

DISSERTATION

HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE PUBLIC
HIGH SCHOOL: A NARRATIVE STUDY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

HOW STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL: A NARRATIVE STUDY

This study was a result of professional experience working with Christian students in a public high school and how they integrated their Christian faith into the academic, social/emotional, and career domains identified in the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) model. In addition the researcher's personal reflection about her Christian worldview influenced her professionally and personally as well as enabled her to gain knowledge and understanding of her beliefs and values. With narrative inquiry it is imperative that the researcher possesses the same background knowledge in order to fully understand the experiences of the interviewees and in return write their story with fidelity by keeping their voice central to the research. In the school counseling literature spirituality is considered important and worthy of exploration; however, researchers encourage school counselors to view it as "meaning making" rather than in a religious context. That said, counselors are encouraged to incorporate spirituality into a Comprehensive School Counseling Program as long as religion is kept separate. The researcher chose narrative inquiry to share the stories of four Christian students' experiences in a public high school. These students share their Christian upbringing and how a variety of micro-systems including family, church, youth camps and other religious activities, and peers influenced their faith. The students share how they integrated their faith into the classroom; relationships with faculty, peers, boyfriend

or girlfriend; extracurricular activities; decision making; and coping. In addition three of the four students shared their experiences transitioning into higher education. Their individual stories are presented in letter format with a composite interpretation of the four stories. The researcher shares her findings with three audiences including the research community, professional colleagues, and the students' parents. The researcher's hope is these audiences will listen to these four students' experiences related to their Christian walk in a public high school and gain an understanding and appreciation for their Christian worldview. Equally important is that readers engage in personal reflection of their own worldview and how this impacts how they work and relate to the students they teach, counsel, and or raise.

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The journey to the PhD was my hardest undertaking and at times I did not know if I would finish, but I am happy to say WE DID IT! This celebration goes far beyond me because without the love and support of ALL of you this degree would be unattainable. As I reflect back on the amazing and overwhelming support I received from you during this gargantuan endeavor, I am deeply appreciative and blessed. Some of you were my editors, readers, teachers, and cheerleaders. Others lifted me up in prayer and/or sent many encouraging emails, texts, or Facebook messages. I must express an overwhelming thank you to my husband, Donnie Knittel, and children (Marcus, Ana, and Cole) who sacrificed right along with me. Either you went on vacation without me or under very strict conditions including Internet access and room for my boxes of dissertation materials. Your patience and understanding were monumental to my successful completion! To my parents, Raymond and Rachel Moreno, thank you for being my place of refuge and instilling in me from the time I was a little girl the importance of an education! Because of you, I have a high school diploma, Associate degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and now a Doctorate! Your unconditional love and willingness to sacrifice for me provided me with the mindset that I can accomplish my heart's desire; you are my biggest cheerleaders!

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helping me with the transcription. I would have never finished this without your help! In addition I want to thank my best friend, Diana Ainsworth and her late husband, John Ainsworth for their prayers and support. A special thank you to the students involved in this project without your involvement this dissertation would have never happened so thank you. Your stories are an inspiration and I enjoyed my time with each of you. Finally, but most important thank you to my Heavenly Father, it was by your grace that I was able to see this dissertation to completion.

Blessings,

PREFACE

Cultural Identity

I am a 43 year-old, Mexican-American woman. When people ask me what my ethnicity is I respond, “Hispanic or Mexican-American”. I respond this way because this is how I identify myself when filling out forms that inquire about my ethnic background. I am a third generation United States citizen on my paternal side and second generation on my maternal side. As a young child, I saw myself as an American with brown skin. I did not grow up speaking Spanish. The only time I heard the language of my ancestors was when I went to visit my grandparents. My parents believed they would do my brothers and me more harm by having us learn Spanish, so they did not teach us Spanish or speak Spanish in the home. Contributing to their decision was their own negative school experiences as both my parents were reprimanded for speaking Spanish in school. It did not occur to me until I grew older how not learning Spanish actually hindered me. I say this yet I did not teach my own children how to speak Spanish. If it were possible, I would send my youngest child to a bilingual school. I think it is important to know another language and possibly after I finish my graduate work I can master the Spanish language.

Language is not the only disconnection I feel from my Mexican heritage. I do not know many of the Mexican traditions. I never had a quinceañera nor does my family celebrate “Dia de los Muertos.” A quinceañera is the celebration of a young girl transitioning from childhood to womanhood on her 15th birthday. As a rite of passage it is celebrated with a fancy dress, dancing, and lots of food. Dia de los Muertos or the Day

of the Dead is a Mexican holiday where families gather to pray and remember family members who have died. I do not feel cheated because I did not grow up celebrating these traditions. I do wonder, however, how my life might have been different had I grown up in a more traditional Mexican culture. I definitely feel privileged growing up “Americanized”. I feel my birth in the United States is a privilege. As a citizen of the United States of America, I earned a college education and the freedom, to a certain degree, to worship my God publically.

I am not ashamed to be Mexican, yet I do not wave my Mexican flag because I am a Mexican-American. The United States of America is the milieu I grew up in, and I am both proud and thankful to be a United States citizen. Again, I feel my status as an American has enabled me to live a life of freedom and opportunity. As an American, I do not feel oppressed because I am a woman or non-white. I believe oppression stems from social economic status and religious preference more than any other variables.

I say this because if anything has contributed to my sense of inferiority, it is a direct result of the social class in which I grew up. This is not to say that I have never experienced racial oppression or any other type of oppression. Nor do I feel these experiences should be ignored. But in my life story, the experience of growing up poor directly influenced my education and worldly knowledge. My family was too poor to take trips to Europe or even travel within the United States; this resulted in my lack of worldly knowledge. I did not sit at the dinner table dialoging about politics, of which I am thankful. In fact, my family very seldom sat at the table as a family. I grew up in the TV tray culture. Mom made a delicious meal and we sat in the family room with my father watching TV. What I am trying to convey is my parents did not have the resources

to provide me with the background to engage in intellectual and stimulating conversations. It is in this realm that I feel most inferior.

In no way do I blame my parents; rather I applaud my parents for instilling in me the importance of an education. My dad was tough on us when it came to education and back then I thought he was mean, but he loved me so much he wanted me to excel so that is why he pushed. Even though we did limited traveling and did not sit at the dinner table engaged in dialogues about current affairs, his expectation for his children to learn and do well in school was always present.

Upbringing

I grew up Catholic and the memory of nuns terrifies me to this day. I consider my years as a Catholic to be extrinsic in nature because my parents raised me this way. We did not attend mass on Sunday as a family, but my brothers and I did attend the catechism classes on Wednesday evenings. Because my family did not attend mass, I did not know how to make all of the symbolic signs nor did I understand the meaning behind them. After confirmation, my father gave me the autonomy to continue with Catholicism or something different. In his eyes God is everywhere, and I did not necessarily need to attend church to believe or have a relationship with Him. I chose not to continue with Catholicism. I did not understand why we spoke to a priest rather than God about our sins. I still do not get it. I first heard of Christianity from my parents' friend. I shared with her my fear of hell and my belief that unless I prayed 1,000 Hail Mary's that is exactly where I was headed. She lovingly shared with me if I simply asked God to forgive me of my sins, He would forgive me and I would spend eternity in heaven. My grandmother confirmed this, and she spent time reading the Bible to me. I know she

prayed for me too. I attended Sunday school at a Baptist church for a while, and I asked for salvation during an altar call, but until recently never truly lived my life according to God's will.

Although I did not recognize it at the time, I believe my parent's liberal Catholicism influenced my curiosity towards other religions. During my adolescent years, I continued to search and my quest for meaning and identity through the context of religion aligned with most adolescent developmental models. For example, I invited Jehovah's Witnesses into my home much to the dismay of my mother. I always believed in God, but I was not tied into a youth group nor did I faithfully attend church on Sunday. In addition I read books about people's conversion to Christianity. Throughout high school I tried to read the Bible, and I posted scripture on my bedroom walls for encouragement. I remember one year my cross country team chose a piece of scripture, which ended up on the back of our team t-shirts. My team prayed before races, too. I do not recall anybody feeling uncomfortable with this or my coach reprimanding us nor did he get any grief for allowing us to pray before meets. As an underclassman, I remember attending a Young Life group. The senior girls attended so they invited us younger girls to attend with them. During college I did not attend church nor did I join any campus ministry. My faith was dormant during this time.

Education

I struggled in school until the third grade. It was the love and compassion of a teacher that made me feel empowered to learn. She made me want to work hard, and once I experienced success, I blossomed as a learner and student. I earned good grades in school; standardized testing was another story. My test scores and my GPA did not paint

the same picture. Test scores alone should not determine one's ability or success in learning. I am living proof of this because I excelled at CSU due in large part to the supportive people in my life—my parents and CSU faculty.

My parents were extremely supportive in my academic and extracurricular pursuits. My parents were strict and protective of me. Growing up I was not always fond of this, but now I realize they were trying to keep me out of harm's way. My mom stayed home with my brothers and me until I was in middle school. She eventually worked as a nurse's aide in a nursing home. My mother chose to work once we were all in school so she could help my father provide for us and buy us what we wanted, within reason of course. My mom and dad sacrificed a lot for my brothers and me. I attribute most of my success to my parents.

I gave birth to my son at an early age and as a result was married at an early age. Because we were so young and had different aspirations, the marriage did not last. I know I disappointed my parents as well as myself. The first time I saw my father cry and tell me he loved me happened the day I told him I was pregnant. I promised him that I would earn a college education. My parents helped me out tremendously, and without their help I would not have earned my degree and raised my son. I have learned how to be a good parent because of them. I have made mistakes in parenting, but for the most part I have been successful. I learned how to manage raising my son while earning a degree.

In no way am I claiming to be a stellar student. I know better. I have to work extra hard to understand conceptual frameworks. I value education and consider myself a lifelong learner; thus, my journey towards a PhD in education has been a core value of

mine. I have benefited from my education, I earn a living through education, and I continue to be a student of education. It is in the educational field that I want to conduct research. I want to contribute to this body of knowledge as well as contribute to my field of school counseling. Education is near and dear to my heart because I know the value of having it. I am the first grandchild to earn a bachelor's and a master's degree. I will be the first to earn a doctorate. It is through higher education that I changed the social class for my children. My son is near the completion of his Associate Degree. I have encouraged him since he was little to seek an education. I want the same for my youngest daughter. When I see her struggling in school, I encourage her and empower her to believe in herself. I want the same for my students on my caseload.

My family and friends are extremely important to me especially my children and parents. I am constantly amazed at how fast my children have grown. I wept when Marcus went to prom both times. Ana's first day of kindergarten precipitated a sobbing fest. I find myself wishing time would slow down so I can enjoy Ana's childhood. I love Ana's innocence, courage, and exuberance for life. I look forward to watching my son graduate from college. My hope for my son was for him to become an educator; he is great with children; however, he found his niche in business and is doing extremely well. My bachelor's degree is in business so maybe I had a little influence.

My upbringing and experiences definitely influenced my outlook on life. My parents taught me to work hard and not take things for granted. I learned discipline and leadership in athletics. I learned the value of loyal friends, and I know the importance respect plays in any relationship. I am demanding of myself and others, but I also know when not to push it. Every person, situation, and experience I spoke of thus far has

played a role in who I am today, but the most influential factor driving my life is my faith.

Transformation

I met my second husband while attending CSU. Again, this was not a relationship built on God, and my marriage suffered due to marrying a nonbeliever or at least a person who did not see the importance of aligning his life with God. I am not proud that I am on my third marriage, but I am, and although I did not enter this marriage with God central, it became evident pretty early that our marriage would not last without Him. Realizing this, my husband and I decided to get plugged into a church, and we started searching for a church to attend. My younger brother encouraged my husband and me to attend his church so we did. It changed our lives and saved our marriage. My recommitment to Christ transformed everything about me. I am a different person in every way because I have committed my life to God's will and purpose for me. I still have a lot of spiritual growing to do, but I am pressing forward. This spiritual transformation greatly influenced my worldview and changed my perception of the world and how I live my daily life.

As a result of committing my life to Jesus, I view the world through a totally different lens. My faith and beliefs are front and center during a vast majority of my cognitive thinking throughout the day. I monitor my behavior, attitude, and written and oral communication by the Bible. This is not to say that I live a sinless life because I encounter a road block from time to time and revert back to old habits and behaviors. I struggle trying to balance my faith and working and studying in a secular environment. I truly feel I cannot "voice" my faith without offending someone so I remain silent. This is

not to say I hold back from sharing with colleagues and students who share my Christian worldview, with them I openly share. In fact it would be difficult to work in a public school without other Christians.

I am socially aware and sensitive to the views and opinions of others, and I do not force my beliefs on anyone. I do not mistreat someone for possessing a different ideology. I know how to be politically correct, but I am frustrated by the lack of sensitivity given to Christianity. Once in class I experienced a Muslim student giving her opinion about the war between Israel and her country. She blamed the situation on Christians. She told the class she was telling the “truth”. This is her perception and the history she knows, but what about the Christian perspective? I see the war in the Middle East very different, and I would imagine so would an Israeli. I listened to her views, but I am certain if I would have challenged her in class, I would have offended her and many of my classmates. I chose to leave it alone.

The situations I encounter in the secular realm challenge my religious ideology on a daily basis. I am learning how to be gracious. I try not to take offense, but ask God for simple guidance so I can exhibit a loving and accepting attitude. I remain attentive to my personal feelings and biases, and I align my professional and personal ethics accordingly. I understand despite my religious views I must remain unbiased in my interactions with others. That is not to say that I refrain from having a mental dialogue with myself and putting everything into the proper perspective. As a researcher and a professional, it is imperative that I deal with ideologies different than mine in a constructive and meaningful way. Despite my occasional constructive venting, I feel I keep a good check and balance.

Living My Faith

Along with education and family, I value life. I know my time on earth is limited. I want to make the best of it, and I try to live my life doing good and helping others. I have always had a passion for the underdog. I cheer for the underdog in athletic events; I cry during most movies, I am inspired by other's accomplishments; and I seek justice. I believe in a right and a wrong. I have very limited shades of gray. I do believe in absolute truth from a spiritual perspective so I have a problem with most postmodern thinking. I have strong moral convictions, and I am not easily persuaded to change them.

My true intrinsic conversion to Christianity is fairly recent. I say intrinsic because I wanted to align my life with God by developing a personal relationship with Him rather than an extrinsic motivator such as believing in God because I was raised Catholic. Because my husband and I were struggling in our marriage and with the encouragement of my husband's aunt, we attended my brother's church. My experience that day aligns with the narrow definition of conversion which is radical because my religious experience resulted in a new identity, meaning, and life through Jesus Christ. In a sense one can define my conversion as a "crisis awakening" because my husband and I were experiencing marital strife prior to our conversion (he accepted Christ too). Today, I consider my conversion as a developmental process. I say this because I continue to monitor and align my relationship with Christ in my personal and professional experiences. A prime example is the change in dissertation focus. The lens through which I see and interact with the world is overwhelmingly influenced by my Christian worldview and because of this I wish to engage in Christian scholarship. Another example is in my daily decisions; I often question my responses and motives to determine

if they are in agreement with my religious orientation thereby “living my faith”. It is through this new self-identity where application is applied to my prayer life, religious and spiritual experiences, health, and spiritual struggles.

I pray every day and my prayers are mostly colloquial, petitionary, and intercessory in nature. Prayer is one of my coping mechanisms especially since I work in a stressful environment. As my religious orientation has transformed from extrinsic to intrinsic, I understand the importance of intercessory prayer. When I was growing up my faith was more extrinsic because I followed my parents’ faith. Now, I consider my faith intrinsic because I want and seek a personal relationship with Christ. With intercessory prayer, I pray for someone’s health, comfort, well-being, and safety. Not only do I pray for others, I pray that God will show me areas in my life that I need to change, and I ask him to make me more Christ like. I believe intercessory prayer is highly effective. According to Eastman (1978) intercessory prayer is the means by which we engage in God’s plan especially when it comes to evangelizing for lost souls. It is during this type of prayer that our personal needs are put aside for someone else (Eastman, 1978). I admit that I need to spend more time in meditative prayer. Often when I am feeling anxious or overwhelmed, I can sense the Holy Spirit directing me to spend time either meditating on God’s Word or spending time with Him. There were times throughout my writing where I took time to pray and to read the Bible so I could concentrate on my dissertation and find the strength to continue. I feel much better after spending time in His presence or reading His Word.

I often hear about other people’s experiences of hearing from God. My pastor often shares that his needs are met because people hear God’s directive and follow

through. For example, my pastor needed a new car so he prayed for one and one day a couple gave him their car after hearing from God to do so. I have yet to experience anything like this; however, I have experienced spiritual darkness. I have felt spiritual attacks during the night. I wake up and feel an evil presence overcome me and the only way it subsides is by professing the Word of God. I often have these experiences after I attend high intensity programs such as concerts or conferences (Women of Faith). One of the first attacks came after I read a book on spiritual warfare. I often think I get these attacks because I am posing some kind of threat to the enemy, but I do not know if this is an accurate assumption. I would like to think I am a threat to the dark side; however, I do not need his presence to confirm this.

My faith helps me most with stress. Life is rather overwhelming right now with family, work, and the completion of my doctorate, and I survive mostly because of my faith. I meditate on scripture often, primarily Philippians 4:13 (New Living Translation), “For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.” The way I make meaning of stressful situations is through my Christian worldview. Throughout my dissertation journey my main goal was to finish! For seven years this was a major stressor in my life because I desperately wanted to finish. Although I have not experienced anything traumatic, all the glory and praise to God, minor interruptions and distractions interfered with my goal of completing my dissertation almost threatening it. For example, my dissertation took a tremendous amount of time away from my family especially time with my husband. When a stressor occurred such as a fight over my lack of attention to the household duties, often the blame was cast on the time and energy focused on my dissertation. An easy solution was for me to throw in the towel as it was

not worth the fight until I remembered the amount of time, energy, and money already spent on this journey. More importantly, God placed the topic of my dissertation on my heart, the voices of the Christian students, and the message He wants me to deliver through my study empower me to persevere. During times of stress, I temporarily lost control of my spiritual faith. I forget that I serve a God who can see me through any difficulties. I often requested my prayer warriors provide intercessory prayer on my behalf. I like to think I am engaging in Christian scholarship, and I hope my dissertation will add to this body of academic discourse.

I can imply casual attributions to the metaphysical by blaming these interruptions and distractions on the enemy himself after all the topic of my dissertation may be a threat to him. I can also blame distractions and interruptions on natural things including procrastination, fatigue, guilt, and other responsibilities. However, it is through my personal strivings of completing my doctoral program in conjunction with my spiritual strivings of turning this overwhelming project over to the Lord through prayer, worship, and meditating on His Word that helps alleviate the distress. I often feel alone and burdened by my dissertation and wonder if God is here for me. It is through the act of reappraising the situation that helps me to gain back global meaning entirely from a spiritual perspective. This dissertation journey is a religious and spiritual struggle which threatens many areas of my life including my sanity, marriage, career, and sleep. Through positive reinterpretation I see the tremendous secular and spiritual benefits of persevering through this momentous task which is the completion of my program.

The greatest religious and spiritual struggle I currently face is complete surrender to God. In my innate human design I want control and often fail because I do not want to

rely on His grace and mercy to see me through difficult and overwhelming times. There are many areas in my life that I feel God is asking me to surrender to Him but because I want to rely on the natural I am not willing to turn them over yet. This may seem petty but one of the struggles I have is eating healthy and exercising. Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program I was a devout runner. I ran the Honolulu marathon in 2003 and completed a few half marathons. Now I am lucky if I can make it through one minute of running. I pray to God all the time to heal my body, but I know that He is waiting for me to take responsibility for my own health by making healthier choices and engaging in exercise. Well, I am happy to report that I surrendered this area over to God. During my dissertation journey, I put on about 40 pounds because of unhealthy choices and habits. With God's and Selene's, a friend and colleague, help along and a change from processed food to an organic diet, I lost those 40 pounds and I am back to my pre-dissertation weight! This change in health filtered into many other areas of my life, and I am much happier as a result.

Purpose

Why an interest in qualitative research and more specifically narrative? Because I understand the power in storytelling. As a counselor I listen to students all day. I try to understand and acknowledge their perspectives. It is through their sharing of stories that I am better able to serve them in my role as a guidance counselor. Students' personal narratives help me to advocate and provide them with the appropriate resources. Students' stories tell me how to counsel them socially, emotionally, and academically. I am more aware of where students are in their personal story. I do not subscribe to the

philosophy that all students are alike and there is one way of counseling and educating them. I respond and advocate according to the student's personal narrative.

Discovering where I was spiritually opened my eyes to how my students were experiencing their own spirituality. As I counseled students, I took a holistic approach and listened as well as watched for physical, emotional, and spiritual indicators. What I discovered was when I was open to hearing about their spirituality they willingly shared. As I walked the halls, sat in classrooms, attended athletic events, and read college essays, it became apparent that students do express their spirituality in school. For many students, faith influences how they behave, interact, experience, and perceive others as well as the world around them. To increase my awareness and to inform my practice as a counselor, I wanted students to share their stories regarding their experiences on campus from a spiritual perspective.

I believe narrative is the most appropriate qualitative tradition to use in my research study. The high school culture and the high school student perspective is where my interests lie. I have a large research pool at my disposal and the fortunate opportunity to learn about the high school student. I hope my findings will contribute to the body of research and literature in school counseling. I am starting to formulate a list of inquiries I have regarding this population. I feel the stories waiting to be told can add richness and tremendous insight into developing best practices for working with high school students.

I look forward to developing my qualitative skills and in particular my narrative skills to tell a student's story that will impact and influence the way students are educated and counseled at the secondary level. The possibilities of narrative inquiry within the educational realm are endless. I believe through narrative inquiry an extensive body of

knowledge will emerge that will change the way I personally view educating and counseling students. It is my hope that I can share these findings and experiences with my colleagues and change the way we listen and interact with students.

Recently, I have become a huge Denver Bronco fan largely because of their quarterback, Tim Tebow. Tim is an inspiration to me because he aligns his career as a professional quarterback in the NFL with his Christian worldview. In doing so, he takes a tremendous amount of criticism. Despite the negative press, he boldly lives his faith on and off the football field. Tim Tebow serves as an excellent role model to Christians and non-Christians. Like Tim, I hope to use the platform God gave me to share and spread the Gospel. According to Tim Tebow (2011, p. x),

... we all have stories to share. We all have life experiences that can bless the lives of others. Whoever we are. Wherever we find ourselves. Whatever we are involved in, no matter our age or station in life. Stories that, when shared with others, can make a positive difference in the world.

Hearing, interpreting, writing, and now sharing the stories of these four, courageous, young people is an honor and a blessing. As you read about their experiences of being Christian in a public high school, I hope you are compelled to examine your own spiritual walk. More importantly, I hope you are blessed, encouraged, challenged, and inspired by their personal narratives.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my loving parents, Raymond Leon Moreno and Rachel Marie Cortez-Moreno. God blessed me with the most exceptional earthly parents. Your love, patience, firm discipline, and sacrifice are the reasons why I am who I am. You have served as cheerleaders on the sidelines of my life story. Interwoven into my personal narrative is your godly influence, for which I am so ever thankful. Thank you for never giving up on me and for always being there for me. You have been the rock in my life; the foundation of my life. You are my heroes to whom I look up to and aspire to be! You have taught me to believe in myself, to work hard, and to strive for excellence.

Dad, thank you for teaching me the importance and love for reading at such an early age. Your influence has impacted me in both my personal and professional life. Thanks for being my first teacher and pushing me to excel in school. I cannot even begin to describe my respect and admiration for you! I will always be daddy's little girl and nobody can ever take that away from me! I am so proud to be your daughter. You'll never know how much you mean to me!

Mom, your quiet nature spoke so ever loudly in my life. As a grown woman, I now see how you were the strong adhesive that kept our family together. I remember as a child lying in bed wondering why you always were the last to bed. Now I understand, you were and still are the master architect of the family, staying up late at night, after a long day at work, planning, managing, and overseeing the important details, thus making life easier for our family. Your personal sacrifice empowered me to achieve my heart's desire. You are my best friend, my confidant, the one I can trust and lean upon.

I thank my heavenly Father, for his favor upon my life by blessing me with two angels from heaven to guide my every step and make my childhood dreams become a reality. Mom and Dad, you have provided me with love beyond measure. I love you!
Your forever blessed and grateful daughter,

Bernadine Marie Moreno-Knittel, PhD

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time of major changes biologically, cognitively, emotionally, and culturally which influence the way adolescents relate to their peers, families, and communities of influence whether at work, school, place of worship, or other institution. Adolescents are the subjects of many research projects and are often studied in multiple contexts including school, home, and church.

According to the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), which surveyed a national sample of 3,290 teens during 2002-2003, of Protestant teens 90% believe in God, 60 % report that religious faith is the underlying foundation in their lives, and 69% declare to live their lives for God (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). Based on this information, one might assume that religious faith and experiences play a vital role in the lives of Protestant youth (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). In addition to the NSYR study, numerous studies report on a variety of variables related to adolescents and their religiosity (Gardner, 2004; Regnerus, 2003; Smith, 2003; Smith, 2005; Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). These research projects examined church attendance; belief in God; views of God; closeness to God; and participation in religious activities such as youth groups, Sunday school, camps, youth retreats or conferences, and music groups or choir.

Beginning in 2001, the NSYR (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008) conducted a longitudinal study, in two waves, on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents from

ages 13-21 in the United States. During the first wave of telephone surveys, conducted between 2002 and 2003, surveyors contacted 3,290 youth ages 13-17. In 2005 (Wave 2), these same participants, who were now 16-21 years old, were surveyed again. Of the 3,290 teenagers, in the first wave, 2,530 adolescent responded in Wave 2. The following results are based on the Wave 2 adolescent respondents (Denton et al., 2008).

Adolescents were asked about their belief in God with 81% of adolescents showing the same belief in the existence of God between Wave 1 and 2. However, 12% showed a decrease in their level of believing God existed, and 9% showed an increase in their belief in God's existence. Participants were asked about God's character or nature. The results of this question showed the majority of adolescents viewed God as a personal, involved God.

Along with the beliefs that adolescents hold, Denton et al. (2008) questioned youth about their involvement in religious services, religious education (e.g., Sunday School), and religious youth groups. The data suggested that as youth moved through adolescence a decline in all three categories of religious involvement was noted. A close examination of the data found the decline in religious involvement was likely attributed to the lack of formal religious opportunities, other than regular service, for older adolescents who were beyond high school (Denton, et al., 2008). In addition, many adolescents claimed busy schedules as the key factor in their decline in religious involvement.

According to Denton et al. (2008), this decline in religious activities may be attributed to adolescents placing less importance on religious practices by showing more interest in other religious measures such as belief in God, importance of religion in daily

life, and closeness to God. Overall, the survey results portrayed little change in adolescent religiosity over the three-year study. The religious lives of adolescents is extremely complex (Denton et al., 2008) and the NSYR continues to study religiosity during adolescence. Few studies, however, examine Christian teens' experiences in the public high school.

My study focuses on how Christian adolescents experience their faith while attending public high school. According to Schwarz (2004) there are many denominations of Christianity and differences in doctrine; however, there are Christian beliefs which are nonnegotiable. First, Christians believe in creation, that is, God created the heavens and the earth. Belief that God is the creator is "...one of the pillars on which our faith rests" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 188). Second, Christians believe they are spiritually separated from God because of sin. Third, Christians believe they are saved from their sin and the punishment because of sin by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

For the purpose of this study, Christian students must agree to these tenets of the Christian faith. Thus, I am defining Christian as one who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and declares a personal relationship with Him. According to Schwarz (2004), a worldview is the way one looks at the world. A Christian worldview is a life dedicated and surrendered to God (Pearcey, 2005) and the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the risen and living Son of God, creator of the universe (Schwarz, 2004). Adolescents come from a variety of religious or spiritual backgrounds, but for the purposes of this study, adolescents holding to the Christian worldview are studied.

Purpose of Study

When working with students, school counselors must consider students' current and historical developmental needs. The students' family background, social economic status, culture (including religion/spirituality), and ethnicity are key factors in students' academic, personal/social, and career development. According to MacDonald (2004), history viewed from a developmental sense is often overlooked by school counselors; a student's individual, family, and social (school, neighborhood) histories are not considered. To make informed decisions and provide appropriate guidance, the counselor must factor in all these variables when working with students. In doing so, a holistic approach is adopted by the counselor. Sink (2004) suggested inclusion of the spiritual benefits of the Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCPs) by adopting a holistic or sociocultural developmental perspective. If counselors are taking a holistic approach to counseling, how are the spiritual needs of the students being met?

The school counseling literature suggests incorporating spirituality in the counseling relationship as long as it does not involve religion. Sink and Richmond (2004) suggested as long as spirituality is considered a "meaning making" activity, spirituality is appropriate for counseling. For example, the editors of *Professional School Counseling* published a special issue on spirituality (Sink & Richmond, 2004). In an attempt to allow most "voices" to be heard, the editors agreed that contributing authors of this issue could define spirituality as a persons' attempt at "meaning-making" which is highly personal and may include the communal or sociocultural (Sink & Richmond, 2004). The editors further asserted that spirituality can include religion in its formal

sense, but in their opinion they did not see students utilizing spirituality or religion this way, to “make meaning” in schools.

Sink (2004) suggested it is less obtrusive to substitute the words “religion” and “spirituality” with phrases such as “helping students through their personal ‘journeys’”. Religion and spirituality are considered contentious; whereas spirituality is accepted, as long as it suggests “meaning-making” or making sense of one’s life (Sink, 2004). This research adds to the field by exploring the role religion plays, in this case Christianity, for adolescents in public high schools. The school counseling literature is lacking information on the Christian student in public schools and how his or her Christian experiences are addressed in the counselor/counselee relationship.

Research Questions

1. How do Christian students experience their faith in the public high school?
 - a. How is their Christian faith experienced in the academic domain?
 - b. How is their Christian faith experienced in the personal/social domain?
 - c. How is their Christian faith experienced in the career domain?
2. How do Christian students experience the counselor/counselee relationship?

Significance of Study

Historically, the school counseling literature has focused on the academic and social/emotional growth of students and only recently has the school counseling discourse mentioned the spiritual development of youth. At the request of counselor educators, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) held a summit on “Spirituality” in October of 1995. Individuals invited to attend the summit were those who published in the area of spirituality and counseling.

The outcome of the summit and follow-up meetings was a description of competencies for addressing spiritual issues in counseling (Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, & Belaire, 2002). The 2001 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards require that counseling programs, endorsing school counselors, include curricular experiences addressing social and cultural diversity. Embodied in these standards is the necessity to include coursework addressing the religious and spiritual values of the clients and counselors (CACREP, 2001).

Similar to the CACREP focus on inclusion of spirituality and religion, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) addresses these topics in the ethical standards for school counselors. According to the ASCA National Model (2005), a school counseling program is comprehensive and designed to ensure every student is benefiting in three domains: personal/social, academic, and career. Sink (2004) argued that Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCPs) are too restrictive by solely attending to these three domains. He referred to the attention that educational, psychological, and counseling literature is placing on other aspects of students' lives, primarily spirituality. He recommended that CSCP adopt a more holistic or sociocultural perspective of human development that incorporates the spiritual domain.

Unfortunately, the topic of spirituality is taboo in the school setting. Wolf (2004) gave credit to the misinterpretation of the First Amendment that states the government cannot officially sponsor any faith tradition as the state religion. Wolf stated that schools have taken this to mean they cannot endorse any particular religion. The ASCA's (2004) Ethical Standards for School Counselors (Standard A.1.c. Responsibilities to Students) states that the professional school counselor, "Respects the student's values and beliefs

and does not impose the counselor's personal values". However, Wolf reasoned that ASCA's ethical standard does not prohibit the school counselor from discussing issues related to spirituality.

Spirituality is essential to humans (Benson, 1997). Benson claimed that nurturing and expressing spirituality are as important as the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of life. MacDonald (2004) cautioned school counselors not to ignore spirituality, suggesting that in doing so they compromise the quality of service given to students. The best way to foster and support spirituality is by education. Wolf (2004) encouraged school counselors to learn more about their students' religious and spiritual expressions. He reminded counselors to be open to all forms of spirituality and learn about the diverse faiths of the world.

The school counselor plays a key leadership role in fostering a school environment and culture that is sensitive to the varied spiritual and religious views of students. Lonborg and Bowen (2004) suggested counselors not only familiarize themselves with the spiritual values of their students but also understand how to access appropriate resources to develop and support students from various faith traditions. Students are always searching for ways to bring meaning to their lives (Allen & Coy, 2004).

According to Benson (1997), it is important to give permission to adolescents to explore their spiritual and religious beliefs as well as provide support needed for them to flourish. Students' spiritual development grows when socializing institutions (schools) nurture it through encouragement, articulation, teaching, modeling, and practice (Benson,

1997). According to Benson, “through their silence, both schools and families do a disservice to spiritual capacity, making it easy for the spark to be extinguished” (p. 219).

Although the search for meaning (spiritual/religious ideology) is critical to learning and developing self, the study of religious/spiritual views has for the most part been ignored by schools where children and adolescents spend most of their lives (Kessler, 2000). Dismissing the spiritual/religious constructs that students identify and adopt hinders their spiritual development.

The concept of spirituality in education is receiving much attention in the educational literature. The problem lies in how spirituality is defined in the literature. Presently, spirituality is considered separate from religion in the educational discourse. Spirituality is seen as a process of making meaning in one’s life without necessarily considering a religious context (Sink, 2004; Smith & Richmond, 2004). Allen and Coy (2004) argued that religion and spirituality are topics students should enthusiastically discuss. Kessler (2000) added that students who identify with a higher power rarely feel safe expressing their faith in school. However, when students are presented with opportunities that allow them to express their religious/spiritual views and relationship with God their spirit is nourished (Kessler, 2000). In Kessler’s “Passages Program” (2002) students openly expressed their religious and/or spiritual views in the classroom and students with strong religious beliefs are empowered and develop more confidence and leadership when nonreligious peers validate their beliefs. She emphasized that young people are seeking adults willing to give as much attention to their hearts and souls as to their academic and athletic accomplishments.

Engaging in research that contributes to the body of literature facilitates change. The ASCA's (2004) Ethical Standards for School Counselors (Standard F.1.c. Responsibilities to the Profession) states that the professional school counselor "Conducts appropriate research and reports findings in a manner consistent with acceptable educational and psychological research practices. The counselor advocates for the protection of the individual student's identity when using data for research or program planning." Knowledge about religion/spirituality from research, self-awareness, professional development, and professional experiences prepare school counselors to ethically introduce common religious and spiritual values into the counseling programs and practices (Allen & Coy, 2004).

Researcher's Perspective

I believe many barriers exist that keeps religion out of the public schools. Most counselors do not receive formal education on religion and spirituality so most choose to ignore it or find it an uncomfortable topic of discourse. Others fear engaging in conversations addressing religion violates Separation of Church and State. As the researcher, my spiritual/religious self-awareness is the catalyst for the interest and sensitivity toward adolescent religious/spiritual development. In my personal and professional journey of self-awareness, I find I am not only searching for answers to address my professional quandaries, but assessing and refining the way I relate to myself and others in this world. The most important discovery is finding the renovation I need in my relationship with God. This awareness fuels my desire to determine my professional position and responsibility to the spiritual/religious needs of my students. Since I am a Christian, I am drawn to the Christian student because I can relate and

understand the Christian worldview. In my professional experience, students are drawn to teachers and/or other faculty members who identify with their faith.

As a professional school counselor with an ethical responsibility to learn about the religious/spiritual views of my students, it is my role to establish a safe and supporting counseling relationship and environment for students to express, share, and explore their religious/spiritual views. The ASCA's (2004) Ethical Standards for School Counselors (Standard E.2.d. Diversity) states that the professional school counselor "Acquires educational, consultation and training experiences to improve awareness, knowledge, skills and effectiveness in working with diverse populations: ethnic/racial status, age, economic status, special needs, ESL or ELL, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type, religious/spiritual identity and appearance." In acquiring this awareness and knowledge, I create a safe forum for students to share their stories regarding their religious and/or spiritual identity. Giving students permission to share their religious and/or spiritual worldviews is another means to validate them as important and contributing members of the student body. As a practicing school counselor, I would have to disagree with Sink and Richmond (2004). In my professional experience, students do bring their religious beliefs into the school setting and express these beliefs in college essays and other writings. They attend and participate in religious based organizations such as Fellowship of Christian Students. They discuss their faith with their peers and some carry religious artifacts, such as the Bible, with them.

Ongoing professional development is crucial to my success as a school counselor. During my 16 sixteen years as an educator, I have participated in many professional

development opportunities, but one crucial experience changed my perspective in counseling students, particularly in the area of grief and loss. I attended an informational workshop presented by local clergy. The workshop entitled *Understanding Spiritual and Cultural Practices at the End of Life*, a joint effort by two school districts and Hospice, organized a panel representing diverse groups of faith and spiritually based organizations to share information related to grief and end of life issues. The panel consisted of presenters representing the Mormon, Hindu, Jewish, Christian (American Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, and Abyssinian), Buddhist, Islamic, and Native American faiths. Each member on this panel discussed how their particular faith addressed the issue of grief and loss and the afterlife.

Prior to this workshop, I had not given much thought to how a student's spiritual and/or religious beliefs played in the realm of grief and loss, particularly to the symbolic meaning associated with proper interment, mourning, and the afterlife. I just assumed to show your support to a grieving family you sent flowers. However, sending flowers is traditionally not appropriate in Judaism. The time of mourning and the afterlife is not standard across all religious beliefs. In some traditions the mourning process lasts a week, for others a year. Even within Christianity differences exist in doctrinal views as it relates to death and the afterlife. It is important for counselors and other educators not to assume all Christians believe in a heaven and hell or that all Christians believe that people enter heaven immediately upon death. Some Christian denominations believe they enter a state of resting until they are reunited with Christ at the Second Coming.

The most important role I have with students is to understand how their worldview relates to their decision making, development, and academic success. Even

though the Christian population is the focus of my study, I understand my professional obligations to all students on my caseload. By studying the Christian population, it is my hope to influence a positive attitude and acceptance of all religious/spiritual worldviews for the school counselor within the public high school.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Religion and spirituality play an important role in the lives of people. Religion and spirituality are a part of a person's culture, traditions, and values. Although there are numerous and varying definitions of religion and spirituality, the commonality they share is the influence and importance in the lives of many. Religion and spirituality are often studied in the lives of adults and college students with less consideration given to adolescents. Of the studies involving adolescents, most refer to spirituality and/or religion within contexts such as attendance and participation in religious services or academic achievement within parochial schools. Little attention is given to adolescent spirituality and/or religion within the context of public schools. With the heightened attention and popularity religion and spirituality play in pop culture, politics, and world relations, it seems evident that religion and/or spirituality must play a role in the lives of public high school students.

The objective of this study is to examine Christian students' perspectives of their Christian experiences in the public high school. To fully understand the role religion/spirituality plays in the lives of public high school students, it was necessary to review religion and spirituality in counseling, the history of religion in public education, religious rights, and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Model.

Religion and Spirituality in Counseling

Religion and spirituality are topics new to school counseling. Although an increased interest in spirituality is present in the school counseling literature, religion and its role in school counseling is lacking. While the scope of interest is religion and spirituality in school counseling, a broader view of the literature in counseling as it relates to religion and spirituality was examined.

In reviewing the literature, I encountered numerous definitions for religion and spirituality. Frame (2003) defined spirituality as “a person’s search for meaning, purpose, and value in life. One’s construction of spirituality may or may not include a Supreme Being or a higher power” (p. 2). Frame’s definition most resonated with me and is used throughout this study. Although I see spirituality encompassing God, I recognize that others may not.

Frame (2003) credited the absence or neglect of religion and spirituality in counseling to several reasons: (1) the strained relationship between psychology and religion; (2) the conflict between the scientific and religion/spirituality worldviews; (3) the historical view of the connection between religion and pathology; (4) the belief that spirituality and religion should be addressed by the clergy and other spiritual leaders; (5) the lack of training counselors receive with regards to religion and spirituality; and (6) counselors or mental health workers’ failure to deal with their own experiences regarding religion or spirituality.

Historical Overview

In 1637 Puritans established public education in Massachusetts by combining knowledge and the interpretation of the Bible. During the 1600s, the Puritans aimed at

reforming the then current religion under Henry VIII. Earlier the protestants, led by Martin Luther, formed Protestantism, which sought to reform the Catholic church of 1517 (Marshall, 2006). According to Marshall (2006), Protestantism was against any established religion resulting in numerous Protestant denominations in the colonies. During colonial times, religion was heavily emphasized in the school curriculum with no consideration given to whose religion was taught (Marshall, 2006). This established practice came under great scrutiny throughout the Revolutionary period due to changes in philosophies and worldviews. The authors of the Constitution were resistant to establish a religion as done in Europe and the introduction of the Enlightenment philosophy emphasized reason over religion which contributed to the rally against the Protestant worldview (Marshall, 2006).

In 1791 the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment were sanctioned; thereby, establishing the role of religion in public schooling. Despite these new sanctions, some states continued to discriminate against certain religions in their state constitutions. At the local level states faced religious freedom and curriculum and school support decisions. During the 17th and 18th centuries, schools were supported by a largely Anglo Protestant majority; however, with increased immigration and religious revival from the Great Awakening, the Protestant majority continued to lose influence (Marshall, 2006). The Great Awakening (1728-1900) was a time of religious liberty brought on by new forms of religious expression (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). During the Great Awakening, more emphasis was placed on individual spirituality rather than the interpretation which resulted in individual decision making and increased diversification of the Protestant sect (Marshall, 2006).

In 1837 the Common School Movement initiated by Horace Mann argued for a democratic education and inculcation of nonsectarian Christian religious and moral values. Since education was not compulsory, parents maintained control over their children's education. This control allowed taxpaying parents to question whose values were taught. The largest opposition against Horace Mann's common school was Roman Catholics who felt schools were too Protestant centered. Rather than subject their children to Protestant teachings and values, Catholics removed their children from the public system and enrolled them in the parochial school system (Marshall, 2006).

Religion in Public Schools

Religion and its role in public schools continue to be an issue of debate between two camps, one lobbying for free exercise of religion and one concerned with the indoctrination of Christian values on all students (The Pew Research Center, 2007). The Pew Research Center conducted a survey in August 2006 which found two-thirds of Americans (69%) felt liberals were too restrictive about religion in the schools and in government. Another 58% agreed creationism should be taught along with evolution (The Pew Research Center, 2007).

Disagreements between Catholics and Protestants were the catalyst for government intervention regarding religion in the public milieu in the 19th and 20th centuries. Because of these disagreements (which prayers and Bible should be used in public schools and the teaching of evolution), the government stepped in and applied the religious clauses once used to regulate the federal government. In *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) the establishment clause was to now include the states (Haynes & Thomas, 2007; The Pew Research Center, 2007). The establishment of religion clause

states that no state or the federal government can support a specific church, force one to attend or not attend a specific church, or participate in the affairs of a church (Haynes & Thomas, 2007).

The first case to address religious involvement in the public schools was *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948). The court's decision in this case was to prohibit different denominations entry into the public schools to provide religious instruction to students whose parents approved. In *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952) the courts gave public schools discretion in allowing students to leave campus during the day for religious instruction. This religious instruction was required to be off-campus and organized by religious or community groups (Haynes & Thomas, 2007; The Pew Research Center, 2007). In *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), the courts ruled against school sponsored prayer deeming it violated the establishment clause.

From the 1960s to the present, courts continued to determine whether religious activity constitutes indoctrination or freedom of speech and freedom of association. In 2000 the Supreme Court ruled against prayer at football games (The Pew Research Center, 2007). Most recently, Colorado Senator David Schultheis introduced Bill 89 to state lawmakers. His bill would give teachers and students the right to opt out of classes or teaching of classes that were against their religious views. In addition, students and faculty would have the right to express their religious views on campus (Fender, 2010). After 4½ hours, Bill 89 was killed 4-3 (Engdahl, 2010).

Religious Expression in Public Schools

The Establishment Clause and Free Exercise and Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment acknowledge two distinct areas. The Establishment Clause prohibits

government endorsement of a particular religion and the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clause protects private speech endorsing religion (Haynes, 2002; Marshall, 2003; May, 2006). The Establishment Clause is meant to prohibit/limit schools from instilling or inhibiting religion (Haynes, 2002; Marshall, 2003). The Establishment Clause is widely misinterpreted by the public schools. School officials see the words separation of church and state and immediately believe religion must be avoided. The words “separation of church and state” do not appear in the Constitution (May, 2006). Basically, schools and faculty working in the schools must remain neutral in how they approach religious matters. They must treat the religious and nonreligious equally.

A common misconception regarding religion is that faculty and students are to leave their religious worldview at the door upon entering the school (Haynes, 2002; May, 2006). In 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court stated in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, “that public school teachers, as public employees, do not forfeit all of their First Amendment freedoms when they come to school” (Hudson, 2008). Students and faculty do not disregard ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, or any other part of who they are upon entering the school. Schools are not religious free zones (Haynes, 2002; May 2006). Students and faculty within schools have constitutional rights protecting their religious views. Haynes (2002, p. 26) said it best,

That’s why public schools are so important. They are our laboratories for freedom and democracy, the places where we learn to apply the principles of the First Amendment fairly and justly. And where we learn to understand one another as American citizens across even our deepest differences.

Students’ Rights

A student enters the school building as a complete person. A student’s identity may encompass academics, athletics, leadership, and music. Students also bring their

ethnicity, gender, age, values, culture, and traditions, which may include religion. Students express who they are through their school work, extracurricular activities, ethnicity, and religious upbringing. Religious identity is expressed in their writings, art, and participation in religious clubs. Haynes (2002) noted students and faculty do not lose their religious identity at the schoolhouse door. Too many educators and students mistake the Establishment Clause to mean religion cannot be a part of public education (Haynes, 2002).

Many court cases address religion in the schools and students' rights. The First Amendment protects students' rights to religious expression. *Tinker* was the first court case to address students' rights of religious expression (May, 2006). Throughout the years and after many court cases, students have gained more rights with regard to religion (see Table 1). Students have the right to pray, evangelize, organize religious clubs (e.g., Fellowship of Christian Students) and participate in "See You at the Pole" events.

The Right to Pray. As long as students are not disrupting or interfering with the rights of others, students may pray alone or in groups (Haynes, 2002). Although much ground has been gained on the inclusion of religion in public education, debate still exists regarding student-led prayer before school-sponsored events. In 2000 the decision of the Supreme Court in *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* resulted in the unconstitutionality of student-led prayer before football games. The ruling is still out whether student-led prayer before school activities is allowed when school personnel are not encouraging or reviewing the prayer (Haynes, 2002).

Proselytizing. As long as students are not harassing or disrupting the operation of school, they can share their faith and scriptures with other students (Haynes, 2002).

Table 1

Chronology of Court Cases Related to Religion in Public Schools

Year of Ruling	Supreme Court Case	Topic	Impacted	
			Students	Teachers/Counselors
1948	McCullum v. Board of Education	Prohibited religious instruction in the school from outside denominations	X	
1952	Zorach v. Clauson	Provided schools the autonomy in allowing students to leave campus for religious instruction	X	
1962	Engel v. Vitale	Prohibited school sponsored prayer	X	X
1969	Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District	Students do not shed their constitutional rights in school; teachers do not forfeit all their rights as public employees	X	X
1983	Roman v. Appleby	Conversations with students about religion are permissible as long as counselor does not force own values		X
1990	Roberts v. Madigan	Teaching religion is unacceptable, but teaching about religion is acceptable		X
2000	Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe	Student led prayers before football games unconstitutional	X	

Note. This is not an exhaustive list of cases impacting religion in public schools.

Religious Expression. If appropriate and within the guidelines of classroom assignments, students may share and express religious views in their papers, speeches, and artistic activities. These activities must not engage other students in religious exercises (Haynes, 2002).

Distribution of Religious Materials. Within reasonable restrictions, as determined by school administrators, students may distribute religious literature during times specified by school personnel. As long as other non-school literature is allowed so must all literature, including religious (Haynes, 2002). Most schools have a person who approves posting of school and nonschool related activities, so it is reasonable to believe this same person, usually the athletic director, approves distribution of nonschool literature.

Religious Clubs. As established by the Equal Access Act, students may form religious clubs as long as other extracurricular clubs are allowed (Haynes, 2002). In allowing other clubs, schools have adopted a limited forum policy. These clubs must be student initiated and not involve outside religious organizations or participating faculty members (Haynes, 2002).

Religious Accommodation. Along with the First Amendment rights of students, schools have done their best to accommodate students from exemption of classroom activities, which conflict with religious beliefs. An example of this is a Jehovah's Witness' request for their children to be excused from participating in birthday parties (Haynes, 2002). At the secondary level, students are exempt from swimming units or health curriculum if religious beliefs differ from course curriculum.

Given the inconsistent rulings in cases involving student religious expression in the classroom and before school sponsored activities, the area of student expression remains nebulous. Although most teachers support student religious expression, others remain hostile (Haynes, 2002).

Teachers' Rights

Due to employment with the school district, teachers' rights are more controlled and restrictive than students. Teachers possess free exercise rights, which include the right to participate in religious activities. When acting in their role as educators, teachers and other employees of the school are restricted by the Establishment Clause (The Pew Research Center, 2007). This means teachers must remain neutral toward religion within the context of the school (Haynes, 1999; 2002). Teachers may include religious content in their classroom, as long as they are objective, and the religious material does not cause disruption and is relevant to the curriculum (Whitehead, 1994).

Teachers do not maintain total religious expression within the classroom. Because teachers represent the school district, the school regulates religious expression in the classroom to avoid violating the Establishment Clause (Hudson, 2008; Whitehead, 1994). Hudson (2008) cautioned not to misinterpret this as the total avoidance of religious discourse in the classroom. In *Roberts v. Madigan* (1990) a fifth-grade teacher was instructed to remove religious material and his personal Bible from the classroom. The school administrator claimed the instructor violated the Establishment Clause by producing a coercive religious environment (The Pew Research Center, 2007). The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals announced in *Roberts v. Madigan* (1990) that teaching religion is unacceptable where teaching about religion was allowable (Hudson, 2008).

According to Mathew Staver of the Liberty Institute, a Florida-based religious-liberty group (as cited in Hudson, 2008), the ruling in *Roberts v. Madigan* (1990) “elevates the Establishment Clause beyond reasonableness and shows a hostility toward religion” (para. 21).

School districts have the right to restrict teachers from religious expression during the instructional day. However, schools have no right to restrict a teacher from religious expression outside of instructional time (The Pew Research Center, 2007; Whitehead, 1994). If teachers wish to pray or participate in other religious activities (including proselytizing among teachers), they may do so as long as no students are present, the religious activity is outside instructional time, and does not infringe on other faculty’s rights (Haynes, 1999; Whitehead, 1994). Whitehead (1994) added teachers’ free speech rights allow them to attend church and instruct Bible studies with students present as long as the study is taught off campus and during non-instructional time.

Counselors’ Rights

In *Roman v. Appleby* (1983), the courts ruled in favor of a student who initiated conversations with the school guidance counselor regarding religion. According to the courts, individual conversations with students about religion are permissible as long as the counselor’s values are not forced upon the student. The court rulings would include teachers because they share the same first amendment rights as counselors (Whitehead, 1994).

The Equal Access Act

Along with instructional opportunities, students have access to a variety of non-instructional opportunities encompassing music, athletics, drama, and other activities.

The Equal Access Act established in 1984 by President Reagan allowed all groups, including religious, equal access to use of facilities in public schools (Whitehead, 1994). According to Whitehead (1994) schools allowing traditional extracurricular groups access to school facilities during non-instructional time must accommodate groups with a religious theme.

Adolescence

Adolescence is considered to start at age ten and continue into the early twenties (Collins, 1988). This span of ten plus years is often divided into three overlapping time frames: preadolescence, middle adolescence, and post-adolescence (Collins, 1988). Middle adolescence includes ages 14 to 18, roughly the time period in high school. Post-adolescence includes the late teenage years and early twenties (Collins, 1988). This study is particularly interested in the middle adolescence or high school time frame which extends into post adolescence.

According to Collins (1988, p. 169) adolescents are searching for answers to crucial questions related to identity (“Who am I?”), relationships (“How do I get along with others?”), future (“Where do I fit?”), and ideology (“What do I believe?”). During this questioning process, adolescents are forming their own values, religious beliefs, and worldviews (Collins, 1988). Developmentally, adolescents are faced with many changes including physical, sexual, and interpersonal. Faced with acquiring new skills, developing self-esteem, increasing autonomy, planning for the future, and struggling with one’s values, morals, and religious beliefs (Collins, 1988) illustrates the many issues adolescents contend with.

Professional School Counselor

ASCA Model

Along with school boards, administrators, and teachers, counselors are accountable for student achievement. To ensure growth in student achievement, schools rely on data driven assessments and programs to provide curriculum instruction and interventions necessary for student success. Within each academic discipline, standards and competencies are developed to ensure students are receiving the appropriate content and attaining appropriate grade level benchmarks. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed a framework to provide school counselors a model to build and structure a comprehensive program aimed at delivering developmentally appropriate instructions to students in three domains: academic, personal/social, and career. “A school counseling program is comprehensive in scope, preventative in design, and developmental in nature” (ASCA, 2003, p. 13).

Comprising the ASCA framework are four major systems on three levels, the foundation (level 1), delivery and management system (level 2), and accountability (level 3). The foundation incorporates the beliefs and philosophies, mission statement, and the standards adopted by the comprehensive school counseling program. According to ASCA (2003), the foundation component is necessary in ensuring the comprehensive school guidance program plays a major role in the whole educational process. The philosophy, mission statement, and standards of the CSCP are aligned with district, state, and national standards, competencies, and indicators.

The guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support comprise the delivery system. The delivery system addresses how the

CSCP is integrated (ASCA, 2003) and aligned with the overall school curriculum and instructional implementation. The management system addresses who, when, and why particular programs and instruction are delivered. The school counselors, administrators, and advisory team agree on who is responsible for program results. Using data, counselors determine the appropriate intervention and activities to use with students by developing action plans such as “guidance curriculum” and “closing the gap” action plans (ASCA, 2003). Reviewing performance standards expected of school counselors, reporting results, and auditing programs, the CSCP demonstrates accountability and is well equipped to answer, “How are students different as a result of the school counseling program?” (ASCA, 2003, p. 23).

Leadership, advocacy, collaboration and teaming, and systemic change are the major themes surrounding the ASCA framework. School counselors are integral and vital leaders in promoting student success through collaborative efforts with other stakeholders to promote school reform, thereby enhancing student opportunity and achievement (ASCA, 2003). Utilizing quantitative and qualitative data, counselors can better advocate for all students by assessing the data and implementing data driven policies and procedures leading to systemic change (ASCA, 2003).

Delivery System

The activities in the CSCP fall into four distinct areas including school guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. These four areas serve as the delivery system within the ASCA Model (ASCA, 2003). The school guidance curriculum is designed to teach knowledge, skills and attitudes through instructional units within the following three domains: academic achievement, career

development, and personal/social growth. Classroom instruction, interdisciplinary curriculum development, group activities, parent workshops, and instruction are the primary content delivery methods (ASCA, 2003).

Counselors work with individuals and/or groups to plan, monitor, and manage their personal goals within the three domains. Individual student and or group planning can include interpretation and analysis of test scores, career decision making, yearly course selection, interest inventories, four-year plans, social skills, college selection, and test-taking strategies (ASCA, 2003).

To meet student's immediate needs and concerns, counselors may use responsive services consisting of crisis counseling, individual and small-group counseling, consultation, referrals, and peer facilitation. These responsive services range from prevention and intervention to crisis response (ASCA, 2003). Through consultations, counselors collaborate with other stakeholders to determine how to best meet the needs of students. Through short-term individual and/or group counseling, counselors help students determine problems, causes, consequences (ASCA, 2003), and viable solutions to personal issues. In crisis situations, counselors counsel and support students and families by offering short-term and temporary services, making appropriate referrals when dealing with suicidal ideation, violence, abuse, family conflict, and mental health concerns. Counselors may adopt and design peer mediation programs which train students to mentor, tutor, and provide conflict resolution and mediation to their peers (ASCA, 2003). Counselors are involved in professional development, consultation, collaboration and teaming, and program management and operations necessary to support the school counseling program (ASCA, 2003) and overall educational system.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In reviewing the literature the lack of inquiry related to high school students and their Christian worldview in public schools is very apparent. As an educator in a public high school, I realize that Christian students do bring their Christian worldview into the school setting demonstrated by their attending Fellowship of Christian Students and expressing their Christian worldview through writing, the fine arts, and interaction within the individual counseling relationship with the school counselor and other faculty members.

I selected a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the experiences of Christian high school students in the public high school. Qualitative studies are designed to ask broad and general questions about a phenomenon as reported through the participant's words or images (Creswell, 2002). The phenomenon I explored was Christian students' experiences of their Christian faith in a public high school. According to the school counseling literature, religion should not be considered in spirituality, especially in the context of public schools (Sink & Richmond, 2004). In my experience as a high school counselor this is not the case. Religion is a viable form of spirituality; however, students may call religion something different. Because a student believes in God does not make his or her spirituality less relevant than those students from a different spiritual or religious view.

The theoretical framework or worldview for my study stems from social constructivism. In this particular paradigm, individuals are searching for meaning in their lives through the context of relationships and historical and cultural influences (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Social constructivism is interested in particular individuals within a particular place and time and how their meaning is brought into the setting along with other contextual factors such as, but not limited to culture, ethnicity, and religion (Schram, 2006). Another aspect of social constructivism is the varied individual perspectives. The focus of the researcher is to listen and interpret each individual perspective (Creswell, 2007; Schram, 2006) through direct interaction with individuals within the setting, thereby shaping the researcher's interpretations (Schram, 2006). According to Creswell (2002, 2007), this interpretation is influenced by the researchers' experiences and background. Creswell referred to this as researchers "position themselves" within the study and are aware of how their own experiences and perceptions influence the interpretations. Because I am interested in Christian students' experiences of their faith in public high schools, social constructivism provides my theoretical framework. In addition, the subjectivity these Christian students bring to establish their own meaning creates the multiple realities (Creswell, 2007).

Strategy of Inquiry

The purpose of my narrative study was to understand how Christian students experienced their faith in a public high school. In an educational setting narrative is an appropriate mode of inquiry to convey the experiences of individual students in the classroom or involvement in school activities (Creswell, 2002). In addition narrative was appropriate because it allowed the capturing of meaning as expressed and experienced

through students' personal stories. According to Creswell (2007), an important factor in qualitative research is participant meaning. The research is not about the researcher or the literature but rather the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon.

The writings of John Dewey influenced how "experience" changed from a common term to an inquiry term. According to Dewey, experience is not only about the individual, but also the individual's relationship within a social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). In other words, an individual experiences both the personal and the social. In my particular study, Christian students experienced their faith as individuals within the social milieu of a public school setting, which included their interactions and experiences in classrooms, on the athletic field, and in relationships with other students and staff.

For the purpose of my study, Christian students were interviewed a minimum of three times to explore their experiences in a public high school. In other words, how did their Christian worldview influence their relationships, extracurricular activities, decision making, academics, mental health, and post-secondary plans? In addition, students shared their perception on how their experiences were addressed in the counseling relationship.

My Students

My four students attended a public high school. Three of the participating students were seniors during the 2009-2010 school year and one was a junior. Because I found rich data regarding the seniors' transition into higher education, my study continued into the 2010-2011 school year with three students enrolled in their freshman year of college and the other student a senior in high school. One student was referred by

a teacher who worked in the school district and the other three I selected from students who attended Fellowship of Christian Students. Students selected to participate met my terms and agreed to a minimum of three in-depth interviews. Selected students were contacted outside of the school setting but reflected back on their experiences in school. My study included two females and two males and represented two grade levels as well as a transition into higher education. My decision to study males and females was based on collecting multiple perspectives from students who were upperclassmen (junior and seniors). The settings for my narrative study took place in the homes of two participating students, the public library for one student and the father's office for the other.

Data Collection

In narrative studies the researcher is interested in learning from the participants in a particular setting. In my study I was interested in how Christian students experienced their Christian faith in the public high school; however, I interviewed the participants in their home and asked them to reflect back on their experiences in school. Learning occurs through the participants' stories which serve as the data and consists of formal interviews or informal conversations (Creswell, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to these stories as "field texts." These field texts serve as the raw data from which I "retell" the story in the form of a letter back to each individual student. In my study, field texts included three to five in-depth interviews each lasting one hour. Students were informed of the purpose of study through an introductory letter. Both student assent and parental consent were required for participation. The interviews were conducted in the students' homes or another designated location. Because of my

affiliation in the public school, interviews were conducted off-site to help distinguish and clarify my role as the researcher as being separate from my role in a public high school.

The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport with the student thereby gaining trust. Initially, I asked the students to speak about life at home. How is Christianity experienced in the home? Were there significant religious experiences (confirmation, baptism, youth camp) growing up? Since my study was focused on the public school, I inquired about school life. What role does Christianity play in school? What were some of the experiences?

Based on my analysis of the first interview, I determined further areas to explore and areas to gain more clarification during the second interview. I repeated this same process with the third interview and started forming a global impression and identified major themes (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, pp. 62-87). After I received Rachel's permission, I interviewed her a fourth and fifth time. Serenity and Remo, with permission, were interviewed a fourth time. Interviewing ended when I reached saturation, that is, I saw a repeat of information.

The use of a tape recorder helped me capture the students' individual stories. In addition, I noted any facial expressions, movements, other utterances such as a laugh, observations in the home related to religious artifacts, familial interactions, and/or conversations significant to my study. My notes were minimal as it was important that I gave the interviewee my full attention. Immediately after the formal interview, I found a location to stop and record my observations, feelings, thoughts, and questions that stemmed from the interview. These recordings and observations served as my field notes

and were included in the transcription. I transcribed the individual student's interviews with significant help from a volunteer transcriber.

Data Analysis

As the researcher reconstructs the story, she includes the individual's personal and social (interactions) dimension. These interactions include a reflection on the internal and environmental conditions. The researcher acknowledges the individual's past, present, and future experiences and realizes that experiences lead to other experiences (continuity). Finally, the researcher includes information about the place or situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2002).

To retell the stories of the students, I transcribed the individual interviews and other documents, thus providing the raw data. From these raw data, I used a Holistic-Content Perspective approach. Lieblich et al. (1998) saw Holistic-Content perspective as reading the transcribed interviews holistically and recognizing early memories as essential to the whole story. I read the transcribed interviews multiple times looking for patterns or a specific focus. Since I was interested in Christian students' experiences in the public school I paid particular attention to this portion of the student's story and how it related to his/her entire life story.

From the transcriptions, I looked for the utterances that were most significant and interesting. Specifically, I looked for experiences, activities, thoughts, and situations surrounding Christian students' experiences in school. From these meanings, I sorted the text into themes. These areas of special foci or themes consisted of information I expected to find or surprising information that I did not intend to find. From these patterns of foci, I classified text into themes.

I formed a global impression and made note of any disconnections or contradictions. As I was interested in how Christianity is experienced in the school I looked for major themes related to my focus. I identified the different major themes and read these themes separately and repeatedly.

I drew conclusions to formulate the narrative or story of the students' experiences. In the whole process of data analysis, I incorporated my field notes, which in this case was my personal journal. I reflected on my experience and positioning (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003) as the researcher. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) referred to this as reflexivity. In the end, I told my story and how my story impacted the research and changed me both professionally and personally.

Trustworthiness

To show trustworthiness I utilized four particular practices. First, I applied the process of epoche which means I came clean with the reader by noting my assumptions and biases and setting these aside. This awareness was recorded in my research journal and noted in the interview transcription. Secondly, through peer review my methodologist read and reviewed each transcription. In addition he read over my interpretation and coding ensuring accuracy of analysis. Thirdly, I developed rich textual descriptions by utilizing the students' voices and established my major themes thereby giving evidence to their voices. Finally, I created an audit trail of interview transcriptions, interpretation and analysis of each transcription, the formulation of subsequent interview questions, and documentation of my global impressions and major themes. I repeated this audit trail for each student.

RACHEL'S STORY

March 20, 2011

Dear Rachel,

Of the six students agreeing to participate in my study, you were one of two I knew the best. I knew you were actively involved in student council and Fellowship of Christian Students which is where I observed and interacted with you most. Although you are very outgoing, I sensed a quiet and confident disposition. You willingly agreed to participate in my study and your mom happily agreed to allow me to interview you. We agreed that the best place to conduct our interviews was in your mother's home. Because your parents are divorced, you live in two residences, but consider your mom's home the primary residence. During our first visit, we sat in your family room, while your mom and sisters interacted in the other room. I am not entirely sure but I wonder if mom hung close by to ease her mind that I was not asking anything inappropriate. After our initial meeting, it was you and I sitting in your family room and occasionally your sisters coming in and out of the home. On most occasions your pug dog happily sniffed around us as we spent time together.

A cross hangs in your family room, I asked you what this meant to you and you said it serves as a reminder and a display of priority. You used the analogy of a wedding ring and said in the same way that a wedding ring symbolizes a commitment in a marriage, the cross symbolizes a commitment as a Christian. In your opinion regardless

of how the cross has been degraded in our society, it remains a powerful symbol for Christians to live for and find purpose.

In addition to the cross, a piano covered with Christian music sat in your family room thus symbolizing your Christian faith. You play the piano, sing, and lead worship in your youth group. The gift of worship is something you continue to develop. Furthermore you view all activities and areas of your life as an opportunity to express your Christian faith. As a result, these activities cannot be done separately from God thus you aim to make Him the focal point.

Being a real Christian and a disciple of Christ means there are no boxes, there are not certain slots where God fits and where He doesn't. It should be this is my life and He's the center and everything else revolves around it and whether or not that is consistent, the idea is that in school, work, home, music, and sports there's a place for where God fits in, He has to.

Rachel, I appreciated your transparency, enthusiasm, and honesty as you shared your story with me. As we spent time together, themes emerged from our discourse such as family, faith, friends, school, church, extracurricular activities, and post-secondary transition. The global impression that emerged from the common themes was your Christian walk and growth, which was woven throughout the other themes. Your Christian identity is the foundation of who you are and plays a role in how you relate and interact with others as well as how you conduct yourself daily. As you told your story, what unfolded was your progression as a Christian and how each experience defined you as a Christian. Just as learning is a lifelong endeavor so is growing in faith, and as we experience life's ups and downs, our Christian identity is refined and developed.

Christian Faith

My first awareness of you being Christian was at Fellowship of Christian Students that met weekly for lunch and gave you and other Christian students the opportunity for

fellowship. It was apparent as you led the other students in devotion, worship, and other activities you took time to prepare hoping it would help them with their daily walk. Your innate leadership skills provided direction and a safe environment for other Christians to gather together for fellowship. I was impressed with your confidence to stand in front of a room filled with 30-50 of your peers and openly share something from the Bible. In fact you would give examples of how you had personally integrated the lesson into your own daily walk and encouraged the attentive students to do the same.

One of the first questions I asked was for you to define Christian and as we continued to meet, your definition enhanced.

Being a Christian means having a personal relationship with Christ and carrying that through, like in school, and at home. I guess integrity in that it means being a disciple and studying the Word of God and attempting to model my life after Christ.

Later, you would add more emphasis on the importance of developing that personal relationship with Christ, who is the foundation. As you spend more time in His Word, personal values are developed which in turn guide and shape you as a Christian. You also said that a Christian must lose focus of self, must live ethically, and model integrity, not easy because of the natural tendency to be self-centered. As a Christian, you believe that God purposely gave you a code of conduct to live an ethical life by discerning right from wrong.

You were raised in a home where both parents were Christian and although your father was raised Catholic, he does not practice this faith. Interestingly enough you attend different churches but manage to share what you learn and spend time discussing the sermons. In addition you spend time worshiping as a family, primarily with your sisters, and you talk, as a family, about your mother's different service projects.

Furthermore you shared that your parents really instilled in you the importance of family and how you must love and respect each other no matter what. When you babysat, it astonished you to see how siblings treated each other because it was completely contrary to what you were taught. You considered it shameful for siblings to say they loved each other but then treat each other poorly.

I think that is the main thing that my parents have taught me even in my kind of goofy family. Just that love is really important and no matter what you are going to love your family, they are going to love you back, and they are going to take care of you and that is from the Bible. I guess in the home our priorities are different than a lot of people and whether or not it's out of a certain obligation, routine, or schedule we'll go to church and whether that's all at the same place or not we'll talk about church. If we ever do have supper together we'll pray.

While your parents were married, they taught you the importance of family even so; your parents faced marital problems during your seventh grade year of middle school. You witnessed your father leave home and return on several occasions which resulted in major confusion for you. Although your parents did not divorce until your sophomore year, your family was in major transition for three years. As in any life changing event, you were deeply hurt and confused as to why this was happening to your family. In addition to the hardship this placed on your family, it happened at an extremely vulnerable stage in your life. You do not recall having many close friends during this time so you internalized what was happening and tried to deal with it on your own. Your mom was concerned about you so she called your middle school counselor. Although you did not want to talk about it, the counselor, who you would realize later was Christian, offered you an opportunity to speak of the situation. You were embarrassed to be called out of class and you recalled your reluctance in speaking with her, nonetheless, she shared some coping strategies. Naturally you grieved over what was transpiring with your parents and family and you sensed a deep loss of what family life used to be. You

realized many students your age face divorce, but you felt your situation was different in that your family shared many significant family events whereas you do not necessarily believe all students experience this same family cohesiveness prior to a divorce.

As a family, we've done a lot of road trips, family nights, and all those sorts of things. During those years, things got really difficult and so it was really hard to accept the absence of something that I already knew. That was definitely a hard thing and I think learning to balance my responsibilities as an older sister. I think I tried to be a peer mediator between my parents sometimes. Also, taking care of myself, learning to comprehend, and just deal with all that was happening.

This event forced you to grow up in some ways, and you recall feeling angry at your father, then your mother, and sometimes both. You questioned why this was happening to your family and wondered why the marriage could not be fixed. It was difficult for you to verbalize your feelings so you tried to ignore the situation or turned to activities to occupy yourself thus keeping you from having to deal with the divorce. As you mentioned before, you did not have many close friends during this time, but the friends you had did not realize you were dealing with family discord because you were dealing with it on your own and had not shared this with any of your peers.

I feel like my own healing was kind of done internally and I don't really know that I so much involved God at that point in time because I was just kind of dealing with it on my own. As I learned that people around me could help me, I think I turned too much to people and maybe the wrong people and so then I felt hurt by that and then I kind of went back to that stage. I think it's just learning that healthy balance. It's definitely a difficult time to learn and definitely a learning time.

Although it was not apparent to you, God was involved in this situation. Indeed an extremely significant event came at a difficult time in your life which would profoundly change how you viewed your relationship with God and in turn how you lived your faith. After your seventh-grade year, you participated in a summer camp that would

serve as the catalyst to developing a more personal faith which went beyond your parents' expectations.

I went to Covenant Heights for summer camp, and I just really realized what it meant and how it could be, more of my own thing and something I owned rather than just a family tradition or something on the schedule every week. It became more real and more personal.

Your faith became more than a surface level thing you did because it was expected of you. Through your interaction with other students and adults at this camp you observed and experienced something more. For example, you observed young people excited and pumped up about their faith. You observed them exhibit their faith beyond the talk; their behavior paralleled their beliefs. In your opinion most people view church as boring, plain, and dry, but this youth event was different because for the first time you observed others living their faith beyond the surface level you had been taught and grew up with. You would encounter young people and adults whose faith ran deeper. Also, it was your involvement in this church camp that brought much needed support during an extremely difficult time.

I think fellowship was the main thing and the way people treated each other and the love even from the camp counselor. At that time my parents were going through their separation, divorce and I think just that support and that brotherly/sisterly Christian love was just really radiant at that point in time. I think it was clearly also the Holy Spirit laying upon me and realizing that I was mature enough at that point and I needed that [deeper relationship with God] to develop that other part of me [growth as a Christian], and I wasn't just physical, mental, or emotional, but there was that spiritual side that was the core of that.

Not only did this camp offer support, but it also left a deep lasting impact that would add to your maturity and growth as a Christian. Your concept of faith grew from a religious practice to a relationship with Christ. Unlike most adolescents who attend church or believe a certain way because of parental influence, this became personal for you.

Something that I have learned over the last four years is that it is not about religion, it's not about the practices, but it is about the relationship which then motivates you to want. It is a want rather than a should and I think that is the hard thing, like you are saying, a lot of teens don't want anybody telling them how to live their life and how they should do this, but once you have that [deeper relationship with God], implanted in you, you realize what you want to do and it all fits together.

Again, as a result of this summer camp, you decided you were not satisfied with what "being a Christian" meant because it seemed so general and not personal like you experienced in camp. In middle school you felt students naturally assumed other students were Christian because of how they were raised and nobody was ashamed to share this about themselves. You were dissatisfied with this general acknowledgement of your Christian identity because you wanted it to mean something more and have more significance in your life.

I think that maturity, whether or not I realized it was coming because of the stuff I was going through with my family, and whether that made me grow up a little bit earlier. It was definitely something I appreciate now because I realized that I needed more out of life, and that I couldn't fully lean on people because even the people you expect to most come through don't always. I think that just really taught me a lot, and so many people just categorize their life into the mental, the emotional, physical and leave out the spiritual side, but there really is that like natural longing and thirst for that [spiritual side] and so just identifying that.

You realized your life had a spiritual component too and you started to formalize this in middle school which would continue into high school. After the Covenant Heights experience, you felt you were called to be different which was pretty significant since you were in middle school, a typical time when students are trying so hard to fit in and be accepted by peers. Finding your place or fitting in would become a major theme in your life. Although you were changing in your view your peers did not notice a significant change because at that time there was not much of a moral clash between what they thought was okay and what you believed was okay. You did see a change in your

relationship with your parents and family. Despite the family turmoil, you felt compelled to share with your family how you were experiencing your faith differently.

I definitely know with my family, I felt a little more called to lead my sisters spiritually, and I think in my immaturity and imperfections sometimes I came off a little too preachy to my family. I think just learning that there is so much opportunity for us to make changes in our own selves and in our community. I think my mom and dad probably definitely saw that change.

Defining and clarifying Christian from religion was not easy for you and you found yourself struggling because there were times when you did not feel like doing certain things such as reading your Bible or doing daily devotion. In your mind religion was about rules. Although praying and reading your Bible are important in your Christian walk, you found they did not replace developing a personal relationship with God because you can go through the religious practices and still not have that personal relationship.

I think religion is definitely something that requires human effort and that's the opposite of what God asks for. He asks for just our heart and our devotion to Him. From our relationship with him and time spent with him, that is where we desire to serve Him and to do the things that bring us closer to Him such as fasting.

You spoke very candidly about your constant struggles as a Christian both in middle school and later in high school; struggles that you learned to embrace and deal with throughout your daily walk. For example, how to use humor appropriately by not having fun at the expense of another, guarding your tongue and not gossiping about others, and refraining from being judgmental. Also, accepting others different from you and reaching out to new students or social outcasts. You shared it was easier to reach out to people in youth group than in school. Lastly, making a daily conscious decision to dress modestly, read your Bible, and choose appropriate music and television.

I remember in middle school some of the hard things were music, the way you dress, just little things like that which are actually bigger than you think. What

kind of movies you watch. One of my main struggles this senior year has been doing my daily devotions because I want to be in the Word, I want to grow in that way, but it is not always easy, and I don't necessarily do it all the time and it is not required but I want to. There are definitely times at school where people have said things, whether or not the person is there and I've been okay with laughing. Gossip is an easy thing in our culture it's even hard for us Christians to recognize it and therefore guard ourselves against it.

I think distinguishing religion from that deep personal relationship with Christ, which shapes you as a Christian, began when you encountered the Holy Spirit at the Covenant Heights Camp. Your walk with Christ became central in your Christian faith and a seed was planted. The way you would grow and mature in this experience was in recognizing the significance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the disciples before His ascension into Heaven that He would send the comforter [Holy Spirit] to take His place. You realized that if you wanted to be like Christ, the Holy Spirit had to dwell in you. As you continue to grow and mature in your faith, you realize the importance and necessity of surrender to Christ by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you.

I really realized how being a Christian means having Christ within you and making your body, heart, and soul Christ's home. God comes into us and that is what actually makes the change like from the inside out. The Holy Spirit is what gives me those gut intuitions, the pulling toward one thing, shows me the opportunities I have in life, and is definitely the comfort that I feel a lot. The Trinity itself is hard to understand, but I mean that love from God and the love from the sacrifice of Christ just manifests within like the way the Holy Spirit works within us and through us. It's been cool to feel that more and more and to allow that to grow because it's definitely something that we have to release and something like we have to surrender to.

Along with the Covenant Heights experience, a mission trip to Guatemala the summer prior to junior year proved to be foundational in your Christian walk. It was during this mission trip that your perspective changed and you realized the importance of serving others. In all this you felt a "call from the Lord". It is interesting to note that you

made the decision not to compromise your faith in order to fit in; resulting in a shift in your peer relationships

In a lot of ways I see that as being the big break through or shift. The shift between friendships and realizing whether or not I am going to compromise [my faith] and [decide] what kind of people I want to hang out with.

Leading up to the mission trip, you attended meetings which enabled you to interact with other students in the youth group. You felt comfort in surrounding yourself with peers who shared your worldview. You shared concern for others and valued relationships with others and family which created a more comfortable environment for you.

That trip kind of forced me, previous to the mission trip, during that sophomore school year, to hang out with the church kids more because I had to be at certain events. I realized that was a healthy thing for my faith, it helped me grow, it was encouraging, and it wasn't uncomfortable. I didn't feel like I had to leave or any of those sorts of things. In Christianity we value the people around us, the Bible and God's Word, and who He is to us. So that really helps a lot, as far as deep relationships, but it also shows that people matter and we aren't just part of this like evolutionary chain to be some like super being.

As a result of your involvement in youth group and participation in activities associated with it, this core of peers became foundational to your Christian faith. Youth group played a big part in your life throughout middle and high school. Although you experienced different youth groups, you came to appreciate the members of one in particular whom you felt were genuine in their faith. It was this youth group and church that you adopted as your place of worship and the peers you interacted with at church eventually became the peers you hung out with at school.

One of my best friends took me with her to a really big group at Grace Chapel during my sophomore and junior year. The people were really real and I had experienced a lot of other youth groups that I didn't like very much because they were closet Christians, they were people you would see in youth group but, would speak a certain way at school, dress a certain way, and you would hear stories and

you would just kind of wonder. But this youth group [Grace Chapel], was genuine and that was just something that I really learned to appreciate.

Naturally, your involvement in youth group helped you establish a church family and through that unity, you saw God work in your life. The church became a huge support to you as you experienced your parents' divorce. In fact the first person you really spoke to about the divorce was a young person at church. You were grateful for the love and support this person and others in the church portrayed and you found comfort there as you transitioned through high school and made changes socially, emotionally, and academically

I guess high school is just a time of transition and learning who you are and that sort of thing, but it just kind of got me rooted in the church. I always found that my youth pastors and people that have helped out at the church have always been so loving, ready to teach, and show me things. In some ways people will say that the church isn't any good anymore, it is lukewarm and in a lot of those I agree, but it still has a lot of potential and in my own life I've seen how God can work through that sort of unity, like He talks about in the Bible so that was pretty big.

Along with growing up Christian, the summer camp, mission trip, and youth group experiences fostered your walk as a Christian. These experiences helped you navigate through middle and high school. You viewed high school as a time of transition where you really developed your self-identity. Your commitment to not compromise your faith was evident throughout your four years in high school; however, it did not come without struggles.

High School

Although you shared some middle school experiences, the majority of our conversations centered on your senior year in high school with some reflecting back to earlier years. My knowledge of the school environment you attended helped me truly relate with your experiences. As you reflected on certain teachers or classrooms, I had

firsthand knowledge of the people and places you were referring to. This shared knowledge helped me understand your walk within the walls of the public high school. It was within those walls that you struggled to portray your faith like you did in youth group. Your conscious decisions to dress modestly, refrain from judging others, appreciate students you struggled to be with, and maintain accountability and integrity with your Christian friends was not always easy.

I think it is frustrating sometimes because there is this balance between okay I'm not willing to be judgmental but there is also integrity and you want to hold them accountable, but sometimes you just want to slap someone and be like, "What are you doing? You are not the same person here." At the same time, I've struggled with that and I think that's a daily thing like getting dressed in the morning and deciding if I'm going to be modest. It is conscious whether or not we think of it; it's something we think of everyday and whether or not we put it into the right perspective is the main difference. Ever since my sophomore year just feeling uncomfortable around certain people and learning how to still show that love, display love to people while also not necessarily saying what they are doing or saying is right at the same time. It has been hard for me to still maintain that integrity at home, like the way I treat my family is always going to be different than the way I treat my friends. I don't know around certain people it's more difficult than others.

High school should be a pleasant experience and a time when memories are created. To say it is a seamless time with no obstacles would be inaccurate. As a high school student, you were faced with many stressful situations involving social and academic pressures. Portraying your Christian faith in a public high school proved to be a daily battle and was not easy. I asked you if it was hard to be a Christian in a public high school:

In a lot of ways, yeah, I would definitely say that. I think in some ways you get this feeling socially from the world's perspective that there is no benefit to it. Because you see these people party and do whatever they want, and it's like well that looks really interesting, that looks fun, that's like intriguing. On a deeper level you know there is benefit to the way you live and there is a purpose for it. I think there is just, that mental game and standing on the truth. I think it has been a daily battle in a lot of ways whether that's very direct with kids saying, "Oh, what is that B.S., the Bible or Creation" or evolution being taught in our biology

classes. I realized the other day that stuff just slipped in and out of my ears. I didn't question it necessarily at that time. It's not easy.

In defining yourself as a Christian in high school, you said it was actually easier to define what Christianity did not look like. For example, the kind of humor used, not using cuss words or profanity, not making fun of other people on how they look or act, not going to "smokers' corner," and respecting your teachers. For the most part, the school culture is clique free but you felt there was still a lot of bullying. You observed much negativity and behavior that contrasted with your beliefs, but you took a stand on right versus wrong and you believe God had a purpose for you in your school.

I think it means extending loving grace to your peers and I think that can be done in a lot of different ways. I know one of the main ways I've seen it is in sports, just the difference between a Christian athlete and a non-Christian athlete. I think it can be applied anywhere, whether it's an art, like a photo class. I think it's also seeking out people, different kinds of friends and being willing to step out and be different, so finding the norm just so you can stride away from that. I guess sometimes it feels like a one against the world kind of battle. I think it means making a stand for what's right whether or not that's projecting you as a Christian like directly or indirectly. I think it means seeing the greater goodness in everything because a lot of things in high school you wonder why you do them. I guess just like these last two weeks of school I wondered why I'm there sometimes, but just realizing that there's a reason and there's a purpose just for life.

Classroom

Although you spent a lot of time in the classroom, you did not spend a lot of time reflecting about this during our conversations. When given the opportunity to write in your college prep advanced placement classes, you felt free to integrate your Christian worldview into your writing and felt teachers validated your perspective for the most part. Regardless whether or not people agreed with you, your worldview influenced your writing and contribution to the classroom discourse.

With a lot of the poems, I'm going to compare their perspective with mine, but my perspective has to do with my faith, so being able to use that. It's not

intentionally to point out that I'm a Christian; it's how I'm going to respond to these because it's what I believe.

When topics of conversation, contrasting your belief system, such as evolution came up you were cautious and thoughtful about how you participated in classroom discussions. In your opinion nobody enjoys yelling matches over controversial topics so a more appropriate response is to ask questions, show an interest in other perspectives, and develop a respectful relationship with them. In establishing a respectful relationship, others are more apt to listen to your perspective, and although they may not agree, you are okay with this because they are not going to change what you believe either.

I think it is a balance between being offended enough for Christ [and] to stand up for what you believe. When you have this relationship it's like sticking up for a friend, it's like that's not right and there's no way, especially when you feel angry about it, but at the same time it's just displaying that confidence. [Also] letting the Lord lead me and show me opportunities has been something to learn.

You shared your Christian perspective often and were never penalized on your assignments because you wrote from a Christian lens. During your freshman year, the topic of evolution versus creation was discussed and you felt the videos were biased toward evolution. This would provide an opportunity to ask questions; however, you were not prepared as a freshman to ask challenging questions. You reflected back on a time in class when the instructor was comparing ideologies and he brought up how a religious person would view the topic. He shared his view that Christianity was something only ignorant people believed in. It was during this conversation along with another conversation that you felt your Christian perspective was viewed negatively.

I've never been graded down because of it or any of that sort of thing because my comp teacher was a Christian. I know that my Lit teacher is not. He's one of those "show whatever you think" kind of people. In my psych class I definitely felt humiliated and degraded for what I believed. I think in a lot of ways in our society religion is viewed as something for stupid people.

In addition to writing and conversing about your Christian worldview, the opportunity to share your perspective with peers would surface in class. One day you happened to have your Bible in health class which was not unusual as you had Bible Literature prior to this class. You happened to make a comment about it and the atheist boy next to you told you not to start. He along with the agnostic girl that sat next to you proceeded to speak negatively about Christianity such as the way preachers sound and the sex scandals. Instead of getting defensive and upset you saw it as an open door for humility and at the end of the semester you wrote him a note. In this note you wrote, "Have a Merry Christmas, God bless you." He read it and looked at you funny and replied, "Nobody has ever told me God bless you before". You did not know how to respond because you were used to saying this, you grew up with it, but it was interesting to hear his perspective. The conversations between the two of you did not go any further but a mutual respect developed and you believe he saw your words as "terms of endearment". You wrote a note to the agnostic girl as well but she left the semester early because of family issues. Rachel, you are so confident in your faith. You did not hesitate to speak about controversial things as well as things not many adolescents speak about in school with non-Christian classmates. You said you did not want to miss an opportunity to show that being Christian means something different than the current views or beliefs these students had already established. Through your caring expression you were planting seeds in these young peoples' lives. I asked you what prompted you to write to them:

Just something deep down, I don't know how to explain it. A tug, there's a lot of open doors that I've felt from the Holy Spirit within me saying this is an opportunity, this is an opportunity and I feel like I've missed so many. Even in those moments where I've taken an opportunity there is a passage [Isaiah 55:11] I

don't remember exactly what it is but it says, "God's Word will never return to us empty." And that's just a promise whenever we stand upon the Lord, like publically that it's not going to return to us empty. Whether or not the way we think it will go out, it's going to be of some purpose.

Student Council

For three of the four years at River Front, you served on student council and senior year you were the student body president. Interestingly enough you did not initiate the interest in student council, rather the student council advisor asked if you wanted to run. You said you would think about it but gave it no more thought. On the day of the ballot she asked you again and you said, "Okay", never thinking you would get voted in, but you did. You attributed your involvement in student council as divine intervention and saw the opportunity to be involved in the most influential student body organization on campus positively. You realized student council had a bad reputation and you wanted the student body to see that it did not have to be that way; rather it could be a service to the school that would be appreciated. Overall, student council was a great experience and a major influence in shaping you as a leader, although senior year proved to be more difficult. You really seemed to struggle the most with your faith in this venue.

I joined it in sophomore year and did it my junior year and this year. I'm the president and so I think that's been definitely a face-to-face struggle with secular school versus my faith. I definitely struggled with student council especially last part of this year because I think it was partially realizing that I was moving on and also the vast difference between our priorities as individuals and as a group.

As a leader you are more susceptible to criticism, and you learned that you could not please everyone. Specifically you found it difficult to relate to underclassmen because their priorities and perspectives were vastly different from yours, moreover in your mind you had already moved on. In addition, as a young leader leading other young people, your desire to bring about change caused major resistance.

One of the main things I was trying to push this year with a little bit of my control was to have an ethical student council. Where in the past, we just kind of had free reign over whatever was in the school store and whatever tickets [dances]. I mean even just that integrity in how you act and how you lead because everywhere you go you should be a leader if you are a leader. I think that's also been another lonely situation with my senior year is just realizing that not everyone will agree with me all the time because I'm naturally kind of a people pleaser. Also learning how to present things that are applicable to them and give a reason for acting a certain way or just being a better student council in general just stems from that character because I think a lot of people do resent [that lack in character] in a student council.

It bummed you out that student council was not as enjoyable senior year and at times you felt hopeless in influencing change both in attitude and work ethic. As student body president, your vision was to empower change in the attitude and direction of student council, in striving toward this, you felt like a parent because you were trying to hold student council members to a higher standard. As a result, you did not feel the friendship and carefree attitude with other students in student council, so in your opinion this social bond was never formed. For example, you showed up for class and took care of business. You did not spend your off hours socializing with others because you felt a heavy responsibility as student body president which caused you to not feel like a normal student.

I almost felt like a mom and I felt like I was kind of a pain in peoples' butts sometimes. Like whether or not that was calling them on something they would say or if it was asking them for more. I felt like, at least in STUCO, I was trying to hold people to a higher standard which caused them to feel like I was like the bad guy in the situation. In a lot of ways I never really wanted to be involved in a lot of social kind of situations just because of the content or the tone. I just didn't really feel like I had much of a friend group or even like a close friend in student council. I would present what I had in the beginning of class and then that was pretty much it.

It is true you focused on the serious side of STUCO but this stemmed from your lead role, maturity, and perception on how others negatively viewed student council. You would later reflect back and realize you lost focus on the fun side of STUCO, which

was why the majority of students were involved in the first place. However, as a leader you learned there was a balance between fun and business, unfortunately for you this caused resentment from others. Of course the results might be different had there been more support from other student council members. This lack of support and social bonds manifested from the values you deemed important contradicting those of the other members. Therefore, you felt uncomfortable with a lot of the conversations and social activities involving student council members.

Even just in the middle of class someone puts on some inappropriate rock song or people wanting to watch an R-rated movie at a student council retreat. I think just those kinds of things and when you are involved in that like “popular/elected vote” kind of group of individuals you are just really immersed in that kind of attitude and that life style.

In your opinion, if someone in STUCO shared your worldview, things would have been better. In your mind this person would have shared their perspective with you and shared their constructive evaluation of your leadership skills. Perhaps a possible outcome of having someone in tune with you would have been that feeling of support and friendship. Instead you felt like you were fighting the main stream and it was not because you were promoting radical changes, but rather something as simple as the expectation of a quiet class to carry on a conversation that conveyed respect. Undoubtedly your goal of running an efficient student council contradicted the social goals of the majority of members and in this discord you experienced loneliness during a time when fitting in was so important.

I guess there has always just been this kind of and I know I’ve used the word uncomfortable, but it’s just really that feeling of not really fitting in. I think that is something I’ve experienced the last year definitely, my senior year a lot. Not really feeling like I could be involved in a lot of conversations because either it was from the party before or it is discussing something I’d rather not discuss. I think it is also just where people get their unity from and I think that’s just from their social lives, from the sports they play, and that sort of thing and a lot of those groups I wasn’t really involved in.

Prior to senior year, student council officers spent time together in preparation for the upcoming school year. At this particular time, you felt validated and supported as the student body president. In fact as a group the decision was made to adopt some practices for the entire group despite the awareness that it would not be well received. However, once the school year started the support you once felt faded as the social agenda of student council took precedence. A natural people pleaser, you wanted people to be happy and supportive but you learned it was impossible to please everyone. Likewise, you learned even if a decision was in the best interest of everyone, not all people would agree.

When I realized that as a leader, when you make long-term changes like fundamental changes people aren't going to necessarily like it so you have to be able to find a balance between accepting other people's perspectives in a respectful way but also knowing within yourself and within your group what is right and sticking with it.

Because your decisions, as a leader, were not always favorable, you had to develop a thick skin. You realized early on that the lens you perceived the world was not the same lens through which others in student council saw the world and the clash between worldviews (secular versus non-secular) became increasingly evident. Unfortunately as a leader, you faced critical people and in your prominent role you were a natural target.

I didn't feel like anybody really shared my worldview, my perspective on things and I think that secular part just comes from the culture, the way people think of other people, and the way people think of themselves or events. I think we had a lot of problems with people trying to criticize other people versus people getting offended. Not very much friendships sort of thing within my group and there was a lot of competition, complaining and whether or not that's only secular or not that was just one of the struggles I realized was few people shared my ideas and my perspective.

It is easy to let the oppression take over and question your effectiveness as a leader. In fact an observation you made of yourself as a leader was too much focus on change and not enough time spent building personal relationships. It is not easy being a leader, Rachel, but it was in these struggles that your character shined the brightest.

I never really felt like my ideas were good or that people were excited about things. I don't know, I guess that was just kind of that lonely feeling too. It was just like, "Am I doing a good job?" I guess even as a senior you start to look back on like your legacy or what you left and you wonder could it have been better. What would I have changed? I don't know if I would change anything. But, how you affect people I guess it's just hard to prioritize what's important and I realize that I can't do everything in some ways.

Through your involvement in student council you grew as a leader as well as learned how to collaborate and lead others, it was not an easy task. As a person who held high standards for herself, you naturally wanted the same for others but in the process you had to learn how to be patient and appreciate change in small increments. Learning to pick your battles was another important lesson, the balance between fighting for things that were worth fighting for and being okay to leave certain things alone. In reflecting back as a Christian leader, you learned the importance of serving others with respect, patience, and humility.

Athletics

Softball was a major part of your life since you were little. In many respects, you saw softball as another form of leadership. It was interesting to hear the significance softball played in your life because you did not devote a lot of time speaking about it. In fact you note that softball was an area of struggle because of the athletic mentality to be overly competitive and as a result, treat people poorly. Despite this you viewed softball as a really great opportunity to express your faith and build meaningful and lasting

relationships. In fact by participating in softball you developed two significant relationships.

There were two specific girls that I'm still, well one that I'm really in touch with and one I'm sort of in touch with but they both basically came to me asking about my faith. How they knew about it I don't really know but I had some really cool opportunities and one girl is my best friend now. She has had some serious life craziness and being able to support her. Both of them have been saved now, but being able to support them, to really love them, and to be there in that softball kind of friendship.

Subsequently, you enjoyed the team camaraderie and in your eyes softball was a different world. Although you enjoyed playing summer ball, you did not like missing church to play in a tournament so to recognize the importance of your faith you organized a Sunday morning prayer. Unfortunately, you do not recall anybody showing up but you invited your teammates nonetheless. In any event softball was a big part of your life, you decided not to participate your senior year because of the time commitment of student council and activities and responsibilities in church. Because of the competitive nature of sports and the feeling of wanting to win, it was hard to balance your Christian perspective with wanting to always be the best and saturate your life with athletics like you witnessed many of your peers doing. Another dominant motive was your Christian growth. You recognized that if you were not careful it was easy to turn activities into idols that would eventually replace your Christian walk with worldly things.

Sports are hard because there's this competitive nature and this desire to win and to be the best. As a Christian there are more priorities, I missed tournaments over church events, such as mission trips. That's because I wanted to and I knew this year if I was going to be in student council and be involved in leading worship with church I wasn't going to be able to play softball. I think there was so many people in basketball and softball, these sports that's just their life, that's what they live, that's what they thrive off of and they just commit so much to it that I could never fit in that way. I just had other things and whether or not it was part of me being a Christian; it was part of me being a student and trying to be involved in a bunch of different things at once. I think that's been in everything even in choir there's kids that are theatre kids and that's just what they do, that's what they live

for they know every musical in the book and being somebody that's a choir kid, an athlete, in STUCO you don't necessarily fit in with those people, you don't really fit in anywhere. Just learning to apply in sports that humility, leadership, and a good attitude about things, but also trying your best, it's a hard balance.

Even though your plate was full and you were trying to be conscious about the amount of focus on softball, it was not an easy decision to give up softball senior year because it was an opportunity to share your faith with teammates. You shared two powerful stories where you were influential in the lives of two individuals. One teammate was a young lady struggling with alcohol and drug issues. Because she was not happy with her choices and lifestyle, she turned to you for support and you happily spent time with her. When you shared this story with me, we would spend much time laughing about the situation and this would be one of many enjoyable times spent together.

I remember the first one is kind of funny because I think she was texting me but she [giggle] is like one of the funniest girls I know and she texted me and said she got saved. We kind of talked a little bit before [giggle] and I didn't know she was talking about Christianity because we didn't talk about it that much and I thought she was talking about her allergic reaction to nuts [we both laugh]. I was really confused when she told me she was saved. Did you almost die [we are both laughing hard]? What happened [giggle]? But, I guess she had gone to a priest and she didn't know what she was doing really but she was able to come to church with me a few times and we talked a lot.

With the other young lady, a player from an opposing team, you were amazed by how God presented the opportunity to share your faith. This young lady volunteered to catch for your team because your catcher was out that weekend. She spent the night with you and you were angry about the situation because this stranger was invading the weekend with your dad. You would eventually attribute your attitude to pride but time spent with this young lady was fun and positive. She, like the other young lady, was struggling with personal issues. She learned you were a Christian through a conversation

about a Christian band. Interestingly this young lady was in the foster system, but because your team needed a catcher that weekend she turned into a best friend and she possibly might move in with your mom when you leave for college.

That whole night we stayed up until like 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning talking about life and about the Lord and the way Jesus has saved me and how He could save her. It was weird because I had never met her and she was staying the night at my house and we had a game at 6 in the morning. We only got 2 hours of sleep but I mean since then we've been like best friends and she's gone through a lot but she's really been learning and growing and trusting the Lord.

Up to this point you shared your summer softball experiences, but you also played softball for your school. You shared that while you were an underclassman there were no positive upperclassmen who could serve as appropriate role models. However, your junior year you took advantage of the opportunity to reach out to the younger players. One of the ways you reached out to the underclassmen was by example. You talked about a significant event that occurred during your junior year. All through your softball career you played the position of third base, but during your junior year the coach decided to move you to another position. You were deeply upset by this decision and could have handled it two different ways. You could have argued with the coach and bad mouthed him in front of the other players like you had observed others do, but you decided to handle it in a different manner though it was not easy.

I played starting third base since my freshman year and all of sudden my junior year I was moved. It was kind of upsetting because there was no reason now that I'm a junior and I wanted to get to state and I wanted to be a state player. I wanted to be an all-star that year but that was just one of those examples of setting my pride aside and is respectful regardless.

Fellowship of Christian Students

The Fellowship of Christian Students was a group where you could be yourself and openly express your love and commitment to Christ. You felt free, safe, and

comfortable. It was nice to interact with other Christian students who came from the same worldview as you. You mentioned it was nice to be in a room where you and others shared something in common—the most important thing being your Christian faith. In addition FCS provided an opportunity to build relationships with other Christian students and establish accountability partners. It was exciting for you to see Christian students who only spent one day a week fellowshiping together, take their Christian walk to the classroom, athletic field, cafeteria, and other school milieus. You also saw this activity as an opportunity to share your faith with other students and your hope was that they would see your Christian walk openly expressed in the walls where the group gathered and outside these walls.

It's a place of fellowship of getting to know other Christians and that environment where you can fit in and not feel the pressure, not feel that uncomfortable feeling around certain people that you get, but it's a pretty chill place where we can all have that one thing in common, that most important thing in common. It's a place where I've gotten to meet some new people, to lead in some ways, but also the chance to learn from other people. Also, being able to support people and whether or not it's really clear just being able to have our foot in the school with that same integrity out in class.

In summary FCS provided support and empowered you to embrace and exhibit your faith in school. In your opinion the reason why some Christian students do not fully embrace their Christian identity is because they do not participate in FCS, surround themselves with other Christian students, or find Christian mentors in the school. In fact as students get older, more things are available to them and the temptation to go with the crowd takes over if they do not have a strong foundation such as a support group. In your opinion, Christian students need resources to help foster their Christian walk.

We have to have people who can hold us accountable and people who we know can offer the love of Christ because we are called to be the body and work together. Jesus always sent his disciples out in twos because we are not meant to be alone because we can't stand it in this world alone. I think that support comes

from siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ even just people that we know can also relate with us. From adults, from teachers, and like you the counselor who I know are Christians. Whether or not it's something that is verbalized it's just that, that comfortable feeling that you just have when you can make that connection.

Relationships with Peers

In high school the social scene is extremely important. High school can be a lonely place without peers to share the good and bad times. From my observation, most people on campus knew of you because of your role in student council. Initially, your group of peers was the "popular" students, and this group was significant in size. Within this group were students heavily involved in soccer and others who were not, this caused friction among members. You attributed this friction to a lack of maturity, but regardless your freshman year was fun and you enjoyed these friends, but over time you saw the change in mindset and the differences in values became rather noticeable.

Your group of friends would stay intact until the latter part of your sophomore year with the pivotal changes happening over summer. Because of the division within the group, you noticed your desire to please people and be the center of attention primarily because you were trying to find some common ground. During this time you did not feel confident in who you were or in what you believed. You allowed the group to define who you were, what you did, and who you hung out with. As your group of friends became more popular, they started attending parties which you chose not to attend. This was the beginning of distance between you and them. Although you were clearly keeping your distance, they would still text you and invite you to parties, but in time the invitations died off leading to a pretty smooth ending of the relationships. Nonetheless, ending these relationships was difficult because you really cared about your peers, but compromising your faith was not an option even at the expense of losing them.

Sometimes we have to miss things that we don't agree with in order to get at the heart of things so I've felt like it is hard to really confront the things that are important to us, what we don't want to do as Christians, and things that we want to stay away from. As we realize this, it makes it harder to allow people to be themselves and to be really accepting of people. Because we are still trying to protect ourselves and define what is right and wrong. I think personally I've learned a lot about how not to compromise my own beliefs, that integrity, and that desire to just be through and through that same person no matter whom I'm with.

At first you were upset to lose these friends and you were disappointed in the choices they were making. You spoke with one friend about drinking and she agreed that it was ridiculous to engage in this activity and it did not make sense to have fun this way, but despite all the talks the two of you had, she would publically embarrass you by stating, "Rachel just thinks she is better than us because she doesn't drink". This was extremely hurtful because you confided in her and she turned against you. In this painful experience you felt it would be easier to let go of these friendships, but you still felt sad that you would no longer have an influence in their lives. Later you would see many of them hurting, but you felt like you lost the right to intervene in their lives because of the severed relationship.

In all the adversity, you were able to connect with a group of friends who also attended your youth group. You described your friends as "goofy" and it pleased you that with these friends you could have fun doing "legal" things. During your junior year, you had a really good group of friends from church who were mostly seniors. When they graduated, you sensed loneliness, but you still had a couple of really close Christian friends who served as accountability partners.

My group of friends is kind of goofy. I just appreciate that we can have fun without doing things that are illegal or that are dangerous and we just do silly things. We go to the golf course and hang out and go on night walks. We enjoy life. It's been interesting trying to figure out groups of friends. I think this senior year has been kind of lonely in some ways because I lost so many friends that

graduated last year. I've always had two really good friends who are Christians who I've been able to have accountability with.

Relationships with Opposite Sex

Along with relationships with the same sex, high school relationships with the opposite sex become important and in some instances more important. My experience both personally and professionally, dating, or what your generation refers to as “hooking up”, is an extremely significant experience in high school. Many girls and some boys really get caught up in romantic relationships and almost develop their self-worth through these intimate or romantic relationships.

Sarah [sister] always tells me that I'm a really goofy, cheesy person. I call it romantic but that's okay. Naturally, I think as a girl we have that as a part of us that we want that kind of attention and especially if girls don't get it from their fathers or some other figure in their life. It's harder for us to just rely on our own self-worth and know that we are beautiful and that we are worthy of somebody important and that kind of thing. I think my dad did make me a pretty confident person but in a lot of ways just as you grow up you are self-conscious as a girl and you always want to look a certain way, act a certain way, and dress a certain way.

During middle school, you shared that you balanced your relationships with both girls and boys but felt pressured to date, despite this pressure you did not date until the end of your sophomore year. It was at this time that you experienced your parents' divorce. Your first boyfriend had been a friend since second grade. He too had experienced his parents' divorce and was struggling with depression. Although you did not share with me any certain criteria a boy had to meet in order for you to date him, you did mention this boy was a Christian or at least claimed to be a Christian, but in your opinion he really was not a Christian. You spent many hours on the phone with him as he was seeking help with his depression. You tried to convince him that you could not help him and eventually agreed that you were not healthy for each other so you both

decided to end the relationship. This was your first serious boyfriend and although it only lasted five months your time with him would impact his Christian walk later.

Probably about a half a year later, he asked to meet me at Starbucks and he was like, “Rachel, I didn’t think I’d ever tell you this, but you know, what you said to me about being a Christian made me realize that I was really missing something. Even though our relationship didn’t work out right I’m seeking God and I want that in my life”. He’s coming through his depression and he’s a lot better now. I mean that was definitely a learning experience because that was my first relationship basically.

I did not realize you had a serious boyfriend until you shared this with me during your third interview. I did not observe you with anybody on campus so assumed you were not dating. Your current boyfriend of two years graduated a year before you. He is a Christian and you met him through youth group. Like you, he has an interest in worship and leaves a few months after you to pursue a career with Hillsong School of Leadership in Australia. Despite what others have told you, you plan to maintain a long distance relationship. In some ways the boy you dated during sophomore year, prepared you for this relationship.

It’s an awesome relationship and I’ve grown a lot and he also struggles with depression and so obviously God has taught me a lot through that and I’m still learning a lot about that sort of thing and just being able to support him. I’m just learning a lot about how our love of God overflows and we love each other, take care of each other, and serve the world together. I don’t think a lot of people support our relationship just because we are trying a long distance thing...and it’s a high school thing is what everybody says. We’ve just really felt God’s presence in both of our lives and just the way it works together through the gifts God has given us.

In my experience as a counselor, I often see students; primarily girls give up their interests or goals to follow a boyfriend. For example, they pick a college based on where the boyfriend is going. Some give up awesome opportunities to stay near their boyfriend. Although you really care for Blake and your relationship is serious, you have both agreed that pursuing your individual dreams is important. This decision did not come easy

however, and you had your doubts about maintaining a long distance relationship. In fact you observed older friends leave for college in a committed relationship, but shortly after entering college were single so this concerned you. Another factor that has concerned you about a long distance relationship was your “love languages” of touch and quality time which would be rather difficult to nourish on two different continents. Despite your doubts and worries, you have both decided to attempt it and this new confidence in maintaining the relationship was a result of journaling, individual prayer, couple prayer, and solid communication. You understand that it is not going to be easy, but you have made the decision that your relationship is worth fighting for.

I think a reason that I’m very confident is because it’s almost been two years and probably like the last two months things have been really good with our communication, our friendship, and our discipline. I can see it is going to carry over because at first when we decided we were going to do this long distance thing it was kind of weird because neither of us could decide what we were doing, how we really felt about it. He’s always been pretty sure, pretty confident about it, but I was a little bit more doubtful. Over the last two months things have been better and I mean this in a modest way, it may not sound like it but our relationship is a lot more mature than probably 95% of the high school relationships that we see today. I know that we are both going to face a huge time of change and growing up and it’s a matter of doing that together or going separate ways with that. We’ll see and I’m ready for it.

You define your relationship with your boyfriend as very mature and it appears you have really invested time together by exploring your “love languages” and your individual “gifts” and how this all works together. Your exposure to the “love languages” happened while you were at breakfast with an older couple from church. This couple spent time teaching you and other young couples in youth group about “love languages” and how to enhance and make relationships stronger by knowing what each person needs to feel loved and validated. Along with exploring your “love languages” you looked at “gifts” and how each other’s gifts influence the relationship. You and

Blake share the gift of music and he took the initiative in discussing the role music would play individually and in your relationship as a couple. It is quite evident that you both invest a lot of time learning about each other which I find extremely mature because I doubt most others spend much time exploring “love languages” and “gifts” and the impacts they have on relationships.

We’ve done a few service projects together and it’s really cool because we have a lot of the same passions. I’ve realized, as I’ve seen other people’s relationships, that in order to really feel fulfilled in your relationship with someone it has to be that overflow in the love of God and if you are feeling content in serving God, doing the things that He’s called you to, and doing that with someone else that you love and care for then that team develops.

Prior to dating, you mentioned you felt insecure about the lack of attention you received from the opposite sex. You would question yourself and wonder if it was because you were Hispanic or not attractive enough. This puzzled you because although you had a lot of guy friends, they did not appear to be interested in you romantically. You attributed it to your assertive nature and felt you possibly intimidated boys with your confident disposition. In my role as a counselor, I often see girls lose their autonomy for a boy. They stop hanging out with both girl and guy friends and give up other interests in order to hang out exclusively with the boyfriend. They tend to change who they are to seem more appealing to the other person. You shared a story about how you did this very thing and it touched my heart to have you share this experience with me. It was during this time that I felt so connected to you.

It is easy to try and change who you are because you like that person. I remember my freshman or sophomore year there was one guy who I liked and he was into rock and roll and kind of the grunge sort of look. I totally, like looking back it is hilarious because I totally did [I laugh] start liking that music [giggle]. I’m like, “wait a second” [giggle]. I still like it but I don’t listen to it that much. It’s just funny [giggle] looking back at the things I did and how I use to want to get bands’ t-shirts because that’s what he wore [giggle] and those kinds of things. Yeah, it’s natural for us to like want to fit ourselves into a certain spot or to fill that space,

whether it's just friendships or if you are looking for a relationship. I think it definitely starts with at least realizing that you want to know yourself and you want to...I mean as a Christian be identified in Christ before you can date and before you can put your leaning on somebody else.

Although your parents are divorced and you spend time going between households, you feel a strong connection to your father who has been a major influence in your life. You feel affirmed by him and that has helped contribute to your confident nature and self-worth. Unfortunately for many adolescent girls, they do not receive this affirming love from their fathers or other significant family members, so they seek this love within an intimate relationship.

My dad was really affirming to me and my sisters as we grew up. I don't know if it's just a general dad thing it seems like it is but he's a critical person and he always has been. I mean as far as us as his daughters and as girls he was always real affirming with you are beautiful, you are loved, and we always felt that kind of love from my dad.

In all this you felt your dad was really affirming to you, but you still felt lost in how to appropriately deal with the opposite sex. You attribute this to your parents' divorce and the different parenting styles they exhibited. Because of their different points-of-view, you did not receive instruction on how to set appropriate boundaries and what to look for in a boy. In your early adolescent years, you were put in situations with older boys and you thank God for getting you through this difficult and confusing stage.

I think it was a blessing that God allowed me to get over that stage without really dating my freshman or sophomore year much because I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I didn't know how to choose somebody, how to treat people, and even how to treat myself in that manner. My dad would always joke and say you can't date until you are 35. Even though I knew he loved me and he told me that I was beautiful and my mom loved me and she was affirming me with my girl problems and that kind of stuff. I didn't actually know what it was like and I think that is one thing that I really missed out on in my high school years is you know getting those lectures, talks from my parents about how to do these things and what to look for.

Granted parents do not always know how to speak to their adolescents about this stage and this is unfortunate because it is a difficult stage for pre-adolescents and adolescents. As a high school counselor and a former middle school counselor, I observed girls being so infatuated with boys to the point of destroying themselves and relationships with others. You mentioned experiencing a little bit of this with older boys wanting to hang out but do not recall it being too distracting or unhealthy, but you do remember the middle and high school crushes and focusing on the wrong people.

The guy that I dated my sophomore year I had a crush on him for a long time. I think that was a lot of reason why I didn't really like in my head think about "is this the right person I should be dating". I think it was like you said an infatuation and so when he texted me and asked me out it was like, "Yeah!" you know the most exciting thing ever, but just those little things that are exciting at that point.

Albeit you did not receive much instruction on the dating process from parents, you did observe the difference in behavior with boys you went to church with and those who attended your school. You felt the boys in school were less mature and disrespectful to girls. You observed how those boys were "speaking wild" about girls at school that you did not hear happening in church. So although you did not receive the lectures from parents, your observations in youth group gave you some understanding.

I did get a little bit of that in a general spectrum through youth group which was good. I think that helped me realize as well the guys at church and at youth group were respectful. The girls always went first to get food, they always open the doors for you, and the way they treated and talked to you. They are still guys but they had something different and made you feel special when you were around those kinds of guys.

Later you reflected on the lack of guidance from your parents regarding dating and boundaries with the opposite sex. In fact you attribute the reason you did not receive much guidance was due to your parents' divorce and differences in parenting styles. You shared that your dad's parenting style was authoritative and your mom's was submissive.

Although their intentions were good, you wished they would have been on the same page and later realized your dad's authoritative approach was what you wanted and needed, although at the time you did not realize it. In addition your boyfriend, who was also from a divorced family, did not receive guidance from his mother with regards to boundaries and relationships. In summary you wanted firm guidelines from your parents in order to make decisions and choices, but without even a little guidance you really felt you had to figure things out on your own.

I just wish whether it's one or both of them that they would have just been very persistent on boundaries because I never realized how hard it was and like how much temptation there is. It's funny because I was talking to a friend about like my purity ring and how doctors never believe me that I don't have sex and that I shouldn't get this shot yet because I don't need it. Our culture is so beyond you know purity and I mean so many people are just thought of as crazy for saving themselves for marriage.

You received your first purity ring from your mother in seventh grade, but at that age you were not good with jewelry and lost it so you replaced it with a "cheaper" version. In throwing a snowball at your sister, your ring slipped off and rolled into the gutter. Eventually you got a third purity ring, but lost this one while swimming which was extremely upsetting to you. Your classmates questioned you about your ring and assumed it was a promise ring (which you consider a high school engagement ring). Although you did not openly talk about the significance of the ring, you felt it was a way to witness to others your decision to remain pure. Your most recent purity ring came with even more significant meaning.

There have been some cool opportunities and with one of my worse rings, my junior year, I left it in Mrs. Peck's class. It said purity right on it and somebody in class said, "That is Rachel's." It's nice that people knew I had one but this one I'm not going to lose. During that really hard time for us he [Blake] actually bought me this one which is really nice and it was really cool to have it come from him too because it was his commitment. Yeah, people definitely notice it

and it's a cool thing because they know I've been dating Blake for a while and it is a cool little witness thing.

As a high school counselor, students come to me to talk about their intimate relationships and a lot of them admit to having sex. In fact with each passing year, students tend to share more and more information about this part of their lives. They speak very openly about their sexual experiences and the parties attended where sex is rampant and public knowledge. During your time in high school, you felt it was a social expectation to make out with your boyfriend and if you did not you were looked down upon. Unlike most high school students, Blake and you spoke about the right time to kiss and how many months should you date before this happened. In doing this you were making sure no boundaries were crossed, and much to your relief Blake took a lead role in this.

He really took a lot of leadership in it which is exactly what I want and need because being that type of people pleaser person I have a hard time saying no and trying to decide within myself like what's right and what's wrong, where the line is, and those kind of things which is really hard. I remember student council retreats, high school trips, or things...it's almost like a mockery if you and your boyfriend don't make out. It's like why is that so wrong!

Despite the fact that you spoke about boundaries as a couple, in your opinion you did not spend enough time speaking about it. As your relationship progressed, both of you sought council from older adults in your church regarding boundaries and felt the time spent was valuable and helped you stay accountable.

I was seeking guidance from an older married woman as well and also with someone who is engaged now and so that was really helpful to have that accountability but also just that freedom to talk it out with somebody and not feel that judgmental thing. I feel like if I would have talked to my parents, I feel like I can, and I actually did talk to my dad quite a bit but then you kind of feel like well now they aren't going to trust me anymore. It was just a little bit, more different. It was really good and we kind of went through that stage probably about 6 months ago it was pretty tough, but I feel like now we have a pretty good grip on where we want to be and the balance and stuff.

Nevertheless, even after seeking counsel and communicating as a couple, you would face temptation. You attribute this to letting your guard down by allowing the busyness of life to take over as you recall being busy with school and Blake with work. Six months prior to this difficult time you spent time together reading the Bible, worshiping, and other activities which allowed you to spend time with God. You realized later that you had stopped carving out time to be focused on God, in turn allowing temptation to creep in. During this trying time, you became very upset with yourself, but eventually worked through it.

We were putting ourselves into temptation; very tempting situations and we weren't even trying to foster an environment where we would have somebody else around. There were a few times where I was done with this relationship and I was so upset at myself. I was like this isn't even worth it but by the grace of God and forgiveness both of us have really learned a lot of discipline and a lot of forgiving one another and learning how to move on. It is really natural and normal to feel that way and it's either two things it's either really hush, hush in the Christian circle or it's really like out right condemned to have a boyfriend and kiss him.

Rachel, to hear you talk and share such a private area of your story with me is overwhelmingly touching to my heart. I struggled with this area at your age and the difference is that I was not mature in my faith, nor did I seek help. Unlike you, I had premarital sex and gave birth to my son four months after graduation; looking back I so wish things would have been different for me. I thank God for my beautiful son, but I wish I would have been as confident and diligent as you. If I had realized that I could have found the love I so desperately needed in our Heavenly Father, there would have been no need to seek this attention elsewhere. It makes my heart happy for you that you are relying on your faith, seeking counsel, and making smart decisions that will reap positive implications for your future. I am so honored by your willingness to be open and honest about something so private and precious.

Relationships with Teachers/Counselor

I would say that along with the student body, the faculty knew you regardless of whether or not they had you in class, because of your role in student council. My first awareness of you (before I knew you were a Christian) was hearing you sing the National Anthem before sporting events; I also observed you in pep assemblies. Although you were not openly proclaiming your Christian identity, you felt it would be obvious to faculty based on your behavior, writings in class, and through conversations on various topics.

...like for my language classes in AP Comp or AP Lit I usually write from that perspective. I mean when I get a chance to free write that's what it comes down to and they like it when you make allusions for or like references to the Bible. I can do that fairly easily and so I think that also shows that, but I know in my science classes some of my teachers may or may not know because I've never been good in science. I think some of my teachers who I'm closer to would know obviously just from experience and I know like in my AP Psychology class the teacher knows because of some of our conversations. I don't think it's necessarily like I make a big deal about it. I mean I don't need to necessarily [be] like "oh, I'm a Christian" or anything like that. I think it naturally, it's a part of conversations sometimes when we talk about like development of people or we talk about evolution or it can be in anything like in my health class when we talk about abstinence a little. I think it can be applied anywhere and I don't know necessarily all my teachers know but I think they pretty much know that I'm an honest person. I think they trust me in that way which I guess would lead them to possibly think that I'm a Christian.

Although you did not share any reflections about teachers other than interactions with them in class, you did talk about your experience with your counselor. Initially you were not sure about sharing your desire to attend a Christian college. In your past experiences with a counselor, you felt they questioned you for wanting to attend a Christian college and basically told you to do better for yourself.

I always felt like it was kind of one of those things that I had to be shy about with my counselors [the fact that] I want to go to a Christian school. As I realized that she had the same beliefs, it became easier to talk about the options. I remember one time she encouraged me [with] "who has this in their hands, who has this

under control.” Those kinds of things just calmed me and made me realize that she was right and that not only did she have my back in certain situations but that I was protected.

As you realized your counselor was Christian, a safe environment was created and you were able to have discussions about your faith. You felt it was a blessing to have a counselor who was willing to allow you to bring your faith into the counseling relationship. Unfortunately in a public school setting, religion is often ignored or not addressed because of fear; however, your counselor fostered and embraced this part of your identity.

I didn't realize it at the time but just sitting in her office having those kinds of conversations was really valuable and really special because it's a public school. In a lot of ways it made things a little bit easier and it wasn't something that was like okay I'm checking in with my counselor because I have to. I'm just going to get in and get out. It was one of those things where it was an actual relationship and she actually wanted to know and I actually wanted her help.

Post-Secondary Planning

Second semester of your senior year was a busy time with making that final college decision, applying for scholarships and financial aid, and completing graduation requirements, all of which were extremely overwhelming. Although you did not go into great detail about your decision on attending Green University, your experience with Urbana during senior year was influential in your decision. At first you were not certain it was God calling you to this university or just your own excitement. You spent time questioning whether or not hearing about all the great things students did on campus was the reason you felt compelled to go, or if it was really God's purpose for you. In addition you questioned whether or not you were prepared to go or even if you were an appropriate candidate. Eventually you attributed your indecisiveness and worries to

emotions, but as you prayed about it and sought discernment from God you really felt this was where God was leading you.

So really learning to quiet myself and seek what God wanted and I mean it wasn't really an audible thing but it was definitely like that kind of gut feeling, like general impression that He had on me that was where I was supposed to be.

Urbana is an event that is held every three years. You had the opportunity to participate in this event your senior year. The target audience is college students, although they allow high school seniors to attend. The purpose is to bring college students together to focus on missions and to gather as a unified body, much like a high school youth event, and share how the Christian faith is imparted and experienced in the academy. Again, at this point your college selection was not finalized, but your experience at Urbana exposed you to how other colleges and college students lived out their faith and exposed the opportunities available to you as a college student. During this experience, much like your Covenant Heights and mission trip experiences, you continued to grow in your faith.

It was a really cool conference and it was really amazing to see a lot of different cultures because we did worship in all sorts of languages. There were a lot of different speakers from other countries and we studied John 1-4 so we talk a lot about being missionaries in our own neighborhood, how we are called to act, and how no matter where we live that is our mission field and even though it was a lot about overseas and cross cultural stuff I learned a lot about how we are meant to shine our light to the world and that sort of thing.

Although this message was not new to you, this experience provided you with another perspective on living your faith. It also reminded you how much Christ loves you and because of His love you in turn could share this same love with others whether through missions, campus ministry, or other outreaches. Through this you also learned about the living conditions of people in third world countries and how as Americans we always want the best, but do not need to live extravagant lives. You reflected on your life

because along with many other families, your family was experiencing some financial struggles and your participation in Urbana helped you cope with the pressure. You in turn used this as an opportunity to reach out to others faced with similar circumstances thus incorporating the most important concept you learned which was to be the “hands and feet of God”.

I think realizing the people who we live around, the financial situations of people. We don't need a comfortable life but if God gives us one then it's a blessing and we should use it to give back. My family was struggling a lot with financial things so [I was] learning to accept that and come along side others who were going through the same sort of thing.

High school seniors experience their second semester in many ways—sometimes with parental and peer conflict, academic stress and the transition of leaving high school, a place very familiar and over four years one you became accustomed to. The weeks leading up to graduation you felt very unstable and attributed it to confusion and fear about transitioning into college. You spoke about the stress of making sure everything was in order and that you were moving in the right direction. You were confident in your decision to attend Green University, but you were anxious about the coming changes, such as having a roommate and choosing a major. The final reality of leaving your family, especially your sisters, made you extremely sad.

Yeah, I was really feeling unstable because I remember I would cry pretty much every week which is weird, but that was resulting from I think a lot of fear and confusion and I think there was a lot of stress, a lot of anxiety, trying to make sure everything was done, and everything was kind of moving in the right direction. I think feeling this call to go to Green University was exciting in a lot of ways, it was also really scary, it was that paradox of emotions, and not knowing anybody that I was going to school with, what I was going to major in, and still not knowing that. It was all really confusing and while there were a lot of unsettled feelings, there was still a lot of confidence in what was going to happen. I think there was also a lot of sadness I remember talking to my sister and realizing I wasn't going to be there for these events and missing out in part of their growing up cause I feel like they are still so little even though they are getting there it's strange to be displaced from my family for a while.

Although you were feeling very emotional prior to graduation, the actual weekend of graduation you felt relaxed, happy, and relieved. Much to your surprise you did not cry! After graduation, you spent time looking at your senior pictures and reflected back on your time in high school. It had been your life for such a long time, but surprisingly you felt you had already moved on. You enjoyed celebrating this huge milestone with family and peers.

The actual weekend and day of graduation was joyful and exciting. I don't think I actually cried during graduation which I was surprised. Graduation was definitely really awesome and it was really cool to have that celebration with all my peers and family and that sort of thing.

I remember sitting with the rest of the faculty as you stood at the podium addressing your graduating class. I remember you were your radiant, beautiful self, I could sense the joy and the excitement you were feeling, and you mentioned "your maker" in your graduation speech. It was simply you being true and genuine. Again, it was not so much your words, but your actions that exuded the very message you wanted to get across—the love of Christ. During the last months of your senior year, you really sensed the urgency of drawing close to God and recognized the love He has for you. You felt this was a time everyone was questioning what purpose life holds for them and whether this was something they were going to address, because for you hearing God's purpose for your life is a reality.

I remember that I didn't plan anything and I decided I was going to get up there and kind of ad lib it. I wasn't really planning on anything big but, I also remember God spoke to me and he said this is an opportunity for you and whether or not you feel you've taken full advantage of every opportunity as student body president this is a time where you get to say what you want, how you want to your student body. It was really cool to use that time to encourage people. I don't know if it was slipping in or mentioning the love of God because it is something that matters so much right now. Whether they know what they are doing in the next few years that's what people question. Whether or not they address it in their own mind and whether or not it's something they want to face, it's something

that's reality. I think God really blessed it because I didn't get any bad or negative feedback from any of the administrators or anything for mentioning God, but it was pretty awesome to convey a little bit of His love.

Your reference to God as "your maker" in your graduation speech is more personal and intimate and reflected in that you see yourself as His workmanship. It was during this moment in time you were giving praise to God for all the blessings in your life. This was another opportunity to share your beliefs with others in a non-threatening way, as well as to communicate the complete trust you have in God.

I think God is an easy term to use because a lot of people will believe in a god of some sort whether or not they will go any further than that existence and the Bible says even the demons believe in God and shudder but they don't actually put their trust in God and I think there's a difference there.

After the celebration faded and life returned to normal, you saw the important details fall into place. One of your biggest concerns was financial but you would eventually earn a prestigious scholarship which solved the financial piece. Along with last minute details, you started the transition process of leaving the familiar and entering the unknown. As you dealt with all the changes, you knew everything was in God's control as long as you lived within His plan for you. You slowly experienced friends separating and going their own way, so you learned to find a balance between sharing time and letting go.

A lot of things came together and I felt God was really showing up, reminding me that He is in control, and that He will reward us when we want to follow Him. One of the huge things was definitely when the scholarship came around and realizing that was all taken care of which was affirming because that was definitely the thing to be worried about was money so that was very good. Just little by little seeing how relationships could change and still be positive and how the changes was a natural timing in everyone's life to move apart but also to still hang out a little bit so I think just finding that balance and learning how to accept the change [was important].

In your view, public school was a positive experience for you even though you swam against the “normal” current. It was a struggle not to throw in the towel and conform to the typical high school scene. You firmly believed the way you chose to conduct yourself in high school was congruent to your Christian faith, but it was not an easy decision to experience high school so differently than the majority of the student body. At times you felt attacked as a Christian and ridiculed for how you chose to live your life, but despite this you remained genuine in your walk.

I think one of the main things is the way my dad has been really influential in that way he’s told me in everything I do I’ve got to come through the bucking system. I think it’s been really hard because I am a people pleaser. I like people to like what I do and be accepted in that way, but what’s right isn’t always popular. I don’t know if it’s even something I can really explain I just think it’s just something like within me, it’s just that natural feeling of right and wrong, and there is benefit whether or not it’s always felt God works for the good of those who love Him. I felt rewarded in that way and I just felt blessed in a lot of ways.

As somebody who views themselves as a natural people pleaser, you did not compromise your faith to fit in. You found comfort because you did not give into the normal culture and environment of high school and you gained credibility as a Christian. Despite how your non-Christian peers viewed your behavior, you knew there was purpose to how you conducted yourself.

I think one of the main things is that people won’t always respect somebody who tries to please people and who does the popular thing that’s not respectable, but being okay with a very counter-cultural reputation has been something that I’ve held onto. . . .which is definitely more of a worldly thing, but it’s been something that’s made it a little bit easier. People expect me to live a certain way and that’s what I’ve made it to be and I think generally I wouldn’t like it if people expected me to do a certain thing, but when it is something that I know is right and is affirmed by what I study and learned then it can’t be wrong.

All in all, your experience at River Front was filled with the normal high school opportunities of social, academic, extra-curricular, and post-secondary activities. In all this your Christian faith was woven in and around these experiences the same way your

faith was a significant influence in your social network, the way you led in student council, interacted in the classroom, participated on the playing field, and made decisions. As you experienced high school and the relationships within high school, you realized your worldview differed from the worldview of many of your peers and teachers. In your experience your peers had a postmodern view that what is right for you is right for you and what is right for me is right for me, whereas your Christian worldview stemmed from absolute truth of right and wrong. Indeed your Christian worldview was the moral compass that helped you navigate through high school. Although at times it was hurtful to hear or see your Christian worldview attacked; you adopted the philosophy that it did not matter what people said or did because you were going to shower them with love regardless of their actions. For these reasons, God was using these four years of high school to prepare you for the transition into college.

I think at times I've become bitter by like the way Christianity has been viewed, the way that I've been treated, things that are said, or thrown out at me, but just having that purpose in life and where I am. I have this opportunity and really a blessing to be involved in a public school, which has been good. It's a realization that God gives you a certain gift and He gives you a place for your ministry. My dad always says God isn't a God of condition; He's a God of character. I think that means applying that to the way you treat people in general. I think another thing that my generation has is we aren't going to respect you unless you respect us. So that applies to teachers and to other students, just applying that love and respect to people whether or not you received it.

Post-Secondary Transition

After graduation you went on a mission trip and saw another opportunity for growth and new experiences. Along with four years of high school, this mission trip served as preparation for the next step—college. This trip was a much needed break from the craziness of senior year as well as another ministry prospect. This mission experience taught you about the power of God and the purpose He has for your life and you were

excited to see His hand in your life. It was extremely affirming that your choice in Green University was part of His plan for you.

I just learned a lot about the power of God and how we are invited to be a part of His plan in that sort of way and it was really exciting. I felt it was a perfect thing I needed after the busyness of the senior year, it was an exciting time of life, for a little bit I forgot I had graduated, and I was going to college. I came to realize that God was preparing me for it and that he held a purpose for me in this specific goal for where I was going to be at Green University next year so it was pretty exciting.

Although you do not know how God is specifically going to use you, you feel His passion and desire for you to use the gift of music in some capacity. During this time, you really saw music play out in youth group, your personal life, and church. You have this passion for music and worship and although you have not always realized its significance, you received confirmation from others on this trip that God had indeed blessed you with the gift of worship. You identify as a worship leader and see the value of worshiping God. Your worship has grown from being a religious practice into something spiritual.

There's a lady that we met on the mission trip who is with a group that we were working with and she really spoke into my life a lot, just very clearly from God telling me that God has given me the gift of music and he wants me to use that. Also just realizing God's power and even in the spiritual realm that our singing songs, our praises to Him, and every time we stomp our feet in a worship way is like declaring His ground. So even in the darkest places like on the Indian reservation I was on these crazy places that just seem to be lacking so much you are declaring God's ground and you are fighting for Him even if it is the simplest song we are singing so it's been really cool to see that. Also how God's used other people to speak into my life, encourage me as a worship leader, and how impactful it can be because sometimes it seems it's not doing anything or it's just one of those religious practices gone dry. This last week particularly, God just really showed me how He can fit His servants together to create something really great.

Although you are not sure what role, if any, worship will play in college you continue to surround yourself with it. You hope to find a campus ministry and church that you can

join, and you plan on teaching yourself guitar while at college. This new interest in guitar will be an opportunity to learn something fun whether you utilize it publically or not. You believe God will use this new interest in guitar to impact others. Surrounding yourself with music not only nourishes your passion, but it also provides you with a way to worship God.

I'm hoping there will be some sort of campus ministry, church I can get involved in that way, but even outside of that I think I'm excited to at least try to learn guitar and have something I can take out there with me and something I can do on my own time. Whether or not people hear that, how God can work through that. Just always bringing that mode of worship which I think will automatically show itself.

During our third interview, you had just returned from visiting your college. You felt intimidated and nervous about this transition and new chapter in your life, but you remained excited to be moving on. Your biggest concern was meeting others and feeling comfortable with new people and an entirely new environment and culture. As you spoke about this experience it reminded me of the excitement I felt when I transitioned from my home of 19 years to a major city and university. I was excited for you and anticipated our next interview wondering what you would share. At that point, you still had no clue whom your roommate would be. You picked your classes, a course load of 16 credits, were excited for first semester to begin, and not anticipating your first semester courses to be too tough.

Your interest in leadership continues to be a major theme in your life and during orientation you stumbled upon a leadership class, inquired about it, found out there was still room and decided to join the class. This class includes other students, faculty, and community leaders. As an avid reader, you purchased the book for this class and read it over the summer. In your opinion, the book was extremely informative but much to your

surprise more in tune with your leadership style. This book actually focused on ethics and integrity in leadership; two subject matters you tried to focus on in STUCO.

...it's actually really, really interesting and I've found a lot of leadership books to be kind of contrary to what I believe just as far as that kind of alpha dominant leadership idea but it's been really good. It talks a lot about different theories of leadership but right now it's about ethical stuff and how to lead ethically and how to be a leader with integrity and so it's really informative but it's not just like things I've already heard but it's a lot of in-depth things and practical ways to motivate people and to just inspire people but it also talks about service a lot. It has more of an emphasis on the follower mentality and so how a group of people can also lead rather than just one person.

Interestingly enough, this theory of leadership resonated with your leadership style and you determined then what role leadership would play in college. You decided you would take the follower role rather than the lead role you were accustomed to during senior year and learn from other people and "soak it in". Although you do not know where God is leading you, you hope to get involved in campus ministry especially worship and if other opportunities such as student government manifest, in your words, "it will be something I figure out as I go". You did research prior to and during your visit to educate yourself of possible campus activities and found a Christian ministry on campus.

I looked at what kinds of clubs they had and things they offered. I found a few Christian clubs they had, only one was on campus but I got in touch with somebody from there before as well. I got a feel for where everything was all the living places were and just the area around the school as well.

I remember how it felt to be in a strange place and the urgency to locate everything. You made it a point to do this during your orientation visit. You felt nervous in this strange environment because it was so different than your home town, but you felt prepared and confident for the college experience to start. Although you were excited to

be on your own and for the semester to start, you remained scared even though you felt ready.

In some ways I'm a little bit more nervous since I realized the environment that I'll be in and how different it is from what I've grown up in. I'm completely on my own in a lot of ways so that's kind of scary, but I'm feeling ready in a lot of ways for it.

For a lot of recent high school grads, the opportunity to have more freedom is awesome. I sensed your excitement but also your concern because you would no longer have the close proximity of family and church to hold you accountable. Your main concern was the campus environment and culture with it contrasting to the environment to which you were accustomed. Even though you encountered a clash with your Christian worldview and the secular worldview in high school, you were still anxious about entering the college culture. In high school you were countercultural but despite this, you believed it would be hard to carry that countercultural attitude into a new environment. Although you challenged the norm during high school, you were struggling with bucking the system in college and you likened it to internal warfare. In addition you wondered how you would handle living in an environment where you would face decisions whether or not to participate in activities that were clearly against your beliefs for the sake of making friends or fitting in. In your mind living in a dorm was not going to be as easy as living at home where you could easily shelter yourself from activities or people you did not want to associate with.

I think finding a support group because whether or not I had one in friends while I was here I always had my family right here. It will be hard to just figure that out at first. It's interesting compared to high school or any other kind of group environment that I've been in there's kind of like no restrictions on what you say or how you act. It's strange to go into an environment where everything is so free and people do whatever they want basically. I think in some ways it's going to be really hard. Just too really hold onto what I believe is right and wrong and to find people that have those similar beliefs. Everybody is in this unstable state,

everybody wants to impress people and make friends. I think being countercultural is kind of a difficult thing to do in that kind of environment but it will be really strange to experience people in that kind of state where nobody is really holding that much back in that way.

In the same way image was important in high school, you felt it would be equally important in college but not so much as a matter of fitting in, but rather in displaying a positive Christian image. In other words, if students learn that you are a Christian then you should conduct yourself accordingly, otherwise you send a false picture of what you stand for. In your opinion if you are going to say you are Christian then you need to be careful with what you support and what you do not support because people will call you on it. In speaking with your sister, she shared her thoughts about this very subject:

In high school everybody is so concerned about their image and what people see them as and I was talking to my sister and she's only a junior but she's like, "I realized that the Lord is calling me to forget how people see me and just to live for Him regardless". I wish I would have seen that my junior year because it's a daily struggle I mean every time you get dressed, every time you walk the hall it's kind of like how are people going to see me? Whether you are nervous about it, confident, or you are faking confidence there's something you are portraying, so I guess in college I would hope to portray a very genuine faith.

Interestingly enough between our third and fourth interview, you spent time alone because many of your friends had already started school, your sisters were in school, and your parents and boyfriend were at work. For the first time in four years, your once very hectic social and academic calendar was open. At first, you were uncomfortable with this down time because you equated it with worthlessness and loneliness because you were committed to nothing. Conversely, this alone time that you first perceived as a curse, gave you the opportunity to renew, prepare, and confront your anxieties about the uncertainties of college. It was during this time that you discerned from God to embrace the calm before the storm.

Slowly in time, probably over the course of one week the Lord taught me that it was a blessing and it was a time for me to relax and get ready because once school starts it's going to get busy. So it was really a blessing to spend time with Him and to spend time just on my own reading and learning. I read a few different books about different things some pleasure reading as well as this leadership book and just a really good time of reflection. Right after orientation I was pretty shook up and nervous about what I was going into but the Lord gave me a peace about it and I'm really excited to start now.

We met on a Tuesday for your fourth interview and you left for Green University the following Sunday with your mother, sisters, and grandma who joined you for the mini road trip. This was a great way to transition to your new home and spend some much needed quality time together before the semester started. You looked forward to this time with your family, knowing it would be hard to say goodbye, but also knowing your roommate would move in, classes would start, and things would just "start rolling". You worked your last days at Joann's, your items were packed, excitement was in the air, and you felt at peace with moving forward. The nervousness and anxiety about transitioning were replaced with an entirely different feeling, which in large part stemmed from the time you had spent alone. "I'm pretty excited. I'm not nervous anymore but I'm a little bit sad just a little sentimental about leaving and pretty much all packed up so that's a little different feeling."

Your roommate was still in question at this time. Although you grew up with sisters and obviously knew how to share and deal with different personalities, you were still worried about your roommate. In fact you spent time in prayer about this person and also prayed about other people you would interact with, one being your Fig leader which you explained was like a RA (Resident Assistant), but rather for classes. You were assigned to a cohort with other students who shared similar classes and this Fig leader would oversee this group.

Yeah, I met her on Facebook a couple weeks ago and she seems really cool. She seems easy to get along with and it's an answer to prayer that she doesn't drink or anything like that. I don't know if she is a Christian or not. We haven't really talked that much but even another answer to prayer is that my Fig leader (kind of like a RA for a few of my classes) she's a Christian and we've contacted each other through email a few times so it's pretty cool.

As an extremely mature Christian, you understood the importance of putting on the full armor of God as stated in Ephesians 6:10-17. You were fully aware that temptations would be readily available in your new environment and through life experience you recognized the constant battle between right and wrong. In the same way you surrounded yourself with other Christians during high school, you sought to find a group of friends with your worldview in college. Recognizing the responsibility was on you to spend time with God you consciously looked for opportunities, such as church and a campus ministry group, to keep you accountable.

I think just getting into a routine but also just very conscious about spending time with the Lord. I know that's going to be hard, it's always been hard but I mean when I'm on my own I definitely think that's something that's a priority for me. I also need to get a job and a few other technical things. I thought a church was a big deal but thinking about it, it's really more important that I find a campus group because Sunday at church is really different from a friend group of college kids that I can meet with and talk with. I do want to find a church within that first month though well maybe not the first month but I want to test out a few churches and then I want to find a good campus group that I can get hooked into. It will be weird trying to find one and testing them and deciding yes or no to each one.

In your search for a campus support group, you contacted a representative from InterVarsity who informed you of the opportunities to participate in Bible studies. At that time you were not sure if you would participate or lead one. In addition to InterVarsity you planned on expanding your gift of worship by learning how to play guitar.

College: First Semester

We met at Starbucks for our final interview and although Christmas was two days past there was still excitement and good cheer in the air. On this particular day it was

busy but we soon found ourselves deep in conversation about your first semester at Green University. You were your usual happy and energetic self and I felt like you were excited to share your new experiences and I was definitely eager to listen as we enjoyed a hot latte.

You were extremely busy your first semester, but it went well and you felt like you grew a lot, although the transition proved harder than you thought it would be. In particular you were overwhelmed with establishing a group of friends and a support group [for fellowship], good mentors, learning to balance social life with academics, and taking care of other items such as financial aid. Much to your surprise you wished your parents were with you to offer help and support.

I expected it to be an easy, smooth transition. I knew it would be a little more difficult than other things but I didn't expect it to be so much at once. So many different things, it wasn't bad and I never really felt like I needed to come home but there were times when it would be nice to have my parents help me with this. I never thought I would have to say that. It's just harder to try and book everything in as well as keep up on all my school and stuff.

One of your most stressful times came during mid-terms. You were dealing with the stress of studying as well as trying to handle a situation with your financial aid. For some reason, your full-ride scholarship had not come in and the financial aid office was ready to charge you tuition. You spent time on the phone with somebody in Denver and the financial aid office at Green University. Although this was a very frustrating ordeal, everything worked out and this experience proved to be one of many learning opportunities.

Surprisingly you never felt homesick even with the intense stress of finals week. By then you were ready to come home, but never felt like you needed to come home. You were amazed at your courage to go to Green University without Blake and pursue

your dreams, and you realized that doing this was good for your relationship. Now, Blake will be leaving to pursue his dream and you are feeling very blessed with all the new opportunities despite the initial difficulties. In your opinion exposure to these opportunities and to a diverse campus filled with a variety of different people resulted in a more open mind and development of your own ideas.

It's been really cool because for so long people told you what to believe and what to think and for once I'm feeling like it's okay to question them but it's still hard to find how to do it exactly. Even theology and things that I believe as a Christian, I'm starting to draw from different sources from the books I'm reading, from my Early Judaism professor, who is a Christian, and also from like my pastor at church. They are two very, very different figures but being able to draw from what they know as experts and feel my way around my own beliefs, create things for myself, and define things which has been really cool.

Fortunately you found a group of friends through the campus ministry and you see these individuals in class as well as in the dorm. Two particular friends are in your Early Judaism class and come from your same background. You realized they were Christian based off a conversation about the Old Testament in a study group. After class, Bay invited you to InterVarsity, which is a campus ministry. You would run into John there and eventually you formed a group that met for dinner before InterVarsity weekly as well as attended church together on Sundays.

God has been really good because I have a friend John who came to school with about the same background I have and about the same place spiritually. Going through one of our classes, Early Judaism, we've had a lot of big theological questions and talks. He and I have always been on the same page, really good friends, and able to mull over that kind of stuff together. Bay kind of had an idea of how everything [the Bible] worked as well as that church background.

Prior to leaving for Green University one concern was in wondering who your roommate would be. You eventually made a connection with her prior to classes starting which eased your mind. As your roommate, Ashley, is from the area; you met her parents and even went with Ashley and her family to a Green University football game.

Although you are very different from Ashley, you find her to be a sweet and a cool person. Living in a limited amount of space, such as a dorm room, comes with many adjustments so you are learning how to be tolerant of your differences. For example, she enjoys music and TV so it is always on; however, this contrasts with your learning style. Although you like to listen to music, it is sporadic so learning how to adjust to a different lifestyle has brought much growth.

I was getting frustrated at the end of the term because I felt like I could never really study in my room and it was this weird balance of it's your home but it's also my home. The Lord just reminded me of the impact I can have as her friend but also a leader in our relationship. She comes from a background where she would go to church with her parents every once in a while but it wasn't really like anything [real] for her.

One of your goals prior to arriving at Green University was to work on being more inclusive and you spent much time reflecting on this. Ashley is a naturally shy person and you noticed she was spending a lot of time in your dorm room so you reached out to her and invited her to your Bible study group. She later thanked you for including her in your activities which was a positive sign to you because it was hard to live with someone and be friends. Later in the semester Ashley lost her grandmother so you wrote her a note and really encouraged her to get connected with your church. It was touching to hear how you continued to reach out to others in need and through notes expressed that love, concern, and service to others.

I always invited her to church but she was really reluctant for a while and then her grandma actually died a couple weeks before finals. I invited her to come to church with us and wrote her a note and she decided to come after that. She started coming to church on Sundays and hanging out with the people from the Bible study and she really liked it, felt like she could be involved, and get to know people. I think that was good for her.

Along with developing your support group of friends you found a church. In your shopping and interviewing for churches you finally settled on a church with a balance of

college students, families, and the elderly. This is a new church and meets at a local middle school not far from campus. The pastor formally served as an InterVarsity pastor so he helps create a cool environment and perspective on worship. You are getting used to the idea of attending a new church. You welcome the “homey” environment and appreciate the way they incorporate the Bible into the service as they work through scripture. It is awesome to see how God led you to a church that helped foster your growth with the Bible because although you knew the importance of getting into the Word, it was at times a struggle for you.

Probably one of the biggest adjustments for you was dorm life. Even though you grew up with sisters and learned to share this was an entirely new experience especially since it was a co-ed dorm. In fact the students next to your room on the right and left were boys. You shared this was interesting because on one side you had loud hip hop music and the other side constant video game playing. This new experience of sharing space with wild boys was interesting and you enjoyed meeting different people and having fun in the process.

On your campus, much like many public universities, there are not many restrictions. Every Thursday-Saturday you could expect some partying which was intriguing to you. Although there was much partying going on, it did not interfere with your studying. From the way it sounds, although students partied they remained respectful to the other students in the dorm and they made every attempt not to get into trouble. One night one of your friends gave you quite the scare because she was supposed to meet you at your dorm but she did not show. You would discover she had

been drinking and managed to get sick. You shared that observing and being around students drinking made you sad.

When I first got on campus, more so than now, I was really curious, not like I was going to go out and do anything wild or anything but like what is this and why does everybody seem to do it, literally like everybody. Maybe there are four people on my floor I know that don't really drink, but it's very different and I can see why people do it. It is sad because people really can get themselves in trouble. I'm grateful that our floor is pretty close because they kind of take care of each other but sometimes you just walk into the bathroom and people are puking all over the place and it's like this just doesn't look like any fun.

In your observation students drink to help ease the social aspect because either they are uptight or shy. Naturally when a student is under the influence they are more social and friendlier. You actually experienced students' behavioral changes when they were drinking and even caught yourself liking one individual better drunk. Another reason you believe students drink is because of their new freedom from the watchful eyes of parents.

The people on my dorm floor who are so uptight and shy but then it's like they are drunk and they are crazy, talking to everybody, they are all over the place, and I'm like wow. I actually caught myself once thinking I like her a lot better drunk because she was so mean to me otherwise. Yeah, a lot of different reasons but I can see why people especially people with uptight parents and rules from home kind of get that independent high and want to go crazy.

In all this craziness of dorm life you experienced much growth including becoming more independent by living on your own. Although you felt you were already good with people, you learned how to deal with a much more diverse group of people by embracing them for who they were. Along with learning how to relate with others, you learned how to be content with who you are. Initially when you arrived on campus you felt very insecure about your knowledge of pop culture because this seemed to be the topic of conversation. You found yourself engaged in conversations about the latest movies, music, and television shows but as you rarely spent time doing these activities

you did not have much to contribute. This bothered you and I even sensed this while you were sharing this experience with me.

I just remember feeling so insecure. I was so lost because how am I supposed to make friends with these people. I really felt like I couldn't relate with anybody that was the main problem like all these movies that came up. I've seen maybe one movie that the rest of you have seen. The music, there wasn't any of the same stuff and I don't watch any TV shows so what do I talk about with you? I felt at a disadvantage because I didn't know anything. I was struggling a little bit with my innocence because not really being that cultured and I don't know who the movie stars are and just stupid things but it was really bugging me.

This situation ate at you and you sought advice from Becca, your best friend on campus. She suggested that you expose yourself to what other people were watching so you could familiarize yourself with the latest information. You thought this was a great idea and you were super excited about it. Later you shared this with Blake and he cautioned you about this and told you to really think about what you were saying. He told you to keep your mind pure, not engage in these activities just because others were, and that there were other ways to communicate with people. You were upset by his advice and became confused and frustrated with the whole situation, but finally decided you needed to relax and think this through alone without seeking anyone's advice. After time in prayer, you found the contentment to be okay that you were much like Paul writes about in Philippians 4:11-13.

I thought about it and I prayed about it for a couple days. I was like, "OK, there needs to be a balance here". You can't totally conform just to be friends with people because being a servant to them, as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, doesn't mean we have to talk about stupid things like movies. It really doesn't, showing them love and respect, and being different, and being OK with that. I realized that I've been refined to the point where I'm really okay with who I am and even with Blake. I just remember saying, "I'm really okay with our relationship and I don't feel like I need to try anything here, I don't need to impress anybody here, and I [am] okay with being in my room on a Friday night and just hanging out with a few friends". It's really comforting that the Lord gave me peace and confidence.

First semester classes went well and you were pleased with your final grades. Indeed you found your classes challenging and spent a great amount of time studying especially during mid-terms and finals. During our conversation about classes, you spent a great deal of time talking about your Early Judaism class. This class was a last minute selection on your part, but ended up being a pretty profound class that resulted in you questioning how you viewed your Christian faith. Your professor, who you later found out was Christian, spent a great deal of time talking about the Old Testament, and what he shared led to many questions and confusion. You and your friend John spent time speaking about what you heard in class and then you would both set up appointments to meet with the professor.

I started realizing the history of the Jews was really foundational for what we believe as Christians. We were talking about the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, a lot and so that was before the midterm and it was really different than I heard it before especially from like a scholarly aspect. Some of the things he was saying were kind of like tripping me out and I was like, "What? Are you sure about that?" It was really weird it was a little bit earth shaking and so that's really why my friend John and I were like, "have you ever thought about that like this or did you hear him say that in class?" Sometimes we would leave class and we were both like "Oh, my goodness" and so then we would both setup an appointment with our professor and talk.

What you learned in this class impacted your prayer life and time in the Word. You felt like you were growing in your knowledge and you saw things from a different perspective, but also felt like you were on a slippery slope of confusion. At first you did not want to read your Bible, nonetheless you started reading through the Gospels and added Romans 2. As a result of this class, you read the Bible differently but found what you learned in class was really helpful and you felt good about it. After spending time with different people while home on break, you realized you were so busy with school

that you had lost your focus on nurturing your faith by spending time in prayer and reading your Bible.

I didn't even realize it because I had been so crazy in my head but over break I tried to avoid a little bit of the facts and scholar stuff and tried to get back on track with simple faith because those two things definitely battle when you have a lot of one or the other.

Along with the Early Judaism class, you enjoyed the leadership seminar you participated in prior to classes starting. You were exposed to numerous leadership theories and guest lectures. You particularly enjoyed the guest lectures and even felt inspired which proved to be eye opening for you. In this leadership seminar you gained new perspectives on leadership, in particular the idea of the follower as leader. During high school, you spent the majority of your time in a key leadership role which resulted in a high profile so many people knew you and you were constantly busy. This was a drastic change from what you were currently experiencing and at one time you felt all alone on campus.

I had to remind myself while I was there, that was definitely one of them like, "it is okay, Rachel, just let it happen it's your first term, just sit back" as well as, "it's okay to be lonely". I knew that was going to happen but you lose track of that while you are in the moment. There was one moment I remember I was walking into class and I was like, "Gosh, it is so hard to not really know people". Almost instantly the Lord reminded me, "I prepared you for this". And even though it doesn't help that much really it's a comforting thought to know I was ready for this. I knew this was going to happen and I'll get through it. Yeah, it's definitely been a soaking it in time.

I remember during your fourth interview how you expressed that alone time with God and the importance for you to have that time with Him while everyone else (sisters and mom) continued to go through the normal beginning of the school year routine. You even expressed how weird it felt that you did not have to do all that and I believe you

even mentioned the loneliness, but God was truly preparing you for your first term. It is awesome to hear how that time was essential for a successful first semester.

Although you are still undecided on a major, you will take some courses in Planning Public Policy and Management, Family and Human Services, and general education courses. You are working on a minor in Spanish. At this time you are contemplating a career in the structural part of non-profits. In total you are signed up for 16 credits spring semester and according to you, “I don’t have to take any math ever which is probably the greatest thing that has ever happened to me!” In addition you landed a job in a law firm as well as accepting a position of Resident Assistant (RA) for next year. These opportunities did not come until after our last interview, but you did provide me with the honor of writing you letters of recommendation. I am confident you will succeed at both.

In our last interview you only spoke of one professor, your Early Judaism professor. You respect him and he is clearly challenging the way you view Christianity. Along with your friend John, you spent time with this professor outside of class questioning him about his lectures. This professor is the head of his department, extremely busy, but he takes time to meet with you which you truly appreciate. Interestingly enough in all your readings, you read *The True Story Book*, about a college student who would spend time with his professor talking theology. For you it is a dream come true to have this same experience and opportunity with this professor.

I think he understands where John and I are coming from, and obviously, I think he’s been there before. Where he’s at this in between stage of, ‘I’ve had this faith for a long time, but now I’m challenging it a little bit, poking it, and prodding it,’ and so I think he really understood where we were coming from. He was really a down-to-business guy, but I could tell that he enjoyed having some people that he could just talk freely to and not try to hold anything back. It was really cool.

In addition to dorm life, classes, classmates, and professors, you spoke about the college campus and surrounding community. On your first visit to campus you were drawn to the beauty of the campus and after classes started you were amazed by how alive the campus felt. You spoke about the students walking and biking to classes, people handing out flyers, the random preachers, and the diverse activities in the Amphitheatre. Unlike your hometown the surrounding community is active, bustling, and thriving with night life and college activities. Although you have not sat in the student section at a football game, you attended a game with your roommate and her family. All these experiences and opportunities added to the excitement of college and living away from home for the first time. As we sat drinking our lattes and talking, I could hear the excitement in your voice. You were happy, excited, and looking forward to the next semester. You explained your new environment in this way, “The streets get all full of people trying to ride their bike and people walking to class, it is magical”.

With transition come many life changes, adjustments, and decisions. One of the toughest decisions was whether or not to maintain a long distance relationship with your boyfriend, Blake. You spent many hours thinking and praying about your relationship and how your move to Green University would impact this very strong, loving, and respectful relationship you so carefully cultivated and nourished. Blake visited you one weekend and it was good for him to see your campus, dorm, and meet the people you hung out with. It has not been easy and you received critical messages about your relationship, primarily from guys on campus about how silly it was to think your long distance relationship would last. Despite this negativity you and Blake learned to adjust

how you communicated and expressed your “love languages” although you were thousands of miles apart.

It’s been really good, we’ve grown a lot, and even [in] our communication. I had a friend out there ask me once what my love languages were and I completely left out touch. I completely forgot about it, but it used to be one of the biggest things for me. It was weird because I was, “Well, words of affirmation and quality time” and that’s it. It’s definitely different but we’ve learned to display affection in different ways, send meaningful emails, and dedicated time on Skype. We have one day a week that we Skype for a couple hours.

On the whole you are thriving in academe. With anything new, it takes time, some adjustment, moments of frustration, loneliness, craziness, but with all this comes new friends, opportunities, learning, and most importantly growing. You have found time to learn how to play the guitar as a form of relaxation. Your roommate, Ashley, was the benefactor of hearing the new songs you learned to play and sing. In addition you contributed to the campus ministry worship team. One of your goals for college was to portray a genuine faith on campus. It seems you are creating this environment and obtaining the resources such as campus ministry, church, and other Christian friends to help you achieve your goal. With any goal, there are bumps in the road, hurdles to jump, and lessons to learn. In my opinion, Rachel, you continue to observe, understand, listen, encourage, and embrace people with an open mind and much love in your heart—you strive to be different and you continue to further His kingdom.

It’s definitely that idea of being comfortable in my own skin and being OK with who I am. I’ve realized I expected a lot out of the campus ministry to propel a lot of that, like ‘Yeah, this is what we do as a group’ and I still want to see more of that. Really a lot of it is being an individual, an individual who lives what I believe, has integrity, and lives among a bunch of other people, but is different, and is OK with that. In my Judaism class I learned there’s just no way to fit in. I’m a Christian there’s just no way because it’s different.

High School Reflection

As you spent time reflecting back on high school, it was natural to think about would haves, could haves, and should haves. For four years, you walked the halls of River Front High School and it was a huge part of your life. Your experience was filled with triumphs and trials, but overall you enjoyed high school. You hope that your leadership in student council influenced positive change. As a faculty member, I believe your leadership did impact change because student council is taking a different shape, a shape more aligned with your vision of an ethical student council demonstrating integrity in their leadership of the student body. You were excited to hear that a Fellowship of Christian Athletes was launched at TV which was indeed an expansion of Fellowship of Christian Students of which you were a key and significant contributor. Although there were things you wanted to introduce in FCS, you did not feel the support of other students.

I heard this year that a Fellowship of Christian Athletes got started and that has nothing to do with me but I'm glad that there is an expansion of what we already had going with the Fellowship of Christian Students. It's step by step; if there hadn't been a Fellowship of Christian Students then maybe there wouldn't have been a Fellowship of Christian Athletes that's now really great. It's the little building blocks of inspiring people to lead, step out, and to do things that they know need to be done whether or not it's accepted right off the bat.

As a Christian you wish you would have reached out a little bit more and forced yourself to be involved in activities that pushed you out of your comfort zone. In reality I think you did participate in a significant activity such as student council which was definitely out of your comfort zone. During our fourth interview, you spoke about image and how students place a tremendous emphasis on self-image. On one occasion you sat in the school parking lot waiting to pick up your sister and as a former grad you were sad at the realization that students desperately want to fit in and even put up with negative

behaviors such as bullying for acceptance. You spent time watching students interact with other students and your observation validated the significant value placed on image and acceptance. You shared your observation:

...just simple things like the way guys would treat each other, the more cool guys would pick on the less cool guys, but they wouldn't say anything because they want to be tough enough. The girls who would wear certain things or the way they act towards guys or towards each other. The girls who ignore certain girls and it seems so petty but it is so real, it's your reality when you are in high school because you know it's that image thing, it's so big.

Along with image comes acceptance, you spent much time reflecting on students who were lonely or lacked friends in high school. Unfortunately there are students who are loners in high school and if there was one place where you would do things differently it would involve reaching out to this population. In your words you wished you "would have been confident, brave, kind enough to reach out to people who were lonely and afraid". In fact you encouraged your sister and other friends in high school to do the same.

...not to care so much about what people think and befriend the people that need friends ...just love people, not care who sees you sitting where, where you're sitting when, who you're sitting with, what they look like, and what you look like. It's weird, it's funny how automatic that is for us to just classify people and just stereotype people.

In addition to reaching out to others, you wrote a letter to your youth group encouraging them to take full advantage of high school and to enjoy the time. In your opinion students are too busy thinking about getting out of high school and do not spend enough time thinking about the opportunities currently available to them. Rachel, your advice to your youth group is excellent. I agree that unfortunately students are in a hurry to grow up and they do not enjoy this time to explore different opportunities, learn, grow, and embrace the four years called high school.

Finally, you spoke about the counseling department and how you did not realize what a great resource it was until your senior year when you were heavy into the college admissions and scholarship process. You were grateful to your counselor for the role she played in helping you navigate through all the decisions you faced as a senior.

In summary you viewed your freshman year as preparation for your commitment as a Christian, leader, and member of youth group. Freshman year was a time of discovering your group of friends. In your opinion sophomore through senior years were the most influential in your maturity and growth. You experienced your parents' divorce, engaged in opportunities such as FCS and youth group, and served as a leader in student council. In all this you felt the Lord taught you a lot and you matured especially in your senior year through preparation for college, spending time with God, and developing that personal relationship and discipleship. In my time interviewing you I shared key words and phrases that came to mind when I thought about you: disciple of Christ, independent but yet dependent on Christ, daughter, sister, friend, musician, Latina, confident, leader and one constantly learning and growing. You would respond by saying:

I think that they are very flattering. It's cool to reflect back with you about all these different things, but thinking [about] the way I've been raised and all the things that have happened in my life. Looking back I'm amazed that without the bumps or with the bumps I guess and all the different things that have happened I'm really blessed to be where I am right now. Things are really good and there's always the hardships and stuff.

In summary, you said it was interesting to look back, look forward, and take in everything about being a Christian from middle school to first semester of your freshman year in college. In addition you enjoyed taking in the whole picture of where you fit in with regard to your school, community, and family. Rachel, without your willingness to participate this dissertation would not happen. I appreciated your honesty and trust in

me. The time I spent with you went beyond this dissertation because in reality you were helping me reflect on my Christian walk. You taught me to appreciate life and people. You reminded me that the most important relationship is our relationship with Christ and by developing and fostering this relationship we can in turn share His love with others. I am so proud of you, Rachel; you continue to lead a genuine Christian faith by loving and respecting others unconditionally. I have no doubt that someday you will stand before our King and He will say, "Well done, my faithful servant, well done!"

Blessings,

SERENITY'S STORY

April 15, 2011

Dear Serenity,

When I started my dissertation journey I wanted you as one of my participants because of my prior work with you. Earlier in my graduate school experience I took a Narrative Inquiry research class and interviewed you for one of my assignments. It was at this time I first heard of your Christian walk at River Front High School. Another Christian student referred you to me during your freshman year. Over the next four years I observed and interacted with you, primarily as you interacted with other students at Fellowship of Christian Students.

You were gracious enough to accept my request to interview, and your father gave his permission. We agreed to meet at his office because your home is located quite a distance from school and since I did not know the roads, your family was worried about my commute back and forth. Although I did not have the opportunity to interact with you in your home, your father's office provided us a quiet space to spend time together.

Albeit you are an extremely positive and caring person, I sensed your quiet, cautious, and reserved demeanor. It was as if your protective walls were up as we spoke; it was not until you started sharing your story did I realize the deep hurt you encountered with others as well as your internal struggles. I was rather caught off guard by your story because I had no idea how lonely at times your walk was at River Front. How you shared

your story was not how I perceived you on campus. As we spent time together, I realized the important details you guarded about your life, but cautiously shared with me. We began with your relationship with God, how it developed, progressed, and influenced your experiences with relationships, school, and post-secondary transition.

Relationship with God

You accepted Christ as your Savior when you were a little girl but would make him “Lord of your life” at age 11. It was at a church camp the summer prior to sixth grade where you felt you met Him as your personal God. He became more real to you, meaning your understanding of Him went beyond logical to relational. You realized there was more to Jesus than just Bible stories. Previous to this experience you understood Him to be your Savior, but at this camp you realized He wanted more, in fact He wanted an intimate relationship with you.

I went to a camp and really met God as a personal God, which was a totally new experience for me. So it was meeting Him face-to-face, having Him know me personally, and show me things about my life. After that camp, I decided I wanted Him to be Lord of my life, and I wanted to be known as a Christian.

You sensed His presence during worship and heard Him speak personal words of encouragement into your heart. It was at this time you realized how desperately you needed Him in your life and how His presence provided peace, joy, and love. As your Savior, He died on the cross to forgive your sins and He gave His Holy Spirit to help guide you as a Christian.

This camp experience came about the same time your mom was diagnosed with cancer, and you felt God gave you peace about the future. You did not speak any more about your mom’s bout with cancer, but I know she is alive and well as I see her at school functions displaying a pleasant, exuberant, and healthy disposition. Along with feeling

God's peace, direction, and love, camp provided you with the opportunity to meet other Christian preadolescents. You were excited to see other Christians your age who loved God and invited His presence into their lives.

It was God himself meeting me during worship. His presence being there, hearing Him speak personal words of care into my heart, and also seeing other Christians and people my own age was really cool, who loved God and had [Him] working powerfully in their lives that was really significant too at that camp. [Also], care and peace about the future because right around that time my mom was diagnosed with cancer. It was cool to see God give me peace and love that was definitely supernatural.

Your personal relationship with God meant He would always be with you and that He loved you deeply. You became His child and He wanted you to know the power of His presence in your life. Seeing other Christians your age experience this deep relationship with God made you realize there were others with whom to fellowship, share God's love, and support one another.

After your camp experience your faith would play a significant priority in your life. Your family actively searched for a new church because your current church did not have enough kids to make a strong group, and you did not want to lose ground on pursuing your faith. Along with changing churches, you made deliberate and conscious decisions about your peers. Despite making wise decisions about peers, you would still struggle because your friends did not know how to help you deal with your mom's cancer. For example when you were depressed and struggling with her illness, they responded by pulling away so you turned to God. You would see your middle school years as that time when God quenched your loneliness.

God was my best friend, constant friend during that struggle and there were a lot of times when I was really sad, but again his presence was really real to me during that time. His love sustained me, kept me going, and filled me when I was empty.

In your daily walk with God you prayed, read devotions, spent time with Him, and asked Him for direction primarily for accountability. You did not want a stagnant relationship with God rather a growing relationship. You spent a significant amount of quiet time with God discerning His purpose and direction for your life. You asked Him to reveal areas in your life that He wanted to change or reveal about Himself.

I do have my set devotions but then there's a lot more than that. I mean there's the time where I focus my heart for the day, keep Him in my knowledge, but then there's through the day praying or spending time alone with God or worshiping. Making sure I have other times as well to sit and listen, listening through the day for Him to direct me, Him saying, "I really want you to take some time with me, I need you to talk with me, and with other Christians" that's definitely a way I fellowship with God.

Within your personal relationship with God came discipline and obedience to do His will rather than your own. This is a struggle at times because you are leery, lack trust, or want to control the situation. You decided if your walk with God was important enough, you had to give Him complete control despite the cost. However, this was easier said than done as you experienced pain, change, and uncertainty when you relinquished control. In the end you found peace by trusting in Him rather than mulling the situation over-and-over in your mind. You attribute the difficulties and hardships in your life as God's way of teaching you to trust Him. Serenity, life is filled with struggles, obstacles, disappointments, and adversity, but God uses these hard times to work in our lives and show His power to help us overcome these burdens.

I think He has given me a lot of things out of my control just to teach me to trust Him more, things that there is no way that I could control anyways. I have to choose if I'm going to be worried and upset about things or if I'm going to let the Lord speak to me about things.

In relinquishing that control you have been very honest with God and spend time talking to Him about your feelings whether they be anger or sadness. Often you do not

understand the direction He is taking you, but you obey nonetheless. Listening, patience, and obedience are essential in surrendering control to Him. It is a conscious choice you must make every day to fully surrender to Him, let Him guide you, and deepen your relationship with Him. On the other hand there are situations in your life where you had no say in the matter, for you this would be your struggle with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Relationship with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

You shared with me that you were diagnosed with OCD at the beginning of your junior year. Initially you were struggling with depression but would later be diagnosed with religious OCD so you were prescribed medication, which would prompt some bipolar episodes. At the time of the interview you shared that your bipolar episodes stopped and although you do not know your true diagnosis, you are no longer seeing a doctor due to cost. Receiving this diagnosis initiated the healing process and also identified the reason for your struggles. Learning to deal with OCD impacted your personal and spiritual relationships, but you sought comfort from God and other key people in your life.

I was struggling a lot with depression and bipolar which was really good. It was a year of healing because God really used me being diagnosed to really bring transformation to relationships in my spiritual life because I could see how those things were impacting them and then how to get out of some cycles.

Prior to your diagnosis you thought you were a terrible sinner, which impacted your relationships with others. Instead of allowing your diagnosis to define or takeover your life, you eventually allowed God to help you understand what you were dealing with as well as He worked through the Christian counselor to help you recognize and identify faulty thinking and how to combat the intrusive thoughts. Recognizing you were not at

fault or alone in your struggle you allowed God and others to help you cope and adapt, which helped in your relationships with them.

You did not share this information with me until your second interview. In prior interactions I did not pick up on symptoms of OCD. This is not uncommon because most people who suffer from religious OCD do so in private and appear fine to the outside world. In fact this was extremely true for you. Moreover because it was religious OCD versus general OCD you kept it hidden for fear of ridicule and judgment from others especially other Christians. The battle was not with an obsession with germs but rather intrusive thoughts that were offensive to your Christian faith. You would express this with different mannerisms primarily exhibiting lots of anxiety.

They call it religious OCD so basically that means it wasn't just your general obsession about germs or something it was more I would get a lot of thoughts all the time that were really intrusive and would be offensive to my faith. I struggled a lot spiritually before the diagnosis because I thought I was a terrible sinner because I couldn't ever control my mind and so that would come out in different mannerisms and stuff.

Although you did not give me specific examples of the intrusive thoughts you struggled with, you shared they were random thoughts that could be offensive to others and thoughts you should not think as a Christian. As a result this would become extremely upsetting to you and to combat the thoughts you engaged in an obsessive cycle. You did not share what the obsession was; you described the intrusive thoughts in general as a voice telling you hateful or lustful things. For example, cursing was common in your mind and these thoughts were uncontrollable. These intrusive thoughts led to self-condemnation and through your healing process you understood this was not part of your relationship with God.

Dealing with OCD not only impacted your relationship with God, but also relationships with family and friends. You attribute the struggles with your family to misinterpretation on their part because of something you would bring up with good intention that would be “blown out of the water.” You did not offer an example of what this looked like but did share it was a regular occurrence. As a result of this tension with family, you feared the same response happening with other relationships, which would lead to mannerisms such as anxiety.

There was that fear that it would happen again with people, and I feel it did happen a lot and that was certainly spiritual warfare and something I worked through with my counselor, not over-analyzing things. Knowing that if people misinterpret you, sometimes that’s OK and that doesn’t mean it’s all your fault, and knowing the boundaries of when to pursue and not. I had a lot of anxiety with relationships, so I’d try to hide them as best I could, but I’d be visibly distressed in class, on a regular basis, which really felt trapping to me. That was part of the fear too that ‘I can’t even keep it together sometimes, so I’m not going to open up on campus.’

Along with the natural came the spiritual component, which you recognized along with the help of your counselor. As a mature Christian you understood the role Satan played in your struggles and you had to confront the lies he was telling you; primarily that you were a terrible Christian. These thoughts lead to bouts of depression and guilt because you could not control your mind. Along with hiding your struggles from other people, you hid from God.

Satan was keeping me trapped in the cycle of hiding myself away from God or even just living in guilt because I thought I was such a terrible Christian and couldn’t control my mind. There was just a spiritual stronghold I guess on my life and that would definitely keep me in depression as well so there were a lot of lies that had to be broken in the healing process. Yeah, [learning] who I was and different things so that was a big type of spiritual warfare from that experience.

Your Christian faith and identity are extremely important to you, and it was an ongoing battle to portray what you deemed was good Christian behavior. You hesitated

in sharing your struggles with other Christians, but you had no problem opening up with non-Christians. Most of this was attributed to personal pressures and thoughts that you were not honoring God by wallowing in your struggles so you would tell yourself, “I’m not being a good Christian if I’m feeling broken; I need to work through it and get over it.”

Indeed you would learn to suppress your true feelings by portraying yourself as a Christian who had it together. You felt like you had to be godly in your struggles. Because you served on leadership teams in a youth group, you felt you must portray yourself as a righteous, maturing, and growing Christian in that environment. Even with your youth leader you did not feel you could share your true emotions and adopted the persona of “this is what God is teaching me and this is how I’m growing” when you really wanted to portray, “I’m discouraged and I need prayer.”

Along with the church environment you tried to hide your struggles in school from your peers and teachers. You felt judged in this environment primarily from a group of friends you grew up with since elementary school. Because of your struggles, you felt students viewed you as a self-absorbed person and because of this self-imposed label you felt you could not reach out. This affected your self-confidence so you tried really hard not to exhibit any type of mannerisms, but this was unrealistic given the anxiety you often felt. Although you did not share details, you recalled a time when you felt judged by a teacher because of some mannerisms you displayed after an incident in class.

When I would have mannerisms or something teachers would look at me funny I’d feel like, ‘Wow, I can’t be vulnerable because if they knew what was really going on they’d probably really judge me’.

Initially in dealing with OCD you kept your struggles hidden. In time you sought help from a selective group including your family, church, friends, and for a short period a Christian counselor. Some of the help you received proved more helpful and supportive than others. You felt your family oscillated between seeing your struggles as truly an OCD diagnosis and your need to “buck up” and deal with it. Because your mom had her own struggles as a teenager (you did not share what these struggles were) and dealt with them on her own, you felt she expected the same from you. Contributing to your parents’ view of the situation was the side effects of your medication and the fear prompted by the media that anti-depressants could lead to suicidal tendencies.

After we tried the medicine and it started me off on bipolar cycles, there was a lot of fear. They feared that I would get very messed up by trying medicine and the cure was worse than the problem basically. You would see on commercial advertisements, ‘oh, higher rate of suicide’ and so they were afraid somehow that could lead me in that direction. I didn’t believe it would, I believed that was my choice. I was already struggling with a lot of severe depression so I saw it as I’m already at that place. It was hard I didn’t feel like they understand a lot of the time. They just wanted me to be better.

Even though your family struggled with how to support you, you felt supported by other people in your church who struggled with similar issues. They encouraged you to walk through it and to pray; they would in turn pray with you and for you when spiritual warfare seemed really strong. As time went on, you shared more of your struggles with one of your Christian friends. She proved to be a good listener, although she did not understand the spiritual part.

I think a big part of not reaching out was because so much of it was connected to spirituality and you really couldn’t understand what I was struggling with if you weren’t a Christian so that would definitely limit the field right away with who I could talk to.

As far as teachers were concerned, you did not feel the school environment was an appropriate place to share your struggles. You did not want to burden your teachers or

counselor with your problems, so you decided not to share. When they did not initiate contact with you, you viewed that as a sign that they were already overwhelmed. At that time, you had access to a professional counselor and you felt she provided a place to talk. You also had the support of your church, so what you were really seeking was peer friendship and support.

I think for me too I don't like to burden people so it's okay for me to be weak with my counselor that's her job we're paying her for it. If I didn't feel like people were reaching out to me and saying, "Oh, how are you doing I care" then I'd feel they are already overwhelmed I don't want to burden them with more.

Because your faith was important to you and you were struggling with religious OCD, you sought the help of a Christian counselor. Your counselor was able to help you process and decipher the ongoing battle in your mind. She helped you clarify whether it was God's voice you were hearing, when you should feel convicted and how to distinguish sin among other questions. You saw your counselor as a consistent friend who would pray with you and help you sort through your questions. Although you still struggle with cycles of unwanted thoughts and you cannot necessarily stop them, your work with your counselor enabled you to work through the obsessive cycles.

I still go through the cycles I get OCD or anxiety cycles or depression but they're not as frequent and they are not as intense. It might not be any different technically but because I've learned to cope better, and I think the spiritual warfare has diminished a lot over the last year or two.

Unfortunately, due to cost you stopped seeing your professional counselor, but despite this you are learning how to take it one step at a time and not agonize over your thoughts. In addition you invited God into your battle with religious OCD by praying about the situation and you saw this time spent with God as His way to heal the situation and provide you with a ministry to encourage others battling with similar situations.

Your relationship with Him gave you hope during a very difficult time. He became your constant source of encouragement, strength, and inspiration as you dealt with your condition, as well as your family's and friends' problems. The most important lesson you learned through this journey was surrendering it all to Him.

It really was a good season of healing and learning what was me and what wasn't me. How God saw me in the times of OCD and how that all kind of worked together so I really learned more about God and became closer to Him. It was probably the biggest healing that took place in the spiritual aspect. Learning how to have freedom in a relationship with God, how to walk with Him, surrender to Him, and peace that He'll show me what I need to know. He'll direct me and be my strength, but I have to be willing to listen and obey.

As I reflected over my time spent with you, the ongoing battle between your relationship with God and OCD was apparent. Naturally God was the center of your life because you chose to make Him the central point, yet your relationship with God and others would be complicated with religious OCD. As Christians, we are consciously and constantly facing the battle between good and evil; your walk was intensified by religious OCD. God never said our journey with Him would be easy; rather He said to expect trials and tribulations, so at an early age your faith was challenged immensely. As you navigated through these challenges, you clung to your relationship with God because He was the constant who would sustain you. As your story unfolded, you shared how your life with God and how religious OCD impacted you in a variety of milieus and relationships.

High School

Initially I believed you were an outstanding student, top 10% of your class, actively involved in extracurricular activities, pleasant, and highly respected by friends and faculty. My letter of recommendation might include a line that stated, "Serenity is an all-around student who manages the craziness of high school extremely well." In theory

you made the high school journey look extremely easy, but that was far from your internal experience. That is not to say that you had a negative experience in high school because you shared that it was a good experience overall. As you shared your high school experience, what unfolded was your commitment to live and share your faith despite the challenges and hardships along the way. You shared that high school was hard regardless of whether you were in a public or Christian school, because being a Christian is not easy. I asked you what a Christian in a public high school looked like and you shared:

You definitely have to be pushed to define where you stand and basically that's whether you are going to be on fire for your faith or if you're not. If you are going to be on fire for your faith, then you will have a lot more confrontation, it will be a lot harder, and you'll need a lot more accountability. You really need to find a couple of people who will walk through that with you, so I definitely tried to do that in high school.

You shared that being a Christian meant staying consistent in what you believed, boldly sharing your faith through words and actions, and being different than other people. Normally students are concerned with fitting in and will compromise personal values to find acceptance. Not once during our conversations did you state your desire to fit in; rather you wanted others to accept you regardless of your differences in ideologies. Earlier you stated being a Christian meant "being on fire for your faith," I asked you what that meant and you replied:

It means knowing where you stand and being consistent there. Which is definitely a lot easier said than done, but being consistent and not necessarily just being consistent when you are confronted but also being diligent and persistent about being different than other people. Just reaching out with love and seeking out opportunities.

Opportunities to share your faith presented themselves in a variety of ways, some within personal communications with other students and other times at events such as

“See You at the Pole.” See You at the Pole, a worldwide event, is usually in September where students, faculty, parents, and community members gather around the school’s flag pole and pray for the school, community, and nation. Within personal conversations, the subject of faith would come up as relationships were established. Naturally people asked about your personal life, which led to communication about your faith. In addition you invited classmates to Fellowship of Christian Students. You really relied on God to lead you in opening the door to share your faith.

In addition to sharing your faith through conversation and activities, the necklaces you wore and the Bible verses you wrote on your binders would present additional opportunities to share your faith. The crosses you wore served as a reminder of your faith. Some of your classmates were curious and commented on your necklaces, and you shared what the variety of crosses meant. Although you cannot recall specific conversations as a result of the verses on your binders, you do remember students wanting to read them.

Instructional Time

Finally, classroom discussion provided you the opportunity to speak about your faith. At times these conversations would be confrontational, especially in science when the class topic centered on evolution. You did not hesitate to ask your teacher if you could present another perspective. These conversations along with other conversations in other classes served as stepping stones to share your faith in the classroom, athletic field, and other milieus as well as in relationships with others.

There were two distinct incidents where evolution was brought up in science class during your freshman and senior years. The teacher handled each conversation

differently. In your freshman class, the teacher presented the topic of evolution as fact with no room for argument. However, you asked for evidence to explain his viewpoint. You did not recall the conversation, but you remember him presenting you with a stack of papers explaining why evolution was true. You remember speaking with this teacher outside of the classroom, and you definitely remember tension. You recall the teacher not appreciating your challenge, and he stated, “Oh, there is always one of your kind who brings that up every year.” I asked how his comment made you feel and you replied:

It was sad, but I tried to be really confident and to not let him get me down at all. Also to try and be as wise as possible with my viewpoints so that I can really show others that I do know what I’m talking about. I remember one time after a conversation a girl came up to me, I don’t even think she was a Christian, but she thanked me for standing up, and she thought that was really cool that I had an answer and that there were other viewpoints.

You did take the stack of papers home and shared them with your parents. You and your parents reviewed them together, and it was your intention to gain a clear understanding of his view and also your view and discuss the matter further with him. In reviewing the papers, you did not find any scientific reasoning on the theory of evolution rather they simply stated why creationism was “stupid”. Your parents discussed these papers with your teacher at parent-teacher conferences; but you do not recall that conversation. You now have regret, wishing you had gone back and discussed this further with your teacher. You wished you would have researched the matter a little more so you could have engaged in a conversation with your teacher; you now see this experience as “a door that God opened but I did not fully walk through.”

In regards to the evolution conversation during your senior year, the teacher presented the topic as a theory with the supporting information so you felt this was a less confrontational method. Other philosophical discussions would present themselves in

classes such as English, but you felt the instructor allowed you to voice your opinions even though he did not agree. Although you thought about dropping classes that clashed with your values, you chose not to because you saw these as opportunities to show love and respect to others with a different viewpoint. In doing so, your hope was to make a good impression of the Christian walk.

Equally important in the classroom is evidence of learning. As an advanced placement student, you carried a rigorous academic schedule. In preparing for tests and other big projects you utilized study methods that worked for your learning style. In addition you prayed and looked to God for direction in what you needed to study. You also prayed over your books and during exams. When it became stressful, you turned the situation over to God by resting in Him and believing He would see you through.

It was my inspiration to strive to do my best and to challenge myself with the classes I took. I really believe we are supposed to be good stewards of our minds and to do the best of our abilities. I maintained a 4.0 in high school and I know God is the one who, not only gave me a brain but also was there every step of the way with tests and stuff so I have to give Him the glory.

As far as relationships with teachers were concerned, you felt you established respectful working relationships with them. Despite differences in ideologies with one teacher, you made it a point to smile and wave to him in the hallway and he would do the same, so you felt a mutual respect was established. This was extremely important to you because you did not want to offend teachers and others; rather you wanted to exhibit love and respect toward them just as you did toward peers. You stated, “It was a priority to reach out and through my interactions be a Christ-like influence, witness, care about their lives, and to say thank you.”

You shared that you did not have a strong connection with your counselor primarily because counselors changed thus inhibiting the possibility of a better

relationship. You did find your counselor to be somewhat helpful, but did not feel that she played a significant and meaningful role. When you were looking at the possibility of going to college in Canada, your counselor did share scholarship information, but you felt she did not check in with you enough, and at times you were not sure what you were supposed to be doing.

Classroom instruction provided you the opportunity to hear other viewpoints, and you courageously and boldly requested to share your Christian worldview. Although challenged by the instructor, you remained respectful and took the time to review the literature he provided. Your boldness prompted another student to not only thank you for sharing your viewpoint, but offering answers. Serenity, only God knows the true impact of your courage that day, but I can speculate that maybe your actions provided encouragement to others with different beliefs. Who knows maybe they were inspired by your actions and later stood up for their beliefs or possibly they were forced to think how their personal beliefs fit with what was presented in class. What I do know is you treated the instructor with respect inside and outside of the classroom. Indeed you maintained respectful relationships with all your teachers and counselors, but you felt one counselor did not stay in close contact.

Non-Instructional Time

Throughout the school day there are many opportunities to socialize, but the two biggest opportunities appear during passing period and lunch. These non-instructional times are either viewed by the students as the social highlight of the day or the worst time ever. Passing period allows students to briefly interact with peers, make phone calls, check-in with teachers, make lunch plans with friends as well as provide ample

opportunity to behave inappropriately. The hallway can be a haven for bullies as well as provide the forum for students to publically announce cruel insults at peers and others. To help filter out the negative, you conversed with God about your day as well as prayed for yourself and others. You shared it was important for you to guard yourself during passing periods and at the same time be open for opportunities to reach out to others.

You have to be careful about what you are letting into your own heart so you aren't just getting drenched into junk. At the same time you have to be really diligent and you really want to see what is going on around you so you know how to pray, reach out somehow, and see how God wants to be using you.

Along with passing periods, lunchtime provides a much needed break as well as 40 minutes of uninterrupted time to socialize, eat, run errands, meet with teachers, and work on homework. During your freshman year, you ate with a core group of non-Christian friends. While you were struggling during your junior year, you transitioned into sitting with Christian friends from youth group. Because of your struggles you needed the positive influence of other Christians who were uplifting. As this group of friends started branching off or going out to lunch, senior year proved to be the most difficult time for you. Although you had a vehicle, you could not go home during lunch because of the distance from school. From our prior conversations during your freshman year, I knew you used this time to reach out to others, but you did not share this with me during this interview. Your heart ached for those who were lonely, and you would try to identify who needed a smile or a friendly hello; this was often prompted while you prayed or spent time with God. Again, I do not know how much of this you did during your senior year, but what I gathered was this time proved to be equally lonely.

I'd say my senior year was hard and I really wish that you could take food into the library or something cause then you don't have to sit by yourself. If there was just a place you could go. Even if you sit in the halls it's just awkward, people walk by and are like, "What's wrong with you?"

During non-instructional time, you were conscious of your surroundings especially during passing period. Because the opportunity to hear language or see behavior that was offensive was often a possibility, you spent time praying for yourself and others. At one time lunch provided you the opportunity to spend time with your Christian friends, but senior year proved difficult and you felt extremely lonely.

Extracurricular Activities

To combat the loneliness, connect, and reach out to others you were involved in a variety of extracurricular activities such as Fellowship of Christian Students, choir, drama, cross country, dance, and various honor societies. You saw these activities as opportunities to minister to other students, build relationships, and tear down some walls. For the most part, the activities you participated in were uplifting, enjoyable, and provided the opportunity to shower others with love and respect. However there was a certain activity that was enjoyable for you, but proved to be a very spiritually oppressive environment.

They were really great opportunities first of all; to be a good steward and to use the doors that God would open up for me in those areas and as mission opportunities. To see what people He would put me around in different roles and in different activities. In these activities it was really an area for me to be a light and do something different. Different ones [activities] were definitely harder than others spiritually the way the programs were run or different things. I know in cross country the head coach was Christian so that was definitely different. In those activities I looked for ways to minister to others, encourage others, to be a leader, to love on them, encourage them, and do something different.

As you shared earlier, each activity was different and your opportunity to minister to others took a variety of forms. Part of the reason why cross country looked different was because the coach shared your Christian worldview and did not discourage you integrating your faith into the sport. With each passing year, you grew bolder in sharing your faith. You especially spent time with the underclassmen and took them under your

wing. At times you provided a listening ear, prayed for students, prayed before meets and productions, and modeled how to be different in actions and behavior. Your message to the underclassmen was to let them know that there was another choice besides going along with the crowd especially if it involved inappropriate activities. You modeled that it was okay to be different in that respect, and they did not have to go with the crowd just for the sake of going with the crowd. For example, they did not need to cuss or show disrespect toward other teammates. You shared that extracurricular activities provided you with the opportunity to be the light.

I think of it as an opportunity to get to know other students in something that's close to their heart, so it really provides a door for you to share their life. In building that relationship it gives you an opportunity to do something different than the world in conversations and by your actions. [Within] the relationship to show that you care; you're there, that you have hope in different situations, and that you're different that way too.

You were actively involved in Fellowship of Christian Students and for two years served as president. As president you organized the meetings, prepared activities, presented the weekly devotions, and sometimes participated in worship. FCS provided you and other Christian students the opportunity to fellowship together once per week. The opportunity to provide a safe place for students to spend time together and share the message of Christ was your vision for FCS. In addition you felt a heavy burden on your heart to reach out to lonely students, both non-Christian and Christian, and you felt FCS could provide an inclusive, safe environment for students. Finally, you hoped FCS would provide students a strong network of other Christian students to connect with outside the organized meetings thus sending the message that their Christian walk on campus did not need to happen alone.

As an upperclassman you hoped to project a caring and helpful image to the underclassmen so you joined Freshman Connect. Freshman Connect is a leadership opportunity to mentor incoming freshmen. Most of the activities and events for Freshman Connect happen during Freshman Orientation where each upperclassman is assigned a group of freshmen. Your job is to help them transition into the culture as well as serve as a mentor and contact person should they need additional help. Throughout the school year you would connect with these students and check in to make sure their first year of high school was transitioning well. Your goal by joining Freshman Connect was to display a more equitable relationship with underclassmen rather than the hierarchy attitude of “you are a freshman so get out of my way.”

It was definitely a priority to me as I became an upper classman to reach out to the underclassmen and to really provide a good example of someone who is kind and uses their seniority to love on other people, to reach out to other people, and to be a good example to the other Christians and invest in their lives. Also to be someone who cares for those who aren't Christian and break down boundaries like, 'I'm an upperclassman or you need to get out of the way' or whatever but to really break down those walls.

One of your non-school activities was dance, in which you were involved for three years. You danced for a Christian company that performed in schools throughout Colorado. Your mini-productions involved sharing the message of Christ through dance in both Christian and secular schools. Although you did not have much contact with students in these schools, you felt your performances and message were well received. The dance and performance experience you gained proved beneficial as you landed significant roles in school musicals.

After you stopped your involvement in dance, you decided to go out for cross county primarily to keep in shape, and because it was something you always wanted to do. Again as an upperclassman you would spend your time reaching out to the

underclassmen by building relationships. Out of all your school sponsored activities (with the exception of FCS) this was where you expressed and shared your faith the most. You played a key role in organizing prayer time prior to meets as well as you would offer to pray for your teammates. Because your coach was a Christian you felt it was easier to express your faith in this environment.

In my experience as a cross country and track coach as well as my involvement in Fellowship of Christian Athletes, runners tend to come from a Christian background. During your runs, you would openly share your faith with those receptive to it and often your teammates would ask you to pray for them. Indeed cross country provided you the opportunity to openly share and express your faith, unfortunately that would not be the case with theatre.

Even though your demeanor is quiet, private, and somewhat reserved you participated in theatre for two years. With your gifts of performance and dance you also participated in show choir. You are truly gifted in the fine arts, and these wonderful talents served you well in the theatre program. Of all your extracurricular activities, theatre allowed you to bring your gifts together on one stage. Unfortunately you would find the theatre environment to be oppressive in many ways.

It's very interesting, but definitely in the theatre program it's a very spiritually oppressive environment. The things that go on, the things that are said, and it's a lot of inappropriate things, which is too bad. Even with the adults so that was hard for me.

From your perspective, the inappropriate behavior included coarse joking, inappropriate touching, and sexual innuendos. Because these behaviors were established and cultivated in this environment, they were assumed to be acceptable by most cast members. You shared that boys would often touch and speak to girls inappropriately and because they

were not called on it, they assumed everyone was okay with it. On a few occasions you would be the recipient of this behavior and responded by either removing yourself from the individual or firmly telling the individual you were not okay with the behavior. For the most part you felt the individual respected your request and stopped the behavior. You felt the teachers willingly and openly indulged in these same behaviors setting the tone that inappropriate behavior was acceptable and even expected. Even though a lot of inappropriate behavior occurred, you felt they were fun times and there were fun people in theatre.

It was spiritually dark and what made it so difficult too was that everyone was so comfortable in it and to be really different from that was so foreign. It was just a pattern that had been [established]. I mean there were a lot of really fun people too, and a lot of fun had been woven into it, and so it was hard to break the pattern, to break the mold.

As you continued reflecting on your experience in theatre, you mentioned a lot of the conversations and behaviors centered on “sexual stuff.” You mentioned there were some homosexual students in theatre. I asked you about your experience with students from a different sexual orientation than your own, and you said your relationship with the homosexual students was fine; in fact you had several homosexual friends. From your Christian perspective, you acknowledge homosexuals have a deep hurt, but you believe most people have a deep hurt and despite sexual orientation you treat them with respect without compromising what you believe.

Plainly the types of activities and conversations in theatre were not aligned with your Christian worldview. In fact you mentioned one of the hardest and saddest events during a production, where you felt the most exclusion, was during cast parties. Initially you went to the cast parties but would soon discover that the same behaviors and conduct during rehearsal carried into other venues. While attending these parties, you felt alone

while everyone else was engaging in “crazy activities”. Because you did not want to engage in these same activities, you often felt sad, lonely, rejected, and disrespected as a person and friend. As a result, you stopped attending cast parties, which made you sad because you really felt most theater students were fun and creative.

You felt like you were rejected as a person and as a friend, that they didn't have enough respect for you to stop their weird activities or whatever, so it was hard to know how to reach out because you felt they didn't even care what you had to say. It was sadder for me to feel like I'm missing an opportunity because I'm not courageous enough to reach out, or the door isn't open.

Unfortunately, you also did not feel supported by the theatre teachers. It was especially frustrating to you because you believed all three teachers were Christians. From your perspective the teachers endorsed and allowed inappropriate behavior to occur. Because you felt the teachers were just as "cliquey" as students, you did not feel supported and you felt they excluded you because you did not participate in the fun along with everyone else. In addition because you were not considered one of the most talented performers, you felt you lacked credibility in their eyes thus having no influence to empower change.

I think all three of the teachers were Christian, and yet they would either endorse or allow such inappropriate behavior. It just made me really sad. Not only do I feel like you're not on my team, I feel like you're oppressing and directly against me. I never knew how you gained credibility with the teachers, and if I had any, because it was a lot of the very talented students who were really crude. I wasn't ever really sure what gave you a voice in that environment with them.

Because you were not certain how to express your concerns and feelings to teachers and students, you kept quiet most of the time. However, your role in the production determined how much say and authority you possessed. In two of the productions you felt you had more credibility because of roles as supporting lead and make-up director. Based on these roles, you felt you could put your foot down a little

more, but this proved hard. As the environment felt oppressive, the culture was firmly set and in the minds of the students and somewhat the teachers was based heavily on talent and skills, much of your focus and energy was spent on performing well.

In my second play I was Mereb, a supporting lead, so I had more credibility then, so I could kind of put my foot down, but it was really hard because it felt like you were going against the tidal wave. In my last performances I was like a make-up director so I had more authority there. But again, it was still really oppressive and I didn't feel like I could ever be completely open or completely free there.

Along with the pressure of performing well was the additional anxiety and stage fright attributed by OCD. To stay focused and combat the anxiety and stage fright, you secluded yourself in prayer and developed a preparation routine, which included staying in character, keeping it together, and telling yourself "this is where I need to be right now". Going through this routine was like being a drill sergeant in that you used your "parent or teacher" voice to snap into performance mode. When your struggle with OCD was at its peak, you had to do this routine otherwise you would not get through the performance. As of your second interview, you felt you had a better handle on OCD, and although you still struggle with stage fright, you noticed a change in your worship performance at church. In your view, the focus was less on performance and instead on allowing God to take control while doing your best.

Even though theatre was stressful, oppressive, and challenged your Christian worldview, your leading role in the production *Aida* was much different. In this particular production your best friend was part of the cast. She would be an encouragement to you because she shared your same faith, supported you, and held you accountable if you were not exhibiting your faith. In your opinion your best friend made theatre much more tolerable.

I always had someone I could go to and I wasn't just excluded from the group if they were off on their own thing. I had someone I could hang out with and have lots of fun with, someone who understood how uncomfortable it was sometimes, and someone to pray with me too, for the company, and that we would be a light and reach out, [she was] someone in there to fight with me.

Originally the part the directors picked for you to audition for was a woman of questionable character. Amneris was the princess that slept around and embedded in the production was a scene that portrayed this. It was unsettling for you to think you would be on stage playing this character, and you were concerned for the message this would send to people in the audience, especially your younger cousins. From your perspective it was hypocritical to go on stage as this character because of the behavior and language connected to this role. You spent a lot of time praying about the situation and were not certain if you would accept the role. Fortunately and with great relief to you, the role was given to another girl and you were given the role of Mereb, a more fitting character for you.

God gave me instead the role of the person who fights for what's right throughout the whole production and then sacrifices her life for what's right and true. I was really excited about that.

After this production, you felt you gained more credibility with your peers and the audience; because of your performance you felt your bio section in the program meant more. In your bio you would give all the credit to God and state He was the reason for your singing and dancing. Even though you struggled to be in the theatre environment and culture this production was a positive experience. Ultimately by participating in theater you sought friendships, found the opportunity to express two of your passions, and portrayed a positive role model. It was a struggle to find your place in this environment but you strived to maintain a balance between acceptance and rejection of behaviors.

It's always interesting to try and find a balance between, I don't want to openly oppose everyone and be like, 'Oh I'm so opposed to all this sin', and come across so judgmental. I wanted to really make sure they knew that I loved them but I believed different things as well.

Through participation in extracurricular activities you gained the opportunity to reach out to others, minister, and build relationships with peers. You integrated your faith in activities that supported your faith including cross country and Fellowship of Christian Students by praying, listening, reaching out to others, and modeling positive behaviors. Unfortunately you endured the oppressive theatre environment and felt extremely alone because nobody shared your Christian worldview. Even though there were Christian teachers you did not feel their support. It was not until another Christian joined theatre did you feel you were able to express your Christian worldview. Your experience in theatre changed because your Christian friend provided support, accountability, and shared beliefs and values. As with extracurricular activities, you found developing relationships with other Christian students beneficial to your faith.

Relationships with Peers

After an experience in middle school, you spent time reflecting on friendships and determined that your peer group must possess the same worldview. This is not to say that you did not have relationships with non-Christians, in fact you did, but to stay accountable in your own walk you saw the necessity to surround yourself with Christian friends.

When I was in sixth grade, I realized my best friend was dating a high school guy, and she set me up with a high school guy. God really opened my eyes and revealed this was not His best for me, and I needed to be wise about my friends. Also, He would satisfy my heart with love.

In spite of this it sounds like during sophomore and early junior years you did have a group of non-Christian friends, but slowly pulled away from these friendships and sought

out Christian friends. You did not choose to pull away because you did not enjoy their friendship rather you desired a more intimate relationship with someone who possessed your same values.

Since faith is the most important part of your life, it is important that your most intimate relationships hold the same regard for their faith. In fact you felt that to establish an intimate relationship, both parties must contribute equally to the relationship. In other words one friend could not expect to receive all the attention and love and the other not receive anything otherwise this would foster an unhealthy relationship. Along with sharing the same faith, your intimate relationships must value their faith by leaning and relying on it to help navigate through the hard times. You would refer to this relationship as sharing an equal yoke. This is where a deep relationship is established and despite the hardship in one's life there is time to help and encourage the other person.

I know it has to be an equal yoke relationship where you're both pulling each other up. I wouldn't invest too much in friendships that aren't encouraging me in my faith constantly because I know I'd get pulled down. It would be a rich relationship if you knew the other person cared, even though they had their own hurts, they would make you a priority, and you'd be doing the same thing, so it would be a mutually loving and encouraging relationship.

In my opinion, Serenity, throughout high school you were searching for a solid peer group to help you cope with your struggles as well as give you the opportunity to reach out and share in their struggles. Although you found love and support within your relationship with God and members of your church, the need to connect with your peers in school was immensely important to you. Our conversation on peer relationships toggled between middle and high school friendships as well as the oscillating between groups during high school. There never seemed to be a consistent group of friends throughout your four years at River Front. Although your group of friends stemmed from

youth group, there was inconsistency within the group and as time in high school progressed, cliques started to develop.

Transitioning into high school your core group of friends was students from youth group. You shared very little about your freshman and sophomore years, which may have been the result of me not asking enough questions to help you focus, or it is possible you felt there was not anything significant to discuss. Although you saw the value in hanging out with youth group members, you still felt lonely at times. Indeed there were times you felt you had no one; God would be your constant support and you felt His love. As a result of feeling alone, you felt God calling you to lead so you immediately began to pray about how you could mend the holes within your group of friends.

There would be times when I wouldn't really have anyone no matter how hard I tried but He [God] would let me go through that. He would still be enough for me, to sustain me, even though that wasn't how He designed it to be. He designed us to have a body [other Christians] to support us, to reach out to, but sometimes it just wouldn't be that way and I would have to be patient and wait on Him and keep praying for that.

In the same way you were struggling with loneliness, other youth group members were feeling left out and noticing the onset of cliques formalizing within the group. As you began to pray about how to lead others, ideas formed on how to unify the group by possibly organizing a prayer group and encouraging others to reach out to those struggling with loneliness.

In trying to understand and rationalize why this solid group of friends from youth group was disbanding into cliques, you were confident it was not a result of malice. In truth you felt members of youth group had no idea that by creating subgroups this was leading others to feel left out. These subgroups did not understand why you and others were upset and hurt because for them this was not a big deal. For you it was a big deal

and the lack of unity saddened you. You would seek comfort in God to get you through this painful time.

I felt like I was alone and that was really painful [because] even the people who share your own beliefs wouldn't be there to walk with you for one reason or another. It is true during those times if I would choose to rely on God, keep trust in Him, and keep being faithful that He would also be faithful, give me the strength I needed, and the love I needed when I didn't feel like I had any. [He] even [provided me with] endurance to keep going and to keep pursuing Him.

Unfortunately by senior year, your peers remained in cliques but you stepped up and spent time in youth group speaking to them about the lack of unity in school. You pointed out the disconnect between the behavior exhibited in youth group and the behavior carried into school. In addition you felt God calling you to another youth group to be fed [receive spiritual nourishment] while still leading the old youth group. At the time of this interview, you were not sure which youth group you truly belonged to, but were happy to find that much needed support in another youth group.

In youth group people would be friendlier and reach out more but then in daily life [school] people would definitely go to little groups. This was really sad because I think that's where we really needed to be the most united was in those tough places.

You continued to encourage your peers to stay connected in school, reach out to each other, and support each other in the school environment. Generally speaking, you felt safe and a sense of belonging on campus, always felt you had at least one good friend throughout high school, friends to eat lunch with, and were confident enough to reach out to peers in class to get to know them. In spite of feeling a general acceptance by peers you still felt alone at times.

There were a lot of times I felt, just internally I felt lonely in what I was going through. But externally it was a good, a good state of belonging.

Despite the fact that you felt safe on campus, you would not allow yourself to exhibit “brokenness”. You either tried to handle things yourself or sought help from friends off campus, but only spoke with friends about your struggles if you were really experiencing tough times. At times, but not very often, you did feel directed by God to share your struggles with others who were facing similar situations. I asked you why it was difficult to open up to peers on campus and you responded:

I think it was because [there] was a lot of friend drama in some ways and a lot of change and so I didn’t know a lot of times who was safe in my core friend group. I knew who was kind of safe, but I did not feel I necessarily had a constant best friend in high school who I could really be real with.

Although you felt a constant person on campus was not available to go to during tough times, you saw value in having someone. In many ways you believe you were available to people who were struggling. At times you would ask friends to pray for you, but overall you felt God was there for you during the hard times. You also attribute pride as a reason why you would not allow yourself to show brokenness on campus.

Romantic Relationships

You did not spend much time talking about relationships with the opposite sex. In high school you were not interested in “dating” but rather “courting.” In your mind you would not consider courting until the possibility of marriage. However, during your junior year and after much prayer about dating, you felt God was leading you toward a relationship with a boy named Steven. It was also during this time that you were diagnosed with OCD, and Steven proved to be a critical support to you as he had experience with similar situations in his family. Although you are not sure why God led you in this direction, the time spent with Steven served as a time to minister together during that season in your life.

I felt that was where God was really leading us for that time, just to minister together and I don't really understand why because my mindset has always been 'God, I don't want to date until it's the right guy,' but He showed me [through] dating there [could] be something beautiful through that process. I learned a lot. And also, even though I wasn't in a place in my life where I could literally just get married right then, have a steady job, and all that stuff, but He still used it, so not quite sure why.

At times you felt your girlfriends gave much time and attention to dating and relationships with the opposite sex. Even in youth group you saw the group go through periods where members were "coupling up". During these times, you experienced loneliness but relied on God and learned to be content in Him and not focus on getting involved with your guy friends. You saw this time (as well as the time you dated Steven) as opportunities to minister to others by demonstrating that relationships were more than emotion. You and Steven used your commitment to each other to have little physical interaction as a ministry in itself. In addition you really wanted to strive towards waiting for the right person to court and felt content in waiting. In your opinion courting meant:

How I see it is dating with a purpose and when you're ready for marriage just to build a strong foundation not just to cultivate romantic feelings but to realize that's a part of it, but that's not the goal. The goal is just to see how God wants you to minister together and to each other.

You view dating as something more than a physical attraction toward someone, but rather as a way for two people to minister together. During your junior year which was the year you were diagnosed with religious OCD, you experienced your first boyfriend. Although you are not sure why God brought you together, this relationship provided you with a ministry opportunity. Even though you observed your peers in youth group develop romantic relationships, you were content with your relationship with God.

Post-Secondary Planning

A large portion of your senior year was spent on post-secondary planning. At the time of your second interview, your intentions were to work as a missionary overseas with children and/or the environment so you felt the importance of Christian training. Although you understand it is not necessary to attend a Christian college to learn how to integrate your faith into your profession, you really felt God gave you peace and guidance about your decision to attend a Christian school. Along with praying about colleges, your parents assisted with a lot of research on the Internet regarding Christian schools and how they ranked and the majors offered. In addition you spoke with friends already in college and consulted college resources.

Initially you held a strong passion for the mission field and made plans to graduate a year early so you could join Youth with a Mission (YWAM) for a year prior to attending college. You strongly believed God was leading you in this direction and placed a passion for missions on your heart. However, much to your surprise God shut the door on YWAM as a viable option. Along with this you saw many more unexpected “turns in the road”.

The college that I am going to I didn't apply until February or March. I think it was February right before the deadline. After all my careful planning, God threw me a curve ball with that one, but I don't know just lots of twist and turns. I feel peace about where He has led me to be next year and study, we'll see it could change again.

Because your initial plans were to attend YWAM for a year, you had done research on possible colleges to attend upon your return. You had a college in mind with an intended major in multicultural studies, but once God closed the door with YWAM you felt Him directing you toward a variety of colleges and majors. God directed you toward different majors at different times and eventually you felt led toward a passion

involving children and the environment. Much to your surprise the college you now attend is located on the west coast and even though you vowed not to go to school in this area you felt a spiritual presence when you visited.

He really brought to my attention the college that I'm going to attend, and He is still changing direction even within this school but with a lot of prayer and slowly over time He's directed me different ways to different schools. I really felt like He was fine with whichever school I chose and He would bless my choice so I chose this one because it offers a variety of international study programs.

Navigating through the post-secondary process was difficult especially as God had given you a strong passion for YWAM and then strongly shut that door. In your opinion this proved to be the hardest time because He changed what you wanted and thought you were going to do. Even though the process required a lot of adjusting, waiting, and acceptance you felt at peace with your college selection despite the unknowns.

He's still giving me peace because this college was my second choice actually and I felt a lot more confident in the other school I was looking at. There's just a lot more [uncertainties] at this college because I really don't know what I'm majoring in and how I'm going to pay for it, but I have a lot of peace about it.

At the time of this interview, there was again the possibility of changing majors. Initially you were thinking something in child development but after speaking with your advisor the recommendation was to start biology because it would be easier to switch over to child development later versus doing it the other way around. Although you are not sure why God is placing biology on your heart, you are confident everything will play out.

In your final weeks of high school you experienced a lot of different emotions, but the one you spoke about was sadness. You were sad to see your four years come to an end, the thought of not seeing your friends and the start of another school year added to your grief. Even though college was on the horizon your focus at that moment was on

high school coming to an end and what that entailed. You were confident once you started the process of leaving for college your mind would switch toward your new mission in life.

Reflecting back on high school you viewed it as a season in life where the experience was good for the most part, although there were definitely bad experiences too. All-in-all, you felt you left high school with a lot more than you brought in. I asked you what you meant by this and you responded:

I guess seeing how God has worked, how He has taught me a lot, and blessed me with different relationships and people I met. Even how He has shown me more about Himself and taught me to appreciate being in the world in new ways.

In your opinion although high school was rewarding, it was difficult and faith was what got you through the tough times. Over the four years there were hard times with friends and family, the pressures of academics and extracurricular activities, and the weariness of balancing everything. Although there were a lot of transitions over four years with peers, classes, teachers, and activities your relationship with Jesus remained constant.

My faith was definitely what got me through high school and there were definitely hard times with peers, family and personal stuff and without my faith I would not have made it. Jesus was a constant friend who I needed and [He] gave me that endurance and strength to keep going in activities and stuff. I wouldn't have been able to do anything good in high school without my faith.

In departing high school, your prayer is that you left your peers and teachers feeling respected and loved. You hope you left a mark in theatre, choir, and other activities, but more importantly the love and care you demonstrated in your relationships with others serve as a positive example. In addition your desire was to be a good example to other Christians by being different and living for something different, which is that contentment and joy found in a deep relationship with God. However this

presented itself in and through your life you hope others saw it as something to seek.

You offered some advice to Christian students entering high school:

Definitely to find a core group of friends, it's easier said than done because I know it, but to look for [a group of friends] but know that if you can't find it that Jesus will be there to sustain you. [Also] make sure that whether you have close friends or not that you are pushing into Christ for your strength and really rely on Him [to] show you things, teach you, and take you into places where you are uncomfortable. [You'll find] it's really rewarding. Be courageous and not be afraid of peers, teachers, activities, or even that you won't know what to say. [Finally], be courageous to be different even though it's scary but to take those steps it's a great thing to be known as.

Serenity, I definitely witnessed you living differently than your peers especially in interactions with others. You were always positive, friendly, and really reached out to others in need. Your time on campus was not about your agenda, rather it was about God's agenda, and you obediently went about demonstrating His love and grace to others daily.

Post-Secondary Transition

After graduating from high school, you spent your summer working in a deli at a local grocery store. Working there proved to be rather difficult because of the hours, the demanding protocols, and the pressure of suggestive selling to customers. You do not consider sales your strong suit and did not feel comfortable forcing products on customers, by doing so you felt rude toward customers. Because of the strict job requirements and constant job evaluations, you felt pressure from co-workers because there was a lot of scrutiny if the required 8-point procedure per customer was not followed.

Although you felt you could not directly share your faith with customers, you shared your faith indirectly through excellent customer service, respect to authority, and demonstration of a solid work ethic thereby setting yourself apart from others. At times

you felt God opened the door for good conversations with co-workers. Even though this full-time summer job was intense you were extremely grateful to God and considered it a blessing to earn money to apply toward your college tuition.

The majority of your summer was spent working but you managed to find time to spend with friends. Most of your friends would leave for college before you so you wanted to get the last farewells in prior to your departure. Along with spending time with friends, you purchased your textbooks, contacted your new roommate on Facebook, and started planning for transition into college. I asked you what you hoped to find in new college relationships and you shared:

Definitely a group of girls who are really good accountability partners and will walk through life with me, a good church where I can get plugged in and grow, and [find] ministries where I can reach out.

At the time of our third interview, the thought of transitioning into college had not crossed your mind because you were focused on your demanding work schedule. In your opinion the anxiety you felt was more toward work rather than college; however, you did admit a small amount of anxiety about the community to which you would relocate. Your college is located in "Tinseltown USA" which is a much different culture than your present community. Throughout the summer you prayed about college as well as people who God would bring to mind. You did not spend time worrying about the transition because God had provided you with the strength and guidance during your post-secondary planning and you were confident He would continue to guide and fill you with strength as you made the transition.

College: First Semester

We met in a coffee shop after Christmas, and I immediately noticed a mature and confident Serenity who was glowing with excitement. The way you dressed and carried

yourself definitely spoke of a young woman transformed by a new environment and experiences. You spoke with enthusiasm, wonder, and as somebody genuinely grateful for all the blessings and opportunities of the past semester. You were super excited to share your experiences and for the first time I saw you freely and confidently express yourself. I sat back and listened as your new adventure unfolded.

Wow! A lot has happened and I've definitely seen God move in a lot of ways. [He] moved in a lot of great ways that I did not expect, grown me in a lot of ways...hmmm, which area do we talk about first [giggle]?

You were apprehensive at first about the school you are now attending. On your initial visit you stayed with a couple of older girls who spent more time educating you about the campus party scene and you also sensed their lack of respect for campus rules. You did not feel they genuinely cared about you as a person based on their lifestyle and the things they wanted to speak about. Because of this negative experience you left questioning the school but at the same time understanding that just because it is a Christian school things are not going to necessarily be positive.

[I] definitely have to realize that a Christian college really isn't necessarily all different than a public place. You have people at all different levels of faith there and [it is] not going to be this perfect little wonderland.

Despite your negative first experience with college, these initial impressions proved inaccurate. You would see God answer your prayers by providing a supportive group of girlfriends and a church. Your initial attraction to the school was the diverse array of majors offered as you felt there was great potential and opportunity within the course offerings. Even though you were initially scared you were pleasantly surprised by the students as you felt they genuinely loved the Lord. You turned to the upperclassmen for mentorship and utilized them as resources because of their shared passion in

missionary work. “The overall population is not partying, there really is caring and [they are] supportive as a community.”

The school you attend is technically a Nazarene college but the professors and students come from all different denominations making it quite diverse. You took a variety of courses covering the core academics, humanities, and wellness. In your opinion you felt pushed in your coursework to seek and form your own viewpoints as well as exposure to other viewpoints. One of the more interesting courses you took was Evolutionary and Ecological Studies; you shared your professor was an evolutionary creationist. His perspective on evolution and creation was new to you, but you found the topic extremely interesting and at the same time something you needed to pray about.

This course, which was more of a review for you since you took AP Biology, brought in a different perspective than the evolution perspective taught in high school. In both classes you felt the teachers only covered the surface level leaving many unanswered questions. Because of your interest and curiosity you obtained some books by Christian authors on the subject so you could further your exploration and you hoped to dialogue with your brother because he was exposed to classes on evolution at Stanford. Again this was a topic you wanted to focus and pray about, but given your busy academic schedule and other pertinent things in your life you have not found the time.

You see the professors on campus as great resources; however, you did not spend a lot of time first semester connecting with them and attributed this to fear, a new environment, and shyness. It is your desire to make more connections with them next semester and develop meaningful relationships. You shared the professor who taught your Evolutionary and Ecological Studies was a Christian who loved the Lord.

After completing a semester, you are still undecided in a major but are exploring options by taking a variety of courses including psychology, sociology, environmental science, and pre-med courses. By taking courses from various areas, you are keeping the doors open so once you decide on a major you will not be behind in coursework. Although your undergraduate degree is swaying between pre-med and psychology with a possible minor in sociology you are planning to get a master's degree in education. Again, all of this is provisional as you continue to explore options, pray, and listen for God's direction.

Unlike your first exposure to dorm life, your floor has bonded, and you feel like you truly invest in each other as well as have a lot of fun. Fortunately, there are no party girls on your floor and with the exception of differences in preferences you all get along. You are aware of some students getting expelled for drugs and alcohol but that has not been an issue in your dorm. Your roommate is from California so she goes home quite often on weekends, which works well because then you get some private time and time away from each other. This is the first time you shared a room so it has been an adjustment but you both manage; however, you are looking at rooming with someone different next year.

Although you did not share how you found a church, you did indeed connect with a church that was a good fit. While participating in a church booth on campus you met a couple from your church who are extremely involved in the college group as well as attend the same college as you. You shared that this couple invested heavily in you personally as well as others attending the college group which was a huge blessing because this church is very relational. The church is non-denominational but charismatic,

which you identify with even though you did not experience this in your home church. When you were younger you actually attended a branch of this church and would often bug your parents about returning, so you were definitely excited to be affiliated with this particular church.

I love it because it is free and charismatic and something I've definitely missed and never really absorbed before, although my parents were definitely charismatic but my church was not very experienced and pretty fearful of that area through high school. So that's been awesome to find a church that really is very free, but [at] the same time Biblical and relational.

An area that was a huge struggle for you in high school was relationships with peers and yet this has not been an area of struggle since transitioning into college. In your opinion the relationships established this semester were positive and you felt accepted as well as genuinely cared for by your new group of peers. You attribute this to moving away from home and leaving behind the old patterns, expectations, and history with friends that stemmed from elementary school. In a lot of ways you felt trapped by living and growing up in your community and felt more freedom in your new surroundings. For the first time, you felt people accepted you for you, rather than what you could offer the relationship. In addition you felt you grew in accepting yourself for whom you are and felt like your experience would be much different if you were to go back to high school.

I feel like when I went to college it was a sigh of relief, I was able to be who I was and it was OK. I feel so blessed by God in that area [for] giving me friends who really love me for who I am and it's just been good being away from home and having time to process and then I can come back and love on people knowing that I really have moved on and knowing who I am a lot better.

You intend on spending time with a few friends from high school during your break, and you do not see any problems transitioning back with these friends as you did stay in contact with them, and you feel they genuinely care about you. In your opinion

transitioning back into church might be awkward because you did not stay as connected, but you are learning to not over invest in relationships. In other words you feel convicted to not feel guilty about not spending enough time with everyone. You do your best and are okay with what you are able to give as well as being okay with leaving people behind as you transition into new surroundings and friendships.

Along with reconnecting with friends and church, you experienced the transition back into home with your parents and brother. Your family stayed in touch while you were away and you feel your relationship with your parents transitioned into more of an adult-to-adult versus an adult-to-kid relationship. In your opinion family dynamics changed allowing you more autonomy where you do not have to share everything and they are not overseeing everything which in your mind lessens the pressure. Besides the change in your relationship with your parents, you developed a closer relationship with your brother. Your brother attends college in the same state you attend, and he plans on visiting you on his spring break. In this time away from each other, you learned some things about his personality that help you understand him better and you developed some of the same interests, such as rock climbing.

In different relational issues I've gone through this semester, he's always been there to impart any wisdom and to be protective of me [as well as] encouraging me and pushing me in my faith. So it's been cool and I've seen him really invest a lot more in my family in general and extended family and our interests have lined up a lot more. We're both into rock climbing a lot and he's coming down for his spring break. I feel like we're just a lot more similar now.

Your relationship with God was strengthened and further developed during your first semester of college. You continue to feel challenged to seek God fully and lately felt convicted to share the Gospel with some peers from high school, invest more time with your family, grow in certain areas, and reach out to your new community. One area

you continue to grow in is missionary work. In fact you are involved with a program that provides medical training so you can lead in this way and hopefully this summer you can go on a mission trip with this program to Rwanda. During this fall semester, you felt God really stretching you especially in the last two months of the semester.

[He is] calling me to pour out in different areas and to be bold while trying to balance school and everything. I'm tempted to say, 'No, God, I can't deal with that right now and this is all so new and I need to get settled before you challenge me to completely get out of my comfort zone'. But yeah, just in ministries and making sure I'm being intentional with my time and life. So, learning how to surrender and trust the Lord.

With the transition and all the adjustments, you could have easily lost focus and not made God a priority in your life but to help keep Him central you found an accountability partner. Her name is Kathy and you consider her your best friend in college. The two of you set aside one day per week to devote to prayer and time with the Lord. In addition you attend chapel on campus when you feel you need to encounter God; you attend church regularly and are involved in church activities. Next semester, you plan on meeting with an older student from church to mentor you, keep you accountable, dialogue with about issues you are facing, and pray with.

Growing and developing new passions are expected with any transition, for you rock climbing and kayaking have become new interests. Your initial exposure to these new adventures was during your freshman retreat because your group leader was involved in the Great Escapes Outdoor Program. He introduced you to the opportunities that incorporate the wilderness, first aid, and spirituality. Your friend Kathy enjoys rock climbing and kayaking as well, so this has been another opportunity for you to spend time together. In fact you are both trainees in the guide program and working on your medical certification so you can advance to assistant guides.

Along with new relationships, classes, instructors, church, and surroundings, you landed a work-study position. You were praying for a position that involved working with kids as well, as you really needed a job to help supplement your educational expenses. You were excited to see God provide you with a job at an elementary school near campus. The school you work in is a public school and you spend time between a kindergarten and fourth grade class three hours per week/per class. Your responsibilities include putting things up, grading, other secretary duties, and individual tutoring with students. You describe the demographics of this school as affluent to middle class with mostly Caucasian students in a medium sized school with a small Hispanic influence, much like the community you grew up in. The experience of working in an elementary school changed your perspective on teacher/student relationships and you are strongly considering pursuing a master's degree in education because of this positive experience.

It's public but my teachers are Christian, which is such a blessing. I am strongly considering going into teaching now, probably get a master's in education just because [of] that experience and seeing the Lord work through them, when they're bold, when they share the Gospel with their students, and just seeing how He blesses that and protects them so that's been really cool.

During a conversation with the teachers, you found out they were Christian. The fourth-grade teacher told you she strives to share her faith with her students and the kindergarten teacher simply stated she was religious. You were amazed by the boldness of the fourth-grade teacher as she openly shared and incorporated her faith into the classroom. She told you it was okay to share her faith as long as she was not proselytizing to the students. You would see her incorporate her faith into classroom discussions involving world issues and other tough questions students posed.

It was definitely significant right before Christmas, she was reading them a book about the true meaning of Christmas and one girl just starts crying in the middle of class so I just kind of took over for her while they just went and had a talk. I

think she prayed for her and it was just really powerful to see the impact of her love on their lives. They did a big surprise thing for her, just because she is like a mom to them and it's just really cool.

I asked you to compare this experience with your experience as a student in a public high school and you immediately thought of your high school science teacher who was Christian. You recall him sharing his faith and developing strong connections with students and by witnessing this made you consider teaching because of the tremendous influence you can have in students' lives. Your classroom experience in the elementary school would be the biggest influence on your consideration of a master's in education. Additionally, I asked what it was like to observe a Christian teacher in a public school openly share her faith and you responded with:

It was really encouraging. She said this was really her first year of being so bold and it was cool to walk through that with her, see how the Lord has protected her, not only has He protected her, but the parents came in and did a big thing for her too just because they love her so much and they see her love for their kids; it was just really powerful.

This work study experience has had a lasting impact on you and you spent time reflecting back on your own journey through high school. You recall how hesitant you were to open up to teachers and counselors because you were afraid you would be a burden to them. You also wanted to prove that you could be strong in that environment and that you could work through your own issues. This mindset of fending for yourself was also encouraged by your parents because you often heard them tell you to get over the issue and move on which made you believe other adults felt the same way. There were many situations you now know you would handle differently such as continuing relationships with teachers you met as a freshman like your Christian science teacher. Since you had him only your freshman year, you did not consider seeking him out later as

an upperclassman. In your analysis you should have taken more advantage of teachers on campus, so I asked what you meant by this and you responded with:

I guess seeing them more as friends which was something I didn't do in high school. That it is okay to be vulnerable and if I need something or if I'm having a rough day to talk about it, confide [in them], and not feel I have to be strong all the time. I felt like I was being a burden and they had so much going on that they only wanted to hear about my school needs, but they did not want to hear about me.

You attribute your immaturity and fear of adults as your hesitancy to make meaningful connections with teachers and counselors. You felt you had nothing significant to share with adults and often observed your teachers rushing to get things accomplished so in your opinion you were lucky to get your questions answered let alone have a heart-to-heart with a teacher. In addition it was out of your comfort zone and still is to approach a teacher or counselor about personal issues.

With my previous counselor in high school, I felt like he only wanted to talk about academics and he didn't think I could do anything. When I would come in with a schedule [issue] he would say, 'Oh, that's too hard for you,' and so that was my picture of counselors really as a whole. I really didn't make the connection of school counseling until this year as I consider it with my passion for psychology and teaching. In my mind [counseling] was always an academic not a social role.

This extremely influential work-study experience empowered you to really reflect on your experiences and an outcome of this reflection was advice for students and teachers. Your advice to incoming freshman is to seek out available resources in school such as teachers and counselors and know that they really are there for students, so do not hesitate reaching out to them. More importantly for teachers and counselors, to make sure in their everyday interactions with students to make it known that they also care about the students' social and emotional needs.

It's important to say, "I'll pray for you or how can I be praying for you?" To be consistently asking, "How are you?" or asking those hard questions, 'How are you doing, not just with your college process, but are you doing okay?'

Overall, Serenity, this first semester in college provided you new experiences but also time for reflection. As expected you grew academically, spiritually, and socially which was evident by your more confident demeanor. It was evident that you spent time learning who you are as a person because you were more willing to express yourself in this final interview. In my opinion you did not hold anything back but openly shared your journey with me. I was amazed by your transformation and blessed by your transparency. After completing your first semester in college, I asked what would you bring back to high school and you responded with:

Well, a lot of the freedom from OCD and from all of those ways of thinking is a big thing. Loving myself for who I am and not fearing myself, being comfortable with myself, comfortable in the Lord's love for me, that He will show me the next step, He'll provide, and I don't have to worry about it or figure it out on my own.

As I wrap up your story, you continue to wait patiently on God to direct your steps. Even before I received an email from you requesting a copy of your transcripts be sent to a local college, you knew in our last interview God could possibly send you back home. Although, home was a place you were so ready to leave, you are ready to return if that is God's plan for you. When we ran into each other at graduation, you sought me out to share God is continuing to change His plans for you, yet you peacefully and confidently obey His purpose for your life and like the prophet Isaiah you boldly stand before your King and say, "Here I am. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8b). Serenity, you are a genuine example of, "It's not about us, rather it's about Him."

Blessings,

JORDAN'S STORY

June 4, 2011

Dear Jordan,

As a counselor, I know a lot of students, even students not assigned to my caseload. As an educator, I believe it is important to support students in their extracurricular activities because it helps build a connection with students. My first awareness was watching you on the basketball court during your sophomore year. You immediately caught my attention because, in my opinion, you were an amazing athlete and when I found out you were only a sophomore that truly impressed me. Later, I found out, along with your exceptional athletic abilities, you were Christian. I immediately decided to interview you for my study, so I approached you and you enthusiastically agreed. Your mother would agree to your participation as well and thus my introduction to you and your family began.

Over a year and a half I observed you at River Front as an athlete, student, leader, and Christian. In addition I had the privilege of observing you outside of TV through summer baseball and interviews. We would meet in the pool room built by you and your grandfather called the "Eagles Nest", which is a game room decked out in your school colors. In your opinion this would be the best place for us to spend time together because it provided a space with little interruption from your six siblings. As we walked out to

the Eagles Nest, you introduced me to your siblings as well as some of the animals including the baby chicks your sister was playing with.

Family

You are the oldest of 7 children; you have 4 sisters and 2 brothers. In addition your family does foster care so at times you have more children in the house. You live in the country with a gorgeous view of the mountains and some land which provides plenty of space for you and your siblings to have fun. Next door, live your maternal grandparents who you consider to be your second set of parents. Although it can get crazy and there is never a dull moment, you enjoy your siblings and together participate in 4-H, support each other in sporting activities, and do lots of activities together at home including video games, basketball, and soccer.

It's never dull that's for sure. I was kind of forced into a leadership role because I'm the oldest so I've always been the one who is looked up to. I kind of had to, well I didn't have to, but I've become really protective especially with Hannah since she was in high school this year. I definitely enjoy them and they made me realize that I want to have kids of my own, but probably not seven of them.

In my past experience working with siblings, especially an older brother/younger sister dyad, typically the older sibling does not want anything to do with the younger, but that was not the case with you. You believed it was your responsibility to look out for your sister who just transitioned into high school. Although you did not always hang out together at school, you had no problem with her being around. You were a huge support to her, often tutoring her and supporting her athletic activities.

She's my sister. She's my family; you take care of your family. I would be pretty upset if she turned around, when I'm gone, and ignores the next one coming into [high school]. We are a family, we are supposed to stay tight knit; we are a support system for each other.

At the time of your first interview, you had a foster brother in the home named Tino. Initially you were not sure how you felt about the latest addition to your family because you felt it was crazy enough. Your initial reaction was based more on wanting some private time away from adoring younger siblings; however, your feelings for the newest addition would soon change and within time this little guy would grow on you.

He's like a brother now. He's here every day; my dad and I were watching him eat before you got here and we were laughing at how he stuffs his face with peaches. Little things like that; he kind of grows on you.

You compare Tino's time in your home to a whirlwind because the courts told your family he was going back to his family, but then he would not. His permanent placement was up in the air the entire time he was with your family but there was hope God would make him a permanent addition to your family. Personally you hoped Tino went where God wanted him to go even though in your heart you wanted him to stay, but you also knew God was in control of the situation.

At the time of your last interview, Tino was placed back into his home, which deeply saddened your family, but despite the pain this caused, your faith remained in God. Indeed God was in control because during Tino's stay with your family he learned how to hug and receive love and attention. The social worker reported to your family that Tino was demanding to be hugged from his family members, which at one time was not the case, so maybe this was God's plan for this little one to learn love through your family so he could in turn teach his family. Foster sibling or not, your siblings hold a dear place in your heart and they make you smile.

[You] get that feeling in your gut, you're like, 'ah yeah, this is where I want to be'. Either it's the stupid things they do [to] make you laugh [or] the little moments. Like the other day, my little brother asked me why I had to go to college for four years. I told him I had to go to school and he asked why I couldn't go to school like everybody else. One of them got upset [because] he's

like, ‘well, I [won’t] have anybody to play video games with’. So, their innocence makes you feel good to see how they think and how little college means to them.

With a large family come many chores and responsibilities as well as a busy, daily schedule. Each of you have chores including house cleaning and outside chores which includes taking care of the animals. Because of your family’s involvement in 4-H you have a variety of animals that come and go including chickens, goats, miniature horses, lambs, and rabbits. In addition there are the domestic pets including dogs, cats, fish, and a hermit crab or two running around. Your day starts early and depending on the amount of homework ends around 10:30 pm. After spending a busy day at school including athletic practice, you come home, eat supper, do your homework, spend time with the “little guys”, which is your affectionate name for your younger siblings, and possibly join grandpa and/or dad in a sporting activity.

You are blessed to have your grandparents live next door and you feel extremely fortunate to have them as huge supporters in your life. Your grandpa taught you how to work with your hands including how to use tools for building and car mechanics. Since your father was not taught how to use tools nor learned mechanics, you and your grandfather maintain the family vehicles (you actually built a car together) as well as complete many building projects at home including the pool (billiards) room and hot tub room. You consider your grandparents a second set of parents as well as key members of your fan club.

I grew up next door to my grandparents, which I don’t think most kids do so I am very lucky. My grandpa is like a father to me, he’s been my basketball and baseball coach until high school. My grandma is like my mom anytime my mom and dad aren’t around she’ll discipline me if I need it. [My grandparents] have no problem stepping in if I’m goofing off and they tend to be harder on me than my parents.

Your relationship with your parents is equally close and you keep open communication with both of them. You tend to go to dad for personal matters, but state you are very close with your mother. During senior year, you spent a tremendous amount of time with mom who helped you navigate the college admission and scholarship process. Because of the hours spent together working on applications, you got on each other's nerves, but in the end you were grateful for the huge role mom played in this process.

She's been my personal secretary by doing a lot of paperwork, e-mails, and I can't tell you how grateful I am for her. I don't always tell her that, but she's definitely helped me get my college stuff [completed] without her I wouldn't be here. I'd still be struggling with the first application.

With college right around the corner, leaving home will be difficult for everyone especially since you are the first child to leave home. In your opinion your younger siblings are too young to understand this transition and you anticipate your mom crying significantly on that day. Although your dad is excited for you, you know you will miss each other because you consider him your bud. As for your grandparents, they are happy for you and will continue to support you throughout college. Moreover, you know this transition will be difficult for you, but you are looking forward to the freedom and new opportunities, even so you know you will get homesick and at the first opportunity you will be home. It did not take me long to understand the significant role family plays in your life, how they have shaped you into whom you are, and what they mean to you.

They're number one; I mean after God, they're my number one thing. They're always there supporting me, backing me, we always have a lot of fun together, and coming home makes me smile seeing them all. Don't get me wrong, we have our moments where we butt heads, but I wouldn't trade them for the world.

Faith

You grew up Christian and went to Sunday school, which was just part of life so in your opinion you do not know anything different. You were the first baby born, baptized, and saved in your church. Originally your family attended a Baptist church but followed the youth pastor when he decided to start his own church. In the Baptist church you helped with Vacation Bible School as well as participated on a couple mission trips where you helped with a Vacation Bible School and construction work. The Baptist church you attended was extremely conservative, in your opinion, people shunned playing athletics, going to the movies, and listening to music. Although you agree there are certain things you must be careful of, you do not believe you should turn yourself off from the world.

I think you can be in the world but not of the world. Our church now we are in the world but we are not of it but there's not a problem with going to see a movie or listening to an iPod or anything like that which my family has always been that way. We went to a church that was [more] conservative so people kind of looked at us a little different. I love our church now. It's awesome!

Your family enjoys your new church, which is non-denominational and you teach Sunday school in the children's ministry. I asked you what it means to be Christian and you responded with:

It means I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins, God created the world, and I believe everything in the Bible. I think I look different from the world, sometimes I don't accept that but it's my role. It means I have a responsibility to be an example and I'm going to heaven when I die.

We would spend a fair amount of time in the beginning discussing your perceptions on faith and your growth as a Christian. Initially you believed faith is something you are taught as a child but as you got older you started to develop your own beliefs. There were times when watching TV seemed more important than going to

church, but as you grew older you no longer needed your parents to tell you to go because it became your choice. Your parents encouraged you to explore other churches with your friends but after all the exploration you decided the church you attend is where you want to be.

As I got older, it got to the point where I wanted to go to church you didn't have to force me. There have been nights where my family cannot go because there is something going on but my sister and I would ride up together. I think in the beginning it's usually somebody, if it's not the parents, it's the pastor somebody has to start you in that direction maybe it's a friend I don't know but I know now for me it is what I've chosen.

Just as your perception on faith continues to develop as you mature so does your growth as a Christian. At one time you believed and behaved the way you were told to, but as you matured you started understanding why you believed and behaved the way you do as well as why you continued to do so. Along with maturity, you believe God draws you to Him, but it is equally important that you respond to His call by seeking Him. For three to four years, you did not see yourself grow as a Christian and were perfectly content where you were. That is to say, you did not stray away from your faith and misbehave, but you also did not seek out ways to grow in your faith like reading your Bible more often. Within the last year or two, you spent time reflecting on your faith and made a decision that you were not content, which resulted in a changed attitude.

Within the last year or two I looked at myself in the mirror and asked, "are you serious about this or not?" I'm this way in everything if I'm not serious about something I'm just going [to] stop. In anything I do athletics, academics if I'm not there to be the best that I can be at what I'm doing then why be there. I kept looking at myself [and asked], "well you do that in everything else, but in your faith you're content where you're at. It's time for you to pick which way you're going to go." Well I've been like this for a long time, what would be the down side of just saying, "No, I'm done with this." I knew the truth and knew what it was like. I finally had to kick myself in the butt and say, "alright it's time to start taking this more seriously," so I did even when I didn't understand. It's like just dive in and God will open it up to you even if you don't know what's going on,

which is a leap of faith. I think I've been doing a lot more of that, but God knows what He's doing and I have to trust Him.

With the decision to make faith a priority, you started reading the Bible and were determined to spend time in the Word every day. Because of your persistence and commitment, reading the Bible became a daily priority. Along with reading the Bible, you continued to look for other ways to grow as a Christian and within time you found God speaking to you about starting a Fellowship of Christian Athletes on campus. Besides family and faith, athletics is a huge passion of yours one that stemmed from childhood. Throughout childhood you played organized football, basketball, and baseball, with the greatest love for baseball. Along with family and faith, baseball would play a significant role in your life.

Competitive Baseball

You were invited to play on a competitive travel league the summer before your senior year; a significant honor as professional baseball teams as well as 70 colleges were watching. In addition your coaches were from the Atlanta Braves, which was truly an honor and privilege to receive coaching from the pros. You played approximately five games in Peoria, Arizona where you were exposed to colleges such as Arkansas, known for college level baseball. Arkansas along with many other colleges would actively recruit you as well as you would catch the eye of some professional teams. The time spent on this travel league provided you with the opportunity to play the game you love, strengthen techniques and skills, and develop relationships with players and coaches across the United States.

As part of this travel league, you played with players, both high school and college, from across the state. While you traveled, you roomed with a young man named

Jordan who you would spend about four months with so in your opinion you knew him fairly well. On a trip back from Dallas, Texas, after playing with the summer league, Jordan and his family were tragically killed in a car accident. You and your teammates would find out about this tragic event through one of the local news channels.

The way we heard it, hearing it on the news and we were like, “No way” none of us had heard it yet so the way we found out was kind of shocking. It was definitely, definitely tough but they are all in a better place. They were a Christian family so we all know they wound up in a better spot, but it was difficult seeing them go that way, but it was kind of encouraging that they were [Christian], they were such a tight knit family. They all actually died together so that was somewhat comforting, I guess. It was also kind of tough too though.

It would be a tough couple of weeks as you dealt with the tragic news, attended the funerals, and reflected on the time you spent with Jordan. Over the course of playing together you had the opportunity to get to know each other fairly well, you were surprised to find out he was Christian. Your response when you found out:

I didn't [realize he was Christian] actually, which was surprising. I roomed with him and stuff but I had no idea until he passed away and at the funeral [I learned] they were a Christian family, which was probably what ate at me the most.

It was upsetting to realize you spent the whole summer together, but never shared your faith. In your opinion had you shared this, you could have supported each other throughout the summer. You took responsibility for not sharing this with him and felt the way you conducted yourself spoke of your faith, and by this alone you should have both realized this about each other. You are still uncertain why you did not share your Christian identity, other than as high school guys you really do not talk about faith that much. This event led you to exam how you portrayed your faith around the guys and served as the catalyst for change. You saw your faith portrayed that summer as:

I don't think I did [portray my faith], like I wasn't doing things that would make people think, 'oh he's a bad kid', I wasn't swearing at the guys, chewing, and that kind of stuff, but I also wasn't, I was just kind of there. I wasn't preaching, not

necessarily preaching, but at least speaking up for Christ, I wasn't doing the other side either, but I was kind of you do your thing and I'll do my thing and we're all good.

How you portrayed your faith during spring baseball looked much different than the summer before. Although, in your mind, you still were not preaching, you were "throwing a little more out" than you used to. By this, you would ask your teammates to look at things from a different perspective and you would continue to set a good example. You did pair up with another Christian teammate, who you invited to Fellowship of Christian Athletes and while you did drills during practice you would often speak about your faith. Sometimes the discussions were about what you talked about in FCA that day, other times you would talk about the other teammates' comments or activities and put them into a Christian perspective.

The death of a teammate was not the only trial you encountered during summer ball; you also became very ill at an extremely inconvenient time, which would cause some distress. You came down with the flu while you were in Arkansas and even played one game where you were feeling awful and in your words "sweating bullets." This became very concerning to you because you had to pitch one of the games and you wanted to show well for the scouts. You called home and Mom immediately contacted people to pray for you. Along with prayer and 12 hours of rest, you woke up feeling much better and were extremely thankful that the flu would not be a part of your pitching that day. Although this illness caused initial panic, you remained positive and believed God was in control.

It was trusting God to get me better and if I didn't get better that was what was supposed to happen. I rode the wave out and wound up being healthy so that was good. I mean everything happens for a reason so if I was supposed to get sick then I was supposed to get sick. There is nothing I can do about it so just kind of live with it and move on.

Many student athletes dream of going pro at some point in their athletic career. The odds of going pro are long, according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association; you have a 9.4 percent chance of going pro in baseball as a senior NCAA athlete, which is the highest percentage in NCAA sports including football, soccer, basketball, and hockey. For you the possibility of going pro at some point is realistic as you were invited by a coach from the Indians to start working with him and play on his college team the summer after graduation. In addition you are on his draft board as well as other coaches' draft boards so there is a possibility that you could delay a college education and go straight to the majors.

To go straight to the majors you would need to be drafted high, but you decided long ago if offered six figures you would go pro. This figure was not pulled out of the sky rather you consulted with college and professional coaches as well as a cousin who plays professional baseball. Your cousin was drafted right out of college, because he was not offered six figures he played at the collegiate level and then went to the majors. All of them agreed that forgoing a college education for a shot at the pros is worthwhile as long as you are offered six figures or higher. In addition to consulting people in the baseball realm, you spoke with your parents who agreed you should take advantage of playing professionally if given the opportunity.

As you progress with your baseball career, you honestly believe you will enter the pros; it is just a matter of when. With the possibility of going pro or even playing at the collegiate level, you realize the possible implications this may pose to your faith. You see these opportunities as a chance to assess your faith to see if it is truly your faith or

your parents. You believe it is indeed your faith, however, you anticipate some challenges.

I think it's going to be a challenge [because] I'm sure there will be a lot more non-Christians than Christians on any team. I'll be on my own I won't be sheltered in my house anymore and it's going to be a big test to see if it's my faith or my parents' faith, which I think I'll handle well but it will definitely be a challenge. It will be the same thing with college too, either way I go.

You believe it is your faith, but you still live under your parents' roof and must follow their rules, give an account for your activities, and answer to them. Things will be different when you are away at college or living on your own playing professional baseball. As you see it, the way you spend time will be up to you and whether God will be a part of that or not, which you believe He will; only time will tell. As with many students, a changed environment away from home does lead them to abandon their faith because they saw their faith as belonging to their parents rather than their own, but you do not see this happening to you. You recognize that it will be harder to keep your faith in college or as a professional athlete, but you do not see yourself losing your faith either in college or the majors.

I think it's if you buy in when you're younger or not. I mean, you can go to church with a Christian family your whole life but that doesn't mean you're a Christian, it's a personal decision. God calls different people to Himself so sometimes people just aren't called to the faith. [I am] definitely not planning on losing my faith through college or pro ball.

In your opinion you believe playing in the majors will be easier than college because of the maturity of the players. You feel playing with older men who are not afraid to speak about their faith will offer a better support system than playing with young college men who may not be as bold as you experienced with your teammate Jordan. In addition there tends to be more resources in the majors than in college when it

comes to living your faith including team chapels and chaplains, which is really encouraging to you.

Although it is still up in the air whether you will play baseball in college or the pros, you understand the importance of finding the resources to help support your faith. While you played in summer leagues, you spent time asking players about the availability of resources; you did the same when visiting colleges. You feel as long as you put these support systems in place and stay disciplined you will remain strong in faith.

You [need] to find a good church wherever you are, if I wind up in college I'll find a church there or wherever I play you have to have some kind of support group [as well as] staying in the Word. You have to be discipline enough to wake up and read your Bible every morning and [continue] to do the same things you are doing now, you just got to make yourself do it on your own.

On a few occasions I had the opportunity to observe you on the baseball field. In my observation you are a fierce competitor, talented player, role model, and a good sport. You enjoy winning, but understand losing is part of the game too. There are days when you perform to the best of your ability and days when your performance falls short; however, you keep it all in perspective and are thankful for the opportunity to play competitive baseball. Along with your athletic ability, you rank in the top 10% of your graduating class and are involved in numerous leadership activities in school. Next to playing baseball, you absolutely love high school and take full advantage of every opportunity to excel.

High School

You started primary education in public school, but were home schooled from second through eighth grade. Because public school was rather easy for you in first grade, your parents decided to home school until high school. You attended middle school for athletics, physical education, and elective courses such as construction. You

enjoyed attending public school for the social and athletic aspects, but enjoyed home schooling because you could move at a faster pace through the curriculum. Because of your involvement in athletics and 4-H, your transition into high school was rather smooth; however, there were certain things you were not exposed to in home school so you had to implement some strategies to deal with the distractions.

The only thing that was tough was some of the language and the way people dressed was different. The girls didn't dress very modest so that was a challenge at first to make sure to keep my eyes from wandering. I'm not allowed to swear so I'd be in school where people would just kind of pop off pretty frequently, which was kind of a culture shock but I got use to it by praying, being conscious of it, and caught myself if I ever went in that direction.

Despite the coping strategies you implemented to deal with the distractions, it remained a challenge to be Christian in a public school. Attending a school of 1,300 students versus home school definitely allowed for many opportunities and exposure to tempting situations. Although you had a system in place, temptation would rear its ugly head and like all of us, temporarily lead you astray. Unfortunately, temptation does not take breaks nor is bias toward anyone, so you had to be deliberate in your choices and make conscious decisions on who and what to surround yourself with, but sometimes temptation would win.

I would say it's a test, it's difficult, and you fail. I've failed multiple times and messed up. A verse comes to mind I don't know what it is but it says, "God will never give us temptations that we cannot handle or problems we cannot beat." There's nothing that He gives us that we cannot overcome so the way I look at it is girls are there, girls are going to dress that way if they want, [and] people are going to say what they want but it's nothing that I know I cannot beat. I've definitely not beat it before there have been times where my eyes have strayed away where I shouldn't have but I think it's also who you surround yourself with.

In your opinion Christians are definitely in the minority at school and people do not see Christianity as a big deal, but you believe they truly do not understand what being Christian means nor understand why you choose to live your life differently. You never

felt persecuted as a Christian and attribute this to your popularity and stature. As a 6'1", 200-220 pound athletically built young man, students do not tend to bug you about anything nor give you grief about your beliefs. Also, you possess a strong personality, tend to be set in your ways, so you have no problem telling people what you think or believe. In your eyes students know you are Christian and do not see it as a big deal; however, if you were not well known you believe students would possibly scrutinize you more as a Christian. Because of your popularity, your friends come from all social groups and are not all necessarily Christian. Hanging out with non-Christian friends poses challenges to your faith, but you are vigilant about their influence in your life.

You have to be careful not to let your friends influence you. I have a lot of friends in school who are non-believers but you have to be careful and make sure they don't influence the way you live, you have to be an example to them.

You believe the actual number of Christian students on campus is far greater than reflected but for whatever reason they choose not to express or share their faith on campus. You attribute this to many reasons including status with peers, perceived limitations, and inability to have fun as a Christian. You managed to overcome all of these possible deterrents primarily because you grew up with a Christian worldview, so do not know anything different, but more importantly you made a conscious decision to not detach from your faith upon entering the front door.

I think a lot of it is they are wanting to be popular, be the big man on campus, think if you are a Christian you can't go have fun with your friends, and you miss out on a lot so they aren't going to do it [expose their faith]. Whereas I, I seem to have success with all those areas having fun with my friends, I have no problem going to parties and that kind of thing as long as I'm in the right spot with the right people, but I think a lot of kids are scared that if you are a Christian you have so many restrictions that it's just kind of a damper.

You are a natural leader on campus, highly respected, popular, athletic, intelligent, and Christian. With your popularity, comes the capability to influence many

students from all walks of life. Throughout your four years, you enjoyed the relationships built within the classroom, athletic field, and other campus activities. You do not treat others as if they were a stranger and embrace every opportunity to reach out to others. In your opinion, God blessed you with popularity so you could have major influence in your school.

I think I've been given [popularity] for a reason especially with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes because I think God wanted me to be fairly popular so I could influence more people than your average Joe, but it does carry weight because kids are watching me. When you are popular people pay attention to what you do and what you say so that gives me opportunity, but it also gives me chances to mess up too more than some kids get because people are always watching me. I think it goes both ways it's good and it's bad.

With leadership comes ample opportunity for success and failure and your experience would be no different; however, how you chose to conduct yourself during the ups and downs demonstrated your outstanding character. Our initial time together started at the end of your junior year, but we would spend the majority of our conversations surrounding the senior year and post-secondary transition. Although I was initially concerned that you would not share enough, your story continued to blossom as the experiences of the senior year came to fruition, what a journey it was and I was profoundly blessed to see each petal unfold.

Senior Year

With junior year finished, and senior year on the horizon there were many events to look forward to and many decisions to make. It saddened you to see senior year was finally here, primarily because you truly enjoyed high school. High school, after all, was a place to learn, grow, develop relationships, compete athletically, and experience success and failure. Your first interview was at the end of your junior year so you spoke about your hopes for senior year. You recalled reading something your friend wrote in

your yearbook; he told you to take advantage of every opportunity senior year and to live it to the fullest because this was your last shot at high school. You made the decision to exit high school with many fond memories and to take advantage of every opportunity and invitation that came your way. As you stated, “I don’t want to be sitting on the couch. I am going to do everything I can and have a ball.”

As you shared your story, what emerged was the relationships formed, the knowledge acquired, experiences in leadership and athletics, transition, and reflection. We met again at the end of your first semester and a couple months prior to graduation, in this time you spoke of your journey through all these experiences. With the start of the school year came the college admission process, this was intense for you because you applied to several colleges as well as applied for numerous scholarships. In your opinion it was a tremendous amount of paperwork, communication with a variety of coaches and athletic directors, numerous campus visits, and a lot of writing. Despite this time consuming process, you were thankful for the opportunity to apply to colleges from the Pacific Coast through central United States.

It’s a long haul that’s for sure, but it is also very gratifying to know you are getting an opportunity, have chances to get scholarships, and get looked at by schools that many kids don’t get the chance to do. Definitely there have been times I’ve been sick of it and ready to quit but then I keep at it and get reminded that it is an opportunity that lots of kids don’t have so I should be thankful for it.

After applying to several colleges, making campus visits, and receiving acceptance letters to a variety of institutions including Division I, II, and junior colleges, you chose to attend a junior college. You would sign in January with this junior college to play baseball and for the time being committed to attend there unless an acceptable Division I offer came through. Going through the athletic recruitment process was fun but came with challenges. Although you had made a verbal commitment to attend

Plainsmen College, another junior college wanted you as well and would pose some problems that would trickle into Plainsmen College. You found yourself dealing with an extremely compromising situation, but would take full responsibility, although technically the issue was not initiated by you, make some difficult phone calls, and make amends with both institutions. Jordan, this was one of many examples of the tremendous amount of integrity you possess and demonstrated. I recall the stress this situation temporarily caused, but you took a step back, did not blame anyone, and courageously faced the predicament.

Even though you were waiting for the right Division I school to make an offer, as the year progressed your decision to attend Plainsmen College seemed to be the right fit and at this point you were not too sure you would take a Division I offer. You liked what Plainsmen College offered with its close proximity to home and the professional coaches in Denver, an outstanding baseball program, experienced and successful coaching staff, and reputable academics. Along with the amenities of Plainsmen College, your view of Division I baseball changed, which helped strengthen your contentment with a junior college.

Definitely leaning towards Plainsmen College, the more I think about it the more it looks really good. I think a lot of [my decision to sign] was because of the coaches who I've worked with. I used to have a perception that you had to go to a Division I to be the stud guy who was going to play professionally, but the more guys I work with, pro guys I talk to, and coaches I get to know they all say the same thing, that junior college is almost better sometimes because you play right away.

With the college decision pretty much decided, essays written, and scholarship applications submitted the first semester came to an end. In your opinion first semester flew by and kept you busy with the college admission process. Football season was different for you because of reasons we would discuss later, but extremely fun. Classes

went well even though a couple of the advance placement courses were challenging and kept you on your toes. As planned, you spent any free time away from fall baseball with friends and started the basketball season. Second semester moved quickly as well with your final basketball season ending, spring break around the corner, and the anticipation for the final activities of your high school career including prom, baseball season, senior ditch day, and graduation. We would spend time reflecting on the relationships, activities, and transitions that transpired and awaited your final year of high school.

Relationships

You never mentioned a best friend rather you spoke about having many friends of different ages. Because of varsity athletics, you tended to have friends much older than you, and now as an upperclassman you have friends who are underclassmen. A person's age has never restricted you from being friends in fact the majority of your friends are younger in large part because of your girlfriend. Christine, who is 18 months younger than you, introduced you to her friends when you started dating and now you consider them mutual friends. In addition to Christine's friends you have many buddies who will be seniors next year, who look up to you. You enjoy having others see you as a role model and do your best to be a positive role model because you know people are watching.

Christine is your first girlfriend in fact she is the only girl you dated throughout high school. You consider your relationship serious as you have been dating for well over a year. At one point you never thought you would meet a Christian girl, but you did and you consider this a huge blessing. Christine and you have a lot in common as she is intelligent and a gifted athlete as well. As mentioned earlier, through your relationship

with Christine you met other Christian students, primarily females who you now consider good friends. Although you have a few Christian, male friends, females outnumber the males. You believe it is important to surround yourself with Christian friends who can offer support and fellowship.

We aren't meant to run this race on our own; we talked about this at FCA last week. God did not put us here by ourselves to do it on our own. He gave us His Word and the Holy Spirit to be there with us. Multiple times the Bible talks about the importance of fellowship whether it is at church, FCA, school, or wherever. Obviously it's important enough to God to tell us to fellowship because He gave us that extra support to push through those tougher things that we cannot beat on our own.

Prior to meeting Christine and starting FCA you found it difficult to meet other Christian students, especially male students. From past experience, it was not that Christian males were nonexistent in school rather the majority of male Christians did not openly share their faith. In your opinion girls express their faith easier than boys because they are always talking about their feelings with each other and checking in with each other, whereas guys do not ask each other how they are feeling. In other words girls are always chatting with each other and expressing their feelings so the probability of them sharing about their faith is more likely to occur. You believe guys tend to not openly express their faith with friends for fear of losing that friend once faith is shared. You shared other reasons why some guys find it hard to express their faith:

I think at times the Christian faith has been feminized too much; it's been played off as loti da, so I think guys think well I don't want to be a "girl." There's nothing wrong with it but I do know a few guys who say they are Christians who are definitely more feminine than others, I mean they aren't gay or anything but they aren't athletes, they aren't very manly, I guess you can say, they are kind of different. I mean there's nothing wrong with them and they aren't afraid to say they are Christians. Guys like myself that go lift weights, play football, and that kind of thing they see that and go "well I don't want to be a Christian, that's kind of like a 'fruity guy.'"

And yet, Jordan, you are a strong, successful athlete and weekly stood in front of a room of peers openly sharing and discussing your faith. Again, you attribute your ability to share your faith because this is how you were raised. In addition if peers took issue with your Christian faith, you were confident they were not going to harass you about it because of your size and popularity.

They never really question why I live that way or what I believe. [It] comes down to that worldly view of you do your thing and I'll do my thing and we'll all head for the same place at the end, so they don't really feel it's that big of a deal. I've never had somebody come up to me and say, "You're wrong."

Plainly, Jordan, you took no issue sharing your faith with other believers, but it seems to me you took a little different approach with your non-Christian friends. Although they knew you were Christian, unless they brought the issue up, you really did not share your faith with them. Indeed you expressed your faith through your behavior, but did not try to evangelize to your friends. In some ways you also took what you call the "worldly view" with the attitude of this is how I am going to live, you live the way you choose, we can be friends, but if I do not agree I am not going to participate.

I do have that tendency to have that bad view of you do your thing and I'll do mine instead of telling people that they are lost. I mean you do what you want, I'm not going to partake but for example I'll tell my buddies who aren't believers (they love to fish and I love to fish) 'well I'm not going to come preach to you while we are fishing. I just want to go fishing'. I think [it] helps that I'm not fire and brimstone in their face all the time. I think there is a time and place for that but I think sometimes I just want to have fun.

As you spent more and more time with Christine and her friends, your perspective on females and males sharing their faith changed because you noticed it was not any easier for girls to express their faith. You realized that your stereotyping of girls and boys and how they relate with each other were incorrect and regardless of gender, sharing

faith is hard; however, you believe if somebody really wants to share his or her faith it does not have to be hard.

Faith, I mean it's hard no matter whom you are, but it's also, it [changes] from person to person. I mean some people can talk to anybody about anything. I think it's just who you are not so much if you're a boy or a girl.

As you mentioned, in our culture faith is sometimes over emotionalized, seen as something weak or “prissy”, when faith can be bold and courageous. You do not diminish that feelings or emotions are a part of faith as you believe God gave us the ability to feel unlike His other creations. As you grow, mature, and spend more time around female and male friends your awareness grows and I think you realized many pastors and other church leaders are now discovering sharing faith may need to look different depending on the audience. For the male audience and females as well, sharing stories like the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found in the book of Daniel is an example of bold and courageous faith. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and worship an idol made by King Nebuchadnezzar so they were thrown into a blazing furnace for disobeying the king. Even though they knew their disobedience would find them in a blazing furnace the three courageous, young men did not sway from their belief in only one true God. You like this story because the three did not whine and cry about their predicament rather they stood up to the king without fear and an attitude of our God is bigger than you. In addition this story serves as an illustration on how Christians can be bold and courageous in their faith.

I think sometimes our faith gets kind of belittled, so being bold in your [faith] by standing for God and what you believe in. I mean someday you might not have to but there are definitely days where people are going to say something and smart off and you can either take it or be bold and stand up for your faith.

Jordan, I believe you truly invest in your relationships and you are insightful of others. Throughout your walk in high school, I saw you demonstrate and share your faith with courage, boldness, and emotion. As you spoke about your relationship with Christine, there was no doubt that you adore, respect, and value her. This relationship, much like other relationships you invest in, stems from the heart and as I listened I felt your love, gratefulness, and happiness for this young lady.

Although you knew who Christine was and sounds like you knew a little about her you would not formally meet and speak to her until basketball season. Even though you knew and met other girls you did not date any of them because they were not Christian. Questioning a girl about her faith background was something you tried to bring up in the first conversation. It was a Saturday when you first approached Christine and asked what she was doing on Sunday when she responded with “going to church” you started asking more questions and once you knew she had the same beliefs as you it was “smooth sailing from there”. I asked if and why it was important that Christine was Christian and your response:

Yes, it is. She’s the first girl I’ve ever dated and I did not want to date a girl that was not. In the Bible it says that you should not be unevenly yoked, which obviously I’m not married to her but even dating I don’t want someone that’s not a believer.

Upon deciding that you were going to date, Christine and you spoke about the role faith would play in your relationship. You both agreed that your faith would be at the forefront of your relationship. In addition your parents would make this a requirement of your relationship as well as do their part to make sure you were “always in check”. After meeting Christine’s parents, you realized her parents were as serious about faith as your parents. You fondly remember your first date with Christine, which

was dinner at her house to meet her parents. You recall that night as the most awkward dinner ever because you “got grilled by her parents the whole night”. Moreover it felt like you were alone with her parents as you recall maybe speaking about ten words with Christine and answering about 101 of her parents’ questions. You never expected to just start dating Christine without her parents knowing who you were so you were not surprised by their questioning and although it was awkward at first you rather enjoyed the questioning and compared it to an interview. Her parents asked you about athletics, school, your likes and dislikes as well as your faith. Her mom was interested in what church you attended, your role in church, and what you thought about church.

You mentioned you had a few conversations with your dad about dating, but nothing serious as he pretty much let you learn on your own. You believe he felt you were not going to make any huge mistakes so he allowed you to figure things out; however, your parents along with Christine’s would make sure you were “in check”. Although your parents did not demand to know everything, you did share your whereabouts and your plans, but neither you nor Christine cared that your parents knew because you had nothing to hide.

We definitely realize there are roads that lead to places we don’t want to go yet. I think the way we were raised by our parents made the bigger difference in keeping us in check then now, because when we first started dating obviously the reins were a little tighter but a year into this I can be at her house and her parents will go to bed before I leave because they trust us enough to where they don’t have to worry.

In addition to your parents keeping you in check, you and Christine keep each other accountable. For example, you are both members of student council so one of your responsibilities is helping with school dances. Unfortunately because of the nature of

dancing these days, Christine and you help set up but then leave because you do not want to surround yourself with the type of dancing that goes on at high school dances.

It's a few steps down from the strip club kind of which is sad to say but it's kind of our culture. Yeah, it's something Christine and I don't want to be a part of, so we [spent] time together without the whole distraction or anything.

Because of the everyday distractions in school and really in society in general, you said you really have to keep your mind in check. Again, the way students dress, sexual content of conversations, and language are things you are exposed to daily. In addition often students feel pressured by peers to have sex. In your opinion it helps that Christine feels the same way because then you help each other by not tempting each other.

There's definitely struggles with it [being Christian and dating] you got to keep your mind in check but I think we do a good job of keeping each other in check with her being as serious a Christian as I am. We balance each other really well and make sure we don't tempt each other in the wrong ways. It helps when you are on the same page in the faith area because we really haven't had any problems with that. We know our limits and haven't had a problem sticking to them.

Jordan, I think because Christine and you placed God first in your relationship you lessened your chances for temptation. In addition when you were struggling with something, you prayed for each other. When things went well or you received good news you gave all the praise to God. The topics of your conversations were often about church or FCA so you did not even notice the amount of time you spent discussing faith because it was so natural for both of you. With your senior year coming to an end, Christine and you spent time discussing your departure for college. You both agreed that you wanted to try a long distance relationship and believed if God wanted you to remain together things would work out. It helped to know that you would not be far from home and would have ample opportunity to see each other on weekends. You are confident that

you will succeed in your long distance relationship because you believe it is much different than most high school relationships.

I would say it is a more mature relationship. We are not your two, little, love birds, high school kids we are more serious about what we are doing, we understand the support side of a relationship, and we are not just in it for the sex like most kids. We are more in it because we care about each other and I think that will go a long way when we get to college.

There is no doubt in your mind it will be different to be away from each other and at times it will be difficult, but you respect each other enough to allow each other room to grow. Before you made the decision to attend a college close to home, Christine encouraged you to go to a college even if it was clear across the country because she did not want you to give up your dreams because of her. Although it will take some time to adjust, you are confident your relationship will survive; however, you see the following year a bigger trial because she will leave for college and more than likely she will not attend the same college. Regardless what the future holds for her, you feel your close relationship will help you work through the time apart. It is evident that you care for this young lady with the same love and respect you hold toward your family and I totally agree if God wants you together; you will be together.

I know it sounds kind of weird coming from a high school kid, but she's definitely someone I could see myself spending the rest of my life with. We are definitely going to give it a try and see how all that will work.

Jordan, I appreciate your honesty and transparency about your relationship with Christine. It was awesome to see the open and honest communication you shared with each other especially when it came to your faith. I honestly believe that your decision to keep God central in your relationship contributes to your strong relationship, and at a young age you are developing habits that will benefit you in marriage. In addition to

sharing about your relationships with peers and Christine, you spoke about the high school staff including your relationship with them and classroom experiences.

You do not recall a teacher who you did not like and you felt it was important to establish good relationships with your teachers. There was a teacher junior year that you did not particularly care for, but you were not defiant with her, you just did not seek out this teacher to talk to outside of the classroom. Whereas you felt you had many positive relationships with faculty where you would just stop to chat with them, some of them were teachers you never had in class but enjoyed speaking with them.

Your involvement in FCA senior year provided the opportunity to meet Christian faculty. There were certain Christian teachers and coaches you were already aware of because of conversations in class. For example you knew your English language composition teacher was Christian, and because your sister participated in cross country you knew the coach was Christian. You were grateful to meet other Christian faculty through FCA and without them participating or helping out you would not have known this about them. You believe it is hard for faculty to share their faith with students because of the restrictions placed on them.

I think Christian teachers are in a hard spot because they cannot profess their faith in class, so it is hard to know who is and isn't Christian. I know I can go up and say something but they are kind of restricted on what they can say. I think through FCA and seeing faculty show up who I didn't know were Christian was cool, but it made me wonder who else was. I have great relationships with a lot of my teachers but I don't have any faith relationships with my teachers.

You were also hesitant about sharing your faith with teachers because you were afraid to say the wrong thing to a faculty member who controlled the grade book. It was not so much that you cared they knew you were Christian; you did not want to stir anything up on campus to cause an issue between you and the teacher. As with your

friends, you did not share you were Christian to faculty unless asked; again you led by example rather than words. Also, you found it hard to approach adults and ask them about their faith, even so you believe it is beneficial to establish relationships with Christian faculty.

I think it would be great [establishing relationships with Christian faculty] because then you have more people on your side. I think it would be awesome to have a network of teachers you could go to and if you are in their class your accountability in that class would be awesome to have.

It took you until your senior year to establish a network of Christian faculty. Freshman through junior years you “went about your business” and really did not give much thought to this, but as your outlook on life became more faith based your awareness grew. It is your hope that your younger siblings will be able to know from the start who the Christian faculty are for that much needed support.

It would have been nice coming in if they were all tied to like FCA, FCS (Fellowship of Christian Students), or one big group. Knowing that coming in would have been a lot more helpful instead of having to dig for yourself. As for my sisters and brothers coming in later, I want them to know before they get here.

In addition to the Christian faculty, you really enjoyed a few relationships with non-Christian faculty. Although your worldviews were much different, you respected your social studies teacher and he respected you even though he knew you were Christian.

I love the guy he’s funny and great to be around. I respect what he thinks and he does the same for me. He knows that I’m a believer but there’s never any resentment from him towards me. I don’t have any problem being close with teachers who aren’t believers as long as they don’t try to persecute me because of it.

You do not recall a time where your faith was challenged in class. Even though you were in several science classes, evolution was never brought up. Other Christian peers would share their experiences with this, but you did not experience anything negative. In your

opinion you believe it is important to learn and understand other perspectives on issues such as evolution therefore, giving you more credibility when discussing conflicts in ideologies. It was your understanding that evolution would come up in Advanced Placement Biology, but you did not share your experience in this class and prior to taking it you were confident you would be fine even if class discussion contradicted your beliefs.

I don't think it will be a problem because I know what I believe. The way I look at it is I'm going to learn the details about it so (1) I can pass the test on it and (2) I don't think it ever hurts to learn the other side because then if someone wants to come argue with me about creation versus evolution I can say well this is my belief about creation and this is what you believe and here is why it is wrong.

Jordan, you were an excellent student and finished in the top 10% of your class. You enjoyed learning and taking a variety of college bound courses to help prepare for college. The respect you gave to faculty members was much appreciated. The faculty held you in high esteem and you gained their respect through your outstanding ethics, exceptional character, and respectful attitude. Along with your academic success, you were an extraordinary leader on campus.

Leadership

Jordan, you served as a leader in a variety of milieus including athletics, student council, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. You believe everyone has the responsibility to lead in some capacity. As a Christian leader, you saw your purpose was to reintroduce a FCA chapter on campus. Fellowship of Christian Athletes is a national organization with chapters in high schools and colleges throughout the United States. Its purpose is to bring athletes together and show how their Christian faith is integrated into athletics. Usually a coach serves as the huddle sponsor and shares lessons from the Bible. Although you had faculty sponsors, you along with the mentorship of a FCA

representative served as the huddle coach. It was your responsibility to lead the group through prayer, devotion, and activities.

Prior to beginning the chapter you set group and personal goals, which included sharing the Gospel with all students, establishing a support group for Christian students, and providing an accountability network for Christian students. Your personal goals included spending more time in the Bible, growing in your faith, and establishing accountability partnerships. Although FCA focuses on the Christian faith, the group was open to non-Christian and non-athletes. You were adamant that the group was not closed off, but recognized as a group open to all students and available to serve in whatever capacity needed.

I want to be out in our school and be a face in our school that has an impact that makes kids think, “What’s going on in there? I want to go check that out” rather than, “well, they meet over there but they never come around”. I personally want to grow through FCA. I know at times it’s tough when I don’t have accountability for example reading my Bible or some sin I’m struggling with, but if other people know about it they [can] come up in the hallway and be like, “Hey, did you read your Bible this morning? Are you struggling with this today?” Even if they don’t say anything just to be in the hallway and make you think, “Oh, I need to work on that or I need to do this.” I hope it does that not only for me but for everybody else as well as build friendships that’s huge to have that supporting cast and to know by just kids showing up who I can [approach] to talk about this.

The first official FCA meeting was at the end of your junior year. I remember walking into a classroom with about 30 young ladies and you. I recall you whispering to me, “They’re all girls, Mrs. Knittel.” I smiled and said, “That’s okay because you are going to make a difference in these young ladies’ lives.” You were extremely nervous as you faced an audience of very attentive young ladies, but you led them through a devotional, spoke about your goals for FCA, helped plan a summer schedule, and led them in prayer.

I was extremely nervous before our first meeting I never, I mean I've been to that stuff but I've never been a leader in anything like that so for me to get up in front and have to lead the whole thing and do a devotion that was definitely nerve racking to me, but when it was done I was pretty pumped about it. I really like what we have going. I just hope that it grows we had all girls there so I know there's a couple of guys who were supposed to come but weren't there so I gave them some stern loving. I'm really excited to see what God's going to do with [FCA] because it's been pretty evident of His hand in the whole thing.

Jordan as I sit here and reflect on that day, I am filled with awe and joy because you demonstrated to these young ladies what a Christian man does. You were sharing the Gospel with female peers! Yes, some of them you knew, but some were total strangers! Here you were this influential and extremely popular student and you were sitting in a room filled with girls sharing, praying, and fellowshiping with them! I do not know too many young men, who would have done what you did that day! We spoke after the meeting and although you were extremely excited; I could see the disappointment that not one boy showed up. I shared what I saw and told you on that very day you either reiterate to some girls how a Christian man conducts himself or some young ladies saw for the first time how a Christian man conducts himself. You showed compassion, kindness, respect, and courage to share the Word. Wow, I will never forget that day! I am confident that many girls left the room that day with a clear vision of the kind of young man they would look for in a boyfriend or husband some day! Powerful, Jordan, absolutely life changing! I was so proud of you and thinking about it still brings me to tears!

Throughout your involvement with FCA, the group studied a book together; did a multitude of activities including skating, bowling, games in the park, Christmas party, pizza outreach; and went through the *Truth Project* (Focus on the Family) video series together. The boy/girl ratio eventually evened out, with about 30-40 regular weekly

participants from sports including basketball, soccer, track and field, cross country, cheerleading, baseball, and swimming. You were particularly excited about the group doing the *Truth Project* because of the discussions that materialized from viewing the series. Although the video series covered a multitude of topics the groups' favorite was the science topic on evolution. The video discussed the claims of evolution and then in your words "bashes and tears them apart". The group enjoyed doing this series very much and even commented about watching it again.

Along with the activities and devotions, you saw yourself mentoring students in FCA. The students trusted you and felt comfortable approaching you with a variety of issues. Although you did not share specifically what the issues were because you were sensitive to the students' confidentiality, but stated they were "touchy subjects". Also, the boys questioned you about how to conduct and compete as a Christian athlete. Two students in FCA experienced significant events and sought your guidance, one was a young man whose mother died and the other a young lady who was exploring her beliefs.

The young man who was grieving the death of his mother was questioning some of his church's views about death and healing so he approached you about the matter. His church believed, if you prayed and believed hard enough, God would heal you, so when his mother, who did all this, still died, it shook his faith. He was concerned that if he did not do the right things he would die as well. You gently explained to him it did not matter how much you prayed or whether your conduct was good or bad, when it was your time it was your time. This was a very difficult issue to work through with him, and you showed compassion and sensitivity as you helped him through this extremely difficult time.

It was tough, but I was honored that he came to me. The fact that people always think highly enough of me to talk about that kind of stuff with, you know, another kid.

This young man was not the only student you had a tremendous influence over as a young lady would approach you about becoming a Christian. Although you taught Sunday school by sharing the Gospel with kids, speaking with this young lady would be a new experience. This student shared that by attending FCA her eyes were opened to a lot of things so she asked you several questions and then made the decision to accept Christ into her life. It was a cool experience to have a deep conversation with her and walk her through salvation as well as watching her grow and learn throughout her involvement in FCA. You hope to have many more evangelizing opportunities.

I remember answering a lot of questions, talked about the Gospel, and took her through salvation and then she made the decision on her own. It's pretty rewarding and cool to see that I can use my popularity and status in our school to have a godly effect on kids. It makes me feel good knowing we (FCA) are doing the right thing and seeing results from it.

Not only did you meet the group goals for FCA, you felt you met your personal goals through your relationship with Travis, a representative from FCA. This relationship would transition into a discipleship/mentor relationship, for which you were extremely thankful because you benefited from Travis' mentoring, teaching, and pastoring. Travis and you did your best to meet weekly; he gave you pointers on leadership and teaching, served as your accountability partner, as well as cleared up some questions you had about your beliefs. It was awesome to see you work with Travis and establish a close bond. I believe your relationship will continue beyond high school.

Under your leadership, FCA was invaluable to many and I believe will continue to positively impact students for many years to come. Leading students was overwhelmingly rewarding for you, especially seeing your own cousin participate and

grow in FCA. You recall this cousin's older brother as somebody you looked up to; however, he did not live a Christian life like he was raised so you were concerned for your younger cousin. You stepped in and encouraged him to get involved in FCA, which he did and responded very well and it was encouraging to you to see how he grew through this experience.

Although you have officially finished leading FCA, you made it a priority to encourage a couple of Christian athletes to step in next year where you left off. You plan on visiting FCA on your breaks and support the students every way you can. There were many things that were important to you in high school, but FCA was especially important and you shared with me why it was important:

It's important to me because we [FCA] get to spread the Gospel through our school. Also, help Christians in our school connect with other Christians, stay strong in our faith, and grow.

Jordan, your leadership in FCA definitely empowered others to express their Christian identity on campus, learn and grow, encourage and support each other, and make a difference in school. Your outstanding leadership in FCA was an example of bold and courageous faith. Along with FCA, you were a leader in student council, which proved to be another fun and positive experience as well as another opportunity to positively impact the student body.

Your involvement in student council your senior year happened on a whim, at the last minute you and a friend decided to write your names on a piece of paper and run for STUCO never thinking you would be selected. Much to your surprise both of you were selected by the student body even though you did not officially campaign with posters and other advertisements. Although shocked by the results, you were excited to be a newly elected member. Because this year was a transition year for faculty sponsors, two

camps formed in STUCO, one group was used to the experienced sponsor and the other group only knew the new STUCO sponsor; you were in the latter group.

With a new leader comes new rules, policies, and ways of doing business, many of your peers took issue with the new way STUCO was run, which created a lot of friction. Many students who were used to having free reign in STUCO did not appreciate the tighter control handed down by the new sponsor. Although it was hard for you to observe friends you liked rebel a little, you were respectful to the teacher and took your role and responsibilities in STUCO seriously. Your main role was to serve on the building committee, which organized activities to make the building look nicer, like painting lockers and buying new trash cans. In addition you organized, planned, and ran community outreaches such as Trick-or-Treat Street for young children to safely trick-or-treat.

Even though it was difficult at times to see the animosity between certain students and the sponsor, you enjoyed student council and liked the faculty sponsor. In your opinion STUCO was positively viewed by the student body; however, you felt the behavior and the lack of work ethics of some students gave STUCO a bad name with the administrators. Regardless of the two camps in STUCO, you developed positive relationships with everyone and never felt attached or disrespected because you were Christian. I shared with you the negative experiences of other Christian students in STUCO, but you felt your experience was positive. Perhaps your involvement was positive because there were at least six other Christians in STUCO, one of them being your girlfriend. When asked how you portrayed your Christian faith in student council, you were not quite sure how to answer me, and replied with:

I don't know, I think just working hard, staying disciplined, staying on task, staying focused, know that you're helping other people, and you have to sacrifice some of your own time. [These] aren't exactly faith qualities but I think your faith helps you learn those qualities. It doesn't say in the Bible that you need to do this or that, like you need to be in STUCO. I think my faith has helped me learn how to help people.

STUCO would serve as another opportunity for you to positively impact peers, the faculty, and the community. You displayed a tremendous amount of maturity and integrity by not allowing your peers' animosity toward the faculty sponsor to negatively affect your attitude and behavior in STUCO. Just as you were an influential leader in FCA and STUCO, your influence on the field was equally impressive. Previously, we discussed your involvement on the traveling baseball team, now we turn to your involvement in school athletics.

Athletics

Since you were old enough to walk you have played football, basketball, and baseball. As an incoming freshman, you played varsity basketball and baseball, but would not play varsity football until sophomore year because they kept all freshmen on the freshman squad. As a junior you were captain in all three sports, as well as received all-conference recognition in all three. By participating in school athletics, you made many friends, traveled, and earned a noteworthy reputation. I asked how sports impacted you and you replied:

...I would say they probably kept me out of trouble growing up. They kept me busy that's for sure; I didn't have time to do anything else but sports. While everybody else was out partying or whatever, I was at practice or at a meeting or something involving sports.

During fall of senior year, your role would change significantly from captain of the football team to holder of the school flag. As mentioned earlier, you decided not to participate in football so you could focus on baseball. As the holder of the school flag,

your job was to get the students in the stands fired up with school spirit so you would run up and down the football field screaming and cheering for the team. You learned all the cheers, wore face paint, showed a tremendous amount of school spirit and according to you, “had a blast and loved every minute of it.” During the opening game, you found yourself longing to be back on the team, but as the season progressed you were glad to be part of the energy in the stands. You recall that season as “some of the most fun I’ve ever had at River Front.”

The first game was awful! Afterwards, I cried like a little girl, and it was the most embarrassing thing ever!...I wasn’t out there with my friends on the team, but the longer the season went the more fun I had.

With a young basketball team and a lot of seniors out for a variety of reasons, your last season of basketball had its up and downs. Although you were not expecting to win state, you thought the team would finish in the middle of the pack instead of bottom of the barrel. For you the season, proved to be successful with all-conference recognition. Toward the end of season, you found yourself on crutches missing a few games, but you finished your high school career with quite a shot.

Yeah, it was pretty emotional because I went to the doctor the morning of and he cleared me, but the physical therapist didn’t clear me so I was kind of up and down, got to the game and I was all excited. I finally got to go out there and I still thought, “I should be able to play.” I thought my ankle was getting [better], so [I] started running around, but [realized], “oh no, that’s not good,” so I [realized] the physical therapist was right. Coach let me start, so I got to go in for 30 sec and take the first shot and made a 3-pointer to finish. Yeah, everyone was happy for me. It was good to get back in and play one more time.

For the first time in several years, River Front had a solid and talented baseball team. You compared the talent of this team to the summer team you played on that won the championship. The entire team and coaching staff felt a state championship was within reach; however this did not happen. Nonetheless the season was successful with

the team making it to the playoffs, losing the possibility of advancement by one run. You enjoyed the season immensely, had a ton of fun, and really felt everyone worked their “butt off”. I asked you how your faith tied in with baseball and you responded:

Before I step on the mound, I always thank God that He let me be there and gave me the ability to do it. I ask him for His help, but I don’t ask, I mean, I ask for wins because the Bible says if you don’t ask you don’t receive. I kind of take the approach that once I step on the mound or the batter box or where ever, once I’m onto the field it’s me. It’s the talent He gave me, but it’s my job to use it so if I succeed I praise Him for it and I thank Him. If I fail, I thank Him for the ability He gave me and the opportunity to be there, but I don’t blame Him for it.

You knew some of your teammates prayed as well, but they would get upset with God if things did not turn out in their favor. They felt since they were Christian, God was on their side, but you pointed out there was Christians on the other team too.

To me there is no winner/loser in God’s eyes. I mean when I play I’m either going to win or lose, but God is there for me either way.

As a Christian athlete, you did not experience many temptations. Even though you are exposed to inappropriate language at times, you feel while on the field you do not have as much time to stop, think, and look compared to being in school where there is the time. You also feel with athletics the chances of meeting Christians is better because of national organizations like FCA. You never felt criticized by teammates for being a Christian.

I’ve never felt like kids look down on me because I am a Christian athlete because I’ve been able to dominate in all three athletics, so they don’t seem to care. I guess if I were failing maybe they would tie that to my faith, but there’s plenty of Christians that are succeeding at the highest level.

In fact there were plenty of times when they tried to get you to do something you were against, but respected you when you refused to participate. There would come a time when the temptation got the best of you, but you handled the situation with maturity and honesty. I was blown away with a situation that happened late senior year, the situation

bothered you so much that you spoke with many adults including myself to ask for forgiveness. This would be another time that I was amazed, encouraged, and inspired by your outstanding integrity. I was truly moved to tears by your genuineness and sincerity.

You did not speak about your coaches; however, I know you had a great relationship with them and highly respected them. Throughout your 18 years in organized sports, you never had a Christian coach, other than your dad and grandpa. In your opinion coaches have a huge impact on the players, so in your mind it would be awesome to have a Christian coach who you could go to when you were struggling and could serve as another accountability partner.

I think it would be cool to have someone who is on your side. For me, out there on the field I compare my faith to athletics a lot, the gridiron. There are so many comparisons between the Bible and sports for me that make sense, so having a coach that thought that way would make everything easier. I'm the only one that sees it that way. I pray before every game, but to have a coach do that with me would be cool. That has never happened to me, but it would be nice to have somebody else on the same page.

With high school athletics coming to an end, you experienced a tremendous amount of success over four years. I am sure your last official high school game was filled with sadness, but knowing that summer ball and collegiate ball were on the horizon probably softened the void. You would end your athletic career receiving one of the most prestigious athletic recognitions as a high school athlete, the Ron Denning Spirit of River Front Award. You were nominated by the staff to receive this recognition, and I absolutely agree it could not have gone to anybody more deserving.

College Transition

The biggest thing you are going to miss about high school is the many relationships you developed with students younger than you as well as classmates who will be going in different directions. You were sad to see senior friends leave at the end

of junior year and now it is your turn to say goodbye, but only a temporary goodbye as you plan on returning home as much as possible. With the transition from high school to college, you understand the tremendous amount of responsibility you must take on. For many years, you relied on your parents to provide you with guidance, basic needs, financial support, and discipline. As with any transition, it will take time to adjust and figure everything out. You are excited about college and are especially looking forward to playing college baseball. “Yeah, it is kind of the closing of a chapter and moving onto a whole new era of life, which is kind of sad to think about, but also exciting.”

You do not anticipate transitioning into college to be a huge change because you are two hours from home and plan on coming home quite a bit until baseball season kicks in. You realize it will be different during the week with new classes, dorm life, and friends. Although you are a family guy, you are looking forward to more freedom and your own space. That is not to say that you will not miss your family and Christine. You know you will get homesick, but you are comforted by the close proximity of home.

Yeah, I’m sure there will be nights that I’m crying myself to sleep like a little girl. Twenty years ago it would have been worse with no e-mail, Facebook, and cell phones. Now you can open this computer screen and talk to somebody face to face so I think it’s a little easier now than it used to be. It’s not write a letter and get a box in the mail once in a while, and I’m only two hours away. If I get that home sick, Friday night after practice I pack it up and come home for the weekend.

As far as classes go, you do not anticipate them being too difficult as you feel prepared for the academic rigor. You see baseball playing a more prevalent role in college and are excited to place more focus there. The possibility of rooming with a teammate from little league is exciting because it will be nice to reconnect with him and develop a stronger relationship. Meeting your teammates and getting to know your coaches better are something you are looking forward to with the transition.

As in high school, college brings new experiences as well as temptations including parties and drinking. On college visits you were exposed to parties, but did not view them any different than the high school parties attended, with the exception of the amount of alcohol and other “stuff” that goes on at college parties. You are sure that the invitation to attend a few parties will happen, and you plan to attend like you did in high school, but this does not mean you will drink. If things get out of hand, you leave like you did in high school. You realize with college parties comes more maturity.

While in college, you understand the importance of staying plugged in with your faith by attending church and finding a Christian support group. There is a Christian group on campus, and you plan on checking into it as well as finding a church to attend in case you do not make it back on the weekend. With the two hour drive back and forth, you thought about listening to the Bible on CD to stay in the Word. You are confident you will continue to grow in your faith because your parents pretty much stepped back and let you decide what this was going to look like: you continued to attend church and studied the Word, so you realized you did not need them to tell you to do these things; you were able to do them on your own. I asked you how you planned on displaying your faith in college:

From day one I have to represent who I am and not start off on the wrong foot by portraying the wrong image because once you go that way it's a lot harder to come back the other way. Definitely keep staying in the Word, and living my faith. I'm sure it won't be any different there, I probably won't be preaching to my teammates. I kind of live by the idea that you live out your faith and people will realize it instead of having to tell them. You shouldn't have to tell them if you live it, so that's kind of how I do it.

In your experience people are perceptive and constantly watching so you find it extremely important to monitor how you conduct yourself. This is the reason why you tend to share your faith through actions rather than speaking because when you are

speaking it is more than likely with one person, but through your behavior there is the possibility of people watching who you do not see.

I've always lived what I believe and then if somebody comes up to me and asks a question I don't have a problem talking about it, but I don't usually start the conversation. ...I think it's almost better that way if you try to force feed people a lot of the times they kind of push you away, but if you give them time to come to you then you know they want to be there; you're not holding them there.

Jordan, I am confident you will thrive in college. You are a respectful young man who loves the Lord and lends a helping hand to anyone in need. I know you will step into a leadership role and portray your faith with courage and boldness. I am excited for you and anticipate you will experience many awesome opportunities. I look forward to sitting down with you and hearing about your first semester in college.

Reflection

Jordan, you told me several times how much you loved and enjoyed high school, and for the longest time you did not want to graduate. For the past four years, TV was your home providing familiarity, a daily routine, the same teachers, and security, but now this all changes. It hurts to know that you will not get to see your buds next year. Over four years, you not only developed significant relationships with friends, but also teachers and coaches. You are especially going to miss the team camaraderie. You are not much for computers but figure you need to get with the times and get on Facebook so you can stay in touch with everyone.

It will be tough not seeing my friends and the security of school, I know every corner, nook, and cranny, [leaving] coaches, family, and just the town. I've grown up here and it will be different being somewhere else.

You leave behind an athletic legacy at TV, are known as one of the better athletes who came through River Front, and have moved on to play at bigger and better levels. Additionally you want teachers to say, "He was a pleasure to have in class." When your

name is mentioned, you hope peers will remember you as kind, good, and someone who was friendly to everyone. You want to see FCA continue and grow and be known as the:

Christian kid who lived the way he wanted within our school. I definitely don't want to be remembered as the preacher kid who didn't do anything because of his faith, but the kid who lived his faith while having a good time at school.

You thought our time together was fun, and I asked a lot of questions you did not take time to ask yourself. Even though you were sharing your experiences with me, you felt like you were telling yourself, which in your mind was fun, but almost eerie. For you, high school went by fast and yet freshman year seems like an eternity ago. It was almost like you rushed through it, but yet so long ago. Although you are finished, you are never going to disconnect yourself from high school.

I plan on being that 45-year old guy in the bleachers at the football game cheering for kids I don't even know and being in the boosters. In the long run my dream is to come back and actually coach at River Front if I'm done playing professional or if I don't make it there, and I don't coach at the collegiate level. I would love to come back and coach that would be so cool to come back and coach with Denning and Robinson either like assisting guys on the bench or take over for them that would be awesome. I've played black and gold since I was a little baby, so I don't plan on stopping any time soon.

Jordan, it was an honor and privilege to write your story. I am truly blessed to have walked with you on your high school journey. To observe you in the classroom, at athletic events, and with friends and family was a joy. I remember fondly a time when I received a call from the middle school principal, who was desperate to find a high school student to mentor a middle school boy with a bad attitude. I immediately thought of you and asked if you would be willing to allow this boy to shadow you and you did not hesitate to say yes. Daniel spent one day with you and his transformation after that day was comparable to a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. The principal and parents were amazed and extremely pleased with his transformation. I had the privilege to work with

him the following year, seeing his changed attitude, determination, and focus was amazing. Jordan, just those couple of hours spent with him changed the trajectory of his life in a profound way and I am willing to bet you had no idea the impact you made on him, but I do!

There is also the time when I witnessed your family bring a faculty member to tears with your generosity. Every year your family collects spare change in a jar and then you find someone to bless with the money. Your younger sister heard a custodian's wife was sick with breast cancer, so you came in and asked if I could arrange a time for your family to meet with him to give him the money you collected. I will never forget that day, the look in his eyes, or the tears we shed. These stories are just a couple of many where you empowered others to believe in themselves as well as demonstrated pure selflessness.

I have no doubt you are going to succeed in life, Jordan, because you already are a success. I do not know what the future holds for you, but as long as you continue to allow God to direct you, your life will be nothing short of amazing. I encourage you to continue living your life like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; bold and courageous! I thank you for the many lessons you taught me including living life with integrity, taking responsibility for my actions, and loving people unconditionally. In my eyes you are a grand slam!

Blessings,

REMO'S STORY

June 21, 2011

Dear Remo,

We first met at Fellowship of Christian Students, and as time went on I would see you in the counseling department when you came in to meet with your counselor. I observed you several times in classrooms or walking down the hall with a Bible in your hand, which intrigued me. I was curious to know why you always walked around with a Bible so I asked if you would participate in my research and you agreed. Although I did not need your parents' consent because you were 18, I spoke to your mom anyway. She was okay with your participation as long as you were okay with it; so we decided to meet at the public library.

Our first interview took place a week prior to graduation. Unfortunately, I did not get to observe you in your home or meet your family; nonetheless we had a great conversation about faith, family, school, and college. Although you were born in Nevada, you grew up in Colorado. You play guitar and attend church often. You started attending Grace Chapel in seventh grade, but it was not until ninth grade that you became more involved with the church by helping out, playing on the worship team, and going on mission trips. Without going into great detail, you shared that your biological parents are divorced; you live with your mother and step-dad, your older brother lives in Georgia, and your biological father lives in Nevada. When you were between two and three years

of age, your grandmother told you about God, and it was at that time you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Your uncle, a Southern Baptist pastor, was influential in your faith when you were younger and took you to camp in the fourth grade where you were baptized. The only exposure you had to God was when you were around your uncle or grandma, so between second and sixth grades there was little mention of God. You did not grow up attending church or youth group; however, during sixth grade a friend invited you to a youth group event and this experience, along with his friendship, reacquainted you to God.

Prior to your friend's invitation to attend youth group, you dreamt God told you to start playing the guitar. Albeit you did not recall the dream, you really felt God's presence, but you did not take any of it to heart nonetheless you convinced your parents to purchase you a guitar. With the newly acquired guitar, you sat around and played heavy metal music with the goal of learning how to play really fast and get a really cool girlfriend. Although in the dream God told you to play the guitar, you did not understand the significance until after you started going to youth group and growing closer to God.

I didn't really know what I was doing, but I had that dream and then it probably wasn't but a month or two later one of my friends, his name is Brocks, was like, "Hey, dude, do you want to go to youth group with me?" I was like, "What's youth group?" I had no idea what a youth group was. He brought me to youth group and we started talking and stuff like that and really started getting back on the God thing.

Throughout middle school you continued attending youth group, (actually attending two youth groups), although during that time you were not serious about your faith. Your faith was transformed during high school after a series of events including encountering God again, friends calling you out on your behavior, and a mission trip to New York City which greatly influenced how you lived your faith. Indeed your high school experience

was intermingled with these significant events, which provided the platform on how you matured in your relationships with peers, teachers, family, but most importantly God.

High School

Transformation

Throughout freshman and sophomore year, although you were starting to become more involved in youth group and church activities, you were still hanging out with non-Christian friends who were a bad influence. They influenced the language you used (profanity) and the music you listened to (heavy metal). It was also interesting that during this time you were still sporadically attending the two youth groups. One particular youth group seemed to negatively influence you much like your non-Christian friends. You referred to the youth who attended this church as “posers” because they were not real Christians. In your opinion they only attended youth group, so they could meet girls and play fun games. This particular youth group seemed fake to you, because they did not listen to the message presented by the youth pastor, some of the students did drugs, partied on weekends, and used profanity at school even though they attended youth group, so you stopped going and started attending the other exclusively. I asked what the difference was between the two groups and you said that one was God inspired and the other was not.

You felt the youth group from Grace Chapel was teaching you useful and important information that was helpful as well as getting you back in line with God, but you were running back and forth between Christian and non-Christian friends. One friend in particular started using drugs and tried to persuade you to join him, but you refused and tried to talk to him about God. At this point you found your conversations

focused more and more around God, and even though you were Christian you could not explain to anyone how God influenced your life or how He could influence theirs if they chose to follow Him. During this time you were not reading your Bible and could not quote scripture, but you could tell people how much God loved them and who He was. It was during your freshman year that you felt God physically grabbed you and demanded your attention.

Freshman year God really grabbed a hold of me and said, “Hey, you got to quit hanging out with these people they are not going the right way.” That is what happened I quit hanging out with those people. I use to cuss like I could stick 10 f-bombs in a sentence and make it make sense, you know. I’m not like that anymore and I’m really glad that God grabbed a hold of me and changed me because He didn’t really do it through anybody else. He actually, like I felt He physically grabbed me it was [Remo makes a slap sound], “Hey, get in line I need you to be doing my work!”

Prior to God grabbing a hold of you, a couple of your Christian friends told you they were “sick of your crap” and did not want to hang out with you because of it. According to you, you were disrespectful to women when you spoke to them, stared at their chest, and cussed every five seconds.

They were like, “Dude, we can’t hang out with you anymore.” They quit hanging out with me and then I don’t know if that was a big help or not, but when they did it, God was like, “Well, it’s time for you to start changing.” I started changing you know. I just kept going with that and at the end of sophomore year I was like, “Whoa, God, yes!” and I hadn’t turned into the Bible kid yet, but I was on the right track.

After this experience, you continued going to youth group at Grace Chapel and started praying. You often spent time in prayer for friends, family, and world issues. You stated, “Once I started praying, everything changed.” You prayed about anything and everything, and through your prayer life you witnessed a dramatic change in yourself:

It changed me. [It] doesn't matter what you pray about, it just matters that you're talking to God.

Praying is important to you because through prayer you are united with God. You quoted, "he who unites himself with Christ becomes one with Christ." Through faith your hope lies in uniting with Christ to become one with Him, thus spending eternity with Him. Therefore, while you are here on earth, you see prayer as a way to communicate with Christ. You quoted scripture from the book of James regarding prayer: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful. So, if it's [prayer] powerful and you do something powerful all the time; it's going to make a difference."

One area in your life where you saw change was in the way you handled debates about issues that contradicted your beliefs. Your sophomore curriculum contained many challenging issues that were debated in class including abortion and evolution. Prior to your perception changing and seeing transformation within your faith, you would have simply stated that abortion and the theory of evolution were wrong, you would have left no room for discussion, and you would not have cared to hear other perspectives. Basically, you would have given your opinion until told to shut up by your classmates or teacher.

I was the kid that [thought] "this is right and you can't tell me differently, and I don't care what you think." As transformation happens, it's different. I didn't want to tell everyone I didn't care what they thought, because it is important what they think too. If you're completely [to the point] where you don't care what anybody says then you're not telling anything out of love.

As you grew and spent more time with God in prayer, you came to understand that God gave you a heart for people. In learning this about yourself, you changed your natural reaction of defensiveness to compassion and respect for another person's viewpoint. You believed that if you did not change your approach, you were giving the

devil a foothold and then your faith was shot. Your defensiveness was a vehicle the devil used to show disrespect and offend others thereby turning people off to your Christian worldview. After realizing you had a way with people, you had no problem sharing your faith with them. In addition you possessed the ability to read people rather well and would often confront them about struggles or issues you discerned from them just to receive confirmation that you were correct. These confirmations were not for your benefit, but for them to process, evaluate, reflect, and ultimately choose whether to act or not act on these struggles. This discernment, you believe came from reading the Bible. As you prayed and read, God placed people on your heart and your ability to speak inoffensively to people about God increased.

Junior year was similar to your sophomore year. You continued to go to youth group, joined in some Bible studies, attended Fellowship of Christian Students, and started dabbling in the Bible more. Meaning you went beyond reading the occasional Psalm and choosing a daily devotion to focus on to reading through the Bible and making notes of what you read. You went on your first mission trip and feel this experience significantly influenced your Christian walk. This mission trip was not typical in the sense of repairing or building houses, rather time was spent evangelizing to others in the park and at a homeless shelter. You handed out soup, coffee, and spoke to people about God, what it meant to be a disciple of God, and how to show that to others. During this time, you fasted from food for five days. Instead of eating you spent time reading the Bible. This time spent in the Bible provided you an opportunity to really experience God by reading through His Word as well as study and learn about the character of God.

Fasting and reading the Bible became significant activities in your life. Although you had fasted before, you saw the fast during the mission trip as a spiritual cleansing that helped get your prayer life back on track with God. In addition you read through the entire Bible by spring break, which you attributed to fasting. After returning from your mission trip to New York City, you made another trip to Minnesota to visit the Mayo Clinic because your mom was ill. Your uncle (the Baptist Pastor) happened to live in the same town so you spent time discussing the Bible with him. This trip reaffirmed the importance of reading the Bible. Your uncle gave you another Bible, which you spent a significant time writing in, reflecting on, and applying scripture to your own life. He also gave you a spiritual gift evaluation. A spiritual gift evaluation is often given by churches to members of the congregation to identify areas of strengths in the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8 including exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, prophecy, service, and teaching. Spiritual gift evaluations can also include the gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. By taking these evaluations, members of the congregation find areas to serve based on their strengths and interests. You did not share much about what you learned from this evaluation, but from what I gathered, the results affirmed your gifts for worship, evangelism, and missions.

In your eyes, junior year was when your faith exploded, the mission trip was the culminating event. Spending time fasting and developing an appreciation for the Bible was a result of this experience. Also, the mission trip served as a confirmation that your calling was for missionary work.

I've always known that I wanted to go into Christian ministry, but that summer [God] really told [me], "Hey, you are going to go into ministry and it's not going to be a regular ministry, it's going to be a guitar slash, helping slash, telling slash,

everything kind of ministry that goes everywhere, is everywhere, [and] is the church of God.”

Because your missionary work will involve sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, learning the Word of God is becoming increasingly important to you. So important in fact that your life goal is to memorize the Bible. I asked why memorize and you replied with:

The Bible is God’s Word on Earth and what better way for me to spread the Word of God [than] with actually using the Word of God, which my life is simply about missions and stuff like that.

While most students were spending time participating in athletics or other extracurricular activities, you were memorizing and reading the Bible. Your time spent in the Word would eventually land you the title of “Bible Kid.” You decided you wanted to memorize the book of Romans because God placed Catholics on your heart. In your opinion, Catholics place more emphasis on ritual than on having a personal relationship with God. You also believe the main focus of your missionary work will be to help in the unification of the Protestant and Catholic Church. Another book of the Bible that became significant for you was the book of Philippians. A friend actually recommended that you read the book of Philippians because you were struggling with an issue involving another friend. You were actually fasting and praying about this situation, but upset because the friend was not speaking to you. After reading Philippians many things in Chapter 4 stood out so you memorized it and actually spent time returning to the book of Philippians.

...It stands out because, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again, Rejoice” [tells] you no matter what is going on in your life, I was upset because of stupid reasons... but you still have to rejoice in the Lord. ...you rejoice even in the bad times because God has you in His hands and you’re never going to be plucked out of His hands. “Let your gentleness be known to everyone”...you’re supposed to be gentle in everything, but the part that sticks out in that verse is “the Lord is near”. The Lord is always near to you. ... “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,” ...when you are in a time of temptation or something you can be like, “Hey, that’s not right, I’ll think about something that’s noble, admirable, lovely, excellent, or praiseworthy.” ...There is

a reason every Christian knows, “I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me” because you can. You can do things by the Holy Spirit of God because He is in you.

Reading the Bible and memorizing verses help you cope during difficult times, especially when dealing with temptation. One area that is a huge struggle for you and is actually a struggle for many during adolescence is lust. You see this struggle as something that keeps you from God so you memorized Psalm 51, which is the very first chapter you memorized. Psalm 51 is about King David’s repentance to God for committing adultery with Bathsheba.

It’s all a gift of forgiveness and one of the verses is about sacrifice like what sacrifices are pleasing to God, what pleases God’s heart. It’s about being washed for God so I can be less of a broken vessel.

You share your knowledge of the Bible with peers and started texting Bible verses to one friend, which turned into many friends and students on campus. In addition to the texting you started a Bible verse page on Facebook where people sign up and you send them Bible verses. You estimate that you are texting at least 100 students and 150 follow you on Facebook. The guys tend to give you a rough time about it because they see this as a ploy to pick up girls. Your intentions are not to pick up girls, but rather to share the Gospel with others. Even so, the majority of your followers are female because they tend to communicate by texting more than males. Also, girls tend to be more public about their faith than boys. You said males would rather communicate face-to-face, so you do not have many requesting text messages. Speaking to others comes naturally so you do not find it difficult to share your faith.

I’m really social and I’ll talk to anybody about anything. The cool thing is I’ll walk up to somebody and talk to them for a while and for some reason people like talking to me about anything. I can get into the deepest conversation with somebody who I just met like 5 minutes ago. I don’t know if that’s a spiritual gift or something but it works out pretty well. I guess after somebody realizes I’m not

out to get them they trust me or whatever and I send them Bible verses, talk to them about life, or bring them to God, which is what I'm trying to do with that [Facebook and texting].

For the most part, students respond well to the texts and Facebook messages; many of them thank you for making them feel better. You do not share lengthy verses with students; usually it is something that is fairly short and to the point like Psalm 147:3, which says "He heals the broken hearted and bandages up their wounds." You enjoy speaking to people about God and telling them of His comfort and this is important to you because you want to save lost souls and give them hope.

I'm sure I have kind of put people towards the idea of God, but it's never been like [having] a disciple or something, that I've brought them from zero to 100, but I just give people pushes here and there. It's planting the seed and letting God grow it.

Junior year was filled with reading God's Word, memorizing scripture, and sharing the Word with peers. As you read the Bible, spent time with God, prayed, and reflected on your missionary trip you realized God was at work preparing you for a life in ministry. Indeed junior year proved to be a time of spiritual growth and maturity. With junior year behind you and senior year to look forward to, you continued to invest time in your relationship with God, marveled at His sovereignty, and embraced His purpose for your life.

Senior year was spent digging deeper into the Bible by studying the points of the Bible, how the Bible was put together, how the Bible is God's work, and how God put the world together. As I sat and listened to your story, it seemed to me that you now looked at the world through a Biblical lens. I am not implying in any way that you did not before, it was just on a deeper level. For example, you loved your astronomy class because learning about the stars and galaxies made you wonder how anybody could not

believe in a creator of the universe. As senior year progressed, God continued to place the unity of the church on your heart. It is your belief that all the different Christian denominations need to unite instead of bickering over whose doctrine is correct. In your opinion the Gospel can be summed up in one Bible verse, John 6:47 which states, “Amen, Amen if you believe, you are saved.” Meaning that as long as one continues to believe and trust in Christ, he or she will have eternal life, so differences in doctrine are insignificant to those who believe in salvation through Christ.

You spent time reading the Catholic Bible and going to a Catholic youth group. As the Catholic Bible contains an additional eight books not found in the Protestant Bible, you decided to read them. Through studying the Bible and attending both the Protestant and Catholic Church you learned that only through unity can love fully work through God.

All over the world people are searching, they’re all on spiritual journeys, they are lost, and the only way that they are going to be found is by what Jesus gave us, the Spirit. The best way that the church of the Spirit of God is going to work is by the bond of unity, which is held together by love. All of these people are disagreeing about all these stupid little things and the only thing that really matters is the love of Christ within us.

In your opinion until the Body of Christ unites by getting on the same page and looking beyond differences in doctrine, people who are searching are not going to want anything to do with Christianity because Christians cannot agree on what they believe. You feel the only way the church is going to help them through their journey is by showing them love; not through debates, factions, or wars; but by solid faith and unification.

Your senior year came with all the final activities of high school: prom, senior ditch day, graduation. You did not concern yourself with these activities but rather you continued to share God’s Word with your peers. I recall walking into your astronomy

class one day to find you with your Bible open discussing tattoos with a classmate. The young man in front of you wanted to know what the Bible said about tattoos so you immediately shared Leviticus 19:28 which states, “Do not cut yourself for the dead or defile yourself with tattoo markings.” You patiently went on to speak to him about the old law versus the new covenant with Christ. Although you do not know whether what you shared with him impacted him, you are confident God will work through that. This is one example of how students approached you about the Bible. You had this to say about sharing God’s Word with peers: “I really think by reading His Word, God is working through me because it says in the Bible, “that the Word of God lasts forever, and forever, and forever”.”

For the most part, your peers did not give you a hard time about sharing or reading your Bible. There were times when students would whisper about it, but that did not bother you. Your teachers, on the other hand, looked at your Bible reading in many different ways. Your math teacher told you that maybe if you stopped reading the Bible all the time you would not have so many math questions. Mr. K., the choir teacher, tried to take your Bible away one day because you were singing and reading the Bible at the same time, which he did not appreciate. You found his reaction interesting because he was Christian. You were upset that he wanted to take your Bible, but you told him you would quit so he would not take it. Even though you obeyed him; it was difficult for you to stop reading. Your English literature teacher was okay with you reading your Bible in class after all it is literature and he asked to look at your Bible one day and said, “I’ve never seen a Bible like this it’s really cool, it has like pictures and stuff.” You got a kick out of his response. Even though he is not Christian, he treated you with respect and

gave you an excellent grade on a paper where you referenced the King James Bible. In your words, “I understand the ideas in the Bible so it is easy for me to read it all the time. It’s kind of like that verse I said earlier, ‘Pray continually,’ it’s kind of turned into ‘Read the Bible continually.’”

Application

Remo, high school was a time of spiritual transformation and application meaning you matured in your faith and applied it to how you lived life. You had many experiences throughout high school that shaped your Christian identity and each experience built on previous experiences. What you learned from these experiences you put into practice as you navigated through high school. Even how you defined Christian changed as you matured and grew in your faith, and you spent time trying to formulate in your mind what it exactly meant. Toward the end of your senior year, you actually identified with both Catholicism and Protestantism because in your mind they both had something to offer. You found the arguing about doctrine between Protestants and Catholics rather ridiculous, and you believed “being a Christian is about fellowship with the body [Church], meaning all of the body.”

It’s [Christianity] about fellowship with all parts of the body, love for all parts of the body of Christ, sharing all the spiritual gifts, and sharing the fullness of Christ, not the fullness of your doctrine. Or what you think is correct, because it’s about what God thinks is correct. God loves Catholics and Protestants.

In your mind the division between Catholicism and Protestantism is that one is viewed as a religion and the other as a relationship. You define religion as man bringing himself to God whereas with Christianity God is bringing Himself to man. By this definition, Protestants tend to view Catholics as religious or trying to reach God. So in your mind religion is man’s way of trying to reach God and that can happen in many

ways including the seven pillars of faith or cooking the right kosher meat. I asked you what you thought about people who say they are spiritual, but not religious. You replied with, “People who say that don’t know where they’re coming from.” In your opinion Christians use the word spiritual too, but their meaning differs from non-Christian.

[The] Christian definition of being spiritual would be having a personal relationship with God, and a secular view of spiritualist would be somebody that’s a monk on top of a mountain or something.

In your opinion religion and spirituality is shaped by one’s worldview. If people grow up believing there is no God, they focus on ungodly concepts. In contrast, people who grow up believing in God oppose ideas and actions against God. According to you, every religion believes they hold the truth, but they cannot all be right. You quoted John 14: 6 where Jesus states, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except by me.” So to show truth, it must come from Christianity because Jesus said He was the only way.

Although you were still solidifying a definition for Christian, your faith was a part of your identity in high school; it followed you into the classroom and in your relationships with peers and teachers. You really did not share what you thought of high school; I think you saw it as something you had to go through to get to the next step in life. For you the greatest challenge about being a Christian in a public school was dealing with the way girls dressed. Some girls tend to dress provocatively by showing too much cleavage or wearing really short skirts or shorts. You did not understand why girls dressed the way they did and in your mind it was rather ridiculous as well as extremely distracting. You had to battle with the physical attraction that potentially could lead toward lust and take you off God’s path. The way you combated this distraction was through prayer and reading the Bible. You dated one girl at the end of your senior year,

but it was not much of a relationship as you hardly saw each other and she went a whole month without speaking to you. Even though you both said you were dating and went on an occasional date, in your opinion, you were only dating in theory needless to say the relationship did not last.

As for relationships with teachers, you really did not speak about this other than you enjoyed most of them and felt for the most part they were respectful of your beliefs. You enjoyed classes like World History and Astronomy. Because you spent the whole summer reading the Bible, you felt like you did not learn anything in Bible Literature; however, you enjoyed this class because you could sit and read the Bible because everybody else was doing it as well. You incorporated your faith into your writings as often as you could because it added significance to what you were experiencing. Classroom discussion that contradicted your faith was fine; you did not feel like you were ostracized for being Christian. In your experience issues like evolution were stated as a theory and not factual. Although you did not go into detail, you felt you did not get the same amount of time or opportunity to express your view versus a secular view.

One of the school's expectations is that students will learn and perform academically. Regardless of this expectation your reason for going to school was not about the grades rather it was learning about the world around you, understanding people, communicating, socializing, learning how to comfort people, dealing with criticism, and overall how to love people. I pointed out that it sounded like "kingdom" work versus "worldly" work and you replied, "Exactly!" In your mind your goals in life are not about being successful, finding the best looking girl, having kids, and achieving other accolades and accomplishments the world views as successful. This perspective shocks people

when they realize that you are not in the game of life for you, but rather for God. This all stems from Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart do not lean on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.” It does not matter where life will take you because God is in control, and as long as you allow Him to direct you; you will be where you need to be. Thus, you saw going to a public school as a great missionary opportunity to share the Gospel. You felt that regardless of your surroundings God was going to work through you and your mission in high school:

I’m here in this world, it’s surrounding me. I go to this high school and it’s public and there’s a lot of non-Christians there, and that’s where I need to be [Remo taps on the table for emphasis] sharing God with everybody. I would die for my faith in a second. Society is on a power trip for success, but I’m more on a power trip for love, not love of a spouse or love of a child or love of anything but the love of God.

You believe, everybody is on a spiritual journey, and this journey is shaped by what they have been taught or exposed to, which they develop into their worldview. In your opinion unless people believe in God they will continue to search their entire lives; which makes you sad. Even in your encounters with Christian peers on campus they tell you how much they enjoyed the Bible verses you sent, but when you asked them if they go to church, they tell you they do not like church. You replied with, “Why because they teach you about the Bible?” You attribute a lot of their thinking or attitude to what they have been exposed to in school.

Well, you don’t like church because you’ve been going to school and they’ve been telling you that abortion is right and evolution is the way we came here. Big stars made us and carbon is the basic element of life, but carbon evolved into a fish that retarded into monkey squirrel fish turtle frog and burned into a half baby turtle lion gorilla bear [I bust out laughing] you know [giggle].

In your opinion school plays a significant role in influencing students' beliefs. You find it hard to believe that a country that was founded on Christian morals and values no longer allows it to be taught in school, but yet education is how we teach the next generation that will teach the next generation, etc. You believe that unless students are rooted in their beliefs, they tend to take what is taught in school as factual. In your mind school is a tool that is used to throw people off, but on the other hand can also lead people on. This is where you came in because you realized, you have been on a spiritual journey as well. Everything you experienced as well as everyone you made contact with was for a reason. God's grace was sufficient to get you through the trials that you struggled with throughout high school and He used your weaknesses to help others who are on their journeys. The dream you had back in middle school came to fruition in high school and grew from playing guitar and telling people about God to: play guitar, tell people about God, read the Bible, memorize Bible, and then glorify God. You realized it was through God's power, not your effort or talent that you grew in these areas and were able to share with others. Your placement at your high school was not a coincidence, but rather you were placed there for a certain reason and you fulfilled that reason by knowing your limitations and depending on God to work through your weaknesses.

It's not always about me, it's not like I have to talk to everybody, but there are certain things that God has put me in certain places to do. Sometimes it's just saying hi to somebody in the hallway and sometimes that makes the biggest difference in a person's life. Everybody that's on their spiritual journeys, on their paths of righteousness or self-righteousness, or whatever, people are looking for that. I have to remember that I found what I'm looking for, and I didn't have to look for very long. God grabbed a hold of me a long time ago and the point of my life is to help God grab onto other people.

Remo, it was apparent as you grew in your faith and continued to define Christianity that your Christian worldview influenced your experiences in the classroom

as well as relationships with teachers and peers. As you struggled with how girls dressed, you relied on prayer and scripture to keep you on God's path. For you, high school was not about the grades, but about developing and growing in your relationship with God. High school was an excellent missionary opportunity for you to share the Gospel and genuinely care and reach out to others. You spent time praying, absorbing His Word, sharing it with others, and genuinely loving others for who they are and where they are on their journey. You embraced your own spiritual journey and realized the importance of guarding your Christian worldview from any opposing ideologies in school. High school truly was the preparation ground for the next phase where you would continue to mature, grow, and gain the knowledge and skills to continue His work.

Transition

With graduation behind you and the summer before college ahead of you, you went on a trip to Europe and flew to Nevada for your biological father's wedding. You have a new step-mom, who is Christian, and a step-sister. Although the trip was quick, you enjoyed meeting your new step-mom and step-sister, and it pleased you that the step-mom is Christian. You did not mention much about graduation other than it did not feel like you graduated, but you believe it will hit when you move to Virginia for college. You enjoyed your trip to Europe and continued reading your Bible even while touring France, Spain, and Italy. A gentleman on the trip teased you about reading the Bible and told you to become a monk. Along with the teasing about reading the Bible, everyone gave you a hard time about not drinking. You were a good sport about all the teasing, but held to your commitment that you were never going to drink. Eventually you see yourself returning to Europe for ministry work because in your opinion Europe used to be

the hub for the Christian faith but because of the heavy Muslim influence is now dry and eventually you see this happening in the United States.

Over the summer you continued to study the Catholic Bible and actually purchased one to give to your Catholic friend. You spent time underlining passages and making her an index with various themes so depending on what she was struggling with she could find verses easily. Along with preparing this Bible for your friend, you continued researching Catholicism. You spent time praying about the unification of the universal church and researching the additional books found in the Catholic Bible and through your readings discovered why you believe Catholicism differs from Protestantism. You believe the book of Sirach explains why Catholics view grace differently than Protestants. Catholics believe you must work toward more grace and Protestants believe you receive grace by faith. The Catholic's belief in purgatory stems from the book of 2 Maccabees. Catholics believe some people go to purgatory and if family members pray enough they can earn the deceased's way into heaven; while Protestants believe there is only one way to heaven and that is through salvation by Jesus Christ. That is they gain salvation by asking Jesus to forgive them of their sins and by faith their sins are forgiven and upon departure from this earth they will go to heaven. These are two examples of how you perceive the two differing in doctrine, but despite these differences you believe they still worship one God.

Before I started doing any research, I always thought Catholics were unsaved and that they were religious crazy people or something, which is really bad to say because I was completely wrong. I found out that a lot of Catholics are saved and a lot of them have personal relationships with Jesus Christ and that we are all one church and all these divisions or denominations are completely unnecessary by what I believe in.

Your continued research and prayer in this area is important to you because you believe your ministry will involve unifying the Catholic and Protestant faiths. In addition you do not like the division between the two and especially take issue with Catholics viewing Protestants as separated brothers, meaning they do not believe in Catholic doctrine. You discerned by praying that the unification of the church, so that the church as a whole is no longer separated, is the ministry God has in store for you. This research also led you to no longer classify yourself as Protestant, but rather as a Christ follower. Unlike the people back in the New Testament who wanted to follow Paul instead of Christ; you want to follow Christ, not a particular denomination or doctrine.

Throughout the summer you fasted to purify your heart because God showed you that you were prideful. Much of your pride showed during your trip to Europe. You talked about the devil's tactics in trying to influence your decisions and the spiritual warfare that resulted. You believe the devil was tempting you, but you felt you could handle the situation without God's help, which led to pride. You felt that since you had been able to handle temptation in prior experiences that this time would be easier, so you did not need to rely on God as much. You found out this was not the case.

I call it spiritual cleansing, but right now it is the pride and trying to humble myself to God. [I am] trying to purify my heart with the help of God because you can't do that by yourself.

With graduation behind you, but not quite feeling like a graduate your summer was filled with a trip to Europe. On this trip you visited many popular landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower. While in Europe you continued to study Catholicism and Protestantism and read the Catholic Bible. By reading the Catholic Bible, you discovered how Protestants and Catholics differ in doctrine as well as gained new insights about the

Catholic faith. In studying you decided to no longer define yourself as Protestant, but as a Christ follower. In your mind this meant you followed Christ not a specific doctrine.

Reflection

Remo, the issues you concern yourself with and flood your mind with, as well as the activities you engage in (praying, fasting, and reading the Bible) are so different from how I observe other students utilize their time. I wondered if you see yourself different than your peers. You do not see yourself as different, you just feel you have more knowledge of God, which is where you believe some of the pride originated from. You did not share anymore about this pride, but pointed out that love compels you to act different, meditate on godly thoughts, and love others as well as stand against the tactics of the devil. In addition you did not feel you missed out on anything in high school such as going to parties. You said it was different when you surround yourself with other Christian friends because the relationship focuses on fellowship and building a deep trusting relationship based on God.

Your non-Christian friends' experiences in high school looked different because in your opinion they invested in high school relationships including dating relationships. In your mind many of them gave themselves away physically and emotionally because they were involved in intimate relationships. You feel their college experiences will be more difficult because they lost part of themselves in high school. I asked you if you ever felt lonely in high school, and you responded with:

You know, loneliness is an interesting subject because – I always come back to, we've talked about this before, but marriage. I still don't know if I'm called to be married, and I don't know if I want to get married, but if I do then that's fine. But being lonely has nothing to do with who you're with. You can be lonely and be around a million people all the time. I'm never lonely because God never leaves my side.

Although you had many friends, you spent more time investing in your relationship with God than in your friends because you were preparing for the next chapter in life.

We spent time discussing and reflecting on how you experienced your Christian faith in high school. I shared with you some of the views about spirituality in schools that I read while doing my literature view. One view is that students do and should have opportunities to express their spirituality. However, one argument states that students usually do not exhibit their spirituality from a religious context, which is contrary to your experience. For you that made sense because in your opinion students can be restricted in their spiritual expression by the secular perspective espoused in schools. You said if a student walks into a classroom and the teacher's worldview is that "there is no God", the student's experience is going to be vastly different than being in a classroom where all viewpoints are acceptable.

Regardless of the secular stance found at school, you brought your Christian identity into the school environment and expressed, as well as openly shared your faith in a variety of ways. While in school you evangelized by sending scripture via text messaging and Facebook. You read your Bible in class and openly shared and answered students' questions regarding the Bible. When you struggled with distractions or experienced stress, you prayed, read the Bible, fasted, and/or recited scripture to help you cope. Your post-secondary goals are based off what God called you to do. Your relationship with peers was focused on reaching out to them, understanding and respecting who they were, and sharing your beliefs with sensitivity. Even though you knew the overlying perspective of the school system stemmed from secularism you

remained true to your Christian identity, which proved to be more difficult than you think people realize.

When I walk through school I have to pray because I am trying to stay in tune with God, and I have to read the Bible because it's God's living, active Word. And if they think that a Christian doesn't go somewhere and automatically feel like Christ is being persecuted there, trust me, we know when we are somewhere that is not a church building and not surrounded by Christians because you can tell. If I went to a party or something, they might think that I can't experience God there, and that I can't experience God at any secular place, not just school. The truth is God is always with us, He never leaves us, and we're going to stay in tune with Him no matter where we are. We're going to tell people about it, and that's just how it's going to be.

To navigate through school you shared that you had to be in communion with the Holy Spirit otherwise you would be sucked into the "mindlessness of everybody else that was there." You desired to have a relationship with God so it was important that you stayed "in tune" with Him so that you could share His love with others. One way you stayed in tune with God was by showing love to others. Another was through expression of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. You quoted Romans 12:2:

'Therefore brothers, I urge you in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies a living sacrifice because this is holy, pleasing to God. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,' If you don't go around experiencing God, then you're going to be transformed into the world.

For you, walking through high school was a constant battle because you faced oppositions to your faith daily, which is why you had to focus on God. You spoke about putting on the full armor of God to deal with those resistant to God because they are "ever present with the spiritual powers of darkness." When one becomes Christian and loves God, he or she can be assured of spiritual warfare because according to you, "Satan is around every bend, prowling like a lion to trample anybody, whether you are a

Christian or not, and the only way you can stand up against that is being a Christian.” So, as a Christian in a public high school you could not let your guard down, otherwise you would be led astray. Everything you did including praying, fasting, and reading the Bible was for the purpose to stay focused for the “race” God prepared for you.

Paul talks about the race and fighting the good fight of the faith and it says in Colossians chapter 2, ‘Do not be led astray by false teachers,’ because if you’re led astray, you’re going to be pushed astray. And you can’t [afford] not to be training for races. Like it says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ‘Every scripture is God-breathed, ... useful in training [in] righteousness, [so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for] every good work.’ If you aren’t actively focusing on God, that’s what I was trying to do, and actively rejoicing in Him at all times then you’re going to be led astray and you’re not going to be on a straight path.

Your high school experience looked much different from your non-Christian peers; however, you did not see yourself as different. While your non-Christian peers invested in relationships with others, you invested in your relationship with God. Because you remained close to God, you never felt lonely. Even though the school environment was clearly secular, you were able to exhibit your Christian faith on campus. You evangelized, read the Bible to peers, showed concern and love toward others, and when faced with struggles you relied on praying and reading scripture. As you planned for post-secondary, your goals were God inspired. It was not easy being a Christian in high school as your faith was tested many times. You understood the importance of keeping your focus on God in order to fight the daily oppositions, and realized you could not let your guard down otherwise you risked the secular influences.

Preparation

Although you did not share details of your decision to attend a Christian college, you stated it was not a hard decision because you knew you were supposed to attend College of the Living Word. Your choice made sense given your calling to enter the field

of Christian ministry. Even though the financial details were not completely solidified you knew God wanted you there, so you were confident He would take care of the financial issues. For some students, choosing a college is based off a number of factors including but not limited to cost, enrollment, location, athletics, majors, parents, boyfriend/girlfriend, and/or peers. Your decision to attend College of the Living Word was about developing a deeper relationship with God.

Going to College of the Living Word is not about making friends. It's about being more in tune with God, and if He wants me to I'll find relationships that will bless Him and me. I plan on studying the ministry after College of the Living Word, and if it makes connections by going to College of the Living Word – great. But if it doesn't, this ministry has to be God and me; it's bigger than anything else.

In fact two of your anticipations for College of the Living Word were to find more time to worship God and freedom from family, who you feel do not understand the important role God plays in your life. It is important to you to worship God throughout the day and sometimes you think the best way to do this is alone, but you do not feel alone when you are at home. Your mom, who suffers from fibromyalgia and a few other ailments, is constantly worried about everything; concerns that you feel are insignificant. You worry about her because you feel she does not pay enough attention to her health and is often taking on projects she should not be concerned with (for example, arranging the furniture every week). Your step-dad suffered a back injury due to picking up your mom who often falls because of her condition. A primary role for you in your family has become that of caregiver, which does not bother you; however, you wish your mom would take it easy.

You often feel negativity at home partially because your parents are not on the same level as you with regards to faith. According to you, they profess to be Christians,

but you do not know where their hearts are, which bothers you. In your eyes your parents do not look at you as a Christian. It almost sounds like they believe you do things just to do things, but without real meaning. Often your parents see the activities you do such as going to church, praying, or wanting to spend alone time with God as a way for you to avoid being around them, so they take it personally, but this is not your intentions. You shared that your mom views your time reading the Bible and long prayers at the dinner table as signs of disrespect toward the rest of the family. Actually, you saw her perception as being disrespectful because in your eyes God's authority was over her authority, but you never verbalized this to her.

They understand that I'm a Christian, but they don't understand, my faith, and they don't understand, like I tell them all the time what I want to do with my life and they're like, 'Well, you're not going to make a living like that' and they don't understand that I don't care, that I don't need to make a living. And there's all that stuff that just...and they think that every time I talk to them that I'm arguing with them. And that sounds like a typical thing with a parent and a child, but every time that I talk to them, I'll be calm about something and they'll start yelling and cussing at me and [say], 'Why are you always so disrespectful?' And I'll say, 'I'm not the one yelling and cussing'. So, they think that everything I do is trying to disrespect them, but I'm not.

Time away from your family proved to be beneficial as you saw your relationship grow a little stronger after you returned from your first semester in college. They were excited to hear about your experiences as was I.

College

The Christian college you attend in Virginia has approximately 60,000 students, 12,000 live on campus. The college continues to grow and is currently working on an expansion to provide more housing for students, even though they expanded a couple years ago. Technically you do not live on campus, but in a hotel that was donated to the school and renovated into campus housing. The college is located in a small city with a

population of approximately 75,000 people, and there are two additional colleges in town. Your first week went well with a high school friend's parents picking you up from the airport, helping you move into your dorm, and taking you out to dinner. As we sat in Starbucks enjoying our coffee, you shared your first semester college experiences including classes, relationships, and activities.

I was ready to leave home and go to a good Christian atmosphere, and it is a great Christian atmosphere. We have a lot of big speakers, and have convocation three times per week.

One of the first things you learned was the many rules enforced on campus. Girls are not allowed into the boy's dorm and boys are not allowed into the girl's dorm (you were okay with this one because you did not want girls to find out you are a messy person). Kissing is not allowed, which is also fine with you because you do not do that anyway. Unlike other universities, class attendance is required and enforced by teachers reducing your grade after three absences. In addition, R-rated movies are not allowed in the dorms. You were happy that the Resident Assistants (RAs) upheld the rules for the most part, although they allowed you to slip by on your room inspection from time to time.

Well, they say if their rooms are clean, they're going to be that strict on ours too, but sometimes their room isn't clean. They are still pretty strict about it, like, they're good RA's, not crazy strict, and they're not like some of my friends, that live on East campus, they have RA's that just do things you wouldn't think Christians would do, and they don't uphold the rules, like the R rated movie thing, they don't care if people have R rated movies and stuff like that, so it depends on your RA.

In addition to some students not following the dorm rules, you heard stories of students drinking, which was hard to believe since the consequence for drinking is expulsion. Other students interviewed shared similar experiences of Christian students not living their faith on Christian campuses. You attribute this to students attending

because their parents wanting them to, not because they really want to attend the school. On a secular campus, you attribute the reason Christian students do not live their faith is because they renounce their faith after exposure to other ideologies. It is your opinion that regardless of the reason a student attends a Christian campus they will benefit.

I go to the largest Christian school in the world, and there are a lot of people that go because their parents make them go, but the important thing is they are going to a Christian school and get the Gospel every day.

Indeed you were excited about the exposure to the Bible and how it was referenced in most of your classes. You took 18 credits and really enjoyed the Bible classes including Evangelism, Old Testament Survey, and four worship classes, which incorporated the Bible. Another component you enjoyed was that most of your classes opened in prayer. In your eyes the classes were a lot like classes in high school with the average class size around 25; however, a couple of your Bible courses had anywhere from 300 to 500 students. Your attitude toward grades remained the same as high school, and you shared you did not do as well as you could have yet would end the semester just under a 3.0 GPA. As for now, you plan on majoring in Worship Studies with an emphasis on intercultural studies and possibly minor in Spanish.

I'm learning things about God's Word in actual school, and I'm learning about what I want to do, which is lead others in worship. I'm learning more about God's plan and God's reasoning, and I'm learning more about God than I am academics, which is far more valuable to me.

In addition to enjoying your courses, you also enjoyed all your professors this semester. You found them to be extremely knowledgeable and personable. Although they offered interpretations of scripture you did not necessarily agree with and introduced their perceptions on various topics of the Bible foreign to you; you enjoyed learning and growing in your knowledge of the Bible. One professor became your favorite person on

campus because he was extremely nice. He would also sometimes sing in the choir with you and other students.

In addition to the relationships you established with professors, you developed many close relationships with guys in your dorm. Your roommate, Andrew, is from Ohio and you find him to be cool, but awkward to speak to at times, and he exhibits weird mannerisms, which you did not elaborate on. You refer to him as a “King James” because he only reads the King James Bible. You have fun together and you appreciate the fact that he is okay with a messy room. Rooms are checked three times per week, but your room is rarely clean. In fact you received seven warnings just two away from a fine, but happy to report it all starts over next semester.

In addition to Andrew you mentioned two other friends whom you refer to as best friends. Brian and Jared are great friends to hang out with, and sometimes you read the Bible together. You gave Brian, who is from Pennsylvania, a Bible because he only had a Teen Study Bible and you thought he needed a different one. Jared lives down the hall and you memorize scripture together as well as belong to the same prayer group.

Prayer group meets every Tuesday at 10 o’clock in the evening, and although it is not mandatory, most students participate unless they have a conflict with work or another obligation. Normally prayer groups consist of six people, but your group has three. Your leader is from Malaysia and you think he is pretty cool and nice. Prayer group has been a great experience for you, which makes sense as it has been an important part of your life since high school. You said this about prayer group, “Our prayer leader prays for us by name every day, and we pray for each other. It’s just really great!”

Remo, I find it interesting that you developed such close relationships because initially you said attending College of the Living Word was not about the social piece; rather it was about your relationship with God. It seems it was in God's plan for you to meet young men just as devoted to God as you. You found the friendships developed at College of the Living Word more mature than your high school relationships, which you refer to as superficial. Interestingly enough a high school friend, who also attended youth group, would attend College of the Living Word as well. You attempted to get together with her for lunch, but she declined your invitation. After confronting her about it, she told you she had moved on and did not want to revert back to old friends from high school. In your opinion she must have taken your invitation in the wrong way, which led us to an interesting discussion about female relationships.

From this experience and possibly others, you learned girls often get the wrong impression when you get too "deep" with them. Albeit some girls are okay with it, but others are not so you have to be careful. Because of this you decided to focus on guy relationships because guys are not going to get the wrong impression. Also, you believe girl-to-guy relationships cannot be as strong as guy-to-guy relationships.

If you get too deep with a girl, she takes it the wrong way, and you're not being careful with their hearts. It's completely different with a guy because you know it's not going to go to that level because they're like, 'Oh, guy, cool.' But when you're with a girl she's like, 'Well, why is he asking me that? Does he like me?' And it's like, 'No, I just want to talk to you,' but girls don't understand that. You have to be more careful with girl's hearts than guys, because guys are guys and girls are girls.

Prior to leaving for college, you spent time reflecting on relating with the opposite sex, how the way some of them dress can be distracting, and God's plans for you in this area. Fortunately, College of the Living Word has a dress code which prohibits the girls from wearing tight fitting clothing so you anticipated their dress to be more modest than

high school. In addition to the rules pertaining to the opposite sex stated earlier like no kissing, dancing and holding hands are also not allowed. As anticipated, the majority of girls did dress modestly, more so than the girls in high school, but there were still a few who did not dress super appropriately. At this time you are 90% sure you are not supposed to get married, but you are leaving it up to God. Dealing with the opposite sex is a constant battle, but you combat it with maturity as well as fasting and praying.

I need to cling to God and He'll cling to me, [which is] the only way I'm going to get over distraction of fleshy desires, which is what the Bible would call it [by]looking towards above; to spiritual things. I need to focus on things above and not on things that are here now. Nobody here is perfect, the only person that walked perfectly is Jesus Christ, and that's who I want to be like. I'm going to have to walk with God because there's no other way to do it. Whether or not I'm going to get married, I'm not going to worry about it; I'm going to pray about it. If I don't get married, I'll be stoked and if I do get married, I'll be stoked.

As with everything, Remo, you continue to relinquish your struggles to God and pray, fast, and absorb scripture. You realize you are human and far from perfect, but unlike many others you acknowledge the areas you need to work on and then address them. You realize distractions and temptations will always be present therefore you cannot let your guard down so you place your trust in the Lord and continue to ask Him for strength. As you journeyed through your first semester of college, you saw your relationship with God grow especially in the area of worship as you felt more connected to Him. Lately, you have been reading and memorizing scripture related to sanctification because you realize God equipped you with everything necessary to lead a godly life; however, it is not always easy to apply this knowledge to daily living.

Everybody gets off the path, it's not like anybody's path is completely straight. Everybody has their things that kind of lead them off to the left, and then lead them off to the right. Spiritual cleansing is about being stuck on the straight line; walking the tight-rope with God. I've got to work more at being sanctified, set apart, so that [I am] using everything to be godly.

One of the areas you are trying to work on and be godlier in is the relationship with your family. In your opinion you need to stop being argumentative and allow the spirit of God to work in you and provide you with more grace. Although time away from family was beneficial and you believe your relationships with all family members are getting better, it is still difficult to come home to a family who does not express their faith. On top of that your older brother moved back into the home, which added slightly more stress to family dynamics as he is going through a divorce and is facing custody issues. Although your family was excited to hear about your first year and happy to have you home, the reunion was quickly overshadowed by their disapproval of the one “D” you received and expected to be paid back for it, which you totally found acceptable. Despite the “drama” and added stress of brother’s family complications, you continue to work on loving your family, and praying for their faith.

They [family] don’t express it [faith] at all. I don’t even know if they have faith, who knows. Actually, my mom had me read her the Bible the other day, which was kind of cool. I read her all of I John, so that was interesting.

Along with developing new and strengthening old relationships, you encountered a few new activities, continued working on old ones, and thoroughly enjoyed all the new experiences of college. While at College of the Living Word you attended two churches, the church on campus and another Baptist church ironically called “Faith.” You befriended the bus driver who drove you to campus and invited you to Faith where he helped you land a “gig” with the worship team you performed with at a high school retreat. You continue to collect Bibles in different languages, but added a new endeavor to this by deciding to memorize John 3:16 in every language. Reading and studying the Bible continue to be important activities, and you try to read approximately 10 chapters per day. You continue to study Catholicism and actually added a few other churches to

your quest to develop a deeper understanding of other Christian faiths. Praying and fasting continued to hold a significant place in your life as well as memorizing scripture.

Although you memorized a ton of scripture, you found it difficult to retain.

It's hard, but you memorize things and always remember the parts that are really profound, which helps you live it out. I found that I'm human and like I can't; I try to live out everything, but sometimes, you know, I'm human.

Remo, it sounds like College of the Living Word is a great place for you to continue to grow and mature in your walk with God. You took full advantage of all the opportunities presented to you, developed some meaningful relationships, and reached out to your new community with love, acceptance, and grace. With one academic year behind you, you eagerly wait for the next semester and courageously allow God to continue working in your life.

College of the Living Word is nice because I can learn new things about the Bible through Bible classes. I can learn better ways to lead people in worship in my worship classes, and of course I still learn new things there, but God speaks to me in different ways there than he [does] here.

Remo, thanks for blessing me with your story. I learned much from watching and listening about your Christian walk through high school as well as thoroughly enjoyed hearing about your continued walk in college. As I listened, outlined, organized, and wrote your story, I examined my own walk with Christ and was deeply touched, convicted, and empowered by your walk. You remind me of John the Baptist, who was perceived to be totally radical during his time on earth. Like John you do not inundate yourself with worldly matters or walk around sheepishly, rather you focus on His kingdom, and boldly share the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessings,

COMPOSITE FINDINGS ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My study examined how Christian students experienced their faith in a public high school. As a practicing high school counselor, students often discussed their faith in individual counseling sessions as well as referred to their faith in college essays. I was intrigued by how they integrated their faith into their high school experiences. In addition I was curious to know whether students shared their faith within the counseling relationship. As I reflected on the students' stories, I naturally thought about my faith and how I integrated it within the same public high school setting. In this chapter I combine my analysis and interpretation of the four narratives and organize this chapter, first by the emerging themes from the students' individual stories and second by the research questions posed in chapter 3.

I interviewed four students from three to five times each. The students all attended the same high school; at the start of my study three of them were seniors and one a junior. The three senior students, who graduated while I finished interviewing the junior, were interviewed again after completing their first semester of college; the remaining student was not. Two students were females and two were males. As I looked over the four students' stories, I found commonalities and differences, but the overarching theme was their individual experiences of being a Christian in a public high school. Although their individual stories were shared in the preceding chapters, I now return to my two research questions and share my interpretation of how the students experienced their Christian faith within the academic, personal/social, and career

domains; however, I find it appropriate to share my insights of them being Christian in a public high school and how they integrated that within the three domains. In addition to my two research questions I found their experiences in college as unintended findings important enough to include in this composite chapter and detailed in Table 2.

Research Question 1

Three students were raised in Christian homes. Remo was introduced to God at an early age by his grandma, but his exposure to the Christian faith differed from the others in that the other three had parents who went to church and openly expressed and shared their faith. If you recall, up until sixth grade Remo's exposure to the Christian faith was when he was with either his grandma or uncle. It was not until middle school, after a friend invited him to youth group, that his faith became a significant part of his life. Jordan, Serenity, and Remo mention they accepted Christ at an early age. Rachel did not mention exactly when she gave her life to Christ, but simply stated she was raised in a Christian home. It appeared that Serenity, Rachel, and Jordan initially followed the Christian faith because this is how they were raised; however, after a significant event each would adopt the Christian faith as something personal rather than traditional.

For Rachel and Serenity, attending a youth camp during middle school significantly impacted the way they perceived their faith. They both mentioned how after this experience their relationship with God became more personal, and they both wanted Him to be central in their lives. Although they all grew in their faith, Remo's story revealed how he progressed in his relationship with God. This relationship initially started with a dream where Remo recalled God grabbing a hold of him and telling him he needed to change. During his junior year Remo experienced the mission trip that

influenced him to develop a serious praying, fasting, and reading the Bible life style. Although Jordan went on mission trips, he did not mention them having a significant influence on his faith, but he mentioned how he looked at himself in the mirror one day and asked himself whether he was going to take his faith seriously. It was during this personal reflection that he decided he was serious.

By developing a more personal relationship with God, the students learned the importance of surrendering their lives to God and giving Him complete control. In surrendering control they were allowing God to guide them. After Serenity surrendered her struggle with religious OCD to God, she felt she gained more control over her life and was better able to deal with the symptoms brought on by the religious OCD. Additionally, she shared how she thought God was leading her toward Youth with a Mission, but would shut the door on this opportunity. Although devastated because she really felt God placed this on her heart, she believed God knew what was best and was confident He would direct her steps.

When faced with the possibility that his foster brother might return to his home, Jordan trusted God was in control of the situation, and He would do what was best for Tino. Even though deep down Jordan wanted Tino to remain in his family, he wanted what God wanted for Tino even if it meant losing his foster brother. Although it would be hard to see Tino leave, Jordan truly believed God was in control of the situation. Similarly, Jordan believed God was in control of whether his long distance relationship with Christine would last. Lastly, when faced with an illness and the possibility of not performing well or not at all in an important baseball game, Jordan believed God was in control and if he played—great—and if he did not it was meant to be. This game was an

opportunity for Jordan to pitch in front of not only college scouts, but professional scouts as well. Although this game was of major importance, Jordan was content with whatever happened because he knew God was in control of the situation. In his opinion, he could not do anything about the situation but pray and see how God responded. If he remained too sick to play, he believed this was God's will for his life.

When faced with the final details of attending college, it was natural for Rachel to worry, but she reminded and comforted herself with the awareness that God was in control of the situation and all the last minute concerns would work out. Like Serenity, Rachel believed in surrendering control to God and living life according to His plan. She realized if she wanted to be like Christ, she would need to surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to guide her.

Remo made reference to Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart do not lean on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." He believed it did not matter what happened because ultimately God was in control and as long as he allowed God to direct him, he would be okay. For Remo, school finances were a concern, but he did not get overly concerned because he knew God would work everything out.

Although Remo was the only one who mentioned Proverbs 3:5-6, they each lived it. With every concern, struggle, and uncertainty each of them remained confident that God was in control of the situation. Also, all four learned that life did not always go their way and even though they were hoping for a certain outcome, it often did not turn out as expected, but they all believed God knew best. From my perspective, it appeared high

school was not about their personal agenda rather it was about God's, and they all genuinely prayed about many issues they faced in high school.

Academic Domain

Within the academic domain, the students' experiences were similar and different partially based on respective instructors. Both Rachel and Remo spoke about how they integrated their faith into their writings and felt validated by their instructors. Neither Serenity nor Jordan spoke about this. They each felt it was important to respect the views and opinions of their classmates and teachers even when they conflicted with their own. Remo originally was defensive but as he matured in his faith, he was more respectful. For the most part they felt safe sharing their Christian worldview, but as I detailed in their respective stories, Rachel and Remo experienced a teacher who degraded their Christian views. Jordan was cautious about sharing because he knew the teacher was in control of his grade.

Jordan was the only student who did not speak about evolution. Although he took AP Biology senior year, he did not mention any difficulties with this class. He did feel it was important to understand other theories and felt this knowledge helped when speaking with others who believed differently. In fact they all felt this way. Remo and Rachel felt the classroom discussions were more biased toward evolution. Serenity was the only one who challenged her teacher when he taught evolution as the only theory, but she handled it in a very respectful way. Rachel reflected and wished she had paid closer attention to what she was taught and looking back she possibly would have challenged some things.

Table 2

Summary of Composite Findings Addressing Research Questions

Experiences	R	S	J	R
Being Christian				
Surrendered control to God	X	X	X	X
Grew up in a Christian home	X	X	X	
Experienced a significant spiritual event	X	X	X	X
Viewed faith as something personal rather than familial	X	X	X	X
Research Question 1				
A. Academic Domain				
Integrated faith in writing	X			X
Respected classmates/teachers opposing views	X	X	X	X
Felt safe sharing Christian worldview	X	X	X	X
Shared their faith with classmates	X	X		X
B. Personal/Social Domain				
Distracted by language and inappropriate behavior in the hallways	X	X	X	X
Prayed about distractions and temptations in the hallways	X	X	X	X
Utilized praying and reciting scripture as coping mechanisms	X	X	X	X
Spoke about spiritual warfare	X	X	X	X
Sought outside support (counselor, church, family, mentors)	X	X	X	
Confided in parents	X	X	X	
Participated in Fellowship of Christian Athletes or Students	X	X	X	X
Attended youth group	X	X		X
Spoke of personal relationship with God	X	X	X	X
Communicated with God through prayer and reading the Bible	X	X	X	X
Communicated with God through worship	X	X		
Core peer group with other Christian students	X	X	X	X
Core peer group comprised of peers from youth group	X	X		X
Served as role models to other Christian students	X	X	X	
Dated either short-term or long-term	X	X	X	X
Serious romantic relationship	X		X	
Kept God central in romantic relationship	X		X	
Set appropriate boundaries in romantic relationship	X		X	
Close relationship with parents	X		X	
Distant relationship with parents		X		X
Participated in student council	X		X	
Participated in athletics	X	X	X	

Experiences	R	S	J	R
Shared and expressed their faith on the athletic field	X	X	X	
Organized prayer meetings during athletic events/practice	X	X		
Viewed school as a missionary field to evangelize	X	X	X	X
C. Career Domain				
Prayed about what college to attend	X	X		X
Confident God will lead them to their calling	X	X		X
Intend to major in a helping profession	X	X	X	X
Asked about Christian groups on college visits	X	X	X	
Viewed establishing a Christian support group in college important	X	X	X	X
Worried about how to cope with challenging situations in college	X		X	
Established Christian support group prior to leaving for college	X	X		
Prayed about their roommate	X	X		
Recognized the importance of finding a church family while in college	X	X	X	X
Research Question 2				
Spoke of negative experience with counselor regarding faith	X	X		
Felt establishing a relationship with Christian faculty important in high school	X	X	X	
Unintended Findings				
Joined a Christian group on college campus	X	X		X
Found a church community	X	X		X
Grew in their Christian faith	X	X		X
Found classroom discourse stimulating	X	X		X
Reflected on their faith due to classroom discourse	X	X		X
Found classroom discourse challenged their beliefs	X	X		X
Established relationships with Christian faculty	X	X		X
Sought Christian peers to discuss classroom discourse	X	X		X
Established friendships with other Christians	X	X		X
Continued to allow God to guide their steps	X	X		X
Grew spiritually, intellectually, and developmentally	X	X		X
Joined a Bible study	X	X		X

Within the classroom Remo, Serenity, and Rachel shared their faith with peers.

Rachel recalled a time that she wrote letters to an atheist and agnostic student in class.

For Serenity the verses she wrote on notebooks and the crosses she wore sparked

conversations with peers. Remo often engaged in conversations regarding the Bible with his peers in the classroom. Jordan did not speak about sharing his faith within the classroom.

Although their experiences in the classroom were both similar and different, they all were receptive to learning about different ideologies. While hearing different perspectives, they remained respectful with some questioning the different perspectives. Two of the students spoke of integrating their faith in their writings and for the most part they all felt safe in sharing their Christian worldview in the classroom. In addition most shared their faith with classmates within the classroom setting.

Personal/Social Domain

They all faced similar challenges in school especially in dealing with the behavior and actions of other students. Remo and Serenity spoke about the difficulties of walking down the halls in school because of the language and behaviors of other students, and both prayed as they walked down the halls. Jordan was shocked by the language and dress when he transitioned into high school from home school, and he had to pray about all the distractions. He also refrained from attending school dances because of the way students danced. Both Jordan and Remo spoke about the difficulties they faced dealing with the inappropriate dress of female students and how they had to pray about these temptations.

Serenity, Remo, and Jordan spoke about being mindful of other students and guarding themselves from the language, behaviors, and dress, whereas Rachel spoke about her struggle to stay mindful of these distractions. She spoke about not gossiping or

making fun of others, accepting others' differences, making a conscious decision to dress modestly, listening to appropriate music, and reading her Bible.

They each spoke about the importance of praying in order to deal with the distractions. They read the Bible and repeated or memorized scripture to help deal with areas in which they were struggling. Praying and reading scripture helped them to stay focused on God and to keep their minds and actions pure or godly. Remo, Serenity, and Rachel mentioned the oppression they felt on campus and attributed this to spiritual warfare. Jordan did not make reference to spiritual warfare. Along with praying and reading the Bible, they found other ways to cope.

Because Serenity was dealing with religious OCD, she saw a professional counselor outside of school. She spoke about the important role this counselor played in helping her deal with the offensive thoughts she battled daily. Remo spoke about fasting and how he would refrain from eating in order to connect with God, which in turn would help him deal with whatever issues he struggled with. Rachel and Serenity also turned to the church for support. Although Serenity struggled with opening up to youth leaders, she did seek them for guidance. Rachel turned to the church for help and found mentors in the church to help her deal with her struggles.

Rachel, Jordan, and Serenity also confided in their parents. Rachel spoke about this the most and really felt comfortable speaking to both her mom and dad about issues. She tended to speak more with her father because he was more authoritative than her mother. She refrained from talking to her parents about temptations she faced primarily with her boyfriend because she did not want them to stop trusting her. Jordan mentioned that he had a pretty solid relationship with his father and grandpa and would seek their

guidance. Although Serenity went to her parents especially with her struggle with religious OCD, she did not feel they adequately supported her and in her perception they made her believe nobody else would want to hear about her struggles. I do not believe they pushed her away because they were non-caring parents, I believe they were not certain how to handle the religious OCD. Remo did not seek anybody out to help him deal with his struggles at least he did not share this with me. He spent more time praying, reading relevant scripture, and fasting about the situation.

Rachel, Serenity, and Remo attended Fellowship of Christian students so they could surround themselves with other Christians. They saw this as an opportunity to support each other and pray for each other. Jordan attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes and saw this as an opportunity to receive support from other Christians. For all four of them, Christian clubs would be an opportunity to meet other Christians who would help them stay accountable in their faith. The other place they found support was within their youth groups. Serenity, Rachel, and Remo all attended the same youth group. If you recall, Jordan switched churches and did not reference attending youth group in his new church.

Along with coping mechanisms including praying, reading the Bible, and gathering with other Christian students, the students invested in various relationships. Developing a personal relationship with God, finding their place in the social scene, establishing themselves as leaders and mentors, experiencing dating relationships, learning to deal with parental authority, building camaraderie with team members within athletic and extracurricular activities, and sharing their faith within all relationships were all influential to their personal/social development.

Finding, establishing, and maintaining meaningful relationships with God, peers, the opposite sex, and family were extremely important in the lives of all four students. Relationships with certain students were more significant or important in the personal/social domains, but overall they all spoke about relationships and their significance.

They all spoke about their personal relationship with God, how He was central in their lives, and how they kept in communication with Him. Serenity spoke about her daily communications through prayer, devotion, worship, and quiet time with God. Rachel spent time worshipping, reading the Bible, praying, and journaling to maintain communication and connection with God. Remo read his Bible, memorized scripture, prayed, and fasted to stay connected to God. He also spoke about his relationship with God more than any other relationship and felt his relationship with God was the most important relationship in his life. Although he had friends, he did not invest a significant amount of time in these relationships. Jordan read his Bible and prayed to maintain His connection with God.

For most students in high school, the social scene is the most important aspect of attending school. Finding a group to belong to or at least one significant friend is vitally important, otherwise high school can be an extremely lonely place. Often times the reason why students leave high school is because they were not able to establish meaningful relationships with peers. As a counselor, I spend a great deal of time listening to students talk about their relationships with peers, especially when the relationship is not going well. Finding someone to connect with and share the

experiences of high school was important to the four students and for Rachel, Serenity, and Remo finding friends who would support their faith became extremely important.

Rachel initially hung out with the “popular” group, but when they started participating in activities with which Rachel was not comfortable, she started to distance herself from them. You will recall her first awareness that the group she was hanging with may not be the best was during her camp experience. She felt if she were going to continue to grow in her relationship with God she would need to establish friendships with friends who held her same beliefs. She would gradually start hanging with friends who attended her youth group.

Like Rachel, Remo gradually shifted toward hanging out with peers from his youth group. God spoke to Remo and told him he needed to make some new friends so Remo obeyed and found friends who were Christian. Remo stated if he had not changed friends, his experience in high school would have looked extremely different. You will recall that his Christian friends called him on his behavior and so he had to take a deep look at himself and make some changes.

After her camp experience, Serenity felt she needed to establish relationships with peers who shared her beliefs as well. In fact her family switched churches so she could attend a youth group that would support her growth as a Christian. Serenity found and established friendships with peers from her youth group, but later friendships within this group became difficult because of her OCD. This would cause Serenity to feel extremely lonely as she could not turn to anybody; so she found refuge in her relationship with God and saw Him as the constant in her life. Perhaps because she did not share with her peers her struggle with religious OCD, her peers perceived Serenity’s behavior or mannerisms

as controlling or bossy when really her behavior was a result of the religious OCD. If her friends had knowledge of this, maybe it would not have been so hard for her to develop trusting and equally yoked relationships. Serenity often felt she gave more to relationships than she received and because of this I felt peers took advantage of her.

Although Jordan dated a Christian girl and had friends who attended Fellowship of Christian Athletes, he established and maintained friendships with both believers and non-believers. In his opinion, he needed to be mindful and not allow his friends to influence the decisions he made, but he saw no problem maintaining relationships with peers who held different beliefs because Jordan had no problem questioning activities that contradicted his faith. He saw it as his responsibility to model good behavior to his friends thus evangelizing through his actions.

Rachel, Jordan, and Serenity felt it was important to serve as role models to other students especially underclassmen. They invested a tremendous amount of time modeling to non-Christian and Christian students. In athletics, all three reached out to the underclassmen. Athletics also provided leadership opportunities like student council for Jordan and Rachel and Freshman Connect with Serenity. Remo was not involved in any extracurricular activities other than FCS.

As for relationships with the opposite sex, Rachel and Jordan were in serious relationships in high school. Remo and Serenity each spoke of their short-term relationships. Rachel and Jordan spoke about the role their parents played with regards to dating, but Serenity and Remo did not mention their parents. Rachel felt pressured to date; Serenity did not but she spoke about the amount of focus her friends placed on dating and the opposite sex.

Rachel's first relationship, with a guy she had a major crush on, lasted five months. She shared she did not put much thought into whether this young man was an appropriate person to date. In her second relationship she did not share how this relationship started other than she met Blake in youth group. Early on in their relationship Blake and Rachel established guidelines on how their relationship was to progress like when they would kiss. Because she did not feel her parents gave enough guidelines, she had to figure out appropriate behavior on her own. Fortunately for her, Blake took a lead role in establishing boundaries in their relationship for which she was grateful. Rachel and Blake invested a lot of time in their relationship especially learning about each other, and they made sure God was central in their relationship. In my opinion this is where Blake and Rachel went right in their relationship by spending time getting to know each other. Many students in high school start dating someone purely based on the physical attraction and do not give much thought or time developing and fostering a healthy relationship.

Blake and Rachel consulted with older adults in their congregation to help guide them in their relationship. They also spent time learning each other's love language in other words what was the best way to communicate with each other. In addition they shared the same passion for music and found ways to integrate this into their relationship. More importantly they integrated God into their relationship by praying, worshiping, and reading the Bible together. At one time in their relationship, Blake and Rachel let their guard down, which led to temptation. Rachel attributed the struggles they faced with temptation to their complacent attitude about the amount of time they were spending together with God. Once they realized they were placing themselves in tempting

situations they immediately made adjustments in their relationship primarily by making sure they were spending time with God.

Like Rachel, Jordan was in a serious relationship during high school and there are many similarities in his relationship with Christine as in Rachel and Blake's relationship. For example, Jordan and Christine established early on that God would be central in their relationship, and like Rachel, Jordan prayed with Christine and spent time talking about how God was working in their lives. Although Jordan did not get a lot of guidance from his parents regarding dating, his parents were very much involved in his relationship by knowing what Jordan and Christine were doing and their whereabouts. Jordan and Christine were also conscientious about setting appropriate boundaries with each other so they would not tempt each other. If you recall, they chose not to attend school dances because of the inappropriate dancing. Jordan never spoke about any struggles in this area; he made it clear that both he and Christine were in agreement that sex would wait until marriage.

Although Serenity and Remo did mention dating during high school, these relationships would be short-term. Remo dated a girl from youth group, but they did not spend much time together, and after about a month she ended the relationship. Serenity did not intend on dating or courting, as she called it, until she was ready to marry; however, she would find herself in a brief relationship with a Christian boy during the time she was really struggling with religious OCD. In her eyes this relationship was about helping each other through her struggle with religious OCD and serving the Lord together. She did not mention much about this relationship other than for that season it was a good experience, and she is happy that he was there for her.

Jordan and Rachel believed their relationships were different than the typical high school dating relationships because in their opinion their relationships were not based on sexual relationship rather more focused on God and letting Him work through their relationships. As I stated earlier, Jordan and Rachel went into the relationships knowing where their boundaries were, but there were some challenges along the way. Although they did not come out and say it, I believe they all were saving themselves for marriage. Rachel spoke of her purity ring to symbolize her commitment to remain pure before marriage. She also spoke of her frustration with the established expectation that making out was required while dating. Equally frustrating was her doctor's disbelief that she was still a virgin.

Along with peer relationships students often see me regarding their intimate relationships. Although sex education is covered in health classes, there are numerous students who still struggle and tend to have many questions regarding dating, sex, and handling conflict within these relationships. Often their struggles in this area stem from their belief system and how their religious upbringing fits into a romantic relationship. Girls tend to see me about their intimate relationships more than boys, but I do encounter some serious conversations about this subject matter from boys. I am amazed by their transparency and honesty when they discuss personal matters. I believe there is hesitation between parents and students to converse about such a "touchy" subject. Usually this hesitation stems from embarrassment or shyness on both sides.

As students get older and want more autonomy, conflicts with parents are more prevalent. I deal with parent/student conflicts on a regular basis during senior year, but also have my fair share of parent/student conflicts at all grade levels. The causes of the

conflict range from poor academics, lack of school attendance, drug/alcohol abuse, rebellion, and the struggles brought on by divorce. Often the underlying reason for conflict is the student does not feel the parent is invested in the student, which then brings up the negative behavior. Within the lives of my four students, Jordan and Rachel were very close to their parents; Remo and Serenity not as close. As with most students they spoke about family life.

Jordan and Rachel spoke a lot about their families due in large part because both of them came from very close families. Although Rachel's parents were divorced, she maintained close relationships with both parents. Jordan and Rachel were the eldest children in their families, so they each took on the responsibility of overseeing younger siblings and were very close to them. In addition to his parents Jordan had the support of his maternal grandparents, and if you recall he referred to them as a second set of parents. Jordan often went to his father and grandfather for advice and relied heavily on mom for the academic support, helping him navigate through the post-secondary application process.

Although Rachel was close to both parents, she was especially close to her father even though he was the tougher parent. In my opinion she developed a very open and honest relationship with her father and even spoke to him about matters typically only shared with mothers such as her dating relationship with Blake. In large part, I believe her ability to make healthy decisions related to her relationship with Blake sparked from the close bond she shared with her father. Her father did an excellent job affirming her as a beautiful, young lady. I find many adolescent girls who are sexually active tend to be because they are longing for positive affirmation and attention.

Serenity did not speak about her parents as much as Rachel and Jordan. She indicated that there was some conflict with her parents pertaining to her religious OCD diagnosis. She felt like they were not on the same page as far as how much of a struggle this was for her. Her parents thought she needed to simply suck it up and she would be fine, while Serenity felt her struggles were beyond that. I felt she wanted to say more about her relationship with her parents, but she was either hesitant to share or out of respect kept this very personal information to herself. As I listened to her speak about her parents I sensed that she felt her parents acted one way in public and a different way in private, but again she did not elaborate. I did not observe her interactions with her parents as much as I saw with Jordan and Rachel primarily because I interviewed Serenity outside the home. Of the times I met her parents, I saw two very caring, loving, and devoted parents.

Like Rachel, Remo's parents were divorced, but he did not get to see his father on a regular basis. Again, his parents, although they professed to be Christian, did not attend church nor were they as serious about their faith as Remo. You recall Remo stating he was not sure where they were with their faith. Remo spoke about the negativity he felt at home which stemmed from his parents not understanding how important his faith was to him. He spoke of his mom getting upset with him for reading the Bible at the dinner table, praying too long at dinner, and not agreeing with him on his chosen career path in ministry. Both Remo and Serenity longed for a closer relationship with family members, and both hoped time away would help develop a stronger and closer relationship.

Because Rachel already shared a close bond with her family members, her time away led to some homesickness. She mentioned there was one time during first semester

that she wanted her parents to be there with her. She was extremely excited to come home during breaks to spend time with her family, and if you recall she was upset that she would miss out on many of her younger sisters' activities. When she returned home during break, she took her sisters to school.

Time away from his parents appeared to be good for Remo, but he longed to return to school because he felt he had more support at school than home. Again, this stemmed from his parents not placing the same amount of importance on faith as Remo. Remo enjoyed the time away because he did not feel as much stress, but upon his return home he found his older brother had moved back into the home adding additional stress to the household.

Jordan, Serenity, and Rachel were very involved in extracurricular activities. Jordan and Rachel were involved in student council or STUCO. Rachel was involved for three years and Jordan one. Both joined on a whim and both landed roles in STUCO, but their experiences were very different. As the student body president, Rachel had more responsibility in STUCO. Her primary responsibility was running the meetings and overseeing the other students. Within her leadership role, Rachel integrated her Christian faith. The morals and values she possessed stemmed from her Christian worldview so naturally this was the lens she looked through in all areas of her life including leadership. She found during her senior year in STUCO that her values and ethics did not align with the values and ethics of her classmates and because of this she felt very alone. If you recall, she spoke of the time an R-rated movie was selected for viewing during a leadership camp, which was deeply disconcerting to her because of her beliefs. She also felt like a mother because she was trying to establish a more ethical student council.

Rachel felt had there been another Christian student in STUCO her experience might have been different as it would have provided support and accountability. Although senior year was difficult she was thankful for her time involved in the most influential student body organization on campus.

Jordan's experience in STUCO contrasted with Rachel's because there were other Christian students in STUCO, and he did not have as much responsibility. He spoke about the two camps in STUCO—the workers and non-workers. He did not state whether the Christian students belonged to one group or the other or both, but he stated his experience was positive because there were other Christians. He did not elaborate on this, but he believed his Christian values helped him display a servant attitude in STUCO.

Although Serenity was not involved in STUCO, she was involved in another leadership group called Freshman Connect. It was important that she was involved in this group because she wanted to help the freshmen transition into high school by providing them with mentoring. She felt there should not be a wall between the underclassmen and upperclassmen and she wanted to serve as a positive role model. It was important that she mentored the young Christian students and found it important to be a role model to them.

Like Rachel's experience in STUCO, Serenity experienced the loneliness of being the only Christian in theatre at least initially. Serenity viewed the theatre environment as extremely oppressive in that a lot of behavior that took place she found offensive. It was disheartening to her that the faculty members engaged in and supported these behaviors especially as they professed to be Christians. It was disappointing to her that she chose not to attend cast parties because the behavior was even more offensive. Because she did

not engage in the behaviors of or conversations with the other students, she felt isolated and lonely. It was not until her senior year when her Christian best friend was a part of the cast that her experience changed. She found the environment more bearable with the support and friendship of another Christian.

The only extracurricular activity Remo was associated with was Fellowship of Christian Students. He did not share a lot of details about FCS other than he believed the group was not as organized his senior year as prior years. Despite the lack of organization Remo attended faithfully. Along with Remo, Rachel and Serenity were involved in Fellowship of Christian Students. Both girls had leadership roles within FCS including organizing, preparing, and conducting a weekly meeting. For all three students, FCS provided a weekly opportunity for Christian students to gather and fellowship, pray, worship, and study God's word. The students felt gathering with other Christian students was beneficial.

Although FCS was established on campus, Jordan felt God led him to establish a Fellowship of Christian Athletes. At one time FCA was on campus, but students felt it excluded the non-athletes so they changed their name to FCS. FCA provided the same opportunities as FCS only with the focus on athletes and athletics. Since Jordan was so passionate about athletics, he wanted a Christian group that would support Christian athletes. In addition he saw a tremendous correlation between athletics and Biblical principles so he found FCA to be ideal for integrating his faith with his passion. Jordan enjoyed meeting the Christian faculty members who attended FCA, and stated FCA provided a great opportunity for Christian students to meet Christian faculty members.

Christian faculty members attended FCS as well and provided students with resources when they did school wide outreaches.

For Jordan and Rachel, athletics was important in their lives. Jordan, a three sport athlete, and Rachel, a serious softball player, grew up playing organized athletics. Serenity was involved in dance, but would go out for cross country during her senior year. All three students saw athletics as an opportunity to share their faith. Rachel and Serenity organized prayer meetings before athletic events in their respective sports, while Jordan longed for the opportunity to pray with other teammates but did not take advantage of the opportunity. During his summer league, Jordan roomed with a Christian teammate, but neither shared their faith with the other. After the death of this teammate, Jordan felt convicted by the Holy Spirit for not stepping out and sharing his faith for others. After this tragic event, he started reaching out to his teammates. Although he did not pray with other athletes at the time, he prayed prior to stepping on the pitcher's mound and entering the batter's box. Rachel and Serenity openly shared their faith with other teammates. You will recall Rachel shared her faith with two of her teammates, and Serenity invested a tremendous amount of time with the underclassmen. She wanted the Christian athletes to know they could have fun without engaging in activities that conflicted with their faith. Serenity shared participating in cross country was a lot easier than theatre because the cross country coach was Christian so she felt supported by him. Interestingly the theatre staff proclaimed to be Christian, but Serenity did not feel supported by them because they condoned inappropriate behavior that took place in theatre. Remo was not involved in athletics rather he invested his time studying the Bible, memorizing scripture, and maintaining his ministry outreach on Facebook.

Through their involvement in extracurricular activities the students shared their faith with peers, and even though Remo was not involved in any organized school activities, he found ways to share his faith. In addition to sharing her faith in the classroom and as an athlete, Serenity participated in See You at the Pole. Rachel mentioned God in her graduation speech and shared her faith in the activities she was involved in. Although she was not as boisterous in STUCO about her faith, she led with integrity and honesty, which in her mind spoke of her Christian worldview.

Jordan was more covert about sharing his faith. He had no problem sharing his faith if somebody approached him, but generally he was not the first one to bring up the subject. He too believed his behavior and actions proclaimed his Christian worldview. After the death of his Christian teammate, Jordan started to share more especially with his teammates. When invited to do something that contradicted his faith such as drinking, Jordan had no problem telling teammates he would not participate because of his faith.

All the students looked at high school as a missionary field with opportunity to share their faith. Remo and Serenity reached out to anybody and everybody. They had no problem walking up to total strangers and sharing their faith whereas Rachel and Jordan stayed more within their circle of friends. They both shared the Gospel with friends and acquaintances. Remo really felt the main reason why he was on campus was to share his faith, and Serenity believed it was her responsibility to reach out and shower others with love and acceptance. Initially Jordan felt Christian students found it difficult to share their faith, but as he matured as a Christian he decided it did not need to be hard at all, but rather a personal choice to share.

It was apparent to me that students integrated their faith the most within the personal/social domain. Their faith served as a coping mechanism when dealing with inappropriate behavior, distractions, and temptations. They each found it beneficial to establish relationships with other Christians on campus in order to fellowship and openly share their faith. Of all their relationships, God was central and because they stayed connected with Him through prayer, reading scripture, and worshipping they were better able to connect within other relationships especially relationships with the opposite sex. Their involvement in extracurricular activities provided opportunities to share their faith and develop meaningful relationships with others.

Career Domain

Along with the academic and personal/social domains, I spend a tremendous amount of time during the school year helping seniors apply to college, the military, or prepare for the work force. For college bound seniors, fall is filled with visiting colleges, meeting with college recruiters, and applying to college. If students are applying to several schools, the application process can be time consuming and intense. Serenity and Jordan spoke about the process and both relied on parents to help them navigate the application and college selection process. Jordan referred to his mother as his personal secretary and appreciated the amount of help she contributed to this labor intensive process. Remo did not share his experience with the college admissions process. By going through the college admission process, Rachel realized the immense responsibility and workload placed upon counselors to help students through this process. She was thankful for her counselor's guidance and support during this time.

For many students, deciding which college to attend can be stressful especially for those students who apply to numerous colleges. For others, the decision is easy because they decided long ago where to attend. Serenity, Remo, and Rachel prayed about which college to attend. Initially Rachel thought she would attend a Christian school, but her experience at Urbana opened up the possibility of attending a secular university. Rachel prayed about attending a secular university and initially struggled with the possibility of attending because she felt this was something she wanted and was not totally positive this was what God wanted for her. After much prayer, she felt at peace with the decision to attend Green University and felt God was leading her there.

As I mentioned earlier, Serenity believed she would attend YWAM but when God shut the door on this opportunity, she had another Christian school in mind. Initially she had no intentions of attending school in California especially after her initial visit which was not a positive experience. After much prayer, Serenity felt at peace to attend Trinity Western University. Remo always knew he was going to attend a Christian school because he had discerned early on this is where God wanted him. Jordan's choice in college was centered on baseball, but he felt confident that where he ended up was where God wanted him.

Along with choosing a college, deciding on a possible major can be a difficult task for students. Some students definitely know what they plan on majoring in and others simply have no idea. At this point in time Serenity and Rachel are not definite in their planned major. Serenity felt God lead her toward a few possibilities including biology, environmental science, and child development. After working in an elementary

school, Serenity is contemplating teaching or counseling. Although her plans are not definite, she is confident God will lead her in the right direction.

Remo discerned from a dream that God was leading him into ministry. He believes God is calling him into a ministry focused on worship and the unification of the church. He believes his ministry will start in Europe. Rachel is leaning toward majoring in public policy but is not entirely sure. Her initial thought was working for a Christian non-profit organization such as World Vision. Jordan did not mention his intended major; however, I know he is leaning toward physical therapy. He did mention he would like to return to high school and coach someday. All four are leaning toward a profession that will serve others which aligns with their Christian worldview.

Initially paying for college was a concern for all four students. Serenity landed a job during the summer to help pay for school and was extremely thankful to God for providing this job. Rachel was equally concerned about paying for college, but would receive a prestigious scholarship that put her mind at ease. Jordan received a baseball scholarship early on so he was not as concerned about finances. He would land several more scholarships which would cover the remaining balance. Remo's parents paid for his first semester of college, but he was not sure how he would cover the second semester; nevertheless, he was not concerned because he knew God was in control.

Leaving home for the first time was a huge transition for Rachel, Serenity, and Remo; however, they were looking forward to all the new experiences and freedom. Although she was excited about being on her own, Rachel was also worried about the transition. She was nervous about her new environment as well as locating everything she needed. Serenity and Remo did not speak about any anxieties. Remo was excited to

leave for school and was looking forward to attending a Christian environment and deepening his relationship with God. Serenity was looking forward to more freedom as well. Jordan is excited and looking forward to more freedom, but he is not looking forward to leaving his friends. Serenity was also sad about leaving her friends.

Rachel was concerned about consciously making the right decisions in college especially since she would no longer be in close proximity to her family. Even though she was countercultural in high school, she was concerned about being countercultural in the college environment. She knew it was important to stay away from activities that went against her Christian values; yet, she worried about fitting in and finding a support group in college. Jordan spoke about how he plans to handle situations that challenge his beliefs while in college. He realizes that he will receive invitations to attend parties, but he has to make the right decisions on what he exposes himself to and how he conducts himself. Remo and Serenity really did not speak about this concern, which possibly was attributed to them going to a Christian school. Neither of them denied the reality that by attending a Christian college the exposure to activities that contradicted their faith was a possibility.

In the same way the students surrounded themselves with support during high school including Christian friends, family, church, and Christian groups, they acknowledge the necessity to find similar supports in college. Rachel meticulously planned, well in advance of leaving for Green University, the support she would need while on campus. When she visited campus she sought Christian support groups on campus and found Intervarsity. Once on campus she looked for a church and compared her search to interviewing. She was looking for the right fit and the one she felt would

support her best. In addition she found Christian friends with whom she could discuss class lectures from a Christian lens and found a Bible study group.

Prior to leaving for Trinity Western University, Serenity wanted to connect with other Christian girls and form a support network. Once on campus she did this and also attended the church on campus. While volunteering with a Christian group she connected with an older Christian couple who would introduce her to another church community. Like Rachel she attended Bible studies and formed prayer groups with other students.

Remo did not speak of any prior planning before leaving for college. He was super excited to attend a Christian college that would allow him to freely speak about his faith. Once he was on campus he did establish a network of Christian friends with whom he attended prayer groups, read the Bible, and memorized scripture. Although Jordan has yet to transition to college, on each campus visit he made it a point to ask about Christian support groups. He plans on finding a church once he settles into his new environment and community.

All four students knew the benefit of connecting with other Christians and establishing a Christian support network. They understood the accountability other Christians would provide them as they experienced in high school. Along with accountability from others, Rachel and Jordan spoke about personal accountability by making sure they read their Bible. Remo and Serenity did not mention the personal accountability but by attending a Christian college their exposure to spending time reading the Bible naturally happened in the classroom.

As in the other domains, students integrated their faith when making important decisions including college selection and contemplating future majors. Although none of

them were certain on a college major, they were positive God would lead them toward a career in the helping professions. Prior to transitioning into college, the students did their research on Christian support groups and locating churches in the community. Once they transitioned into college they followed through by establishing Christian support groups.

Research Question 2

Only Rachel and Serenity spoke about their experiences with their counselors in high school. Because of a transfer, both girls experienced two different counselors during high school. Rachel recalls her experience with her first counselor as negative as she felt he did not support her initial desire to attend a Christian college. She felt the counselor looked down on her idea of attending a Christian school and told her she could do better. This experience made her apprehensive to speak about this with her new counselor during senior year. Once she realized her new counselor did not think negatively about the possibility of attending a Christian school, she felt safe to discuss this with her counselor. As her trust and confidence grew, Rachel and the counselor's relationship grew stronger so Rachel felt safe to discuss the important role her faith played in her life. Although Rachel did not say how she ascertained her counselor was Christian, she was happy to know she could openly discuss this with her counselor. Rachel recalls a time when she was speaking with her counselor about her decision to attend a secular school and her counselor reminded her that God was in control of the situation. The opportunity to discuss her faith with her counselor led to a stronger relationship between the two, and Rachel recalls wanting to speak to her counselor versus just signing up because she thought that was what she was supposed to do.

You will recall Rachel also spoke of her experience with her counselor during middle school and how she felt embarrassed to get pulled from class. During the time her parents were going through their divorce, Rachel's mom called the counselor and asked that she check in with her. At that time Rachel felt she did not need to speak to her counselor about her parent's divorce. Once in high school Rachel would run into this counselor again, and it was then that she realized the counselor was Christian. Although she did not know if knowing this about her counselor would have changed anything, she recalled thinking about how she had missed knowing this about the counselor.

Serenity's experience with her initial counselor was similar to Rachel's. She felt the counselor did not support her decision to attend a Christian school, and it upset Serenity when he told her she could do better. In addition Serenity did not feel supported by the counselor when it came to choosing classes, which caused her to not invest much into the relationship. Because she had a hard time opening up to most adults, she did not invest a lot of time with her new counselor and only visited with her counselor about post-secondary needs, but never discussed anything personal with her counselor.

After her experience working in the elementary school, her view of teachers and counselors would change. Serenity was pleasantly surprised by the teachers' transparency in sharing their faith with students. This experience brought back memories of her freshman science teacher, who was Christian, and how she wished she would have maintained a relationship with him even though she did not have him as an instructor sophomore through senior year. She now understood the impact and influence teachers and counselors can have on students.

Jordan did not mention his experience with his counselor in high school; however, he spoke of his teachers and coaches. Although he did not bring up faith with his teachers and coaches, he was grateful of the opportunity to meet Christian faculty through FCA and was disappointed it took until senior year to discover who the Christian faculty were other than the two he knew of because they had already shared this with him. His hope is that his younger siblings will know who the Christian faculty are as soon as they enter high school. In addition Jordan felt having a Christian coach would have added additional support and accountability as a Christian. Remo did not mention his relationship with his counselor nor any relationships he established with Christian teachers.

Unintended Findings

College

As I presumed, Remo, Serenity, and Rachel experienced much growth during first semester of college. Each shared their new experiences and how they witnessed God working in their lives. For Rachel transitioning into a large university was overwhelming and harder than she expected; however, during times of difficulty she realized God had prepared her for the transition. For example, she recalled a time when she felt immensely lonely during the semester, but was comforted by reflecting back to the summer prior when she spent a lot of alone time with God. She realized that God was working in her during that time to help her through this period of loneliness.

As with Rachel, Serenity saw God work in her life especially by providing her with a group of Christian, female friends. Moreover she really felt God helped her build more confidence and overcome some of the inner personal struggles of high school. She felt blessed to land a job at the elementary school and gave all the credit to God. Remo

felt he grew closer to God especially during times of worship. He was thankful to attend a Christian college that encouraged and embraced his Christian faith.

As I listened to Rachel, Serenity, and Remo share their first semester experiences, they were filled with excitement and wonder as they spoke of their classes. They found the richness of classroom discussions and lectures stimulating as well as thought provoking. Each of them felt their coursework challenged them to examine how their Christian worldview fit into the intellect. Rachel found her Early Judaism class interesting as she felt challenged by some of the teachings and found herself discussing the daily lectures with other Christian friends. Eventually she made an appointment with her professor and found he too was Christian so they openly discussed their faith together. Rachel was excited by this and felt extremely blessed to have her professor share his faith with her.

Serenity would find her Evolutionary and Ecological Studies class challenging. Like Rachel the concepts she learned in this class challenged her prior understanding and knowledge of evolution, and she found herself seeking Christian books to help her understand how this acquired knowledge fit her Christian perspective. Although she did not share much about her professors, she did state her professor who taught the Evolutionary Ecological Studies course loved the Lord.

Remo thoroughly enjoyed all his classes because the Bible was central in all his classes, and he was excited at the opportunity to openly discuss the Bible. He too gained different perspectives from his professors and found himself questioning some concepts he learned in class. He was equally excited to have Christian friends to dialogue with

about course content. Remo would find many of his professors approachable, and he became extremely fond of one of his professors.

The students' excitement and thirst for knowledge allowed me to reflect on my own experience in my doctoral program. Early on I was equally challenged with classroom discourse which actually countered my Christian worldview; however, unlike the students I did not feel safe to openly share my Christian perspective, but would integrate my faith into my writings. Thankfully, I had Christian faculty members who embraced and encouraged my Christian worldview and felt equally blessed that they shared this part of their life with me. I believe my experience through this journey would have been much harder without their support and encouragement. They offered prayer, shared scripture, and allowed me to freely express my Christian beliefs.

As with high school, peers played an important role in the students' lives. Rachel immediately connected with peers from class and her dorm floor. By establishing these friendships she was able to determine who held the same worldview as she and would attend Bible studies, Intervarsity, and church with her peers. One of Rachel's goals for college was to be more inclusive, and she demonstrated this with her roommate who was fairly reserved. Although Rachel felt her roommate was not quite as mature in her faith as she was, she invited her to her Bible studies and introduced her to her group of friends. Her roommate was extremely appreciative of Rachel's thoughtfulness and would thank Rachel for including her in activities.

Serenity formed a tight knit group with several girls from her floor. Prior to leaving for college she prayed that she would find a group of girls with whom she could connect. She genuinely felt accepted by her peers and felt much freedom to be who she

was without the conceptions or opinions of her past, which she often felt her high school friends brought into the relationship. With her new group of friends, Serenity also felt valued unlike her high school relationships which she felt were more one sided.

Although Remo had friends in high school, he placed more value on developing his relationship with God than peers. Prior to leaving for college he was not concerned about establishing peer relationships rather he was concerned about growing spiritually. In his outlook if God wished to bless him with friends—great, but that was not his first priority. However, once he settled into campus he developed some very close relationships with peers and felt blessed at the opportunity to spend time with peers discussing classroom lectures, studying the Bible, and praying for each other.

Unless students preselect their roommates, they tend to feel anxiety about the person they will room with. Although students fill out questionnaires to help the university match students based on compatibility, a chance remains that roommates will not get along. Rachel and Serenity prayed about their roommate and hoped God would provide them with a Christian roommate. Even though Serenity was going to a Christian college, prior experience showed her not all Christians were at the same maturity as her.

Rachel found this to be the case with her roommate who was Christian but saw her relationship with God as a “business” relationship rather than how Rachel viewed her relationship with God as personal. Despite where they were spiritually the girls developed a close friendship that is not to say there were adjustments and sacrifices to be made. Although Rachel grew up with sisters, she had to learn how to share a tight space with another female and develop patience with different study habits.

Serenity did not share much about her roommate and although they were compatible she developed closer relationships with other girls on her floor. Since Serenity did not have sisters, her adjustment to sharing a room took a little more time than Rachel. As her roommate lived in California she went home on weekends thus providing them time apart and privacy for Serenity, for which she was extremely thankful. Although there were no issues, Serenity plans on rooming with a different girl next year.

Unlike the girls, Remo did not concern himself about his future roommate; however, like the girls he was paired with a compatible roommate who was equally as untidy as him. He spoke affectionately about his roommate in that they felt comfortable with each other and gave each other a hard time. He felt blessed to have a roommate and other peers to openly share with and discuss the Gospel. Even though his initial intentions were not about developing friendships, he was grateful that God blessed him with friends who were as passionate about God and the Bible as he was.

As planned, Rachel maintained her long distance relationship with her boyfriend and although thousands of miles apart, they factored time into their busy schedules to connect. Rachel and Blake used Skype to stay connected and over time were able to adjust how to communicate with each other so they would continue to nurture each other's love language. To get a sense of Rachel's new environment, Blake flew out to spend a week with her. It was hard to be so far away, but Rachel was happy with her decision to maintain the relationship as she felt no need to date other boys while in college.

Serenity did not mention a boyfriend or dating while in college. She did mention that her brother became very protective of her so there may have been some male pursuers but she did not share. Remo did not date, but he spent time thinking about relationships with the opposite sex. He found maintaining relationships with females to be difficult because he felt he was not able to develop a meaningful relationship without the female thinking he had romantic feelings for her. He decided it was best to invest in relationships with his male friends thereby protecting the female heart.

With the completion of one semester of college, Remo, Serenity, and Rachel exhibited much growth intellectually, spiritually, and developmentally. I found it interesting and enjoyable to see how all their careful planning, praying, and preparing turned out. Rachel and Serenity spent the most time carefully considering all the important details of their post-secondary transition. It was interesting to see all the areas that were important in high school transition over to college. For example, Rachel was an avid reader, she had her support groups (church, family, friends, FCS) in place and had her interest in music, and she meticulously transitioned all these important areas of her life over to college. She found Intervarsity to maintain her Christian support group on campus, she connected to Skype so she could communicate with her family and boyfriend, she took up guitar to continue her passion for music, and she enrolled in a leadership class which required a tremendous amount of reading and studying different leadership styles. Just as leadership was important in high school, Rachel found ways to continue growing in this area. She also found peers and community resources to continue to support her spiritually. From a developmental perspective, she exhibited a new sense of confidence, autonomy, and intellectual growth.

Serenity was no different in she carefully planned and transitioned all the important areas to college. She too established meaningful relationships and support groups; however her interests changed toward outdoor activities versus theatre and music. I was amazed at her developmental growth as she definitely exhibited more confidence. Spiritually she grew in adding a new way of thinking into what she learned in church. She continued to allow God to direct her steps.

Although it did not appear that Remo spent as much time preparing for the transition, he did exhibit much growth. He too grew intellectually, spiritually, and developmentally. The things that were important to him in high school such as reading and memorizing the Bible as well as studying the unification of the Catholic and Protestant churches continued to grow and remained very important to him. He too continued to allow God to direct his steps. Remo always appeared very confident in whom he was so I did not notice much change; however, he did a lot of thinking about how he was relating with God and what it was in his life that he needed to work on to remain sanctified.

The students shared a lot of the same experiences both in high school and college while maintaining a very distinct experience or story. They all commented on how important and meaningful they found this experience of reflecting on high school and college. After reading her story, Rachel cried and was deeply touched by how everything she worried about and prayed about turned out. She was excited to see how God had worked in her life.

As with the students, this experience was meaningful to me. It helped me reflect on my own experience as a high school counselor and how I work with students and their

spiritual needs. I learned so much from the students and walked away truly blessed at the opportunity to hear their stories and in turn share their stories. From the composite findings it was evident that students expressed their Christian faith in the academic, personal/social, and academic domains with some experiences similar and others different. Although they did not speak much about the counselor/counselee relationship, mainly because counselors changed, they did mention the importance of connecting with Christian faculty. Because they made such a conscientious effort to make sure the same support groups they had in place in high school transitioned into college, they grew in their Christian faith. Their first semester in college reflected that of high school in that God was working in their lives and He remained central. As in high school, the students grew intellectually, spiritually, and developmentally with God at the steering wheel of their lives. He works in all of our lives but we need to be in communication with Him so that we can recognize it and act accordingly.

LETTER TO COLLEAGUES

July 25, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

Although we are trained to perform different functions within our role as educators, there are certain teaching and counseling duties, which overlap primarily in dealing with the social/emotional concerns of students. I started my career 18 years ago as a classroom teacher and within three years I returned to the university to earn a master's degree in school counseling. I always knew I would obtain a master's degree; however, it was the students who came to me, as their classroom teacher, with their personal concerns that led me to school counseling. Now 14 years in the trenches as a school counselor I am honored to share four Christian students' stories of their experiences in a public high school. It is my hope as you read Rachel's, Serenity's, Jordan's, and Remo's stories that you are able to make connections to their stories and better understand how you relate with your students.

Although religion is a very touchy subject in the public, it is especially controversial in the public school. Historically many court cases dealt with religion and school just as there are fresh cases each year dealing with this complicated relationship. There are many who believe the two should be separated thus separation of church and state; however, I found regardless of this concept students do experience religion in the school as evident by the four students. The four students shared how they experienced their Christian faith within the academic, personal/social, and career (post-secondary)

domains of the public high school. As I spent time listening, transcribing, reading, organizing, developing, and sharing their stories I reflected on my role as a counselor and teacher within a public high school. Religion has meaning in some students' lives, which carries into the school setting, and as educators it is important for us to understand how students define, experience, and integrate their faith within the public school. In addition it is important that we acknowledge this and learn how to respect and support this significant and meaningful area of students' lives.

Religion in Public Schools

The matter of religion is not without controversy especially in public schools. Since the common school movement the debate regarding religion in schools centered on those who were for it and those adamantly opposed. Naturally, conflict was a result of these two very opposing views. To help address these conflicts Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center and Ron Brandt of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) joined with leaders from education associations, civil liberties groups, and religious organizations to draft *Religious Liberty, Public Education, and the Future of American Democracy: A Statement of Principles*. These principles were published in 1995 (Haynes & Thomas, 2007).

Students' Religious Rights

Students may express their religious views in their oral and written assignments, art work, and homework without penalty for religious content (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). The purpose of the six guiding principles was to establish rules that addressed conflicts in public education. Principle one reiterates religious freedom for all citizens as recognized by the first amendment. Principle two reminds us that we live in a diverse society and we

must learn how to respect each other despite our differences. Principle three encourages consultation with all stakeholders when adopting policies and curricula. Principle four states schools must protect and respect the religious rights of students. In addition the study about religion is considered essential to a comprehensive education. Principle five urges a collaborative relationship between the school and parents acknowledging the important role each plays in educating students. Furthermore, educational institutions recognize and reinforce community values assuring family values and convictions are uncompromised. Lastly, principle six calls for the establishment of a safe environment which fosters respectful dialogues on debatable issues (Haynes & Thomas, 2007).

These principles were meant to establish an effective relationship among varying views and values without expecting anyone to lose sight of personal convictions or to discount any religion. These six principles align with the First Amendment with the intended purpose to help educators understand, clarify, and adopt practices that ensure students of their religious rights (Haynes & Thomas, 2007).

The students appreciated teachers who respected their Christian beliefs in the classroom. Rachel and Remo shared that they often incorporated their Christian worldview in their writings and felt for the most part that teachers were respectful. The students respected teachers with different views who respected students despite differences in ideologies. In contrast to these teachers were teachers who degraded religion in classroom discussions. Rachel felt humiliated by a teacher who shared his belief that religion was for stupid people. Remo had similar experiences with the same teacher.

As a counselor, I dealt with teachers who were respectful to their students' Christian worldview. I witnessed teachers give students alternate reading assignments because the assigned book conflicted with their faith. Depending on state law, schools can excuse student from lessons that are objectionable to the student's faith (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). Recently, I received an email from a parent who requested her child be dropped from a literature class because of the contents of the assigned readings. Out of respect for the teacher, I requested the parent email the teacher with her concerns. The teacher completely understood and acknowledged the concerns of the parent and recommended the student drop the course, which is what the parent was requesting. I appreciate colleagues who are sensitive to their students' worldview.

On the other hand, I experienced a colleague who was very vocal about his dislike for Christians. Unfortunately, he did not refrain from sharing this with Christian students so I worked with administrators, parents, students, and the teacher to address his hostility toward students and their beliefs. It was disheartening to deal with him after these situations as he let me know he did not like me because I was Christian. It was unfortunate that his hatred for Christians was based on his preconceived belief that Christians were intolerant when he himself was intolerant toward a Christian worldview. Moreover, it is unfortunate for the students to sit in a classroom where the teacher makes it known he despises people for their Christian worldview.

Students have the right to express their religious views as long as it is relevant to the classroom discussion and/or assignment (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). As expected controversial topics including abortion, evolution, and sexuality were discussed in the classroom. The students' experiences varied depending on the teacher. Remo and Jordan

did not mention any negative or positive experiences with the topic of evolution. On the other hand, Serenity's experience proved challenging. Although she felt challenged by the teacher, she expressed her viewpoint, and took the literature provided by the teacher home to discuss with her parents. Her intentions were to speak with the teacher about their different ideologies, but she did not and later regretted not taking advantage of the open door provided by God. Despite missing this opportunity she felt a mutual respect was established between her and the teacher.

After completing her first semester of college, Rachel reflected back to the high school classroom and realized she basically ignored scientific theories that opposed her Christian worldview. She attributed this to her lack of maturity; however, she spoke up when abortion and abstinence were discussed in class. Jordan was cautious about sharing his Christian worldview with his teachers because he knew the teacher controlled the grade book. He did not want to offend the teacher so he kept his beliefs to himself.

At first Remo was extremely vocal about his beliefs and relished the opportunity to openly debate controversial topics. As he matured in his faith, he realized this was not the best way to handle the situation and changed his once abrasive approach. Although the students were respectful to other viewpoints, they were not allowed the same opportunity to openly share their Christian worldview to the extent of other worldviews. Remo and Rachel shared they felt secular viewpoints received more attention from teachers.

Even though educators are cautioned not to force their beliefs upon students some dismiss this directive and espouse their beliefs with little regard for the students. On the other hand some choose to ignore religion for fear of reprimand for allowing such

controversial discourse in the classroom. Because many educators are not sure what they can and cannot say about religion, they simply choose to play it safe and do not mention it (Stronks & Stronks, 1999). Unfortunately, some educators' interpretation of separation of church and state means no conversations about religion in the classroom. Like teachers, counselors tend to ignore or disregard conversations regarding religion with students out of fear of violating counseling ethics. Others do not see the value of religion and simply ignore it.

As educators there are boundaries we must maintain within our relationship with students; however, this does not mean we cannot share personal information with students as long as it is appropriate. In my professional experience students are drawn to teachers, counselors, and coaches who share similar interests. When I was coaching cross country, many students, who were not assigned to my caseload, sought me out because we shared a passion for running. In addition to shared interests students are drawn to educators who show interest in their lives outside of the classroom. Just as students are drawn to faculty with the same interests they are also drawn to them based on shared worldviews. Jordan and Rachel saw value in knowing Christian teachers. According to Sink (2010), students may stand a better chance bonding with their teachers, peers, and counselors, if their spirituality is recognized in the school. Although Jordan was grateful to know who the Christian faculty members were on campus, he was disappointed that it took until his senior year to figure this out. His hope for his siblings is that they will know who the Christian staff is prior to entering high school. Jordan felt Christian faculty would help keep Christian students accountable, serve as role models, and openly express and share their faith with them.

Like Jordan once Rachel learned her counselor shared her Christian beliefs she felt comfortable sharing this extremely important area of her life. She also experienced the opposite with her previous counselor who told Rachel, after she disclosed her plans to attend a Christian college that she could do better. After this experience, Rachel would not share the importance of her faith and when she encountered her new counselor she was very hesitant and shy to disclose this because of her prior experience. Because Serenity had the same initial counselor as Rachel, her experience was the same. Serenity felt teachers need to reach out to students and ask about their personal lives because sometimes students do not know it is okay to share this part of their lives with teachers or students assume teachers are too busy with their teaching load to engage in conversation beyond the classroom.

Counselors who recognize the need to support students' religious and spiritual development can influence the adoption of spiritual and religious safe zones. To do this, counselors must educate themselves about religion in the schools starting with understanding the First Amendment. By knowing the legal rights of students' religious expression in the school, counselors are better able to interact with students in all counseling settings (Stoukal & Wickman, 2011). Additionally, counselors must explore and identify their own spiritual and religious beliefs and understand how these beliefs could influence student/counselor relationships (Stoukal & Wickman, 2011).

As counselors spend time with students, they learn about students' interests, family life, likes and dislikes, and other important information. Stoukal and Wickman (2011) encourage school counselors "casting out nets" or asking broad questions related

to spirituality and religion. In addition they encourage counselors to listen for spiritual and religious expressions including, “I believe everything happens for a reason.”

As students bring up their religious beliefs in a counseling session or small group, it is important that counselors keep the focus on the student. Should a student ask about the counselor’s beliefs, the counselor should redirect the question back to the student. This is not to say that counselors may not self-disclose; however, it is important that counselors are mindful to whom they self-disclose so they do not discourage students with different views or those with like views from participating in the school counseling program (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Stloukal and Wickman (2011) adopt a postmodern view noting like other values and biases one’s spirituality is not separate from the person. They further state counselors build genuine relationships when their values and beliefs match their outward self. This transparency develops trust and rapport between the student and the counselor. As counselors explore how to integrate their beliefs into their professional setting, they are more able to abide ethically “without abandoning their personal beliefs at the school entrance” (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011, p. 166).

Just as non-Christian educators are hesitant to discuss religion, some Christian educators are not aware of their religious rights in a public school so they remain silent. As a Christian educator, I understand my religious rights and limitations as well as ethical guidelines as they apply to being a counselor in a public high school. In addition I find it important to develop an understanding and awareness of all religious ideologies so I know how to best meet my students’ spiritual needs. These practices are supported by the spiritual and religious competencies (multiculturalism; competencies 1, 2, 6, 10, 11,

12, 13) of Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC). Again as educators, it is not about forcing our beliefs or personal agendas rather it is about taking a holistic approach to teaching and/or counseling students that recognizes their academic, social/emotional, post-secondary, and spiritual needs.

My dissertation topic covered two of my greatest passions, my career as a professional school counselor and my Christian worldview. My beliefs influence my role in the school setting daily. Not only was this dissertation an opportunity to share stories of Christian students' experiences in the public high school but how I attempt to navigate through a public school system with a Christian worldview. It is through my struggle with how to genuinely live my faith in a secular school that I grow to appreciate the importance of addressing religion and spirituality in the school setting. It is my hope that my dissertation is a step in the right direction to advocate for spiritual and religious development in the school. It is time to stop expecting students, teachers, and counselors to live fragmented lives but rather live a holistic life free from religious and spiritual prejudices. It is important that counselors gain competency in religion and spirituality in order to work with students who wish to engage in spiritual and religious discourse because it is an ethical responsibility to give religion and spirituality a voice in the school counseling program (Stloukal & Wickman, 2011).

Respectfully,

LETTER TO PARENTS

July 30, 2011

Dear Parents:

As parents we are naturally protective of our children and want what is best for them. While they are toddlers and young children, we relish in how much they rely on and trust us. Hearing our little one call us “mommy” or “daddy” and look at us with adoring eyes is irreplaceable. We lovingly look at the scrapbooks or albums we painstaking put together and reminisce and wonder, “Where did the time go?”

As our children continue to grow, we are faced with the frightening reality that they are no longer our little, dependent girls or boys, but growing and maturing young ladies or gentlemen who with each passing year crave more autonomy. We congratulate ourselves for surviving through the turbulent middle school years just to realize high school is around the corner, which presents its own apprehensions.

Over four years we watch our adolescents as they learn, grow, and experience successes as well as failures. We cautiously watch who they are hanging out with, what they are involved in, and what and how they are learning. We are their cheerleaders, coaches, nurses, cooks, teachers, and advocates, but at the same time we entrust them to the school. Will the teachers, coaches, administrators, and counselors treat our son or daughter with the same love, care, and respect they receive at home? More importantly

how will the values and beliefs we instill at home be nurtured and/or challenged by the faculty and other students?

I am fortunate to be a parent and an educator. While I am working with parents, I try to empathize and understand the parents' perspective. It is not always easy and we do not always agree. During my 17 years in education, I worked in collaboration with many parents to ensure their child's academic, personal/social, and post-secondary needs were met. I learned a lot over 17 years as well as met some incredible parents. As with parenting, counseling can be a thankless job; however, there are those rare moments when a friendly note, email, or voice mail informs me that my work with the students is appreciated. Although we do not enter parenting or counseling for recognition, it is still nice to hear, "job, well done!"

I had the privilege and honor to interview four wonderful and inspiring students from my high school because you blessed me with the opportunity to spend time with them. Even more amazing you allowed me to speak to them about their Christian faith. I realize this took a tremendous amount of trust on your part, and I am forever humbled by this. My letter to you is an opportunity to share what I learned of their experiences, but more importantly to say thank you for raising such remarkable, beautiful, and godly children. I pray their stories inspire, encourage, and bless you as they blessed me. Some of you asked where you could go to learn more about what I found out in my interviews with your children. Therefore, I am sharing some of the more prominent literature that will allow you to read more deeply in these areas. I encourage and invite you to share my findings with other parents who share your same Christian values. As you read this, please note your child's journey through four years of high school and for three students

that first semester of college, was fruitful because you provided them with the foundation, supervision, and cultivation to boldly share and live their Christian faith.

Foundation

There are many factors which influence a student's religious development including family, peers, church, and school. These social factors make up the micro-system within an ecological systems theory (EST). EST is a holistic theoretical approach to human development, which presents a mutual relationship between person and environment over a life time (Abbott & Dalla, 2008). It is not the environment but the people within the environment who interact with and hold expectations for the person's development, who contribute the greatest influence on developmental outcomes (Abbott & Dalla, 2008). Lately, researchers are showing a greater interest on the ecological influences in the development of religiosity (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). Moreover, those in the research community credit the family as the most influential social factor in the development of religiosity (Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003). One's beliefs and practice of religion are often referred to as religiosity. Religious practices often include attending church, involvement in faith-based activities, praying, and seeing value in one's religious beliefs (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Although there are many studies on religious socialization as it relates to the family, there are inconsistencies on how parental religiosity influences their child's religiosity. Despite these inconsistencies numerous studies show a connection between parental and child religiosity (Martin et al, 2003).

Several theories exist on how parents influence their child's religious development including the channeling hypothesis, social learning and spiritual modeling, and social and spiritual capital theories of religious development (Regnerus, Smith, &

Smith, 2004). In the channeling hypothesis, introduced by Himmelfarb (1980), parents socialize their children by channeling them into groups or activities that will influence values learned in the home (Martin et al., 2003). Although my study was not about parental influence on religiosity nor did I ask students specific questions about your role in their religious development, their stories implicitly and explicitly evidence your influence and support in their development.

Parents who model above average religiosity are more apt to influence their child to seek activities and friends who are more aligned with their religious beliefs and practices (Regnerus et al., 2004). Your students did not speak specifically whether you channeled them into groups or activities that supported their beliefs; however, students did socialize in groups and activities that supported their Christianity. In school they developed relationships with other Christian students and joined Fellowship of Christian Athletes and/or Fellowship of Christian Students. All four students were involved in youth group and attended church. In addition you supported their involvement in other activities including mission trips, youth conferences such as Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and Urbana, and church camps. All of these groups and activities supported the beliefs instilled in your home. Because the students were involved in these activities and socialized with other Christian students, I assumed you supported these social influences, which were significant in the development of their religiosity.

In the social learning and spiritual modeling theory students are assumed to model the religious behavior of someone they respect namely their parents (King & Mueller, 2003). The students spoke about growing up Christian and being raised in a Christian home. With the exception of one student, students shared they grew up Christian. One

student said this is all he has ever known. Students mentioned the following activities occurring at home: praying before meals, reading the Bible, attending church, and talking about church. Although one student did not receive as much spiritual modeling in the home as the other students, he did have an uncle and grandmother who modeled religious behavior such as reading the Bible and talking about scripture. So religious modeling can be accomplished by extended family as well as by the nuclear family.

Praying before meals, reading the Bible, attending church, talking about church and scripture are referred to as “inputs” in the religious capital theory. These religious practices influence a family’s ability to “produce” religious satisfaction. Familiarity with the skills and experiences of one’s specific religion including knowledge of doctrine, rituals, and fellowship are known as “religious human capital.” Religious human capital is essential in producing and appreciating religious services (Iannaccone, 1990). Religious practices and religious human capital are acquired by religious upbringing. People formalize religious beliefs and behaviors through their religious upbringing, which is the foundation of religious human capital. Religious human capital eventually impacts religious participation as an adult (Iannaccone, 1990).

For the three students who transitioned into college, their religious beliefs and behaviors were developed by their religious upbringing as well as from their various experiences. Rachel, Serenity, and Remo continued maturing in their faith during their first semester of college. Although they were no longer in the home, they found other micro-systems to support their faith. While in high school you supported and encouraged your student’s involvement in church, which proved beneficial to your student’s Christian growth. Within their faith communities, the students felt supported by members of the

congregation. Rachel connected with an older female mentor to help with her spiritual growth as well as offered her guidance with her romantic relationship. Serenity turned to her youth group leaders when she felt broken and to help with the religious OCD.

Although not part of his church, Jordan connected with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) representative for discipleship and mentoring. Remo turned to his uncle who engaged in conversations about scripture and offered Remo a spiritual gifts inventory. Involvement in church offers students the opportunity to interact with other caring adults who can offer additional support, promote positive behavior, and negate negative influences (Bridges & Moore, 2002).

As the students' foundation, you instilled beliefs and practices that influenced their religious upbringing. Within the structure of your home, you encouraged these beliefs and modeled behaviors including praying, attending church, and reading the Bible. By establishing and fostering a Christian home, students sought other micro-systems outside the home for additional support and acceptance of their Christian upbringing. As they navigated and transitioned within their high school experiences, you continuously supervised their Christian beliefs with direction, guidance, and protection.

Supervision

While in high school your children encountered a variety of experiences that either enriched or challenged their Christian upbringing. High school offers many new experiences including challenging academic work, romantic relationships, and exposure to positive and negative behaviors. Without being too intrusive on your students' personal lives you learned to allow your children to handle situations on their own.

However, opportunities would present themselves where intervention was warranted and you intervened in a way that created positive growth and maturation.

Attending a public high school with a secular stance presents the opportunity for the academic curriculum to contradict Christian and other ideologies. One class that tended to conflict with Christian values was biology. Depending on which teacher your student was assigned determined how the concept of evolution was presented in the classroom. Serenity's experience resulted in her parents confronting the teacher about classroom content. Because Serenity challenged her teacher regarding other theories besides evolution, her instructor handed her literature arguing his perspective. Serenity took this literature home and shared it with her parents who in turn met with the teacher. Although Serenity did not take the opportunity to follow up with this instructor, a lost opportunity she later regretted, Serenity felt a level of respect was reached with her instructor despite their differences in ideologies.

During their senior year Serenity and Jordan relied on their parents for guidance through the college admission and scholarship process, which is an overwhelming undertaking. Often during the senior year, students find it hard to stay focused in school especially as graduation approaches. As it became tougher to stay academically motivated, Jordan mentioned his mother stayed on top of him and held him accountable. Remo spoke about the importance his parents placed on academics even though Remo saw more value in his relationship with God.

When looking at adolescent academic achievement parenting is considered one of the most influential indicators of academic success. In addition parents who participated in religious activities with their children impacted their children's academic

achievements. More specifically, higher levels of involvement in church services placed a greater emphasis toward education which leads toward better academic achievement (Park & Bonner, 2008). All four students performed well academically. In addition to academics students spent a considerable amount of time socially interacting with their peers. Eventually parents encounter their child's first romantic relationship. As with academics, supervising these relationships presents a whole new opportunity for teaching and guiding your adolescent through an important developmental phase in their lives.

According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2011), in 2009 46% of high school students reported having sexual intercourse; with 32% freshmen reporting having sex compared to 62% of seniors. Unfortunately, parents face the possibility of their child engaging in sexual activity some time during adolescence. As a high school counselor, I counsel students on sexual issues including unplanned pregnancy, sexual activity, birth control, and abortion. Students tend to be very open about their sexual activity and want to talk to a trusting adult about these issues. With this said, not all high school students engage in sexual activity. According to the National Survey on Family Growth (Guttmacher Institute, 2010) between 2006 and 2008, the most common reason students did not engage in sexual activity was because it was against religion or morals with 42% females and 35% males selecting this as their number one reason. Like the adolescents in this National Survey, your students attributed their sexual abstinence to their faith.

All four students held strong beliefs that sex outside of marriage was wrong, and they all planned to remain virgins until marriage. Rachel wore a purity ring which symbolized her commitment to remain pure until marriage. Rachel was frustrated by her

doctor who did not believe she was still a virgin. According to Abbott and Dalla (2008) many people believe abstinence is a worthy goal; however, not realistic.

Although Rachel and Jordan were in committed relationships, they felt their relationships were different than most high school relationships. They believed their relationships were more mature than their peers because they were not based purely on the physical attraction, but rather on serving God together. Both couples integrated their faith into their relationship and agreed God would be central in their relationship.

As far as dating, Rachel wanted more direction from her parents. Since her parents are divorced, she felt her parents held different views about dating with Rachel's mom exhibiting more of a laissez-faire parenting style as opposed to her father's more authoritative style. Because Rachel was a natural people pleaser, she was relieved when Blake took the leadership role in their relationship. Both couples communicated up front about appropriate behavior within their relationship. Blake and Rachel spent time discussing when it was appropriate to kiss and Jordan and Christine were extremely conscientious about refraining from behavior that would tempt the other. Although Jordan did speak with his father and grandfather about relationships, he felt his parents and grandparents trusted that he would not do anything inappropriate so they gave him the autonomy to learn on his own.

Prior to establishing a committed relationship Jordan had dinner with Christine's parents. On his first date with Christine, her parents questioned him about his faith, family, and goals. Jordan's parents expected to know Jordan's whereabouts at all times. Jordan took no issue with this and felt it was a reasonable request. Christine's parents expected the same. Knowing where, what, and with whom about your child's activities

are essential to parental monitoring. Parental monitoring lessens the opportunity for sexual behavior (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006). In contrast to Jordan and Christine's intact families, Rachel and Blake came from broken families. Because of this Rachel felt there was opportunity to find themselves in situations where there was less parental monitoring. At one point in their relationship Rachel felt they let their guard down, which placed them in tempting situations. Christine and Jordan did not attend school dances because of the type of dancing they were exposed to so they found alternative activities that supported their Christian faith as well as sought other Christian friends to hang out with. In a comparative study involving sexually active and sexually abstinent youth on variables influential to sexual behavior, Abbott and Dalla (2008) found "avoiding people, places, and things, that encouraged sexual activity" (p. 641) was a strategy employed by 47% of the non-sexually active youth to remain abstinent. In addition these same youth sought friends with "similar beliefs and values."

In the same study 27% of the abstinent youth attributed their ability to refrain from sexual pressure and temptation as a result of receiving "help from God." Jordan and Remo mentioned seeking God by praying and reading the Bible to deal with how girls' dressed on campus. Serenity turned to God to combat the lustful thoughts that penetrated her mind. Likewise once Rachel made God a priority in her relationship with Blake, there was no room for temptation.

It was apparent from your student's stories that you provided them with direction, guidance, and protection. You were involved in their lives and monitored their activities and peer relationships. However, you provided them with the opportunity to learn and grow on their own thus contributing to their autonomy. Even though you witnessed your

student grow more independent you maintained that connection by remaining present in their lives and fostering their Christian growth. As parents you played an important role in helping your student mature in their faith (Martin et al., 2003).

Cultivation

Rachel was extremely close to her father and felt he gave her positive affirmations. Although she spoke with her mother about peer issues, she went to her father more so than her mother for advice. She appreciated her father's firmness more than her mother's passivity. A strong connection to one's father when there is less maternal communication about sex results in less sexual behavior for both boys and girls (Sommers & Paulson, 2000). Despite her parents' divorce Rachel remained connected with her father. Fathers who remain in their daughter's lives contributed to the lowest rates of early sexual activity and teen pregnancy (Ellis et al, 2003). According to research, girls who have strong relationships with their fathers are less likely to engage in sexual activity (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006). I believe because Rachel's father gave her positive affirmation and spent quality time with her, Rachel did not need to seek attention elsewhere because she felt validated by her father. Jordan was close to both his parents, but went to his father with personal issues. Jordan and Rachel were close to their parents and felt comfortable opening up to them. Studies show a close parent-child relationship delays and lessens adolescent sexual activity (Dittus & Jaccard, 2000; Lammers, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 2000).

Remo did not have a close relationship with his parents. Because his parents were not in the same place spiritually, they had a hard time relating. Remo shared that his mother gave him a hard time about lengthy prayers and reading the Bible at the dinner

table. Remo was excited to attend a Christian college that would foster his Christian faith. As the students matured in their faith and realized their faith was a personal choice rather than a family expectation, they continued to attend church and read their Bible without being told by their parents. Jordan was appreciative of his parents' encouragement to attend other churches and decide whether his faith was important rather than forcing him to attend church.

It was apparent in your students' stories that their Christian faith was established in the home early on. Your involvement in their Christian upbringing helped them integrate their faith into other contexts of their lives such as school. In addition you encouraged their participation in activities including youth group, mission trips, youth camps, and FCA or FCS. As they experienced high school, the Christian foundation established in your home continued to permeate their academics, relationships, and coping skills. Maintaining open lines of communication, monitoring their activities, and modeling your Christian faith in the home contributed to their Christian identity and maturity.

As I spent time with your students, I was amazed and inspired by their maturity, courage, and commitment to their Christian faith. As they walked the halls, sat in class, interacted with peers and teachers, participated in extracurricular activities, and prepared to transition into college their faith was ever present. They truly looked at every situation, experience, and opportunity through a Christian lens. As they witnessed your faith in the home, they in turn carried that into other social contexts. Your constant devotion and encouragement enabled them to courageously enter a secular environment and live their Christian faith with courage and boldness. I applaud you for the

outstanding job you did raising these wonderful Children of God. Thank you for allowing them to share their stories because it was through their voices that I learned how students experience their Christian faith in the public high school. Spending time with your child has blessed me beyond measure and their stories will forever guide me in my professional and personal life.

Respectfully,

LETTER TO RESEARCH COMMUNITY

August 7, 2011

Dear School Counseling Research Community:

As I complete my research endeavor as a doctoral student, I come full circle to the community I hope to contribute to as a practicing, professional school counselor. As a practicing counselor who reads the professional school counseling journals, I hope my research adds to the school counseling literature, provokes some thought and discussion, and helps establish a research agenda. More importantly I want the counseling literature and research to inform, influence, and empower my work with the students I counsel in the school setting. As educators, school counselors are equally accountable for student achievement. To show fidelity school counselors must stay informed, contribute, learn, and implement practices and procedures driven by research.

The counseling literature, my anecdotal experiences as a practicing school counselor, my students' experiences, and my personal experiences influenced my dissertation topic. However, being inspired and intrigued by the students' experiences remained central. Often teachers, counselors, administrators, and other leaders base educational decisions on what is best and most convenient for them rather than what is best for students. I consider myself blessed to conduct research in my own "backyard". Informed by the students' experiences in a shared and familiar environment provided me

with rich and valuable data thus informing and influencing my work as a professional school counselor.

Lately the topic of spirituality is receiving considerable attention in the school counseling literature. Although focused more on religious views held by a minority not the majority such as Christianity and considering spirituality without a religious influence, a more holistic approach to counseling is gaining attention from those in the research community. Within my role as a school counselor, I see students exhibiting and sharing their spiritual lives within individual counseling sessions. Even though some consider the subject of religion or spirituality taboo, many teachers report students writing about their faith in classroom and college essays, reports, and other classroom assignments. When the subject presents itself, their religious beliefs are often brought into classroom conversation. Students pray before games or meets, during passing periods and in the classroom, and they organize religious clubs such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes or Fellowship of Christian Students.

Within the last few years, I noticed an increase in students sharing their spiritual lives within the counseling session; often during times of hardship such as a death of a loved one. They share how their religious views impact their decision making as well as how it influences their opinions on certain topics including abortion, sex, drugs, and evolution. They are eager to share their religious experiences such as Baptism, Holy Communion, and spiritual encounters while attending youth retreats. Because these events held significance in their lives, they speak about them.

As affirmed by the students' stories, their Christian faith was fundamental to their personal/social, academic, and post-secondary well-being. The students did not live a

fragmented life nor did they compartmentalize their faith rather it was woven into every area of their lives including academics, personal/social, post-secondary planning, family, and activities. Although these are healthy and positive activities for students and families, counselors and educators who explore, introduce, and imbed topics, which touch upon religion and/or spirituality, may encounter opposition from administrators and other stakeholders (Sink & Devlin, 2011). Introducing and engaging in conversations about spirituality, which might incorporate religion may cause major stakeholders including district administrators, school board members, principals, counselors, and teachers to shy away for fear of possible litigation repercussions (Sink & Devlin, 2011).

Dobmeier (2011) reminds school counselors of the ASCA Ethical Standard Preamble which states, “Each person...have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including...religious/spiritual identity” (p. 318). Although this is an ethical obligation, many counselors (including myself) did not receive any formal training in their school counseling programs. The Multicultural and Social Justice Advocacy and Leadership, section E.2. c of the ASCA Ethical Standards, Dobmeier (2011) points out the ethical responsibility that school counselors receive the training, consultation, and educational experiences to address students’ spiritual and religious identity. Along with the ASCA Ethical Standards, counselors can refer to the 14 competencies approved by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) when addressing students’ spiritual and religious issues. Although there are competencies and standards to refer to, including religion and spirituality into the Comprehensive School Counseling Program is not an easy task.

Because separation of church and state or the interpretation of it is so confusing, how does a counselor integrate it into a Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCP) without causing alarm while being sensitive, receptive, and affirming of a student's religious and/or spiritual beliefs? Sink (2010) notes that anecdotal evidence reveals that most school counselors understand the important role spirituality plays in student development and family life, but they are not sure how to address it in the school setting.

Sink (2010) encourages schools counselors to help students see healthy expression of spirituality as ways of coping and fostering resiliency. He cautions school counselors from imposing their values and personal agendas by allowing students to control the direction and content of the conversation. He goes on to caution school counselors to seek outside resources for situations that address student's spiritual questioning or harmful spiritual activities.

Addressing a student's spirituality and/or religiosity in an individual counseling session may present less opposition than in a classroom setting, namely because the conversation is between the student and counselor. According to Sink (2010), often students in crisis bring up religious and non-religious topics so it is important that school counselors listen and support students' spiritual expressions. In the classroom, students stem from a variety of ideologies so it is imperative that an inclusive environment is established and fostered. This does not mean spirituality with a religious context is ignored rather it should be accepted along with spiritual practices that do not include religion. At the secondary level students can speak about their ethnic, cultural, and

family traditions that incorporate spiritual beliefs and practices. In addition, counselors can help students reflect about their values and coping mechanisms (Sink, 2010).

As counselors search for ways to introduce and implement spirituality into the counseling curriculum, they can draw from the developmental assets which originated from the Search Institute, character education, and the National Standards Competency Indicators of the ASCA Model. Developmental Assets are the internal and external resources children and adolescents can utilize to help them overcome barriers to success (Dobmeier, 2011). Within the Search Institute Developmental Assets (SIDA), 20 external and 20 internal developmental assets were adopted in 1997 (Search Institute, 2012).

Constructive use of time (Search Institute, 2006) is considered an external developmental asset where youth involvement in creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home are considered beneficial. Within my study, students spoke about the positive benefits of belonging to a youth group and how they often sought out youth leaders and other adults in their faith community for additional support. Briggs, Akos, Czyszczon, and Elridge (2011) encourage school counselors to gain knowledge about spiritual wellness models that focus on resilience and positive development. Their work involves looking at components of spiritual wellness models which may include “a community of shared values or positive interconnectedness” (p. 174). Briggs et al., (2011) state the importance for one to spend time in a group or community with others with similar beliefs and values, which offers an opportunity to share, grow, develop, and challenge one’s self.

Students in my study found an opportunity to fellowship with other Christian students on campus by participating in Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Fellowship of Christian Students. They spoke of the benefits that came from belonging with a group of students with similar beliefs. As a school counselor, I often refer students, who share they come from a Christian worldview, to these groups to help them find areas of safety and belonging.

Another area where students may exhibit their religious or spiritual beliefs is within acts of community service. Addressed in SIDA under “service to others” as well as stressed in character education and national standards, students are encouraged to participate in community service activities. All four students in my study participated in mission trips and spoke of how these experiences were life changing, encouraged them to reach out to others, and deepened their faith. When applying for scholarships and other awards, students often speak about these mission trips and other acts of services. Again as counselors work with students to enhance their scholarship applications, engaging with students about their mission trips and other acts of community service is a great way to acknowledge their spiritual and religious beliefs.

As school counselors work with students and respond to counseling related events, they will see the various spiritual and faith traditions represented in the school community as well as the resources available to support these beliefs and practices. To foster students’ spiritual and personal well-being, a school counselor must support students’ spirituality and faith development rather than ignoring or referring conversations about the spiritual to others (Sink, 2010).

In working with other stakeholders to transform education and prepare students for the 21st century, special consideration and attention must be given to the students they work with as well as reading the school counseling literature to inform and influence decision making. Although there are models to help guide counseling programs, Galassi and Akos (2004) suggest these models including Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Programs, National Standards for School Counseling Programs (i.e., ASCA), and The National Initiative for Transforming School Counseling all come with limitations. Two areas they suggest needing considerable attention are the developmental nature and comprehensiveness of these programs. Although not the focus of my research, but still important and in my opinion an example of advocating for students, Galassi and Akos (2004) encourage the revision of programs to include research based findings addressing the indicators of positive youth development and implementation of these indicators into the school environment, community, and home thus encouraging student achievement. They pose developmental advocacy where counselors build on students' strengths; teach the skills, knowledge, and attitudes associated with positive youth development; and adopt a supportive environment that encourages the development and strengthening of these assets.

Although spirituality is a component of the ASCA Model, addressed in CACREP Standards, and ASCA ethical codes, the inclusion, assessment, and implementation of spiritual wellness in secondary schools is often neglected (Briggs et al., 2011). School counselors can educate stakeholders and elicit their support in implementing a spiritual domain to their CSCP. The American Counselor Association (ACA) and ASCA ethical codes along with CACREP standards stress the importance that counselors acknowledge,

understand, and recognize the need for students to express themselves spiritually. Counselors who recognize their own spirituality, understand the role it plays in holistic development, and how spirituality is integrated in developmental assets, character education, and National Standards Competency Indicators are better able to help students seek their own spirituality (Dobmeier, 2011).

As I continue to work with students in my building and at the district level through my leadership role on the diversity council, I continue to advocate for students' religious/spiritual rights. Although it is refreshing to see the school counseling literature engaging in topics addressing spirituality, I am concerned with how religiosity is addressed in the counseling literature. Through my readings and understanding of the literature, it seems that by making the distinction between religion and spirituality makes it okay then to address spirituality in the school setting. In other words as long as spirituality is addressed in the schools in a secular fashion or disguised through character education curriculum, the topic is okay. Moral values must not be taught in a way that undermines religious authority (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). What I want to emphasize is through my experience and the outcomes of my research, students do include religiosity in spiritual expression. In my readings of the school counseling literature, I did not see students' religious rights addressed. It is imperative that school counselors and others in the school community understand students' religious rights so they are better able to understand and support the students. More importantly school counselors need to be open and able to address students' need to explore and address spirituality and how doing so enhances their development (Briggs et al., 2011).

Respectfully

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EPILOGUE

The main purpose for writing an Epilogue was to give an update on the students since their last interview. I included an update on how I continue to see students experience their faith on campus as well as reflect on how the four students experienced their faith in school and tied this back to my perspective as the researcher. Although I did not find how parents exhibit their Christian worldview in relation to public school in the literature, I continue to see parents share their Christian worldview in the counseling relationship. Along the way, I share how I experienced my faith during my dissertation journey. Finally, I share with colleagues, parents, and students what I learned by conducting this research.

After I wrote the students' story, I provided them with a copy to read, and I requested their feedback. I met with each of them individually to provide them with the opportunity to share their thoughts about their story, update me on how they were doing since our final interview, and reflect on their experiences of participating in my research. Each found the opportunity to share his or her experiences with me extremely beneficial and enjoyable. In fact, they felt everyone should have the opportunity to share their experiences. Rachel found the experience to be therapeutic and in many ways compared it to individual counseling. All the students enjoyed participating in my research project, and they felt I presented their stories accurately. Reading their stories provided them

with the opportunity to see how God worked in their lives during high school and for three of them into post-secondary education.

By reconnecting with the students, I was encouraged and inspired by how God was continuing to work in their lives and it was interesting to see how their lives had changed since I wrote their stories. Rachel keeps in regular contact with me by periodically sending emails. She leads worship for the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship on her university campus. While holding down two jobs, she still manages to make the Dean's List. It did not take Rachel long to find her place in a leadership role. Besides leading worship, Rachel serves as a Residence Assistant (RA) for approximately 80 freshmen. She manages this job along with her other part-time job on campus. As of now, she remains undeclared in a major, but continues to take an assortment of classes. She still plans on a minor in Spanish and looks at studying abroad during her junior year.

Rachel enjoys spending time with the friends she established during her freshman year. In addition to these friends, she is developing relationships with new friends. Currently in her second year of college, Rachel finds herself disagreeing with her professors more and more as well as some of the content in her textbooks. Two of the issues with which she struggles are immigration and environmental concerns. From her Christian worldview, she feels the United States should reach out to our Mexican neighbors and help. In turn the United States should help Mexicans immigrating to the United States; however, in her public policy class her perspective is not shared by the professor. In her environmental textbook, the author refers to the book of Genesis and how God gave dominion over the earth to Adam which trickled down to us. The author stated since our country was founded on Christianity and primarily a Christian nation, the

environmental concerns can be tied to Christians who do not value the environment. Rachel perceived this to mean the author was insinuating all Christians treated the environment poorly or were not conscientious of environmental factors. These are a couple of examples where she feels her Christian worldview and what she is learning in her courses conflict. Because of this, she seeks discernment from God on how to approach these topics. Although she does not see eye-to-eye with some professors and textbook content, she continues to work hard in the classroom.

Her Christian faith remains important in her life, and she continues to spend time reading her Bible. In addition to reading parts of the Bible on her own, she is reading the Epistle to the Romans with her friend. She sees God using her in the RA position and recently shared with me the following, “I have seen how God has placed me in this hall for a reason and how I can love these freshmen and help them on their journey. I try not to get too busy with things so I can spend time with PEOPLE. It’s a struggle but I’m working on it and growing.” It is such a blessing hearing from Rachel and I am so proud of her. Every time I receive an update, I receive confirmation that my study was worthwhile.

Remo attends the same Christian college, and his intentions remain on entering the ministry. He enjoyed sharing his story and said, “I realized I actually do have a good testimony and God’s work in my life is pretty evident.” The most interesting development in Remo’s life is he has a girlfriend. Although she does not attend the same college as Remo, they maintain a long distance relationship. Remo met this young lady during his summer break. Remo shared his story with his girlfriend, which made her reflect on her own Christian walk. She told Remo she wished she had been given the

opportunity to share her story with someone. Although Remo is in his second year at Liberty, he is not sure if he will attend all four years because he is open to God's plan for his life even if it means transferring to a different college. He realizes he was supposed to go to Liberty for a year, but will continue to rely on God's direction. He is ecstatic about what God is doing now. As of now, he still sees God steering him toward a music ministry.

I recently met with Serenity, and it was evident that she is struggling. The last time I saw her was at graduation in the spring. She looked happy and was excited to see me, and she spoke about her recent return to Colorado and plans to attend the local university. Prior to seeing her at graduation, Serenity hinted to me in our last interview that God was speaking to her about some changes. Although Serenity initially transferred back to pursue a degree in art with an emphasis in education, she is in transition. She did complete a semester at the university but transferred at semester to a local community college.

During the time I spent interviewing Serenity, I always felt she was not completely open with me, especially regarding her relationship with her family. She disclosed that my assumptions were accurate, and after reading her story, she was ready to fill me in on that area of her life. She shared that she was verbally abused growing up, which led to her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Bipolar Diagnosis. Through therapy sessions she realized she was exposed to verbal stimuli while growing up, basically she was exposed to her parents' intense conversations and confrontations that she then internalized. Her exposure to these extremely harsh and violent messages took

root in her subconscious. The messages she internalized became the messages she believed about herself, primarily that she was a bad Christian.

The main reason Serenity returned home was due to her estranged relationship with her parents which led to depression and suicidal ideation. Initially upon her return, she felt her family was making positive strides in their relationship; however, this would change. Because Serenity was battling with depression, it was hard to stay focused in school. Her decision to transfer to the local community college did not sit well with her parents who insisted she stay at the university. Serenity along with her therapist did not see staying at the university as the ideal situation for her mental state. Her parents did not agree and told Serenity if she stopped attending the university, they would stop their financial support, which led to Serenity moving out of her parents' home.

Serenity has an apartment that she shares with a roommate from England. Because of the financial burdens of living on her own, she is working. Although she was signed up to take classes again this semester, she decided it was in her best interest to focus on work and getting healthy, so she is in the process of dropping her classes. In addition to work, Serenity attends church and meets regularly with the pastor's wife for spiritual guidance. She is dating the same boyfriend, who attends the same church. Serenity enjoys where she works and sees her position with this organization as a viable career opportunity. She does not need a degree to work for this organization; however, she is allowing God to direct her in this area.

Serenity enjoyed reading her story and said I did a good job writing it. Reading her story helped her realize she was in denial about her relationship with her family. Along with the depression and suicidal ideation she exhibited in college, she shared there

were many times she felt this way in high school. In addition to the denial, she said it was hard to admit that she was a Christian who needed help. She wanted me and others to see her as a Christian who had it all together. It is Serenity's hope that one day she and her parents can mend their relationship. She firmly believes one day God will use her experiences to help others. I firmly believe this to be true as well. Although I can see how the stress in her life is affecting her emotionally and physically, I believe Serenity is taking the appropriate steps to take care of herself.

I am happy to report Jordan is thriving in college. Although I did not have the opportunity to interview him after his first year of college, I do get updates from his mom and Jordan visits me when he is home on break. Jordan's faith was certainly challenged in college; however, he looked to God for strength, and he had a positive influence on his teammates. One of the greatest challenges was the partying that happened on the weekends. Jordan was often invited to parties, but he decided his time was better spent away from the influence of alcohol and other temptations. He spent his weekends in the TV room located in his dorm. Initially Jordan thought he would be spending his weekends by himself, but slowly other teammates joined him. He thought most of his teammates wanted to party, but they were waiting for someone to step up and choose an alternative to the drinking and partying. Once again Jordan found himself in a leadership role and allowed God to speak through his actions and behavior.

As for me, I continue to counsel students, and I continue to see God working in my professional and personal life. There are days when I believe I am ready for a career change, but God has His way of showing me that my work is not completed in my current position. I still continue to see students bring their spiritual life into the counseling

session. One of my students altered her career path because of her Christian worldview. She wanted to study genetics but found human genetics controversial, so she is going to major in agriculture and study plant genetics. Recently a student mentioned attending church with her sister, but was irritated with the message, because her life was in chaos; she was struggling with believing in God. She felt if God truly cared, people would not hurt her. I saw this as an opportunity to step in and shared how her view of God could be negatively influenced by her prior experiences. Another faculty member was in the room with me, and she added that it was her faith that got her through the hard times.

In addition to meeting with students individually, I attend the Fellowship of Christian Athletes meetings on campus when my schedule allows. I had the opportunity to witness the students in FCA put on a dinner for the custodial staff in our building. It was wonderful to sit in the room and watch the students share the love of Christ with the custodial crew. The custodians were deeply touched and appreciative of the kindness and tasty dinner the students prepared for them. I was deeply touched by their generosity and ability to cook and organize the dinner. They went as far as coloring a Christmas tablecloth and individualized placemats for each of the custodians. One custodian asked if he could take his placemat home. The simplest gesture, a personalized, colored placemat meant so much to him. It was an amazing dinner, and I was blessed to see God work through these awesome students.

Students are not the only ones who bring their faith into the counseling relationship; parents continue to make prayer requests. When meeting with their student, they ask that I incorporate their Christian worldview into the conversation. In other words, they are giving me permission to openly discuss faith with their student. Recently

one of my student's parents came to see me about a situation that deeply hurt and impacted the entire family. They sought my input from a spiritual perspective as well as requested I pray for the family. I was deeply moved and honored by the level of trust they had in me. Often, I get emails or phone messages from parents telling me that they are praying for me, which always serves as a reminder that I am having a heavenly impact on my realm of influence.

It was through professional experiences such as these that contributed to my perspective on how students experience their faith in high school. One of my assumptions was that students are drawn to teachers/counselors who share their faith. Although Rachel was the only one who spoke to her counselor from a spiritual perspective, the other students never developed a strong relationship with their counselor because each of them had different counselors throughout their four years. When Serenity spoke to her counselor about attending a Christian college, she felt he dismissed her desire to attend a Christian school. Therefore, she stopped seeking his help concerning college admissions. Jordan's counselor changed his senior year so he did not establish a relationship with his counselor, but he mentioned the importance of knowing who the Christian faculty were on campus and hoped his siblings would make connections with the Christian faculty prior to their senior year. Because of the relationship Jordan developed with me through our interviews, he often sought my input about college and other concerns on campus. He often approached our conversations from a spiritual perspective.

Within their academic writings, Rachel and Remo incorporated their faith into their high school papers. For the most part they felt their instructors acknowledged and

were respectful of their Christian worldview. The only opposition toward their Christian perspective happened in psychology and biology courses. The students did exhibit their faith in the academic setting by incorporating their faith in their writings, praying for their academics and post-secondary plans, sharing their Christian worldview in classroom discussions, sharing their faith with classmates, and integrating their faith in their extracurricular activities.

Within the personal/social domain, students participated in Fellowship of Christian Students or Fellowship of Christian Athletes in order to fellowship with other Christian students on campus. The students gravitated toward other students who were Christian and in the process developed meaningful relationships and established accountability partners. Within dating relationships, faith was central to the relationship. All the students make a commitment to remain pure until marriage. Although at times they felt alone in their faith, especially when they were participating in activities or engaged in controversial topics, they knew they could turn to God for comfort.

As for the career domain, the students often incorporated their faith into their post-secondary decision making. Rachel and Serenity were very systematic in establishing Christian support networks on campus. When the students visited various institutions, they sought out opportunities that would support their Christian worldview. They all felt God was directing them in their college choices and majors. Although most of them felt they would face some challenges in regards to their faith while in college, they felt by establishing a support network and making God a priority in their lives their faith would persevere. As of now, this has proven true for all four of them. Rachel shared how she has witnessed a few of her Christian friends turn from their faith while in

college. I asked her what she thought caused them to turn away from their Christian beliefs. She felt they were not rooted enough in their faith prior to leaving for college, and she felt some of her friends often adopted the views of their professors both in classroom content and religious views. In addition, she felt there is this belief among many young people that if you are religious, you cannot be intelligent.

I have to smile at this misconception because some of the most intelligent people I know are Christians who are very established in the academy. In addition they contribute to scholarly work and are making a spiritual impact on their realm of influence. As I worked through my dissertation journey, I encountered professors who acknowledge my Christian worldview from a positive perspective and those who did not. I believe at one time I could have been easily persuaded to adopt a worldview different from my current Christian worldview, but God was looking out for me, and it was while I was in an environment often hostile toward Christianity, I reestablished what I knew to be right all along, my Christian faith. There are many examples I can share where God's hand and perfect timing were evident throughout my journey.

A perfect example of His touch came while I was enrolled in a women's leadership class that came from a feminist perspective. I found this environment to be deeply hostile toward men and Christianity. This class was supposed to provide the opportunity to find my voice and at times I felt I did, but not when it came to my religious views. Long story short, I took an incomplete in this class, and I was required to write one final paper. I chose to write my final paper on my Christian worldview and how many of my beliefs did not agree with a feminist perspective. My then professor left my institution so I was assigned to another professor who would grade my final paper

and assign my final grade. I wrote the paper and I was certain I would end up with an F on the paper and a B in the class because of the content of my paper. After all, I used the Bible as one of my sources and was certain this professor would find this repulsive.

Well, my assumption was totally inaccurate! After checking the mail, I remember sitting in my truck. I said a little prayer before opening the envelope and what I found paved the way toward the development of a wonderful relationship with a man of God who became my methodologist. Instead of ripping me on the content of my paper, this professor quoted scripture back to me! I was dumbfounded! I got an A on the paper and an A in class, and I requested to meet with this professor. After a wonderful discussion, I knew I had to have Dr. Timothy Davies serve on my dissertation committee. In God's perfect timing, Dr. Davies agreed to serve as my methodologist. In the process, I received a professor who was not only invested in my dissertation, but he was invested in my spiritual growth. I respect him beyond words and I am totally blessed to have him in my life.

Other committee members are Christians too. One of them not only guided me through my doctoral program, she also guided me through my master's program. Although, we did not speak about our mutual faith during my master's program, it did not take long for us to realize we shared the same beliefs as I worked through my dissertation. In the process, Dr. Sharon Anderson prayed for me, encouraged me to incorporate my Christian perspective in my research, and she was equally invested in my spiritual growth. As a woman of God in the academy, who was equally invested in the spiritual well-being of her colleagues in academe, she organized a symposium for

Christian faculty. I was invited to participate in this symposium and it was during one of these symposiums where I met my outside faculty member, Dr. Mary Poplin.

Dr. Poplin presented a wonderful account of her transformation from a nonbeliever to a devout Christian. She spoke about the role a student played in her conversion to Christianity. In addition she spoke about the responsibility Christian faculty play in contributing to the scholarly research as well as serving as Christian mentors to students and other faculty. While listening to her story, I decided I wanted her to serve on my dissertation committee. I asked Dr. Anderson if a committee member could be from another institution and she responded with a yes. I approached Dr. Poplin, and she agreed to serve on my committee. Not only did she support me in my writings throughout my dissertation journey, she also fostered my spiritual growth.

At my dissertation defense, Dr. Poplin asked me to reflect back on my research and share a few thoughts with parents, students, and colleagues. After spending time with these students, I learned that they seek more guidance with dating and sexuality. Although this is a difficult subject for both parties, parents who engage in this conversation with their students are helping them establish boundaries in intimate relationships. Another important factor is the role of the father especially with daughters. If fathers spend time modeling how God expects them to conduct themselves as Christian men, daughters will understand and recognize their value and not seek affirmation or attention from inappropriate or harmful relationships.

Secondly, parents need to encourage and foster their children's spiritual development in a positive and supportive way. The best way to do this is by modeling their own Christian walk, in other words "walk their talk." They cannot expect their child

to go to church or read the Bible if they do not hold the same expectations of themselves. If the child wishes to explore another church, allow the child to explore or at least have the conversation with him or her about possible concerns. Although it is tough to witness a child struggle or stray from their faith, it is important to not mandate or dictate the child attend church. Establishing a transparent and respectful relationship with their children establishes a collaborative relationship. Ultimately, prayer is more powerful than persuasion or authoritarian parenting.

It is important that parents understand they have resources they can utilize to help them foster their child's spiritual growth and development. Attending a church with a strong youth group is vital to a child's Christian walk. In addition attending a church that establishes an environment where mentoring and supporting the youth in the congregation are valued and expected provides youth with other godly people to seek spiritual guidance and direction. The students all spoke about people in their church who provided mentoring and spiritual guidance. Participating in church camps and missions contributed to their spiritual growth. Not only seeking help from the church, but from other Christian organizations and Christian faculty in their child's school establishes other networks and Christian mentors for students.

Lastly, parents need to stay connected with their child. There is a misconception that as children age they need less guidance and direction from their parents. Although it is correct that students seek autonomy, they still want their parents involved in their lives. Parents and adolescents will not always agree, but knowing their parents are invested in their academic, personal/social, and spiritual lives provides them with the security and affection they desire and need.

To my colleagues, I encourage them to examine their own spiritual and religious beliefs. They need to acknowledge and understand how their own beliefs as well as their biases influence their interactions with students. In addition I encourage them to seek educational opportunities to learn about the different religious views held by students. Regardless of what they believe, they need to remain open and respectful of students' views on religion. To my colleagues who are school counselors, in addition to what I already stated, I would add that counselors not dismiss or avoid conversations with students because they stem from a religious context. If a counselor is uncomfortable speaking about religion, they need to seek counsel. In addition it is important that counselors are aware of the religious and spiritual resources available to them and the students they counsel.

As for my Christian colleagues, I encourage them to familiarize themselves with their students' religious rights as well as their own rights as they pertain to the school environment. Unfortunately, we are restricted to what we can and cannot say or do based on our religious beliefs; however, despite these restrictions we remain Christian faculty. Students seek faculty members who share their Christian worldview, and Christian faculty who are willing to encourage and nurture their spiritual growth encourages them. The school environment can be an oppressive place for Christian students and faculty, finding other supportive Christians encourages and supports our faith as well as creates a beacon of light in the darkness.

As with faculty, I encourage students to seek faculty and students who share their Christian worldview. Finding other Christians provides students with support and accountability partners. The students I interviewed mentioned how other Christian

students and faculty helped them keep accountable on how they were living their Christian faith on campus. Along with individual support, participation in Fellowship of Christian Athletes or Students provides students with an opportunity to fellowship, study, participate in community outreaches, and pray with other believers. These forums also provide students with a safe environment to openly express their faith.

Finally, I encourage students to not compartmentalize their faith. Students maintain the right to express their Christian worldview in a public high school. Faith is not limited to church on Sunday morning; it has a central place in life and should be integrated into all areas of one's life including school. Throughout life one will find others with differing views; however, one does not lose their voice. We all have a story and a purpose here on earth. Sharing our stories with others, reminds us of how truly blessed we are to walk this earth and how God equips us for every season in our lives. Let us not forget we are the body of Christ and our purpose is to be the light and further His kingdom on earth.

In Christ,

Bernadine Marie Moreno-Knittel, PhD