stored data using descriptive and inferential statistics.

## **Procedures**

As part of the required First Year Experience course, incoming freshmen were asked to participate in a survey created by the Christian institution of higher education. The survey was created by staff of the Spiritual Formation department collaboratively with the Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. During the week which addressed the students' spirituality, the department of Spiritual Formation presented information to all course sections (class meetings) about what the institution was doing to help students develop a deeper relationship with the Lord. The Spiritual Formation department additionally communicated with students about how to complete the survey. Before the students left class that day, they were provided the opportunity to complete the survey.

Students were also offered the option to complete the survey outside of class through an email with a link to the survey. To encourage participation, students were informed of the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a gift card. Survey completers' (participants') names were entered into a drawing, one name was randomly selected, and the gift card was provided to the student. The data was housed in the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness until analyzed by the researcher. Because the researcher analyzed previously collected data, the researcher validated the survey instrument after administration and collection of the survey. Inferential and descriptive statistical analysis were applied to the survey data to draw conclusions regarding students' self-reported levels of spirituality as well as practices of spiritual development activities.

## **Limitations**

The limitations identified in this study included: limited methodology, lack of participant context, and limited extrinsic rewards for participation. The study was a quantitative study, and

limiting methodology reduces the quantity and potentially quality of data in that including qualitative items on the survey would have allowed for open-ended responses not accounted for in the allotted survey items.

The study participant pool was limited to incoming freshmen; whereas the study could have included all new students to the university to allow for more broad themes of data to emerge. Additionally, the participant pool was limited to one Christian university; whereas the study could have surveyed freshmen from various Christian institutions of higher education to allow for greater generalizability.

The researcher was limited in the resources for providing extrinsic rewards (gift cards) for participants in order to entice participation; however, with more rewards to offer – financial or academic such as points toward the course grade for completing the survey – potentially more students would have participated.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Institution of Higher Education** refers to post-secondary education delivered at universities, colleges, seminaries, conservatories, and institutes of technology. Higher education is also available at vocational and trade schools (Teichler, 1998). This term is used synonymously throughout this paper with phrases such as: Christian Education Institutions, Christian Colleges, and Christian University.

**Student** refers to an individual involved in formal education (Vygotsky, 1978). An incoming student refers to an individual who is entering into college for the first time. This term is used interchangeably with freshman (Fike, 2008).

**Four-year progression** refers to students who enter into college and complete their degree within four years (University of Arizona, 2019). Despite the fact that some students stay

in undergraduate programs longer than four years, taking up to six years to attain a baccalaureate degree (Kelly & Schneider, 2012), this study refers to students who complete their degrees in four years.

**Spiritual Formation** refers to the process of an individual looking within and striving to become like the inner being of Jesus (Willard, 2002).

### **Summary**

Spiritual formation is a high priority among Christian institutions of higher education (Otto & Harrington, 2016). This study was aimed at analyzing survey data in order to determine undergraduate students' self-perceptions of their levels of spiritual formation upon enrollment in a small, Christian, liberal arts university in the state of Florida. The review and analysis were intended to yield themes to identify practices of spiritual formation in undergraduate students to enable departments of Spiritual Formation at Christian institutions of higher learning can deeply develop Christ-followers to serve the will of God on earth.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

Spiritual formation in Christian institutions is a hot topic among higher education professionals (Small & Bowman, 11). Spiritual formation has been a topic of concern for decades because every four years higher education institutions enroll a new group of students which creates not only the opportunity to implement new initiatives but also creates challenges based on a new cohort of students representing a new set of needs (Adams, 2009). According to Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward (2005), colleges should develop students holistically by recognizing and building on the students' search for purpose in life, intellectually, spiritually, and ethically/morally. How to most effectively reach the current generation of college students spiritually is one of the top questions for Christian higher education institutions. The millennial generation has been the most difficult to predict and to stimulate spiritually (Bauman, Marchal, McLain, O'Connell, & Patterson, 2014).

The millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, is made up of individuals born in the 1980s and the 1990s (Nelson, James, Miles, Morrell, & Sledge, 2017). In the United States, history shows that religious participation increases with age; however, the millennial generation exhibits the least amount of religious behavior (Nelson et al., 2017). According to the Pew Research Center, one out of four millennials are unaffiliated with one specific religion which is significantly lower than their parents or grandparents (Nelson et al., 2017). However, millennials who do affiliate with a religious group are strong members in their chosen faith group (Nelson et al., 2017). One of the best ways to determine how to help format someone's

spirituality is to first determine how that person views their spirituality upon entering college (Bauman et al., 2014).

One of the possible reasons there has been a marked disinterest in college-aged students regarding their spirituality is that many have decided to put their spirituality or religious beliefs in a “lock box” (Small & Bowman, 2011). Students choose to put the idea of finding their spiritual identity on pause until their college career has concluded in order to focus on their academics, develop new relationships, and explore new things (Small & Bowman, 2011). Various reasons lead to students avoiding spiritual development during college.

This literature review will seek to find what strategies have worked in the past to spiritually formulate students and what strategies have not worked in Christian higher education institutions. Additionally, this review seeks to identify the degree to which incoming freshmen would assess themselves spiritually upon college enrollment. Finally, this literature review will focus on what is missing in spiritual formation programming because the lack of spirituality in Christian higher education students is evident (Bauman et al., 2014). Focusing on spiritual development during collegiate experience is important because there is a high rate of individuals leaving the church altogether once they have graduated college (Horan, 2017).

There is also research which suggests “decreases in religiosity, as indicated by disaffiliation with a religious organization, diminished service attendance, and reduced importance placed religion, were greatest among young adults who had not attended any college” (Small & Bowman, 2011, p. 156). Therefore, even though it may seem religious commitments may decline during college, it appears that those who attend college may reduce the rate of this decline overall through spiritual formation experiences (Small & Bowman, 2011). Thus,



Christian institutions of higher education must implement best practices of spiritual formation in order to retain believers in the faith during and after college.

In an article titled, “Spiritual Formation Within Christian Higher Education” written by Patrick Otto and Michael Harrington (2016), the authors stated, “the spiritual formation of college students is an issue about which all postsecondary Christian educators should be centrally concerned, and is an area that has gained attention from researchers outside of Christian colleges in recent years” (p. 252). Many colleges and universities are interested in the beliefs and the religious background of their students; however, there has been very little research done about faith development compared to other issues concerning higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### **Spirituality and Religion Defined**

For over twenty years, frequent discussions have been held regarding spiritual formation in higher education and the impact it has on students (Otto & Harrington, 2016). However, “research that promotes spiritual formation as a broad educational aim meant for all students typically defines spiritual formation in broad terms as an individual human development task not connected to religious practice” (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 253). There is a distinction between being religious and spiritual (Chesbrough, 2006). “The two terms are compatible but not necessarily partners, with spirituality, the quest for inner growth and meaning for both often not requiring the ‘external validation’ of formal religion” (Chesbrough, 2006, p. 165). Thus, Christian institutions of higher education are responsible for spiritual formation enabling students to feel more deeply connected to their religion.

According to Nelson et al. (2017), “Religiosity as a construct is a large phenomenon to study, but one succinct definition that has been used in the literature is an organized system of

beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols, designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred and transcendent and to foster religious communities” (p. 388). For comparative purposes, a case study was completed on four different universities which found many college students wanted to explore the many different religious denominations and were open to the religious diversification that a university brings, but students did not necessarily want to identify with or dive deeper into any particular one (Small & Bowman, 2011). Furthermore, “a national survey found that college graduates were much more likely than non-college graduates to allow for the truth claims of other religions, leading the author to conclude that students may view religions as interchangeable cultural traditions” (Small & Bowman, 2011, p. 156).

According to Nelson et al. (2017), “Spirituality spreads beyond practices and rituals to encompass an individual’s relationship to the transcendent and understanding of life” (p. 389). Spirituality is more about the belief in something than it is about the behavior of the individual (Nelson et al., 2017). It is possible for someone to be religious without being spiritual. For instance, an individual may attend a church service occasionally, have a lot of knowledge about a particular denomination, but not have an actual transformational experience or relationship with a higher being. Spirituality encompasses the innermost thoughts of an individual and provokes transformation within (Nelson et al., 2017). Spiritually affects an individual’s behavior, decision making, attitudes, and morals (Nelson et al., 2017). Nelson et al. (2017) stated, “the focus of spirituality as defined here, is on living according to a higher purpose, finding meaning in life, creating inner wholeness, seeking connectedness with others, and achieving self-transcendence toward the supreme value one perceives” (p. 389).

Multiple studies suggest that students attending secular institutions are less likely to have strong religious beliefs or spiritual practices than students attending religiously affiliated higher

education institutions (Small & Bowman, 2011). Small and Bowman (2011) wrote, “according to a large-scale study that grouped into six religious and secular types, students enrolled in religiously-affiliated schools (especially those considered ‘fundamentalist’) were more likely to engage frequently in ‘spiritually enhancing activities’ (described by the authors to include worship, meditation, and prayer) and to have greater self-reported ‘deepened sense of spirituality’” (p. 156). Thus, the terms “spirituality” and “religion” are related but markedly distinct; this distinction is important for Christian higher education institutions to recognize to appropriately meet the demands of undergraduates’ needs for developing as believers during their four year collegiate experience.

### **Christian Higher Education Institutions**

Higher education, in general, tends to focus on academia rather than values, beliefs, and moral development of students (Bugenhagen, 2009). Whereas in Christian higher education, the focus tends to be on the whole self as far as the students are concerned and not just on what they learn in the classroom (Bugenhagen, 2009). There are many goals for Christian higher education institutions; and, these goals include, but are not limited to, leading students to salvation through Christ, helping students in their daily relationship with the Lord, and training students to use their relationship with the Lord to impact those around them (Moore, 2014). However, it is still possible for an individual to attend a Christian higher education institution and still not understand the true message of Jesus and his saving grace (Moore, 2014). An individual has to want to establish a relationship with the Lord – it is not something that can be forced. Moreover, according to the Bible (New International Version), a relationship with the Lord is a relationship that takes time and dedication but is free for those who want it.

In an article written by Deborah Moore (2014), the author stated, “Christian schools provide the avenue for intentional, multifaceted process of providing for students to mature and be transformed in the image of Christ” (p. 258). One of the key components of Christian education is to integrate worldview (Moore, 2014). Worldview is the way in which an individual sees the world based on three aspects: proposition, behavior, and orientation (Schultz & Swezey, 2013). “Worldview is not strictly about information, beliefs, or knowledge, but must entail ‘heart orientation’ and behavior as well” (Schultz & Swezey, 2013, P. 231). Having a good, well thought out worldview will allow students to process incoming information and act in harmony with their beliefs (Moore, 2014). Moore (2014) describes Christian institutions as, “having teachers who seek to transform all activities and studies into an expression of biblical wisdom, training the students to walk as disciples of Jesus Christ” (p. 259).

According to English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003), in this day and age, higher education institutions face many obstacles: funding freezes, lack of good quality faculty members, and students deciding to go to trade school rather than four year institutions. Christian higher education institutions will eventually face students who are avoiding private schools due to the expense and deciding to attend state or community colleges (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2010). One fear among the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU) schools, is that Christian higher education institutions will slowly lose their Christian identity (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2010).

In an article titled, “A Slippery Slope to Secularization? An Empirical Analysis of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities”, Joeckel and Chesnes (2010) wrote:

One moment of relaxed vigilance—one twitch or stumble in a secular direction—and down slides the college into the tar pits of apostasy. The only thing left of its former faith would be a stately chapel building—a fossilized artifact of the college’s Christian past.

The process started with Harvard—once the pride of Puritanism—and has since claimed almost every Christian college. (p. 177)

Thus, Christian institutions of higher education must update spiritual formation practices to include more than chapel services.

The Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU) is known for their dedication in advancing Christian education (CCCCU, 2011). In order to be a part of the CCCC, universities must meet several criteria, but at least two pertaining to spirituality; and, institutions part of CCCC must have a Christ-centered mission statement, and only employ individuals who profess their faith in Jesus Christ (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2010). According to a survey from 2010, 98% of faculty members believe strongly that their institution should maintain their Christian identity, and 84% of faculty would agree they do not have a difficult time integrating faith and learning into the classroom (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2010). Therefore, Christian institutions of higher education employ the human resources apt to be additive to students' spiritual development.

English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) thought that the focus in Christian education should not only be the students who attend the university but also the faculty members. Faculty members have an advantage with students that most would overlook. From the outside looking into a university setting, individuals would assume that the Resident Assistants, Resident Directors, or members of the Student Development staff would have the most interaction with and positive impact on students; but, it is the faculty that have both the most regulated time with the students and impact on the students. "The givens of the institution might move to view the teachers as sources of life and vision, not just content experts" (English et al., 2003, p. 78). However, Joeckel and Chesnes (2010) conclude that as Christian higher education institutions become stronger academically, they become weaker religiously.

One of the top priorities of a Christian higher education institution is to prepare its faculty with the ability to integrate faith into their field of study; yet, many faculty members come to the Christian universities straight from secular training which does not provide faith integrative training (Rhea, 2011). “As they (new professors) begin their professional careers, they are often confronted with two separate and disjointed bodies of knowledge and belief, because their graduate program has not assisted with, or has even actively discouraged, the establishment of connections between them” (Rhea, 2011, p. 12). Some universities do an excellent job helping new faculty learn to integrate faith into their classroom since many of the faculty are not used to Christian teaching from their prior experience (W.C. Hackett, personal communication, May 24, 2017). There is still work to be done to create faculty and staff members who are the best resources for spiritually developing students. According Kramer (2007), “It takes a whole campus of whole persons to develop whole students” (p. 236).

There are many ways to explain the differences between Christian higher education institutions and non-Christian higher education institutions (Otto & Harrington, 2016). One of the largest distinctions toward the understanding of Christian higher education are those institutions which maintain the Christian vision and worldview as an ongoing standard (Otto & Harrington, 2016). According to Benne (2001), “there are four categories of church-related colleges: orthodox, critical mass, intentionally pluralist, and accidentally pluralist” (p. 254). Benne (2001) outlined the common denominators of Christian higher education institutions as: each institution describes their community as being Christ-Centered, each institution desires to have a strong theological and biblical studies program, each institution requires university personnel to have a relationship with the Lord, each institution mandates regular attendance to

university chapel services, and each institution prefers every student would desire a relationship with the Lord.

In 2000, the leadership team of CCCU developed a committee comprised of members from various institutions to determine the role and effectiveness of Christian higher education in the spiritual formation of students (CCCU, 2011). One of the main tasks of this committee was to formulate a cohesive definition of spiritual formation (CCCU, 2011). According to the committee's report (2011), "Spiritual formation is integral to Christian higher education—it is the biblically guided process in which people are being transformed into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit within the faith community in order to love and serve God and others" (p. 254).

In his article entitled, "Christian Higher Education Reaching the Whole Person," William R. Jeynes (2012) wrote that the purpose of Christian higher education institutions is to help strengthen each person as a whole. Christian higher education does not only place importance on students' academic performance, but also on students' character and religious identity (Jeynes, 2012). Some Christian higher education institutions refer to the three pillars of success: academic, social, and spiritual (Southeastern University website, 2018).

Jeynes (2012) wrote, "Christian higher education shares with secular institutions a sense that knowledge is increasingly fragmented, and that this fragmentation results from the increase in specialization of the academic disciplines" (p. 67). Researchers believe that students in Christian higher education institutions should not only be enrolled in courses that teach biblical principles, but also be enrolled in classes that address moral consequences (Jeynes, 2012). Some courses offered at CCCU institutions include: Introduction to Moral and Social Philosophy (University of Arizona, 2019), and Philosophy of Human Rights (Macalaster College, 2019).

Moral consequences classes are important so that individuals would understand the why, or reason (Sinek, 2009), behind what they believe. According to Jeynes (2012), in this day and age, there are more adults slipping up morally and having to face severe consequences for it. Without courses on the why of Christian principles and consequences, some students may never deeply understand their faith.

The purpose of higher education whether it is Christian, private, or secular is to instill values (Otto & Harrington, 2016). “Every educational system in this world teaches values of some kind, and the type of values a campus espouses greatly affects the values of every college student, either positively or negatively—often leading to some sort of social action (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 257-258). What a Christian higher education institution has to offer is the ability for students to work through their faith within a community instead of figuring it out for themselves (Otto & Harrington, 2016). On a larger level, operating as a Christian higher education institution provides opportunities for college personnel to engage students rationally and emotionally in discussions of faith (Otto & Harrington, 2016).

### **Spiritual Formation Defined**

Dallas Willard was an American philosopher also known for his writings on Christian spiritual formation; and Willard (2002) defined spiritual formation as, “the spirit driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (p. 22). Spiritual formation happens when the individual strives to be more like Jesus and dies to oneself (Rhea, 2011). Further, spiritual formation is a process in which individuals move from childlike faith to a deeper understanding of spirituality, and from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity (Moore, 2014). Moore (2014) stated spiritual formation is described as “a step by step process, through which a child is guided, encouraged, nurtured, admonished,



and disciplined to embrace Christ as Savior and be disciplined to develop as a Christian through the work and power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 258).

In an article written by Anna Puidk Horan (2017) called “Fostering Spiritual Formation of Millennials in Christian Schools”, the author defined spiritual formation as “the life-long transformational self-analytic and relational process where individuals become more like Christ through the Holy Spirit and Biblical guidance resulting in a relationship with God” (p. 56).

Spiritual formation is ever-changing in that the individual is in a constant state of transformation not only for the betterment of themselves but also for the benefit of others (Horan, 2017). In an article titled, “Spirituality and Leadership: Engaging Both in Higher Education”, author Marilyn Bugenhagen (2009) wrote, “being a spiritual individual means to be grounded in a set of values and beliefs, morals and ethics, and to consider how one’s acts have an impact on others” (p. 71).

The point of spiritual formation is not to just become a person who does and says the right thing; instead, the idea is to become the person who makes the right choices and does the right thing because of the transformative power of the spirit which is in them (Willard, 2002). More specifically, no person is inherently good by themselves; rather, a person is good because of the love of the Father which lives in that person through the spirit. James 1:17 says that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (New International Version). Horan (2017) wrote, “Transformation occurs when life conflicts produce anxiety prompting one to scan for solutions with the assistance of the Holy, consciously or unconsciously” (p. 61).

One of the most crucial points of spiritual formation within higher education is that the student would develop their God-given ability to know truth (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Spiritual formation typically peaks in an individual’s college years between their late teens and

early adulthood, and it is during this time period that individuals are capable of thinking critically about ideas that have previously been assumed (Otto & Harrington, 2016). It is also during this time that individuals walk away from their faith because they do not understand the importance of their faith to begin with (Horan, 2017).

During these late childhood and early adulthood years, spiritual formation starts to become young adults' own, and they are capable of taking responsibility for why they believe what they believe (Otto & Harrington, 2016). During this time, young adults start asking questions based on the meaning of life, work, death, sexuality, and power; likewise, young adults begin to develop religious ideologies (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Thus, the period within the lifespan for a college student is transformative for spirituality; and, the Christian higher education institution has a responsibility to facilitate spiritual depth.

Patrick Otto and Michael Harrington (2016) wrote, "Christian higher education has a responsibility to create an atmosphere in which the faculty and administration intentionally seek ways to integrate spiritual formation into the full educational experience of students attending these institutions in order to provide the full measure of spiritual formation" (p. 253). An individual's spirituality is defined as a personal commitment to continually develop oneself in depth and growth (Chesbrough, 2006). The faculty, staff, and administration must maximize the four years of undergraduates' time on campus through spiritually formative practices.

"Research that promotes spiritual formation as more of a catechetical aim not meant for all students tends to define spiritual formation as a God-inspired process that stimulates an individual's response to God" (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 253). A catechetical aim is religious instruction preparing an individual for Christian baptism or confirmation (Catholic Church, 2000). One researcher noted that in order for spiritual formation to be immersed into the culture

of a higher education institution, it must be promoted by educators as having both an educational aim to appeal to all people and a catechetical aim to focus on those responding to God (Meehan, 2002).

### **Common Practices of Spiritual Formation**

Christian campuses provide students with various opportunities to interact within their communities allowing students to learn to live within a community setting (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Christian higher education institutions develop a sense of community through the classroom setting, residential halls, small Bible study groups, athletic events, intramurals, clubs and organizations, and chapel experiences (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Additionally, students engage in spiritual formation through community service projects. At some institutions, students interact with the faculty and staff to deepen spiritual formation (Horan, 2017). According to Otto and Harrington (2016), “The community is the setting in which spiritual formation takes shape, because it forces students to begin to understand the connection between belief and behavior as daily life on campus begins to help make sense of all that is happening” (p. 258).

In order for university students to grasp the idea of spiritual formation, they must realize the ever-present and transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rhea, 2011). In his book, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, Dallas Willard (2002) wrote about spiritual formation being the daily transforming of the mind. Ideas, inner thoughts, and images are information received to make decisions (Willard, 2002). If an individual transforms his mind, then the whole of the person – feelings, the will, the body, social contact, and the soul – is transformed as well (Willard, 2002).

Young adults may not spend the time reading or studying scripture as most Christ-centered institutions would hope; they will, however, watch and study the lives of the adults that

are employed at the institution (Westerhoff, 2012). Westerhoff (2012) wrote, “The new generation may have faith but only if the present generation in the church is faithful in living the life of faith with them” (p. 143). According to Horan (2017), “Young people with mature spiritual formation are more likely to participate in community service and extracurricular activities; and, they are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviors and improved self-esteem, self-control, and academic achievement with fewer risk behaviors” (p. 57).

Every institution has challenges, and Christian higher education institutions are not the exception (Otto & Harrington, 2016). One of the many challenges within Christian higher education is spiritual formation. Otto and Harrington (2016) wrote about three particular challenges: postmodern philosophy, diversity, and assessment. Otto and Harrington (2016) wrote, “Postmodern philosophy represents a challenge in the discussion of Christian spiritual formation, for the reason that although postmodernism allows for a more open and academic discussion of spirituality, it removes the foundation of biblical truth” (p. 259). A postmodern definition of spiritual formation without biblical truths would make someone’s faith exclusively a private matter (Otto & Harrington, 2016). In a Christian institution of higher education, students should not be left to develop spirituality alone (Smith, 2009). Similar to education in general, spiritual development is a social construct (Vygotsky, 1978). “Truth is not contingent on someone to believe it, although faith is personal it should not be considered only a private issue” (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 259). A postmodern mindset allows students to choose what they believe is right or true and how they may be different from everyone; and, being different is okay (Horan, 2017). Horan (2017) wrote, “In a postmodern culture, the Christian worldview offers an important framework of meaning and identity development, motivating millennials to contribute to the greater good” (p. 62).

Diversity is a societal issue in the United States not only in the workplace and in the school systems, but also in Christian higher education institutions. Institutions that are members of the CCCU have documented an increase in diversity throughout the years in both the student and faculty populations (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Diversity is an overarching term with various factors contributing to the definition; but, for CCCU institutions, diversity is mostly related to racial and ethnic backgrounds. Diversity is represented by heterogeneous people or people groups. Factors contributing to diversity include: ethnicity, mobility, religion, learning style, and socioeconomic status (Diaz-Rico, 2013). However, although there has been an increase, there is still a lack of racial and ethnic diversity on these campuses which can stunt the spiritual formation of students as certain beliefs go unchallenged (Otto & Harrington, 2016).

With the lack of diversity on CCCU campuses, spiritual formation suffers for all students, but particularly among students of color (Paredes-Collins, 2014). Paredes-Collins (2014) wrote, “The most reliable predictor for spiritual growth among students of color at Christian colleges was their sense of belonging, whereas the most reliable predictor for spiritual growth among students of the dominant race (i.e. predominantly white) was overall satisfaction with the university” (p. 260). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Christian higher education institutions to create cultures that promote a sense of belonging for students no matter what their background (Otto & Harrington, 2016).

The assessment of spiritual formation is the third challenge for Christian higher education institutions (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Many schools offer students opportunities to go to chapel or to be a part of a small group, but hardly any schools formally teach or assess the methodology of students partaking in spiritual formation. Many colleges mistakenly assume that all students coming into their Christian institutions come from the same background, have a solid

relationship with the Lord, and have a desire to grow in their faith. Otto and Harrington (2016) wrote, “Spiritual formation becomes difficult to adequately and truthfully assess, primarily because outcomes can be met falsely separate from any real connection or response to God” (p. 260). According to Otto and Harrington (2016), “assessment of the role of the Christian institution and its impact upon spiritual formation will continue to be a challenge as accrediting agencies and other governmental programs require increasing documentation to confirm that the primarily elements of institutional mission statements are met” (p. 260). The three main challenges for Christian institutions of higher education combine to set forth a need for CCCU institutions to develop a research-based set of best practices for spiritual formation in undergraduates.

### **Spiritual Development in Students**

In creating a spiritual formation program, Christian institutions must determine where the students are spiritually influenced the most. However, before one can dive into how students are spiritually developed on a Christian campus, it is important to first gather information about the types of students that attend a Christian campus (Rhea, 2011). Christian higher education institutions must be well versed in ways to provoke spiritual growth within their student culture (Rhea, 2011). Spiritual growth among students can help them in many ways to become better as far as their academic performance, their mental state, their interpersonal and leadership skills, as well as their overall college satisfaction (Subbiondo, 2011). According to Subbiondo (2011), “Spirituality points to our inner, subjective life, as contrasted with the objective domain of observable behavior and material object that we can point to and measure directly” (p. 31).

College age students are typically between the ages of 18-24, otherwise known as young adults (Rhea, 2011). Understanding the characteristics of college students better equips faculty,

staff, and administrators to serve the students. Young adults are vibrant, full of life, in transition, and can be unstable and on the search for a new beginning; and, typical undergraduate students are known for being self-focused but not self-centered. Most students realize that college is one of the only times in their lives that they are able to focus on themselves and make decisions based on what is best for them (Rhea, 2011).

Young adults are either still fully supported by their parents during the college stage of life or are completely on their own (Rhea, 2011). Financial support is a factor that varies among college students and tends to help shape their perspectives and priorities during college. Students who are financially supported by their families find taking the time to figure out what is the best next step for them is a lot easier than being forced to get a job that they are not as happy with (Rhea, 2011). According to Rhea (2011), “Research has shown that parents are willing to provide room, board, and educational costs as long as they perceive that their sons and daughters are making progress towards autonomy through education or employment” (p. 4).

Young adults also identify with being solo (Rhea, 2011). Some undergraduate students perceive that they do not need anyone to help them with managing life, and those students are more likely to live by themselves than with a roommate. Living alone, in turn, can lead to higher rates of depression because depression is fueled by loneliness (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro, & Solnet, 2013). Many students find they can entertain themselves through social media, video games, and other electronic outlets without having to engage in face to face interactions (Rhea, 2011). According to Mark Molter (2010), religious involvement rapidly declines between the ages of 18 to 24. The decline could be attributed to the fact that students before the age of 18 were taught to believe whatever religious views their parents exposed them to. Consequently, when the students graduated from high school and did

not live under their parent's roof anymore, they had the independence to explore their own religious truths (Molter, 2010).

In a book titled, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith (2005), wrote about the spiritual lives of emerging adults. Smith (2005) stated the most common spiritual perspective of the students: "being moralistic therapeutic deists". This perspective has five primary ideas: 1) God created the world and is the author of everything that goes on in the world; 2) God is someone who wants everyone to get along and be kind to one another; 3) the sole purpose of life is to be happy and to feel good about yourself; 4) God does not need to be a part of the intricate details of one's life unless it involves a big decision or issue; and, 5) God allows all good people to go to Heaven when they pass (Smith, 2005). The college-aged generation seems to make decisions based on momentary feelings instead of basing their decisions on principles, their faith, or what they know to be right. With this perspective, individuals believe that whatever feels right at the moment, is right (Smith, 2005). Thus, the therapeutic deist view of spirituality represents undergraduates' perspectives of themselves and how they manage their lives.

In another work by Smith (2009) is a book titled *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* in which the author described six religious dispositions; but, he focused on only three categories that Christian university students would fall into: Committed Traditionalists, Selective Adherents, and Spiritually Open. The students who would connect with the Committed Traditionalists have a strong belief in God, desire a personal relationship with Him, and involve Him in their day to day decisions and routines. Committed Traditionalists' focus is on their morals, values, and beliefs rather than political or social issues (Smith, 2009).



The students who would connect with the Selective Adherents seem to take their faith less seriously; and, though they are still active in their faith, Selective Adherents are more likely to make their beliefs customizable in order to line up with their actions (Smith, 2009). Selective Adherents, the largest of the three, utilize religious-based practices and responses on the situation. Selective Adherents would be more likely to depart from traditional Christian beliefs, such as sexual purity, regular church attendance, and the existence of hell (Smith, 2009).

The group of individuals identifying as Spiritually Open are not quite committed to a religious belief yet, rather, they are open to exploring all their options (Smith, 2009). Spiritually Open students believe in all forms of gods and higher powers; but, being spiritually open allows for anything and everything to be a god. While this group does not necessarily represent a large population at a Christian institution, they do still exist (Smith, 2009).

It is within Christian higher education institutions where students are evaluated the most (Rhea, 2001). Students' intellect is assessed through tests and papers, their social skills are assessed through relationships and attendance at events, and their athletic ability assessed through records, statistics, and championships (Rhea, 2011). "A student's identity can be continually up for grabs in the wake of these success markers. Therefore, there is not a more important theological issue and language for university students than knowing one's identity in Christ" (Rhea, 2011, p. 6). Thus, understanding the three types of individuals identified by Smith (2009) will facilitate spiritual development departments' baseline of students' levels of spiritual formation.

Teaching young adults their identity and significance are found in Christ alone, must be a primary educational outcome in Christian higher education institutions (Rhea, 2011). There are many ways in which Christian higher education institutions can achieve this outcome.

According to Rhea (2011), “An accurate self-awareness before God positions us to grow in wisdom” (p. 6). Self-awareness should be one of the first skills leaders should teach the incoming freshmen of a university cohort (Rhea, 2011).

In a study conducted in 2003, researchers determined that students who have a high level of interest in spiritual things may not be interested in spirituality as it related to Jesus, but rather spirituality that refers to finding a deeper meaning for life (Higher Education, 2003). “In general, students searching for meaning and purpose seem to be asking for help in answering questions such as: How do I know? Who am I? What relationships do I want with others? How can I best contribute to making this a better place to live?” (Kramer, 2007, p. 239). Freshmen have high expectations for colleges in general but especially for their spiritual well-being as well as their emotional development (Higher Education, 2003). “Varying degrees of spirituality and religiousness also translate into significant differences in students’ political and social attitudes” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2003, p. 3).

Millennials comprise of the largest and most diverse generation in college to date, and there are many reasons for why they do not have a concern about spiritual matters (Horan, 2017). Millennials live in a technological culture with all the information they need at their fingertips through electronic devices accessing the information highway in most venues. This generation of college students has real-time communication, including globalization, pluralism, redefined religious liberties, postmodernism, and moral relativism (Horan, 2017). According to Horan (2017), “This unique generation is at risk from aftershocks of indulgent parenting, unrealistic perspectives of adulthood portrayed through media, education preparing them to be students rather than workers, a cynicism fostered through postmodernism, and a culture of convenience over commitment” (p. 58).

Christian institutions of higher education must be acquainted with the characteristics of the student cohorts in order to create appropriate spiritual development programming. Trying to figure out the spiritual formation process for this generation of students is not as easy task (Horan, 2017). Generations change characteristics, and the current college-aged generation is the millennials. Millennials question everything, including their past beliefs, therefore, millennials are nervous to affiliate themselves with one denomination or one church because they do not want to be tied down (Horan, 2017). According to Horan (2017) millennials believe, “churches are equated with hypocrisy, judgement, formalities, and flexibility; as much, millennials are less likely to adopt statements of faith or church doctrines, and they shop around for the most comfortable life perspectives (p. 59). Due to technology, everything said can be misconstrued, recorded, and manipulated in such a way that can make situations seem as though they are not; in fact, history itself can even be manipulated in the social media world (Horan, 2017). Keeping this in mind is important for educators who will be in the eyes of millennials who are skeptical of information shared through religious outlets, namely Christian institutions of higher education.

### **Spiritual Formation in Higher Education**

Most Christian higher education institutions claim that spiritual growth within their university is one of their top priorities (Rhea, 2011). Some institutions advertise being Christ-centered in order to promote this priority with potential students and families. Many Christian institutions of higher education have created departments within the university dedicated solely to the forming of students’ spirituality (Azusa Pacific, 2019). Spiritual growth is most commonly found within the department of spiritual formation (Rhea, 2011). Rhea (2011) wrote, “Spiritual formation is synonymous with the more conventional terms of discipleship, and

sanctification, which all refer in some measure to the same idea of growing in an understanding of what Jesus meant when he said, ‘if anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me’” (p. 7). Thus, departments of spiritual formation must implement practices of intentional discipleship.

Most would think spiritual formation takes place mainly in campus chapel services, but spiritual formation actually takes place in academic classes, resident halls, and at athletic events. It is imperative for the spiritual formation of students in Christian institutions to not just be an “add on” to the title in a university’s name but also to be developed into the curriculum in the classroom and into their student development activities (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Bugenhagen (2009) posited that “the academic curriculum needs to consider how to teach the values and beliefs that engage students as tomorrow’s leaders, not in just science, medicine, technology, and commerce, but in the democracy of fostering the common good for the nation and the world” (p. 73). Further, Otto and Harrington (2016) stated that institutions of Christian higher education have a distinct advantage over secular universities in their ability to aid in spiritual formation through curriculum development.

Some researchers suggest that the individuals who will influence and transform the minds of the generations to come are those who speak both the language of the church and the language of culture (Rhea, 2011). Rhea (2011) wrote, “As the language of the university refines and reinforces these goals, graduates will increasingly give effective testimony to the glory of God through their lives and words” (p. 7). Christian institutions of higher education must determine best practices of communicating with a skeptical generation in language that is believable and understandable.

Additionally, there are individuals who question whether or not it is the Christian higher education institutions' sole responsibility to aid in the spiritual formation of the student (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Wolterstorff (2003) suggested that spiritual formation is a redemptive process not just growth that take place instantaneously. Therefore, according to Otto and Harrington (2016), "the statement that the Christian college has a responsibility for the development of the spiritual formation of its students should be altered in that Christian higher education does not have a specific responsibility to develop the spiritual formation of its students, but rather should focus on creating a distinct and purposeful atmosphere where spiritual formation is promoted and fostered" (p. 256).

Spirituality is cultivated when students at Christian higher education institutions sign a faith statement of some kind (Parades-Collins, 2013). Faith statements require students to sign their names to a document stating they agree to abide by Christian principles and develop a deeper relationship with the Lord (Clarifying Christianity, 1998). Another way to cultivate spirituality on campus is to require Bible courses and offer consistent chapel services each month (Parades-Collins, 2013). In an article written by Parades-Collins (2013), the author wrote, "although such programmatic opportunities as Bible studies, small groups, and chapel programs are likely important to spiritual growth, elements of the actual lived community experience between students can also inhibit or promote spiritual growth" (p. 130).

An aspect of spiritual formation that is often overlooked or not spoken of is the student's community experience (Parades-Collins, 2013). If a student feels they have a sense of belonging, they have a seat at the table, and they are an important part of the campus community, then their spirituality will be positively impacted; "however, if the impact of the campus climate

(regardless of institutional intention) systematically leaves students without a seat at the table, the institution's spiritual mission is not fulfilled" (Parades-Collins, 2013, p. 130).

There are many reasons why a college-aged student would feel disconnected from God. According to Strelan, Acton, and Patrick (2009), disappointment and unwillingness to forgive God can play a huge factor in an individual feeling disconnected spiritually. Some individuals believe that when tragic events happen or deeply disappointing events occur that the only one to blame for such events is God (Strelan et al., 2009). Blaming God for tragedy or disappointment leads to disenchantment from religious practices and spiritual development. Furthermore, "although many Christians may be reluctant to singularly hold God responsible for all the calamities that occur in the world, they may, from time to time, experience a degree of dissonance and distress, believing that God was more than capable of intervening but for some reason failed to do so" (Strelan et al., 2009, p. 203).

Another reason an incoming student would feel discouraged by their spirituality is because of the lack of community within the institution (Allison & Broadus, 2009). Students long to know that they are not alone in their spiritual journey. Young adults often look for individuals who share the same beliefs as they hold in order to make a connection with someone who has common interests. Humans are, by nature, relational creatures (Langer, Hall, & McMartin, 2010). "Successful image-bearing demands successful relationships with both God and our fellow human beings" (Langer et al., 2010, p. 348). Some researchers argue in order for individuals to find complete satisfaction in life, they must be able to develop and maintain good relationships (Langer et al., 2010). Therefore, if a student spends the first year in college unable to establish a good relationship with a fellow Christ follower, then that student will more than likely be dissatisfied with both their spirituality and their college experience.

Additionally, incoming students may feel discouraged by their spiritual journey because they do not know or understand their calling or purpose. It is common knowledge that we all were created to be image bearers of Christ, but most long to discover what they were put on this earth for (Langer et al., 2010). Students are often not fulfilled by the abstract purpose statement of being made in the image of Christ because college students desire a more concrete purpose which often translates into a future career. Individuals were created with different passions and strengths which shape them and prepare them to accomplish different tasks (Langer et al., 2010). According to Langer et al. (2010), “historical Christian conceptions of the flourishing life include the notion that God calls and appoints individual human beings to particular tasks that serve his sovereign purposes” (p. 351).

### **Best Practices of Spiritual Formation**

According to Otto and Harrington (2016), The Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is a “premiere research organization that is having a huge impact in the study of collegiate spiritual growth” (p. 253). The HERI research findings have revealed four main ideas which engage in the success of spiritual formation within higher education (Otto & Harrington, 2016). The first main trend identified was that with an increase in spiritual formation on campus, a positive outcome in academic performance and leadership development arises (Otto & Harrington, 2016). The second point that emerged is that higher education institutions can develop their student development events around spiritual formation in order to foster a sense of belonging and a deeper knowledge of Christ (Otto & Harrington, 2016). Developing events for students around spiritual formation goes well beyond the walls of a chapel. Members of student development staff can be intentional on ways in which to integrate spiritual formation into their events by creating space

for students to express themselves spiritually or by allowing students to have a time of sharing their testimonies and testifying about what the Lord has done in their lives.

The third positive trend that emerged and engages in the success of spiritual formation within higher education is the awareness that institutional diversity allows for an improved spiritual development experience (Otto & Harrington, 2016). When administrators from Christian higher education institutions realize the way in which students from diverse populations are spiritually formatted, the administrators will more than likely create space for those students to connect in a way that is meaningful to them. The fourth point identified was that “spiritual development is enhanced when intentionally integrated into the classroom” (Otto & Harrington, 2016, p. 253).

Some CCCU institutions of higher education apply at least some of the four best practices identified by the HERI. For example, at Southeastern University, all freshmen students are enrolled in a course called “SEU 101” (SEU Website, 2018). This class meets once every week for the first four weeks of school; and, each week, the freshmen students learn about what it means to be a Southeastern University student socially, spiritually, and academically. A distinguishing factor of this course is that the students enrolled are diverse yet similar in their collegiate experiences and tend to be like-minded. During one of the final weeks of the course, the freshmen students sit under the teaching of the President of the university; during that lesson, the President teaches about how to live a disciplined life (SEU Website, 2018). Research shows that students thrive more when they are surrounded with like-minded students because it allows them to grow in their religious identification (Small & Bowman, 2011).

Furthermore, at Southeastern University, freshmen are enrolled in First Year Experience groups, and they meet every Wednesday morning for eight weeks with seven to ten other



freshman students. For the First Year Experience groups, an upperclassman student facilitates the group meetings and discussions. The First Year Experience group allows for freshman students to ask any questions, to learn more about the culture of the school, and to grow in their knowledge of what it means to be a Christian student on a Christian campus (SEU Website, 2018).

Another example of formal spiritual development programming is found at Laidlaw College. Laidlaw College is a large interdenominational Christian higher education institution where students can obtain credentials varying from a certificate to a doctoral degree (Laidlaw Website, 2018). The students who attend Laidlaw College enroll in a course that is called Spiritual Formation (Nichols, 2016). The course is intended to implement best practices of spiritual development for undergraduate students. Students find this course to be significant to their formation in terms consistent with transformative learning theory in that taking this course led students to notice an incremental, or gradual, transformation (Nichols, 2016). According to Nichols (2016), “it is important that theological educators consider the entire ecology of students as contributing to Christian formation (p. 29).

## **Conclusion**

After gathering and analyzing the practices of spiritual formation in Christian higher education, research has shown a gap in which spiritual formation practices actually work in comparison to the spiritual formation practices that do not work. Many solutions to spiritual formation practices have not been revealed mainly because most Christian higher education institutions have not discovered the best way to ensure spiritual formation in college-aged students.

Due to the many sources not showing what actual practices contribute as practical works for developing proactive spiritual formation initiatives for college students, more research is needed in creating a systematic and research-based spiritual formation program for undergraduate students at Christian institutions of higher education.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The study was broadly defined as non-experimental, utilizing a survey research methodology. Data used to address the study's formal research questions and hypotheses were archival in nature. A conveniently accessed, purposive sample consisting of incoming freshmen students at a private university located in the state of Florida represented the study's data source. A total of 328 participants comprised the study's sample, representing 86.8% of the potential pool of eligible participants. The study's data were archived by the university at the outset of the 2018-2019 school year.

#### **Instrumentation Background**

The study's research instrument was designed by staff members of the spiritual formation department at a small private university located in the State of Florida. The university's Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department distributed the survey to the students eligible to participate in the study. The survey was utilized to determine the way in which incoming freshmen would rate themselves spiritually as well as what hinders their spiritual growth and what enhances their spiritual growth. The survey was validated in a posteriori manner using the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) test statistic. As a result, the survey's internal reliability was considered very high ( $\alpha = .83$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

The purpose of the survey was to determine how best to help spiritually format students in a Christian higher education institution. In order to gain a better understanding of how to best help spiritually format a student, it is important to first understand the degree to which students view themselves spiritually upon entrance to the university. It is perhaps a natural assumption that all students entering a Christian higher education institution would be Christians. However, even though a student may agree with a university's faith statement during the application process that agreement does not necessarily mean the student knows what it means to have a relationship with the Lord nor even know what being a Christian is. More than likely, and perhaps in many cases, students simply want to be admitted into the university and will click whatever button necessary to get accepted.

With this realization in mind, the spiritual formation team of the small Christian higher education institution at the center of the study determined that in order to best meet students where they are spiritually they must first actually know where the students perceive themselves spiritually. As such, the university spiritual formation team felt the best way to acquire information regarding the spirituality of the incoming students would be to administer a survey during study participant freshmen year, specifically in their First Year Experience course.

### **The Survey**

The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of four questions in total and was administered both during a class meeting and was emailed to each student after class. The department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness developed the survey and offered every participating student the opportunity to win a gift card upon completion of the survey as an incentive. Using the Likert scale for the first survey question, the students were provided the option to select: "Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Almost Always". The students were then asked an

overarching question followed by three statements. The overarching question was stated as: “Please indicate the frequency with which you do the following”. The statements posed were expressed as: “Participate in spiritual activities”, “Enjoy personal time in God’s presence through worship, prayer, and Bible study, as well as other spiritual disciplines”, and “When facing questions about life and faith, I know where to find answers from a biblical perspective”.

Using the Likert scale for the second survey question, participating students were provided the option to select: “Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Somewhat Agree, or Not Applicable”. The students were asked an overarching question followed by six statements. The overarching question was stated as, “Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements”. The first statement posed was, “I believe that God has a sense of purpose for my life [*sic*] and I expect Him to use me every day in His work on earth today”. The second statement posed was, “I understand my spiritual gifts and use them to serve others”. The third statement asked was, “I prioritize my daily devotions and guard that time spent with God”. The fourth statement asked was, “What I learn in my daily devotions affects my attitude and choices throughout the day that follows”. The fifth statement posed was, “I walk in fellowship with the Spirit throughout the day and constantly surrender my thoughts and desires to Him.” The sixth statement posed was, “I’m eager to spend time in God’s presence, and I hunger for more of Him in my life.”

The third question asked in this survey was open-ended, designed to allow students the opportunity to insert their own answers to the question. Question three was posed as, “What do you find to be the most challenging/frustration part of your spiritual life?”

The fourth and final question asked in this survey was also an open-ended question which allowed students to insert in their own answers to the question. Question four was posed as, “What do you find to be the most rewarding/enriching part of your spiritual life?”

## **Procedures**

The study was conducted at a small Christian higher education institution. The institution has a department of Institution Research and Effectiveness which aids the university in completing and obtaining all their accreditations, administers all surveys, and helps conduct research in a variety of professional fields represented on the campus. The Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness assisted the department of Spiritual Formation in developing the necessary questions for the Spiritual Formation survey.

The Christian institution where the study was conducted offers a mandatory course for all incoming freshman students called First Year Experience. First Year Experience at this particular school is required for all incoming students who are 19 years of age or younger upon registration *and* who have transferred in less than 28 credit hours. The course meets every Monday for the first five weeks of the fall semester. Each week, a different topic of collegiate life is discussed. Topics include academics, spirituality, or social life.

During the week which addressed the students’ spirituality, the department of Spiritual Formation presented information to all course sections in a combined class meeting about what the institution was doing to help students develop a deeper relationship with the Lord. The Spiritual Formation department additionally communicated with students about how to complete the survey they would be requested to take. Before the students left class that day, they were provided the opportunity to complete the survey. Students were also offered the option to complete the survey outside of class through an email with a link to the survey. To encourage

participation, students were informed of the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a gift card. Survey completers' (participants') names were entered into a drawing, one name was randomly selected, and the gift card was provided to the student.

## **Data Analysis**

**Preliminary Analyses.** Preliminary analyses were conducted in advance of addressing the study's formally posed research questions and hypotheses. Specifically, missing data, and the internal reliability of participant response were assessed through both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Study data were exclusively analyzed, interpreted, and reported using IBM's (Chicago) Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.

The study's essential data arrays were evaluated for missing data in two distinct stages. In the initial stage, data arrays were analyzed for omnibus missing data points and randomness of missing data through an initial screening process. In light of the fact that the proportion of missing data is directly related to the quality of statistical inferences, and the fact that there is no consensus of agreement as to an established cutoff from the professional literature regarding an acceptable percentage of missing data in a data set for valid statistical inference, Schafer's (1999) assertion of 5% or less as being inconsequential guided the handling of the issue of missing data in the study. In the second phase of the missing data analytics, a decision regarding the extent of missing data was made to forego formal imputation procedures in favor of follow-up screening for patterns of missing data per study participant.

**Instrument Validation.** The internal consistency of participant response to the study's research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), or tau-equivalent reliability  $P_T$ , was selected as the test statistic for posteriori validation procedures with respect to the study's research instrument (Cho, 2016). Cronbach's alpha, by definition, is

functionally derived through the number of instrument items, the average covariance between item-pairs, and the total variance score. Posteriori validation was utilized because the survey was previously created by university SMEs prior to this study.

Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), a test statistic widely used in the social sciences, is considered a measure of the internal consistency of participant response to items on a test or research instrument. It is represented as a number on a scale between 0 and 1. Internal consistency or reliability refers the extent to which all the items on a research instrument measure the same concept or construct, and reliability is connected to the inter-relatedness of the items within the instrument or test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). As the estimate of reliability increases, the fraction of a test score that is attributed to error decreases (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

In the area of psychometric testing, most alpha levels have been noted to range between 0.75 and 0.83 (Nunnally, 1978). The alpha of .83 achieved in the current study would appear to be noteworthy in light of the fact Cronbach alpha levels are impacted considerably by the number of items represented on a research instrument. In the current study, the restricted number of survey items would customarily impact the resultant alpha in a negative manner.

**Unidimensionality.** The concept of unidimensionality is a fundamental assumption of Cronbach's alpha. The concept assumes the research instrument items are only measuring one latent variable or dimension (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). If the instrument is measuring more than one dimension, the resulting alpha may be meaningless as an overall measure of reliability. The solution involves breaking the test into parts or factors, each part measuring a different latent variable or dimension using exploratory factor analysis.

The research instrument utilized in the current study contained a very restricted number of survey items specifically designed to be associated with the construct of spiritual formation by



the original panel of SMEs. As a result, the notion of unidimensionality of construct represented a plausible means by which to view the instrument, providing further rationale for the use and interpretation of the Cronbach's alpha test statistic in assessing the internal consistency of participant response to items on the research instrument.

**Analyses by Research Question/Hypothesis.** The study's six formally posed research questions and follow-up hypotheses were addressed using a variety of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. In research questions one and two, the One Sample t-test was used to assess the statistical significance of participant response in the first portion of the question. The alpha level of  $p < .05$  represented the threshold for statistical significance of finding. Cohen's  $d$  was used to assess the magnitude of effect (effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes. In the second portion of research questions one and two, the t-test of Independent Means and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to assess the statistical significance of difference in mean scores between the two or more groups being measured (demographic identifiers). The alpha level of  $p < .05$  represented the threshold for statistical significance of finding. The assumptions of "normality" and "homogeneity of variances" were assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk Test and the Levene Test respectively. Values of  $p > .05$  were indicative of both assumptions having been satisfied. Cohen's  $d$  was used to assess the magnitude of effect (effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes.

Research question three was associative in nature, and as such the mathematical relationships between respective variables featured in the research question were addressed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ). The statistical significance of mathematical relationships addressed in research question three was assessed using the

probability level of  $p < .05$  as the threshold value for statistical significance of finding. Magnitude of associative effect was measured through the Cohen's  $d$  effect size statistic. Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes.

Research question four was associative and predictive in nature utilizing multiple independent predictor variables. As such, the Multiple Linear Regression test statistic was employed to assess predictive robustness of the respective independent variables in each question. Predictive model fitness was assessed through the interpretation of the ANOVA Table  $F$  value. An  $F$  value of  $p < .05$  was considered indicative of a viable predictive model. Variable slope ( $t$ ) values represented the means by which the statistical significance of independent variables were interpreted. Values of  $p < .05$  were considered statistically significant.  $R^2$  values were utilized as the basis for effect size measurement and for comparative purposes. The formula  $R^2 / 1 - R^2 (f^2)$  was applied to each predictor for comparative purposes. Effect sizes of  $f^2 \leq .35$  were considered indicative of a "large" magnitude of predictive effect and were transformed into Cohen's  $d$  values for interpretive purposes. Assumptions associated with the use of the Multiple Linear Regression test statistic (linearity, independence of error, variable inflation, homoscedasticity, and outliers) were addressed and satisfied by either statistical means or visual inspection.

Research questions five and six featured both an assessment of the normality of data array as well as the application of descriptive statistical techniques. The specific descriptive statistical techniques of frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were used to assess the elements perceived to be most challenging and most rewarding for study participants in achieving spiritual formation. The Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) test was used in both research questions to assess the normality or relative normality of distribution of study participant responses to both

research questions five and six. An S-W value of  $p > .05$  was considered indicative of relative normality of study participant response distribution. According to Razali and Wah (2011), “the Shapiro-Wilk test is the most powerful normality test” (p. 21). Although the Shapiro-Wilk test was originally only used for sample sizes of 50 or less (Razali & Wah, 2011), it was subsequently determined that the test could be used on larger sample sizes as well. Razali and Wah (2011) determined, “this test was the first test that was able to detect departures from normality due to either skewness or kurtosis, or both” (p.25).

## IV. RESULTS

### **Preliminary Findings**

Preliminary analyses were conducted in advance of addressing the study's formally posed research questions and hypotheses. Specifically, missing data, and the internal reliability of participant response were assessed through both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

The study's essential data arrays were evaluated for missing data in two distinct stages. In the initial stage, data arrays were analyzed for omnibus missing data points and randomness of missing data through an initial screening process. As a result, the level of missing data was 6.66% ( $n = 226$ ), a figure beyond an inconsequential level of 5% noted by Schafer (1999). Moreover, the missing data obtained in the initial screening was found not to be sufficiently random (MCAR  $\chi^2_{(191)} = 365.84$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

In light of the fact that the proportion of missing data is directly related to the quality of statistical inferences, and the fact that there is no consensus of agreement as to an established cutoff from the professional literature regarding an acceptable percentage of missing data in a data set for valid statistical inference, Schafer's (1999) assertion of 5% or less as being inconsequential guided the handling of the issue of missing data in the study. As a result of the unsatisfactory level of missing data and concomitant lack of randomness, incomplete data (more than one datum) associated with study participants were eliminated. As a result, the study's participant sample size decreased by 13.3% ( $n = 50$ ; 378 to 328), and the new level of missing data was minimal and acceptable at 0.14% ( $n = 4$ ). The internal consistency of participant response to the study's research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). The

internal consistency level of participant response (reliability) in the study was considered very high at  $\alpha = .83$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

### **Findings by Research Question/Hypothesis**

**Research Question #1.** What is the perceived degree of spiritual formation of incoming freshman at a Christian University setting?

Using the both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to address research question one, the overall spiritual formation mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.57) was found to be statistically significantly beyond the established null value of 3.0 ( $t_{(327)} = 36.97$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, the magnitude of effect (effect size) for the overall spiritual formation was considered very large at  $d = 2.02$ .

**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 1$ ).** The degree of perceived overall spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University will not be manifested at a statistically significant level.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the overall perceived level of spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 1$ ) for research question one was rejected.

**Research Question #2.** Which of the six sub-elements of perceived overall spiritual formation was manifested to the greatest degree?

Using the both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to address research question two, the mean score of 4.75 (SD = 0.85) for the spiritual sub-element of “I believe that God has a sense of purpose for my life [*sic*] and I expect Him to use me every day in His work on earth today” was found to be statistically significantly beyond the established null value of 3.0 ( $t_{(327)} = 37.09$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, the magnitude of effect (effect size) for the sub-element was considered very large at  $d = 2.06$ .

Table 1 contains a summary of the descriptive and inferential findings associated with the six respective sub-elements of overall spiritual formation:

Table 1

*Summary of Descriptive and Inferential Analyses for Study Sub-Elements of Spiritual Formation*

| Sub-Element                              | n   | Mean | SD   | <i>t</i> | <i>d</i>          |
|--|-----|------|------|----------|-------------------|
| Participation Spiritual Activities       | 328 | 4.12 | 0.82 | 24.82*** | 1.37 <sup>a</sup> |
| Personal Time in God's Presence          | 328 | 4.25 | 0.82 | 27.76*** | 1.52 <sup>a</sup> |
| Biblical Solutions to life's Problems    | 328 | 3.79 | 0.93 | 15.33*** | 0.85 <sup>b</sup> |
| Sense of God's Will & Purpose of My Life | 328 | 4.75 | 0.85 | 37.09*** | 2.06 <sup>a</sup> |
| Understanding & Use of Gifts             | 328 | 4.15 | 0.87 | 24.04*** | 1.32 <sup>a</sup> |
| Prioritizing Time with God               | 328 | 3.86 | 1.02 | 15.15*** | 0.84 <sup>b</sup> |

\*\*\* $p < .001$     <sup>a</sup> Very Large Effect Size ( $d \geq 1.30$ )    <sup>b</sup> Large Effect Size ( $d \geq .80$ )

**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 2$ ).** The degree of perceived overall spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University in the six sub-elements will not be manifested at a statistically significant level in any of the six sub-elements.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the perceived level of all sub-elements of spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 2$ ) for research question two was rejected.

**Research Question #3.** Of the six sub-elements of spiritual formation, which represents the most robust correlate of overall student spiritual formation?

Using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) to assess the mathematical relationships between sub-elements of spiritual formation and overall perceived degree of spiritual formation, the sub-element of “I prioritize my daily devotions and guard that time spent with God” manifested the greatest degree of mathematical relationship with study

participant perceived overall spiritual formation at  $r = .69$ ;  $p < .001$ . Moreover, the associative effect size was considered very large at  $d = 1.91$ .

Table 2 contains a summary of the mathematical relationships and associated effect sizes of respective sub-elements with participant perceived overall spiritual formation:

Table 2  
*Mathematical Relationships & Effect Sizes: Sub-Elements and Overall Spiritual Formation*

| Sub-Element                              | $r$    | $d$               |
|--|--------|-------------------|
| Participation Spiritual Activities       | .67*** | 1.81 <sup>a</sup> |
| Personal Time in God's Presence          | .68*** | 1.86 <sup>a</sup> |
| Biblical Solutions to life's Problems    | .66*** | 1.76 <sup>a</sup> |
| Sense of God's Will & Purpose of My Life | .44*** | 0.98 <sup>b</sup> |
| Understanding & Use of Gifts             | .67*** | 1.81 <sup>a</sup> |
| Prioritizing Time with God               | .69*** | 1.91 <sup>a</sup> |

\*\*\* $p < .001$  <sup>a</sup>Very Large Effect Size ( $d \geq 1.30$ ) <sup>b</sup>Large Effect Size ( $d \geq .80$ )

**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 3$ ).** The degree of mathematical relationship between overall perceived spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University and the six sub-elements will not be manifested at a statistically significant level in any of the six sub-elements.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the mathematical relationships between perceived level of all sub-elements of spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian university and the overall perceived degree of spiritual formation, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 3$ ) for research question three was rejected.

**Research Question #4.** Considering study participant perceptions of impact of daily devotions, continual surrender of thoughts and desires to God, and desire to spend time in God's

presence, which represents the most robust correlate and predictor of study participant overall perception of spiritual formation?

Using the Multiple Linear Regression test statistic to assess the predictive abilities of the three identified independent variables with the dependent variable of overall perceived spiritual formation in the predictive model, all three variables were found to reflect statistically significant predictive ability. Of the three variables, however, it appears that the variable “Impact of Daily Devotions” represents the most robust predictor of study participant perceived overall spiritual formation, accounting for 13% of the explained variance in the dependent variable overall perceived spiritual formation ( $R^2 = .13$ ) and exerting an approximate large predictive effect at  $d = .77$ .

The predictive model in research question four was viable ( $F_{(3, 322)} = 113.05; p < .001$ ), with the confluence of the four independent predictor variables accounting for 51.3% of the explained variance in the research question’s dependent variable of overall perceived spiritual formation ( $R^2 = .513$ )

Table 3 contains a summary of finding for the predictive model utilized to address research question four:

Table 3

| Model  | $\beta$ | SE   | <i>Standardized <math>\beta</math></i> |
|--|---------|------|--|
| Intercept  | 1.96    | 0.12 |  |
| Impact of Daily Devotions                          | 0.22    | 0.03 | .36***                                 |
| Continual Surrender of Thoughts and Desires to God | 0.21    | 0.03 | .35***                                 |
| Desire to Spend Time in God’s Presence             | 0.09    | 0.03 | .17***                                 |

\*\*\* $p < .001$



**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 4$ ).** The degree of mathematical and predictive relationship between overall perceived spiritual formation of incoming freshmen at a Christian University and the three independent predictor variables in research question four will not be manifested at a statistically significant level in any of the three independent predictor variables.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the mathematical associative and predictive relationships between the three independent predictor variables identified in research question four and the overall study participant perceived degree of spiritual formation, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 4$ ) for research question four was rejected.

**Research Question #5.** What element did study participants indicate to be most challenging or frustrating part of spiritual formation?

Using the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic to assess the normality of the distribution of study participant response to the research question, the distribution of study participants to the research question was found to be statistically significantly different than normal ( $S-W_{(15)} = 0.81$ ;  $p = .004$ ). The element representing the greatest frequency of response to research question five was “time” at 32.1% ( $n = 118$ ). The element representing the least frequently responded to in research question five was “balance” and “disappointment” at 1% ( $n = 4$ ). A total of 25 study participants (7%) indicated that “nothing” was perceived as challenging or frustrating in the process of spiritual formation.

**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0 5$ ).** The distribution of study participant responses to the research question of challenge or frustration in spiritual formation will not be statistically significantly different than normal.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the distribution of responses for the elements that challenge or frustrate study participant spiritual formation, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$  5) for research question five was rejected.

**Research Question #6.** What element did study participants indicate to be most rewarding or enriching part of spiritual formation?

Using the Shapiro-Wilk test statistic to assess the normality of the distribution of study participant response to the research question, the distribution of study participants to the research question was found to be statistically significantly different than normal ( $S-W_{(15)} = 0.88$ ;  $p = .04$ ). The element representing the greatest frequency of response to research question six was “connection with God” at 16.1% ( $n = 61$ ), closely followed by the element “blessing” at 13% ( $n = 49$ ). The element representing the least frequently responded to in research question six was “heaven” at 2% ( $n = 8$ ). A total of 21 study participants (5.5%) indicated that “nothing” was perceived as rewarding or enriching in the process of spiritual formation.

**Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$  6).** The distribution of study participant responses to the research question of reward or enrichment in spiritual formation will not be statistically significantly different than normal.

In light of the statistically significant finding for the distribution of responses for the elements that reward or enrich study participant spiritual formation, the Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$  6) for research question six was rejected.

## V. DISCUSSION

### **Overview of Study**

There are many Christian higher education institutions across the United States – some of these schools are shutting down due to the decrease in student enrollment, while others remain steady because of their interest in being innovative, remaining affordable, making education more accessible, and being more engaged in the student experience. One of the main factors of the student experience in successful Christian higher education institutions is spiritual formation.

This quantitative study discussed ways in which Christian higher education institutions attempt to develop students spiritually and the degree of development at which students perceive themselves spiritually upon entrance. The purpose of the dissertation study was to evaluate the spirituality of the incoming freshmen at a small Christian higher education institution in order to determine the best way to further their spiritual development. The evaluation surveyed students enrolled in a required freshman-level course offered during their first semester at the university.

The students were able to take the survey electronically during class, and students were also emailed the survey in case they were unable to complete it during class or were absent. There were 704 students eligible to take the survey. Of the 704 students eligible, 378 students chose to take the survey, representing 53.5% participation.

## Discussion of Preliminary Findings

Two specific preliminary analyses were conducted in advance of the formal address of the study's six research questions and accompanying hypotheses. Evaluations of the study's missing data and the internal reliability of participant response were conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The study's essential data arrays were evaluated for missing data in two distinct stages in an effort to account for missing data. In the initial stage, the level of missing data was 6.66% ( $n = 226$ ), a figure slightly beyond what is generally considered inconsequential for analytic purposes (Schafer, 1999) and not sufficiently random (MCAR  $p < .001$ ). Patterned missing data were removed in the second stage of the process, and as a result, the study's participant sample size decreased by 13.3%, with missing data at 0.14% ( $n = 4$ ). The adjustments made with the study's data set, in light of the extent and non-randomness of missing data, were necessary for establishing the highest possible accuracy of analytic processes and subsequent interpretative exercises.

The internal consistency of participant response to the study's research instrument was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) test statistic. Although the study's research instrument (survey) had been used previously within the university as a means of measuring the concept of spiritual formation, no clear validation processes were evident that would confirm the reliability of the data produced by virtue of its use.

In the study, subsequent participant response data were analyzed for instrument validation purposes, as well as a means of assessing the internal consistency of participant response to instrument items for study purposes. As a result, the internal consistency level of

participant response (reliability) to the study's research instrument was considered very high at  $\alpha = .83$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The alpha level of .83 is well beyond what is generally acceptable for researcher created instruments ( $\alpha = .70$ ), and even beyond the level considered desirable ( $\alpha = .80$ ) for research instruments of its kind (Field, 2018). As a result, the very high level of internal reliability of data yielded by the study's research instrument provided a trustworthy foundation for the subsequent interpretation of analyses conducted with respect to the study's six research questions.

### **Results of Research Question One**

Research question one discussed what the perceived degree of spirituality of incoming freshmen at a small Christian university was. There was a statistically significant response when referring to the overall spiritual formation of incoming students. There was a larger percentage of students responding to frequently participating in spiritual activities than not. These results both align and contradict with the research given in chapter two of this dissertation report. Chapter two stated that the millennial generation exhibits the least amount of religious behavior or interest (Nelson et al., 2017). However, chapter two also stated that for those millennials who exhibit an interest in a religious or spiritual affiliation are strong members in their faith groups (Nelson et al., 2017).

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question one are that freshmen students coming into the institution are interested in spiritual things or at least have somewhat of a spiritual inclination. Therefore, Christian higher education institutions should not have to

worry about the incoming students not having any knowledge of who God is or what it means to have a relationship with him.

### **Results of Research Question Two**

Research question two discussed which of the six sub-elements freshmen perceived to be the most effective for their spiritual development. The spiritual sub-element which was found to be the most significant was, “I believe that God has a sense of purpose for my life [*sic*] and I expect Him to use me every day in this work on earth today.” The significance of this finding is that many of the incoming freshmen attending the university know that the Lord has placed them on this earth for a purpose, and the students expect the Lord to show up in their lives and teach them their purpose on this earth.

This significance contradicts some of the literature review findings in chapter two. While students may know that they were placed on this earth for a purpose, students may feel discouraged by their spiritual journey because they do not know or understand their calling or purpose. Students not understanding what their calling or purpose is can be frustrating leading to student complacency and disengagement with the learning process.

There were two sub-elements that were rated lower than the others, and those lower sub-elements were “biblical solutions to life’s problems” and “prioritizing time with God.” Thus, of the students surveyed, many found it difficult to prioritize spending time with God. Additionally, many students reported having a difficult time knowing where to find the solutions to life’s problems in scripture. Results of this survey item indicate students’ biblical illiteracy negatively impacts their spiritual development.

Results from research question two align with literature reviewed for chapter two in that many college-aged students take a break from spirituality during their college years. Students want to use this time to explore their beliefs and to explore experiences they never had when at home. Furthermore, students have to learn how to adjust to their new schedule and balance school, work, friends, and time spent with God. If students have never developed a way in which to study scripture, never found ways to memorize Bible verses, or never participated in Sunday school or a Bible study, then it would follow that students' inability to find solutions in the Bible is reflected in the data.

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question two are that Christian higher education institutions must encourage students to use their time in college to deepen their faith and not put their faith on pause to explore other religious (or non-religious) options. The best time for deepening students' faith is when those students are surrounded by a community of believers and like-minded individuals who want to see students grow in their faith. Faculty, staff, and administrators at Christian institutions of higher education are responsible, then, to help students realize that once they leave college, they will have a more difficult time deepening their faith because they will be less likely to be surrounded by like-minded peers outside the campus community.

### **Results of Research Question Three**

Research question three provides support for the notion that although prioritizing time with God manifested the highest level of correlation at  $r = .69$  ( $p < .001$ ) and the highest level of magnitude of effect ( $d = 1.91$ ), the relationship of prioritizing time with God with overall

spiritual formation is not substantively different from the remaining sub-elements. Prioritizing time with God exerted a trivial level of effect when compared to Biblical solutions to life's problems ( $q = .06$ ;  $p = .24$ ), participation in spiritual activities ( $q = .04$ ;  $p = .32$ ), understanding and use of my gifts ( $q = .04$ ;  $p = .32$ ), personal time in God's presence ( $q = .02$ ;  $p = .41$ ). The only substantive difference in magnitude of effect was evident when comparing prioritizing time with God in relation to a sense of God's will and purpose of my life ( $q = .38$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Five of the six sub-elements appear to contribute significantly to the overall concept of spiritual formation. Only one of the elements, although related to spiritual formation at a statistically significant level ( $p < .001$ ), is statistically significantly different from the other five sub-elements. In research question three, it may seem that the results contradict some of the other findings listed previously, but it should be noted that knowing the Lord has a plan for an individual's life and actually discovering what that plan is, are completely different elements of spiritual development. The study results identify that there is a significant difference when students rate the other five sub-elements higher than "sense of God's will and purpose of my life" because many students, especially during their freshman year, are trying to discover and develop their calling and purpose.

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question three are that Christian higher education institutions should encourage incoming students to take assessments to help them become more self-aware enabling students to identify their own strengths/weaknesses and likes/dislikes about themselves in order to determine areas for growth. Additionally, Christian



universities should aid in helping students determine what problem they were put on this earth to be a solution for – unveiling God’s plan and purpose for their life.

#### **Results of Research Question Four**

The findings in research question four appear supportive of the fact that although all three independent predictor variables (Impact of daily devotions; Continual surrender of thoughts and desires to God; and, the Desire to spend time in God’s presence) represent statistically significant correlates and predictors of overall spiritual formation, Impact of Daily Devotion exerts the highest degree of mathematical and predictive relationship when compared to the other two independent predictor variables in the predictive model. Moreover, the impact of daily devotions and continual surrender of thoughts and desires to God are nearly equivalent in their mathematical relationship and predictive relationship with overall spiritual formation. However, the desire to spend time in God’s presence is statistically significantly different than the elements of impact of daily devotions and continual surrender of thoughts and desires to God ( $q = .21$ ;  $p = .004$ ). Although daily devotions are significant predictors of overall spiritual formation, and may be viewed as constituting one concept, daily devotions perhaps represent the most concrete manifestation of what an incoming freshman student would perceive most related to overall spiritual formation.

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question four are that incoming students in Christian higher education institutions are greatly impacted by daily devotions and by continual surrender of their thoughts and desires to God. However, there was a significant decline in students’ desire to spend time in God’s presence, and this decline may be attributed to

the immaturity of the respondents and those respondents not having an understanding of what it means to spend time in God's presence. Since time spent in the presence of an invisible person – God – is not tangible or comprehensible to many. Abstract concepts are difficult for young adults to grasp due to the incomplete nature of brain development at this life stage. Early in students' four year tenure in college, Christian higher education institutions should teach their students the importance of being still and having solitude time each week to help clear their minds and make way for the voice of the Lord. This practice of quiet solitude will deepen students' relationship with the Lord.

### **Results of Research Question Five**

Research question five discussed the elements the study participants found to be the most challenging or frustrating in relation to spiritual formation. The item from the survey aligning to this research question allowed students to write-in their answers instead of providing selectable responses. Of the 328 responses analyzed, 118 students wrote that spending time with God or prioritizing their time to make room for spiritual things was among the most challenging part of spiritual formation.

Time management, in general, seems to be tough for all college students but especially freshmen because of the difficulty of adjusting to the time demands of the new college lifestyle (Beattie, Lalibert, Michaud-Leclerc, & Oreopoulos, 2019). Typically, the first things students will give less time to tend to be activities which do not receive grades. Non-graded elements include healthy eating, exercise, personal hygiene, and general life/self-skills; additionally, students ignore readings, lectures, and devotions. In this case, a daily devotion would be on the

low end of priorities especially when up against a deadline of a graded class task. Forming a lasting relationship with Jesus takes time and dedication, and is not a graded effort. After adjusting to the new demands of time and time management, this relationship becomes a priority and can be woven into a student's everyday routine.

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question five are that Christian higher education institutions should teach students the practice of time management at the start of their first semester and facilitate continuous practice enabling students to develop time management as a skill. Teaching students to manage their time wisely is a skill best developed over time and repetitive practice, thus students will be able to access the skill over their entire lifespan. In addition to generalized time management instruction, Christian institutions of higher education should give students tools to make spending time with Jesus a natural part of their everyday lives. These tools should be concise and easy to apply, especially for students who are not accustomed to any structured time of Bible study. Once time management and structured Bible study time becomes a natural part of their day-to-day lives, then there can be additional tools provided. If students managing their time in small segments, such as just five minutes a day, then they will be able to build upon that while managing the other tasks they have to complete each day. The idea of scaffolding aligns with best practices of instruction, so faculty members at institutions of higher education should collaborate with Spiritual Formation departments to design effectively scaffolded curriculum for time management and Bible study.

### **Results of Research Question Six**

Research question six assessed the elements the participants found to be the most rewarding or enriching aspects of spiritual formation. This survey item allowed students to write in their own words what they found to be the most enriching and rewarding part of spiritual formation. Of the 328 respondents, 61 reported their “connection with God” was the most rewarding part of spiritual formation. When students are connecting with God, they feel a stronger sense of purpose in life. This finding aligned with the literature review findings in Chapter 2 of this dissertation report. Students connect with God in the classroom, during chapel services, during church services, during worship, and through friends and peers. Connecting with God allows students to believe in something greater than themselves.

Additionally, of the 328 respondents, 49 students responded that the “Blessings” they receive from having a relationship with God is what they find to be the most rewarding or enriching part of spirituality. Receiving the blessings of the Lord can be interpreted as the spiritual gifts one receives, the fruits of the spirit, the peacefulness one can receive, or the blessings of the doors the Lord opens up when an individual is walking in faith. Of the 328 respondents, 12 students reported they felt “nothing” was enjoying or enriching when it comes to having a relationship with the Lord.

**Implications.** Implications of the results of research question six are that Christian higher education institutions should help students create time to connect with God in order for their students to develop spiritually. Universities can do this by creating time throughout the semester where students reflect on what the Lord has done in their lives. Perhaps, instead of

always having the same agenda for chapel services every day including the same style of worship followed by a speaker, the chapel time could be used as a uniform time when students find various areas across campus in solitude and have time for personal reflection. Self-reflection and meditation have a positive impact on spiritual formation and commitment to one's spiritual journey (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Additionally, the university could host small Bible study groups or fellowship teams to allow time for students to share with one another about what the Lord is doing in their lives. Varied activities taking the place of mundane chapel services would be a student-centered approach to promote spiritual formation.

### **Limitations**

Quantitative studies are both accurate when given the correct data to compute and clear to understand when data is presented in tables; however, this does not mean quantitative studies are without limitations which could hinder accuracy. The survey given as part of this dissertation study had a mix of both Likert scale questions as well as open-ended questions. The Likert scale questions yielded results in numbers which were statistically tested and visually analyzed to determine patterns; whereas, the open-ended questions yielded qualitative data analyzed quantitatively based on common themes. In the future, using a more evenly represented quantitative and qualitative, or mix-methods, approach would yield varied data that could be more informative.

Another limitation in the study is the lack of information the students heard regarding the survey prior to taking it. In an ideal setting, the students would get to hear the “why” behind the survey allowing for a better understanding of the purposes driving the study as necessary and

helpful for the future at the university. Instead, the Spiritual Formation staff visited required freshman-level courses, shared reminders of spiritual formation activities offered, and gave directions for completing the survey. Some individuals did not participate in surveys because they felt the survey was not anonymous. This sense of fear, or lack of secure anonymity, led students to believe if they wrote something negative about their spirituality then they will be found out and enrollment at the university or acceptance by peers would be jeopardized.

Another potential limitation to the dissertation study was in variance in, and number of, participants. The participant pool was drawn from one university, thus generalizability may be restricted. Future studies should gather survey responses from students at various Christian institutions of higher education. Though the sample size was well above the recommended number of participants (53.5% response rate), perhaps more students would have participated in exchange for an extrinsic reward. While students who completed the survey were put into a raffle for a gift card, participants understood there would be only one winner. In the future, this researcher would like for every student participating to get some sort of a gift.

The limitations of this dissertation study were not perceived to negatively impact the validity nor reliability of the study. Therefore, the limitations serve as variables to control for in future studies.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the results of the Spiritual Formation evaluation through both an extensive review of the literature and student surveys, several recommendations follow: change from non-experimental to experimental mixed-methods approach adding a stronger qualitative approach,

give students context for the survey, send the survey to every incoming student not just freshmen, and conduct a post-study with the same group of students when upon graduation.

**Mixed-methods.** In order to make the study most effective for both the student and the institution, it is recommended to implement a mixed-methods approach in which the researcher administers a variety of Likert scale and multiple-choice questions in combination with open-ended responses that do not solicit limited-scope responses. Another methodology recommendation is for future researchers to host small groups of first year students (or focus groups) to present the open-ended questions originally asked in the survey.

**Context.** While the students are in their freshman orientation or freshman courses, they should be instructed about the variety assessments they will receive throughout their first year. Assessments in this context is not referring to classroom tasks, assignments, quizzes, or tests; instead, assessments refers to student surveys. If students are given the reason behind why assessments are necessary and how they will help their future as a student, then the greater the response will be. Furthermore, to increase the participant pool and obtain a wider variety of response themes, future researchers should distribute the survey to all incoming students not just to those who qualify to be in the first-year experience course.

**Post-Study.** After a survey such as the one given in this dissertation study is completed, often researchers are left wondering what to do next in light of the study participation. Often, studies are completed to establish the need for further studies – the need is established, but the follow up study is never conducted. In order for Christian higher education institutions to know if what they are doing within their institution to help develop students spiritually is working, then

a post-evaluation is necessary as well as establishing the baseline of incoming students' spiritual levels. The survey given the first year will help the institution know where the students are spiritually as they come into the institution, but the only way to scientifically determine if students' spirituality was deepened is to administer an exit survey from which data would be compared to the incoming baseline data.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation study presented the definition of spiritual formation as well as operationalizing of spiritual formation practices in Christian higher education institutions. An evaluative survey was distributed to incoming freshmen during their first semester at a small Christian university. The purpose of the survey was to identify the self-perceived spiritual maturity of incoming students. The overarching purpose of the dissertation study was to determine practices of spiritual formation for undergraduate students in Christian institutions of higher education related to students' self-perceived levels of spirituality. The trends and patterns from the data indicated that most students know that the Lord has a sense of purpose for their lives, but many of those students long to know specifically what that purpose is. Additionally, students identified that the most rewarding part of spiritual formation was their daily devotions and the blessings they receive when walking with the Lord.

The results of the evaluation were used as a baseline for the department of spiritual formation to know students' perceived level of spirituality and the practices of speaking into the lives of students spiritually. Results from this dissertation study should be further developed into future research in the area of spiritual development on a wider scope. As Christian institutions of



higher education continue to want to develop deeper believers and servants of Christ in this world upon graduation after a four-year post-secondary experience, Christian institutions of higher education must know their students' perceptions of self- spirituality; and, Christian institutions of higher education must intentionally work to provide varied activities students want to participate in for a stronger sense of spiritual formation.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix: Student Spiritual Formation Survey

### Department of Spiritual Formation - Spirituality Survey

1. Please indicate the frequency with which you do the following, on a scale of 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost Always)

|  | 1. Never              | 2. Rarely             | 3. Sometimes          | 4. Often              | 5. Almost always      |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Participate in spiritual activities  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enjoy personal time in God's presence through worship, prayer, and Bible study, as well as other spiritual disciplines | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When facing questions about life and faith, I know where to find answers from a biblical perspective                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

2. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

|  | 1. Strongly Disagree  | 2. Somewhat Disagree  | 3. Neither Disagree nor Agree | 4. Somewhat Agree     | 5. Strongly Agree     | N/A                   |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I believe that God has a sense of purpose for my life and I expect Him to use me every day in His work on earth today. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I understand my spiritual gifts and use them to serve others.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I prioritize my daily devotions and guard that time spent with God.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| What I learn in my daily devotions affects my attitude and choices throughout the day that follows.                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I walk in fellowship with the Spirit throughout the day and constantly surrender my thoughts and desires to Him.       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I'm eager to spend time in God's presence, and I hunger for more of Him in my life.                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

3. What do you find to be the most challenging/frustrating part of your spiritual life?

4. What do you find to be the most rewarding/enriching part of your spiritual life?