

Christian School Leaders and Spirituality: A Phenomenological Study

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This phenomenological study examined the spiritual experiences of Christian school leaders who are the spiritual leaders of their schools. A purposeful, nominated sample of 12 Christian school leaders was selected. In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted, audio taped, and then transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was based on Rudestam and Newton's (2001) method of researcher description. Findings indicated participants believe that spiritual leadership is an active, personal process for each individual. They see the importance of relationships with others; exhibit personal growth; provide for needs and opportunities; promote personal and spiritual growth; have a personal relationship with God; exhibit humility; are real and accessible; and serve as mentor, encourager, and supporter of all the members of the community.

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Context: Theoretical Framework

Greenleaf (1977) first introduced the servant leadership theory in 1970 in an essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf's idea came about as a result of Herman Hesse's (1956) story *Journey to the East*. In the story, the servant Leo serves and assists the members of the journey. It is through Leo's dedication to the task and his attitude of service that the party thrives. When Leo leaves the journey, the party becomes disenchanted, disconnected, and in disarray, and as a result, the servant not the leader, is the one who really leads and directs. Because of Leo's internal strength, his desire for excellence and true understanding of what a servant is, he leads as well as serves. The key then to Leo's leadership success was that first he was a servant (Greenleaf, 1991). Thus, Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory's first priority is serving others (Spears, 1998).

Greenleaf's servant leadership theory was developed after years of management research in major organizations (Polleys, 2000; Spears, 1998). Greenleaf's objective for servant leadership was to encourage thinking and acting to produce a place where people cared for each other (Spears, 1998). Wilkes (1998) defined a servant leader as "one that serves the mission and leads by serving those on the mission" (p. 18). Blanchard and Hodges (2003) describe servant leadership as a vision for those in service that teaches others to serve while awakening this same vision in other members in the organization. Greenleaf's (1977) theory includes spirituality as a necessary part in servant leadership and bases his model of leadership on Jesus Christ. Greenleaf (1991) asserts that "The idea of servant is deep in our Judeo-Christian heritage. Servant (along with serve and service) appears in the Bible more than thirteen hundred times" (Spears, 1998, p. 13). Blanchard and Hodges (2003) emphasize that "Christians have more

in Jesus than just a great spiritual leader; we have a practical and effective leadership model for all organizations, for all people, for all situations” (p. 10).

In addition to spiritual leadership, the servant leader is also responsible for all managerial tasks and responsibilities needed in the organization and must complete these tasks with the same attitude of service (Autry, 2001). Unexpected people, hectic schedules, interruptions, and deadlines are all looked on as a part of God’s plan when viewed through the perspective of servant leadership (Warren, 2002). Therefore, true servant leaders do not have the option to pick and choose when they will serve, where they will reflect leadership, or who they will serve. They have a determination to have a Christ-like attitude of service reflected through acts of humility and obedience, and they remember that it is through Christ that servant leaders accomplish their work (Blackaby & King, 1994).

Building relationships, while completing the responsibilities of the job, are the keys of leadership (Hunter, 1998). It is developing a nurturing relationship with colleagues so a community at work will be developed (Autry, 2001; Spears, 1998). Placing value on the contributions of each individual reflects one who cares and is concerned, and as a result, the colleagues believe their work is good and their efforts are noticed (Autry, 2001, Northouse, 1997; Polleys, 2002).

Literature Review

Spiritual Leadership

Over the years, educational leadership has evolved from an autocratic to a participatory style; definitions, descriptions, concepts and the focus of leadership have also changed over the years. As Bennis and Nanus (1985) reported there are over 850 different definitions of leadership. Chopra (2002) defined leadership as

A mysterious and elusive concept. What we read as history is really the creation of myths.

From an ordinary person, society creates a Napoleon or Gandhi, or a Martin Luther King Jr. or Joan of Arc, someone who acquires mythic status as a shaper of destiny. (p. 1)

Terms such as value broker, scientific manager, democratic leader, theory-guided administrator, bureaucratic executive, humanistic facilitator, and instructional leader have also reflected changes in school leadership (Bogue, 2000). Popular models of leadership such as Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership, Conger and Kanungo's (1987) charismatic leadership, Covey's (1991) principle-centered leadership, and Sergiovanni's (1992) moral leadership have begun to take a spiritual rather than merely a business perspective (Northouse, 1997). These popular theories reflect a trend in leadership showing the importance of spirituality in today's organizations. In recent times, best-selling books such as *Soul at Work: Spiritual Leadership in Organizations* (2008) by Margaret Benefiel, *The Soul of Leadership: Unlocking Your Potential for Greatness* (2010) by Deepak Chopra, *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (1999) by Parker J. Palmer, and *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace* (1998) by Alan Briskin have been written about spirituality in the workplace.

Recent changes regarding the focus of leadership and the emphasis on spirituality in the workplace may reflect that people are longing for something greater at their respected places of employment (Dent, Higgins, Wharff, 2005; Karakas, 2010; Wolf, 2004). These changes in the workplace could indicate that people are yearning for personal fulfillment and acknowledgement that they are valued employees at their respective places of work (Karakas, 2010; Zellars & Brees, 2009). Fry and Slocum (2008) noted that Patricia Aburdene, in her book *Megatrends*, 2010, stated that business spirituality is "today's greatest megatrend" (p. 89). As the workplace has become a major influence in people's lives, there is a yearning for a deeper connection to a life more important than money or power (Wolf, 2004), or as Autry (2001) described it, a "spirit

of work.” Bringing about spirituality in the workplace may produce visions of singing hymns and holding hands, but as Autry (2001) indicated, it is “your attitude and behavior as well as in your relationships that your spirituality expresses itself at work—an expression that is most often manifested as service” (p. 8). Therefore, it seems likely that organizations that accept and promote spirituality in the workplace may become driving forces that will produce quality in today’s organizations, enhance organizational learning, and enhance employee well-being (Bierly, Kessler, & Christiansen as cited in Dent, et al., 2005; Karakas, 2010; Polleys, 2002; Zellars & Brees, 2009).

There are numerous definitions of spirituality. Palmer (1998) defined spirituality as “diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life--a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (p. 5). It is a personal value and inner journey one strives for in areas of comfort, happiness, psychological well-being, and inner peace (Chafer, 1981; Stokley, 2002; Unterrainer, Ladenhauf, Moazedi, Wallner-Liebmann, & Fink, 2010; Willard, 1988). Covey (1989) noted that spirituality is a commitment to certain values. Solomon and Hunter (2002) defined spirituality as a way of being that changes the way people think and act as well as providing a connection to the self and beyond. Spirituality can be defined as “transformational, moral, and ethical” (Dent, et al, 2005, p. 629) and as “the journey to find a sustainable, authentic, meaningful, holistic, and profound understanding of the existential self and its relationship/interconnectedness with the sacred and the transcendent” (Karakas, 2010, p. 91).

Spirituality is an internal part of one’s identity and manifests itself through outward actions as well as intrinsic desires (Chafer, 1981; Stokley, 2002; Wolf, 2004). Therefore, authentic spirituality may take place in one’s actions rather than inactions (Chafer, 1981; Wolf,

2004). Actions of spirituality could assist spiritual leaders in furthering their spiritual development toward the goal of continuous improvement. So it is logical to assume that a leader's spiritual condition and spiritual development cannot be neglected if one wants to promote organizational spirituality (Karakas, 2010; Phipps, 2009; Vaill, 1991).

Many authors discussed spiritual leadership (Dent, et al., 2005; Wolf, 2004). For example, Secretan (1997) described a spiritual leader as one who leads by giving life meaning. Wheatley (2002) characterized a spiritual leader as one who reflects a sense of calling. A spiritual leader is a person who reflects an inner peace, desires to develop and improve spiritually, and has consistent external actions (Stokley, 2002). Wolf (2004) indicated that organizations that have spiritual leaders "behave differently" and focus on values, spiritual development of employees, and community involvement adding, "spiritual leaders should be an inspiration to the people they are serving..." (p. 23, 25).

School Administration and Spirituality

Today's school administrators are expected to lead and manage schools. They balance the budget, attend to students' personal and academic needs, evaluate personnel and curriculum planning, and all the while attempt to inspire the community and accomplish the objectives, mission and vision of the school. The school administrator truly has many tasks and responsibilities. Besides all the daily duties, administrators are expected to be influential leaders within the school community. By taking risks, school administrators can lead by being honest in action and deeds, and reflect character and integrity (Willard, 1998). Christian school leaders are responsible for all these same tasks and responsibilities as other school administrators but are also responsible for the spiritual development of the school, guiding the Christian school community towards spirituality (Smitherman, 2002). But the most important job of every school

leader is the responsibility to make a difference in the lives of the students placed in the school administrator's care (Fullan, 2002) and to genuinely lead and serve for a higher purpose for the right spirit, can transform a school into a sacred spiritual place (Stokley, 2002).

Spiritual Development and Education

Learning from the experiences of both self and others is a beneficial, proven method that can be used to assist the improvement of school leadership. Indeed, experience comprises the most frequent method of learning for school leaders (Bogue, 2000). As Kochan, Bredeson and Riehl (2002) noted

Adult learners are self-directed and have life experiences that are a learning resource, seek learning based on their experiences and needs, focus their learning on solving problems, and want their learning experiences experiential in nature and have immediate application to their needs. (p. 1)

Though experience is a proven learning tool, Alexander (1988) warns not to depend only on experience as a part of development. It should be used to balance those societal, intellectual and educational dimensions.

Experiences that assist in the development of spirituality are linked beyond an emotion or thought (Stokley, 2002). It is these spiritual experiences, significant events and reflection that assist the adult towards a better understanding of spiritual development and one's identity (Tisdell, 2003). Thus, spiritual development is an active rather than passive process that may involve risk and struggles (Foster, 2002). Learning in adulthood, as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) suggested, takes place through the practice of reflection as it relates to spiritual development. Spiritual development involves a time of reflection, communion, and an acceptance of God's direction. Additionally, McGreevy and Copley (1998) stated "A reflective

life, attention to balance, an authentic self, optimism and hopefulness—is enhanced by the experiences described, and that school leaders have the opportunity to affirm and value these experiences” (p. 4). These experiences of reflection could change who the person is and will eventually lead to a greater understanding of spirituality. Lowrie (1984) reported that

Christian education like all education is rooted in experience, and all experience contributes to the understanding of life, but Christian education has an empirical anchor in the experience of worship which marks it off from systems which ignore this kind of data. Yet Christian education also deals with the data of common experience as well as selected unusual experiences and the problem to work out some coherent unity for our belief system. (p. 180)

Purpose of the Study

The Christian school leader aims to direct the school community towards deeper spirituality. This is an arduous task because of the requirements of true spirituality and the many challenges facing Christian school leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the spiritual preparation programs and experiences Christian school leaders have undertaken to become the spiritual leaders of their schools. For the purposes of this paper, the following question guided this study:

What experiences, meanings, or spiritual programs contributed to the Christian school leaders’ spiritual development and how have these experiences, meanings, or spiritual programs helped development towards spiritual and servant leadership and implementation of spirituality in their Christian schools?

Methods

Philosophical Paradigm

The philosophical framework for this study is constructivism (Brandon & All, 2010).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) described the constructivist paradigm as relative – “specific constructed realities” and subjective – “created findings” or knowledge (p. 203). Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997) pointed out “knowledge is constructed by people and that realities do not exist objectively, for no reality exists except that created by people” (p. 70). Thus, mental models are formed as a result of one’s experiences. Constructivism identifies with naturalistic inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 1998), is associated with cognitive developmental theories, and has been developed by numerous philosophical, psychological, and educational theorists such as Vygotsky, Kant, Piaget, Bruner, von Glaserfeld, and Dewey (Howe & Berv, 2000; Hunter & Krantz, 2010; Liu, & Chen, 2010).

Tye (2000) discusses the role of developmental theory as it relates to Christian education. Christian education is based on developmental theory. The theory suggests that learning takes place in various stages. Through Christian education, learning takes place on an individual basis in various stages of development (Tye, 2000). Furthermore,

The constructivist educator must actively promote a fallible view of knowledge by inviting critical perspectives to be brought to bear on these conceptual schemes. But this activity must occur against a background of shared meanings, only a few of which can be up for grabs at a given time (Howe & Berv, 2000, p. 36).

Rationale for Selected Method

A phenomenological investigation was the most appropriate method to address the purpose of this study. Phenomenology is a description of the various experiences of a specific phenomenon by those who have knowledge of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and involves gaining an understanding through the experiences of participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). In order to ascertain and better understand the

essential experiences of the Christian school leader, it would be desirable to explore and identify these spiritual experiences of the Christian school leader. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) elaborate that “a phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation” (p. 51). This phenomenological study identified and described spiritual experiences and training programs that have developed Christian school leaders to be the spiritual and servant leaders of their schools.

Data Generation

Participants. Phenomenological research uses various models for participant selection. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is used to increase information about the topic being studied (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Berg (2004) notes that “When developing a purposive sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent the population” (p. 36).

Since this study was about Christian school leaders, a purposeful, nominated sample was used. Only Christian school leaders were selected because the study specifically focused on the spiritual experiences of Christian school leaders and Christian schools. Participants were recommended by consultants from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The criteria for inclusion were that they were nominated by an ACSI consultant, they were administrators in a Christian school, and they had a minimum of five years of experience as a school administrator. The independent organizational structure of each Christian school resulted in various Christian school leaders that included titles such as principal, superintendent, head administrator, headmaster, president, and head of school. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used. The participants’ administrative experience ranged from 6 to over 25 years. (See Appendix A for descriptions of the participants).

Instrument. The interview protocol was the primary instrument used in this study (See Appendix B). In-depth, open-ended interviews were used for this study and are the most frequently used method for data collection in phenomenological research. This type of interview reflects more of a conversation than an interview, with the participants controlling much of the discussion. Both researchers and the participants work toward finding the real meaning in the experience. As the interview proceeds, researchers must be acutely aware of any clues that bring meaning to the discussion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

The researchers developed an open-ended protocol based on the review of the literature. The interview process was conducted in the same manner with all participants. Both structured and open-ended questions were used which allowed for easier analysis as well as unsolicited responses and in-depth insights (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2007). The interviews took from one to two hours in order to give participants sufficient time to provide responses.

Data Collection and Record Keeping

After the interviews were completed, participants were given copies of the interview to review and verify. Follow-up interviews took place as needed in order to elicit further responses from the participants. All interviews were audio taped. By recording the interviews, the data became more objective (Gay, 1996). Recording also allowed the researchers to be aware of the participant's pauses or connections from one theme to another (Silverman, 2001). Some of the participants were interviewed face-to-face, while other interviews took place on the telephone. Through interview transcripts and notes, the researchers were able to develop an index of the interviews and reflect on the information given by the participants (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1996). All interviews were transcribed verbatim. By taping the interviews and transcribing them verbatim, a greater opportunity exists to correctly interpret participants' meanings.

Data Analysis

The methods used for data analysis of this study are based on Rudestam and Newton's (2001) method of researcher description, as well as Creswell's (2007) strategies of developing ideas, getting feedback on codes, and comparing, and contrasting of each participant's interview. Creswell (2007) suggests strategies to use with data analysis in a qualitative study that range from sketching ideas and coding themes, to coding frequency and redesigning the study. The information gathered in data collection, the experiences, the feelings, the images and memories provided a thorough understanding of the study. NVivo software was used to code transcripts.

Rudestam and Newton's (2001) method of data analysis takes place through the description of the phenomenon being studied. The transcripts were reviewed for quality of description of the experience. Statements that were repetitive were removed resulting in primary themes becoming apparent. Through primary themes, structures were developed as they related to the essence of the experiences (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

The researchers used the constant-comparison method often used in qualitative data analysis. Rudestam and Newton (2001) describe the process that takes place through this method:

Data are systematically coded into as many themes and meaning categories as possible.

As the categories emerge and are refined, the researcher begins to consider how they relate to one another and what the theoretical implications are. Gradually the theoretical properties of the meaning categories crystallize and form a pattern. (p. 43)

The data analysis for this study began at the conclusion of the interview process and remained open to changes during analysis.

Trustworthiness

Many traditional researchers accept trustworthiness in place of internal and external validity in a study (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness as discussed by Krefting (1999) defines truth value as credibility.

Guba's (1981) model of consistency, known as trackable validity or dependability, takes place when the results would be the same if the study were replicated. The information gathered in this study to promote trackable validity took place through low inference descriptors, participant feedback, reflexivity, and pattern matching. Low inference descriptors are described as "the use of description phrased very close to the participants' accounts and researchers' field notes. Verbatim quotes are a commonly used type of low inference descriptors" (Johnson, 1999, p. 161).

Krefting (1999) referred to Guba's (1981) model when discussing applicability in qualitative research, often called transferability. This takes place when the results of the study fit into various situations outside the study. Applicability is achieved when the researcher shows adequate information allowing a comparison of the phenomenon under study (Krefting, 1999). Thus, transferability in a qualitative approach is determined by the readers of the study. The findings of this study may be transferable to certain other settings.

Findings

Spiritual Leadership Experiences

All twelve participants shared various experiences that impacted and assisted them toward spiritual development. Some of the experiences that were shared were both positive and negative, but all of the participants agreed that these experiences affected their spiritual development and impacted their spiritual leadership roles as Christian school leaders.

Participants discussed spiritual leadership in the context of beliefs, family influence, college

experiences, spiritual meanings, and programs. Spiritual leadership on a daily basis and stories of how they demonstrated their spiritual leadership as Christian school leaders were also reported.

Family influences. Ten of the twelve participants expressed that their families, especially their parents, had an impact on their spiritual development. Eight of the twelve Christian school leaders specifically mentioned their parents' Christian faith and influence on their spirituality as a result of their parents' spiritual walk and involvement in church. Craig stated

I was raised in a Christian home with parents who were strong believers and had committed their lives to sharing the hope that they found in Christ to people that hadn't heard. That definitely shaped my sense of what it meant to be a Christian and how the Christian life should be lived out and how people handle the gifts they had.

Five of the twelve participants noted that their parents had significant spiritual impacts but did not include any specific inferences about the Christian faith as a part of the overall influence. As Sarah pointed out, "I was raised in a good home, with good values. Who my parents were, their style of parenting, and their love of their children certainly pushed me."

Lewis shared his experience of his parents' influence:

I was taught to know God, to fear God, and that was something that was real clear in my home. I grew up with a real understanding of you love God, you love family, you love country, you do the right thing even if nobody is watching. You take whatever you have and you try to make the world a better place to live.

Four of the twelve participants discussed experiences that were specifically related to their mothers. Cindy expressed admiration and respect for her mother, who modeled for her a dependence on God, as a result of the death of her father who was killed in Vietnam. Another example of a mother's influence was described by Mercy:

I was raised in a small Baptist church, and my mother did not go to church although she was a Christian. There were health and work-related issues, so I had to step up and make myself go. I think God put that there so I would have to be the one to do that, and it was important that I did.

Three of the twelve Christian school leaders specifically pointed out the role that their fathers played in their spiritual development. Participants explained their father's role as one of influence, by displaying servant and spiritual leadership, and by their involvement in church.

Mark stated

I can go on and on about examples of my dad and how he served behind the scenes through physical labor, through giving his time and money. So I just grew up with that's just what you did; you worked for the Lord.

Grandparents also played roles in three of the twelve participants' spiritual development. Mercy expressed information about her grandfather:

I have pictures of my grandfather, who worked at the university part time, and he would bring these exchange students home on Sundays. He had all these people in weird garbs at a time when that wasn't really acceptable, and that was around 1910-1920. Black people and Hispanics and Indians rolling through your home just to share the essence of evangelism and compassion for other people.

Cindy added, "My grandfather, who was a very strong Christian, set the standard for spiritual development."

Only one participant mentioned a spouse in reference to spiritual development. In addition, another participant made no mention of any family member's influence toward spiritual development. None of the participants mentioned their siblings or children as having

impacted their spiritual development.

College experiences. Six of the twelve participants reported experiences of college relative to their spiritual development. Sarah elaborated on her college experiences:

My early spiritual walk was heavily emphasized with a set of rules of do's and do nots in the Christian life, most of which I have set aside 33 years later. But I will say that those rules helped structure a life for me that allowed me to respond to the spirit of God in my heart.

Brian also discussed college experience and spiritual leadership. "My faith was not my own. When I went to college, I was forced to wrestle with my own faith." Two Christian school leaders shared that their college programs did not impact their spiritual development. However four of the twelve participants noted that their college professors, not their college programs, impacted their spiritual development. Craig discussed his college professors as:

Exemplary scholars who had great minds and a compassion for students. They combined the two to be extremely effective teachers and great witnesses. Their personal testimonies, what they shared what God was doing in their lives, challenged us to see God at work in our lives, and that really helped shape my sense of what spiritual leadership could mean in a school setting.

Lewis shared his university experience. "My university experience just prepared me to be a thinker, learner, and a decision-making problem solver, and those are such life skills. All that was an incredible way that God has positioned me."

Church experiences. Eight of the twelve participants pointed out that not only the church, but their pastors and an involvement in ministry, had impacts towards their spiritual development. Sarah noted

I have been blessed to have very strong preaching and teaching ministries in my life sitting under people who took God's word and made sure it thumped me upside the head on a regular basis. I would say that has been extremely powerful.

Luke also valued his experiences at church:

I owe my spiritual development to those times of a lot of ministry. When your whole church is composed of small groups of people, meeting together to do a lot of study and a lot of serious discipleship, you tend to grow pretty quickly. You open your life. You didn't have time to sit back and just be religious, going to church and sit in pews. It was very active Christianity. Spiritually, I feel that a year in that environment was probably worth 10 or 20 years growing up in a traditional church setting in the back row of a pew, maybe going to Sunday School once in a while.

Programs such as attending Sunday School, youth group activities, and Bible studies had special meaning for six of the twelve participants. Several participants also mentioned that teaching Bible studies, as well as attending Bible studies, influenced their spiritual development.

Faith shared

The years of teaching Sunday School would probably be the most that helped my spiritual development and servant leadership. When I didn't teach, I was very blessed to go into Sunday School classes with two older women in my church. They were very godly women who taught very powerful Sunday School lessons.

Other programs mentioned by the participants included the Girl Scouts, and International Crusade for Christ. Various courses, such as Bible courses and philosophy of Christian education courses provided by the ACSI were mentioned. Furthermore, ACSI conventions and professional development seminars also influenced the participants' spiritual development.

Spiritual Meanings and Programs

The Bible. All twelve of the participants agreed that the Bible has brought about meaning in their lives. Mark noted that

I would be remiss if I left out the fact that first and foremost, God’s Word is the greatest book on spiritual leadership, and those of us in ministry always talk about it and know the importance of it. But honestly I just have my doubts that most of us give the time and emphasis to it that we should. I can’t feed until I have been fed. I can’t lead until I’ve been led by God during my personal time with Him.

Sarah added that “God’s word has got to be central, central in every way in a devotional way, in a personal hold-me-accountable kind of way, in an encouragement kind of way; it is something that I can pass on.”

Prayer. All 12 of the Christian school leaders also discussed the importance of prayer in both their spiritual lives and servant leadership roles as Christian school leaders. Regarding prayer, Mark pointed out

God asks us to pray for a reason, and if it wasn’t a good reason, God wouldn’t ask us to do it. I believe deeply that He works in our lives as a result of our prayers, and our time together with Him. God has a way through prayer of speaking to my heart, and showing me things, and bringing things to my mind, and convicting me of things, and teaching me things as well as empowering me with his ability.

Cindy also shared the importance of prayer: “I have to wear football pads on my knees. I cannot accomplish a thing without God and prayer.” Sarah described prayer as “my opportunity to let God hear me say I am not in charge. It is you know a chance to see Him in all the ways that are

necessary on behalf of everybody around me.” Craig also reported

There’s no substitute for that personal walk with Christ. I can’t lead people into a relationship if I’m not in a close relationship with Christ, and I don’t think it’s something you can fake, so I do think a willingness to pray regularly with your faculty and team, to pause in the middle of an administrative team meeting, and just ask God for wisdom. To recognize publicly that we are insufficient to the task, that in ourselves we don’t have a good answer or a right answer, that pride or self-interest will interfere, or that our own short-sided view of people will keep us from recognizing the solution that God would have us see. I think that that conscious yielding, bending the knee sort of figuratively and literally, is really important.

Seven of the twelve Christian school leaders reported that people other than family members held a special meaning and assisted their spiritual development. Teachers, dorm parents, college roommates, acquaintances, friends, former bosses, and deacons were specifically mentioned. One participant reported that her husband’s parents were role models for her spiritual leadership. Lewis also shared

When I look at my past my high school guidance counselor, who brought me from wanting to be a police officer to guidance counselor. He encouraged me to get involved in education because I wanted to help people. There might be more intervention with people if I became an educator, so I became a guidance counselor.

Brian pointed out

Probably the biggest influence in my life is working under men and women who demonstrated spiritual leadership for me in a variety of places. At one of the schools where I worked, the Assistant Headmaster was a godly woman who was on her knees in

prayer, and she modeled this for me. However, the Headmaster at that same school did not take his spiritual leadership seriously, and I think the school suffered as a result of it. At another school, the Headmaster demonstrated spiritual leadership. Watching him as he dealt with tough decisions, as he dealt with the staff, or the board and how he handled it spiritually, not in a prideful manner, that was a great lesson to be learned.

Spiritual Leadership Stories

All twelve participants gave examples of how they reflect spiritual leadership in their schools. Five of the twelve Christian school leaders shared spiritual leadership stories that related to parents of students of the school. Mark elaborated

My state of the school address is my opportunity with parents, to let them know about the school, where we've been, what we've done, where we are headed and what we're planning to do. The first point I start with is spiritual foundations, the second is spiritual vision.

Mercy makes a real effort to minister to parents and shared the following story:

I make a real concerted effort to provide opportunities for the parents to meet with me in small groups to discuss grade level topics. What I do is have a coffee and talk to parents about topics like finances and chores. I will bring a book written by a Christian author on financial parenting, and we will discuss it. That's an example where parent educating is really a spiritual leadership piece for me.

Sarah added a story about spiritual leadership in her school:

A couple of the ladies of the school didn't know the Lord and had put their kids in the school and they had gotten interested in spiritual things, and so I invited them one day "Do you want to have a Bible study, and I'll tell you what your kids are learning in

Bible? I will give you a background, and you can just be informed.” Out of that grew a Bible study that I have now taught for 21 years. Every Tuesday morning somewhere between 80 to 120 ladies now show up.

Four of the twelve participants mentioned spiritual leadership stories that took place through their faculty and staff. Luke stated

I do faculty devotions. We’re going through the entire Bible. We started last year, so its going to take about two or three years. I am not telling Bible stories, but I’m digging up the issues we might face in our Christian schools, such as disciplining kids, or teaching certain views, or how we approach certain things.

Faith also discussed faculty devotions with the staff:

I just want to show them that, even though I am driven by everyday curriculum demands, I really try to make sure that I’m interacting with them. Having that interaction there, giving them opportunities and getting teachers to listen to both sides is a small example of spiritual leadership.

Cindy stated: “I try to e-mail a daily devotionals to my teachers from something I have learned. By doing daily devotions, it is a way you can give someone a way to grow closer to Christ.”

Three of the twelve participants shared stories about students and spiritual leadership.

Craig explained

I have a booklet with school pictures that we make up each year because I want to know the names of every one of my students. I carry that around with me everywhere I go and I look up people. So if I pass you in the hallway and I don’t know your name, I’ll whip around the corner, read it, and then come back and say for example, “Hello Susan, how is it going today?” I really think that in some deep level, the idea of personal relationships

matters in our ability to lead people into a personal relationship with Christ. If we don't care to learn someone's name, it's unlikely they will believe us when we say, "I care deeply about you, and I want to introduce you to Christ."

Spiritual leadership on a daily basis. Eight of the twelve participants thought about their roles as spiritual leaders at their Christian schools on a daily basis. Luke remarked about spiritual leadership on a daily basis:

I would say it's probably the one consuming thing. It's not just a side thing. I would say that I see it integrated so deeply in who I am. If I can't be the spiritual leader, I don't know what I am. I have a tremendous burden for academic excellence and all the things that schools should be. I don't pretend that we are a church. But to me, those things aren't going to be worth anything if the kids don't see God clearly for who He is. If they have misconceptions of God or don't know God, then what they have, their great academic education, isn't going to do much for God's kingdom.

Two of the Christian school leaders mentioned that they don't think about spiritual leadership on a daily basis because it is just a part of who they are. Cindy discussed this point of view: "I mean it's not like I think, oh, I have to be a spiritual leader, I have to do this. I guess at this point in my life, it's a way of life for me." However, two participants were unsure if they think about their spiritual leadership on a daily basis. Beatrice reported

I guess I think about spiritual leadership on a daily basis to a degree. We are a large church school, and a lot of the spiritual issues, the pastors fill that role. In the position I am in now as Head Administrator, it is very different from what it was when I was Principal.

Life Changing Experiences that Impacted Spiritual Leadership

The participants referred to numerous experiences that strongly impacted their spiritual and servant leadership. Five participants discussed how experiences impacted the Christian school leader's spiritual leadership. Three participants had experiences they felt impacted servant leadership and nine participants discussed a life changing experiences that impacted both spiritual and servant leadership.

Beatrice discussed her experience regarding the death of both of her parents in the same year:

My dad's death was very, very unexpected. My mother had strokes and heart attacks and was placed in a nursing home. Within five days of a bladder infection, Dad died, and I was so unprepared for that. A month later my mother died. Since then, I have dealt with another family who lost both their parents unexpectedly, and I was able to walk them through it and help them with the veteran's administration process. God put something in my path in the past year, and through that, I could minister to someone else. It's almost exciting now to be honest with what God has planned because I know the worst things I feel that I could ever go through He has blessed me in such a way to realize why I've gone through it.

Faith shared an event that took place at her father's funeral:

My dad was always very active in a Baptist church. He was a deacon and chairman of the board. I can remember when my dad died; I was probably 15 when he died. At the service, the minister had all the deacons put their hands on the casket, and I never saw anything like that, and then the pastor made some comments about my dad, and I learned about church. So more experiences about church and all I learned from my dad.

Cindy's life changing experience came through events that took place at her school. She described her experience:

I was on a roller coaster because there were times when I felt so frustrated and kept asking God “Why?” Unfortunately, I can’t see down the road to the future as God knows everything. I asked God, “Why is this happening?” He knew what was going to happen all the time, but I didn’t. I felt heartache because of the ministry I that had been working at for 17 years was, as I felt, really crumbling, and it was because of the leadership of the organization at that time. There were times I did feel hopeless, and those were the times that I took my eyes off of Christ and put them on someone else or sought answers with my own wisdom. Then there were times I was so joyful because I did follow Christ and things began to happen.

Luke also shared an event as headmaster of a Christian school:

I was headmaster of a K-8 school, and after seven years realized that the board was going in one direction and I was going in another or at least the board president was, so it was time for me to say, “Good bye” before they said, “Goodbye” to me. So I told them late in one year that I really needed to move on. Some people were sad, but some were happy and it was just a good time to leave. To leave the school and realize that there is life after being in one place for seven years. I went to another school as an interim Principal, and it was sort of a recovery stage. Sometimes you get so involved that you don’t see the whole world, and it was almost like a breath of fresh air.

Sarah shared an event that impacted her spiritual leadership and ministry:

There was a gentleman who was a leader at a Bible college where I was at. Now granted, I was a pain in the neck and not the most compliant child. I went to see him one day because I was really struggling over missions work and considering some additional training. I went to see him and asked for his advice, and he looked across the table and

said, “You know I have to tell you... You are never going to amount to anything for the Lord.” His assessment of my inability to be useful at all to the Lord was almost devastating. I often laugh about that now, in that I think there might have been a part of me that said, “Oh yeah; you don’t think so?” So that professor was used in that way.

Lastly, Mark shared a life-changing experience that impacted not only his spiritual leadership, but impacted his role as Christian school leader as well:

You know I was going along with a sincere heart living for God, trying to lead and serve God. People were getting saved, and I was myself, leading people to the Lord, and yet there was an aspect of my life that, that I rationalized. It’s hard to describe, but it’s like you have 100 rooms, and God blesses you with this ministry mansion where He’s blessed you and rewarded you to do all these things and serve all these ways and gives you all these things. You’ve got 100 rooms, and 99 of them are everything that they should be, so there’s just this one little room in the corner, and it can’t be any big deal; it’s just one room, and I rationalized, and I avoided. One way I rationalized was, “God I’m doing this and doing that. I’m serving you here and leading here, and souls are getting saved here, and the Sunday school class is doing great, and the school is doing great here,” and it doesn’t work that way. So there is no good way to put it. I got involved in sin from a sexual standpoint, which unfortunately happens to a lot of pastors and Christian leaders. It is a reality of life. Although my goals were good, and my motives were pure, and my desire to serve God was always what it should have been, I neglected my own personal growth and time with God, and I did not follow the signs, the red flags God put in my life. You need to take time, and you need to grow, and you need to understand that you’re

What happened after that was, I immediately got alone with God, literally

hours and hours of prayer, and sought God and His word and asked what do I do now? God showed me I can't change what happened. I can't go back and undo sin that was done, but I can dedicate myself to allowing God to be God and to bring good out of evil. God is a great enough God that regardless of what you choose to do to me or with me, He can bring good from this. So I went to my pastor, and I confessed to make things right with him. He and I went together to the deacon board and made things right with them. Sandy's life changing experience took place through the involvement of fellow Christian

school leaders:

I had to have an emergency appendectomy. I have three kids, and my husband had to go out of town as there was a family emergency. I was having some health problems, and to make a long story short, I had to have an emergency appendectomy. It was the leaders of the school that came and stayed with me basically nonstop until my husband was able to fly back home, and that really impacted me. What happened afterwards really impacted me too. I was supposed to take six weeks off to recuperate, and the Dean of Women and Dean of Men each took my classes all day so that I could continue to get paid the entire time that I was out. I didn't stay out the whole six weeks because it was during spring break, and I came back early. They went in without hesitation and taught my classes for me. I never asked, and it wasn't anything we discussed. I continued to get paid all along, and that was a tremendous example of servant leadership.

Cindy's life-changing experience came about through the sacrifice of her father:

I guess I have always been around people that were important in my life, that were servants of some kind, as far back as my childhood. My father served in the army and was killed in Vietnam, so he was serving for a cause and a country. My mother, who later

married my step father, was always involved in some type of service as far as volunteer work. They were always trying to find ways to improve someone else's life. Many times they sacrificed themselves as my first dad did. He tried to improve someone else's way of life and sacrificed himself. So I always had those three very important people in my life from the very beginning that showed me the importance of serving others. One lesson they taught me was that you never ask someone to do something that you're not willing to do. That has always been something on my mind and in the forefront. My parents always had high morals to live by, but religion was not important. It was really only at holidays and prayer at dinner time before we ate, but serving people, I always had role models that showed me that.

Mercy elaborated about an experience she related to servant leadership:

About four years ago, my husband and I made a decision to leave the church that was very spiritually mature, had lots of wise leaders and had lots of good leadership. We decided to find a church that needed leadership, that needed servants, and a little gray hair. We located a church that had a large recovery ministry, large evangelistic outreach, a lot of younger Christians, not necessarily by age. With that, we have gradually stepped up to leadership the church needs, not that we need to give, but what they needed, and we have been making a conscious decision to do that, and it is just our personal commitment. "Do I need another Bible study or do I serve?" In order to serve in some capacity, I am going to have to do the behind the scenes Bible study, and that study is going to equip us to serve, not just to study for study's sake.

Sarah discussed spiritual life-changing experiences through her role as a Christian school leader:

I've been real involved in walking families through the loss of kids or parents. I spend an awful lot of time sitting in hospital rooms and living rooms with people that are struggling through those times in their lives. I would have never chosen those opportunities, but I think participating in that way, sitting by a family in a hospital room. We had a little boy pass away a year ago, and you know I drove to the hospital, and it's an hour and a half away, and I was at the hospital night after night after night with that family, and that boy, he finally passed away. I didn't do it for any reason other than I loved the family, and I loved that little boy, but I am motivated to be that way, I am motivated to act like that. It's not self-serving, it is what the Lord has put in my heart.

Discussion

This study suggests that the participants' experiences have affected their roles as spiritual leaders of their respective schools. Participants discussed spiritual leadership in the context of beliefs, family influence, college experiences, church experiences, and the Bible and prayer (Dent, et al, 2005). Learning from various experiences assisted these Christian school leaders in learning how to be better spiritual leaders. Congruent with the literature, the participants in the study did reiterate that reflecting on the experiences discussed in the study resulted in an assessment of their present spirituality and leadership (Dent, et al., 2005; Karakas, 2010). Therefore, findings from the current study indicate that there is a need for continual, ongoing discussions regarding personal experiences as they relate to spiritual development and the development of a sense of purpose, calling, and meaning for leaders from all walks of life (Fry & Slocum, 2008; Karakas, 2010; Palmer, 1998; Wheatley, 2002; Wolf, 2004).

Participants in the current study believe that leaders strive to help others grow closer in their relationships to God and model that relationship. In addition, spiritual leadership requires

that the personality of the school and the spiritual mission and vision of the school are focused on this belief. This is consistent with the concept that spiritual leaders inspire others regarding meaning and purpose (Dent, et al., 2005) as well as motivation and altruism that may even lead to those who see their work as a vocation (Fry & Slocom, 2008; Wolf, 2004).

The objective of Christian education is to instruct the constituents of the school community to gain a thorough understanding of the doctrines of the Christian faith, reflect on each person's individual experiences that have taken place regarding spiritual development, and apply this knowledge throughout one's life. Estep (2002) discussed Vygotsky's developmental theory and explained that an individual's spiritual development takes place in stages. This concept is consistent with the literature that suggests spiritual leaders help their followers to develop their own spirituality (Dent, et al., 2005; Fry & Slocom, 2008; Stokley, 2002; Wolf, 2004).

Christian school leaders must fully understand the dual responsibility of spiritual development and academic excellence in a Christian school. This awareness ought to be clearly defined in the school's mission as well as communicated to the Christian school community. Christian school leaders need to personally grasp, define, implement, and assess how the school can accomplish both objectives. Within this framework, Christian school leaders need to know the philosophical framework of Christian education and its role as it relates to the church.

Spiritual opportunities outside and inside the academic arena might be encouraged and promoted by Christian school leaders. Activities outside the academic arena might include church retreats, spiritual development programs, campus ministries, team building, communication, and servant leadership seminars. Within the school community, Christian school

leaders might meet with faculty and staff on a regular basis to emphasize the mission and vision of the organization (Fry & Slocum, 2008; Wolf, 2004).

The scope of this phenomenological study is limited to a discussion of the experiences of selected Christian school leaders regarding their spiritual leadership. The study included a purposeful, nominated sample and is limited to this group. However, findings may be transferable to certain other settings as determined by the reader.

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Appendix A: Descriptions of Participants

Participant One

“Beatrice” is a married female, mother, and head administrator. She has been a Christian school leader at the same school for the last 20 years. Before this, Beatrice worked at four other Christian schools in various teaching positions. Beatrice first became a teacher in a Christian school working part time, so she could stay at home with her children. Eventually Beatrice

moved into a full time position. While teaching at the school, the pastor offered her the position of elementary school principal. After much reluctance, Beatrice accepted the position. At her present school, Beatrice moved up through the ranks as teacher and is presently the head administrator. Beatrice has her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in Administration and Supervision.

Participant Two

“Brian” is a married male, father, and high school principal with nine years of experience in

Christian school education. He has his Bachelor's Degree in History and Master's Degree in Educational Leadership. Brian's plan was to go into public school education, but as he stated “God opened doors for me to only go to Christian school education.” While Brian was teaching, leadership opportunities were made available to him in the area of coaching football. Brian has had various leadership roles in three different Christian schools as coach, summer camp director, and academic council chair. Several years later, Brian accepted the athletic director's position at another Christian school. While athletic director, Brian requested the opportunity to move into administration and took on the dual role of athletic director and assistant secondary principal, eventually desiring one day to become a principal. Soon Brian accepted the position of upper school principal at his third school. Brian is presently considering a headmaster's position.

Participant Three

“Cindy” is a single female principal who has been involved in Christian school education for 15 years. Cindy came to Christian school leadership “strictly by accident” as she stated.

While finishing graduate school in social work, she began teaching elementary school. Cindy's original plan was to work in the field of social work. While teaching, she was offered an

administrative position as Director of After School Activities. Later she was promoted to dean of students for the elementary school, assistant principal and then elementary school principal.

After 15 years at her first school, she is presently starting her first year at her second Christian school as lower school principal. Cindy discussed that she knew that God wanted her “to move on and leave a school that I was used to and move out of my comfort zone.” Cindy received her Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Social Work and is presently working on her Educational Specialist’s Degree in Educational Leadership.

Participant Four

“Craig” is a married male, father, and headmaster, who has been in Christian school education for 22 years. Craig has his Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology, Master’s degree in Educational Administration and is presently completing his Doctoral work in Educational Leadership. Craig’s experience of becoming a Christian school leader was through the route of teacher. While continuing to work on his certification in teaching, an interest and desire for administration began to develop. Craig was given various leadership opportunities, eventually becoming assistant principal. Craig was then hired at another Christian school as teacher and dean of students, taking on responsibilities such as student life, coordination of campus activities, and nursing facilities. The school where Craig is now working had been seeking a headmaster for over a year because the original headmaster was retiring. Also, the school was looking for a forward thinking and innovative Christian school leader. Through a Christian school consultant, Craig became a candidate, eventually accepting the position as Headmaster. Craig is in his fourth year as Headmaster.

Participant Five

“Dwight” is a married male, father and Christian school leader for the past 32 years.

Following his service in the military, he began his Christian school experience first as a teacher. After three years, Dwight became the upper school principal and remained in this role for 22 years. He has worked at two different Christian schools, staying at his first school for 25 years. Dwight accepted the headmaster's position at his present school and is in his seventh year. This school had a desire to expand student population, and as Dwight remarked, "I came to my present school as headmaster responsible for the expansion program." Dwight has his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Administration and his Ph.D. in Educational Administration.

Participant Six

"Faith" is a married female, mother, and is middle school principal and academic dean. Faith is still at the same school where she began. Faith became a Christian school leader as a result of her son. Originally, she wanted her son to attend a Christian school, but when reviewing her options, she decided it best not to enroll him. Although her child did not attend Christian school, her respect and belief in Christian school education became apparent. She retired from public school administration and accepted the position of curriculum director. A few months later, she became the middle school principal and academic dean. Before Faith became a Christian school leader, she was a public school administrator serving as elementary principal and middle school principal for over 20 years. Faith has her Bachelor's Degree in English, her Master's Degree in Curriculum and Supervision, and has completed her six-year advanced Degree in Administration and Supervision.

Participant Seven

"Lewis" is a married male, father, and head of school, who has been involved in Christian school education for nine years. Lewis received his Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Science, his Master's Degree in Counselor Education and Ph.D. in Education. Lewis was president of a local

college and very active in his church. The church had a Christian school and was in the process of searching for a new headmaster. Lewis was asked to be a part of the search committee. While on the committee, he felt compelled to be a candidate for the position and communicated his interest in the position. Lewis eventually was selected for the position and became headmaster. After five years, Lewis was approached and asked to consider a headmaster's position at another Christian school. He is at his second Christian school where he is the President and Head of School.

Participant Eight

"Luke" is a married male, father, and headmaster for the past 16 years. He is presently headmaster and high school principal. Luke came to Christian school leadership "by accident" as he puts it. After college, Luke an active member of his church, began working at a Christian bookstore. The elders of the church believed Luke had leadership strengths and offered Luke the head of school position. After his first administrative position, Luke left and became a pastor for seven years. Luke has been at four different Christian schools, always as administrator. He did not move up through the ranks as many Christian school leaders, but has taught classes at each of the schools where he has worked. Luke has his Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, his Master's Degree in American Studies, and his Ph.D. in Educational Administration.

Participant Nine

"Mark" is a married male, father, and headmaster with 20 years of experience in Christian school education. Mark's first experience in Christian school education began as a teacher. While a teacher, he was given leadership opportunities at the church and the school. Mark was promoted to assistant principal and to elementary principal within two and a half years out of college. Mark's next position was at a church school where he served as elementary principal

with church leadership responsibilities. He served eight years. Mark later accepted the Headmaster's position at another school. Mark has his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Educational Administration.

Participant Ten

"Mercy" is a married female, mother, headmaster and Christian school leader for the last 13 years. She has worked at three different Christian schools as teacher and principal at various grade levels and various subjects. Mercy was first a nurse and community health educator. Her family moved, causing her to home school her children, resulting in an enjoyment of teaching. Upon returning home, to assist the family finances, Mercy began substituting at a local Christian school. This eventually developed into a full time teaching position and eventually the elementary principal's position. The Christian school where Mercy worked closed down, resulting in her looking for another position. The following year, Mercy accepted a teaching position at another Christian school and during her first year became interim principal. During her second year, Mercy was promoted to Headmaster and is currently in her 13th year. She has her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing and Master's Degree in Education Administration.

Participant Eleven

"Sandy" is a married female, mother, and secondary principal. Sandy has been in Christian school education for 15 years. She has her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and Master's Degree in Counseling. Her first experience in Christian education began as a teacher, with no intention or desire to become a Christian school leader. The principal asked Sandy to develop a program to oversee students in need of additional academic support. The program's success eventually promoted Sandy into the guidance counselor's position. Sandy came to her present school as assistant secondary principal. Sandy was promoted to the secondary principal's

position and currently continues in this role.

Participant Twelve

“Sarah” is a single female. She has been a Christian school administrator for the last 20 years. Before becoming a Christian school leader, Sarah worked at a church and also worked as a consultant in a Christian consulting firm. She did not come up through the ranks as a teacher. She, along with other friends, established a Christian school. Sarah is in her 20th year as the founder and lead administrator at the same school where she began. Sarah has two Bachelor’s Degrees, one in Christian Education, and the other in Biblical Studies. She also has a Master’s Degree in Biblical Studies.

Appendix B: Interview

1. How did you come to be a Christian school leader?
2. What experiences in your life such as family, friends, school/college, teaching, and church, assisted you towards spiritual development and servant leadership?
3. What experiences, meanings and spiritual programs have assisted you towards spiritual development and servant leadership as a Christian school leader?
4. How have these experiences placed spiritual leadership in the context of your life?
5. What does it mean to be the spiritual leader at a Christian school?
6. What does it mean to be a servant leader at a Christian school?
7. How do spiritual leadership and servant leadership manifest themselves at a Christian school?
8. What stories can you share that reflect you are the spiritual leader of your school?
9. What stories can you share that reflect how you demonstrate servant leadership?

10. Describe a day in your life as the spiritual leader and servant leader in your school.
11. Given the experiences that took place before you became a Christian school leader, and given what you have said about your work now, how do you perceive spiritual leadership and servant leadership in your life?
12. Given what you have reconstructed in this interview, where do you see yourself in regards to spiritual leadership and servant leadership in the future?