
Assessing Discipleship in Christian Higher Education: The REVEAL University Spiritual Life Survey

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Therefore go and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

—Jesus, Matthew 28:19-20, emphasis added¹

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until *Christ is formed in you*, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

—St. Paul, Galatians 4:19, emphasis added

Introduction

The process of discipleship or spiritual formation is a central focus of contemporary faith-based higher education. At the institution where I serve, the university's mission is, in part, "to inspire [students] within a Pentecostal environment to develop spiritually, emotionally, and culturally in order to use their chosen careers to serve both God and humankind" (Evangel University n.d.). Further, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (2011) affirms, "The intentional mission of Christ-centered institutions to encourage the spiritual formation of students is one of the distinguishing characteristics of our member institutions" (v). Certainly Christian colleges and universities also have academic, social, and professional development goals; however, *discipleship* or *spiritual formation* goals contribute to a holistic perspective on student development not commonly found outside faith-based institutions.

While the spiritual development of students is a distinctive objective in Christian higher education, valid, reliable assessment of student spiritual formation is problematic. Not only are educators faced with measuring a latent factor², denominational and confessional differences between Christian universities complicate the process of model specification, which drives the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations from the New International Version. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

² In the language of social scientific research, variables are often categorized as either *observed* or *latent*. Latent variables cannot be directly observed but are often indicated by a complex of correlated, observed variables.

development of assessment instruments and enables meaningful comparison with peer institutions. Recently, though, Evangel University (EU) and the Willow Creek Association (WCA) have collaborated to develop the REVEAL University Spiritual Life Survey (University SLS), which is providing useful data in support of the spiritual formation mission of Christian colleges and universities. The purpose of this paper is to present the biblical and theological framework for assessment of Christian discipleship and to discuss how the SLS provides valid, reliable data to faith-based institutions seeking to evaluate and improve the performance of their distinctive spiritual formation objectives. In the first section, I will discuss (1) definitions of discipleship and spiritual formation, (2) domains of discipleship, (3) institutions that foster discipleship, and (4) contemporary assessments of discipleship. In the second section, I will examine the results of the University SLS from a pilot project ($N = 448$) that was conducted at EU in Springfield, MO in the fall of 2011 and will present preliminary data from a larger pilot study ($N = 5,363$) conducted among four Christian universities in the fall of 2012.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

One of the fundamental challenges of assessment in any discipline is the definition of terms. Biblically, *spiritual formation* and *discipleship* are closely related concepts. The epigraphs that headline this paper provide the biblical foundations for considering discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20) and spiritual formation (Gal. 4:19). In contemporary scholarship, each word has its own following. An EBSCO Host³ search for “spiritual formation” among peer reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2013 located 1,453 listings. A similar search for “discipleship” returned 2,114 listings. Though discipleship is still the predominant keyword in

³ The search included the following five databases: Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Elite, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, Christian Periodical Index, and PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO.

the literature, spiritual formation is garnering increasing scholarly interest. In the 1980s, only 25 percent of the articles published on these two subjects were keyed to spiritual formation. In the 1990s, that proportion rose to 36 percent, and in the 2000s it increased again to 41 percent. At the same time, scholarly interest in both subjects increased from approximately 31 articles per year in the 1980s to 274 per year in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Discipleship⁴ finds its biblical foundation in the Gospels, wherein Jesus calls both the Twelve and others to follow him. This “followership” was commensurate with the rabbinic tradition of teachers inviting individuals to submit to the rabbi’s tutelage by following him in both his teachings and in his lifestyle (Hull 2006; Plueddemann 2000; Wilkins 2000; Young 2007). Hull (2006) points out that the Greek term for disciple is found “at least 230 times in the Gospels and 28 times in Acts” (32), and it denotes a relationship of submission to Jesus Christ as master. Contrary to other forms of discipleship in which the follower may hope one day to become a master in his or her own right, Grams (2004) notes that Matthew stresses the diminutive nature of Christ’s disciples. They never become leaders; rather, they remain servants, just as Christ was a servant of all. In each of these characterizations of discipleship, the focus is upon the disciple’s action: following Christ, learning his teachings, imitating his lifestyle, and positioning one’s self as a servant.

In contrast, *spiritual formation* is the dominant term in the Pauline epistles, and it focuses on the unseen, inner transformation brought about by the gospel (Gal. 4:19; Rom. 8:29; 12:2). Jim Plueddemann (2000) states, “Spiritual formation is a process that takes place inside a person, and is not something that can be easily measured, controlled, or predicted” (901). At the same time, the inward transformation of the gospel is necessarily evidenced by outward behavioral

⁴ Discipleship is derived from the Greek μαθητής, meaning “disciple” or follower. Its verbal form is μαθητεύσατε (inf., μαθητεύω), translated “make disciples” in Matt. 28:19.

transformation (Rom. 12:2; Jas. 2:14-26). Louise Adnams (2010) writes, “Christian spiritual formation is the transformative movement towards being conformed to the image of Christ for the glory of God and service to others, in this life and the one to come” (134-135). Spiritual formation, in order to be authentic, must catalyze holistic transformation and motivate the ongoing discipleship of a Christ-follower.

In June of 2010, senior representatives from eleven member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCC) gathered at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia in order to develop a definition of spiritual formation that would provide a foundation for the development of an assessment instrument. Their final definition states: “Spiritual formation is integral to Christian higher education—it is the biblically guided process in which people are being transformed into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit within the faith community in order to love and serve God and others” (Council for Christian Colleges & Universities 2011, 13). Beyond the CCCC definition of spiritual formation, the symposium also identified sixteen “core definitional elements of spiritual formation intended to serve as indices of the above definition:

1. God-initiated, Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-led
2. Rooted in and guided by Holy Scripture
3. Informed by historic Christian tradition
4. Fosters an ongoing awareness of the human condition, personally and universally
5. Affirms repentance as evidenced by change of behavior
6. Aims at love of God and others
7. Motivates to self-less service
8. A holistic developmental process which involves mind, body, and soul
9. Communal and relational in nature

10. Embraces practice of various spiritual disciplines
11. Involves a spiritual/social ecology
12. Increasing evidence of appropriating the character of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit
13. Supports the local and global church
14. Advances gospel witness, biblical justice and reconciliation
15. Renews and transforms the mind
16. Expresses itself in positive character qualities and behavior” (2011, 13).

To summarize, the relationship between discipleship and spiritual formation is cyclic. Temporally, discipleship precedes spiritual formation, since it is in the process of following Jesus that Christians are transformed. Dimensionally, discipleship is visible and action-oriented while spiritual formation is invisible and oriented toward character transformation. Discipleship initiates spiritual formation, which motivates and enables further discipleship. Both discipleship and spiritual formation are ongoing processes, which characterize the lives of Christ-followers, thus engaging in the process is, simultaneously, arriving at the goal.

Domains of Discipleship

The CCCU discussion regarding “definitional elements” of spiritual formation raises the critical issue of *domains* of discipleship. If discipleship is a latent construct, what domains or factors are indicated by it? If spiritual formation is primarily internal and discipleship is its observable result, is there any logical way to arrange spiritual formation and discipleship, which might permit their valid, reliable assessment?

Relationship with God

When Jesus was asked, “which is the great commandment in the Law?” he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the

first and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:36-38). Mark adds “and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30) to the list. The quotation of the Šēmā’ [שְׁמָא] (Deut. 6:4-5) is unmistakable. Commentators often note that the first five of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3-17) all address issues related to humankind’s relationship to God. Thus it is of first importance that disciples restore a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, rather than simply exhibiting a legalistic submission to the rules and traditions of a religious community. That relationship is intended to be holistic, encompassing the central values (heart), beliefs (soul / mind), and actions (strength) of Christ-followers (France 2007, 841-846). The fundamental fracture brought on by sin is in the relationship between God and humankind, indeed all of creation. Through Christ’s intervention and sacrifice, however, human beings are offered the opportunity to resume their long-abandoned ambassadorship for God. Peter writes, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet. 2:10). The enmity between God and humankind is dissolved in Christ, and that inner transformation begins to manifest itself outwardly.

Relationship with Others

The second domain of discipleship follows closely on the first. In fact, Jesus was not content to deal with loving God apart from also loving others. After declaring that a holistic love of God “is the first and greatest commandment,” he continues, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:38-40). The restored relationship with God makes possible a restored relationship with humankind, and that relationship is to be modeled in the Church.

Relationship with Others in the Church

The verb “to call” (καλέω) occurs frequently in the NT. Jesus calls the disciples to follow him (Matt. 4:21). Jesus asserts that he came to Earth in order to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17). Repeatedly Jesus calls the disciples to come near to him so that he can explain things about the Kingdom of God (e.g., Mark 10:42; 12:43). The Pauline epistles refer to God’s calling, which is upon all who are in Christ by faith (e.g., Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:6; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:9). In each of these cases, God is calling followers *to himself*.

Further, the verb, καλέω, is the root of the Greek word for Church or assembly (ἐκκλησία, literally “called out ones”). When God calls believers to himself, he also calls them to leave their broken communities⁵ and gather into assemblies. These communities of believers are analogous to the nation of Israel in the OT in that they present an alternative to the larger communities of the unredeemed. Their manner of living is a prophetic condemnation of life apart from God. This prophetic, alternative community is what Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). In the case of both “your light” (τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν) and “your good works” (ὁμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα), the word, “your” (ὁμῶν) is plural. Thus, Jesus is not speaking of individual acts of righteousness as much as he is calling for a community that is characterized by the ethics of the inbreaking Kingdom of God, living in full view of the kingdom of this world (c.f., Calhoun 2005, 121-162; Foster 1998, 141-201; Wilhoit 2008; Willard 1998, 215-270).

⁵ This leaving is not physical; it is mental, emotional, and spiritual. No longer are Christians to order their lives and find their sense of self-worth or spiritual power in the structures and systems of unredeemed communities (John 17:15-18; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 7:15-20).

Relationship with Others Among the Nations

Not only are Christ's disciples called to engage in redemptive relationships with other Christ-followers, they are called to represent Christ to the world. Paul writes, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. ... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:16a, 20). Thus, discipleship involves an altered view of the world and of the disciple's personal mission. No longer are the other nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) adversaries; rather, they are considered candidates for discipleship (Matt. 28:19). Apart from Christ, people of other races, genders, social classes, and religions were largely to be avoided. In Christ, they are to be engaged with the gospel and welcomed as "fellow citizens with God's people" (Eph. 2:11-22). While the fall resulted in broken relationships with God and with others, Christ's disciples are called and empowered to engage in restored relationships as a sign of their membership in Christ's kingdom (Averbeck 2008; Bonhoeffer, Kelly, and Godsey 2001, 225-252).⁶

Transformed Character

Christian discipleship involves more than simply transformed relationships, it also brings about transformed character: an inward revolution that affects cognition, volition and values. Perhaps the most familiar path toward transformed character in Christian discipleship is through transformed knowledge and beliefs. Paul writes "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2a), and Psalm 119 extols the value of

⁶ For more on the relationship of the Church to the non-Christian community, see "The Holy Spirit's Role in Sending" (Plake 2013, 11-15).

learning scripture: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

Modern discipleship programs, such as the well-known *2:7 Series* by the Navigators make scripture memorization and interaction with biblical literature central to a program of discipleship (Navigators 1978). More recently, Greg Ogden (2007) has developed a basic discipleship curriculum for small groups, which is based on inductive Bible study and memorization. Indeed, ancient and modern forms of catechesis rely on scriptural instruction as the basis for changing the beliefs and values of both the individual disciple and the community of Christ-followers.

The aim of discipleship is to educate the mind and reorient the value system in order that character might be transformed. Paul describes this process in agrarian terms wherein the gospel is the seed planted in the heart of the disciple, and the fruit of the Spirit—”love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22)—grow from the soil of the human heart (Matt. 13:18-23). While character transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciple (Willard 1998, 347-352), that work is accomplished, at least in part, when biblical education affects a transformation of beliefs and values.

Transformed Action

This inward revolution in the realm of beliefs and values is latent and cannot be directly observed. However, the impact of a transformed character is transformed action. Biblically, transformed action apart from a changed heart is hypocrisy. A transformed heart that does not result in transformed action is a logical impossibility. It is, though, important to note that cognitive assent to propositional truths about the gospel has never been an appropriate measure of discipleship. James addresses the issue when he writes, “Show me your faith without deeds,

and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:18-19). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) sets forth a treatise on the ethics of the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ turns contemporary notions of righteous actions upside down and describes what transformed action looks like in daily life (Searle 2009). He confronts the popular wisdom on marital fidelity, divorce, use of power, retribution, alms-giving, the power of words, and the manner in which to approach God in prayer. Because of the reoriented relationships to God and others and because of a transformed heart, disciples behave differently than those who do not follow Christ. This behavioral contrast is the natural result of inward transformation, and it is missional in its purpose, providing a living example to non-disciples of how life-in-Christ can be different (Plake 2013).

To summarize, Christian discipleship is a latent construct indicated by changes in the domains of (1) relationship with God; (2) relationship with others; (3) beliefs, values and character; and (3) actions. Valid, reliable assessment of discipleship must account for each of these components.

Catalyzing Discipleship

In order for faith-based institutions to accomplish their distinctive objectives related to discipleship or spiritual formation, they must understand how discipleship has been fostered throughout church history. The Holy Spirit is the primary actor and catalyst in discipleship. God calls us to himself and leads the way in spiritual formation; however, social institutions, such as the family, Church, and schools may contribute to the discipleship process by providing models of authentic discipleship in a particular cultural context.

The Gospels provide a great deal of information about the discipleship process for the original band of disciples. Primarily, they lived in close proximity to Jesus, himself. They

observed Jesus' ministry, and later participated with him in ministry activity. On a short-term basis, they were empowered by Christ to minister within Israel (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-17). Through a relational process, Jesus began to make disciples who understood their relationships to God and others in a new way. He confronted their values (Matt. 18:1, ff.), and he prepared them for a radical shift in value-driven behavior that followed the resurrection. All of this discipleship took place prior to the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost. Thus, discipleship takes place in the context of relationship (Moreau, Corwin, and McGee 2004, 233-243).

Discipleship in Families and Churches

Since the days of the New Testament Church, communities of faith have undertaken the process of discipleship together. Typically, especially in collectivist societies and prior to the industrial revolution, Christian faith and discipleship were expressed by entire families who belonged to parish churches. These churches implemented structured programs to support families in catechesis. Periodically, churches would undergo periods of revival or corporate recalibration to the biblical faith, which were often accompanied by a corporate recommitment to authentic Christian actions. Timothy Keller (2012) describes a typical process of discipleship:

Before the eighteenth century, a person became a Christian through a process that was corporate, gradual, formal, and completely church-centric. ...One's faith was first inherited and then personally confirmed by the individual through a highly communal process that entailed the support and approval of his or her family, church, and religious authorities. (55)

Following the Industrial Revolution, however, increases in mobility and urbanization resulted in a decrease in the community ties that held together the parish church system. Wesleyan revivalism and later Pentecostalism democratized both theological reflection and spiritual formation, transforming discipleship from a communitarian to an individualistic endeavor

(Keller 2012, 54-61, 311-321). Today, loyalty to local churches is thin, and families bear a larger burden for discipling children than ever before.

Though families have the closest relational ties to their children and have perhaps the greatest influence over their faith development (Jones 2011), many parents feel ill-equipped to engage in discipleship (Steenburg 2011). Os Guinness (2003) notes that most evangelical Christians have uncritically accepted the notion that ministry is for professionals. Consequently, modern families frequently turn to churches and Christian youth organizations to disciple their children (Shirley 2008). Kara Powell and Chap Clark (2011) quote the University of Notre Dame's Christian Smith: "Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important societal influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents. ...When it comes to kids' faith, parents get [from their children] what they [the parents] are" (24). So, while the church may support parents in discipling children, parents remain central to the discipleship process.

Discipleship in Schools

Another catalyst for discipleship is the faith-based educational institution. In much the same way that modern parents have turned to churches and Christian youth organizations for assistance in discipleship, they have also turned to Christian colleges and universities for help. The religiously skeptical environment of higher education in the twentieth century United States was certainly a factor in the rise of Christian liberal arts institutions. Unlike their Bible college counterparts, whose mission was to prepare ministers and missionaries through a unique curriculum not available at secular institutions, Christian liberal arts universities arose from a desire to integrate faith with learning and living. Arthur Holmes (Holmes 1977, 1987) and Barry

Corey (2005) both note that Pentecostal and evangelical Christians looked to faith-based institutions as both a protection against secular humanism and hedonistic social forces in the broader academy and as an extension of the discipleship process wherein students would be encouraged to wrestle with the implications of Christian faith and epistemology in light of modern scientific data and theories. In a sense, the Christian university was seen as an advanced form of catechesis, which moved students from learning the precepts of their faith to evaluating its principles in a culture of open, respectful inquiry.

Since the days of Jesus' first followers, spiritual formation and discipleship have taken place in the context of relationship. The family and the local church have always been involved in the discipleship process; however, the urbanization and mobility of modern life have loosened ties with the parish church and have left parents essentially alone in the spiritual training of their children. Modern parents often look to local churches and faith-based educational institutions to take the lead in the discipleship process, but loose relational ties with institutions make discipleship problematic. David Kinnaman (2011) explains that young Christians are leaving the institutional church in unprecedented numbers, at least in part because churches are trying to accomplish discipleship along an assembly-line model. However, disciples are never mass produced; they are custom made. Certainly Christian universities and local churches have a role to play in discipleship, perhaps by connecting students to Christian mentors. These institutional efforts, however, must be in cooperation with the mentorship of Christian parents.

Assessment of Discipleship

Theoretically and theologically discipleship is comprised of domains or components, which include relationship with God; relationship with others; a complex of beliefs, values, and character; and actions. Additionally, history demonstrates that institutions such as families,

churches, and educational institutions may serve as catalysts for discipleship, which always takes place in the context of relationship. It remains to be seen how such domains and catalysts may be assessed in a valid, reliable fashion. How can parents, ministers, educators, and even Christ-followers gain insight into the discipleship process within an individual or a population of individuals?

Seeing the Invisible

The fundamental challenge for assessment of discipleship or spiritual formation is twofold: (1) spiritual transformations cannot be directly observed, and (2) the results of spiritual transformations may be imitated or acted out in a way that is not genuine. Certainly there are people who have no relationship to Jesus Christ who exhibit ethics and behaviors that are commensurate with the Sermon on the Mount and with the historical virtues of Christianity. Determining whether such behaviors are the result of a Christian discipleship process or whether they spring from some other motivation requires researchers to see the invisible. Biblically, there are only two “people” who know about an individual’s spiritual condition: God and the individual disciple. Confounding the difficulty of assessing inward transformation is the biblical caution that no human being has perfect insight into his or her own heart (Dueck 2011, Jer. 17:9). Researchers are rightly cautious about the idea of empirically evaluating someone’s spiritual condition.

In the social sciences, the problem of describing phenomena that cannot be directly observed is not a new one. Assessing such things as personality, intelligence, attitudes, and motives requires strategies for operationalizing latent constructs (Bollen and Hoyle 2012). Not only may latent variables be defined, described and assessed through factorial analysis, but latent variables may also be arranged into causal structures, based on theory (Pearl 2012). Factor

analytic structural equation modeling may provide empirical assessment of theories of causation in the area of Christian spiritual formation. Perhaps through the use of social scientific methodology, a discipleship assessment can be developed that is complementary to biblical teaching, acceptable to a broad range of Christian theological perspectives, useful to institutions that seek to catalyze spiritual formation, and—most importantly—helpful to those who seek insight into their own spiritual journey. Before presenting the results of the University SLS, I will briefly examine three recent attempts to assess Christian spiritual formation in the context of a local church. The Lifeway Research studies, Monvee, and the WCA’s church-based REVEAL study (Church SLS) provide important points of convergence in discipleship assessment.

Lifeway Research

Beginning in 2008, the team from Lifeway Research began a study into the characteristics of Protestant churches that are being effective. Ed Stetzer’s team used a mixed methods approach, conducting telephone surveys, qualitative interviews, surveys, and exploratory factor analysis to determine that certain characteristics are more prevalent in growing, missional churches than in less effective organizations. Included in the Lifeway “Transformational Church” paradigm are seven factors:

1. Missionary Mentality
2. Vibrant Leadership
3. Relational Intentionality
4. Prayerful Dependence
5. Worship
6. Community
7. Mission

These seven factors group into three second-order factors or domains, labeled (1) discern, (2) embrace, and (3) engage (Stetzer and Rainer 2010, 23-43). These domains interact with one another in a “transformational loop,” similar in concept to the hermeneutical spiral (Shaw and Engen 2003, 80-82). Stetzer and Rainer assert that there are best practices for churches, which lead to greater effectiveness at making disciples. These characteristics formed the theory behind the Transformational Church Assessment Tool (TCAT) (Geiger, Kelley, and Nation 2012, 12).

Subsequently, the LifeWay team turned their attention to the individual believer: “In 2010, LifeWay Research embarked on another ambitious research project: to survey believers about their spiritual lives and level of maturity” (Geiger, Kelley, and Nation 2012, 12-13). As a theoretical foundation, the team used the Spiritual Formation Inventory (SFI) (Waggoner 2008), and again they employed a multi-phase, mixed methods approach. They conducted qualitative interviews with Christian leaders from a variety of denominations, surveyed one thousand Protestant pastors in the United States, and then surveyed four thousand Protestants in North America. Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation write, “The team built on the seven [SFI] domains and added factors based on the expert interviews. Ultimately, the research revealed an eighth domain that points to spiritual health. We will refer to these as attributes of discipleship” (2012, 15). The eight attributes of discipleship discovered by the LifeWay team are:

1. Bible Engagement
2. Obeying God and Denying Self
3. Serving God and Others
4. Sharing Christ
5. Exercising Faith
6. Seeking God

7. Building Relationships

8. Unashamed (Geiger, Kelley, and Nation 2012, 59)

The team further determined that these attributes or factors are most likely to develop when disciples encounter “truth given by healthy leaders when [the disciple] is in a vulnerable position” (61). This confluence of Truth (about identity and spiritual disciplines), Healthy Leaders, and a Posture of weakness, interdependence, and outward focus is labeled the Transformational Sweet Spot (TSS) (61). The LifeWay Research team has now made the Transformational Discipleship Assessment available online.⁷

Again, in the research conducted by the LifeWay team, domains of discipleship emerge that coincide with the theoretical foundation outlined above. Relationship with God and others are involved. Character transformation through catechesis is present, and transformed action—particularly in the areas of mission and spiritual disciplines—is involved. Additionally, the LifeWay research develops notion of the church as a catalytic agent for spiritual formation. Though the team is clear that only the Holy Spirit can cause a disciple to grow, the church must create an environment in which that growth may be encouraged.

Monvee

A second contemporary discipleship tool is the Monvee spiritual growth assessment. Created by Eric Parks, Casey Bankord, and the Monvee team in Rockford, IL, Monvee has enjoyed the endorsement of popular author and pastor John Ortberg (Ortberg 2010; Parks and Bankord 2012). The primary uniqueness of the Monvee approach to spiritual life assessment is that Parks and Bankord are more concerned with what *kind* of person each disciple was made to be, rather than exactly *where* they are in their spiritual formation journey. Thus, Monvee focuses

⁷ See <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/the-transformational-discipleship-assessment-tda-P005216492>.

on grouping respondents into ideal types of disciples and suggests resources that fit their personality, spiritual pathway, learning style, and even signature sin or “frequency blocker” (Parks and Bankord 2012, 39-57).

For its personality type assessment, Monvee has adopted the language of the Enneagram, categorizing respondents as (1) reformers, (2) helpers, (3) achievers, (4) individualists, (5) investigators, (6) loyalists, (7) enthusiasts, (8) challengers, or (9) peacemakers. Their notion of spiritual pathways is taken from Gary Thomas (2010), who describes ways in which people tend to connect relationally to God. Thomas’ seven pathways are (1) activist, (2) contemplative, (3) creation, (4) intellectual, (5) relational, and (7) serving. For learning styles, Parks and Bankord suggest that people may prefer one of five primary learning styles: (1) auditory, (2) classroom, (3) social, (4) verbal, and (5) visual. It is not entirely clear from their writing how Parks and Bankord (2012) might categorize a “signature sin,” except that they state, “Because we are unique, we each have unique habits of sin (correlating to our personality) that tend to get in the way of our growth and cause us to live outside our frequency” (39). Nevertheless, by assessing these twenty-one concepts, the team believes they can provide useful resources and insight to individuals who are seeking to grow in Christian discipleship (Parks and Bankord 2012).

The ideal-type approach is novel and holds some promise for meaningful discipleship engagement. Students who participated in a trial of the Monvee system at EU in 2011 ($N = 120$) indicated that the visual style of the assessment was engaging and that the materials produced by Monvee were attractive. However, participants also indicated that the assessment could be frustrating because they believed it to be inaccurate. The assessment asks only 22 questions to measure at least 21 factors. Parks and Bankord (2012) explain that the Monvee Discovery “is based on 780 questions boiled down to 22 easy-to-answer questions.... Through years of

research and thousands of experiments, we know that the Monvee Discovery is precise in helping people” (80). Mathematically, the idea that 22 questions can precisely represent a field of 780 questions that group into 21 factors is frankly suspect. The standard minimum ratio of indicators to latent variables in factor analysis is four to one. Below the four to one threshold, factor indeterminacy becomes an issue (Mulaik 2010). The research and experimentation that led Parks and Bankord to place their confidence in the Monvee Discovery assessment is not included in their writing.⁸

Certainly the Monvee team presents an attractive idea: Christian discipleship programs should be custom made for each disciple. Since people are not all alike, their ways of connecting to God should not have to be the same. Perhaps the one-size-fits-all approach to discipleship has sometimes characterized institutional programs, including Sunday school, catechism, and other church-based ministries. However, I suspect that the failing of these programs is more the lack of a mentoring relationship within the program’s structure than a fundamental flaw in programs as a whole. In an effort to create a customized program for each disciple through a technological solution, Monvee may actually be working against the communitarian aspects of discipleship. Still, leaders interested in catalyzing discipleship would do well to respect the personality, spiritual pathway, and learning style of each believer. Probably no system of discipleship will apply equally to every believer apart from meaningful relationship with a mentor.

Willow Creek Association

A third attempt to assess both spiritual formation and the effectiveness of local churches at catalyzing discipleship is the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey (Church SLS), conducted by the

⁸ It may be worth noting that at the time of this writing, the Monvee website (<http://www.monvee.com>) is only loading a blank page. I cannot determine whether or not Monvee is still in operation.

WCA (Hawkins and Parkinson 2008, 2011; Hawkins, Parkinson, and Arnson 2007). The REVEAL research began in the 1990s as a pastoral attempt to better understand a single congregation, the Willow Creek Community Church. Since that time, it has grown into a multi-wave, multi-method research study involving more than 1,500 churches and 350,000 respondents (Scammacca Lewis 2012, 2). Hawkins and Parkinson (2011) write, “The distinction of REVEAL is its ability to ‘measure the unseen,’ using a research approach that assesses how people’s spiritual attitudes, needs, and motivations align with spiritual behaviors” (Appendix 1, Loc. 4351).

Beyond simply assessing spiritual formation—defined as spiritual attitudes, needs, motivations, and behaviors (Creative Leadership Ministries 2001)—Hawkins, et al. (2007) were testing three hypotheses:

1. “There is a migration path for spiritual growth based on church activities.”
2. “The most effective evangelism tool is a spiritual conversion.”
3. “Spiritual friendships are a key driver to spiritual growth” (57).

What they discovered through their initial round of research was different:

1. “A spiritual migration path exists, but it is not defined by a person’s church involvement. Instead, it is defined by a person’s relationship with Jesus Christ.”
2. “Spiritual conversations are important to evangelism, but the most effective outreach strategy—bar none—is to motivate the most Christ-Centered people. They are the best evangelists, best volunteers and most generous donors in the church.”
3. “Meeting the need for connection and genuine spiritual relationships is crucial to spiritual growth. Yet organized efforts to create these environments appear to be effective only in the earlier stages of spiritual growth” (57).

In order to arrive at these conclusions, Hawkins, et al. developed a four-stage “spiritual continuum” based on respondent self-descriptions of their spiritual lives:

1. **Exploring Christianity** was indicated by the following response: “I believe in God, but I’m not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.”

2. **Growing in Christ** was indicated by: “I believe in Jesus, and I’m working on what it means to get to know him.”
3. **Close to Christ** was indicated by: “I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.”
4. **Christ-Centered** was indicated by: “God is all I need in my life. He is enough. Everything I do is a reflection of Christ” (37).

Beyond these simple, direct responses, the WCA researchers used multi-group analysis to explore whether these respondent segments expressed statistically significant differences in behaviors, attitudes, spiritual practices (disciplines). Since the spiritual continuum did not correlate to church involvement, in what ways did it correlate? The team found that as respondents moved up the spiritual continuum, the following items also increased:

1. **Spiritual Behaviors**, such as tithing, evangelism, and serving others
2. **Spiritual Attitudes**, such as love for God and love for people
3. **Personal Spiritual Practices**, such as prayer, confession, reading the Bible, and listening to God (Hawkins, Parkinson, and Arnson 2007, 37-46)

Further, the team discovered that at some point, a significant proportion of their respondents indicated that their spiritual life had stalled or that they had become dissatisfied with the church (47). In subsequent research, the team broadened their respondent pool and learned that the stalled segment reported higher incidents of barrier issues in their lives, including conflict with other priorities, emotional issues, failure to forgive, addictions, inappropriate relationships, and other traumatic experiences, such as abuse (Hawkins and Parkinson 2008, 87). The REVEAL researchers also used discriminant analysis to examine the statistically significant differences between proximate groups on the spiritual continuum. Though the research was cross-sectional, the data provided church leaders with critical clues to how parishioners move up the spiritual continuum.

The continuum itself eventually led to the development of a Spiritual Vitality Index against which churches could benchmark key measures related to spiritual growth on the congregational level (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, Chapter 11: Loc. 3181). The Spiritual Vitality Index is a three-dimensional model, comprised of:

1. **“The Church’s Role.** This category assesses the congregation’s satisfaction with a few key church attributes that are most catalytic to spiritual growth—for instance, how the church helps people develop a personal relationship with Christ, understand the Bible in greater depth, and challenges them to grow” (Chapter 11: Loc. 3164-3172, emphasis added).
2. **“Personal Spiritual Practices.** This category assesses those spiritual practices most critical to spiritual growth across all three movements, including reflection on Scripture and prayer for guidance” (Chapter 11: Loc. 3172, emphasis added).
3. **“Faith in Action.** This category includes factors significant to the more mature movements of spiritual growth, such as evangelism, serving those in need, and the degree to which congregants are willing to risk everything for Christ” (Chapter 11: Loc. 3172, emphasis added).

By employing multi-wave cross-sectional studies, an individual church could measure how changes in ministry practices were affecting the spiritual formation of the congregation, if at all.

The 1,007 churches that had participated in the Church SLS by 2011, represented a wide geographic and denominational cross-section of the Protestant Church in the United States. Congregations varied in size. The bulk of the respondent churches (75 percent) reported an average weekend attendance of between 101 and 1,000 people. Participating churches indicated the denominational affiliations shown in Table 1. Researchers compared congregation-level data and identified “best-practice churches.” “[Best-practice] churches achieved a Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI) that placed them in the top 5 percent of the 500 churches taking the REVEAL survey in the fall of 2007” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011, Appendix 4: Loc. 4432).

Table 1: Denominations Represented in the REVEAL Church SLS from 2007-2011

Church Denomination	Percentage of Church Sample
Base Size	1007
Nondenominational	28%
Baptist	17%
Methodist	9%
Lutheran	8%
Presbyterian / Reformed	7%
Christian Church / Church of Christ / Disciples of Christ	4%
Assembly of God / Church of God / Pentecostal	4%
Association of Vineyard	3%
Other	20%

Source: Data adapted from Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson. *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition. Appendix 3: 4418.

In summary, the WCA's multi-year study of discipleship practices and outcomes at local churches across the United States demonstrates that the latent factors associated with spiritual formation can be measured with validity and reliability. Further, these factors provide actionable data to church leaders who are seeking to catalyze discipleship among their parishioners. The data are both theoretically sensible and challenging to popular views of spiritual formation. The primary weakness of the Church SLS is its cross-sectional design. Because respondents are not tracked longitudinally, it is difficult to understand precisely what factors most influence changes in SVI. However, repeated assessments in a local church can provide important data in support of church leadership decisions. In the final section of this paper I will present the structure and results of the REVEAL University Spiritual Life Study (University SLS), which is an extension of the Church SLS research into context of Christian higher education.

REVEAL University Spiritual Life Survey

In the fall of 2008, EU chartered an Action Project Team to formally investigate assessment of student spiritual formation. The team's efforts were a the university's commitment to continuous quality improvement and were a response to opportunities for improvement noted in the university's most recent Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Systems Portfolio Feedback Report.⁹ However, the university's interest in assessing student spiritual formation actually began prior to the team's work. At least since the year 2000, the university's directors of spiritual life and vice president for student development had been researching available assessment instruments and had even attempted to develop their own assessment tools. Assessments that were considered—sometimes even tested—and discarded include, (1) The EU Spiritual Life Profile and Questionnaire, (2) The Christian Character Index (Zigarelli 2002a, 2002b), (3) the Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) (Piedmont et al. 2008), (4) the Defining Issues Test (Rest and Narvaez 1998), (5) the Christian Life Profile (Creative Leadership Ministries 2001), and (6) the REVEAL Church SLS (Hawkins and Parkinson 2011). While each of these assessments provided valuable data, none was designed to assess the spiritual formation of students in a Christian university setting while providing meaningful program evaluation to campus ministries directors and administrators. By the summer of 2010, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) had begun a lengthy process of definition, operationalization, and assessment of spiritual formation, which continues today (Council for Christian Colleges & Universities 2011; Stokes and Regnerus

⁹ Evangel University has chosen to participate in the AQIP accreditation pathway, offered by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). See <http://www.ncahlc.org/AQIP/AQIP-Home/>.

2010). Unaware of the CCCU effort, in the summer of 2011, EU asked the WCA to begin collaboratively adapting the Church SLS for use on Christian universities.

Methodology

Prior to fielding an online survey, researchers¹⁰ adapted the REVEAL Church SLS by (1) removing questions that had relevance only to a church setting, (2) adding questions related to students' participation in and satisfaction with campus ministries initiatives, (3) changing language to make it appropriate to students' stage of life, and (4) investigating whether student spiritual formation followed the identity status taxonomy developed by James Marcia (Marcia 1966). In the spring of 2011, fifteen EU students completed a draft survey on paper, and were subsequently interviewed about the questionnaire's wording, length, and general acceptability. Researchers used student feedback to improve the questionnaire, which was later coded for electronic delivery. In September 2011, 448 traditional undergraduate students completed the pilot version of the University SLS via an online interface. Respondents were limited to returning students, resulting in a 43.9 percent response rate. No attempt was made to stratify the sample. Respondent demographics follow:

- 64% female, 36% male
- 4% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 33% juniors, 38% seniors
- 87% White, 5% Hispanic, 3% two or more races, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% African-American, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Average Age: 20.8 years

Students indicated the following denominational affiliations:

- 70% Assemblies of God
- 16% Non-denominational
- 5% Baptist

¹⁰ The principal researchers for the University SLS are Terry Schweizer and Nancy Scammacca Lewis, Ph.D. from the Willow Creek Association and John Farquhar Plake and Jeffrey Fulks, Ph.D. from Evangel University.

- 3% Other
- 1% Church of God
- 1% Lutheran
- 1% Methodist
- 1% Presbyterian
- 1% “I am not sure.”

Participating students averaged 30.4 minutes (SD = 14.2 minutes) responding to 64 questions.

The survey was available to students over a three-week period. Most questions produced multiple items.

Survey Design

The University SLS included multiple choice questions in six sections: (1) Spiritual Journey, (2) Faith Development, (3) Spiritual Practices, (4) Spiritual Relationships, (5) Faith-in-Action, and (6) School Life. Similar to the Church SLS, the University SLS is based, in part, upon the Christian Life Profile (Creative Leadership Ministries 2001). Nancy Scammacca Lewis, statistician for the WCA, explains:

Many of the items used in the analyses described below were taken from the Christian Life Profile (CLP), created by Randy Frazee, senior minister of Oak Hills Community Church in San Antonio, Texas. Frazee engaged church leaders, theologians, and others in a rigorous process of biblical inquiry to find the core, repeatable characteristics of a follower of Christ. The statements were then tested and refined in multiple forums, including The Spiritual State of the Union, an ongoing benchmark of the “spiritual temperature” in America, sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania and The Gallup Organization. Among the experts contributing to this comprehensive effort were Dallas Willard, J.I. Packer and Larry Crabb. The specific statements included in the college version of the SLS represent the most discriminating statement for each of the thirty core competencies and were used with the permission of the author. (2012, 3)

The Christian Life Profile contributed items related to Christian belief, spiritual practices, and spiritual virtues. Items in these areas typically featured instructions like, “Below are different statements regarding your religious beliefs. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree

with each of these statements. (Select one for each statement).” Responses were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale (Agree-Disagree with “I don’t know” as a null value).

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the University SLS began with developing a spiritual continuum that accounted for both love of God and love of others. Researchers used students’ responses to questions regarding their self-defined *Intimacy with Christ* (e.g., “I have a solid relationship with Christ that makes a difference in my life.”) and their *Love of Others* (e.g., “I unconditionally forgive all members of my family who wrong me.”) to form response clusters. Responses to students’ closeness to Christ formed four clusters, and responses regarding love of others formed three clusters. The twelve-part paradigm produced by cross-tabulating these two dimensions ultimately yielded five stages of a spiritual continuum among EU students:

- Non-Believer – 0%
- Beginner – 4%
- Believer – 46%
- Follower – 34%
- Disciple – 16%

Once a spiritual continuum had been established, researchers investigated spiritual beliefs, spiritual practices (disciplines), spiritual relationships, faith-in-action, and virtues in each stage of the continuum.

Key findings of the research include the following:

1. Spiritual growth does not correlate to college class, age, or gender.
2. Building central biblical beliefs that develop a close relationship with God is important for students in the early stages of their spiritual growth.
3. Spiritual practices, especially those related to prayer, are highly correlated to spiritual growth in the early stages of the spiritual continuum.
4. Spiritual relationships with peers are important in early stages of the spiritual continuum; however, in later stages, relationships with adult mentors become more prominent.

5. Spiritual disciplines centered around Bible study and single-mindedness (e.g., “I want Jesus to be first in my life.”) are catalytic in movement from believer to follower.
6. The most advanced segments of the spiritual continuum report the highest levels of evangelism.
7. Spiritual practices like reading the Bible (not for class) and solitude increase significantly for students in the more advanced stages of spiritual growth.
8. The virtues of peace and self-control increase dramatically in the most advanced segment of the spiritual continuum.
9. Overall, beliefs and spiritual practices increase early, while virtues develop later.

While these findings are certainly intriguing, it is important to recognize that they are the result of a single pilot study among a relatively small and homogeneous sample of students. Also, these findings are primarily descriptive. They give no indication of causality; particularly, they cannot account for the influence of the university on student spiritual formation.

School Factor

In order to determine the university’s influence on student spiritual formation, researchers selected five items “from a pool of 28 items that asked students to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their school’s efforts to aid them in their spiritual growth” (Scammacca Lewis 2012, 5). The selected items were orthogonal and displayed excellent model fit when submitted to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), $CFI^{11} = 0.99$, $SRMR^{12} = 0.02$. Factor loadings ranged from 0.68 to 0.82, and each item was statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Finding and validating a School Factor enabled researchers to investigate the impact of the university on student spiritual growth, using structural equation modeling. Scammacca Lewis (2012) writes:

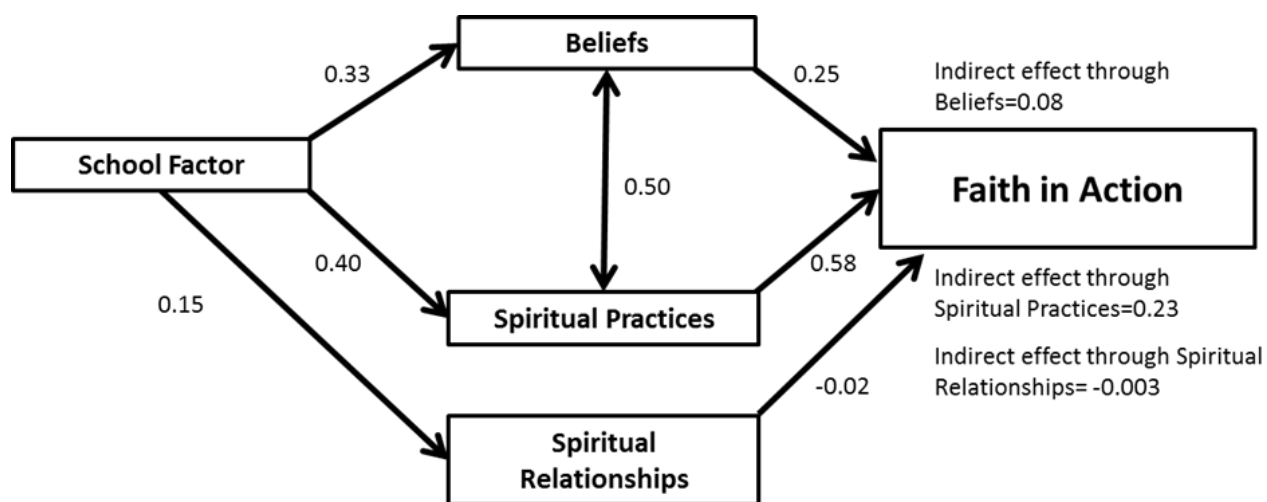
¹¹ Bentler Comparative Fit Index (Bentler 1990)

¹² Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

Faith in Action was selected as the endogenous [output] variable for these models. This variable was the average of [1] the student's willingness to risk everything that is important in life for Jesus Christ, [2] extent of knowing and using one's spiritual gifts to serve, and [3] extent of practice of forgiveness of those who have hurt you. Researchers believed that these actionable behaviors and attitudes represented the fruit of the students' spiritual growth and thus would make for an appropriate outcome variable. (7)

Several models of the university's direct and indirect effect on Faith in Action were tested iteratively. Analysis revealed that the school's effect on Faith in Action is fully mediated by Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, and (much less significantly) by Relationships (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Effect of the School on Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, and Faith in Action Through Spiritual Relationships.



Source: Nancy Scammacca Lewis. *The Role of Evangel University in Students' Spiritual Growth.* (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2012), 11.

Scammacca Lewis concludes:

The fit of this model was good, CFI = 0.95 and SRMR = 0.06. Adding Spiritual Relationships to the model slightly increased the percentage of variance accounted for in Faith in Action to 56.4% ($r^2 = .564$). The indirect effect of the school was again much larger through Spiritual Practices (0.23, $p < .001$) than through Beliefs (0.08, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of the school through Spiritual Relationships was close to zero and not statistically significant (-0.003, $p = .544$). This model also was tested with the inclusion

of a direct effect between the school and Faith in Action. The direct effect was small (0.09) and its addition worsened the model's fit slightly. As a result, it was dropped from the model. (2012, 10-11)

Thus, over 56 percent of the total variance in students' Faith in Action may be accounted for by the university's efforts to directly influence the students' beliefs and spiritual practices; however, impact is nearly three times more powerful through spiritual practices. Though the procedures used in developing these models are exploratory, rather than confirmatory, if these models are replicated in subsequent research at other faith-based institutions, universities will be well-served to help students not only learn about their faith but practice it as well. It will also be useful to continue examining the Spiritual Relationships factor in subsequent studies. I am not convinced that the University SLS has framed its questions appropriately. It is also possible that Spiritual Relationships exert their influence on another endogenous variable that has not been studied in this process. Further investigation into the role of Spiritual Relationships in student spiritual formation is needed.

Parent Factor

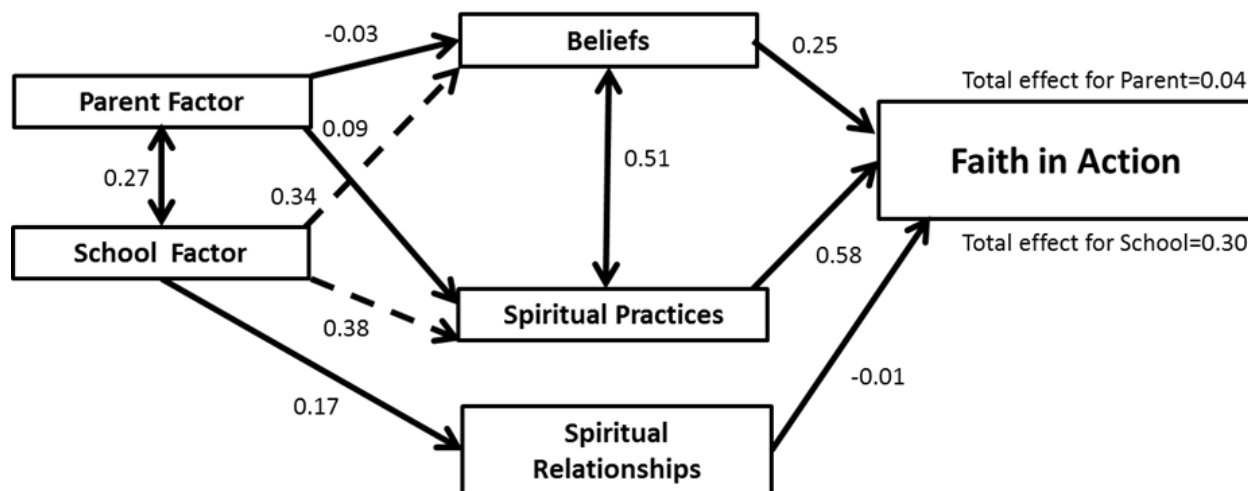
Beyond the impact of the university, researchers were interested in the impact of parents on student spiritual formation. Data from the Church SLS and another pilot study among Christian high school students led researchers to believe that student spiritual formation was connected to the spiritual practices of their parents (Powell and Clark 2011; Scammacca Lewis 2011a, 2011b, 2012). In the same way that the school factor was identified, researchers selected five of nine items "that asked about family spiritual practices" for inclusion in a one-factor CFA model. Scammacca Lewis explains:

Items were selected that represented a diversity of family practices including prayer, worship, studying Scripture, and service. Students were asked the extent to which their families engaged in these practices when they lived at home before attending college. Results indicated excellent model fit, CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.02. All items loaded 0.57 or

higher on the latent variable and were statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level. (2012, 16)

Once the Parent Factor had been validated, researchers iteratively tested its effect on several mediating and endogenous variables through structural equation modeling. In the final model, both the Parent Factor and the School Factor are represented (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Effect of the School and Parent on Spiritual Practices, Beliefs, and Faith in Action



Source: Nancy Scammacca Lewis. *The Role of Evangel University in Students' Spiritual Growth*. (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2012), 20.

Model fit was good (CFI = 0.096; SRMR = 0.05); however, the total variance in Faith in Action explained by this model ($r^2 = .563$) was not improved over the previous model (see Figure 1).

Scammacca Lewis concludes:

The results presented in this section indicate that the influence of parents on their children's spiritual growth may decline and/or be difficult to detect in young adults. Parents' influence was much smaller than the influence of the school in determining the extent to which college students put their faith into practice. Results from a previous pilot study involving high school students indicate a greater influence of parents on the spiritual growth of their high school children. However, it may be that other factors are more influential once children leave home and enter the university environment. (2012, 20)

Further research, including a broader sample of respondents, a larger number of cases, and perhaps different questions related to the Parent Factor may give further insight into how the influence of parents is manifest in the spiritual maturity and practices of Christian university students.

Spiritual Vitality Gauge

The final goal of the researchers in the University SLS pilot study was to investigate whether or not a Spiritual Vitality Gauge (SVG) could be developed. The purpose of such a gauge is not to evaluate the individual student's spiritual formation. Rather, it is to assist campus ministers and university administrators in assessing the impact of the university on student spiritual formation and in evaluating programming changes.

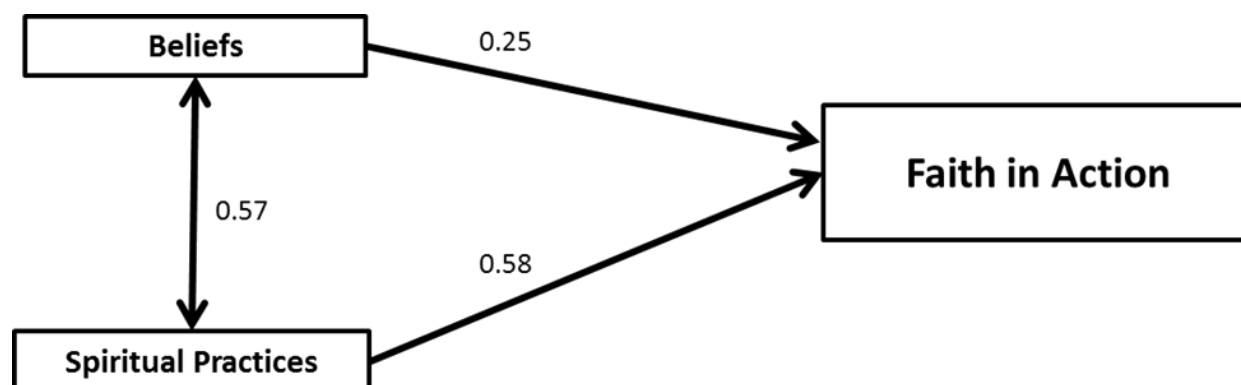
In order to develop the SVG, researchers returned to the core items from the Christian Life Profile, where they selected items from the domains of Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, and Faith in Action. Scammacca Lewis (2012) states, "The specific statements included in the SVG were chosen from 30 possible CLP items to represent Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, and Faith in Action. The [nine] items selected were those that were found to be most discriminating between students in different stages of spiritual maturity in a discriminant function analysis" (13). She continues:

All nine items were given equal weight. The numerical scores for each student's responses to the nine items were summed and then divided by the total possible score for this set of items. The resulting decimal was converted to a percentage that represents the student's SVG score on a scale of 0 to 100. In the dataset used in the present analysis, the mean SVG was 84.36 (SD = 12.26; SE = 0.58). The minimum SVG was 16.67; the maximum was 100. (2012, 13-14)

Researchers conducted reliability analysis on the SVG and found overall coefficient alpha to be good ($\alpha = 0.88$). Overall alpha was not improved by eliminating any items. Inter-item correlations varied between 0.21 and 0.62 with most ranging from 0.35 to 0.55. Item-total

correlations ranged from 0.50 to 0.73, reflecting a cohesive scale. A path model of the SVG is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Spiritual Vitality Gauge: Effect of Beliefs and Spiritual Practices on Faith in Action.



Source: Nancy Scammacca Lewis. *The Role of Evangel University in Students' Spiritual Growth*. (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2012), 8.

This baseline SVG model demonstrated excellent fit to the sample data (CFI = 1.00; SRMR = 0.000), and it accounted for 56 percent of the variance in Faith in Action ($r^2 = 0.560$) (Scammacca Lewis 2012, 8). Scammacca Lewis concludes that the model of SVG shown in Figure 3 is “representative of spiritual growth. Additionally, the goodness of fit of this model indicates that the SVG is a robust measure” (2012, 14).

Further research at EU and at other faith-based institutions will be necessary to establish measurement invariance of the SVG as well as determining whether or not the SVG is sensitive to the influence of the school factor over time. The EU study included the data structure necessary for longitudinal study. It remains an open question how positive change in SVG (Δ SVG) may be catalyzed and exactly how much change can be expected in a typical collegiate career.

Campus Ministries Program Evaluation

Beyond simply describing how spiritual formation happens among EU students, the REVEAL University SLS provided a three-dimensional “Benefit Analysis,” based on (1) stated importance of a particular ministry or service, (2) student satisfaction with that ministry or service, and (3) regression of the benefit against Spiritual Vitality Gauge. Ministries may be evaluated as falling into one of four quadrants:

1. **Low Priorities** are low in both stated importance and impact on satisfaction. Programs in this quadrant could be over-resourced.
2. **Opportunities** demonstrate a high impact on satisfaction but are low in stated importance. These programs are areas for potential future investment.
3. **Givens** are high in stated importance but low in impact on satisfaction. Programs in this quadrant are out-performing their impact and should not receive additional investment.
4. **Drivers** have a high impact on satisfaction and are high in stated importance. Programs in these areas should be refined but never discounted.

Evangel University’s report indicated that its programs and personnel perform well at supporting student spiritual growth. One particular driver is, “[EU] has teachers/faculty that model and consistently reinforce how to grow spiritually.” The Benefit Analysis section also challenged growth areas for the university. Two areas where the university can improve fall under the category “Support of Developing One’s Faith:”

- “Helps me process doubts that I might have about my faith in a constructive way.”
- “Provides worthwhile suggestions on how to work through barriers in my faith development.”

The area where EU can most effectively improve its spiritual life programs, according to the University SLS, is by providing encouragement, support, and structures for students to engage in spiritual practices, such as connecting chapel services to “next steps” in service or study and assisting students in developing the spiritual discipline of prayer. Each of these opportunities for

improvement are specific, actionable, and confirm other data available to leaders in the Spiritual Life Department.

Discussion

The goals of the EU pilot of the University SLS were to develop valid, reliable measures of student spiritual formation that are commensurate with biblical and theological perspectives on discipleship. Though the pilot study involved a relatively small sample size ($N = 448$) drawn exclusively from one denominational liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States, all of the pilot study's goals appear to have been achieved.

Investigations into correlations between Marcia's theory of Identity Status and student spiritual formation did not suggest any strong connection between the two concepts. Spiritual formation appears to be independent of identity development, age, college class (e.g., freshman or sophomore), gender, and even academic major. Findings suggest that parental influence over student spiritual development may be waning by the time students enter college. Respondents indicate that the people with the greatest influence on their spiritual growth are friends (26%), self (24%), or parents (14%); however, parental influence appears to be largely confined to modeling spiritual practices rather than forming beliefs. Beliefs may become reified at an earlier age. This hypothesis is supported by a 2011 study among 1,300 Christian high school students in Michigan. In that study, the Parent Factor exerted a much stronger effect on students' Beliefs ($\beta = 0.21$) than in the study of EU students ($\beta = -0.03$). Based on the findings in the EU pilot study, researchers determined that a broader pilot was needed to confirm and refine the models developed in the EU study.¹³

¹³ Further information about the Evangel University pilot of the REVEAL University SLS is available online at <http://web.evangel.edu/revealstudy/>.

REVEAL University SLS – Phase-Two Pilot

In the spring of 2012, EU and the WCA began seeking partner institutions to participate in a phase-two pilot of the University SLS. Because data analysis is conducted using structural equation modeling, the researchers were interested in increasing overall response to a level above $N = 5,000$. Additionally, since EU is a denominational institution and requires a statement of Christian faith from all entering students, the researchers were interested in broadening the range of both theological perspective and Christian spiritual maturity among respondents. More than fifty institutions, affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), participated in a live webinar about the EU pilot and received information about how to participate in the phase-two pilot. Though researchers sought grant funding for the study, funds were not available on the study timeline, and all participating institutions were required to underwrite their university's costs.

Methodology

Ultimately, four institutions participated: Evangel University (Assemblies of God, $N = 896$), California Baptist University (Southern Baptist, $N = 2,819$), Bethel University (Baptist General Conference, $N = 713$), and Bethel College (Missionary Church, $N = 487$). In total, 5,363 students participated in the study. Respondent demographics include:

- 65% female, 35% male
- 25% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 25% juniors, 24% seniors, 1% graduate students

As of this writing, not all data have been fully analyzed, and full demographic information is not available from all universities. Researchers compared Evangel University's respondent demographics with the known university-wide demographics and determined that respondents represent a reasonably representative sample of the student population (see Table 2).

Participating students from all four institutions averaged 27.81 minutes (SD = 15.36 minutes) responding to the same questionnaire used in the EU pilot study in 2011.

Table 2. Demographics of Evangel University Respondents Compared to University Population

	Number	% Sample	% Population	Variance
<i>N</i>	895	100%	43.3%	
Female	547	61%	57.8%	3.3%
Male	348	39%	42.1%	-3.2%
Freshman	322	36%	23.8%	12.2%
Sophomore	180	20%	20.8%	-0.7%
Junior	177	20%	20.9%	-1.1%
Senior	178	20%	24.8%	-4.9%
Graduate	38	4%	9.6%	-5.4%
Evangel Campus	781	87%	73.6%	13.7%
JRLC	15	2%	6.2%	-4.6%
Graduate School	38	4%	9.6%	-5.4%
Professional Studies	61	7%	10.6%	-3.8%
White	691	77%	77.6%	-0.4%
Non-White	204	23%	22.4%	0.4%

Survey Design

The survey used in the phase-two pilot of the University SLS was the same online instrument that EU used in 2011 with one exception. Evangel University included ten parochial questions, related to theological issues of interest to Assemblies of God institutions. These ten questions were appended to the main questionnaire for EU respondents in both the initial survey and in the phase-two pilot survey. These ten questions were not included in the questionnaires completed by respondents from other institutions.

Preliminary Results

Currently, researchers are continuing analysis of the survey's results and will be producing a full report on the study as well as individualized reports for each participating institution. Preliminary results indicate that the basic spiritual continuum described in phase one continues to be present in the broader study. Additionally, the idea that Marcia's theory of identity development might be correlated to spiritual growth has once again been rejected. Unlike the previous study, however, in the phase-two pilot, parental involvement in student spiritual formation appears much more important. The level parental involvement in a student's spiritual life is strongly correlated to the student's eventual spiritual development, including Faith in Action.

Spiritual Continuum

The spiritual continuum was calculated in the same manner as with the previous study; however, due to a more heterogeneous response pool, the percentage of respondents in each segment of the continuum changed. Following is a list of the percentage of respondents in each segment, followed (in parentheses) by the change from the EU study:

- Non-Believer – 2% (+2%)
- Beginner – 15% (+11%)
- Believer – 43% (-3%)
- Follower – 28% (-6%)
- Disciple – 11% (-5%)

Once a spiritual continuum had been established, researchers investigated spiritual beliefs, spiritual practices (disciplines), spiritual relationships, faith-in-action, and virtues in each stage of the continuum.

Key Findings

The following list is a summary of key preliminary findings in the phase-two pilot study:

1. Identity formation and spiritual continuum do not have a linear relationship.
2. Parental involvement in spiritual practices exerts a great deal of influence on student spiritual formation.
3. The basic notions of continuum described in phase one have endured a broader and larger sample.
4. *Intimacy with Christ* and *Love of Others* continue to provide a two-dimensional foundation for development of a meaningful spiritual continuum among respondents.
5. Spiritual growth remains uncorrelated to college class, age, or gender.
6. Building central biblical beliefs that develop a close relationship with God continues to be important for students in the early stages of their spiritual growth.
7. Spiritual practices, especially those related to prayer, continue to be highly correlated to spiritual growth in the early stages of the spiritual continuum.
8. Spiritual relationships with peers continue to be important in early stages of the spiritual continuum.
9. Relationships with adult mentors become most important in the third movement (Believer to Follower), but they never rival peer relationships.
10. Spiritual disciplines centered around Bible study and single-mindedness (e.g., “I want Jesus to be first in my life.”) remain catalytic in movement from Believer to Follower.
11. The most advanced segments of the spiritual continuum continue to report the highest level of evangelism.
12. Spiritual practices like reading and reflecting on the Bible (not for class) and solitude increase significantly for students in the more advanced stages of spiritual growth.
13. Spiritual Virtues all increase dramatically in the most advanced segment of the spiritual continuum.
14. The highest levels of serving through the university occur in the more advanced segments of the spiritual continuum.
15. Overall, beliefs increase early, spiritual practices follow, and virtues develop later, showing their largest amplitude change in the final movement of the continuum.

Beyond these preliminary results, researchers asked students about their level of involvement in several family spiritual practices. The questions took the form, “Before you started college and were at home, how often did **your family** engage in the following practices?”

Nine questions followed, probing issues such as prayer, worship in the home, scripture engagement, and service. Responses were scored on a five-point Likert-type frequency scale (never to daily). Based on their responses, students were assigned to three involvement groupings: (1) No Involvement (27%), (2) Some Involvement (38%), and (3) High Involvement (35%). Family of origin involvement in spiritual practices correlated strongly with student Beliefs, Spiritual Practices (outside of school), Virtues, and position on the spiritual continuum.

No analysis of the school factor or of the Spiritual Vitality Gauge has been completed for the phase-two pilot study as of this date. Individual university reports are currently in development to assist each university with program evaluation. Researchers plan to conduct preliminary longitudinal analysis on EU data, since approximately 120 EU students participated in both the 2011 and the 2012 surveys.

Conclusion

Literature on discipleship and spiritual formation make it clear that they are complementary, ongoing processes, which characterize the lives of Christ-followers. Though discipleship produces visible, measurable results, not all domains of discipleship are observable. Latent factors, including (1) Relationship with God, (2) Relationship with Others, (3) Transformed Character, and (4) Transformed Action all characterize the discipleship process. The discipleship process is led by the Holy Spirit with the cooperation of each Christ-follower; however, families, churches, and even schools may catalyze spiritual formation or, conversely, impede it. Assessing discipleship requires the ability to measure latent variables and test them in causal relationships to one another; thus, structural equation modeling is a helpful tool in valid, reliable assessment. Lifeway Research, Monvee, and the WCA have all contributed to spiritual

life assessments for the local church, and the Association's University SLS is producing valid, reliable spiritual life assessments for Christian colleges and universities.

The University SLS has been used in two waves on four Christian universities in the past two years. Analyses of the data have validated the existence of a spiritual continuum among Christian university students and have produced a meaningful Spiritual Vitality Gauge. Preliminary results indicate that students' involvement in family spiritual practices before coming to college is strongly correlated with Christian beliefs, spiritual practices, virtues, and with position on the spiritual development continuum. The University SLS has also produced meaningful data to provide university leaders with needed feedback on campus ministry programs. Through longitudinal data analysis, the University SLS is expected to demonstrate how changes in student spiritual vitality occur over time.

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