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How Christian College Student Leaders Discover Purpose

Emmanuel Ayiku

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September 2, 2019

ABSTRACT

Among college students, research has revealed that 76% of them reported that they search for meaning in life (Dunn & Hammer, 2015). Spirituality is one specific way in which students begin their search for meaning. A qualitative approach was used to examine the perspectives of how six Christian college student leaders from three different campus ministries found their purpose. By examining and understanding purpose from one subset of religious students who serve in a leadership position, we may gain insight into the interplay of meaning-making, purpose, and leadership. This study concluded that faith or spirituality played an important role in how participants discovered their purpose. By examining these participants' lived experiences through the lens of their Christian faith, certain themes were found. Meaning is found through engaging with the bible or spiritual books, through prayer, by listening to a divine nudge or voice, and by establishing a mentor/mentee relationship in the faith. Purpose is found 1) through discovering God-given talents and skills through service, 2) through an emerging process, 3) through taking advantage of service opportunities, and 4) through pursuing a servant-leadership style. Lastly, students displayed stages 4-6 of Fowler's Faith Development Theory (2004). The interaction between the process of making meaning, discovering purpose, and leadership occurred through the participants taking a risk to serve, developing a servant-leadership style, and discover why they serve.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents John Ayiku and Esther Ayiku who have been such a great support to me through college. I really wouldn't have made it this far if it wasn't for both of you who taught me that with hard work you can be anything that you put your heart to. I thank my father for all the necessary sacrifices he made to be a great example to me. I thank my mother for always reminding me and my sisters to, "Do your best and leave the rest for God." I know that if I ever needed encouragement or if I ever felt alone you were always a phone call away. Anytime I speak with you I get such a sense of peace and strength and I know that is from the Spirit of God that lives inside of you.

I also dedicate this to Bishop Andrew Robinson and Wanda Kay Robinson for all their love, support and prayers. You both have been such a blessing to me. Coming to college I had dreams, but I didn't know how I would make them become reality. Then God brought me to you and you both covered me with your love, thank you so much for taking me in as your son and wanting nothing but the best for me. I am truly blessed to have you both as mentors and I pray that God gives me the same opportunity to pour into others.

My friends and family from ACTS Campus Ministry thank you for your love, prayer and support. Thank you for helping to make meaning of my life and encouraging me to do the same for others.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Life has meaning and individuals are all in search of it. Weiten, Dunn & Hammer (2015) said that theorists working from different perspectives on this topic of purpose all agree that “the basic challenge of modern life has become the search for meaning” (p.3). People see this search in the million-dollar self-realization and self-help books industries that attempt to assist individuals to discover “purpose” or meaning in their life (Salerno,2005). Even this research has “purpose”. As Damon, Meon, & Bronk (2003) stated, purpose is defined as “A stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121). From this definition, we understand that for something to be created there has to be a reason, which gives that thing meaning or purpose.

Victor Frankl (1992) believed that the primary force of every man’s life on earth is the search for meaning in his life. If individuals can have something that they believe has meaning, he or she will be willing to go through anything (Frankl, 1963). We live in an era where people are trying not just to understand the world, but to understand their purpose in it.

Among college students, research has revealed that 76% of them reported that they search for meaning in life (Weiten, Dunn & Hammer,2015). This data makes sense as college is all about figuring out who you are, your beliefs and your purpose in life (Noah, 2017). Students are seeking an answer that will point them in the right direction of discovering who they are as well as what they believe. Ask a college student what something is they have learned about themselves in college, and you will frequently hear the response, “I found myself.” Could this statement possibly mean that the students found meaning for themselves? We understand that

their development can occur in a multitude of ways, such as identity development, which major to study, as well as what leadership opportunities to embark on (Noah, 2017).

Spirituality is one specific way in which students begin their search for meaning. “Many theorists believe that one of the fundamental functions of religion (or spirituality) is to help individuals fulfill their yearning for meaning and purpose in life” (Galk, Flannelly, Ellison, Siltan, & Jankowski, p.2, 2015). Why is religion or spirituality so heavily connected to purpose? Religion has been proven to help in making meaning of the most severe challenges of life such as death, suffering, and many other things (Galek et.al, 2015; Frankl, 1963; Martela & Steger, 2016).

Individuals who discover their purpose also discover that the purpose of life is not just the betterment of themselves but enhancing society through their interaction with others. Warren (2002) believed that our purpose in life is not about personal wants and desires, but true purpose is service to others. Dierendonck (2011) discovered six characteristics that shape a servant leader; “empowering and developing people, they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole” (Dierendonck, 2011 p.1). Servant leadership, unlike other style of leadership, is not focused mainly on helping the organization achieve its goals but in helping individuals to grow (Spears, 2010). These leaders have a desire to help others discover meaning by doing things that matter (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997).

If student affairs professionals are determined to help students in their development, we must then take a moment to understand how purpose is discovered. For this research, the target population is Christian student leaders in college. By examining and understanding purpose from one set of religious students who serve in a leadership position, we may gain insight into

the interplay of meaning-making, purpose, and leadership. Current literature has addressed this interplay from a qualitative perspective. In fact, Chickering and McCormick (2005) believed that inner development of college students gets little attention in areas such as value and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the interplay of meaning-making, purpose and leadership among college student Christian leaders. In order to study this phenomenon, the following research questions were pursued.

Research Question

1. How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life?
2. How do current college Christian student leaders discover their purpose?
3. How does making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other?

Significance of Study

Higher Education in the United States was originally conceived to provide public servants for the republic. George Washington desired universities that would help develop patriotic citizens and civil servants (Bugenhagen, 2009). But now the focus has shifted from producing civil servants to the attainment of wealth through job opportunities and the promise of prosperity (Buegenhagen, 2009). So not only do we need to help students make meaning in life, but in doing so we help them to be helpful citizens in our society. This study will assist student affairs professionals gain insight into helping students find purpose, but also help students find the helpful campus resources for themselves.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

A limitation of this research could be that the participants would not be genuine in their response to the questions. To anticipate this, the researcher scheduled one interaction with each before the day of the interview in the hope that when the interview day comes, they would feel more comfortable. The researcher asked them to explain their faith development in order to make the conversation more comfortable as they unfold their journey.

A second limitation is the scope of my research. Since this study focused on religion, specifically Christianity based religion, it will not be able to compare the interviewees answers with other religions to contrast individual development. Every religion has its own beliefs and those beliefs will govern the choices of their members. Individuals personal religious beliefs could limit in generalizing the findings for individuals with other beliefs.

A third limitation is I am part of one of the campus ministries (ACTS Campus Ministry). In order to limit bias, I did not interview leaders from this ministry.

Definitions of Terms

Purpose. “A stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (Damon, Meon, & Bronk p. 121).

Servant Leadership. An individual who is a leader that desires to serve others (Spears, 2004).

Faith Development. “A generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning” (Andrade, 2014, p.3).

Chapter II

This chapter provides a review of the literature on various aspects of purpose, meaning making and leadership. Specifically, the chapter will cover relevant research on the definition of purpose, purpose and service, purpose and motivation, purpose and religion, purpose and mental health and alcohol abuse, leadership, purpose and leadership, leadership and spirituality, servant leadership, and spirituality and decision making. Lastly, the chapter will provide two theories that guide the overall understanding of need and faith development.

Purpose Definition

When psychologists and researchers examine concepts such as purpose or the meaning of life, they often find these metaphysical topics difficult to answer (Debats, Drost & Hanssen, 1995). “What is the meaning of life” is a question that can only be answered by looking at individual human experiences and asking, “what makes their experience meaningful in their lives” (Martela & Steger, 2016 p. 3). It can mean that “making of meaning” helps individuals during life challenges, such as accepting death, life failures, rejections, and many other challenges that people may face on a daily basis. According to Frankl (1963), meaning in life occurs when people have a clear purpose in life. If a person can have something that they believe has meaning, he or she will be willing to go through anything (Frankl, 1963). An individual who has a sense of purpose in life can maintain mental and emotional well-being (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). An individual who has a sense of purpose can also endure the hardships of life because it makes even the hardship have meaning (Frankl, 1963).

McKnight and Kashdan (2009) defined purpose as, “a cognitive process that defines life goals and provides personal meaning” (p. 242). Since there is an end goal or destination, individuals’ daily decisions are guided by their end goal (McKnight

& Kashdan 2009). In a qualitative study, Tirsi and Brandy (2010) discovered that once purpose or “meaning in life” is discovered, individuals begin to embody it over time. Jim, a participant in their research, was strongly influenced by his religion. Jim expressed to them that his religion guided all of his choices and his life goals. For example, he stopped working on Sundays because his religion, Christianity, teaches to respect the Sabbath (Tirsi & Brandy, 2010). As time goes on, the goal or purpose becomes woven into a person’s identity, and individuals make choices that bring them closer to their goal (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). It seems that purpose can be a compass that offers direction, not only directing individuals to life goals, but also their daily decisions (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Ryff (1989) defined purpose in life as, “a belief that gives one the feeling there is purpose or a meaning to their life” (p. 1072). She believed that purpose gave an individual a sense of direction and with that sense of direction comes intentionality when it comes to making choices that will help them achieve the feeling of what life means to them. Frank (1963) believed, all human life human life has meaning and purpose, and once that purpose is identified with every single challenge or circumstance that individuals face, they will find meaning even in the midst of these circumstances. Even though there are many perspectives that can direct an individual on achieving meaning in life, it is important to remember that each person, individually, must create his or her own meaning of life (Battista & Almond, 1973). According to King et.al. (2006) life has meaning to an individual when they personally feel like there is meaning beyond the trivial chaos in life. Frankl believed that regardless of doubt, despair and a sense of emptiness, life has meaning, and it isn’t something that is invested, but discovered (Das, 1998).

Damon, Meon, and Bronk (2003) defined purpose as, “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121). According to Damon et. al, purpose highlighted three key points. First purpose is a goal which is much bigger than something that can be achieved in one day. Second, purpose is part of an individual personal search for meaning which is external with a desire to make a difference in the world. Lastly, purpose is intentional steps towards making progress to a goal. Frankl (1963) agreed with Damon in the fact that purpose must be discovered by the individual. Once individuals discover what life means to them, it comes with a commitment because if they succeed, they will personally continue to grow through all adversity. Nietzsche (Frankl, 1965) said that, “He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*” (p. 4).

Purpose and Service to Others

Individuals who discover their purpose also discover that the purpose of life is not just the betterment of themselves, but also enhancing society through our interaction with one another. Warren (2002) stated that our purpose in life is not about us, but our service to others. Research study conducted by Hill (2010), asked adolescents what it means to have purpose in life and the most common theme mentioned was pro-social. Pro-social is the ability for a person to weigh the consequences of their decision with its effect on others. Sharma and Patra (2014) explored college student is understanding of what happiness means to them and they discovered that about 92% of their participants felt like happiness is achieved by helping others. The more individuals develop cognitively, the more individuals begin to think beyond themselves (Piaget, 1972). Warren (1954) believed that purpose is not found within a person, but by looking outside of them.

According to Maslow (Griffin, 2009), before people can begin to think beyond themselves there are four needs that need to be satisfied first physiological, safety, love, and esteem. If these needs are not first met, individuals cannot move forward to helping others. Now the ultimate goal or need that people seek is self-actualization. In this stage, individuals dedicate themselves to tasks which at the end benefit others more than themselves (Griffin, 2009).

There are three paths to happiness according to Seligman (2002). The first route is experienced with an individual seeking to experience all the pleasures that life brings, which only last for a short period of time. The second route is when a individual becomes involved deeply with others and lose themselves in the process. This process toward happiness last longer. The last route, just like the second, is a route that leads to long term happiness. In this route individuals commit to a cause which is greater than themselves. This route demonstrates that a concern for the world and people other than self is required in order for an individual to achieve lasting sense of well-being (Bronk et.al, 2009).

Purpose and Motivation

Maslow explained that a person's motivation is the lowest need on his pyramid of needs (Griffin, 2009). All humans are motivated by different needs, but the one common desire we seek is for love. In a qualitative study, African American woman were interviewed to see the relationship among spirituality and coping, but mainly how they make meaning of significant events (Mattis, 2002). Mattis discovered that the sense of destiny, or being able to see the big picture, prompted some of these women to attach divine or spiritual significance to a particular event. These crises or challenges that happen in individual lives are opportunities for growth (Koenig and Sigeler, 1988). According to Frankl (1963), human beings are driven by a "will to find meaning", "this gives them the drive to find meaning and significances in

their personal life. Failure to find meaning sometimes results in psychological distress” (Steger, p. 81).

When purpose was first researched, Frankl (1963) believed that individuals pursuing their purpose, or meaning, was the most important aspect of motivation. Once individuals have identified their purpose their purpose, they find their motivation (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Another aspect of what motivates individuals is the pursuit of a goal (Duckworth and Peterson, 2007). In their research, pursuing a goal motivated individuals to accomplish tasks more than others of equal intelligence regardless of hardships. In fact, enduring hardships or challenges while pursuing a goal is strengthened if the individual is committed to a task (Dyke and Elias, 2007).

In recent research about how women recovered from alcohol disorders, Jacob (2018) discovered three common themes: spiritual growth and healing with the help of a higher power, renewed purpose in life, and active engagement of rehabilitation. Discovering a new sense of purpose in life involved them exploring alternative ways of having a reason to “be in the world.”

Purpose and Religion

“Many theorists believe that one of the fundamental functions of religion is to help individuals fulfill their yearning for meaning and purpose in life (Galt et.al, 2015 p.2).”

Religion, according to Wong (2010), provides answers to seven main questions that every human seeks to answer: 1) Who am I; 2) How can I be happy; 3) What should I do with my life; 4) How do I make the right choices; 5) Where do I belong; 6) Where can I find acceptance; and 7) What happens after death? Empirical research has indicated that there is a positive correlation between religion and the belief that there is meaning and purpose in life

(Galk et al., 2015). The reason there is a significant relationship between religion and meaning in life is the fact that “religious commitment fosters a coherent set of goals that provide meaning and purpose in life” (Galk et al., 2015 pg. 2)”. Religion helps individuals make meaning of the world around them, for example, the experience and wonder of the sun rising and sun setting (Tirri et al., 2010). According to Galk (2015), people not only seek for meaning in their life, but they also seek it in their surrounding world.

Cranney (2013) discovered that people who identified as having strong religious beliefs have a much firmer sense of purpose than their counterparts. Cranney (2013) also concluded that people who identify as having “a high sense of purpose are naturally drawn to religion” (pg. 644). Research has also suggested that individuals who are under extremely high level of stress have numerous reasons for turning towards religion to cope (Shin, 2014). Religion has provided help in making meaning of the most severe challenges of life such as death, suffering, and many other things (Galek et al. 2015; Frankl, 1963; Martela & Steger, 2016).

Many people of different faiths rely on religion as a means to not only make sense of the world, but to find meaning in their personal life as well (Galek et al. 2015). Palinkas et al (1992) created a measure of spiritual research when they were trying to see how purpose in life-related if any to spiritual well-being. They discovered that there was a positive correlation between purpose in life and spirituality.

Purpose and Mental Health and Alcohol Abuse

Research has been done on meaning and purpose in life to see if it is associated with mental health (Galek et al., 2015). Harlow, Newcomb, and Bentler (1986) found that young adults’ depression was linked to lack of purpose or meaning in life. Research performed by Jacobson, Ritter and Mueller (1977), looked to see if there was a correlation between purpose

in life and adult drinkers. They found that a lack of purpose or meaning in life was in fact related to higher alcohol consumption among adults at a rehabilitation hospital.

Harlow, Newcomb and Bentler (1986) also discovered that with women, substance use had a significant correlation with purpose in life ($r = -.10$) and correlated with suicidal thoughts ($r = .10$). However, with men the correlation between these factors was less significant ($r = -.11$, $r = .04$). Harlow's (1986) research was replicated by Kinner et.al (Harlow et.al, 1986), but this time with adolescents, to determine the causes of depression, meaninglessness, and substance abuse. Their results confirmed what Harlow (1986) found, which was the strong relationship between a lack of purpose or meaning in life had with drug use (Harlow et.al., 1994). In other research, Harlow, Newcomb and Bentler (1986) examined whether a lack of purpose leads to depression, which may lead to ideation and substance use. The results suggested that a lack of purpose had a great impact on people being depressed (1986).

Purpose and Leadership

Frankl (1963) believed that the primary force that drives humans is their search for meaning. So, what happens when individuals cannot find meaning in life? Frankl (1963) believed that when meaning cannot be found, existential frustration is present, which leads to "noogenic neurosis", a pathological condition. Noogenic neurosis is a term that was coined by Viktor Frankl who founded logotherapy (Devove, 2012).

According to Maddie (1967), noogenic neurosis is characterized as a syndrome where an individual believes that their life is meaningless. The most noticeable characteristic features are boredom, depression and low level of activity (Maddie, 1967). An individual suffering from these symptoms does not have a clear goal or direction in life (Das, 1998). According to Das (1998), these individuals suffer from a chronic inability to believe in the truth, significance, or

usefulness of anything that they are currently engaged in or anything that they might contemplate doing in the future” (p. 203). A lack of personal meaning also leads to stress and poor coping skills through an individual’s life span (Lazarus & DeLongis 1983).

Leadership

Leadership is a broad topic and there are many aspects of leadership. This study will limit the focus of this chapter on Christian leadership focus to spirituality. According to Chelladuari (1995), there are three common elements that define what leadership is: "leadership is a behavioral process, leadership is interpersonal in nature, and leadership is aimed at influencing and motivating members toward group goals" (p. 160). The common characteristics that make up a leader have been researched for centuries to determine if leaders are born or created (Ahmed & Nawaz et.al, 2016).

The first person to look at leadership was Thomas Carlyle in 1847 (Spector, 2016). In Carlyle’s Great Man theory, he argued that certain unique individuals with leadership skills were a gift from God and were placed on the earth to meet human need in a particular time (Spector, 2016). Unlike Carlyle, Sigmund Freud believed that leaders are chosen by a group and these chosen leaders love their followers equally and are individuals whom others seek to be like (Spector, 2016). Freud also believed that everyone has leadership qualities within them, and it is not that only a few people are chosen (Spector, 2016). Freud stated that leaders are like fathers and the followers are like sons. As the son grows up, he seeks to have the same qualities as his father. Now Freud believed that these qualities are already in the son, but it takes time for those qualities to emerge (Spector, 2016). Bernard Bass also agreed with Freud that leaders can be both born and created (Day, 2012).

Leadership is also the process where members of groups which consist of a leader and participants who all work towards a specific goal for a common good (Gehrke, 2008). Now the effectiveness of a leader is based on the performance outcomes that these leaders accomplish (Day, 2012). If organizations are reflections of their top leaders, then it is important that we understand the nature and influence of a leader's spiritual beliefs in order for us to gain an understanding of how that leader operates (Phipps, 2011).

Leadership and Spirituality

There has only been a small number of academic articles that address personal spiritual beliefs of a leader with strategic leadership (Phipps, 2011). According to Bugenhagen (2009), an individual that is spiritual has a set of values, beliefs and an ethic system that serves as a lens that they make decisions through. There has been undeniable connections found between spiritual values and leadership success according to researchers and writers (Reave, 2005). It is important to remember that an individual doesn't have to be spiritual nor religious in order to provide spiritual leadership (Reave, 2005). McCormick provided with things to observe when it comes to spirituality and management or leadership: "compassion, right livelihood, selfless service, work as a meditation, and problems with pluralism" (Phipps, 2011, p. 181).

Spirituality has helped many high school and college students adjust to the demand that their new transition brings by giving them a sense of inner control over their life and their surroundings (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, & William, 2009). Religion also has a positive effect on their academics, with many college students being involved in their campus ministry. For many college students transitioning to a university is where many begin to redefine their own beliefs, values, and begin to question structures that were given to them by their family (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, & William, 2009).

Servant Leadership

As times change so also does our views on leadership behavior (Dierendonck, 2011). The term servant leadership was coined by Robert Greenleaf who defined it as the following: A Servant Leader must first be a servant to others. They are motivated by a desire to serve others before themselves. Then while they are serving discover a desire to lead others (Dierendonck, 2011).

Greenleaf defined a servant leader as one who has a desire to serve others (Spears, 2004). Luthans and Avolio (Spears, 2004) believed that servant leaders are motivated by a desire to help their followers grow. Servant leadership, unlike other leadership style, is not focused mainly on helping the organization achieve its goals, but also helping individuals to grow (Greenleaf, 1997). This individual helps others gain balance in their inner life as they seek to meet the needs of others with genuine care and appreciation (Bhatti & Sadia, 2018).

In order to go beyond their own self-interest, these individuals must have some level of self-actualization (Griffin, 2009; Dierendonck, 2011). Having self-actualization gives them the ability not only to lead but the ability to serve those that they are leading (Dierendonck, 2011). According to Dierendonck (2011), there are six characteristics that shape a servant leader: “empowering and developing people, they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole” (Dierendonck, 2011).

First, a servant-leader is one that seeks to empower and develop the people they are leading by enabling them to make decisions (Conger, 2000). Empowerment seeks to give a sense of personal power to followers, where the followers feel the freedom to leave whenever they desire (Dierendonck, 2011). The second characteristic is humility; this virtue refers to the

fact that the leader is not afraid or ashamed to ask for the help of their followers (Dierendonck, 2011). Buddhism and Taoism believed that humility is the ability for an individual to lose themselves (Morris, 2005). They believed that a sea is powerful because the sea is lower than all the streams. Humility is what gives the sea its power, and in order for anyone to govern or lead others, they must place themselves below them (Morris, 2005 & Mitchell, 1988). Morris (2005) therefore concluded that, “leaders with a high level of humility are more likely to be servant leaders” (p. 339).

Authenticity is the next characteristic of servant leadership and consists of a leader being true to themselves (Dierendonck, 2011). Authenticity dates back to Greek philosophy where it is defined as, “To thine own self be true” (Avoli & Gardner, 2005, p. 329). Maslow saw these individuals as “in tune” with themselves and the world around them (Avoli & Gardner, 2005). Bhindi and Duignan (1997) believed that leaders earn the trust of people they lead through authentic actions. A servant leader shows authenticity by keeping their word or promises, being visible in their organization and being honest (Dierendonck, 2011). Reave (2005) believed that instead of leadership theories focusing on the need for the leader to have an inspiring vision, they should focus and emphasize the action of the leader, because action demonstrates the leader’s ethical perspective and level of “respect and compassion shown to others” (p. 657).

Interpersonal acceptance is the next important characteristic, this characteristic consists of the leader being able to understand the feelings and experience of the people they are leading (Dierendonck, 2011). Covey (1992: 178-9) explained it best:

Now we work with fairness, kindness, efficiency, and effectiveness. We work with the whole person. We see that people are not just resources or assets, not just economic,

social, and psychological beings. They are also spiritual beings; they want *meaning*, a sense of doing something that matters (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997, p. 119).

Having interpersonal acceptance enables a leader to have compassion in terms of forgiving the individuals they serve because the leaders know that the follower will make a mistake (Dierendonck, 2011). By doing so, they create a relationship based on trust as well as makes people feel accepted (Dierendonck, 2011).

The last two characteristics of a leader are providing direction and stewardship. Providing direction means that the leader informs their followers what the expectations are (Dierendonck, 2011; Laub, 1999). According to Bhatti and Sadia (2018), “People are always seeking direction in order to perform duties” (p. 23). Lastly, a good leader has the desire to “guide the ship” and care for the passengers. Stewardship is the leader’s ability to take responsibility for the organization in which they are representing (Spear, 2010; Dierendonck, 2011).

Spirituality and Decision Making

Fernando and Jackson (2006) researched what influences spiritual business leaders’ decision making in their workplace. They discovered that these leaders engage spiritually in the workplace when they have encountered a difficult moment. When they were asked how they incorporate their spiritual belief at their workspace, many of them said that when they are faced with organizational decisions, they seek for spiritual guidance. Fernando and Jackson (2006) concluded that these spiritual leaders draw from their spirituality to find the best or the right way to handle a situation or problem that they may encounter.

Noah (2017) wanted to discover how faith or spirituality impacted college student decision-making. She came to the conclusion that the feeling of guilt or the fear of some of her participants’ reputation or image being tarnished is what sometimes motivated them to make

certain decisions. One of her participants expressed how she wanted to be more sexually explorative in high school, but she knew that making this decision would ruin the reputation that her family had of her (Noah, 2017).

Genia (1990) said that people make moral decisions based on civil law and socio-cultural norms when they are not in direct violation of an individual's religious code. Which basically means that a student on a college campus, if they are still actively engaged with their faith or walk in accordance to their church doctrine, then these doctrines or beliefs influence their daily decisions. Now if a student questions their doctrine in any way, they don't feel obligated to make decisions that correlate with their spiritual code or doctrine and would, therefore, break church laws or engage in behavior that would be against their religious doctrine (Noah, 2017). A participant in Tirri and Quinn's (2010) research, expressed that she is less spiritual and because of that, her decisions are not always aligned with what she learned in church, another participant in the research, who decided to stop working on Sunday because his religion taught him that the seventh day is a day of rest.

It was discovered by Fernando and Jackson (Phipps, 2012) that when, "when spiritually motivated leaders are challenged to the extent that they need to reach deeper and draw from their spirituality to find the "right way" of managing a situation (pg.181)."

Theoretical Framework

Abraham Maslow sought to discover what motivates people and he discovered five essential needs that all humans seek (Ward, 2017). These needs are arranged into a pyramid, starting from the bottom or the most basic or physical human needs and moving toward the top of the pyramid representing higher tier of more psychological or aspirational needs (Griffin, 2009). The basic needs are physiological needs which includes food, water, shelter and

items that help us live (Maslow, 1943). The second level of needs is human safety; these needs includes personal security, property, and freedom from any sense of fear (Maslow, 1943). The third level of needs is the need to feel loved and the need to belong (Maslow, 1943). This includes having friends, family, and significant others where trust and intimacy are built into the relationship (Maslow, 1943). The fourth level of needs is the need to feel respected and recognized; this level, according to Maslow is the stage that people struggle the most with (Ward, 2017). The last, and most difficult to achieve is the need for self-actualization. At this level individuals seek personal growth (Maslow, 1943).

Fowler's Faith Development

It is impossible to discuss faith development or spiritual development without mentioning James Fowler, the founder of faith development theory (Andrade, 2014). Faith is defined as, "a generic feature of the human struggle to find and maintain meaning (Andrade, 2014) (pg.3)". According to Fowler (2004), faith development provides three things to humans. The first is that faith is rooted in the need for humans to find and or make meaning in life. Faith gives understanding to what the meaning of life is, and to creation as a whole, its origins, and its mysteries (Fowler, 2004).

Second, "faith has four constructive dimensions that involve the interweaving of the example, emotion, knowing, discernment, and response" (Fowler, 2004 pg. #412-413).

These include: 1) The capacity for responding to and evaluating sources of authority (Locus of Authority); 2) The quality and extent of our capacity for both a deepening and widening of the imaginative construction of the perspectives of others (Bounds of Social Awareness); 3) The imagination and construction of a coherent and meaningful experience of the "world" (Form of World Coherence); and 4) A developmental account

of the growing capacities, in humans, for shaping and responding imaginatively to symbols, narratives, and rituals that invite participation in the sacred, and that touch the deepest dimensions of our relatedness to the Holy (Fowler, 2004, p. 413).

Finally, faith development offers methods that relate to what we have learned about how religion nurtures and also how it works in our life (Fowler, 2004).

Fowler's stages of faith development provide an image that helps us to identify what stages an individual would likely be in transitioning from high school to college (Noah, 2017). As an individual goes from one stage to another, the things they value become more visible and individuals begin to embody their own personal beliefs (2017).

Fowler's theory consists of the following stages (Noah, 2018). Stage zero, (see figure 2) the primal stage, takes place between infancy to about two years old. In this stage, an individual learns what it means to feel safe as well as learning how to trust the environment. Stage one, the intuitive stage, takes place between three to seven years old and in this stage, individuals are introduced to faith-based bible stories and practices. Stage two, the mythic stage, takes place in elementary school. In this stage individuals are challenged with trying to understand symbolic bible stories. They also begin to understand that others may have different beliefs than they do. Stage three, the synthetic stage, occurs between the ages of twelve to young adulthood and during this stage, if there is something that goes against an individuals' faith, he or she would ignore it because it is not something that can be justified by what they believe. Stage four, the individuate stage, occurs from mid-twenties through an individual's thirties. In this stage, individuals begin to take ownership of their faith and begin to influence those around them. Stage five, the cognitive stage, takes place in mid-life, individuals struggle with trying to correlate or justify life experiences with their faith doctrine. By the time an individual

reaches the sixth stage, universalizing, they are now close to the end of their life and begin to see how all things are connected and begin to treat everyone around them with kindness (Noah 2018).

Faith is not a set of beliefs, but faith is a way of knowing and making sense of the world around us as well as events that happen (Noah, 2018). Faith is a guiding force that assists an individual in justifying any experience they face and aligning them with a moral compass; this is practicing faith.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter describes and discusses the methods that were used to conduct this research. This study sought to understand the interplay of meaning making, purpose and leadership in Christian student leaders. For this research, a qualitative research method was selected in the form of an individual interview with participants to provide answers to the research questions.

Design of Study

A qualitative approach was selected to conduct this research and to collect data. Qualitative study allows researchers to conduct an in-depth study about a broad subject that they want to gain individual perspectives on (Yin, 2011). Due to the nature of the topic, qualitative methodology is the best way to measure how Christian student leaders discover purpose. Doing qualitative research allows researchers to study and explore individuals lives through their lived experience (Yin, 2011). The purpose of qualitative research is not to *prove* an assumption or hypothesis, but to illuminate complex phenomena in our daily lived experience (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Participants

Participants were selected by their campus minister or leadership through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research in order to identify and select information or individuals related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). Participants were identified as individuals who are members of a Christian based organization who were: currently students at a mid-size university, held a leadership position in a Christian campus ministry, and were actively involved in their church ministry role.

Participants were students who were a part of a ministry as well as held a leadership position in their ministry.

Participant 1: Aaron is a white male who is currently a senior in college majoring in engineering. He joined his campus ministry Fall 2018 and joined the leadership team in Spring 2019.

Participant 2: Elizabeth is a white female who is currently a junior in college majoring in Spanish and Communication Disorder and Science with Latin American Studies minor. She joined her campus ministry in Fall 2017 and joined the leadership team in Fall 2018.

Participant 3: Abigail is 19-year-old white female who is currently a sophomore year majoring in accounting and minoring in religious studies. She joined her campus ministry about two years ago and joined the leadership team a year ago.

Participant 4: Destiny is a white female who is currently a sophomore in college majoring in mathematics for teacher licensure. She joined her campus ministry in Fall 2018 and joined the leadership team in Fall 2019.

Participant 5: Alexis is a 21-year-old a white female who is currently a senior in college double majoring in Communication Disorder and Sciences and Spanish. She joined her campus ministry in Fall 2016 and joined the leadership in Fall 2017 or Spring 2018.

Participant 6: Dereck is a white male who is currently a senior in college majoring in construction management. He joined his campus ministry in Fall 2015 and joined leadership Fall 2018.

Research Site

The research was conducted at a predominately White, midsized, four-year public institution. During the time of this study there were approximately 7,500 students enrolled. The

racial demographic of the institution was 66% white, 18.8% Black or African American, 9.8% Hispanic/ Latino, 2.3% Non-Resident Alien, 1.7% Asian, and 5% ethnicity being reported as unknown. This institution offered minors, bachelors and master's degrees. There were fifteen campus ministries listed as registered student organizations (RSO).

Data Collection

Data was collected through individual interviews with participants from Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship, Christian Campus House, Immanuel Lutheran Campus Ministry, Newman Catholic Community, and Wesley Foundation. In order to unveil deep viewpoints on each individual participant's experience, an interview format was used. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The researcher asked open ended question that would to an extended dialogue, with the interviewee speaking more than the interviewer (Yin, 2011).

In order to accurately obtain and transcribe the interview, permission was requested to allow participants to be video audio recorded. After video audio was transcribed, transcriptions emailed to participants to review for accuracy. Participants signed an informed consent document at the beginning of the interview (See Appendix A).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by the researcher through the process of coding after the interviews were transcribed. The researcher searched for commonly used themes or phrases that came up during each interview and grouped them together in order to make meanings in the collected data. The data was analyzed using Yin's (2011) five phased cycle: "compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting, and conclusion" (p. 177).

Treatment of Data

The gathered data will be saved and kept for three years which is required by the institution's IRB policy. All research participants who participated in the interview will be protected as required by the International Review Board (IRB). The recordings are saved on a password protected flash drive. A copy of the participant transcription was emailed to participants to allow them review their interview transcript. The notes and transcription taken are typed password protected.

Summary

This study used a qualitative approach in order to answer the research question. The methodology of this study included 6 participants who were picked as student leaders in their various faith-based organization and campus ministry. Participants were of a Christian affiliation and there was no determine factors on their belief. In order to protect the identities of individuals, pseudonyms were assigned to participants. This chapter presented the description of how participants were selected, how the data was going to be collected as well as how it will be kept. The next chapter will present the findings.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter focuses on summarizing qualitative interviews in an effort to determine how college student Christian leaders discover their purpose. This chapter will focus on the various themes that emerged after evaluating the interviews. There were six participants that were interviewed.

Research Question #1: How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life?

This first research question elicited five themes among the six participants. In order to answer this question, students shared their experiences of their past and how it has helped them discover meaning in life.

The Bible or Spiritual Book

The Bible was mentioned as one of the tools that four of the six participants used to make meaning of life. Aaron, mentioned that the Bible was a major one source of how he made meaning in life, he said:

There's definitely the ultimate user and leadership guide (the Bible) right there. To be able to, if you have a question there is always an answer that you can get from there. So that is a big one to always consult. If it is not first, it should have been first.

Aaron went on to explain how he used the Bible as a frame of reference this past summer when he and his church found out that the director of their campus ministry lost their job. He said during that time he turned to Bible scripture verses such as, "Be strong and courageous" and "I know the plans that I have for you declares the Lord." For Aaron scriptures like these helped

him refocus himself as well as give him insight into any challenge that he may currently be facing.

When speaking with Destiny, she also expressed how she used the Bible to help her make meaning in life. She spoke about, how “the Bible is God’s word and it’s 100 percent true.” She went on to say “So anytime I am going into life and I have any question, that’s my truth that I base my life off, is that God’s word is true.”

Destiny shared how when she was getting ready for college, she was nervous and anxious and didn’t know where God wanted her to go. She said the one thing that helps her get through that time was remembering that God was in control of it and that everything was going to work out for his good. The verse she used during that time was 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you.” She shared how this scripture reminded her that God cared about how she felt, and he wants her to give him all her worries and cares of life. She expressed how that was a huge process for her was learning that God cares for her life. Through coming to college God provided for her as she received a generous scholarship to attend.

Alexis, on the other hand, didn’t mention the Bible but shared how she is a part of a religious book club. She mentioned that the current religious book she is reading talks about faith and it is centered around a relationship. She didn’t expand too much on the book but tied it back to her faith. She shared how the author of this book is her frame of reference for the time being. She went on to say, “So, you know, I think it (frame of reference) changes.”

Dereck also shared how he uses the Bible as a frame of reference to make sense of life. He gave an example from one of the gospels in John, “It is a quote talking about how Jesus lived his life. He talks about how Jesus lived every day like it was a new day.”

Dereck then went on to say that “there is a lot of inspiring stuff in the Bible.” He would look up certain quotes that are “inspirational towards love, towards guidance and stuff like that and just read those” sections. When he needs inspiration in a particular area in his life, he will look up Bible verses that talk about that topic and read those verses.

Building Faith Through Prayer

Prayer or divine meditation with God was another theme that five of the six participants used to make meaning in life. Elizabeth shared how one of the ways she makes meaning in life is by trusting in God and her faith in him. One way to build this trust is through being more intentional in her prayer life. She says through her church, she has learned how to be more present in the moment with God. She spoke about how she does this through adoration:

So, a big one for me this year is adoration. Adoration is just adoring or praising God and it's in front of the sacrament which we believe to be the true presence of Christ on Earth. So just having that intention like being. When I am feeling down or it's been a rough week or I haven't been nice to other people, taking that time away from the world with all the commodities and the physical on Earth, to come back and refocus on God.

Elizabeth spoke about how many people have different ways of refocusing or re-energizing themselves other than through prayer. She believes that prayer and faith are the same thing and are the outpouring of God's love. She explained that the reason why sometimes bad things happen is not that we did something wrong, it's because life is just tough, and we sometimes have our highs and lows. She went on to say:

Just because we are experiencing this low in life and we're super stressed out and super fragile, we don't feel like God is there that is not a reason to stop believing in God and

start to stop trusting in Him. It just shows that we need to put more effort into our relationship with him. Which comes back to prayer.

Abigail also spoke about how prayer helps her refocus and makes her calmer. She said that the world is a messy place and she knows that at least for her when she is stronger in her faith, life seems to calm down. She went on to explain that the reason why prayer makes her calm is that, when or after she prays she feels like she understands her purpose a little better. Whether it is a little bit or a lot.

A different participant, Destiny, shared the same views as Abigail. She shared that, “communicating with God through prayer has taught me a lot about me, my purpose and my shortcomings.” When life presents a challenging question, she says how she deals with it.

I have questions in prayer, ‘How should I have handled this situation?’ or stuff like that, and I go to read my Bible that night and it’s like God has worked through. His words, like my followers should live their life like. Has been a huge thing in my life of just learning more about myself and my purpose, through my relationship with God and prayer and in His words.

She explained that there are times when she prays and she doesn’t immediately find the answer in her Bible. She said even in this circumstance she stills finds peace, knowing that God is the same and he is there for her “no matter what.

Alexis also spoke about how prayer is also a big one for her when it comes to how she makes meaning in life. She gave this illustration of how she sees life:

You can picture it in two ways. You can picture it like you’re in a car in the driver seat, and God’s there (in the back seat). But you're driving like you're calling the shots, you're making the decisions or (second option) you can like take a back-seat approach where

like God's in the driver's seat and you're in the back seat and God's just taking the wheel, calling the shots and you're just following, you're listening to where he's going.

Alexis spoke about how she struggled to give up control in the driver seat and God take the wheel. She said fully trusting in God was her biggest challenge with her faith. It wasn't as though she didn't trust God, but she still wanted a little piece of control. Right now, Alexis is applying for graduate school and explained that even though she is deciding where she wants to apply, she doesn't ignore the fact that God still plays a role in the process. She believes, in the end that, God's going to call me to wherever I need to be.

Derek also explained how he used prayer to determine what major he should pursue. He shared his story of how when he prayed about what major to go into, he was walking on campus and saw a sign for construction", and was like this is a sign from God. He believed, or had a certain feeling, that this was a sign from God. He also said he prays when he feels stressed out or just anxious. Prayer is what he believes brings him back to normal, so he is not looking around everywhere like what is he doing. Prayer allowed each participant to not only focus solely on problems and how they can solve it, but to trust in God with the problem. This, in turn, gave them a sense of peace, or calmness knowing that everything is going to work out. This pattern repeated in five of the participants with how prayer brought them a sense of peace in the midst of confusion.

Divine Nudge or Voice

Abigail said, "Praying can only get us so far. Eventually we have to step outside and see actually where God wants us to go." When the participants were asked to talk about how their faith plays a role in their day-to-day decisions, all six participants spoke about having a feeling or nudge of some sort when it came to making decisions. Aaron shared that his faith has an

impact on his decisions. He describes a nudge as that little voice that tells everyone what is right or wrong, but for him, he knows it is the voice of God. He describes the voice:

So, whenever there's a situation or problem that comes up through whatever I have read in the scripture or different things he (God) is definitely there. He (God) will give you a little reminders and stuff. I think the voices inside of your head listen to him too.

He went on to explain that the voice of God comes through reading God's word. He explained that is one of the reasons he tries to read the Bible every day because when he does, what he reads that day can apply to a problem he may face the same day. The way he distinguishes his voice from God's voice is by a feeling inside where he knows that he has made the right choice.

Elizabeth also mentioned how she believes that "God is good at giving us little shoves in the right direction." According to her he does this through the opportunities that he gives us and the people he puts into our lives who he uses to point us in the right direction. She expressed that her faith is the biggest part of shaping meaning in her life. She said,

Because without my faith, without my identity as Christian as Catholic, without my belief in God and in heaven and in heaven as an end goal, it seems harder to find meaning in life. Because our time on earth, compared to the grand scheme of things, if our end goal is heaven and we are going to be spending eternity in heaven, then our time on Earth is inconsequential in comparison.

Abigail spoke about how the voice is mainly inside of her as well, but it's her own voice. The way she distinguishes God's voice from her voice is, "as Catholics we have to believe that our conscious is like the Holy Spirit and it is guiding us." She says she has a good sense of when it's her own thought. For example, she said, "

Any time that someone would ask me to do something or we (friends) would be making plans I would be like is this for me, is this what God would want me to do. And that was sometimes point me in the right direction.

She also spoke about how she knows this voice when friends or family speak with her because they would “say something that sticks out” to her, she doesn’t know why it sticks out to her, it just does.

Similarly, Destiny also mentioned that the Holy Spirit which she defines as God who lives inside of Christians, guides her when she is unsure of the path to take. She explains the little nudge as a voice saying, “maybe you should talk to that person or maybe you should push the conversation more.” She said that is how God interacts with her life and when it comes to long term decisions that she has difficulty going always with God’s words, she goes to other people that are Christians for counsel.

To Alexis this gut feeling is described as a weird feeling she felt when she was asked by a high school teacher to join a program for students with disabilities, but she now knows that it was God talking to her at that time. It all makes sense now because when she looks back now, she sees how everything falls into the right place. She also said that when she begins to second guess something there will be a sign or something that will happen that will remind her this is what I am supposed to be doing. This she says gives her a glimmer of hope for when it is hard to keep going on with all her responsibility and commitments.

Finally, Dereck also spoke about how most of his decisions goes back to faith base. He spoke about this nudge after he prayed about what major to go into. The nudge that Dereck felt when he saw the construction sign is the happiness that he has after making the correct choice.

“Most of my decisions been based on if I should be happy. If you are strong firm believer in faith, you are going to be happy, you tend to be happy, I guess.”

Mentors in the Faith

Lastly, four of the six participants spoke about the role that friends, other people, or faith mentors have in making sense of life. Abigail believes that she can make sense of life through what friends and family say. Through that, she is able to sort out how life is supposed to be. She continued by saying that, “I know sometimes through things that my friends and family have said, I sort out how life is supposed to be from what they say.” She went on to say even though God speaks to us individually, God can sometimes speak through people we least expect him to. Abigail also mentioned that being a part of the church gives her a pretty good idea of what is right and wrong.

Abigail shared a story a friend who is in seminary right now to become a priest. She said that becoming friends with this individual really got me wondering what my purpose is. She shared how that friend “seems like he had it all figured out and what he was going to do.” When asked if she would say that him knowing what he wanted to do motivated her to seek her purpose, she replied “Yeah. Especially because he was so strong on his faith and obviously when you are priest faith is going to be a big part of your life.” She went on to say, “he was the one that put the prayer seed in my head. Like you never pray too much.” This she said made her pray more.

Destiny also mentioned how the teachings of other people helps her frame her life. She explained that apart from reading the word of God there are times that she doesn't know what path to take. In situations like these where it's hard for her to see where God is directing her, she seeks the counsel of other people that are Christian.

While speaking with Abigail she mentioned that she understands the meaning of life through people. She believes that an individual can learn something from everyone that they meet even if it is just a brief interaction. She gave an example of the small groups, Bible studies groups, and a book club that she is a part of that helps her shape meaning in her life. She stated:

But in general life, I would just say, people, what people think, what people say, but in a positive way, not in a, they don't like this, so I'm not gonna do it. Not in like a judge way, but just seeing how, I guess, seeing how others perceive the world, expectations, and reality.

She went on to also say that even though she uses prayer to listen to what God has to say, she also uses people of faith. She said she has so many friends that believe in God that she can talk to help her gain a sense of what life is.

When Alexis was speaking about her mentors in faith, she explains how her mentor helps her make meaning of life. She shared that before going on a mission trip her church would prepare them by getting into their mindset to, “let it (mission trip) affect you when you come back instead of feeling okay, that was great.” She explains this by saying when she went to Mexico where she saw so much poverty and sadness she allowed the experience to affect her instead of brushing it off. Through that, she learned that she is now in a partnership with them whether if she is physically there or not, she will be thinking about them and praying for them. She explained that one of her mentors Mr. Ronald, told her, “after a mission trip you are ruined for life, you cannot act like you didn’t experience those things, but you must allow those experiences to change you.” This is one of the ways her mentors help her make meaning of life.

Research Question #2: How do current college current Christian student leaders discover their purpose?

When the students were asked how they discovered their purpose, four themes emerged. Students shared how they discovered their purpose and all six participants pointed their understanding of their purpose back to their faith.

God-Given Talent and Skills

When the participants were asked what the phrase ‘purpose in life’ means to them, four participants saw purpose as a God-given talent or skill. Aaron defined purpose in life as, “things that you are good at and things that that you know how to do.” He believes that these things are already in an individual they just need to be discovered. He said, “I think those skills are God-given and he obviously had the purpose in mind for what you should do so he equipped you with those.”

He gave an illustration that we are all game pieces that all come together to form the puzzle of life. He went on to explain that each of us has different shapes and skill and that we all come together to form that big picture. He said, “we sometimes believe that we chose what gift is given to us, but it all comes from God, good and bad. Even though we are all different when we come together, we get the bigger picture.’ Elizabeth also shared the same illustration as Aaron, about us being pieces in a puzzle and how we are apart of the bigger picture. She said:

We are all pieces in a puzzle and our lives fit together in such a way that we serve a purpose, but we are a part of this bigger picture. We are part of this bigger picture that it's hard for us to see our place in it until we recognize that we only play such a small part.

She went on to say that the way that we discover our skills or talents points us back to God who is the big picture.

When speaking to Destiny about how she discovered her purpose she shared that since she was eight years old, she knew that she had a ‘God-given’ purpose and that she was created for a reason. For me, purpose is using my God-given talent, that He has given me to serve Him and glorify Him in the world.” Destiny believes she does this in her daily interactions with people, by treating them “like Jesus treated people when He was on the Earth.”

Alexis also briefly mentioned how she knows that the skills that she has were given to her by God and that she knows that she has been good at being his hands and feet on earth through serving others. So, because these skills or talent come from God it is easy for her to enjoy serving others.

Emerging Process

When speaking about discovering purpose, five of the six participants mentioned that their purpose is not something that they discovered in a moment, but it’s something that begins to emerge through the process of time as they draw closer to God. Aaron said that it is God’s purpose which led him here to this campus and to campus ministry. He said, “So I think that there is definitely a purpose that his (God) purpose led me here. This year more so than last year and it’s coming out and being seen.” He went on to say that it’s in this year more so than last year that God’s purpose of his life is becoming discovered.

Elizabeth summed up what all four of the participants said when it comes to one of the ways purpose was discovered,

Finding a purpose in life is a process. It's not just going to be like a lightbulb where we like, oh my gosh this is it. It's (purpose) like a journey just like our faith is. I think those

two in some sense are synonymous. Our faith and our purpose in life. But I think that our faith is the means through which God communicates our purpose in life. Like he's leading us down a path that he knows, in the end, will bring us closer to him. And you know we will be learning things along the way.

She explained that it's through our ups and downs in this journey of life that individuals discover their purpose. She said sometimes we focus so much on thinking purpose in life in the sense of people reaching a ripe age and the satisfaction they obtain at the end of their life. She said there are some people that "don't make it to a ripe old age, so it (purpose) is something that we are discovering each and every single day." She ended her thoughts by saying, "I think that we have this overarching purpose. But all of our decisions in it of itself has purpose and has meaning."

Abigail mentioned that as she prays, (which is her way to speak to God) she feels that she understands her purpose a little better. She said this happens little or a lot. At the end of the interview her advice to help others discover their purpose was, "I will say just keep your heart open something we should all strive to do every day."

Destiny was asked the same question and she said, I don't know if there was a moment where everything comes together at once where it all makes sense, but I think it is a gradual dying process of being in a relationship with God, where you learn more about yourself and about Him.

She explained her statement by saying that as you go through life an individual's purpose is revealed to them little by little. Just like Elizabeth she also said, that even though purpose is "revealed to you little by little as time goes on and as you deepen your relationship with God."

Destiny may have clarified what Elizabeth's overarching purpose was when she said, "As a Christian you have your main purpose spreading God's word and just living for Him."

Elizabeth mentioned this when she referred to, “allowing God to shine through them.” Destiny added by saying that we each individually have a purpose and that purpose is a thing that makes us a special asset in God’s kingdom.

Amber spoke about this emerging of purpose when she shared the story of how she got into her current major. She was asked by her PE teacher to join an adaptive PE program for students with disabilities called ACE. Once she joined, she discovered a new passion and “stopped playing softball, something I have been playing for many years.” Through her new-found passion, she decided to major in speech therapy when she came to Eastern. From there she was invited to join Best Buddies, where she became president. In the end, she said, “And then that (being president of Best Buddies) just led to like so many different avenues. Like it all just fell into place.”

Exploring Through Opportunities

Five of the six participants mentioned how opportunities were provided to them for them to discover their talent or skills. Others pointed to this by advising students who want to discover their purpose to try new things. Aaron gave an example of how his campus ministry helps individuals discover their talents. He said,

So, the way we do that campus ministry is through the conversations that we carry and the different events that we have. That is a very quick way of people to show their skills and talent. And then just through talking to them and interacting and watching. You can get a sense of what skills people have. So, if someone is the kind of person who is the life of the party. Those people will handle more of the fellowship events the fun events stuff that people come to and get involved at. If someone is good at carrying a

conversation or listening, they are kind of in the Outreach and can talk to people on a one-on-one personal level.

Aaron said, for him, he is more of a planner an analytical thinker so that's why he was placed at the point position to handle the task. When Aaron's campus ministry was building a float for a parade, he didn't know that this opportunity was what would cause the campus director and others to see the skills and talents he had to take on a leadership role.

When Elizabeth spoke about discovering her purpose, when it came to her leadership role she said, "Through going to church and their great vine of people there and the different programs there; and they're always looking for volunteers. So, I was more than willing to step up and fill those shoes whenever needed." Elizabeth also mentioned when she first joined her campus ministry, she saw that the church had a choir and seeing that they had that, and other things made her want to help. She immediately stepped into a position that was open. One opportunity that Elizabeth said helped her to discover her purpose was when she was talking to certain people and they were sharing some aspects of their hearts that are "very private" to them. She expressed that them being able to be vulnerable to her gave her a sense of feeling that was her purpose.

Abigail expressed how being apart of her campus ministry provides her support and opportunities to discover her purpose. She said, "Like you know the experience part I was talking about earlier, the church gives you a lot of different experiences that you can use to find your purpose." One of those experiences is the prayer group she joined her freshmen year; through that experience she joined the leadership team and became a small group leader of the same prayer group. She also encouraged people who want to discover their purpose to try new things and as they try new things, to listen to where God is pointing them.

Finally, when Destiny was asked how someone can discover their God-given talent she said,

You just need to see what you enjoy; do you enjoy talking to people, do you enjoy serving behind the scenes. Like what are things that you love in your life and that is something that God has given you to be able to serve and nothing through.

She went on to talk about how she even uses her love for math to service the church. She said, “As the treasurer, I count out the offering and do the math and do different percentages because we give a percentage of our offering to other Ministries.” So that is how God has allowed her to use them to serve him in his kingdom. Math is a passion that God has given her, and she is glad that she can use this talent to serve in God’s kingdom.

Alexis’s first sense of her purpose was discovered when she was invited by her PE teacher to apply for an adaptive PE program for students with disabilities called ACE. At first, she wasn’t interested in joining and she had no experience with special education. After accepting the opportunity to join she discover her sense of purpose. Amber said:

That's what I realized at that time, I was playing softball and volleyball, year-round. I thought I was passionate about it, but, once I got involved in the ACE’s program, that's when I realized I was so much more passionate about that and lost the passion for softball. So, I stopped playing sports and that's when I got involved with Best Buddies. Then through that, that is how I decided I wanted to do speech therapy (her current major) too, like from the people I worked with.

Alexis now realized that it is through that opportunity that brought her to campus and got her involved in other programs. She said, “that one moment has changed everything.”

Noticed by Others

All six participants mentioned that as they were serving others and their campus ministry, they were noticed by others in leadership. Some of them shared that being noticed by other helped them discover their purpose in their major. Aaron started off by saying, “If someone told me I had the characteristics (to be a leader) that I had, I probably wouldn't believe them.” This is a comment that most of the participants made about being in the leadership position they were currently in. They weren't seeking to be leaders, they were serving and asked to be leaders.

Aaron said he was asked by his campus leadership to be a leader after his first semester in the ministry. He believed that they felt that it was the best year for him to be the point person in the ministry because he was showing up and participating and was willing to help. Aaron summed up his thoughts by saying,

They would say that I am hardworking which I feel that I am. But I believe that everyone is hardworking when they are motivated to do something that they enjoy doing. They will always be happy and be willing to do it. So, for me it is not a big deal to be over there helping.

When Elizabeth was asked how she obtained her current college leadership position she also mentioned that she was asked to join the leadership team. She said:

Through the eyes of my campus ministry I begin to shine as someone that can fill a leadership position. So, at the end of my freshman year that position (leadership position) was extended to me and I asked me to join their team and I was like yea.

She said, “sometimes we feel like we know ourselves well, but sometimes we need someone to say something to us.” She was noticed by a leader in her ministry as she served her skills or talents to the ministry and to others. Her thoughts are concluded in this statement,

And sometimes we don't recognize our own skills and talent until someone else brings it to our attention. It could be something as little as someone saying or recognizing in someone else that you have a great talent with working with kids like I admire the way you do that.

Abigail, who was highly involved in her campus prayer group, was also noticed by her group leader. She said, "I was willing to answer. I answered a lot, and so my small group leader recommended me to join the leadership team and be a small group leader." She said when she was asked to join, she felt doubtful, and didn't think that she was going to be good at it. Now being in it she said she feels like this is where she is supposed to be, and this is what she is supposed to be doing.

Destiny shared the same experience as the other three participants. She recalls being asked to apply to be a part of the leadership team last year. She mentioned that emails were sent to particular students that the leadership would like them to apply. She said, "They also sent out emails to particular students that they would like to apply, and I got an email from my campus minister who sent me an email about a possible application." When it came to her major, Destiny shared how it was her math teacher who noticed her. She said, "God provided an amazing Math teacher who was like, 'Hey you are good with this, this is something you can pursue with your life'."

Alexis was asked by her high school PE teacher to join the PE program that was meant for students with disabilities. For this program, students either applied or were asked to apply to be leaders in it. From there Alexis became very involved in students with disabilities. She was so involved that she decided to major in speech therapy which is her current major.

Finally, Dereck, when asked how he obtained his current leadership position, pointed to back to how he was randomly asked by a campus leader to lead a spring break trip which he willingly agreed to. He was then later asked by this same leader to step up and set up for football games and other events the campus ministry needed. Someone else noticing their gift, talent, or purpose is something that all six participants shared.

Research Question #3: How does making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other?

Three themes were presented from this research questions. Students discussed their willingness to serve, servant leadership, and the “why” being Christ, or their faith.

Willingness to Serve

All six participants mentioned or pointed to the fact that having a sense of meaning and discovering their purpose gave them a willingness to serve others through their campus ministry. For example, Aaron shared how he got involved with his campus ministry and it all begins with being willing to help build a float they needed for the parade. He said:

I was one of two guys last year that was a regular in the group. A lot of the construction aspect of building the float I was involved in. I was putting in time outside of regular meetings time to work with the director. And I was staying late at unwind Wednesday. And then from there, it was kind of the thinking of the place that I could definitely see myself it again. And then I just continue to be involved and I never can think of a time where I said I wasn't willing to help out.

Aaron said when the leaders saw his passion and drive, they asked him to join the leadership. I asked Aaron where his “passion and drive” came from and he said:

They would say that I am hardworking which I feel that I am. But I believe that everyone is hardworking when they are motivated to do something that they enjoy doing. They will always be happy and be willing to do it. So, for me, it is not a big deal to be over there helping.

Aaron and his campus ministry try to get a sense of student's skills or talents and through that place them into different leadership roles. Aaron believes that by, "helping people to find their drive and something that they want to do and when they're happy doing it then they'll continue."

When Elizabeth first joined her campus ministry, she also spoke about how she was so willing to step up. She said, "So, I was more than willing to step up and fill those shoes whenever needed."

She mentioned how she obtained her current leadership position was by, just willing to jump in. She said that during her first or second time at Newman she was looking for ways to be involved. She joined the choir and when her campus ministry offered a retreat, she immediately decided to join and through that learned about all the other different service opportunities.

When the second retreat came along, Elizabeth said, "I was like I can staff this one and I will be able to help other people. In a sense it was my own personal personality of just being super willing to try those things and be open and bubbly and positive and filling that role, I guess." When I asked Elizabeth why she was so willing to help she said,

Ministry in general, when it's done through Christian love, it is a lot more meaningful and there's true intention there. And it's not like you're just volunteering to get service hours. Like there is love involved and recognize the people that you serve as brother and sister in Christ. And being aware that you were put on this Earth for a reason and you were put

here to serve and you're not here to keep all of your talents for yourself. And being able to share those (talents) with others why wouldn't you?

When Abigail spoke about why she got involved she also mentioned how she was willing to serve. Her service came through her being willing to answer questions in the small prayer group she was a part of. She said, "I was in a small group my freshmen year. I was more of the outgoing person in my small group. I was willing to answer. I answered a lot."

Destiny also spoke about how when she joins her campus ministry, she joined a life group in her first semester, and she loved it. When it came to her serving, Destiny spoke mainly about how everything that she does is to serve and bring glory to God. Destiny said, "So in my life right now, a lot of my service to God is through my campus ministry." She believes that by serving her skills or talent to others she is serving God.

When Alexis is heavily involved in her campus ministry, where she is consistently serving others. I asked her, why is she so involved and feels like she has to personally take it to another level in serving others, she said:

A lot of people have asked me the same question, why are you so personally involved in like everything like that? I describe it as, I know like how much I am loved (by God) and how much I've been blessed. Then I see kids that are so much; I've been so much more fortunate than they are now. So, I just feel connected to that (them being unfortunate), and I just feel like a personal connection.

She continued by saying that because she feels such a connection, she, can't just do things serving only 50%, "if I'm going to be there and be passionate about something, I want to do it all the way and I want to do it right." She said that her passion comes from her knowing she is loved, so she wants to share love and kindness.

Finally, Dereck shared that when he saw that his campus ministry was a fun place to be, he decided to get involved. Unlike the other participants he didn't immediately get involved, it took him two years to get involved. By his junior year, he was a leader on campus and a vice president of his organization. He said during this time he was stepping up into leadership positions. When I asked him how he obtained his leadership position he said, "For me, it all starts service base, my willingness to (serve), when I step up to be a leader. All the participants shared a willingness and or passion to serve their campus ministry and others as they were able to make meaning and begin to discover their own purpose.

Servant Leadership

When the participants were asked, how does understating of the meaning of life shape their leadership style? They all mentioned how understanding the meaning of life motivates them as leaders to serve others by being Christ-like or by helping others to discover their purpose. Aaron speaks about to him the way he makes sense of life is by just finding happiness. As a leader, he said,

"For me as I said earlier one of the main meanings of life is happiness. So, when we are trying to figure out what we should do or events for people or trying to find new leaders. It is all what makes people happy."

By seeking out what makes those that he is serving happy or listening to their recommendation when it comes to programing, Aaron believes that the campus ministry gets happy people. By making these people who come to their ministry happy it becomes "a reciprocal cycle where we (leaders) giving them(people in their ministry) what they want and makes them happy and they're coming again. And from that we get our purpose and then we can make everyone happy."

When Elizabeth was asked how her understating of the meaning of life shaped her leadership style, she also pointed back to serving others. She said that on the one hand, many people see leaders as being the head and being in charge. A seeing service as lowering themselves. But for her, she said, “I think the two really come together when you think about it through faith. Like being a faithful individual and being a Christian leader also entails serving others.”

Elizabeth summed up what all six participants said when it comes to what it meant to be a servant leader when she said, “I would say a reason for being here. Our purpose here on earth is to be God’s eyes, ears, hands and feet and, in that way, we serve God by serving others.” She went on to say that,

Sometimes we think of leadership as just telling people what to do instead of just acting alongside them. So, I guess that understanding that we should never be able to ask people to do something that we're not willing to do ourselves. It's an important aspect of leadership. Being willing to lower ourselves, which ties into faith being Christ-like, Jesus lead by example by lowering himself and serving others and that was his way of saving us and presenting God's love to the world. It is the example he left us with. So that is the example we should carry forward.

Abigail also said that she decided to become a leader because of all the impact she will be able to make. She said,

“I would say that is the reason I became a leader. Not because I wanted to for myself, but I thought that it would make my campus ministry better. I thought it will help bring others to Christ. And help others become disciple-makers.”

I then asked her, what would she say the purpose of us discovering our purpose is? She responded by saying, “We discover our purpose to help others to discover their purpose or to do the work of God.”

Destiny also mentioned how understating the meaning of life helps her to love and lead other people as God did. She said that he knows that her purpose is to make other disciples. When asked what she meant by making disciples, she said, “If there's a Christian younger than you, like a mentor relationship. Encouraging them in their faith and praying for them and being a person in their life they can go to when they need support and good advice.”

Like Elizabeth, Alexis’s mentioned that she is good at being God’s hands and feet. Here She stated:

I know the skills that God has given me, and I know that I'm good at being his hands and feet and like serving others. So, it's easy to do for me, because I like it (serving), and I feel like I'm called to do it and I enjoy it and I get so much out of it. Um, so I feel like that has led me to the leadership positions, um, and just really any of my involvements.

Here, Alexis was speaking about the reason why she is so involved in so much because she knows God has given her skills and because of that she likes to serve others. Alexis went on to speak how understanding the meaning of life motivates her as a leader to “lead by passion.” She said,

“I really try to focus on like the purpose and the why behind like why we do what we do kind of thing. I know that when you know, the why behind something, it's so much more meaningful like that that shapes my leadership style.

Derek had a different reason on why he decided to become a leader, he said, “I look at it like I want to be there to help someone as they (other leaders) help me.” He gave an example of

another way that he served others was when his ministry was asking for monetary donations, he decided to help with a monthly donation because,

“The reason why I am being the leader now is that someone was a leader to me. I just want to give back. Because if someone sees me stepping up as a senior, some freshmen are more likely to going to step up.”

By discovering their purpose and making meaning of life it impacted their leadership style by motivating them to be servant leaders in order for them to make more disciples or leaders.

The “Why” Being Christ or Their Religion

All six participants mentioned or pointed to the fact that making meaning, discovering purpose and then accepting their leadership position all point them back to God or their faith. When Aaron was deciding whether to be a leader or not, he said, “I just kind of accepted the position (leadership) rather quickly. I didn't know what I was getting into, but I felt with God, there wasn't going to be, where I shouldn't have taken a leadership position.” He went on to share that he knew God had his back and that he believes that God wouldn't have presented him with this opportunity if he (God) wasn't going to take care of him. Since he had that assurance, he decided to, “jump right in and dove head-first into the leadership team.”

Elizabeth shared this same sense of direction, but she became a leader because of the end goal. Her meaning of life, discovering her purpose and her leadership position all lead her to her belief in God. She said, “Because without my faith, without my identity as Christian as Catholic, without my belief in God, and in heaven, and in heaven as an end goal, it seems harder to find meaning in life.” She went on to say, “Our purpose here on Earth is to be God's eyes, ears, hands and feet.” By being God's hands and feet she said you are able to “recognize the people that you serve as brothers and sister in Christ.”

Abigail also mentioned that the reason why she became a leader was not for herself but to bring others to Christ. Abigail summed it up what it comes to, how does making meaning, discovering purpose, and leadership interact with each other when she said, “We discover our purpose to help others to discover their purpose or to do the work of God.” Abigail went on to explain how religion helps her, “They can get kind of messy if you don't keep religion as the main focus. I know, at least for me, when I am stronger in my faith, my life seems to calm down a little.”

Just like Aaron, Destiny mentioned that the reason why she accepted being a leader was that she felt like it was something God has called her to do. She said:

God has called me to be here (leadership position) and has shown that through my campus minister, like sent me that email like, ‘Hey we are interested in you applying, and we love it if you would.’ Just seeing purpose in those things in my specific life and just wanting to be a leader and serve Him in that way here.

By understanding that the invitation to be a leader was from God, it helped Destiny to make the decision to accept the leadership position. By her seeing purpose in being invited to be a leader from God, it also made her willing to serve God by serving others.

Alexis also spoke about how she never does anything that she is not passionate about. Here is what she said, “I don't do anything that I'm not passionate about. I feel like, what I'm passionate about comes from like my faith.” Similar to Abigail she also mentioned how she understands her purpose through prayer as well. She said, “But like there are so many kinds of prayer too. Like prayers, reflection, or another example could just be like sitting in silence. Another one could be listening to Christian music or reading a Bible.”

Finally, Dereck, summed up how his faith impacts him as a leader, he said, “He guided me.” and who is the ‘he’ he is talking about, he replied, “God. He guided me to where I should be in life. As a leader, it is not easy, but I pray about it and with the prayer comes good thing.” This statement summed up what all six participants said about how making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other. “He (God) guides me.”

Chapter V

This research used qualitative methodology to explore the life of individuals to discover how Christian college student leaders discover their purpose in life. Six participants who identified as Christian and held leadership positions were interviewed. The interview sought to answer the following research questions: 1) How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life? 2) How do current college Christian student leaders discover their purpose? 3) How does making meaning, discovering your purpose, and leadership interact with each other? This chapter discusses the findings as related to the literature review, recommendations for student affairs professionals, and recommendation for further research.

Discussion of Findings

In Chapter IV, three research questions were presented, and many themes emerged for each question. The first question (How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life?) presented four themes: the bible or spiritual book, building faith through prayer, divine nudge or voice, and mentors in the faith. In the second research question (How do current college student leaders discover their purpose) four themes emerged: God-given talents and skills, emerging process, exploring through opportunities, and the call to servant leadership. Finally, research question three (How does making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other), emerged three themes: willingness to serve, servant leadership, and the ‘why’ being Christ or their religion.

Research Question 1: How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life?

In terms of the first research question, which focused on a search for purpose, Victor Frankl (1992) believed that the primary force of every person’s life on earth is the search for

meaning. In a search for this meaning, Galk (2015) said, “Many theorists believe that one of the fundamental functions of religion is to help individuals fulfill their yearning for meaning and purpose in life (p.2).” Research also suggested that individuals who are under an extremely high level of stress have numerous reasons for turning towards religion in order to cope (Shin, 2014).

Whereas Galk (2015) and Shin (2014) focused on religion being extrinsic, which focused on rules or laws that are followed, the participants saw religion more as a spiritual intrinsic experience. Intrinsic spirituality, according to Bergin (1991), means using religion regardless of any social or external pressures. Participants showed less interest in rule following and more interest in a lived spiritual experience. These lived experiences were evident by the four themes: the bible or spiritual book, building faith through prayer, divine nudge or voice, and mentors in the faith.

The first way of making meaning, according to the participants, was using the bible or spiritual books. This seemed to be evident when Abigail mentioned that the bible was a tool she used to make “sense of this messy world.” She also said life seems to calm down when she is strong in her faith. Aaron also mentioned the Bible as the source you go to, “if you have a question there is always an answer that you can get from there”, while Destiny believed the Bible to be the “truth that she bases life off. All the participants seemed to point to the fact that when life gets tough or life doesn’t make sense, one of the ways they make sense of it is by going to the Bible, which gives them direction.

The second way that college Christian student leaders make meaning, as conveyed by the participants, was through prayer. Prayer was not something that came up during the review of the literature. However, it was a dominant theme among of the participants. Frankl (1963) said that individuals who have a sense of purpose can endure hardships because it makes them have

meaning. Elizabeth, for example, expressed strongly that when she feels down, when it's been a rough week, or when she needs time away from the world with all its commodities and that prayer helps her center and she refocuses on God.

For Alexis, prayer was a way to "give up control and let God be in the driver seat." It appears that prayer was a tool used by these participants to escape or take a step out of the world in order to make sense of it. For those participants who were Catholic, it was interesting to notice that they didn't mention a Rosary prayer which would be a more formalized prayer structure. These participants, however, spoke about prayer in a more intrinsic manner. Abigail, a catholic, spoke about prayer as more of meditating or listening, while Alexis talked about prayer as reflecting or sitting in silence. It appears that reading the Bible and praying brings these participants a sense of peace or calmness about life.

The third way that college Christian student leaders make meaning, voiced by the participants, was through a divine nudge or voice. This divine nudge or voice, according to the participants, was from God. This divine nudge or voice was not something that came up in the review of the literature. Although the literature review mentioned that having a sense of purpose gives an individual a sense of direction, it didn't mention that this sense of direction comes through a spiritual channel. However, the participants in this research said their sense of direction comes from a divine nudge or voice, which comes from God.

McKight & Kashdan (2009) said that purpose acts as a compass that offers direction, not only directing individuals toward life goals, but also their daily goals. Ryff (1989) also believed that having this sense of direction comes intentionally when it comes to making choices that will help individuals achieve the feeling of what life means to them. According to Abigail, after praying and discovering meaning, she believes individuals must "step then outside (prayer)

and see where God wants them to go.” Likewise, for Aaron the way he knows he is being intentional about the direction he is taking, is from the feeling that comes from within which lets him know he has made the right choice. This feeling or nudge, he says, comes from God and reading the Bible, which he uses to make sense of life and what choice or direction to take. Destiny says for her this little nudge comes from the Holy Spirit that is God that guides her on the path she should take. It appears that this nudge comes during prayer and through reading the Bible, which is used by some of these participants to make meaning of life.

Finally, the fourth way that college Christian student leaders make meaning, according to the participants, was through mentors in faith. A few of the participants mentioned how they make sense of life through friends, family, and mentors in the faith. Mentors in the faith didn’t come up in the review of the literature as one of the ways people make meaning in life. When Destiny can’t make sense of life through the Bible, through prayer, or through that divine nudge or voice, she seeks counsel from other people in her faith.

Likewise, Alexis stated, her mentor helped her make meaning of a mission trip her church was going to be a part of. So, whether it’s through the Bible, prayer, a divine nudge or through a mentor, participants suggested these intrinsic spiritual methods helped them discover meaning in life.

Research Question 2: How do current college Christian student leaders discover their purpose?

In terms of the second research question, there is a great impression among the participants that purpose is God-given, it's an emerging process, it's discovered through opportunities, and it’s a call to servant leadership. During the interview, when it came to the

topic of individual purpose, the terms purpose and discovering skills and talents were used interchangeably.

Through the course of this research, it became clear that faith helped these participants to make meaning of the world around them, as well as in their own personal lives. Cranney (2013) also discovered that people who identified as having strong religious beliefs have a much firmer sense of purpose than their counterparts. Frankl believed that regardless of doubt, despair, and a sense of emptiness, life has meaning, and it isn't something that is invested but discovered (Das, 1998). Damon et.al (2003) also said that purpose is lacking intentional steps towards making progress to a goal.

The Christian student leaders discovered their purpose is through understanding that it is God-given. This is evident when Aaron talked about how he believes that purpose comes through God and that through him he finds the right path he needs to take in his life. Another example is Elizabeth, who said that it's through her faith that she communicates to God, as well as how God communicates her purpose.

Elizabeth and Aaron described purpose as a puzzle and how we are all pieces, and they saw God as the one that brings all things together. Knowing that God is in control of the pieces in this puzzle, may contribute to these participants' firm sense of their purpose. Aaron said because he knows God is in control and knows the purpose and plan, and that is why he accepts the offer to be on the leadership team so quickly. Even though life seems unpredictable, their spirituality gave these participants a sense of peace, knowing that everyone has a purpose. Abigail and Destiny both spoke about being taught in church or by someone of faith that everyone has a purpose. So, when life gets tough or doesn't make sense, it is clear why some participants were able to 'give it to God and go to bed.' For these participants, by

understanding that “God sees the bigger picture, it gives them a firmer sense of their own purpose.

The second way college Christian student leaders discovered their purpose is by understanding it as an emerging process. Although the literature review spoke about motivation, it didn’t address how individuals from a spiritual background are motivated. The notion of the discovery of purpose as an emerging process was noticed by the participants as they mentioned that they were on a journey to discover their purpose in life.

Elizabeth summed it up when she said, “finding a purpose in life is a process.” She and other participants believed that purpose is something that they discovered as they developed their relationship with God. As their relationship with God or their faith grows stronger, so also does their sense of purpose. Through the eyes of the participants, it seemed as though purpose is something that emerges as the participants engaged in purposeful action guided by spirituality. It’s interesting to note that none of the participants could pinpoint when they first had a sense of purpose but spoke about seeing purpose emerge in a lot of little moments. For Elizabeth, one of those moments was people sharing intimate parts of their life, for Aaron it was building the float for his campus ministry, and for Alexis it was when she was asked by her teacher to join ACEs.

According to Destiny, purpose is a “gradual process of dying in a relationship with God.” Destiny believed that “as a Christian your main purpose is spreading God’s word and living for Him.” The end goal for each participant was different. For Elizabeth it was heaven and for Destiny it was making other disciples. As they shared their experiences, it seemed as though they could never remember the exact moment when they discovered they had a sense of purpose. It is something they discovered as they experienced life and made meaning of those experiences through their faith.

The third way college Christian student leaders discover their purpose is through exploring different service opportunities. Exploring purpose through opportunities was not something that came up during the review of the literature. Although this wasn't explored in the literature review because it wasn't something that was brought up by other researchers, it was however a dominant theme among five of the six participants. Aaron spoke about how his campus ministry creates events in order to help students discover their skills or talents. Alexis discovered her purpose was to work with students with disabilities. These events opened the door for other opportunities even as participants sought to obtain their degrees. It seems that as students try new opportunities to discover their talent or purpose, they can make meaning of those experiences and determine if it is the right fit for them. By being able to make meaning of those opportunities, they begin the process of seeing their purpose slowly emerging. In these opportunities. Elizabeth discovered a passion to serve, Destiny discovered a desire to lead, and Abigail discovered a passion to serve children with disabilities. It also seems that these participants' willingness to immerse themselves into different opportunities birthed a passion or motivation within them to continue serving others by being "Christ like (Elizabeth)."

Sometimes discovering their purpose, skills, or talents can be challenging. All six participants mentioned how they discovered their purpose in their current leadership position because a mentor or someone else noticed them. The call to servant leadership was the fourth way that these college student leaders discovered their purpose. Although being noticed by others was not a theme that arose in the literature, it was a clear theme among all participants. Elizabeth talked about how as she was serving her campus ministry and the leaders thought she shined as someone that could fill a leadership position.

Abigail also spoke about how she was recommended by her small group leader to join the leadership team. It seemed that as the participants were taking advantage of service opportunities, other mentors or friends noticed a talent or skill the participants obtained that they didn't notice themselves. While they were serving, they discovered a desire to serve. As they served to others, they were noticed as individuals who had leadership qualities. This finding is consistent with Sigmund Freud, who believed that everyone has leadership qualities, but it takes time for these qualities to emerge (Spector, 2016).

Research Question 3: How does making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other?

When looking at the relationship between meaning-making, purpose, and leadership, a theme that emerged was the participants having a willingness to serve. One of the five qualities of spirituality and leadership that McCormick (1994) presented was selfless service. McCormick (1994) discussed that selfless service to Hindus and Christian means making work a form of service to others. When it comes to the topic of servant leadership, Robert Greenleaf defined it as being a servant first (Spears, 2004). Morris (2005) also said that a leader's power or ability to lead is in their ability to place themselves below those they lead.

All six participants mentioned how willing they were to serve their campus ministry. Elizabeth, like many of the participants, mentioned how she saw a need for volunteers or a vacancy in her campus ministry and was willing to jump right in. They each acted out of selfless service by stepping in or stepping up into these leadership roles. Aaron put in time outside of regular meeting time to work on the float, Abigail was willing to share her thoughts in the prayer group, and Destiny was willing to be a mentor.

The second way that making meaning and discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other, according to the participants, is that it made the participants into servant leaders. This combination of serving and leadership is confirmed in the data as Elizabeth spoke about how she views leadership and service as two things that go hand in hand. Similarly, Aaron explained servant leadership as his willingness to help his church with the parade float by putting in extra time to get the job completed. Many of them couldn't believe they were being asked to be leaders since they felt they didn't have the qualities of leadership. However, it was their willingness to serve that made them more likely to fit these leadership positions their campus ministry was looking for.

The humility of the participants was apparent as they spoke about being undeserving of the leadership position they were in. Morris (2005) concluded that "leaders with a high level of humility are more likely to be servant leaders" (p. 339). Elizabeth spoke about how being a leader meant being willing to lower oneself, which points back to spirituality in the sense of being Christ-like.

Conger (2000) said that a servant-leader is one that seeks to empower and develop the people they are leading by enabling them to make decisions. Before enabling them to make decisions, Dierendonck (2011) said that the followers must be able to discern that servant leaders are authentic. Avoli & Gardner (2005) defined authenticity as an individual being true to themselves. Through the interview, a few of the participants spoke about how they constantly reflected on their personal life. Dereck, Destiny, and Elizabeth mentioned at great length how they self-reflect on their lives to ensure they are being 'Christ-like' as students and as leaders. Abigail spoke to a great extent of how her purpose as a leader is to help others become "disciple-

makers. Dereck also mentioned that the reason he became a leader was because he wanted to “help someone as someone else helped him.”

Finally, the third way that making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other was through discovering the ‘why,’ which is being Christ, or their spirituality was a theme that arose as the participants shared their experience. Kirsi and Brandy (2010) said that once purpose or meaning in life is discovered individuals begin to embody it over time. We see this embodiment as some of the participants mentioned that being a leader to them meant being Christ-like. Destiny, for example, spoke about how knowing God’s character allows her to love and lead people as God did. For Elizabeth it was letting God shine through her by recognizing her role in this puzzle of life.

Fernando and Jackson (Phipps, 2012) discovered that “spiritually motivated leaders are challenged to the extent that they need to reach deeper and draw from their spirituality to find the ‘right way’ of managing a situation.” We see Dereck going back to his ‘why’ when he advises other leaders to pray about all the decisions they make. Having this sense of being Christ-like or serving others like brothers and sisters in Christ, seems to motivate the participants to be authentic servant leaders.

Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (2004) stated that faith gives understanding of what the meaning of life is. Fowler presented six stages faith development where individuals can move up stages as they grow in their faith. As individuals go from one stage to another, the things they value begin to become more visible as individuals begin to embody their own personal beliefs (Noah,2017). These six stages include stage zero - primal stage, stage one - intuitive stage, stage two - mythic stage, stage three - synthetic stage, stage four - individuate stage, stage five - cognitive stage, and stage six - universalizing stage (Noah, 2017).

The participants in my study appeared to be between stage four and stage six. In stage four, individuals take ownership of their faith and begin to allow it to influence their life and the life of those around them. We see Destiny, Abigail and Aaron in stage four as they both share how they either use their faith to relate to a current issue in their life, or to make certain decisions. This is evident when Aaron shared how he had to turn to the scripture verse “such as be strong and courageous,” in order to make sense of his director losing his job last semester. During this moment, according to Fowler, he would be in stage five. In this stage individuals struggle to justify life experiences with their faith doctrine, but through the process of time and making meaning of the situation, he moved to stage six. In stage six, individuals are able to see how all things are connected, like in a puzzle, and treat everyone with kindness. We noticed this as Aaron and his campus ministry regained strength to pull in a lot of students into their ministry this semester.

Although Fowler says individuals don't reach this stage until the end of their life, the participants from this study seem to move in and out of stage six. When presented with a situation or decision, they turn to their faith (stage four), as all the participants did when they were asked to be in the position of leadership. They remain in stage five, a place of justifying life experience with their faith, as they were deciding whether to apply or accept the leadership position. This was evident when Destiny shared how she seeks counsel from others in order to answer questions she couldn't find in the scriptures. Aaron was also in stage five when asked to be a leader. We see Aaron moving to stage six when he used his tools through his faith to accept the position knowing that ‘God has his back.’ He started living out his purpose, and making other people happy. Each participant made meaning through their faith, giving them a sense of purpose. Once their purpose is discovered, they serve their purpose through campus ministry.

Through serving their purpose, they become servant leaders and treat others as Christ would treat them, which points them back to their foundation of meaning-making, their faith.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals

Spiritual development is a component of student development that is sometimes overlooked, but students' spiritual development plays a critical role in their life and should be acknowledge. Even though not every student may be seeking to develop their faith, it should be presented to students along with other developmental options as a tool to help make sense of life. Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are presented:

1. *Educate Students on Spirituality:* As student affairs professionals, we have a duty to present students with options of ways to discover purpose and make sense of life. The topic of spirituality should be presented as an option in discussions. Whether or not they decide to explore spirituality or faith any further will be a decision that they are allowed to make. However, not presenting them with the benefits of a way to make sense of the world around them and their own personal life, is shortsighted. In an era where many college students are seeking meaning in life and their purpose in it, we owe it to them to show them the possibilities.
2. *Knowing Resources on Campus:* Student Affairs professionals should be made more aware of the role of campus ministry in their institutions. Whether or not the student affairs professional defines themselves as a spiritual person, they should receive training on how to hold a conversation about spirituality. Student affairs professionals should become familiar with the resources on campus available to better assist students who express interest in exploring spirituality.
3. *Opportunities for Discovery:* Based on the research finding, it was discovered that one way that college student Christian leaders discovered their purpose was through participating in a service opportunity. By exploring and participating in the different service opportunities, they discovered what they had a passion for. Campus ministries, as well as the Office of Student Life on college

campuses, should be motivated by this finding to continue to create new service opportunities for students to discover their passion.

Recommendation for Future Research

If this study was to be conducted again, one recommendation would be to conduct a quantitative research study to examine a larger pool of Christian leaders. Without further quantitative research, it will not be possible to determine whether or not a majority of Christian student leaders use their faith to make meaning, make decisions, and to discover a purpose in life. This will also give us a better understanding of other ways college Christian leaders discover their purpose in life, that may not have been discovered in this research.

A second recommendation is to conduct the same research, but with college student leaders who do not practice any faith. These students may have been brought up in some kind of religion, but they currently do not practice their faith. Along with this idea, I recommend not performing this research in a predominantly white institution, in order to get a more diverse pool of participants. This would make the data more representative.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to understand how college Christian student leaders discover purpose. This study concluded that faith or spirituality plays an important role in how participants discovered their purpose. Although this research presents evidence that faith plays a role in individual discovery of purpose, it should be noted that little the research has been done in this area. By examining these participants' lived experiences through the lens of their Christian faith, certain themes were found. Meaning is found through the bible or spiritual book, building faith through prayer, divine nudge or voice, and mentors in the faith. Purpose is found through understanding purpose is a God-given talents and skills, purpose is an emerging process, by exploring through opportunities, and call to servant leadership. Making meaning, discovering purpose and leadership interact with each other by making individuals willing to serve, servant leadership and the "why" being Christ or their religion.

Purpose cannot be discovered until individuals are able to make meaning of their life. As some of the participants, said we are all pieces in a puzzle trying to discover what role we play in this world. Since faith development does play a role in helping students make meaning in life, student affairs professional should not find it difficult to bring up faith as a resource to help students make meaning of crisis that they go through. As this study has indicated, once meaning is made, even when life is “messy”, one can always find a “why” to keep moving forward. As Nietzsche (1965) said, “He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how” (p. 4).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research

CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN RESEARCH

How Do Christian College Leaders Discover Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Emmanuel Ayiku and Dr. Richard Roberts from the College of Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. Your participant in this study is entirely voluntary. You have been chosen to be apart of this study because you are a Christian college student leader who is heavily involved in your campus ministry.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the interplay of meaning-making, purpose and leadership among college student Christian leaders.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in a one-hour interview about your involvement in your campus ministry. You will be asked to reflect on your experience in life and how you came to discover your purpose. You will be asked about your leadership role and how it may or may not correlates with your purpose.
2. The video will be video-taped for research purposes. You will be given a new name of your choosing instead of your actual name to protect your identity.

POTENTIAL RISK AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no potential risk or discomfort associated with this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SBUJECTS AND/ OR TO SOCIETY

There is no direct benefit for participants from this study other than the chance for them to share their story with others. They will also be contributing to a research about purpose that has not been performed for almost five years now. This new-found knowledge will help institution understand students' developments and how student professionals can help them in their development.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of:

- All data will be stored on a password protected laptop which no one has access to, except the researcher.

- After the recorded tape has been transcribed for data purpose, once three years have passed the data will be deleted.
- All notes taken will be password protected on Microsoft Word.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Emmanuel Ayiku

Student Success Center GA

eyayiku@eiu.edu

217-581-6696

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Telephone: (217) 581 -8576

E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. How do current college Christian student leaders make meaning in life?
 - a. How do you make sense of life?
 - b. What is your frame of reference for understanding the meaning of life?
 - c. Talk about your faith orientation and its role in making meaning of life.
2. How do current college Christian student leaders discover their purpose?
 - a. What does the phrase “purpose in life” mean to you?
 - b. When did you first sense you had a purpose in life?
 - c. How does your faith orientation help you in determining purpose?
3. How does making meaning, discovering your purpose and leadership interact with each other?
 - a. How did you obtain your current leadership position?
 - b. What impact did your faith orientation have on choosing to become a leader?
 - c. How does your understanding of meaning shape your leadership style?
 - d. How does your understanding of purpose shape your leadership style?