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RESILIENCE THEORY AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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RESILIENCE THEORY AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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To my Lord, my wife, my family, and friends

We are resilient

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PREFACE

Lord, you have shown me your enduring love first by redeeming me and then by consistently answering prayers that seemed impossible. To my mom, Grace, and dad, James Sr., who provided for me and taught me the value of hard work and dedication, and to Crystal, Justin, and Sharice, my siblings who have walked with me through life with love and supported me through the depths of my educational journey—you have been my anchors.

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James (JJ) Francis

Kansas City, Missouri
December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the heavyweight champion rose to his feet for the fourth time in the match, he mustered all his strength and knocked out the contender in one final blow. He silenced the audience who moments earlier groaned, “Stay down!” Now the crowd stood in awe at the champion’s demonstration of resilience. The American Counseling Association defines *resilience* as “a person’s ability to maintain equilibrium; adjust to distressful or disturbing circumstances; or to ‘bounce back’ to a level of positive functioning in spite of, or often in response to, adverse situations.”¹ Commonplace experiences with resilience occur in the transition from high school to college, a significant milestone in American society. Some freshmen college students will aptly navigate new challenges, including increased independence from family, finding an identity within romantic relationships, social groups, and involvement in the community. Meanwhile, others will struggle to adjust and will be overwhelmed by the social and academic changes they encounter.²

In *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Tim Clydesdale surveyed 125 recent high school graduates and found that some students had a superficial relationship with God, whereas others did not subscribe to any religious notion.³ Other students took the opportunity to place their spiritual identity in a “lockbox”

¹ American Counseling Association, *The ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), 458.

² Sungok Shim and Allison Ryan, “What Do Students Want Socially When They Arrive at College? Implications of Social Achievement Goals for Social Behaviors and Adjustment during the First Semester of College,” *Motivation & Emotion* 36, no. 4 (December 2012): 504–15.

³ Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Morality and Society Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 3, “On the Role of

alongside their political affiliation, ethnicity, and economic status.⁴ James Fowler exclaims that students who are unintentional about examining their beliefs will experience psychological tension.⁵ Is there a relationship between psychological factors and spiritual engagement? Should students be assessed within the first year of college to identify areas of potential difficulty or to promote success?

These adjustment and related challenges of first-year college students represent a problematic pattern worthy of further exploration. A 2014 survey of 1,033 students attributed a premature departure from college to mental health concerns, namely, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, and maladaptive adjustment during the first semester.⁶ Vincent Tinto approximates that 60% of college students will leave their first institution before receiving their degree, with approximately 30% departing after their first year and most leaving after their first semester.⁷ First-year students need resilience to endure the adversities of higher education and to demonstrate a stronger commitment to orthodox faith.

Introduction to the Research Problem

The first year of higher education is integral to academic and personal

Family, Faith, and Community,” para. 4, Kindle.

⁴ Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, chap. 1, “Seated at a Wobbly Table,” para. 3.

⁵ James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory posits that students entering college with strong faith have a greater likelihood that their faith will remain intact. Donald Edmondson and Crystal Park state, “Identity formation does not require belief change, however, nor does every student who goes to college change their beliefs.” Donald Edmondson and Crystal Park, “Shifting Foundations: Religious Belief Change and Adjustment in College Students,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12, no. 3 (April 2009): 289–302.

⁶ Alicia H. Nordstrom, Lisa M. Swenson-Goguen, and Marnie Hiester, “The Effect of Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem on College Adjustment, Academics, and Retention,” *Journal of College Counseling* 17, no. 1 (April 2014): 48–51.

⁷ Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 21. Three decades later the percentages are identical according to the U.S. Department of Education. “Digest of Education Statistics, 2018,” U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, accessed October 11, 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_326.10.asp.

success.⁸ The struggle of faith and belief appear to be ingrained in many students and plays an essential role in many of their experiences.⁹ Commitment to faith and spiritual formation at Christian institutions seems to be taken for granted. Clydesdale states that an alarming “30 percent of American teens take religious faith very seriously.”¹⁰ Spiritual and psychological struggles are symptoms attributed to students leaving college prematurely.¹¹ These psycho-spiritual issues often go unnoticed and unaddressed since they are often not assessed during freshmen orientation or throughout the student’s program.¹²

The first year is critical to set a firm foundation upon which discipline is required to participate in reading assignments, understanding new concepts, and the

⁸ In 1930, Boston University implemented a “first-year experience course.” Today 90 percent of universities in the United States have developed a freshmen orientation course. The goal of this programming experience is to bridge the gap between previous high academia and integrate students into their new academic and social environments with additional campus and community resources such as tutoring and mental health services. There is a lack of empirically valid proof that these efforts are effective in retaining students. Studies revealed that surveys were taken up to three semesters into the program where some freshmen had already dropped out of school. Other findings support the notion that psychological factors greatly influenced the student’s decision to leave school prematurely. Edmondson and Park, “Shifting Foundations,” 289–302.

⁹ Keith A. Puffer, “Religious Doubt and Identity Formation: Salient Predictors of Adolescent Religious Doubt,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 36, no. 4 (2008): 278.

¹⁰ Clydesdale states, “Teen faith is strongly associated with lower risks of risky behavior,” while other students surveyed shared that they felt more independent and mature after their first year. Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, chap. 3, “On the Role of Family, Faith, and Community,” para. 4. These teens felt more independent, although, it is not clear whether this felt maturity was rooted in moralism or an actual pursuit of Christian virtue through a transformed heart (Rom 12:1–2).

¹¹ Lee B. Kneipp, Kathryn E. Kelly, and Benita Cyphers, “Feeling at Peace with College: Religiosity, Spiritual Well-Being, and College Adjustment,” *Individual Differences Research* 7, no. 3 (September 2009): 188–96; R. Ashwini, and Vijay Prasad Barre, “Stress and Adjustment among College Students in Relation to their Academic Performance,” *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing* 5, no. 3 (March 2014): 288–92; Margarita Azmitia, Moin Syed, and Kimberley Radmacher, “Finding Your Niche: Identity and Emotional Support in Emerging Adults’ Adjustment to the Transition to College,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 23, no. 4 (December 2013): 744–61.

¹² According to Astin, “Assessment can be referred to two rather different activities: (a) the mere gathering of information (measurement) and (b) the utilization of that information for institutional and individual improvement (evaluation).” A. W. Astin, *Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (New York: ACE & Macmillan, 1991), quoted in Sukhwant S. Bhatia, “Quality Control in Christian Higher Education: The Importance of Evaluating What We Do,” *Christian Higher Education* 8, no. 4 (September 2009): 270. Not every aspect of educational experience can be measured, yet assessments provide a baseline to compare future development and growth. Current literature shows no consensus toward what an assessment would entail about the effectiveness of a first-year experience program.

choice of whether or not to engage with faith.¹³ Clydesdale noted that some parents send their children to Christian schools with the assumption that they will engage in Christian formation.¹⁴ The activities of Christian formation commonly include participation in spiritual activities, renewal of the mind, interpretation and application of Scripture, an expectation of growth in an individual's character, and involvement in a gospel-centered community.¹⁵ Spiritual maturity is presumed and gauged through an observation of a Christian life ethic, which is congruent with what students learn and how they live.¹⁶ An assessment of spiritual maturity may serve to inform students of areas of spiritual challenges or inconsistencies or to provide a baseline for growth. Incorporation of a resilience assessment might provide insight into psychological matters in need of adaptation, hope that overcomes adversity, and meaning in life.¹⁷ Resilience theory has not traditionally been incorporated into Christian formation and embodies a missed opportunity for the body of Christ.

¹³ Heinz Streib is concerned with the advancement of faith development theory through methodological clarity and empirical research to be appropriately recognized within the psychological community and calls for more empirical studies. Heinz Streib, "Extending Our Vision of Developmental Growth and Engaging in Empirical Scrutiny: Proposals for the Future of Faith Development Theory," *Religious Education* 99, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 429. See also Jonathan P. Hill, "Faith and Understanding: Specifying the Impact of Higher Education on Religious Belief," *Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 3 (September 2011): 535; M. Clark and Nicole Cundiff, "Assessing the Effectiveness of a College Freshman Seminar Using Propensity Score Adjustments," *Research in Higher Education* 52, no. 6 (September 2011): 616–39.

¹⁴ Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, chap. 1, "Poppy Lopez," para. 8.

¹⁵ Craig Dykstra contrasts life development which includes attitudes, sense of self, language, emotions, thoughts of self with the life of faith that involves a transformation and growth in maturity. Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005), chap. 3, "Faith and Human Development," para. 2. See also Larry A. Golemon, "Professional Identity Formation throughout the Curriculum: Lessons from Clergy Education," *Mercer Law Review* 68, no. 3 (2017): 649.

¹⁶ Frances L. O'Reilly and Roberta D. Evans, "Community: Calling Students to be Accountable," *Christian Higher Education* 6, no. 2 (March 2007): 119–30. Spiritual formation is essential for students who identify as Christians to have congruence between how they live and what they learn.

¹⁷ Jean Clinton, "Resilience and Recovery," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 3 (August 2008): 221; Robert J. Haggerty, *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Processes, Mechanisms, and Interventions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvii. Frequency and progression of adverse events in short intervals of time, coupled with socio-cultural context, and the developmental stage of an individual are common contributors to risk factors and problematic behaviors.

This research explores whether an assessment could incorporate the theory of resilience and spiritual maturity to help understand the process of Christian formation in first-year college students. The literature validates the need for developing resilience in higher education.¹⁸ Student resilience remains unmeasured on the psychological spectrum at most Christian institutions.¹⁹ Can a proper understanding of resilience theory aid Christian institutions in providing more in-depth psychological and spiritual support, thus producing more durable students who are better able to endure the rigors of higher education? Research has neither designed an instrument that applies resilience theory to Christian formation nor articulated a theoretical basis that measures the significance of the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity.

Current Status of the Research Problem

Many youths who choose to attend religious colleges desire to influence the world, develop their identity, and “make a deeper impact on their lives than students at nonreligious colleges.”²⁰ A caption from the Boyce College website reads, “You’re not casual about your faith. Your Christian College shouldn’t be either.”²¹ According to

¹⁸ According to Sukhwant S. Bhatia, “Christian higher education needs assessment and evaluation more than ever.” Bhatia, “Quality Control in Christian Higher Education,” 277–78. Wheeler states, “Program evaluations, if conducted with integrity, can contribute substantially, not only to management, but also to the mission that gives seminaries their reason for being.” B. G. Wheeler, “Program Evaluation: Some Practical Guidelines,” *Theological Education* (Autumn 1985): 93–188, quoted in Bhatia, “Quality Control in Christian Higher Education,” 277–78; See also Nataliya V. Ivankova and Sheldon L. Stick, “Students’ Persistence in a Distributed Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership in Higher Education: A Mixed Methods Study,” *Research in Higher Education* 48, no. 1 (February 2007): 94; Ashwini and Barre, “Stress and Adjustment among College Students,” 288–92.

¹⁹ Diana F. Wood, “*Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*: Student Well-Being and the Development of Resilience,” *Medical Education* 50, no. 1 (January 2016): 20–23; Enes Rahat and Tahsin İlhan, “Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Constructual, and Resilience in Predicting Students’ Adjustment to University Life,” *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 16, no. 1 (February 2016): 189.

²⁰ Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, chap. 3, “The Role of Faith,” para. 3. Prospective parents and students often select institutions based on their Christ-centered worldview used to shape and engage “participation with the culture and [offer] a new way of thinking, seeing, and doing based on a new way of being.” David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008): 62–67.

²¹ Boyce College, “Al Mohler, Introduction to Boyce College,” accessed January 26, 2019, <http://www.boycecollege.com/>. Boyce College is the undergraduate school at The Southern Baptist

President R. Albert Mohler Jr., the central distinctive of Boyce College is an “emphasis on a comprehensive Christian worldview education.”²² Boyce College is one of six affiliated undergraduate colleges in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) that identify as confessional Christian schools.²³ The faculty is committed to consistency in teaching and theological understanding. They are also encouraged to engage the students inside and outside of the classroom to provide opportunities for growth and transformation.²⁴ Mohler states that “the beliefs and convictions and passions of the faculty will be channeled into the lives of the students.”²⁵ Boyce College, therefore, provides a comprehensive setting for this study to take place.

According to the registrar at Boyce College, approximately 262 students were first-year students in 2018.²⁶ At Boyce College, 85 percent of the students were under the age of twenty-four, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.²⁷ According

Theological Seminary.

²² Mohler states that Boyce is “preparing a new generation of Christian young people to face a world that is increasingly pluralistic, increasingly secular, and to be able to apply all that the Scripture teaches and to think of all things through the lens of a comprehensive Christian worldview.” “What Makes Boyce College Different?” YouTube video, 5:20, Southern Seminary, January 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLad27JsuvM&feature=youtu.be>.

²³ Kimlyn J. Bender discusses the designation of a Christian university as comprising a confessional task, commitment to intellectual, moral, and even spiritual formation of its individual members. Bender states “The confessional task of the Christian university is to see itself in relation to God’s act of creative, sustaining, and salvific activity in Jesus Christ through the Spirit heralded by the church for the sake of the world, to see all aspects of the created and social order in this light . . .” Kimlyn J. Bender, “The Confessional Task of the Christian University,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 9.

²⁴ Boyce faculty sign doctrinal commitments, the Abstract of Principles, and the Baptist Faith & Message to ensure consistency in teaching and theological understanding.

²⁵ Boyce College, “Al Mohler, Introduction to Boyce College.”

²⁶ Academic Records, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 20, 2018. This number reflected the 2018–2019 academic year and excludes those enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic year. The graduation rate is at 48 percent, whereas student retention measured 74 percent for full-time first-year students.

²⁷ According to College Navigator, 56 percent of the population were reported as full-time on-campus students, 44 percent were part-time, and distance students were reported at about 50 percent at either full-time or part-time. College Navigator, “The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” accessed November 16, 2018, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Boyce&s=KY&id=157748#general>. This

to Chris H. Smith Jr., the Assistant Director of Boyce Student Life, students are required to live on campus during their first year.²⁸ The rationale is to build a relational community through shared connection, discipleship, activities, service opportunities, and Christian care. Boyce College also has an organized spiritual support network available to students in the residence halls.²⁹ Smith describes the emerging first week experience program, which started in 2017, as aimed at jumpstarting relationships between students, parents, staff, faculty, student services, and the administration.

Research supports the notion that spiritual and psychological factors contribute to holistic wellness and student retention in college.³⁰ The inclusion of an assessment of resilience and Christian formation at Boyce College can be used to identify the strengths and maturity of students desiring to pursue academia, ministry, or a Christ-centered vocation.³¹ Many students at Boyce are assumed to have a confession of faith with a

presents an important dynamic of housing availability on-campus at Boyce as well as in the surrounding area in Louisville and affects the culture, particularly within a 0.5-mile radius of the school.

²⁸ Smith states that students are required to live on campus until the age of twenty-two unless they are married, will be getting married, have extenuating circumstances, or decide to live with their parents. Smith reasons that student development and the disciplines associated with spiritual formation degrades if students are not residing on campus. Chris H. Smith Jr., interview with author, Louisville, Kentucky, July 25, 2019. Smith reports that the Student Life handbook is in the process of revision and will be available at the conclusion of 2019.

²⁹ Smith describes the first line of the spiritual support network at Boyce College as the Resident Assistants (RAs) who are assigned 25 students per hall and two student leaders who have undergone rigorous training and met set character standards. The RAs report to the male (2) and female (2) Resident Directors. Of those, three of four directors are seminary graduates, have degrees in biblical counseling, or are leaders in their local churches. Depending on the severity of student issues, the resident staff can work with local churches, the family of the student, or the Dean of Students. Smith, interview.

³⁰ Jaclyn M. Stoffel and Jeff Cain, "Review of Grit and Resilience Literature within Health Professions Education," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 82, no. 2 (February 2018): 124. The American College Health Association found that "fifty-six percent of college students surveyed reported feeling 'overwhelming anxiety' within the past 12 months" in 2014. See also Sandra Prince-Embury, Donald H. Saklofske, and David W. Nordstokke, "The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults," *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 35, no. 3 (June 2017): 276–90; Kneipp, Kelly, and Cyphers, "Feeling at Peace with College," 188–96; Ashwini and Barre, "Stress and Adjustment among College Students," 288–92; Azmitia, Syed, and Radmacher, "Finding Your Niche," 744–61. Chris Smith describes the top three factors for premature student departure from Boyce as financial, substantial academic issues, and failure to comply with campus policies. Smith, interview.

³¹ Ben Hussung, Advisor for Vocation and Career Development at Boyce College, reports that there is a foundations course for academic success available to all students; consequently, the course is mandatory for those on academic probation. At the inception of this research endeavor in July 2017, Boyce College initiated the department of Vocation and Career Development. This department specializes in

higher commitment to pursuing a Christian life ethic than the general population of Christian college students. Smith states that while a spiritual maturity assessment has value, there is uncertainty that first-year students can fairly and effectively evaluate their own spiritual maturity.³² Conversely, the Office of Vocation and Career Development at Boyce College yields that incoming students have struggled with identifying the strengths and skills needed to take the next step in their journey of life.³³ Some students enter college with an appropriate amount of preparation, while others have to learn how to problem solve, manage their time well, and demonstrate resilience in their faith and academics. Thus, this study is needed to evaluate how first-year students experience resilience and persevere academically despite hardship.³⁴

Resilience Foundations

Resilience is a concept that has scientific, psychological, mental, cultural, biological, spiritual, and social implications. Resilience can be acquired at any time from early childhood to the final stages of life.³⁵ One aim of this study is to describe the

guidance, career, calling, and preparation, and deployment of students for vocation or ministry. Hussung described that prior to this time, students did not take strength-based or spiritual gift assessments and received career guidance informally through their professors or other mentors. However, progress has been made in incorporating an aptitude assessment in fall of 2019. Ben Hussung, interview with author, Louisville, Kentucky, August 1, 2019.

³² Smith reports that the evaluation of a student's spiritual maturity might be evident by the affirmation of the local church, staff, faculty, and other students. He discusses that students are in the initial stages of becoming responsible for themselves, making day-to-day decisions, and might not be the best judges of their own psychological or spiritual status. In contrast, Smith believes that an assessment might be a valuable tool that has not been researched or implemented; yet the best evaluation would be to use wisdom to watch and discern the actions, activity, and affirmations of students. Smith, interview.

³³ Boyce College, "Vocation and Career Development," accessed August 1, 2019, <https://boycecollege.com/academics/student-success/vocation-career-development>; Hussung, interview.

³⁴ College Navigator, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary." Students represent those enrolled in fall 2016 who returned to Boyce College in fall 2017. Resilience factors include exploring their beliefs, enduring hardship with hope, and demonstrating ownership of faith.

³⁵ Ann S. Masten, "Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth," *Child Development* 85, no. 1 (February 2014): 6. Resilience is defined as the willingness to consistently and persistently go through a process of effective navigation with social institutions, managing healthy self-governance and esteem, maintaining perspective in the midst of psychological disturbances, adapting to adverse difficulties with application of available resources, and enduring hardship with hope. Steven M. Southwick et al., "Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,"

biblical, theological, and spiritual foundations of the phenomenon of resilience and contrast them with the psychological foundations. A second aim is to inquire whether an assessment could measure the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity experienced by first-year students at Boyce College. Insight about first-year student adjustment to adversity was obtained through a literature review of the psychological and spiritual support that students need and the problems that contribute to premature student departure.

Biblical Foundations of Resilience

A biblical or theological framework of resilience is not present in the existing academic literature.³⁶ However, patterns of resilience in Scripture are evident. Biblical concepts are analogous, but not identical, to the psychological construct of resilience. Endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness, for instance, appear in the Scripture and provide meaningful insight into the growing character of a believer. This ability to endure hardship serves to increase the faith of believers and their confidence in God's character and sovereignty despite their personal suffering. Scripture describes a pattern of resilience in Psalms 66:10–12; Romans 5:1–5; 2 Corinthians 4:7–18, 11:16–12:10; Ephesians 4:1–16; Colossians 1:24–29; Hebrews 12:3–11; and James 1:1–5.³⁷ God assigns or allows adverse events for his people to face with a joyful attitude while they trust and hope in his future promises. The testing and refining process is difficult but temporary, resulting in more mature and durable believers who finish their course in a better state than when they initially encountered the adverse situation.

European Journal of Psychotraumatology 5, no. 1 (January 2014): 1–14.

³⁶ Jim Dekker, "Resilience, Theology, and the Edification of Youth: Are We Missing a Perspective," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 67–89.

³⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture uses and quotations are taken from the ESV.

Christian Formation and Spiritual Maturity Assessment

Christian spiritual formation, according to Dallas Willard, is “obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”³⁸ Spiritual maturity is the implementation of Christian formation experienced by the believer as the life-long intentional pursuit and growing in conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ through the message of Christ in the context of community.³⁹ Spiritual maturity is empirically measurable with instruments such as Don Willett’s *Spiritual Growth Profile* and Brad Waggoner’s *Spiritual Formation Inventory* (SFI).⁴⁰ In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Brad Waggoner, along with the Lifeway Research Group, constructed the SFI to measure spiritual formation and growth. LifeWay’s *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA), is an assessment taken online that helps determine the spiritual maturity of a group or individual by analyzing and measuring attributes of discipleship, i.e., biblical engagement.⁴¹ Assessing spiritual maturation and resilience, analyzing if there is a relationship between measures, examining the outcomes, and drawing implications can help Christian formation be better understood among first-year students at Boyce College.

³⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), chap. 1, “Distinctively Christian Formation,” para. 2.

³⁹ Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 239–42. Spiritual maturity expressed in this research is distinctly Christian.

⁴⁰ Don Willett, “A Biblical Model of Stages of Spiritual Development: The Journey according to John,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 10; Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008): 35.

⁴¹ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 5. Lifeway Research Group, “Transformational Discipleship,” accessed November 5, 2018, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/transformational-discipleship>. Instrument used with permission from the LifeWay Research Group.

Sociological Foundations and Assessment

Family members, peers, adults, and significant others nurture pathways of resilience that promote healthy growth of resilience and empathy.⁴² The emotional availability and responsiveness of parents often lead to social relatability in peers and one's community and builds self-efficacy from childhood to young adulthood.⁴³ Jean Clinton contends that hope is a principal characteristic of resilience that helps in adaptation, viewing oneself through strengths over weaknesses, and providing meaning in life.⁴⁴ Thus, resilience represents the ability to cope with stressful situations, to grow, and to thrive through the experience of those difficulties.⁴⁵ Resilience can be assessed to provide crucial information for students in their first year of college. Resilience assessments bring awareness to areas of deficiency and suggest ways that a student can improve or adapt as well as ways in which the college administration may provide helpful interventions. Resilience assessments also show areas of mastery in students which can promote social connection, well-being, and academic flourishing.

Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin developed an inventory to measure the variances of resilience among college students. In this study, they found a pattern of

⁴² The primary influences of this potential for coping seen in children are their worldviews, socioeconomic situations, family, theological insights, and spiritual views. Annemie Dillen, "The Resiliency of Children and Spirituality: A Practical Theological Reflection," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 1 (February 2012): 61–75; Isabella McMurray et al., "Constructing Resilience: Social Workers' Understandings and Practice," *Health & Social Care in the Community* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 299–309.

⁴³ Clinton, "Resilience and Recovery," 220.

⁴⁴ Clinton, "Resilience and Recovery," 221; Haggerty, *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents*, xvii. Frequency and progression of adverse events in short intervals of time coupled with socio-cultural context and developmental stage of an individual are frequent contributors to higher risk factors and problematic behaviors.

⁴⁵ Southwick et al., "Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges," 2. The literature notates numerous factors that contribute to the formation of resilience such as age, experience with trauma, genetics, and social environment. Ann S. Masten states that resilience is not an extraordinary phenomenon; yet, "evidence strongly suggests, on the contrary, that resilience is common and typically arises from the operation of basic protections." Ann S. Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 2015), chap. 1, "Ordinary Magic," para 1.

personality constructs associated with positive resilience during adverse situations.⁴⁶ Adapting this instrument for a first-year student is vital to identifying psychological factors that contribute to holistic wellness yet lack a deliberate spiritual component. A combined assessment that incorporates resilience and spiritual maturity will address gaps that are identified in the literature. The gaps include (1) an absence of an evangelical or biblical framework that describes the theory of resilience and (2) an absence of a scale or instrument that measures the significance of the relationship between resilience and Christian formation in first-year college students.

Purpose Statement

A convergent mixed methods design was used to address first-year students' personal assessment of spiritual maturity and corresponding experience with resilience. This was a "type of design in which qualitative and quantitative data [were] collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged."⁴⁷ The *Inventory of College Students Resilience* assessment was used to enumerate the experience of resilience and was joined with the *Transformational Discipleship Assessment*, which measured spiritual maturity in first-year students at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky.⁴⁸ The semi-structured interview explored the student's articulated experience and response to adversity. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was necessary to determine if the qualitative findings confirmed the quantitative results.

⁴⁶ Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin, "Development of the Inventory of College Students' Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance," *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 483. Instrument used with permission from the authors.

⁴⁷ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 186.

⁴⁸ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee prior to use in the thesis research.

Research Questions

Quantitative Strand

1. How do respective measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among first-year Boyce College students?

Qualitative Strand

2. How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

Convergent Strand

3. To what extent do the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results?⁴⁹

Delimitations

The sample was delimited to first-year students enrolled at Boyce College. The sample only included students seeking an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or those enrolled in a certificate program. Students must have completed one semester of college at Boyce or at a previous institution. The sample did not include students who were dual-enrolled in high school and college or students who were not seeking a degree. Students were professing believers that Jesus Christ is Lord as noted in the confessional statement of Boyce College. Minimizing the potential of ethical and/or psychological risk to underage participants was vital. Therefore, the sample was delimited to students eighteen years of age and older.

Terminology

Keywords, concepts, and terminology used throughout this writing are defined in this section.

⁴⁹ Creswell and Creswell suggest developing “a unique mixed methods question that ties together or integrates the quantitative and qualitative data in a study.” Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 191; John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 257.

Adaptation. “the ability to cope with the demands of one’s environment, includes self-help strategies, communication and social skills.”⁵⁰

Christian formation. “Obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”⁵¹ It is “the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁵²

Cognitive maturity. “To think things through, to discover what is going on, why an event is happening, and assigning meaning.”⁵³

Empathy. Emotional availability and responsiveness to others.⁵⁴

Hope. A principal characteristic of resilience that helps in adaptation, viewing oneself through strengths over weaknesses, and providing meaning in life.⁵⁵ Also, confidence and faith in the promise of God to be attained in the future.⁵⁶

Interpersonal interaction. “Behaviors needed to develop and deepen supportive personal relationships,”⁵⁷ while finding an identity within social groups and involvement in the community.⁵⁸

Optimism. Positive interpretation, initiation of communication, and community

⁵⁰ Jean Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” 214.

⁵¹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, chap. 1, “Distinctively Christian Formation,” para. 2. Willard notes, “Obedience is an essential outcome of Christian spiritual formation (John 13:34- 35; 14:21).”

⁵² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, chap. 1, “Distinctively Christian Formation,” para. 1.

⁵³ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 473.

⁵⁴ McMurray et al., “Constructing Resilience,” 299–309.

⁵⁵ Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” 221.

⁵⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 263.

⁵⁷ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 473.

⁵⁸ Shim and Ryan, “What Do Students Want Socially?,” 504–15.

connection skills structured to help individuals manage their behaviors in cognitive and affective processes that lead to a successful adjustment.⁵⁹

Problem-solving. Exploring solutions or opportunities to mitigate setbacks or adverse experiences.⁶⁰

Resilience. “A person’s ability to maintain equilibrium; adjust to distressful or disturbing circumstances; or to ‘bounce back’ to a level of positive functioning in spite of, or often in response to, adverse situations.”⁶¹

Spiritual maturity. Defined as union with Christ and the completion or maturity of our faith that comes through “a life of complete dependency on Christ and on the Spirit of Christ in whom we live.”⁶²

Transformation. Becoming something else entirely, beyond a surface level alteration.⁶³

Methodological Design Overview

The convergent research design brought together quantitative results from an assessment of resilience, an assessment of spiritual maturity, and a qualitative interview to “obtain a more complete understanding of a problem.”⁶⁴ The quantitative strand of the convergent research design featured two preexisting assessments, and the qualitative

⁵⁹ Rahat and İlhan, “Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience,” 202–03; John F. Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey, “Degrees of Resilience: Profiling Psychological Resilience and Prospective Academic Achievement in University Inductees,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 21.

⁶⁰ Glenn E. Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, no. 3 (March 2002): 308.

⁶¹ American Counseling Association, *ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling*, 458.

⁶² Gordon T. Smith, *Called to Be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 38, 55.

⁶³ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 9–10.

⁶⁴ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 122, 128.

strand featured a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions.⁶⁵ The *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA) was designed to measure spiritual maturity, and the *Inventory of College Students Resilience* (ICSR) used four personality traits to measure resilience factors. The quantitative strand assessed first-year degree and certificate-seeking students at Boyce College. The results of the quantitative portion provided a statistical profile based on spiritual maturity and resilience scores.

Quantitative Strand

The quantitative strand featured eighty-two TDA questions and seventeen ICSR questions in an online assessment format. The population was 262 first-year students attending Boyce College, according to data provided by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary registrar.⁶⁶ The data from the TDA portion provided scores that measure the spiritual maturity of first-year students.⁶⁷ The TDA scores reflected nine attributes of discipleship that presented average scores based on a five-point Likert scale. The ranges were consistent spiritual development (4.0–5.0), moderate spiritual development (2.0–3.9), and limited evidence of spiritual development (0.0–1.9).⁶⁸ The data from the ICSR provided scores that measured patterns of psychological constructs associated with positive resilience during adverse situations. The ICSR used scoring

⁶⁵ Creswell and Plano Clark state, “When using a theory orientation, the theory may operate in the convergent design by providing an umbrella theoretical or conceptual model that informs both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis as well as the researcher’s approach to integrating the two sets of results.” Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 126. The research design for resilience theory and student formation is notated as quan + QUAL due to the larger emphasis placed on the qualitative portion of the two strands of data.

⁶⁶ Academic Records, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 20, 2018. This number reflected the 2018–2019 academic year and excludes those enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic year.

⁶⁷ See chap. 2, “Spiritual Maturity Assessments,” 34–37.

⁶⁸ Lifeway Research Group, *The Transformational Discipleship Assessment Summary Report*, accessed November 5, 2018.

procedures identical to those of the TDA.⁶⁹ The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results from the TDA and ICSR assessments in the quantitative strand provided a statistically based profile of the participants (i.e., moderate resilience and consistent spiritual maturity).

Qualitative Strand

Using a purposive sampling of the population, I requested that fifteen students from Boyce College participate in the interview.⁷⁰ Next, I contacted consenting students and asked them to participate in a focused interview that sought “to chart key aspects of the subject’s lived world.”⁷¹ The semi-structured interview questions were informed by the literature review and constructed to discover how students articulated their experiences with resilience and spiritual maturity. The qualitative results were compared to confirm or disconfirm the quantitative results.⁷² Open-ended questions were constructed to explore resilience factors featured in the ICSR assessment (i.e., empathy, interpersonal relationships, hope and optimism, cognitive maturity, and problem-solving; see appendix 3). The audio from the interview was recorded via Zoom video conference

⁶⁹ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483. The same measures of consistent, moderate, and limited scores from the TDA will be used to determine if there is a relationship between spiritual maturity and resilience.

⁷⁰ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2015), 255. The number of participants recommended in a phenomenological interview can vary between 5 and 30 as long as the participants experience the same phenomenon. Creswell and Creswell state that the “quantitative results inform the type of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and that types of questions that will be asked of the participants.” They assign the priority of the study to the qualitative approach due to the in-depth explanations that result. Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274.

⁷¹ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann state, “The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standard questions, nor entirely ‘non directive.’ Through open questions the interview focuses on the topic of research” (31). Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 106.

⁷² Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 301; Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 284. Although the data for the qualitative strand will be smaller than the quantitative data, using the same students in each strand provide a comparison between databases that are more similar and create a better comparison according to Creswell. In addition, the intent of each strand differs by one focusing on gaining an in-depth perspective while the other focuses on generalizability.

software and transcribed with Otter.ai software. Themes that developed from the qualitative findings were coded using NVivo 12 software, and a content analysis was performed to uncover a greater depth to the responses in the quantitative strand.⁷³

Convergent Strand

The results from the quantitative and qualitative strands were then merged. Content areas were compared with a graphical representation. Numerical data was transformed into thematic data for comparison.⁷⁴ A summarization, separation, and interpretation of the results determined the ways in which the data “converged, diverged, related to each other and/or produced a more complete understanding” of resilience and spiritual maturity.⁷⁵

⁷³ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 301.

⁷⁴ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 128.

⁷⁵ Creswell and Plano Clark state, “The integration involved merging the results from the quantitative and qualitative data so that a comparison can be made and a more complete understanding emerge than that provided by the quantitative or the qualitative results alone.” 129. Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 128.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of resilience and adaptive behavior is multifaceted. Interdisciplinary studies in the fields of psychology, science, economics, and sociology have taken place over the last forty years.¹ This literature review discusses the biblical and theological similarities within the concept of resilience, existing assessments of spiritual maturity, and the concept of the empirical measurability of spiritual growth. Then, the psychological understanding, contribution, and definitions of resilience are contrasted with Scripture. Lastly, points of interaction of resilience, higher education, and student formation are explored.

The Biblical and Theological Basis of Resilience

The Bible describes the concept of resilience in the Old and New Testaments. Concepts such as perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness are analogous, but not identical, to the psychological concept of resilience. Although these patterns may be observed in nature, articulated by scientific theories of development, and have application for teaching in the church, a majority of popular lifespan developmental theories of resilience rarely represent a Christian worldview. Therefore, the biblical text must inform concepts such as resilience and spiritual maturity.

Scriptural Foundations of Resilience

In Scripture, people learn resilience through experience over a lifetime, as seen

¹ Robert J. Haggerty, *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Processes, Mechanisms, and Interventions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 10.

in the lives of people such as King David and the apostle Paul. Jesus marveled at the faith of individuals who demonstrated resilience, and he attributed a lack of faith to those who lacked resilience (Luke 7:9).² The apostles James and Peter wrote to the scattered and persecuted church and “on different occasions reminded believers that their suffering would result in maturity.”³ The psychological definition of resilience, according to the American Counseling Association, is “a person’s ability to maintain equilibrium; adjust to distressful or disturbing circumstances; or to ‘bounce back’ to a level of positive functioning in spite of, or often in response to, adverse situations.”⁴ Scripture describes the process of resilience in passages such as Psalms 66:10–12 and 2 Corinthians 4:7–18.⁵

Psalms 66:10–12. The psalmist describes the work of God in testing and refining the believer to “reveal and develop the character he wants.”⁶ God allowed difficult circumstances to test whether his people would be obedient to him despite their circumstances. John Goldingay alludes to the silver smelting metaphor as a means of revealing what the real nature of silver is.⁷ God appointed occasions where his people had to face adversity and seemingly unbearable circumstances; yet, their true nature was exposed. God only temporarily permitted such crushing burdens to be laid upon his people. Despite the prosperity of other nations, and Israel’s experiences with captivity

² Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Markan Faith,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81, no. 1/2 (April 2017): 31–60.

³ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012): 135.

⁴ American Counseling Association, *The ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015): 458.

⁵ Scripture that portrays a process of resilience includes, but is not limited to, 2 Cor 11:16–12:10; Col 1:24–29; Heb 12:3–11; Jas 1:2–5.

⁶ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 20 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2000): 150.

⁷ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 292.

under foreign kings, the Lord sustained his children and brought them out of their trials.⁸ Marvin E. Tate describes the trials of the Psalter as comprehensive.⁹ Such trials recall the Exodus, when Moses led the Israelites through the extremes of fire and water into abundance and freedom. Thus, the Lord brought them into a place of prosperity at the end of their trials.

2 Corinthians 4:7–18. Paul declares that God trusted the safety of the gospel message to frail human vessels. These earthly bodies are subject to physical, mental, and emotional hardship. Meanwhile, these difficulties serve to redirect focus away from the self toward God’s glorious power.¹⁰ Trials and adversity surround Paul. Though he does not appear to know what to do, he maintains confidence in God’s work of salvation. While difficulty in life and ministry is inevitable, it is purposeful.¹¹

Human weakness is the conduit through which God’s power flows. Hardship and adversity are described vividly in the lives of believers so that they may imitate the life of Jesus. Paul reminds his audience that God will not abandon believers. Though they get knocked down, they are not destroyed and should be encouraged because of the Lord’s faithfulness. The strength of believers lies in the hope of salvation and future residence and union with Jesus Christ. Verse 15 explains that this hardship is for the benefit of the sufferers—so that they will exercise gratitude and give glory to God.

The grace of God spreads contagiously through the act of thanksgiving and

⁸ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 293.

⁹ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 150.

¹⁰ George H. Guthrie emphasizes that Paul’s word picture presents the commonness, fragility, and ordinariness of these clay containers. George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 249.

¹¹ Guthrie states that Paul “insists that the suffering experienced by authentic ministers has a purpose: the advancement of the gospel in the world.” Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 249.

pronouncing glory to God, thus spreading his fame.¹² Confidence inspires hope. God preserved believers from losing heart, even at the cost of their lives. For Paul, life in the Spirit was his hope for renewal and revitalization through God's power, and it reduced the sting of suffering.¹³ Paul persevered, though his body was subject to sickness, vulnerability, weakness, and the aging process. He was still inspired to pursue his mission. Paul contrasts the future "weight of glory" with temporary and insignificant "light afflictions," determining them to be incomparable.¹⁴ Guthrie states, "Since suffering in the visible, temporary world produces immeasurable glory in the eternal, unseen world, the logical place on which he and his coworkers focus their attention is on the latter rather than the former."¹⁵ Spiritual maturity and Christian character are some of those eternal and unseen values.

Products of Resilience in Scripture

Resilience conceptually appears in the Scripture through the terminology of endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness, which all produce hope and maturity.¹⁶ The

¹² Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 266.

¹³ Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 241.

¹⁴ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 272; Bruce M. Metzger, David Allan Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, eds., *Word Biblical Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999): 228. Furthermore, these afflictions "bring about something," anticipate, accomplish, or work to produce something.

¹⁵ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 273; Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 137. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation write, "Suffering has a way of causing believers to remember what really matters."

¹⁶ Jim Dekker, "Resilience, Theology, and the Edification of Youth: Are We Missing a Perspective," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 67–89. These three words are used synonymously in the Greek text. In the Greek lexicon, the transliterated word *hupomone* is defined as "steadfastness, constancy, endurance. In the NT [it is] the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings." Bible Study Tools, "Hupomone," accessed September 27, 2019, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/hupomone.html>. *Hupomone* is used for all three words in the New Testament. Scripture references for steadfastness include Col 1:11; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 3:5. Scripture references for endurance include Luke 21:19; 2 Cor 6:4; Heb 10:36; 12:1; Jas 1:3–4; 5:11. Scripture references for perseverance include Luke 8:15; Rom 2:7; 5:3–4; 8:25; 15:4–5; 2 Cor 12:12; 2 Thess 1:4; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 3:2; 2 Pet 1:6; Rev 1:9; 2:2–3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12. See also Donald E. Gowan, "Wisdom and Endurance in James," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 15, no. 2 (December

literature suggests that concepts such as perseverance are analogous, but not identical, to the psychological construct of resilience, which focuses on enhancing human potential and self-efficacy.¹⁷ The psychological concept of resilience tends to approach adversity as an interruption that threatens self-esteem, personal competence, and self-perception. Resilience and the related concepts of endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness in Scripture contribute to the growing character of a believer. Perseverance is continually pushing forward or adhering to a course of action despite setbacks (Mark 10:47–52).¹⁸ Steadfastness implies “immovability,” that is, to be rightly stubborn, unwavering, and obstinate enough to excel beyond problems.¹⁹

Douglas J. Moo depicts perseverance as, “A person successfully carrying a heavy load for a long time . . . Like a muscle that becomes strong when it faces resistance, so Christians learn to remain faithful to God over the long haul only when they face difficulty.”²⁰ Perseverance produces the ability or power to withstand hardship through demonstrated strength.²¹ David Forney describes the scriptural concept of endurance as “the ability to bear all things in such a way that the hardship becomes

1993): 151.

¹⁷ Steven M. Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5, no. 1 (January 2014): 6.

¹⁸ Howard-Snyder, “Markan Faith,” 55; Dan Lioy, “The Faith Journey of Paul: An Exegetical Analysis of Philippians 3:1–14,” *Conspectus* 7, no. 1. (March 2009): 96. Dan Lioy states, “Christ requires unrelenting dedication and perseverance on the part of believers. This involves doing the following: (a) putting our past—with all its shortcomings and attainments, whether real or imagined—behind us; (b) living wholeheartedly for Christ in the present; and (c) using all our effort to press on toward the future goal of being made complete in spiritual union with Christ in heaven.”

¹⁹ H. Drake Williams, “Encouragement to Persevere: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:58,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 76. Thomas Alva Edison demonstrated steadfastness by becoming a student of failure leading to his greatest success, the light bulb.

²⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 5.

²¹ Richardson presents a reintegration process which entails a “coping process that results in growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities.” Glenn E. Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, no. 3 (March 2002): 310.

transformative, even to the point of becoming a blessing.”²² The apostle James encouraged the scattered and persecuted believers among the nations to rejoice despite certain adversity.

James 1:2–4. The result of these trials was the testing of faith which produced the biblical concept of steadfastness or endurance. Faith is not just merely belief in something; it is “fidelity, commitment, and truth.”²³ Ralph P. Martin shares that perseverance, which would not have existed without the trial, becomes engrafted in the believer’s character. The right type of test examines the quality of faith evidenced by the resulting endurance.²⁴ Steadfastness then develops into full maturity and wisdom, which render the believer “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:3). This maturity encompasses the disposition of faith manifested through moral action. The divine character and standard of Christ is our model presently, and it will be fulfilled in us at the eschaton by God’s will.²⁵ God uses trials to “perfect our faith and make us stronger Christians.”²⁶ A believer who doubts is like a wave that is turbulent. Wisdom, stability, and the generous blessing of the Lord are forfeited (Jas 1:6–8). However, “trials are a necessary part of the process of preparing believers for presentation to God.”²⁷ In Romans 5:1–5, the apostle Paul provides an example of how one’s endurance of trials produces hope and assurance of God’s promises.

²² David Forney, “A Calm in the Tempest: Developing Resilience in Religious Leaders,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2010), 4.

²³ Dan McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009): 85.

²⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *James*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988): 15.

²⁵ Martin, *James*, 17.

²⁶ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 54.

²⁷ McCartney, *James*, 88.

Romans 5:1–5. Believers have obtained justification by faith in Jesus Christ and peace with God rather than wrath. Peace with God “represents harmonious relationships between God and man.”²⁸ Access by faith through grace is an exchange from hostility to peace and hope in God’s presence. Such access to grace, peace, and hope in Christ was cause for joy despite purposive suffering. Joys led to a progression that produced endurance, then character, and then hope.²⁹ Moo suggests that “sequences of this kind, in which suffering inaugurates a chain of linked virtues, are introduced as a stimulus to face difficulties with joy.”³⁰ Furthermore, Thomas R. Schreiner states, “The hard realities of life conspire to make believers more godly and Christlike.”³¹ Hope is essential and confident in the passage.³² Hope is not fully attained or experienced in the present moment but is guaranteed. Such a guarantee of future hope calls the believer to rejoice in faith and the promises of God. Hope is rooted in God’s love, which is given to believers by the Holy Spirit who resides in us. According to Schreiner, “Paul closes with the affirmation that those who have received such hope and confidence, including the confidence that even the worst sufferings will be turned to their good, will boast in God through the Lord Jesus Christ.”³³ The promises of God produce confidence and assurance of God’s sovereignty. Confidence in the character of God provides a foundation on which

²⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 263.

²⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 251.

³⁰ Moo denotes endurance as tested steadfastness, as “the spiritual fortitude that bears up under, and is indeed, made even stronger by, suffering. It suggests a ‘stick-to-itiveness’ which is required if the Word of God is to produce fruit in us (Luke 8:15).” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 303.

³¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 251.

³² Dunn, *Romans 1–8*.

³³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 251.

to stand—with joy—during trials, hardships, and adversities. Moreover, Donald Gowan explains that suffering is “a means of purging, discipline, and testing which produces wisdom in those who endure.”³⁴ Trials are not the source of steadfastness but the opportunity to exhibit immovability and develop maturity.

In conclusion, a biblical or theological framework of resilience is not present in the existing academic literature. However, patterns of resilience in Scripture are evident. God purposefully assigns and allows adverse events to produce the character in believers that he desires.³⁵ The testing and refining process is often arduous, yet it is temporary. Believers engage in the process of resilience by maintaining a joyful attitude, trusting, and hoping in God’s future promises despite trials (Rom 5:1–5). The results of such perseverance are more refined and mature believers who are capable of bearing a heavier load than before their encounter with adversity. Resilience theory needs to be incorporated into Christian formation to help further develop mature character and competence for effective service.³⁶

Integrating Christian Spiritual Formation and Resilience

Christian spiritual formation, according to Dallas Willard, “is focused entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”³⁷ Willard continues, “Spiritual formation for the Christian refers to the Spirit-

³⁴ Donald E. Gowan, “Wisdom and Endurance in James,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 15, no. 2 (December 1993): 146; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 303.

³⁵ Scott J. Hafemann writes that “the contrast of [2 Cor] 4:8–9 underscore that during this evil age it is endurance in the midst of adversity, not immediate, miraculous deliverance from it, that reveals most profoundly the power of God.” Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 184.

³⁶ David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds, Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 28.

³⁷ Dallas Willard notes, “Obedience is an essential outcome of Christian spiritual formation

driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”³⁸ God shapes an individual’s character through the power of the Holy Spirit with the ultimate goal of spiritual growth and full maturity forming the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ.³⁹

James R. Estep provides a meaningful framework for Christian formation through three significant areas: (1) Christian formation is human, with an expectation of having a relationship with God and experiencing a process of growth and development; (2) it is distinctively Christian and informed by theology and the social sciences; (3) it is diverse and can be utilized for ministry and influenced by social sciences toward more efficient practice.⁴⁰ The nature of Christian formation is evident through the lens of Paul’s appeal in Romans 12:1–2. New believers must take intentional steps to embrace a

(John 13:34–35; 14:21).” Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), chap. 1, “Distinctively Christian Formation,” para. 2. Sanctification is commonly alluded to in discussions about spiritual maturity. Willard summarizes sanctification not as an experience, a status, or an outward form but a “track record” or system of habits. Sanctification “comes about through the process of spiritual formation, through which the heart (spirit, will) of the individual and the whole inner life take on the character of Jesus’ inner life,” according to Willard (chap. 12, “Summary on Sanctification,” para. 2).

³⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, chap. 1, “Distinctively Christian Formation,” para. 1. Willard states, “The outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus.” Willard concludes that the path of the authentic human person engaged in Christian spiritual formation is “Seen in the people of Jesus Christ through the ages . . . living with increasing fullness in every essential dimension of the personality of the individual devoted to [Jesus] as Savior and Teacher.” Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, “Postlude,” para. 1–2.

³⁹ Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010); Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 30; Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008): 35. According to Waggoner, spiritual formation is an attitude and posture of learning beyond mere facts that transforms one’s perspective, renew one’s mind, defines one’s character, and is grounded in one’s heart and soul. Spiritual growth and maturity are results from a transformed mind rather than behavior modification.

⁴⁰ James R. Estep Jr., “Developmental Theories: Foe, Friend, or Folly? The Role of Developmental Theories in Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 37, 45.

renewed thought life, shape their future through their convictions, actively discern and pursue God's will, and integrate principles into action.⁴¹ Integrating resilience theory with Christian formation provides channels to learn flexibility through analyzing a situation, problem-solving, exercising contextual sensitivity, utilizing a range of resilience characteristics, or developing an ability to be redirected after receiving curative feedback.⁴² Increased obedience, faithful engagement in spiritual practices, and transformation within a community of faith are potential outcomes.⁴³

Clemens Sedmark defines resilience as coping with unfavorable circumstances and overcoming displacement through learning based on one's inner wealth.⁴⁴ Sedmark states that resilience and strength from within are based on a person's inner life rather than social capital, and he posits that religious individuals are more resilient than non-religious people.⁴⁵ He contrasts high and low resilience with a dichotomy between massive forward progress after an adverse event (high) and the reduction of progress in response to an adverse event (low).⁴⁶ Sedmark states,

The resilient person disposes of existential knowledge of the susceptibility to being wounded; knowing that our own identity and integrity can be jeopardized reminds us that identity is tentative and transient. It is this knowledge of vulnerability which constitutes the identity of who we are and the knowing that we are fallible and fragile.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Stephen Fortosis, "A Developmental Model," *Religious Education* 87, no. 2 (1992): 283–98.

⁴² Southwick et al., "Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges," 2.

⁴³ Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," 239–42; Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2005); David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 1–7.

⁴⁴ Clemens Sedmark, *The Capacity to Be Displaced: Resilience, Mission, and Inner Strength*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 2–3.

⁴⁵ According to Clemens Sedmark, here are numerous sources of internal strength that individuals use to cope with adversity leading to inner strength such as nationalism, education, tradition, and faith. Sedmark, *The Capacity to Be Displaced*, 2–3.

⁴⁶ Sedmark, *The Capacity to Be Displaced*, 37–38.

⁴⁷ Sedmark, *The Capacity to Be Displaced*, 41.

Holding resilience in one hand and Christian formation in the other, we can begin to see how the two can work together. On the one hand, God allows or assigns adversity for believers to encounter with an attitude of joy with the goal that they will eventually develop perseverance and grow to maturity (i.e., resilience). On the other hand, Christian formation is the intentional, visible, and measurable journey of growth and reshaping that believers encounter in their character in the manner God desires. Believers can then repeatedly and persistently practice adaptation to adversity by understanding learned experiences and by participating in spiritual activities in a supportive community. These activities—which can include, but are not limited to, sharing one’s testimony (life story), maintaining a greater reliance on the Holy Spirit in daily life, extending service and concern for others more often and discernibly, and maintaining consistent growth for an extended period—demonstrate ownership of faith.⁴⁸ In a discipleship relationship, students can imitate more mature students to develop Christ-centered character, interweaving resilience. Learning in this manner can result in the expansion of their natural capacity to overcome adversity. Students can be enabled to demonstrate their inner-personal stability and maturity and to grow toward their spiritual capacity.

Spiritual Maturity and Stages of Growth

The literature defines spiritual maturity in various ways. Gordon T. Smith describes spiritual maturity as union with Christ and the completion or maturation of our

⁴⁸ Johnathan Kim writes, When individuals are asked to relay their testimonies, how many times do some of the most compelling testimonies come from those who have seemed to overcome obstacles in their lives, both external and internal and presented a distinctive Christian witness? While the crisis is not the only means of facilitating Christian formation, it is indeed at least one contributing factor of not only our identity achievement but also of our faith formation as Christians. (Johnathan H. Kim, “Personality Development and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim [Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010], 117)

faith that comes through “a life of complete dependency on Christ and on the Spirit of Christ in whom we live.”⁴⁹ E. D. Mbennah defines spiritual maturity as “the bridge between the new identity of the Christian (Eph 1–3) and the moral code of the Christian life commensurate with the new identity (Eph 4:17–6:20).”⁵⁰ He posits that Christians must mature through the unity of faith and knowledge, which enables students to stand in opposition to false teaching and falling away.⁵¹ In Ephesians 4:1–16, believers are expected to live lives worthy of their calling as a lifestyle, conforming to conduct established through criteria grounded in the gospel of salvation.⁵² Humility, gentleness, patience, and peace characterize the members of the community. Mark A. Maddix concludes that spiritual maturity is experienced by the believer as the life-long intentional pursuit and growing in conformity to the image of Christ through the message of Christ in the context of community.⁵³ According to James Francis, “Following conversion, a Christian needs spiritual support from the faith community to grow and adapt to their new

⁴⁹ Gordon T. Smith, *Called to Be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 38, 55. Smith provides four distinct, but interdependent expressions of a mature disciple: (1) knows Jesus through the fruit of learning—specifically a learning that leads to intimate knowledge; (2) loves Jesus such that Christ is the first love and the deepest love, the source of one’s greatest delight and joy; (3) serves Jesus such that all one does is in response to Christ’s call and an expression of allegiance to him” (184). See also Jim Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

⁵⁰ E. D. Mbennah, “The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13–16,” *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 1 (January 2016): 111. D. A. Carson presents Paul’s prayer for the perfection of the Corinthians as the aim of “Restoration to Christian values, their achievement of some degree of real maturity, their abandonment of the false gospel, their rejection of false apostles, [and] their pursuit of Christian character.” D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 128–29.

⁵¹ Mbennah states, “Only spiritually mature Christians will be able to have a positive influence on society and make the world a better and wholesome place. Similarly, only spiritually mature Christians, as the light of the world, will be able to illuminate and give guidance to society.” Mbennah, “The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13–16,” 129–30.

⁵² Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1999), 276–78.

⁵³ The ultimate goal of spiritual growth and full maturity is forming the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Christian spiritual maturity is holistic and includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral dimensions that “mirrors ‘the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’ (Luke 2:40, 52; Eph 4:13). Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 239–65.

commitment to life and faith.”⁵⁴ Unity in the same Lord, the same faith, and the same baptism identify believers as part of the same family with the one God and the Father of all (Eph 4:5–6). In the body of Christ, gifts and grace build up the community and equip the saints for ministry.⁵⁵ This “building up” progresses until the community attains unity in the faith, full knowledge and experience of Christ, and complete maturation of its members (vv. 12–13).⁵⁶ Thus, the members of the body are called to work together, grow into Christlikeness, and be built up in love.

In Scripture, there is a recognition that there are certain stages of growth that people should progress through, such as Don Willet’s three-stage model of faith development (Luke 2:40, 52; 1 John 2:12–14).⁵⁷ Steve Fortosis also authored a three-stage model. He writes,

Christian growth is different from other developmental processes in that a supernatural factor is present—the indwelling Holy Spirit of God helps guide, teach, and empower the believer to live and grow satisfactorily (John 16:13–14). The true measure of spiritual growth is motive-based. A Christian may possess great biblical knowledge and exhibit many right behaviors, yet the master motive may be self-seeking. Movement toward purer motives is imperative if the Christian development is to be authentic.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ James E. Francis, “Integrating Resilience, Reciprocating Social Relationships, and Christian Formation,” *Religious Education* 114, no. 4 (July 2019): 503.

⁵⁵ O’Brien states, “Christian growth or progress does not occur in isolation, for Paul’s language here envisages God’s people collectively (we all) as en route to this vital destination.” O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 305.

⁵⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 281–82. The imagery of maturity used here is of a grown man in contrast to an infant. Thielman also claims that the mature man does not refer to “the individual believer, but to the church.” Paul’s letters are consistent regarding the unity of the believer and the body of Christ.

⁵⁷ Don Willett, “A Biblical Model of Stages of Spiritual Development: The Journey according to John,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 88–102.

⁵⁸ Steve Fortosis proposed three stages of Christian formation on a continuum following conversion: formative integration, responsible consistency, and self-transcendent wholeness. The formative integration stage characterized by religious inflexibility, fluid convictions, conditional love, black/white morals, less biblical knowledge/discernment, and egocentric reasoning. It is typical for new believers to get stuck at this stage. These characteristics represent a shallow understanding, immature application of the Christian life, and direct opposition to spiritual maturity which is the ultimate goal of Christian formation. According to Fortosis, tracing the spiritual formation of an individual is difficult since individuals become believers at differing ages, stages of intelligence, and levels of biblical education before conversion. Evaluating maturity in the believer is tremendously problematic because mentors or members of the community might look for changes in behavior or engagement in spiritual disciplines. However, the inner

Willett's model seems to include intellectual and identity development within three stages: believers as children, youth, and adults.⁵⁹ When believers move out of the childhood stage, they develop a greater sense of their identity in God and others. The apostle John encourages young men to utilize their understanding in order to stand firm against the enticements of the world (1 John 2:13). Fathers in the faith are looked up to as experienced, sources of guidance, and are "worthy of respect and imitation."⁶⁰ Maturity, rather than chronological age, is the basis of stages of growth.⁶¹

Resilience and identity achievement are the marks of maturity attributed to a nourishing exploration of belief. Secure identity within the faith community and differentiation between reconciliation of doubt and unbelief is a tool within spiritual formation that induces resilience.⁶² Individuals must find evidence to support their beliefs. Students who have experienced a crisis of faith tend to have reflected upon and assessed fundamental personal beliefs, made substantial commitments to personal beliefs, exhibited healthier identity development, and increased faith-driven motivations—all undoubtedly as products of resilience.⁶³ Just as in developmental theories, when believers do not fully grow within a stage, they tend to stagnate spiritually or atrophy

evidences of right attitude, pure motive, and Spirit-led conviction cannot be evaluated outside of the believer. Fortosis, "A Developmental Model," 283–98.

⁵⁹ Willett, "A Biblical Model of Spiritual Development," 91.

⁶⁰ Willett, "A Biblical Model of Spiritual Development," 91.

⁶¹ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, New American Commentary, vol. 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001): 100–107. Daniel Akin writes for new believers to focus on their relationship with God and to resist the lure of the temporary things that are opposed to God. The text describes three groups of people based on spiritual maturity who demonstrate loyalty to their teaching. The fathers know the experience of overcoming and have continued to overcome. They have access to the power in the name of Jesus to stand against those outside of the community that opposes them. John encourages the men to take heart that through knowing the life of Christ on earth and his resurrection, they can also overcome the evil one. The victory in battle is assured with the finished work of Christ.

⁶² Tiago Baltazar and Ronald D. Coffen, "The Role of Doubt in Religious Identity Development and Psychological Maturity," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 20, no. 2 (May 2011): 182–94.

⁶³ Baltazar and Coffen, "The Role of Doubt in Religious Identity Development," 182–94.

progressively.⁶⁴ On the other hand, when students become new believers, even in their adulthood, they experience stages of growth which result in increased faith commitments.⁶⁵ First-year college students can benefit from an initial assessment of their spiritual maturity that describes their present level of maturity and prescribes areas needed for spiritual growth and development. Such an assessment will be discussed next.

Spiritual Maturity Assessments

Stages or domains of growth are empirically measurable with growth profiles/inventories such as Don Willett's *Spiritual Growth Profile* or Brad Waggoner's *Spiritual Formation Inventory* (SFI).⁶⁶ In concluding his assessment, Waggoner states, "Since spiritual maturity can be seen, it can also be measured."⁶⁷ These instruments utilize self-reports to assess a believer's experiences, expectations, application of beliefs, and understanding of doctrine. In 1994, Todd Hall and Keith Edwards found that the instruments utilized had notable weaknesses in theoretical and psychometric variables.⁶⁸ Thus, they designed the *Spiritual Assessment Inventory* (SAI) to measure the psychological and spiritual components experienced in relationship with God. Measurements included the terms of awareness (i.e., God's communication and presence in life) and quality (i.e., developmental levels of relationship: unstable, grandiose, and realistic).⁶⁹ They found a significant relationship between awareness factors that reflected more maturity in spiritual capacities and quality factors that seemed to influence

⁶⁴ Fortosis, "A Developmental Model"; Willett, "A Biblical Model of Spiritual Development."

⁶⁵ Baltazar and Coffen, "The Role of Doubt in Religious Identity Development," 182–94.

⁶⁶ Willett, "A Biblical Model of Development" 10; Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 11.

⁶⁷ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 11.

⁶⁸ Todd W. Hall and Keith J. Edwards, "The Initial Development and Factor Analysis of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 24, no. 3 (1996): 234. At the time this research was initiated, few measures were empirically valid and in use by pastoral counselors or clinicians.

⁶⁹ Hall and Edwards, "Development and Analysis of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory," 239.

psychological maturity.⁷⁰ Jennifer L. Fee and John A. Ingram of Biola University built upon the foundation laid by Hall and Edwards by utilizing correlational studies with the SAI and the *Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (SWBS) designed by R. F. Paloutzain and C. W. Ellison in 1982.⁷¹ The research of Fee and Ingram resulted in the *Holy Spirit Questionnaire*, which is “an exploratory instrument for measuring differences in attitudes and perceptions regarding the Holy Spirit.”⁷² Certain areas of “well-being and spiritual maturity are [suggested to be] significantly related to knowledge of the Holy Spirit.”⁷³

As described above, Brad Waggoner, along with the LifeWay Research Group, developed the SFI.⁷⁴ Seven key domains measured spiritual formation: (1) biblical engagement, (2) obeying God and denying self, (3) sharing faith, (4) serving God and others, (5) exercising biblical faith, (6) building relationships, and (7) seeking God.⁷⁵ The twenty-one characteristics of a disciple within the assessment were derived from Scripture, literature, commentaries, articles, scholars, and validated by a panel of experts. This quantitative assessment measured the trend in the Protestant church attenders’ attitudes toward the biblically described characteristics of a disciple.⁷⁶ The results found that discipleship practices influenced their spiritual growth and maturity. Therefore,

⁷⁰ Hall and Edwards, “Development and Analysis of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory,” 44.

⁷¹ Jennifer L. Fee and John A. Ingram, “Correlation of the Holy Spirit Questionnaire with the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 104–6.

⁷² Fee and Ingram, “Correlation of the Holy Spirit Questionnaire,” 104, 106.

⁷³ Fee and Ingram, “Correlation of the Holy Spirit Questionnaire,” 104, 106 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 15.

⁷⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 276–79.

⁷⁶ The sample of this longitudinal study took place in May 2007 and again in May 2008 which allowed observation of spiritual progress that participants made in one year. Researchers followed up with a qualitative interview by phone or email with some of the 700 out of 1,044 people that took the second interview and grew spiritually in the one-year period. The qualitative study included life impacting events, such as the death of a loved one, that caused the believer to draw closer to God, led to them reading and studying God’s word daily, and increased involvement in the church. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 281–88.

assessments can help Christian institutions enhance the discipleship process.

The *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA) is an inventory of attributes of discipleship that identify transformation present in a believer's journey. The TDA is completed online (LifeWay.com) and "is available to help determine the spiritual maturity of your group or congregation."⁷⁷ The results provide an analysis of the domains of spiritual development and suggestions for growth.⁷⁸ This assessment is a comprehensive tool that can be employed in higher education to assess and suggest measures for spiritual maturity. See appendix 4 for a list of the attributes of discipleship measured in the assessment tool.

In conclusion, Christian formation is the life-long Spirit-driven process that God uses to grow and transform believers into the fullness and likeness of Jesus Christ. Scripture depicts encounters with adversity as purposed by God for the refinement of his children. Believers are admonished to see suffering as an opportunity to glorify and be built up by God, not merely to become more self-sufficient (as is the goal of many developmental theories of resilience). The disposition of believer's is one of joy because of the hope of glory and the maturity that has resulted from their pursuit of Christlikeness despite suffering. Readers should be mindful of the goal of spiritual maturity—via God's character development—as they engage in the study of social-scientific theories of resilience. Spiritual maturity is a factor based on spiritual growth rather than chronological age. This growth can be observed and assessed with quantitative scales to

⁷⁷ Lifeway Research Group, "Transformational Discipleship," accessed November 5, 2018, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/transformational-discipleship>.

⁷⁸ The TDA provides a score report that "will help you assess your spiritual development from the perspective of eight attributes of biblical maturity." Lifeway Research Group, *The Transformational Discipleship Assessment Summary Report*, accessed November 5, 2018; Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 58–59. The TDA is the third generation of assessments that have evolved from Brad Waggoner's *Spiritual Formation Inventory* that measured the areas of life that contribute to spiritual maturity in an individual. The second generation of assessment was Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer's *Transformational Church* that measured the health of believers in seven thousand churches.

further understand the process of Christian formation. Therefore, an integrated discussion about the biblical and social-scientific approaches to resilience theory requires a more in-depth examination of developmental theorists who study resilience.

Engaging Theories of Resilience

The social sciences lack a universal definition of resilience.⁷⁹ Theorists and organizations describe patterns they observe in nature, using their own definition. The American Counseling Association defines *resilience* as “a person’s ability to maintain equilibrium; adjust to distressful or disturbing circumstances; or to ‘bounce back’ to a level of positive functioning in spite of, or often in response to, adverse situations.”⁸⁰ Jean Clinton defines resilience as “being transformed and altered by an experience of adversity so that one is not the same.”⁸¹ Thus, a person does not return to the previous stage of function but moves on in a better direction.⁸² Related concepts to resilience include resiliency and being resilient. According to Ann S. Masten, *resiliency* is an elastic property likened to a rubber band that returns to its former shape after being bent or stretched.⁸³ Being *resilient* is a title ascribed to materials that can be bent but resist breaking or cracking under pressure.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Francis, “Integrating Resilience, Relationships, and Christian Formation,” 510; George A. Bonanno, Sara A. Romero, and Sarah I. Klein, “The Temporal Elements of Psychological Resilience: An Integrative Framework for the Study of Individuals, Families, and Communities,” *Psychological Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 139–69; Glenn E. Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 307–21; Cornelis F. M. van Lieshout, “Lifespan Personality Development: Self-Organising Goal-Oriented Agents and Developmental Outcome,” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 24, no. 3 (September 2000): 276–88; Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges.”

⁸⁰ American Counseling Association, *ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling*, 458.

⁸¹ Jean Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 13, no. 3 (August 2008): 213–22.

⁸² Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” 213–22.

⁸³ Ann S. Masten, *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 2015), chap. 1, “What Exactly Does Resilience Mean in Developmental Science,” para. 1; Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” 213–22; Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenge*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7.

⁸⁴ Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, chap. 1, “What Exactly Does Resilience Mean in Developmental

Academic literature that mentions Scripture with resilience is uncommon. The incorporation of biblical text as a theoretical basis for resilience is rare in the precedent literature. Spirituality is referenced often as a “higher power” devoid of the distinction of the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible.⁸⁵ The usage of “spirituality” is commonly regarded in society as an ephemeral, subjective experience desired to make one wise and increase positive self-regard (Gen 3; Rom 1:29).⁸⁶ In fact, less than 10 percent of the literature surveyed related to resilience includes references to Scripture, the *imago Dei*, the Holy Spirit, the gospel, creation, or any facet of eternity.⁸⁷ A biblical basis for resilience emerges from God’s assignment of adverse events for his people to face with joy for purpose of developing in them perseverance, refinement, and Christian maturity.

Engagement with the literature on resilience will feature a cautious, yet charitable perspective toward common grace revealed through God’s general revelation. John David Trentham writes, “Social science models of human development are typically oriented unto counter-biblical ideals, even while they may describe modes and means of growth that reflect authentic patterns of personal maturity.”⁸⁸ Trentham continues, “In order for Christian scholars and educators to read and interpret models of human development faithfully in light of normative biblical truth, they must approach and

Science,” para. 3; Southwick and Charney, *Resilience*, 7.

⁸⁵ Mary Raftopoulos and Glen Bates, “‘It’s That Knowing That You Are Not Alone’: The Role of Spirituality in Adolescent Resilience,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 2 (May 2011): 151–67.

⁸⁶ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 307–21.

⁸⁷ An Ebsco search with the key words “resilience” and “scripture” produced three results which have been reviewed in the compilation of this thesis. A search for “resilience” and “holy spirit” returned one result. A search for “resilience” and “gospel” returned two results, one of which was about a Mormon parable. Accessed September 4, 2018.

⁸⁸ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2019), 458–75. Trentham appeals to the image bearing nature and capacity in humans as the basis for the legitimizing of insights from secular sources.

qualify the social sciences with theological clarity.”⁸⁹ Resilience theory provides insights useful for faith development and Christian formation through wisdom enabled by God’s general revelation.⁹⁰ The following section is an exploration of the leading social science contributions to resilience theory. Common themes that emerge in the resilience literature are incorporated with attributes of discipleship from the TDA to help provide further application and understanding of Christian formation.

Resilience and Adaptation

Resilience can be acquired at any time from early childhood to the final stages of life. Ann S. Masten adamantly denies that resilience is a personality trait; rather, she contends that it is an ordinary response to everyday experiences.⁹¹ Although the term initially was previously used to study psychological disorders, today, broader uses include “academic resilience.”⁹² Masten states, “Some of our capacity comes from our inherent potential and some of what we learn over time.”⁹³ Masten theorizes that

⁸⁹ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically,” 460. Trentham outlines four phases that guide the reading of the social sciences theologically for practical appropriation. He writes, “Points of divergence and discontinuity between the confessional priorities and doctrine intrinsic to Christianity versus that of the secular social sciences are both obvious and stark. Yet, although these divergences are real and substantial, they do not preclude the Christian from seizing upon truthful and meaningful insights where those may be found. Christianity is neither anti-scientific, anti-secular, anti-modern, anti-experiential, nor anti-empirical. A Christian is thus not confronted with an impasse regarding the implications of social science vis-a`-vis faith. Likewise, Christian scholars, educators, and students are not forced into a zero-sum choice between summarily adopting or rejecting the analysis and paradigms of social scientific research. Rather, they are faced with four distinct responsibilities: (1) approaching the social sciences with clarity; (2) qualifying the legitimacy of the social sciences with theological integrity; (3) engaging the social sciences discerningly, and (4) appropriating the social sciences constructively” (465).

⁹⁰ Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, “Faith Development and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010): 190.

⁹¹ Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, chap. 1, “The Organization of this Book,” para. 3.

⁹² Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, chap. 1, “Patterns and Pathways of Resilience,” para. 3.

⁹³ Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 6.

resilience science is shifting from developmental models to dynamic models that reflect multiple disciplines. “The study of resilience ultimately has a practical goal, which is to inform efforts to change the odds in favor of positive adaptation and development.”⁹⁴ She defines *resilience* as “the potential or manifested capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the function, survival, or development of the system.”⁹⁵ Adaptation is an element that needs time to develop into pathways of resilience. Adaptation is a response to challenges, life contexts, home, school, family, culture, and community. Masten offers the fourth wave of resilience methodology, adding to Glenn Richardson’s metatheory (discussed below) and entailing the influence of human development systems over lifespans. Studies may follow that include a review on cultural contributions to resilience. There are multiple and complex processes that interact in dynamic ways which contribute to the science of resilience. Masten concludes that further empirical studies and methods are needed to measure and understand the various processes that are present across lifespans and disciplines.

Masten offers a deeply humanistic rendering of resilience based on hope and optimism rooted in human potential. Masten and Clinton accurately see hope as a principal characteristic of resilience that helps in adaptation to hardship, viewing the human self through strengths over weaknesses, and providing meaning in life.⁹⁶ Resilience provides positive interpretation, communication, and community connection skills structured to help individuals manage their behaviors in cognitive and affective processes that lead to a successful adjustment. Unfortunately, because of the fall of

⁹⁴ Masten, *Ordinary Magic*, chap. 1, “What Exactly Does Resilience Mean in Developmental Science,” para. 1.

⁹⁵ Ann S. Masten, “Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth,” *Child Development* 85, no. 1 (February 2014): 6–20.

⁹⁶ Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” 221; Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 6.

humankind into sin (as recounted in Genesis 3), the integrity of cognitive and affective systems has been compromised. Philosophies are based upon self-perception, which, in humans, is inherently flawed.⁹⁷ The acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty in human development and the consequences of sin is absent. Table 1 provides a comparison of texts between Scripture, resilience and adaptation, and the assessment variables for resilience (ICSR) and spiritual maturity (TDA).

Table 1. Scripture, resilience and adaptation, and ICSR/TDA comparison⁹⁸

Scripture	Theory	<i>ICSR/TDA</i>
Romans 5:1–5	Ann Masten	<i>Hope & Optimism</i>
Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”	Adaptation and the development of resilience pathways are a response to adversity.	Obeying God and Denying Self, Unashamed Transparency

The kindness of God that ordains the challenges, families, and circumstances present in the lives of believers is meant to lead to repentance, faith, and—eventually—spiritual maturity. Believers have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and such justification allows believers to rejoice in hope. The most accurate meaning of

⁹⁷ Sulamunn R. M. Coleman et al., “Self-Focused and Other-Focused Resiliency: Plausible Mechanisms Linking Early Family Adversity to Health Problems in College Women,” *Journal of American College Health* 64, no. 2 (March 2016): 93.

⁹⁸ The tables in this section highlight how Scripture (first column), significant concepts from resilience theorists (second column), resilience factors from the ICSR (italicized in the third column), and attributes of discipleship from the TDA (third column) can come together to be used as the basis for student assessment based on spiritual and psychological themes.

life is within the eternal perspective that even in suffering, a Christian will mature. Such a perspective shifts focus from self to God when believers are faced with hardship.

Identifying with the suffering of Christ in the community of faith allows believers to be transformed rather than merely to adapt to their circumstances.

Resilience Trajectories

According to George A. Bonanno, the origins of resilience were traced from chronic studies of adversity in children to “potentially traumatic events” in adulthood.⁹⁹ A primary focus of his work has been the study of traumatic experiences. He defines resilience as a “stable trajectory of healthy functioning after an adverse event.”¹⁰⁰ This trajectory is typical and represents a thoughtful response to those circumstances. Bonanno states that resilience first needs a referenced event, then it can be understood as a process and, finally, an outcome.¹⁰¹ Discussions about the functionality of those who experience adversity have shifted away from symptomology and poor coping to confident and successful coping mechanisms.¹⁰² Bonanno continually advocates for more empirical studies to integrate approaches with analysis, experimental procedures, and scientific modeling.¹⁰³ This need for more empirical studies is a testament to the importance of this research.

Bonanno has individually contributed research verbiage, including the phrases “emergent resilience” and “minimal-impact resilience.”¹⁰⁴ Emergent resilience is only

⁹⁹ George A. Bonanno and Erica D. Diminich, “Annual Research Review: Positive Adjustment to Adversity—Trajectories of Minimal-Impact Resilience and Emergent Resilience,” *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 54, no. 4 (April 2013): 395.

¹⁰⁰ Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 2.

¹⁰¹ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 394.

¹⁰² Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 2.

¹⁰³ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 394.

¹⁰⁴ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 394.

recognizable after the stressful event has subsided. Minimal-impact resilience posits that there are eight categories that predict a trajectory of minimal impact: (1) demographic variation, (2) exposure, (3) personality, (4) past and current stress, (5) social and economic resources, (6) positive emotions, (7) coping, and (8) flexibility.¹⁰⁵ Although many other factors slightly contribute to the enhancement of resilience, no particular biological or demographic factor can predict it.¹⁰⁶ Bonanno and Galatzer-Levy launched a longitudinal and cross-sectional study that measures the levels of distress experienced by college students. They found that attachment behavior and ego resiliency were two prime factors that could predict trajectories of distress.¹⁰⁷ Attachment patterns developed during childhood profoundly influence the stress of college and the ensuing coping that takes place.

Ego-resiliency is critical to psychological adjustment and behavioral modification in college for students to become more flexible.¹⁰⁸ Ego-resiliency is an ability to adjust to circumstances, with responses ranging from assertiveness to self-deprivation in the face of adverse situations and environmental stressors.¹⁰⁹ Making an appraisal draws a distinction between positive and negative loss in the face of impending danger, resulting in resilience. Bonanno states, “It fosters feelings of mastery, competence, commitment, and other aspects of positive self-perceptions that maintain or

¹⁰⁵ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 388–93.

¹⁰⁶ Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 6.

¹⁰⁷ Isaac R. Galatzer-Levy and George A. Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress Over the Four Years of College: Associations with Anxious Attachment and Ego-Resiliency,” *Journal of Personality* 81, no. 5 (October 2013): 248. Bonanno postulates that if a prediction of distress trajectories are possible, then prediction of resilience factors might also be possible through experimental procedures which he advocates for in his writing.

¹⁰⁸ Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress,” 479.

¹⁰⁹ Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress.”

restore self-esteem after potentially threatening experiences.”¹¹⁰ Bonanno and Galatzer-Levy conclude their study by stating that most individuals report a healthy adjustment, with few students who experience distress throughout their four years in college. Their study also found that there was an indication that students display greater stress in the spring semester, which included other seasonal factors affecting mood.¹¹¹

Like Ann Masten, Bonanno also concurs that resilience is common. Many factors contribute to resilience, such as creating meaning, a critical component in mental health and effective life adaptation.¹¹² Bonanno provides a conceptual insight into “flexibility”—a social construct regarding self-regulation and emotional coping, demonstrative of successful adaptive behavior.¹¹³ These mechanisms provide a means of overcoming challenges and promote a more significant trajectory of resilience than other manners of coping.¹¹⁴ Bonanno describes the need for neuropsychological assessments, longitudinal studies, and “prospective trajectories.”¹¹⁵ There has recently been an interest in programs that have preventative interventions for minimal impact resilience.¹¹⁶ Thus, Bonanno’s research leaves much left to be desired from the data, exposing a gap in the literature as well as the appeal for a study such as this. Bonanno’s notions of a stable trajectory and a flexibility to overcome challenges share commonalities with Paul’s experience in 2 Corinthians 4 (see table 2).

¹¹⁰ Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress.”

¹¹¹ Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress,” 483.

¹¹² Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, “Heterogeneous Patterns of Stress,” 150.

¹¹³ Bonanno and associates created a questionnaire to measure the “Perceived Ability to Cope with Trauma (PACT) scale to measure behaviors related to flexibility in coping with traumatic life events. Those who scored higher showed greater flexibility and tended to predict adjustment. George A. Bonanno, “Meaning Making, Adversity, and Regulatory Flexibility,” *Memory* 21, no. 1 (January 2013): 152–53.

¹¹⁴ Maren Westphal and George A. Bonanno, “Posttraumatic Growth and Resilience to Trauma: Different Sides of the Same Coin or Different Coins?” *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 56, no. 3 (July 2007): 425.

¹¹⁵ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 394.

¹¹⁶ Bonanno and Diminich, “Annual Research Review,” 394.

Table 2. Scripture, resilience trajectories, and ICSR/TDA comparison

Scripture	Theory	ICSR/TDA
2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 16–18	George Bonanno	<i>Cognitive Maturity</i>
“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”	Resilience is a process and a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after an adverse event. “Flexibility” and “ego-resiliency” are social constructs regarding self-regulation and emotional coping, resulting in successful adaptive behavior and self-esteem.	Sharing Christ

Bonanno sees resilience as minimizing the impact of an adverse situation or distress. However, Paul views the impact of adversity as minimal and insignificant in comparison to the future glory of God’s power and eternity. Paul was cognitively aware that the afflictions he faced were purposeful and for his eventual benefit. Ego-resiliency is similar to the contentment that Paul experienced in Philippians 4:12. He maintained an outward focus rather than an emphasis on his esteem. For Paul, human weakness inspired confidence in God, an opportunity for renewal, and an increase in maturity for those with whom he shared Christ. While not everyone would suffer for the sake of the gospel as Paul did, they could anticipate the refining process that would produce endurance and flexibility.

Three Wave Metatheory of Resilience

The metatheory of resilience applies perspectives from the fields of physics, biology, psychology, theology, and mysticism into a common paradigm concerning

resilience in humans.¹¹⁷ Glenn Richardson describes three waves in the development of a resiliency metatheory: “Resilience and resilience theory may help to promote healing at a deeper, softer, yet more efficacious level.”¹¹⁸ First wave literature defines resilience as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a matter that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of . . . internal and external qualities that help people to cope with or ‘bounce back’ in the wake of high-risk situations or after setbacks.”¹¹⁹

The second wave discovered the acquisition process and the development of resiliency traits, which include coping behavior, management of stress, identification, and enhancement of first-wave protective factors. Richardson provides a model that suggests that people have the opportunity to choose the outcomes of their life interruptions since resiliency begins at the point where they adapt.¹²⁰ The third wave represents the personalization and activation of the resiliency process. The theory postulates that the source of energy is spiritual or innate resilience.¹²¹ Clients and students discover their internal energy that drives them through recovery from disturbances and toward self-efficacy.

Richardson’s model postulates that individual perceptions in the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions develop protective factors that allow life to continue with minimal interruption in order to maintain homeostasis.¹²² Richardson

¹¹⁷ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 313.

¹¹⁸ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 308.

¹¹⁹ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 313.

¹²⁰ Richardson presents a reintegration process that entails a “coping process that results in growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities.” Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 310.

¹²¹ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 313.

¹²² Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 311; Michela Milioni et al., “The Predictive Role of Ego-Resiliency on Behavioral Problems,” *European Journal of Developmental*

provides important application by stating that “the educational experience of identifying and exploring resilience allows students to contemplate who they are and how their body, mind, and spirit function concerning transpersonal sources of strength.”¹²³ Dysfunction occurs when people utilize maladaptive coping (e.g., substance abuse, socially unacceptable behavior, destructive integration) or lack resiliency traits.¹²⁴ Richardson observed that students were able to adapt from conventional risk factors of socio-economic disadvantages, prenatal trauma, and mental instability inherited from parents due to placement in a nurturing environment.¹²⁵ The involvement of the family also assisted the young people in thriving. Disruptions were seen to have the potential for the growth of the individual through marriage, leaving a job, or having an accident. These incidents lead to self-analysis and engagement in the resiliency process. Resilience after disruptions might eliminate the reliance on medications and transitory external support.¹²⁶

While Richardson infers an acknowledgment of spirituality in a universal sense or a channel to increase positive self-worth, he does not endorse the God of the Bible. He contends that humans are innately moral and capable of loving others.¹²⁷ Indeed, humans are capable of exhibiting empathy, emotional availability, and responsiveness toward others when they are experiencing distress.¹²⁸ An instinct Richardson and educators attribute to a spiritual source of strength is “nobility”—the need to give back to society

Psychology 12, no. 2 (March 2015): 229.

¹²³ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 317.

¹²⁴ Richardson states, “Life progression is a function of repeated resilient reintegration that results from planned and reactive disruptions.” Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 313.

¹²⁵ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 309.

¹²⁶ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 309.

¹²⁷ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 317.

¹²⁸ Isabella McMurray et al., “Constructing Resilience: Social Workers’ Understandings and Practice,” *Health & Social Care in the Community* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 299–309.

through altruism, service, education, or counseling tools to gain self-fulfillment.¹²⁹

However, human instincts need filtration through a biblical worldview to determine if the motivation to give back is for self-fulfillment or God's purposes. Romans 3:10–12 reads, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one desires good, not even one." Fortosis reminds us that students have encountered moralistic deficiencies due to the influence of the social sciences on the church which produces immature believers characterized by "fluid convictions, conditional love, feelings driven loyalty, less biblical knowledge, and discernment."¹³⁰ Disruptions in life are more than an interruption; they produce growth and maturity in believers.

The process of resilience in Psalm 66 begins with God directing adverse circumstances for character and perseverance development in believers, which results in their maturity. The biblical refinement process serves to reveal the character of the individual facing adversity. In contrast, Richardson views resilience as beginning with the perception of the individual at the point of adaptation which develops protective factors in an attempt to return the individual to homeostasis (see table 3). Francis states, "Integrating resilience and Christian formation yields a product of adaptation that moves one's spiritual development from cognition to application."¹³¹ Richardson postulates that intuitive resilience interventions are needed to guide teachable and receptive individuals to determine the direction of their lives.¹³² For believers, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and regular biblical engagement result in the acquisition of wisdom, understanding, transformation, and spiritual maturity.

¹²⁹ Richardson, "The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency," 318.

¹³⁰ Fortosis, "A Developmental Model," 283–98.

¹³¹ Francis, "Integrating Resilience, Relationships, and Christian Formation," 502.

¹³² Richardson, "The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency," 318.

Table 3. Scripture, the three wave metatheory of resilience, and ICSR/TDA comparison

Scripture	Theory	ICSR/TDA
Psalm 66:10–12	Glenn Richardson	<i>Empathy</i>
“For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.”	Biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors are the basis of a three-wave model that maps the acquisition and development of resilience traits. Resilience drives individuals through recovery from disruption toward self-efficacy.	Bible Engagement

Factors of Resilience

In *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges*, Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney share about their personal stories of resilience. Inspired by examinations of social, psychological, neurobiological, and spiritual approaches to survivors of traumatic experiences, they found meaning through the ability to grow through adversity. “It is important to note that healthy adaptation to stress depends not only on the individual, but also on available resources through family, friends, a variety of organizations, and on the characteristics of specific cultures.”¹³³ Resilience commonly occurs in humans and provides channels to learn flexibility through analyzing a situation, exercising contextual sensitivity, utilizing a range of behaviors, or redirected oneself after receiving curative feedback.¹³⁴ During his studies of coping strategies, Southwick and Charney found ten resilience factors that effectively dealt with trauma and high levels of stress. While not comprehensive, the list includes “realistic optimism, facing fear, moral compass, religion and spirituality, social support, resilient role models, physical fitness,

¹³³ Southwick and Charney, *Resilience*, 9.

¹³⁴ Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 184.

brain fitness, cognitive and emotional flexibility, meaning, and purpose.”¹³⁵ He explores the biological factors of resilience through anatomic structures such as the hippocampus, which regulates the body’s response to stress.¹³⁶ He also purports that stress can be managed and is even necessary for healthy growth; it can be harnessed to develop greater strength and wisdom.

Southwick and Charney provide details surrounding his experience with religion and spirituality as one of the most common ways people deal with trauma and adversity. On the one hand, Southwick and Charney give credence to transformational spiritual experiences, though their writing seems to esteem ritual, moralism, and tradition over a relationship. In contrast, they share that some people look to God for direction, protection, and inner strength—all of which fuels resiliency. Meditation, prayer, and church attendance promote psychological wellness and resilience. Southwick and Charney discuss the benefits of religious faith, which is often responsible for one’s abstention from destructive habits such as substance abuse, crime, sexual promiscuity, and alcohol abuse.¹³⁷ Resilience, Christian formation, and interpersonal interaction can converge through “behaviors needed to develop and deepen supportive personal relationships.”¹³⁸ Finding an identity within social groups and maintaining involvement in the community of faith help students adjust to the pressures of higher education.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Southwick and Charney, *Resilience*, 15–16.

¹³⁶ Southwick and Charney, *Resilience*, 19.

¹³⁷ Southwick and Charney, *Resilience*, 125.

¹³⁸ Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 473.

¹³⁹ Sungok Shim and Allison Ryan, “What Do Students Want Socially When They Arrive at College? Implications of Social Achievement Goals for Social Behaviors and Adjustment during the First Semester of College,” *Motivation & Emotion* 36, no. 4 (December 2012): 504–15.

Table 4. Scripture, factors of resilience, and ICSR/TDA comparison

Scripture	Theory	ICSR/TDA
Ephesians 4:11-16	Southwick and Charney	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”	Ten resilience factors: (1) realistic optimism, (2) facing fear, (3) moral compass, (4) religion and spirituality, (5) social support, (6) resilient role models, (7) physical fitness, (8) brain fitness, (9) cognitive and emotional flexibility, and (10) meaning and purpose	Serving God and Others Building Relationships

In Ephesians 4, Paul reinforces the notion of cooperation between members of the same body to build unity, faith, and maturity so that each member can experience the fullness of Christ. Southwick and Charney’s resources of family and friends are analogous to the “building relationships” attribute of discipleship (see table 4 and appendix 4). This attribute emphasizes caring for others in the community of faith, developing God-honoring relationships that serve as channels to relieve stress, and developing healthy coping strategies and resilient behaviors. Another relevant attribute of discipleship in Christian formation includes serving God and others through word and deed. Titus 3:14 admonishes believers to be devoted to good works and to help others in crucial times of need so that they avoid unfruitfulness.

Resilience and Grit

Angela Duckworth is a psychologist, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, the New York Times 2016 best-selling book in the field of education. Grit is a phenomenon that represents modern research and current trends in the field of education stemming from Duckworth's et al. 2007 study on grit.¹⁴⁰ Duckworth et al. studied seventh graders in a New York public school, West Point cadets, and National Spelling Bee finalists and found that the number one predictor of success was grit.¹⁴¹ The research team defined grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress.”¹⁴² Grit represents successful attainment in academics regardless of IQ.¹⁴³

Perseverance with a passion for continuous long-term commitment despite setbacks and adversity defines “grit.” It is related, but not identical, to resilience.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Jaclyn M. Stoffel and Jeff Cain declare that resilience “is an inherent attribute of Grit.”¹⁴⁵ Another key to a passion for something higher than oneself is the long-term loyalties and deep commitments maintained over many years that expand perseverance in an individual.¹⁴⁶ A key component in Grit is the theoretical concept Duckworth

¹⁴⁰ Angela L. Duckworth et al., “Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1099.

¹⁴¹ Duckworth et al., “Grit,” 1087–101.

¹⁴² Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 50.

¹⁴³ Duckworth, *Grit*, 8; Jaclyn M. Stoffel and Jeff Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature within Health Professions Education,” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 82, no. 2 (February 2018): 124–34.

¹⁴⁴ Stoffel and Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature,” 125.

¹⁴⁵ Stoffel and Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature,” 125.

¹⁴⁶ Deborah Perkins-Gough, “The Significance of Grit: A Conversation with Angela Lee Duckworth,” *Educational Leadership* 71, no. 1 (September 2013): 14–20.

popularized as “follow-through,” which first appeared in Warren Willingham’s 1985 *Success in College: The Role of Personal Qualities and Academic Ability*.¹⁴⁷ Duckworth et al. posit that past behavior often predicts future behavior, drive, effort, and energy in an area of passion and leads to persistence through adversity.¹⁴⁸

In a Ted Talk on the subject of “grit,” Duckworth says, “To me, the most shocking thing about grit is how little we know about building it. Everyday, parents and teachers ask me, ‘How do I build grit in kids?’ The honest answer is, I don’t know.”¹⁴⁹ In contrast, the apostle James admonishes believers who are lacking in wisdom to ask God, who gives generously for his good pleasure (Jas 1:5). Exercising faith and seeking God are appropriate attributes of discipleship; the two attributes are marked by weakness that is made strong by trust in and reliance upon God. Endurance’s “full effect” is brought about by the endurance of various types of trials that make one perfect, complete, and mature (Jas 1:2). See table 5 for the contrast of Scripture, grit, the ICSR, and the TDA.

Table 5. Scripture, Duckworth, and ICSR/TDA comparison

Scripture	Theory	ICSR/TDA
James 1:2–4	Duckworth et al.	<i>Problem-solving</i>
“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”	Perseverance with a passion for continuous long-term commitment despite setbacks and adversity defines “grit.”	Seeking God Exercising Faith

¹⁴⁷ Duckworth, *Grit*, 9. See Warren W. Willingham, *Success in College: The Role of Personal Qualities and Academic Ability* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1985).

¹⁴⁸ Duckworth, *Grit*, 73.

¹⁴⁹ Angela Duckworth, “Grit: The Power of Passion of Perseverance,” TED Talk (April 2013), https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance?language=en.

According to Rick Lawrence, long-term commitment and resolve, which are rooted in God’s promise to be with us and infuse us with his strength, have produced a spiritual concept of grit (Exod 3).¹⁵⁰ Lawrence defines grit as the “nuclear core that drives perseverance and profound impact in life. It’s the steely determination to keep going when it would be easy to give up. It’s the will to keep going when persistence isn’t enough.”¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Lawrence argues that the apostle Paul reveals that “we are empowered by our union with Jesus when our intimate attachment to him releases his core strength to flow into and through us.”¹⁵² Problem-solving becomes enhanced by the wisdom of God, rather than that of humankind, in order to explore solutions or opportunities to setbacks or adverse experiences.¹⁵³ Apart from God, we can do nothing. When he is in us and we are in him, we can persevere through anything (John 15:5). Also, Lawrence states, “If a passion for something higher than ourselves is what fuels our ability to persevere through great challenges, then we find it only in a Source that is beyond our human potential.”¹⁵⁴

Assessments of Resilience

John F. Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey propose that profiling the level of resilience, capacity to adapt, and psychological challenges of first-year students might boost their achievement and assimilation into higher education.¹⁵⁵ Their findings

¹⁵⁰ Rick Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit: A Journey into Endurance, Character, Confidence, and Hope* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2018), 12.

¹⁵¹ Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit*, 7.

¹⁵² Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit*, 20.

¹⁵³ Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” 308.

¹⁵⁴ Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ John F. Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey, “Degrees of Resilience: Profiling Psychological Resilience and Prospective Academic Achievement in University Inductees,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 9.

showed lower levels of adaptation than with their peers in the general population, indicating “declining mental health, poor resilience and/or problematic transitions of new students to higher education.”¹⁵⁶ These scales used resilience characteristics as descriptive and/or predictive measures of phenomena such as college student adaptation or adjustment to classroom stressors. A correlation was found between academic success and outcomes from students who demonstrated resilience characteristics.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, Sandra Prince-Embury, Donald H. Saklofske, and David W. Nordstokke studied the challenges of young adults who struggled in college using the measurements from the *Resiliency Scale for Young Adults* (RSYA). They claimed that other instruments had too wide a variety of foci and were inconsistent with the definition of resilience across instruments.¹⁵⁸ Using Masten’s definition, they based their research on a three-factor model of personal resiliency, which indicated a “sense of mastery, sense of relatedness and emotional reactivity” based on the personal experiences of the students.¹⁵⁹ The sense of mastery was shown to correlate with higher grade-point average and completion of the first year, while a sense of relatedness correlated to youth forming new relationships, connections, and flourishing in their social environment.¹⁶⁰ The scores on the emotional reactivity scale described students who reported greater emotional struggles that affected their functioning and interfered with their well-being.¹⁶¹ The findings of the instrument allow for future research toward preventative measures or interventions to increase student success in academia.

¹⁵⁶ Allan, McKenna, and Dominey, “Degrees of Resilience,” 9.

¹⁵⁷ Allan, McKenna, and Dominey, “Degrees of Resilience,” 9.

¹⁵⁸ Sandra Prince-Embury, Donald H. Saklofske, and David W. Nordstokke, “The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults,” *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 35, no. 3 (June 2017): 277.

¹⁵⁹ Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Nordstokke, “The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults,” 278.

¹⁶⁰ Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Nordstokke, “The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults.”

¹⁶¹ Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Nordstokke, “The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults.”

Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin developed the *Inventory of College Students' Resilience* (ICSR), an inventory to measure the variances of resilience among college students. They found personality traits that promote resilience in a four-factor scale which included “Emotional and Interpersonal Interaction,” “Cognitive Maturity,” “Problem-solving,” and “Hope and Optimism.”¹⁶² The studies found that there was a pattern of personality constructs associated with positive resilience during adverse situations.¹⁶³ Moreover, students who scored poorly on the ICSR were more prone to vulnerability during times of adversity.¹⁶⁴ Those who scored favorably demonstrated utilization of better coping skills, had better self-confidence, and maintained superior academic skills.¹⁶⁵ The findings were similar between male and female students and attained both empirical reliability and validity. Huang and Lin reported that higher scores on the resiliency scale correlated with more refined academic skills, a wider variety of coping skills, and greater self-reported competence.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the ICSR is not only valid and reliable to measure personality traits associated with resilience, but can be used to enhance resilience in college students.¹⁶⁷

In conclusion, theorists have made notable contributions to the study of resilience, articulating processes such as adaptation, coping, stabilizing life trajectories,

¹⁶² Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

¹⁶³ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

¹⁶⁴ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

¹⁶⁵ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

¹⁶⁶ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

¹⁶⁷ Huang and Lin conclude, “Previous research has established that personal characteristics have an influence on students’ resilience. An important step to assist students in understanding how these personal variables can be identified and, in turn, enhanced to improve outcome, is to provide accurate and meaningful assessment tools. Therefore, the study demonstrated that the ICSR is not only a valid and reliable measure of this personal trait, but also an applicable starting point for determining strategies for enhancing students’ resilience.” Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience.” 482.

and psychological wellness. However, there remains a lack of a standard definition of the term from a psychological standpoint. The construct of resilience is fundamentally grounded in a humanistic philosophy. Trentham observes, “a secularist may describe a phenomenon rightly, while ascribing meaning and value to that phenomenon wrongly.”¹⁶⁸ Key phrases like a “better trajectory” are subjective, speculative, and merely based on the perspective of the individual without a standard measure of psychological wellness or specific aim in the “better trajectory.”¹⁶⁹ Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer posit that developmental theories explain how development occurs but lack in a teleological focus that directs human development.¹⁷⁰ Balswick, King, and Reimer confer,

The psychological community has built much theory and practice on the repair and healing of persons. This emphasis has resulted in a deficient model of human development, lacking a clear understanding of positive or optimal development. We suggest that our model of the reciprocating self provides a theological perspective of optimal development.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically,” 472. Trentham notes that believers and nonbelievers “may share and affirm common observational knowledge in a social scientific context even while divergent in their vision and pursuit of redemption. This is possible due to the nature and function of the enduring image of God, as affirmed from a common grace perspective. On this basis, developmental models that emerge from the secular social sciences may be qualified as legitimate sources of insight on a qualified basis, with due discernment.”

¹⁶⁹ Southwick et al., “Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges,” 1–14; Masten, “Global Perspectives on Resilience,” 6–20. Christian formation is an intentional journey that has a destination of conformity to the image of Christ. The adaptation that happens in resilience theory seems helpful, but random in comparison. According to Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, “Transformation is more than a surface-level alteration; it’s actually becoming something else entirely . . . [T]ransformation only comes through the discipleship that is centered on Jesus.” God works to shape an individual’s character through the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in increased obedience, spiritual activity, and transformation within a community of faith. Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 9–10. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 239–42; Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 1–7.

¹⁷⁰ Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed., Christian Association for Psychological Studies (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 350.

¹⁷¹ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 352.

Thus, becoming Christ-like in our unique selves, maintaining daily relationships with God, and maintaining reciprocating relationships with others is an objective in Christian formation.¹⁷² Willard compares the spiritual formation of modern disciples to patients in a hospital at different stages of recovery progressing toward health.¹⁷³ Consequently, Scripture provides a framework to critique and, when necessary, articulate points of redemption within the humanistic theoretical basis in much of the psychological theory toward God’s sovereign purposes concerning resilience.

Assessments for spiritual maturity and resilience factors have been empirically validated, found useful in separate research processes, and have application in higher educational settings. Evidence of a combined resilience and spiritual maturity scale does not yet exist. Therefore, this literature review is vital to future development of such a measurement.

Points of Interaction with Resilience, Student Formation, and Higher Education

The transition to college is a significant milestone in American society. Some freshmen college students will aptly navigate new challenges, facing increased familial independence, finding an identity within social groups, and establishing involvement in the community. Meanwhile, others will struggle to adjust, being overwhelmed with the spiritual, social, and academic changes they encounter.¹⁷⁴ According to Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin, “Research has shown that social and emotional

¹⁷² Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 25.

¹⁷³ Willard paraphrases Ephesians 4:13, noting that identification with Christ and his community and the equipping of the saints are for the purpose of “building up the body of Christ, until all of us arrive at a coherent faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God—at a completed human being, as measured in terms of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, chap. 13, “A Spiritual ‘Hospital,’” para. 1

¹⁷⁴ Shim and Ryan, “What Do Students Want Socially?,” 504–15.

dimensions of development have a great bearing on academic performance.”¹⁷⁵ A greater understanding of the psychological and spiritual support that students need is fundamental to their successful continuation of college. More in-depth exposure to developmental theorists, theoretical interaction, and educational engagement is warranted to enhance resilience. Estep and Kim note that the integration of Christian theology, redemption of human developmental theories, and incorporation of the promotion of spiritual maturity is the task of Christian educators.¹⁷⁶ Although Estep and Kim’s *Christian Formation* provides essential biblical truths that interact with human development from cognitive, social, and moral theories, there is a scarcity of literature that addresses a Christian theory of resilience.

Young Adulthood Needs and the Transition to College

Many young adults must learn how to manage their emotions and own their thought processes for the first time as they enter college. Masten states that the transition to adulthood includes more solidified brain development, mentoring, and motivation that “support a positive redirection of the life course.”¹⁷⁷ Diane Wood suggests a litany of solutions to enhance well-being, including pastoral support, formal student counseling, physical and mental health services, development of healthy lifestyles, available social support networks, participation in interpersonal relationships, and engagement in recreational activities.¹⁷⁸ The American Counseling Association indicates three key areas

¹⁷⁵ Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin, *Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys*, Youth Development and Education Series (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2014), 169.

¹⁷⁶ *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ann Masten, “Pathways to Integrated Resilience Science,” *Psychological Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 189.

¹⁷⁸ Diana F Wood, “*Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*: Student Well-Being and the Development of Resilience,” *Medical Education* 50, no. 1 (January 2016): 21.

that promote protective factors of resilience: (1) positive attitudes and ideologies, (2) compassionate family or other positive and significant relationships, and (3) safe involvement in community, institutions, school, and social and faith-based organizations.¹⁷⁹ Conceptually, the capacity for resilience increases through therapeutic interventions.

Nevertheless, empirical studies are currently monitoring trends and strategies for the expansion of positive results.¹⁸⁰ Faculty promotion of these activities, modeling, and effective teaching within the curriculum are essential to the success of such endeavors. Encouraging optimism, positive re-interpretation, communication initiation, resilience characteristics, and community connection skills on campus were found to be consistent predictors of successful adjustment.¹⁸¹

The problem. Average first-year college students encounter several challenges, including an adjustment to a new environment, self-guided autonomy, managing one's finances, and providing for basic needs.¹⁸² According to Vincent Tinto, approximately 60% of college students will leave their first institution before receiving their degree, with approximately 30% departing after their first year and most leaving after their first semester.¹⁸³ A 2014 survey of 1,033 students attributed this premature

¹⁷⁹ American Counseling Association, *ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling*, 458. Additional resources contributed by James R. Cheek, University of Houston–Clear Lake, Houston, TX, American Counseling Association.

¹⁸⁰ American Counseling Association, *ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling*, 458.

¹⁸¹ Optimism, self, respect, and focus of control are stated by the authors to be resilience factors. Self-construal are dynamic structures that help an individual manage their behaviors in cognitive and affective processes. Enes Rahat and Tahsin İlhan, "Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience in Predicting Students' Adjustment to University Life," *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 16, no. 1 (February 2016): 189; Allan, McKenna, and Dominey, "Degrees of Resilience," 21.

¹⁸² Rahat and İlhan, "Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience."

¹⁸³ Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 21. Three decades later the percentages are identical according to the U.S. Department of Education. "Digest of Education Statistics, 2018," U.S. Department of

departure to mental health concerns, namely, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, and maladaptive adjustment during the first semester.¹⁸⁴ Students need more help than ever in academic and personal development. Their constant reliance on parents to make decisions might attribute to more significant difficulties in adjusting to the pressures of higher education than in previous generations.¹⁸⁵ Sulamunn Coleman et al. reported that family adversity in early years for college-aged women affected psychosocial resiliency in two areas: self-perception and the perception of others.¹⁸⁶ University life is filled with numerous sources of stress; yet, it is also an environment in which first-year students can learn to thrive vis-à-vis coping behaviors, resilience, social support, and adjustment.¹⁸⁷

The solution. Authors from the Madras School of Social Work in Tamil Nadu, India, studied the relationship between balancing relationships, academics, motivation, and socialization. Paul et al. state, “Individuals who are highly resilient exhibit adaptive coping skills and often convert stressors into opportunities for learning and development.”¹⁸⁸ Stoffel and Cain suggest that the growing interest in grit and resilience studies might drive an institution to be morally accountable to serving students through

Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, accessed October 11, 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_326.10.asp.

¹⁸⁴ The American College Health Association found that “fifty-six percent of college students surveyed reported feeling ‘overwhelming anxiety’ within the past 12 months” in 2014. Stoffel and Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature,” 124; Alicia H. Nordstrom, Lisa M. Swenson-Goguen, and Marnie Hiester, “The Effect of Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem on College Adjustment, Academics, and Retention,” *Journal of College Counseling* 17, no. 1 (April 2014): 48–63; Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Nordstokke, “The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults,” 276–90.

¹⁸⁵ Wood, “*Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*,” 21; Stoffel and Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature,” 124–34. In fact, Stoffel states that students have not developed strong coping skills because parents have removed challenges, while schools then inherit the responsibility of changing curriculum to develop and advance students through curriculum without coddling them.

¹⁸⁶ Coleman et al., “Self-Focused and Other-Focused Resiliency,” 85–95.

¹⁸⁷ Rahat and İlhan, “Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience,” 190.

¹⁸⁸ Hannah Paul et al., “Resilience, Academic Motivation and Social Support among College Students,” *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology* 6, no. 1 (January 2015): 106–10.

counseling, life guidance, and safeguarding their substantial investment in tuition, thus ensuring a high graduation rate.¹⁸⁹ Students completing the application process require early guidance for success in their program.¹⁹⁰ In contrast, the incorporation of technology through video tutorials, text message reminders for financial aid, cellular phone interfaces to select classes, or scheduled meetings with guidance counselors can engage students who are struggling with administrative barriers.¹⁹¹

Nataliya Ivankova and Sheldon Stick studied factors related to persistence to assist academic institutions in meeting the needs of graduate students, “improve the quality of their academic experiences, and increase their retention and degree completion rate.”¹⁹² Their findings identified critical personal factors that impacted resilience, such as commitment to goals, social interaction, academic integration, and embeddedness in the community.¹⁹³ Ivankova and Stick concluded that self-motivation, support, academic advising, faculty-student interactions, assistance from student services, the quality of the program and faculty, the learning environment, and the quality of academic experiences were the top factors in students’ persistence and successful completion of their degrees.¹⁹⁴ The next section addresses the support that first-year college students need for spiritual maturity.

¹⁸⁹ Stoffel and Cain, “Review of Grit and Resilience Literature,” 124–34.

¹⁹⁰ David S. Yeager et al., “Teaching a Lay Theory before College Narrows Achievement Gaps at Scale,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113, no. 24 (June 2016): 7.

¹⁹¹ Yeager et al., “Teaching a Lay Theory,” 7.

¹⁹² Nataliya V. Ivankova and Sheldon L. Stick, “Students’ Persistence in a Distributed Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership in Higher Education: A Mixed Methods Study,” *Research in Higher Education* 48, no. 1 (February 2007): 94.

¹⁹³ Ivankova and Stick, “Students’ Persistence in a Distributed Doctoral Program,” 95.

¹⁹⁴ Ivankova and Stick, “Students’ Persistence in a Distributed Doctoral Program,” 121.

Student Support and Spirituality

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, the apostle Paul retorts, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” Believers have the task of integrating their faith, distinguishing the true and beautiful, confronting—when necessary—what is false, and meaningfully engaging with the culture.¹⁹⁵ Waggoner’s survey found that the “number one factor, or characteristic, most correlated to the highest maturity scores is the practice of ‘reading the Bible.’”¹⁹⁶ For some students, the first year of college provides an opportunity for the exercise or abnegation of spirituality.

In *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Tim Clydesdale surveyed first-year college student perceptions in important areas of academic experiences, social challenges, and influences of religion and culture.¹⁹⁷ According to his findings, spiritual growth was seemingly unaddressed during freshman orientation. The faith struggle appeared to be engrained in many students and played an essential role in their collegiate experiences. Dockery remarks that a “Christian University, [uncommon] with any other institution of higher learning, must shortly subordinate all other endeavors to the improvement of the mind in pursuit of truth.”¹⁹⁸ Spiritual assessment can reveal areas of maturation needed in students and provide an institution with a focus beyond the

¹⁹⁵ Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 113.

¹⁹⁶ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 68.

¹⁹⁷ The current default settings in the United States install a popular American moral culture that: celebrates personal effort and individual achievement; demonstrates patriotism; believes in God and a spiritual afterlife; values loyalty to family, friends, and coworkers; expects personal moral freedom; distrusts large organizations and bureaucracies; and conveys the message that happiness and fulfillment are found primarily in personal relationships and individual consumption.” Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Morality and Society Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 1, “Unexpected Journey,” para. 4, 6, Kindle.

¹⁹⁸ A Christ-centered institution must be more accountable than their secular counterparts. Dockery, *Renewing Minds*, 102.

mastery of academic content. Assessment studies have shown that the development of character competency through resilience characteristics are equally important.¹⁹⁹

The pursuit of truth cultivated within the community of learning promotes the moral, spiritual, and social development of its students. The facilitation of social support networks, the availability of guidance and counseling service centers, and curricula that teach and assess coping styles are needed to produce thriving students.²⁰⁰ Mark Pearson suggests that institutions create a counselor-mentor position through higher degree research students. In his study, the counselor-mentor was to encourage interpersonal connections, provide advice, build bridges to social networks, serve as a liaison between students and faculty, and lead student support groups.²⁰¹ The incorporation of the counselor-mentor position into research programs would undoubtedly boost universities' reputations and attract higher quality research students. Research findings showed that mentoring relationships "had an impact on student retention, on successful completion of the doctoral dissertation, and future career opportunities for those mentored."²⁰²

Student mentors could serve to provide biblical discipleship and assessment of spiritual maturity of young adult believers in two vital ways: Paul to Timothy (more mature to younger) and Paul to Barnabas (similar stages of maturity). Additionally, the organization could provide a role model for lower-level students to emulate, learn resilience characteristics from, and, ultimately, experience a sense of belonging and social

¹⁹⁹ Wood, "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano," 20–23; Rahat and İlhan, "Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience," 189; Mark Pearson, "Building Bridges: Higher Degree Student Retention and Counseling Support," *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management* 34, no. 2 (April 2012): 187–99.

²⁰⁰ Rahat and İlhan, "Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience," 202–203.

²⁰¹ Pearson, "Building Bridges," 192.

²⁰² Pearson, "Building Bridges," 192. This might be an avenue to bridge the gap between the isolation of faculty and loneliness experienced by higher level students through integration.

support that the literature has demonstrated is vital for student success.²⁰³ This initiative could fill a gap in Christian education philosophy to help educators connect education, Scripture, maturity, and adjustment toward a more comprehensive program.

Conclusion

Resilience can be acquired at any time, often through a transformative experience with adversity, such as the experience of the first year of college. This literature review reveals that there is neither a comprehensive psychological nor biblical definition of resilience. The incorporation of biblical and theological bases of resilience with the psychological components serve to explain Christian formation and to further, and even strengthen, the pursuit of spiritual maturity. A quantitative design is needed to enumerate the relationship between measures of spiritual maturity and resilience. A fused assessment of spiritual maturity and resilience does not yet exist, but it can, theoretically, provide insight into the spiritual and psychological struggles that college students face. The ICSR and TDA assessments are empirically validated instruments that provide all of the essential components for such an assessment. Research supports the empirical validation of resilience characteristics such as problem-solving and cognitive maturity and their correlation to behavior in student populations. Research also supports that assessments of spiritual maturity are helpful in identifying areas of growth for Christian formation. Therefore, the following chapter constructs a convergent instrument to identify how measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among first-year Boyce College students.

²⁰³ Pearson, "Building Bridges,"192.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research questions, design overview, population, sample, delimitations, limitations of generalization, instrumentation, and procedures used to conduct this study. A convergent research design was selected to examine the relationship between resilience and Christian formation in first-year degree-seeking college students at Boyce College.¹ This convergent design brought together quantitative results from an assessment of resilience, an assessment of spiritual maturity, and a qualitative interview to “obtain a more complete understanding of a problem.”² The literature review identified two gaps: (1) the absence of an evangelical or biblical framework that addresses resilience theory, and (2) the absence of an instrument or scale designed to measure the significance of the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturation in first-year college students.

Research Purpose Statement

A convergent mixed methods design was used to address first-year students’ personal assessment of spiritual maturity and corresponding experience with resilience. This design was one “in which qualitative and quantitative data [were] collected in

¹ A convergent design occurs when “the researcher intends to bring together the results of the quantitative and the qualitative data analysis so they can be compared or combined. The basic idea is to compare the two results with the intent of obtaining a more complete understanding of a problem, to validate one set of findings with the other, or to determine if participants respond in a similar way if they check quantitative predetermined scales and if they are asked open-ended qualitative questions. The two databases are essentially combined.” John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 122.

² Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 122, 128.

parallel, analyzed separately, and then merged.”³ The *Inventory of College Students Resilience* assessment (ICSR) was used to enumerate the experience of resilience and was joined with the *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA), which measured spiritual maturity in first-year students at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. The semi-structured interview explored the students’ articulated experiences and responses to adversity. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was necessary to determine if the qualitative findings confirmed the quantitative results.

Research Question Synopsis

Quantitative Strand

1. How do respective measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among first-year Boyce College students?

Qualitative Strand

2. How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

Convergent Strand

3. To what extent do the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results?⁴

Methodological Design Overview

The convergent research design brought together quantitative results from an assessment of resilience, an assessment of spiritual maturity, and a qualitative interview to “obtain a more complete understanding of a problem.”⁵ The quantitative strand of the

³ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 186.

⁴ Creswell and Creswell suggest developing “a unique mixed methods question that ties together or integrates the quantitative and qualitative data in a study.” Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 191; Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 257.

⁵ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 122, 128. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by

convergent research design featured two preexisting assessments, and the qualitative strand featured a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions (see figure 1).⁶ The *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA) was designed to measure spiritual maturity, and the *Inventory of College Students Resilience* (ICSR) used four personality traits to measure resilience factors. The quantitative strand assessed first-year degree and certificate-seeking students at Boyce College. The results of the quantitative portion provided a statistical profile based on spiritual maturity and resilience scores.

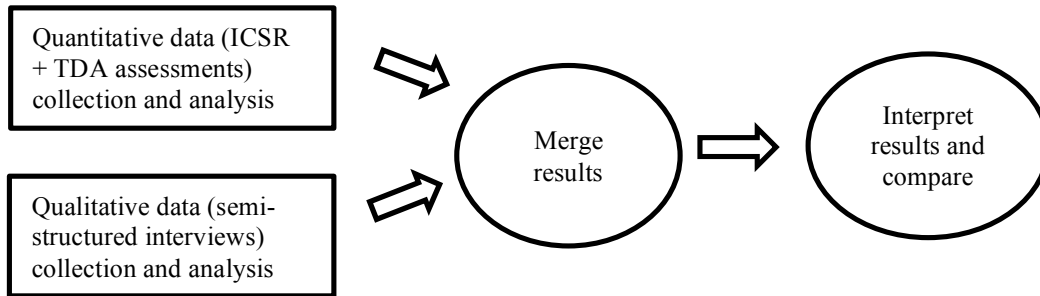


Figure 1. Convergent mixed methods research design

Quantitative Strand

The quantitative strand featured the eighty-two TDA questions and seventeen ICSR in an online assessment format. The population was 262 first-year students attending Boyce College, according to data provided by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary registrar.⁷ The data from the TDA portion provided scores that measure the

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee prior to use in this thesis research.

⁶ Creswell and Plano Clark state, “When using a theory orientation, the theory may operate in the convergent design by providing an umbrella theoretical or conceptual model that informs both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis as well as the researcher’s approach to integrating the two sets of results.” Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 126. The research design for resilience theory and Christian formation is notated as quan + QUAL due to the larger emphasis placed on the qualitative portion of the two strands of data.

⁷ Academic Records, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 20, 2018. This number reflected the 2018–2019 academic year and excludes those enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic

spiritual maturity of first-year students.⁸ The TDA scores reflected nine attributes of discipleship that presented average scores based on a five-point Likert scale. The ranges were consistent spiritual development (4.0–5.0), moderate spiritual development (2.0—3.9), and limited evidence of spiritual development (0.0–1.9).⁹ The data from the ICSR provided scores that measured patterns of psychological constructs associated with positive resilience during adverse situations. The ICSR used scoring procedures identical to the TDA.¹⁰ The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results from the TDA and ICSR assessments in the quantitative strand provided a statistically based profile of the participants (i.e., moderate resilience and consistent spiritual maturity).

Qualitative Strand

Fifteen students from Boyce College were requested to participate in the interview using a purposive sampling of the population.¹¹ I contacted consenting students to participate in a focused interview seeking “to chart key aspects of the subject’s lived world.”¹² Ten semi-structured interview questions were informed by the precedent

year.

⁸ See chap. 2, “Spiritual Maturity Assessments,” 34–37.

⁹ Lifeway Research Group, *The Transformational Discipleship Assessment Summary Report*, accessed November 5, 2018. The quantitative strand will utilize a phenomenological approach to identify 10 to 15 students to be selected from three groups that represent statistically significant (consistent), median (moderate), and non-significant (limited) scores. The participants for the qualitative interview will be stratified from this group (see chap. 3, “Quantitative Procedures,” 77–79).

¹⁰ Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 483. The same measures of consistent, moderate, and limited scores from the TDA will be used to determine if there is a relationship between spiritual maturity and resilience.

¹¹ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2015): 255. The number of participants recommended in a phenomenological interview can vary between 5 and 30 as long as the participants experience the same phenomenon. Creswell and Creswell state that the “quantitative results inform the type of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and that types of questions that will be asked of the participants.” They assign the priority of the study to the qualitative approach due to the in-depth explanations that result. Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274.

¹² Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 31. Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann state, “The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standard questions, nor

literature review and constructed to discover how students articulated their experiences with resilience and spiritual maturity. The qualitative results were compared to confirm or disconfirm the quantitative results.¹³ Open-ended questions were constructed to explore resilience factors featured in the ICSR assessment, including empathy, interpersonal relationships, hope and optimism, cognitive maturity, and problem-solving (see appendix 3). The audio from the interview was recorded via Zoom video conference software and transcribed with Otter.ai software.¹⁴ Themes that developed from the qualitative findings were coded using NVivo 12 software, and a content analysis was performed to uncover a greater depth to the responses in the quantitative strand.¹⁵

Convergent Strand

The results from the quantitative and qualitative strands were then merged. Content areas were compared and included a graphical representation. Numerical data was transformed into thematic data for comparison.¹⁶ Finally, a summarization, separation, and interpretation of the results determined the ways in which the data “converged, diverged, related to each other and/or produced a more complete understanding” of resilience and spiritual maturity.¹⁷

entirely ‘non directive.’ Through open questions the interview focuses on the topic of research.”

¹³ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 301; Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 284. Although the data for the qualitative strand will be smaller than the quantitative data, using the same students in each strand provide a comparison between databases that are more similar and create a better comparison according to Creswell. In addition, the intent of each strand differs by one focusing on gaining an in-depth perspective while the other focuses on generalizability.

¹⁴ Zoom, “About Zoom,” accessed March 27, 2019, https://zoom.us/about?_ga=2.147174647.1356340332.1572551581-384244822.1570218315; Otter.ai, “Otter for Education,” accessed August 20, 2019, <https://otter.ai/edu>.

¹⁵ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 301; NVivo, “What is NVivo,” accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>.

¹⁶ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 128.

¹⁷ Creswell and Plano Clark state, “The integration involved merging the results from the quantitative and qualitative data so that a comparison can be made and a more complete understanding emerge than that provided by the quantitative or the qualitative results alone.” Creswell and Plano Clark,

Population

The population of this study consisted of first-year undergraduate degree or certificate-seeking students enrolled on campus or online at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky.¹⁸

Sample

The appropriateness of the research called for a purposive sampling of the first-year student population due to the specific nature of their experiences.¹⁹ All first-year students in the class of 2022 were invited to participate in the online assessment. The class standing distinguished students in their first year, first semester; first year, second semester; and/or second year, first semester. Permission to garner student participation was obtained from the dean of students at Boyce College.

Delimitations

The sample was delimited to first-year students enrolled at Boyce College. The sample only included students seeking an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or those enrolled in a certificate program at Boyce College. Students must have completed one semester of college at Boyce or in a previous institution. The sample did not include students who were dual-enrolled in high school and college or students who were not seeking a degree. Students were professing believers who affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord. Minimizing the potential of ethical and/or psychological risk to underage participants was vital. Therefore, the sample was delimited to students eighteen years of age and older.

Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research, 129.

¹⁸ This number reflected the 2018–2019 academic year and excludes those enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic year.

¹⁹ Creswell and Creswell state that the “quantitative results inform the type of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and that types of questions that will be asked of the participants.” They assign the priority of the study to the qualitative approach due to the in-depth explanations that result. Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274.

Limitations of Generalization

1. The results may only be generalized to the students who participated in the study.
2. The outcomes of this study on resilience and Christian formation cannot be generalized to all undergraduate schools in the Southern Baptist Convention, evangelical Christian colleges or universities of identical size and student composition.
3. The original scales for measurement used in the TDA and ICSR were designed for unique purposes by separate organizations.²⁰
4. This survey only tested one group of students. Without a control group or other group of students, the comparison of scores is limited.
5. The methodology was entirely self-reported and lacked a true third source of validation to triangulate the outcomes and ensure certainty.
6. The implications of this research might be used to identify and develop methodologies within programs, courses, and assessment instruments to promote perseverance in schools and churches. However, the number of respondents (e.g., at a larger university) might produce different results.
7. The direction of correlation was not established, and causation was not implied.

Research Assumptions

1. Boyce College desires to provide the effort and resources necessary for first-year student formation and growth assessment.
2. Students who attend confessional Christian schools are concerned with spiritual growth.
3. There will be students interested in participating in this study and who will complete the entire assessment. The assessment could take up to half an hour to conclude, depending on each student.
4. Potential researcher biases will not impede the results of the study.²¹

²⁰ Huang and Lin, "Development of the Inventory of College Students' Resilience," 483. The sample population in the development of the ICSR were Taiwanese. The results are not generalizable to college students across cultures because the findings are based on two independent samples. Additionally, arguments might allege that the "life-strength" constructs that are "evidence-based protective factors that contribute to resilience" are not capable of cross-cultural validity in investigations such as this thesis.

²¹ "In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study." John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 251.

5. Students will take the anonymous survey only once.
6. Mitigating factors of student attrition, such as lack of finances, the death of loved ones, natural disasters, pregnancy, and students who are naturally more skilled for trade or who need remedial classes will not impact the sample.
7. Students will respond in a manner consistent with their actual beliefs and behaviors.²²

Instrumentation

The composition of the 120-item instrument included a description of the research, consent to participate, the *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA) and *Inventory of College Students Resilience* (ICSR) portions of the assessment, demographic information, and consent to follow up with a qualitative interview, allowing eligibility for the incentive. This study employed a convergent mixed methods design, combining the two assessment tools. The TDA was designed to measure spiritual maturity, and the ICSR was constructed to measure personality traits related to resilience. Permission was obtained to utilize the TDA and ICSR instruments from the original authors (see following section). These instruments were empirically validated in their original contexts. The administration of the assessment took place via the internet, whereby, students participated by clicking a link that was sent to their student email.

The literature review affirmed the TDA assessment as the most appropriate assessment of spiritual maturity to be included in this study based on its composition of longitudinal quantitative and qualitative data gathered over ten years.²³ The TDA consisted of eighty-two questions and was published by the LifeWay Research Group in 2011. Nine constructs were extracted from the TDA and incorporated into this study: (1) biblical engagement, (2) obeying God and denying self, (3) sharing faith, (4) serving God

²² Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 115.

²³ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008); Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012).

and others, (5) exercising biblical faith, (6) building solid relationships, (7) seeking God, (8) unashamed transparency, and (9) doctrinal positions.²⁴ Each of these constructs had a number of indices that were clustered together and gave a composite score between zero (limited evidence of spiritual development) and five (consistent spiritual development).²⁵

The ICSR contained seventeen questions published by Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin in 2013 by the *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling*. The ICSR identified the psychological resources a college student has available. It is an empirically reliable instrument that assessed the resilience of college students through a short questionnaire.²⁶ Four psychological constructs were extracted from the ICSR that promote resilience: (1) empathy and interpersonal interaction, (2) cognitive maturity, (3) problem-solving, and (4) hope and optimism.²⁷ The assessment items utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree,” “Somewhat Agree,” “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” Each scale item was assigned a point value, with “Strongly Agree” receiving five points and “Strongly Disagree” receiving one point.²⁸

²⁴ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 1–315.

²⁵ For instance, “Exercising Faith” has seven questions that together form a composite score which indicates whether an individual has consistent, moderate, or limited evidence of spiritual maturity in that area of his or her life.

²⁶ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483. The sample population was Taiwanese. Therefore, the results are not considered generalizable to college students across cultures because the findings are based on two independent samples. However, arguments can be made that the “life-strength” constructs that are “evidence-based protective factors that contribute to resilience” are capable of cross-cultural validity in future investigation such as this thesis.

²⁷ Huang and Lin combined the psychological constructs of empathy and interpersonal interaction in their research. Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 483.

²⁸ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 476; Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*; Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 18. Waggoner’s research measured each domain based on the performance on a 0 to 100 scale (with 100 being the most ideal score and 0 being the least). The *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* changed the metric measurement to reflect a 0 to 5-point scale, with ranges of 4.0–5.0 (consistent spiritual development), 2.0–3.9 (moderate spiritual development), and 0.0–1.9 (limited evidence of spiritual development). Both the TDA and the ICSR used a Likert scale, with Strongly Agree/Always True being the ideal response.

Researcher Permission and Competencies

Initial permission to conduct the study at Boyce College was granted by the academic dean and the dean of students on March 2, 2018. Permission to use the ICSR was granted by Dr. Yun-Chen Huang, the co-author, on October 24, 2018. Permission to use the TDA was granted from Kevin Walker from the Lifeway Research Group on February 7, 2019, stipulating that I would not be able to publish any of the questions in my thesis. The methodology of this study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on March 27, 2019, prior to conducting any assessment or interviews with human participants. Risk to human subjects involved in research was assessed by the committee and stated guidelines were followed. Permission to directly contact the students at Boyce College was granted by the dean of students and the academic dean on April 2, 2019.

A basic knowledge of qualitative and quantitative analysis and statistics was needed to organize the data from the existing assessments. Ensuring low risk to students' well-being included maintaining sensitivity to racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and eliminating any coercive or mandatory requests for participation. There was an equal opportunity for active involvement of all first-year students, gender inclusivity was promoted, and the questions were free of socio-economic biases. Appropriate explanation of the research process was made available to participants. I restricted operations to fit within my budget and the research doctoral studies program timeline. In writing the research project, I aimed for clear and concise readability by scholars, practitioners, and the general population. The study utilized a pilot assessment phase as listed below (under "Procedures" section).

Thesis Study Participation Form

This study utilized a modified version of John David Trentham’s Dissertation Participation Form (see appendix 1).²⁹ Informed consent was required of all participants. Such consent included their biographical history and student demographic information (i.e., academic major and housing). This information was included in the analysis of data and provided additional insights from the participants once participants completed the interview. The participation form was included in the quantitative strand and provided an option for students to willingly participate in the assessment and qualitative interview.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions used to further study the resilience factors of empathy, interpersonal relationships, hope and optimism, cognitive maturity, and problem-solving (as featured in the ICSR assessment; see appendix 3). Attributes of spiritual maturity from the TDA were integrated into the question probes to evaluate how first-year students at Boyce College understood their experiences with adversity. Emerging coding based on data obtained through the quantitative assessment process was used. The audio of the interview was recorded via Zoom online meeting software. The themes that developed from the qualitative findings were transcribed and coded, and then a content analysis was performed to uncover a greater depth to the responses in the quantitative strand.

Procedures

The instrument was administered following similar procedures used by their initial developers. Prior to and following the pilot study, the instrument was validated

²⁹ John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 224. Used with permission.

with a panel of experts.³⁰ The assessment was the subject of a pilot study at Shelterwood Academy, a residential boarding school, which provided an opportunity for the assessment to receive feedback from participants. I used member checking in the final study. It consisted of transcribing the semi-structured interviews and emailing them to the participants to ensure that their experiences were accurately reflected.³¹

Conduct a Pilot Study

The assessment was pilot-tested (or field-tested) on the campus of Shelterwood Academy, a residential boarding school which employs mentors who have typically completed a four-year college degree. Ten mentors were enlisted to complete the quantitative strand, and they received an incentive. Two mentors were selected to complete the qualitative strand. The assessment was designed using Google forms and was accessible through student email. The responses in the quantitative strand determined the identification of the profile of participants for the qualitative strand interview. This evaluation helped to validate the scoring system of the assessment, provided clarity to certain question probes within the semi-structured interview, and afforded an opportunity to correct errors and make improvements to the research design.

Recruit Study Participants

The assessment was sent out to first-year students at Boyce College between April 9 and August 9, 2019. Permission was obtained through the dean's office to contact faculty, the registrar, and Boyce student life. Faculty provided students with the link to

³⁰ For the research design, I consulted with my supervisory team in addition to Kim Fielding, who is a doctoral supervisor at Shelterwood Academy. Interview questions were sent to Amy Crider, Professor of English at Boyce College, and Chris H. Smith Jr., Assistant Director of Boyce Student Life, for feedback based on their familiarity with first-year students.

³¹ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274. Each interviewee was provided with the final transcript that was used to code the information and produce the themes seen in chapter 4. The participants were allowed to review and offer corrections. If there was no response after ten days, the study proceeded with an understanding that the transcripts were valid and accurately reflected the student's experience.

the online assessment via email. The registrar delivered an email to all enrolled first-year students eligible to participate. Boyce student life provided an invitation for inclusion through an undergraduate student newsletter. I contacted students who participated in the quantitative strand by email, phone, text message, and Facebook, and then he scheduled them based on mutual availability. Students were informed that their involvement was voluntary, and incentives included two \$10 gift card raffles and a \$10 gift card that was given to everyone who participated in the interview.

Quantitative Procedures

The initial assessment was sent to participants by email or through an electronic newsletter published by student life at Boyce. The students granted consent to participate by clicking “I agree,” then they completed the assessment in approximately fifteen minutes (see appendix 2). Participants provided demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, housing arrangements, and class standing. The students were asked to voluntarily offer an email address or phone number for a follow-up interview in the qualitative strand of the design. Granting this information registered them for the research incentive.

Data analysis. Student scores were collected from the Google forms survey in a Microsoft Excel document. Each of the nine TDA attributes of discipleship and the four ICSR traits of resilience produced a numeric sum based on the five-point Likert scale (see appendix 4 for the summary and sample score report of all 13 variables). The averages of each of the nine TDA attributes and the averages of the four ICSR resilience traits produced a score between 0.0 and 5.0 points on a scale ranging from 4.0–5.0 (consistent spiritual development/resilience), 2.0–3.9 (moderate spiritual development/resilience), and 0.0–1.9 (limited evidence of spiritual development/resilience). The descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, mode, and standard deviation) produced a statistical profile for each participant. Students were emailed a score report containing their quantitative results. The

email also contained an invitation to participate in the semi-structured interview. The score report listed the average of the nine attributes of spiritual maturity and the four constructs of resilience (see appendix 4). Profile data was analyzed to converge, diverge, relate, and make individual and group comparisons.

Case selection: Interview protocol development. Interviews utilized semi-structured open-ended questions as well as additional exploratory questions or probes as necessary.³² These question sequences emerged from the themes that converged primarily through resilience factors present in the ICSR, Scripture, important concepts and definitions from resilience theory, the TDA attributes of discipleship, and comparisons from the literature.³³ Factors of spiritual maturity from the TDA were incorporated into the question probes to identify patterns that exist between resilience and Christian formation among first-year students at Boyce College (see appendix 3). Interview questions were modified after the pilot study through deductive analysis of themes, dimensions and categories based on the literature review (see chapter 2), and quantitative findings. Anticipated results included an interrelated understanding of practices of spiritual maturation and cognitive awareness of decisions that lead to outcomes favorable to understanding resilience.

Qualitative Procedures

Student consent to participate was granted through verbal response during the qualitative interview. Fifteen participants were selected and then assigned a fictitious

³² The questions changed and became more refined during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, chap. 4, "Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research," para. 7.

³³ Kvale and Brinkmann state, "A good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction." Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 131. I employed open-ended questions to describe what the participants have experienced in greater depth.

name to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. The objective of the interview was to gain an awareness of how respondents articulate their positions and perspectives regarding resilience and spiritual maturity. The interviews were conducted and the audio recorded utilizing Zoom online meeting software.³⁴ The quantitative data was collected, transcribed, and then distributed to interviewees for member checking.

The data was analyzed, aided by the NVivo 12 software, using theme development and emergent coding that moved from general to particular.³⁵ The qualitative results were analyzed and coded using emerging coding. Points of interaction between Scripture, resilience constructs, and measures of spiritual maturity were the basis of the emerging coding design. A matrix was developed to organize data after coding. Recurring codes were reported as themes that emerged and were analyzed with a cross-thematic analysis (i.e., similar and different themes).³⁶

Convergent Procedures

The nine attributes of discipleship from the TDA, the four traits of resilience from the ICSR, and the themes of the interview questions were jointly displayed using a table in Microsoft Excel. The content areas of quantitative and qualitative data were compared, contrasted, transformed, merged, and synthesized.³⁷ This process allowed the

³⁴ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 266. Following an interview protocol maintained consistency along each interview.

³⁵ Coding is used by researchers in qualitative studies to make abstract ideas and principles more concrete by assigning numerical values to them. This also aids in the “computerization” of observations. Leedy and Ormrod suggest making a spreadsheet containing items on a checklist that can be observed during an interview. Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 32, 165. NVivo is a digital platform built for mixed methods and Qualitative research to store, organize, categorize, analyze, visualize, and discover themes, patterns, and classifications of collected data. NVivo, “What is NVivo,” accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>.

³⁶ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, chap. 4, “Procedures for Conducting a Case Study,” para. 5.

³⁷ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 128.

qualitative results to confirm the quantitative results. A comparison report was created and then discussed (see chapter 4).

Interpreting Results

The results from the quantitative data and the qualitative data were interpreted separately. The extent of the convergence and divergence of data was explained to produce a greater understanding of the patterns that exist between resilience, a student's spiritual maturity, and the assessments that measure these factors (see chapter 4). Potential themes and categories that emerged might contribute toward developing a spiritual model of resilience, provide further insights for divergence of responses, and help explore the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity in first-year students at Boyce College.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to address first-year students' personal assessment of spiritual maturity and their comparable experience with resilience at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. The initial focus was to determine if there was a correlation between the assessment scales of the *Inventory of College Students Resilience* (ICSR) and the *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA). The subsequent focus was to organize and compare themes in order to understand the interaction between spiritual maturity and resilience as articulated by first-year students at Boyce College. This chapter provides descriptions of the research protocol, detailed analysis, and an explanation of the findings of the convergent research design. The results of the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research, strengths, and challenges are also considered.

Compilation Protocol

A convergent design was utilized to bring together two preexisting assessments in a quantitative strand and semi-structured interviews in the qualitative strand. The Research and Ethics Committee granted permission to conduct the study at Boyce College in April 2019. I contacted professors at Boyce College who had a large number of freshman students enrolled in their courses. Professors provided their students with the 120-item instrument through an email link, which resulted in 17 participants. In June 2019, I requested that the registrar send an email to all eligible students at Boyce, which resulted in 15 respondents. The final wave occurred in August 2019. Twenty-one students were recruited using the Boyce Student Life online newsletter. The qualitative study

commenced two weeks before the fall semester started. There were 53 total respondents to the quantitative strand and 15 interviewees in the qualitative strand.

Quantitative Strand Participant Demographics

Students at Boyce College who have completed at least one semester of coursework were the intended target of the online assessment. There were 53 out of 263 possible participants.¹ Males accounted for 20 participants, while females accounted for 33 participants. The class standing of students included the following: twenty-three students were in their second year, first semester; 15 students were in their first year, second semester; and 11 students described themselves as beyond their third semester at Boyce or in higher education. Students beyond their first year were allowed to participate by retroactively reflecting on their first year. Four first-year, first-semester students were excluded from participation.

Table 6. Quantitative gender and class standing demographics

Gender	Male	%	Female	%
Students	22	37.7	33	62.3
Class standing			Students	%
First year, second semester			15	43.4
Second year, first semester			23	28.3
Third semester or beyond			11	20.8

The smallest group of 8 students (15.1 percent) were born between 1990 and 1997, while second-largest group of 17 students (32.1 percent) were born between 1998 and 1999. Twenty-eight participants were born in 2000 or 2001, representing 52.8 percent

¹ The number of eligible students is 262 according to data provided by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary registrar. Academic Records, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, November 20, 2018. This number reflects the 2018–2019 academic year (graduating class of 2022) and excludes those enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic year.

of the sample. Ninety-eight percent of students involved in the study were enrolled in the bachelor's degree program. Full-time students represented 94.3 percent, whereas 5.7 percent represented part-time enrollment. Forty-four students (84.6 percent) live on campus, while 6 individuals (11.5 percent) commute to campus, and 2 described themselves as online students (3.8 percent).

Three students identified as international (5.7 percent). Ethnic origins of the sample included those who self-identified as Asian (4 percent), Hispanic (8 percent), White or Caucasian (22 percent), European (30 percent), American (28 percent), and two or more ethnicities (4 percent). Forty-eight percent of students replied that they are involved in parachurch ministries. The percentage of students who pursued vocational ministry before enrollment was 40.8 percent; 20.4 percent decided to pursue ministry while enrolled; and 38.8 percent had not decided to pursue ministry at the time that the assessment was administered.

Research Question Synopsis

The intent of this study was to examine the statistical measures and articulated responses of first-year college students regarding resilience and spiritual maturity at Boyce College. This study was based on three strands of research guided by three guiding research questions:

Quantitative Strand

1. How do respective measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among first-year Boyce College students?

Qualitative Strand

2. How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

Convergent Strand

3. To what extent do the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results?²

Quantitative Research Procedures

Upon the completion of the final student assessment, Google Forms amassed the data in a Microsoft Excel worksheet. I duplicated the sheet to preserve the original data. The columns were labeled based on responses from the TDA or ICSR. The nine constructs extracted from the TDA were as follows: (1) biblical engagement, (2) obeying God and denying self, (3) sharing faith, (4) serving God and others, (5) exercising biblical faith, (6) building solid relationships, (7) seeking God, (8) unashamed transparency, and (9) doctrinal positions.³ The four psychological constructs that promote resilience from the ICSR were (1) empathy and interpersonal interaction, (2) cognitive maturity, (3) problem-solving, and (4) hope and optimism.⁴ Using the “Sort” tool in Excel, the categories were sorted alphabetically by row from left to right in order to place all of the attributes (i.e., biblical engagement) together. An empty column was added after each attribute to insert the average for each participant. The “Find and Replace” feature was used to change the nominal data to a numeric value.⁵ The ideal response reflected the highest value (i.e., “Strongly Agree” = 5). The numerical values for responses were (5)

² John Creswell and David Creswell suggest developing “a unique mixed methods question that ties together or integrates the quantitative and qualitative data in a study.” John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 191; John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 257.

³ For instance, the question “Have you been baptized?” on the TDA corresponded to the category “obeying God and denying self.” Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 1–315.

⁴ Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin combined the psychological constructs of empathy and interpersonal interaction in their research. Yun-Chen Huang and Shu-Hui Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 483. Using the same measures of consistent, moderate, and limited scores from the TDA will be used to measure the four constructs of resilience to determine if there is a relationship between spiritual maturity and resilience.

⁵ The researcher had to check “Find Entire Cells” and type “Strongly Agree” so that the search would not accidentally find “Agree.”

Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (2) Disagree, (1) Strongly Disagree. Certain attributes were asked in a negative manner such that answers had to be inverted.⁶ The data from the TDA portion provided scores that measure the spiritual maturity of first-year college students.⁷ The statistical average of each of the nine spiritual attributes (e.g., building relationships) and four resilience factors (e.g., cognitive maturity) was the basis of all statistical calculations and produced a range of scores for each participant. The TDA provided a summary report scale of consistent spiritual development (4.0–5.0), moderate spiritual development (2.0–3.9), and limited evidence of spiritual development (0.0–1.9).⁸ A comprehensive score report was created denoting each of the thirteen variables (e.g., TDA 9, ICSR 4) as a statistical profile that was emailed to each student upon his or her request. The statistical mean of each of the nine spiritual attributes (e.g., building relationships) and four resilience factors (e.g., cognitive maturity) was the basis of all calculations. Appendix 6, table A2 lists the complete profile of all students surveyed.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The analysis of the data commenced with a visual inspection and descriptive analysis to determine the trends of data.⁹ The nine TDA attributes and the four ICSR resilience factors were regarded as independent variables. The descriptive statistics were calculated with formulas within Microsoft Excel (see table 7). The means are the average

⁶ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*. The inverted values included (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Disagree, and (5) Strongly Disagree. The values for answers to calendar-related questions were Every day (5), A few times a week (4), Once a week (3), A few times a month (2), Once a month (1), and Rarely/Never (0). Answers indicating “yes” were assigned a (5), and the values of “no” received a (1). The value for frequency responses included 10 or more (5), 6–9 times (4), 3–5 times (3), 1–2 times (2), and zero (1). Other values of 4 or more received a (5), less than 3 (4), less than 2 (3), less than 1 (2), and zero (1).

⁷ See chap. 2, “Spiritual Maturity Assessments,” 34–37.

⁸ Lifeway Research Group, *The Transformational Discipleship Assessment Summary Report*, accessed November 5, 2018.

⁹ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*.

scores from the entire population (n = 53). The sample population of first-year students at Boyce scored in a range that suggests that 44.4 percent of students experienced consistent spiritual development (4.0–5.0) in the attributes of Bible engagement, doctrinal positions, exercising faith, and obeying God and denying self. Students scored moderately in building relationships, seeking God, serving God and others, sharing Christ, and unashamed transparency (2.0–3.9), representing 55.6 percent of responses.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Bible Engagement	4.31	4.33	4.33	0.45
Building Relationships	3.73	3.83	4	0.58
Doctrinal Positions	4.89	4.92	5	0.15
Exercising Faith	4.03	4	4	0.50
Obeying God and Denying Self	4.30	4.36	4.43	0.40
Seeking God	3.87	3.86	3.86	0.70
Serving God and Others	3.68	3.69	3.69	0.51
Sharing Christ	3.29	3.14	3.14	0.61
Unashamed Transparency	3.49	3.57	4	0.51
Cognitive Maturity	4.14	4.2	4	0.50
Hope and Optimism	3.51	3.67	3.67	0.67
Problem-solving	4.07	4	3.75	0.64
Empathy and Interpersonal Interaction	4.23	4.2	4.2	0.40

Seventy-five percent of participants in the assessment scored consistently (4.0–5.0) in cognitive maturity, problem-solving, and empathy and interpersonal interaction. Twenty-five percent of respondents scored moderately (2.0–3.9) in factors of hope and optimism. The median scores suggest that there was not an extensive range of variability in scores. The mode represents the scores that were repeated the most in each variable group. For instance, 11 students (out of 53 respondents) averaged a 3.67 in the hope and

optimism group. The standard deviation measures the average distance from the mean.¹⁰ The variance in values shows the average amount of space between responses, how far the values are spread out, and how different the values are from each other. The shorter distance between doctrinal positions suggests that students responded more similarly than they did for seeking God. A graphic representation of the TDA and ICSR scores was generated, depicting how students compared to each other (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Graphic representation of TDA and ICSR scores

¹⁰ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2017), 50.

The x-axis values represent the student identification number from three to fifty-three. The y-axis represents the student scores. For example, Kyle (student 34) represents the individual with the most considerable variance that ranges from limited evidence of spiritual development in seeking God (1.57) to consistent spiritual development in biblical engagement (4.83; see appendix 6, table A2).

Table 8 displays the results of a *t*-test performed on the male and female groups, allowing for comparison to be made between same-gender participants and then between gender groups.

Table 8. Comparison between male and female groups

Variable	Female mean	Female Var.	Male mean	Male Var.	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Result <i>p</i> < .05
Bible Engagement	4.28	0.20	4.37	0.22	-0.68	0.50	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Building Relationships	3.73	0.34	3.73	0.43	-0.03	0.98	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Doctrinal Positions	4.85	0.03	4.94	0.01	-2.04	0.05	The result is <i>significant</i>
Exercising Faith	3.99	0.26	4.10	0.24	-0.75	0.45	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Obedying God and Denying Self	4.30	0.13	4.3	0.26	0.007	0.99	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Seeking God	3.86	0.40	3.87	0.65	-0.06	0.95	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Serving God and Others	3.67	0.32	3.7	0.21	-0.19	0.85	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Sharing Christ	3.22	0.33	3.4	0.44	-1.06	0.29	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Unashamed Transparency	3.39	0.32	3.64	0.21	-1.67	0.10	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Cognitive Maturity	4.12	0.30	4.18	0.24	-0.43	0.67	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Hope and Optimism	3.38	0.59	3.72	0.34	-1.66	0.10	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Problem-solving	4.14	0.40	3.95	0.50	1.03	0.31	The result is <i>not</i> significant
Empathy and Interpersonal Interaction	4.22	0.19	4.24	0.16	-0.18	0.86	The result is <i>not</i> significant

Neil J. Salkind states, “The *t*-test for dependent means involves a comparison of means from each group of scores and focuses on the differences between the scores.”¹¹ A variance of zero indicates that each of the data values is identical. For example, the responses for males and females are nearly identical and statistically significant for doctrinal positions. Meanwhile, the scores for hope and optimism for males deviates less between other males but at twice the measure with the female group. While the mean scores for males indicate a higher score as a group (except for problem-solving), individual female values for resilience and spiritual maturity are higher overall (see figure 3). The most dissimilar responses were calculated to be seeking God, building relationships, sharing Christ, and hope and optimism. The variance within groups indicates how similarly the group will respond in reference to the variable. For instance, women in the sample were statistically more likely to have similar responses involving empathy and interpersonal interaction, which infers the type of involvement, values, and patterns of behavior they report.

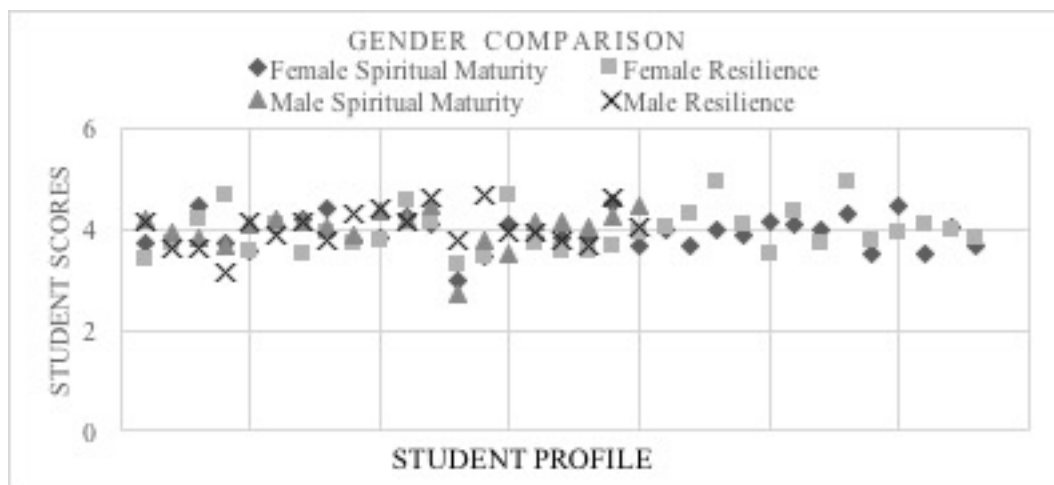


Figure 3. Gender comparison

¹¹ Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 232.

Search for Significance

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient r_2 and Spearman's rho correlational coefficient were used to determine whether the average for the TDA scores and average of the ICSR scores were correlated.¹² The calculated value of the Pearson r was 0.3687, and the p value was .006596.¹³ The association between the two variables is considered statistically significant at $p < .05$ by usual standards. The correlation coefficient reflects the amount of variability shared between two variables and what they have in common.¹⁴ First-year students at Boyce did not have a large range of values. Most scored between 3.5 and 4.5, which denotes high moderate to consistent resilience and spiritual development (see figure 4).

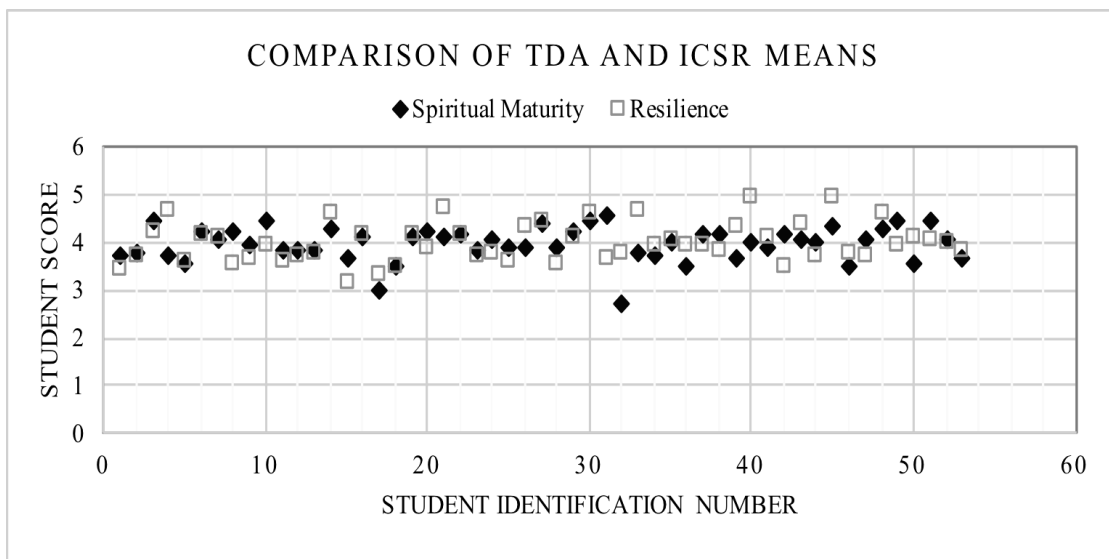


Figure 4. Comparison of TDA and ICSR means

¹² The correlation coefficients were determined with a statistics calculator available on at Social Science Statistics, "Statistics Calculators," accessed August 16, 2019, <https://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/>.

¹³ A Pearson r of 0 indicates no relationship.

¹⁴ Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 84.

Differences between Test Variables

Each of the ICSR resilience variables (e.g., cognitive maturity) were compared against the nine TDA factors of discipleship (e.g., building relationships). The Spearman rho correlational coefficient was used to test the differences between the population mean for resilience and spiritual maturity. Salkind states that “one variable does not ‘cause’ the other, and the presence of one does not mean that the other will be present as well. The positive correlation is just an assessment of the relationship between these two variables, the key idea being that they share some variance in common.”¹⁵

Hope and optimism are statistically significant when compared to building relationships, serving God and others, and sharing Christ (see table 9 and figure 5). The graphic representation shows the observable pattern of responses that are mathematically correlated.

Table 9. Hope and optimism correlation

Variable	Pearson <i>r</i>	Spearman <i>r</i> _s	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	Result <i>p</i> < .05
Bible Engagement	0.24	0.23	0.09	Weak correlation
Building Relationships	0.39	0.40	0.003	Statistically significant
Doctrinal Positions	0.09	-0.008	0.95	Weak correlation
Exercising Faith	0.24	0.22	0.12	Weak correlation
Obeying God and Denying Self	0.20	0.20	0.15	Weak correlation
Seeking God	0.27	0.21	0.13	Weak correlation
Serving God and Others	0.26	0.27	0.05	Statistically significant
Sharing Christ	0.32	0.38	0.004	Statistically significant
Unashamed Transparency	0.21	0.15	0.27	Weak correlation

¹⁵ Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 99.

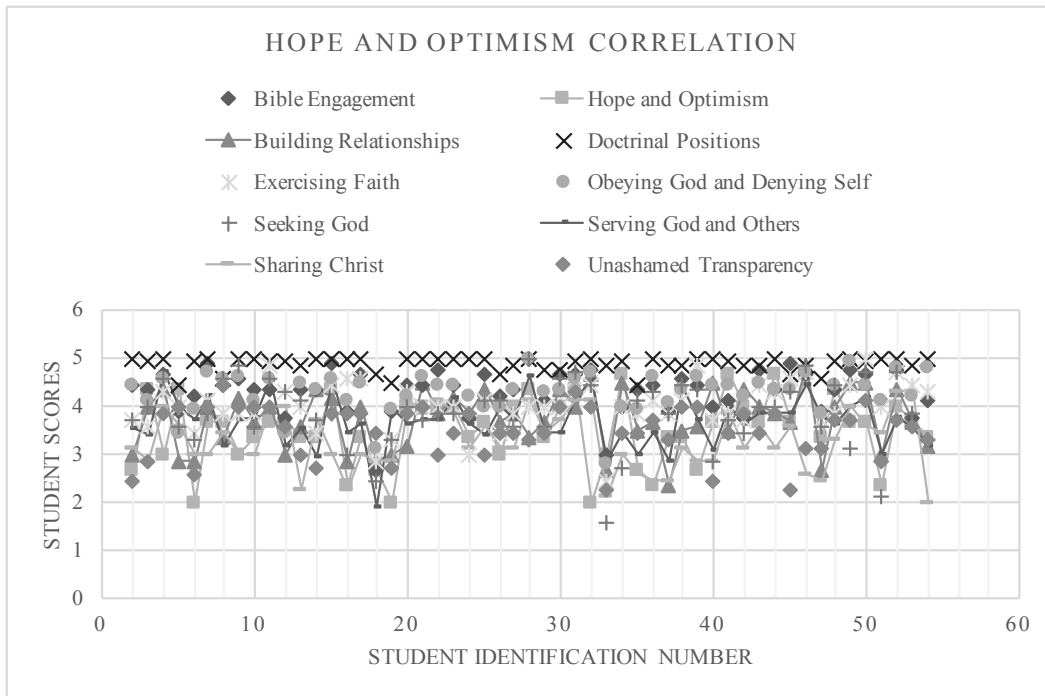


Figure 5. Hope and optimism correlation

There was no statistical significance found between the cognitive maturity variable and the TDA variables (see table 10).

Table 10. Cognitive maturity correlation

Variable	Pearson <i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ₂	<i>p</i> (2-tailed)	Result <i>p</i> < .05
Bible Engagement	0.09	0.16	0.24	Weak correlation
Building Relationships	0.05	0.06	0.65	Weak correlation
Doctrinal Positions	-0.05	0.008	0.95	Weak correlation
Exercising Faith	0.06	0.10	0.46	Weak correlation
Obeying God and Denying Self	0.08	0.17	0.23	Weak correlation
Seeking God	-0.06	-0.03	0.86	Weak correlation
Serving God and Others	0.14	0.16	0.25	Weak correlation
Sharing Christ	0.18	0.17	0.24	Weak correlation
Unashamed Transparency	0.7	0.05	0.72	Weak correlation

Table 11 and figure 6 show that there was statistical significance found between the problem-solving variable and building relationships, obeying God and denying self, and serving God and others.

Table 11. Problem-solving

Variable	Pearson r	r^2	p (2-tailed)	Result $p < .05$
Bible Engagement	0.30	0.23	0.10	Weak correlation
Building Relationships	0.38	0.33	0.02	Statistically significant
Doctrinal Positions	0.15	0.25	0.07	Weak correlation
Exercising Faith	0.17	0.20	0.15	Weak correlation
Obeying God and Denying Self	0.31	-0.002	0.98	Statistically significant
Seeking God	0.04	0.30	0.03	Weak correlation
Serving God and Others	0.43	0.39	0.003	Statistically significant
Sharing Christ	0.23	0.19	0.18	Weak correlation
Unashamed Transparency	0.13	0.15	0.27	Weak correlation

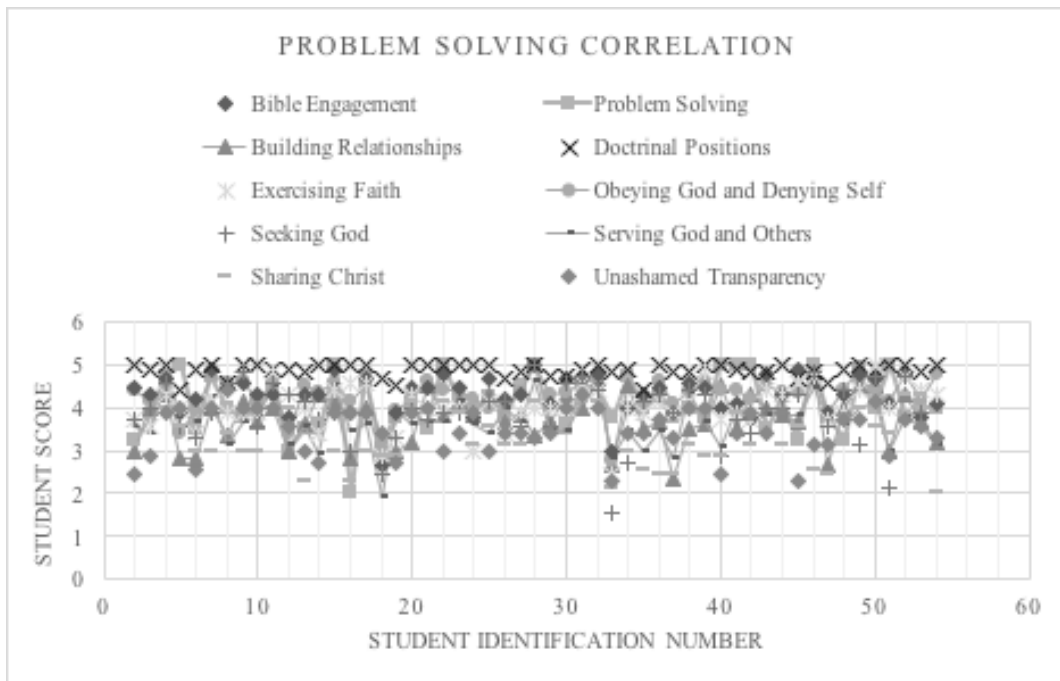


Figure 6. Problem-solving correlation

Table 12 and figure 7 display that there was statistical significance found between the empathy and interpersonal interaction variable and exercising faith.

Table 12. Empathy and interpersonal interaction

Variable	Pearson r	r_2	p (2-tailed)	Result $p < .05$
Bible Engagement	0.24	0.16	0.25	Weak correlation
Building Relationships	0.02	-0.02	0.89	Weak correlation
Doctrinal Positions	0.05	0.09	0.52	Weak correlation
Exercising Faith	0.32	0.29	0.03	Statistically significant
Obeying God and Denying Self	0.23	0.19	0.17	Weak correlation
Seeking God	0.03	-0.03	0.82	Weak correlation
Serving God and Others	0.17	0.11	0.42	Weak correlation
Sharing Christ	-0.02	-0.04	0.78	Weak correlation
Unashamed Transparency	0.05	0.03	0.84	Weak correlation

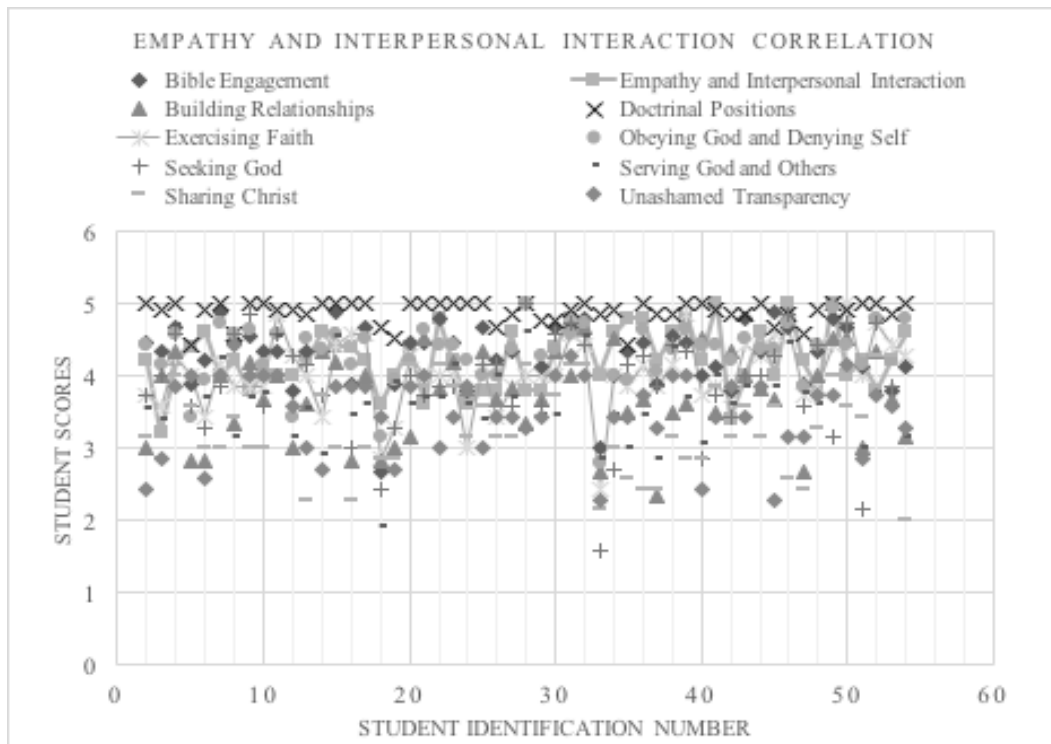


Figure 7. Empathy and interpersonal interaction

Qualitative Research Procedures

The objective of the semi-structured qualitative interview was to gain an awareness of how respondents articulate their perspective regarding resilience and spiritual maturity. The questions were informed by the precedent literature review and the quantitative results and then constructed “to chart key aspects of the subject’s lived world.”¹⁶ Fifteen students from Boyce College were purposefully selected from assessment respondents who indicated a willingness to participate in the semi-structured interview.¹⁷ The researcher contacted eligible students via email, phone, text message, and a link on the Boyce Class of 2022 Facebook page. Next, each participant was scheduled based on mutual availability. The audio from the interview was recorded via Zoom video conference software.¹⁸ Each student verbally granted consent to participate. A script was used for the instructional portion to ensure consistency in technique. I took field notes during the interviews using a journal to record qualitative procedures. The interviews ranged from 32 to 106 minutes. The students discussed any questions they had regarding their quantitative score report (see appendix 4). Following the interviews, the quantitative data was collected and transcribed using Otter.ai software. The quantitative strand provided the students’ demographic information. Each student was assigned an

¹⁶ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann state, “The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standard questions, nor entirely ‘non directive.’ Through open-ended questions the interview focuses on the topic of research.” Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 31; cf. 106.

¹⁷ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2015), 255. The number of participants recommended in a phenomenological interview can vary between 5 and 30 as long as the participants experience the same phenomenon. Creswell and Creswell state that the “quantitative results inform the type of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and that types of questions that will be asked of the participants.” Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274. They assign the priority of the study to the qualitative approach due to the in-depth explanations that result.

¹⁸ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 266. Following an interview protocol maintained consistency along each interview. Zoom, “About Zoom,” accessed March 27, 2019, https://zoom.us/about?_ga=2.147174647.1356340332.1572551581-384244822.1570218315.

identification number and their names have been changed to maintain anonymity. The interviewees received an email for member checking and validation.¹⁹ Two percent of the sample suggested corrections or omissions, while 10 percent made no corrections.

Qualitative Demographics

Seven first-year students (46.7 percent) were female, while 8 students (53.3 percent) were male. The class standing of student participants at Boyce College was as follows: 4 students (26.7 percent) were in their first year, second semester; 8 students (59.3 percent) were in their second year, first semester; and 3 students (20 percent) described themselves as second year, second semester or beyond (see table 13). Students in their second and third year provided an enriched perspective, critical reflection, and awareness gained over time through their experiences of overcoming adversity. One respondent was born between 1990 and 1997. Individuals born between 1998 and 1999 represented the second largest group of respondents (six students; 40 percent), while eight interviewees (53.3 percent) were born between 2000 and 2001.

Table 13. Qualitative gender and class standing demographics

Gender	Male	%	Female	%
Students	8	53.3	7	46.7
Class standing			Students	%
First year, second semester			4	26.7
Second year, first semester			8	59.3
Third semester or beyond			3	20

¹⁹ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274. Each interviewee received the final transcript emailed from the researcher. The transcript was used to code the information and produce the themes seen in this chapter. The participants were allowed to review and offer corrections. If there was no response after ten days, the study proceeded with an understanding that the transcripts were valid and accurately reflected the student's experience.

All participants were full-time students who lived on campus and were enrolled in a bachelor's degree program. Two respondents identified as international students. Two interviewees self-identified as Asian (13.3 percent), 3 as Hispanic (20 percent), 2 as White or Caucasian (13.3 percent), 3 as European (20 percent), 4 as American (26.6 percent), and 1 as two or more ethnicities. Involvement in parachurch ministries was recorded at 86.67 percent. For those who responded, 40 percent decided to pursue vocational ministry before enrollment at Boyce College, 20 percent decided to pursue ministry while enrolled, and 40 percent had not decided to pursue ministry at the time of the assessment.

Qualitative Data Analysis

I read through all the data upon completion of all 15 transcriptions in order to develop a general understanding of repeated words and experiences. Field notes were compared to transcripts, then the data was analyzed using theme development and emergent coding.²⁰ The codes were initially suggested automatically by the Otter.ai program and then queried by the NVivo 12 software.²¹ The resulting keywords and codes were extracted, compiled, and organized into categories. Points of interaction between Scripture, resilience constructs, and measures of spiritual maturity were the basis of the emerging structural coding. According to Saldana, structural coding is “appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those employing multiple participants, standardized or semi-structured data-gathering protocols, hypothesis testing, or

²⁰ Coding is used by researchers in qualitative studies to make abstract ideas and principles more concrete by assigning numerical values to them. This method also aids in the “computerization” of observations. Leedy and Ormrod suggest making a spreadsheet containing items on a checklist that can be observed during an interview. Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 32, 165.

²¹ NVivo 12 is a digital platform built for mixed methods and qualitative research to store, organize, categorize, analyze, visualize, and discover themes, patterns, and classifications of collected data. NVivo, “What is NVivo,” accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/what-is-nvivo>. See also Otter.ai, “Otter for Education,” accessed August 20, 2019, <https://otter.ai/edu>.

explanatory investigations to gather topics lists or indexes of major categories or themes. . . . Structural Coding both codes and initially categorizes the data corpus.”²²

Recurring codes were reported as in categories that emerged into themes, then they were analyzed with cross-thematic (similar and different theme) analysis using NVivo 12.²³ Seven major themes emerged from the presence of artifacts or shared experiences (e.g., reading Scripture). The codebook from NVivo 12 was exported and served to document the major and related themes that emerged from the data. In the following section, the names of the students who were interviewed have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience. In a grand total of 147 occurrences, first-year students at Boyce College experienced interpersonal struggles, including anxiety, depression, feelings of inadequacy, failure, and isolation (see table 14). There were 13 instances in which students reported sentiments of personal inadequacy that criticized their identity or hindered their pursuit of Jesus. Nikki stated, “I’m not sure if God is going to use me for anything. I’m not sure if I’m even important.” These sentiments of insufficiency ran through different contexts, including academic majors, calling, ministry, romantic relationships, church involvement, illnesses, and disabilities that the students experienced. In some cases, the distress they felt caused them to contemplate giving up on academic pursuit. Kevon expressed,

Since I’m going to probably going to be studying for four or more years, studying biblical counseling. Sometimes I have a mindset of when work gets tough and I have so much homework to do, I start to have thoughts of why am I here? Why am I doing all of this studying and all this hard work? And sometimes I have thoughts of maybe I should just give up because I don’t feel like I’m adequate enough to be able

²² Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 67.

²³ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), chap. 4, “Procedures for Conducting a Case Study,” para. 5; Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 67.

to do this well. I think that's the biggest area where I think that I've come the closest to giving up.

In 5 separate instances, students verbalized that they avoided adversity. Trevor remarked, "I think if we bottle up our adversity that doesn't help anything." On the other hand, Nikki said, "Typically, I try and ignore it first. I try and say, 'Oh, that's not actually happening.' I sort of bottled up everything, like, 'Okay, I'm not going to deal with that.' Being at college I've learned to really confront things. I feel on the front end I will not deal with it. But then I know I have to."

Fear and anxiety were common experiences shared by all respondents, specifically, moving to Louisville, Kentucky, an unfamiliar place without prior friendships, which contributed to thoughts of uncertainty. David stated, "Just making the move out to Kentucky was a really scary thing for me. I've had like the same friend group pretty much as long as I can remember." Forty-two incidents were recorded that referred to isolation and/or loneliness. Some who identified as new believers (i.e., who came to faith within the last four years) struggled with assimilating to the culture of those who grew up in church. Three young men reported that their issues with sin would drive them into isolation for a period of time. Some interviewees had roommates who would leave on weekends or hang out late at night. Four students reported that such actions on the part of their roommates caused them to feel isolated. Some students even felt alone as they took classes during the summer while their friends were at home or on vacation. Three students did not grow up in America, had to learn to adapt to the culture, and had to develop new relationships, whereas others already had established friendships. Several students still held on to the deeper friendships they had in their home communities and, thus, were not able to connect with close-knit groups on campus. Kevon expressed, "Sometimes I would even think, 'Lord why aren't you letting me connect with these people? Why do I feel so lonely?'" So it's definitely been my biggest area discouragement." Three students found it difficult to connect with people and get involved at churches that were considerably larger than their home congregations.

Nikki verbalized,

Dealing with current issues, and coming to the school and different isolation and rejection, different issues like that just really bring me down. They bring me to a level of hurt and I just sort of lay there and go, “This hurts! Why does it have to be this way?” But you just trust God that he designed everything to be this way. Everything you go through now, is hopefully going to help somebody later on.

Four students discussed struggling with depression in their first year due to their perception of a lack of control in their lives. Trevor remarked, “I think for me one struggle was definitely anxiety which was on last year and still this year. But I think one difficulty that I definitely had in pursuing Christ was just actually trusting Him, that He had all the things that I have to worry about in control.” Tia reported,

I was going through a rough time. I was taking a math class, and it was super stressful, and it affected me in every way because I didn’t have all the help I needed. It affected me physically and emotionally. I used to cry a lot. It affects me in every way. Not just the academic side in the sense that because of that I have poor grades turned in, but because of the stress. I tend to get pretty emotional or sick depending on the circumstances.

Leslie discussed, “I used to let my fear rule me. I have struggled a lot with depression. I still fall into that every once in a while. I definitely think that it’s just a matter of, like, letting your letting lies consume you or letting truth consume you.”

Feeling overwhelmed by the college workload was reported by most of the students and recorded in 17 instances during their first year. Five students attributed a great amount of stress to their enrollment in the Greek language course. A fourth of the sample population reported that they struggled with procrastination and/or laziness, while others found it difficult to keep up with assignments and the course schedule. Meanwhile, 3 students identified that their pursuit of top grades were idols in their lives. Jim recalled, “I would say that was a really big hindrance for me, because then I would wake up late and, and not read the Word or not be in prayer. Then I’d go throughout my day, without reading the Word. I think that was a huge hindrance for me during that whole year.”

Some students responded with anger in 5 instances when things did not go their way or when they experienced prolonged sickness. Selfishness was acknowledged

in 3 of those occurrences. Three young women relinquished their anger toward God when they reflected on God’s provision and comfort. Cheryl remembered, “I was forced to adjust and, like, my lifestyle had to change. And, all of a sudden I wasn’t able to do all these different things anymore. And I was just sick all the time. I just asked a lot of questions, and got really angry, and cried a lot of tears and I don’t know if I adjusted really well.” Students had largely varied responses to interview question 5 regarding doubt about their future (see appendix 3). Consequently, 6 students expressed that they consciously hid their doubts, did not share their doubts, or did not think about their actual doubts.

Table 14. Spiritual and interpersonal struggles

Theme	References
Isolation-loneliness	42
Distress from workload	17
Wanting to give up	16
Fear-anxiety	15
Hiding doubt	13
Inadequacy	13
Selfishness-self reliance	7
Anger	5
Avoiding adversity	5
Failure	5
Laziness	5
Depression	4

Note: Total responses were 147

Life’s difficulties and trials are temporary, but the reward is worth the sacrifice. Four students verbalized that the world is in a fallen condition, and the earth is passing away. Three students identified that the difficulties they faced shaped a sense of “sobriety,” or a realistic perspective, about living in this world. This perspective enabled them to look forward toward the end of a trial, challenging situation, or circumstance

with hope, knowing that God always establishes a way out. Table 15 summarizes sentiments of first-year student's regarding the temporal nature of trials. Jim stated,

So I think going through trials has almost given me more real realistic perspective of what trials are and what the Lord uses them for. They're not fun. They do cause stress, they cause unrest. They're hard to go through, hard to endure. And that's not really going through a lot of trials. Growing up having kind of a very mild, safe childhood, having a few injuries here and there, but never serious loss other than grandparents experiencing some trials that kind of give me that perspective, like, "Oh, these aren't fun." This isn't something we should necessarily be looking for, but not reject when the Lord brings them into your life.

During the interviews, an expectancy to be equipped for trials by reading the Bible was unanimously noted. Trials faced by biblical figures such as David were often cited by students as tangible examples of God's faithfulness. One student identified the magnitude of his own trials as meager in comparison to others and as evidence that God will take care of him. Leslie shared, "I really love the Psalms because if you read that David faces so much adversity his whole life. I think fills me with a lot of hope. The Lord got David through the trials, he can do that for me. Just seeing the passion written in the Psalms, I often find myself praying the Psalms almost daily. I just want that renewal of my heart, especially when I'm facing trials." Justice stated, "It's just the realization that this life is short, and the life to come is eternal and so, I need to be more concerned with the life to come than I am with this life. And that takes my mind away from the present trials." Seeing the "whole picture" produced a recognition in several first-year students that trials redirected focus toward God and engagement with their faith. There was a split response on how trials affected students' academics. Some reported they were able to put aside thinking about trials and focus on their assignments, whereas some others could not retain their focus because of their adverse experiences in their first year. Gabe responded, "I know that five years down the line, it will all be worth it. And that when I stand before the throne of God above that it will all be worth it. I hope. Time is gonna pass on and we're going to get through it. It's going to be for God's glory." The interviewees each reported receiving constant and meaningful encouragement from a mentor or a member

of the community of faith. Three students reported that their professors explicitly stated that their sacrifices were “worth it.” Sara stated, “I just don’t like quitting. I may look forward to the end of something when I know that there’ll be an end.” Most of the students described common rewards for their trials, including learned contentment, humility, patience, and a renewed love for the Lord.

Table 15. Life’s difficulties and trials are temporary, but the struggle is worth the sacrifice

Theme	References
Life’s difficulties and trials are temporary, but the struggle is worth the sacrifice	34
Hope for an eternal future	11

Note: Total responses were 45

Consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity. Each participant noted that interactions with Scripture had a noticeable impact on their spiritual growth. Seventy-five percent of students described that their primary means of emotionally connecting to God was through personal reading of Scripture. Daily reading of Scripture was referenced by 8 students as a habit that grounded, renewed, and inspired joy within their spiritual walk. Cognitively, Scripture provided a corrective lens for Cheryl, who stated, “I’m still struggling through trying to reconcile the God of Scripture to the God that I’ve painted in my mind.” Three students indicated that through reading the Scripture, they were able to understand more about God’s character and increase intimacy with him. Jim articulated,

First with the Lord, that’s something that’s pretty new in my spiritual walk, actually. I didn’t really have a feeling of that intimacy with the Lord, that closeness with the Lord as a personal relationship. I kind of saw it more as just a list of do’s and don’ts and rights and wrongs, that sort of thing. I should be living as a Christian because I’m saved. But recently, the Lord’s just kind of used Scripture to show me that I am transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. I’m free from sin. I am a child of God, and He loves me.

In 31 references, students verbalized that adversity inspired them to seek God (see table 16). Scripture reading was foundational in trusting God and noted in 23 references. Sara embraced the struggle to trust God through adversity because “God doesn’t lie. . . . Sometimes it’s hard for it to transfer from being head knowledge to heart knowledge.” Nearly 50 percent of students reported that God’s specific promises in Scripture served to calm their anxiety. Gabe responded, “If I don’t read my Bible, I’m empty. Blessed is the man who meditates on the law day and night. He is a tree planted by springs of water and his shoot will not wither. I’m at peace whenever I’m reading my Bible. When I see everything going on in the world, I’m at peace.” Kevon reported, “He preserved me through that [situation], and blessed me, even though I didn’t deserve it. So that’s kind of a promise that has stuck with me. And it’s definitely helped to get me through those times. Just trusting in God’s preservation of my life.”

Table 16. Scripture is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity

Theme	References
Consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope	49
Seeking God through adversity	31
Connecting to God	25
Trust in the Lord	23
God’s love	17

Note: Total responses were 145

Collective gatherings, such as times of prayer and worship, were the second most reported ways that students connected with God. Nine students discussed that when they read the Bible in groups, they grew closer to other group members. The preaching of the Word of God in contexts such as chapel was identified by 10 students as a catalyst that challenged and encouraged them to persist through hardship. Nine students reported that they responded to specific adverse incidents by exercising faith and trust in God. The

realization that there was a reciprocal occurrence of love between God and the respondents was noted in 17 references. God's love was shared by 8 students as a motivating factor for obedience. The Psalms, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 John were cited as reminders that God loves his children. This love was amplified while sharing about the Word of God in community.

Students encountered a personal transformation. In response to question 6 (see appendix 3), students identified certain virtues as strengths, such as honesty, listening, helping others, discernment, obedience to God, determination, dedication, and vulnerability (see table 17). Twelve out of 15 students affirmed that their strengths often led them to be self-reliant in a particular manner. However, most students were aware of personal weaknesses or brokenness that they experienced in their spiritual lives. In 7 instances, students desired to serve others in a meaningful way through their church, which, they reported, made a personal impact. Conversely, some students identified that it was difficult to serve during their first semester. Those who were just getting acclimated to the new environment and did not find churches to connect to minimally served or did not serve. Twelve students were able to condense their experiences into short testimonial statements. Of those who responded, 8 had titles that specifically corresponded to the love of, trust in, dependence on, and the faithfulness of God. Winston labeled his experience "Rising for the One Who Stands in Heaven." He verbalized, "It sounds all dramatic and stuff. It's just basically what we're getting at. We fall a lot. But we always have to get back up. But the thing is, we're not getting back up alone. We're always being helped back up. Because if we're alone then we wouldn't get back up." Other students had creative titles that spoke directly to their experience, such as "This is the Way Not to Start College," "Songs and Stories of Hope," "A Season of Change." Cheryl stated, "I've had multiple nights in the ER and EMS had been called because I stopped breathing for four minutes and you know, crazy stuff like that. It's very dramatic. So, maybe 'Barely

Breathing.”” Leslie remarked,

Life is like a glow stick. The more you break, the brighter that you shine. Even if it’s not like that right away, then shake it and it gets a little brighter. Like the Word really does that in my own life. It’s like he really breaks me hard, but I come out glowing and better than ever, not because of anything I did. Because obviously I don’t want to go through any trial. But it’s because he’s faithful.

Table 17. Personal transformation

Theme	References
Personal Transformation	24
Strengths	18
Resolute determination	17
Owning their story	13
Transformational service	7

Note: Total responses were 79

First-year students displayed a resolute determination in 17 instances when asked if they ever thought about prematurely departing from their studies at Boyce. Twelve students gave a resounding “no” in response, stating that they had considered quitting. Two students were concerned about job prospects and wanting to work in a more secular market to provide for themselves and their families. Over 80 percent of the interviewees described themselves regarding their work ethic as “diligent,” “determined,” “passionate,” or “wanting to do everything with excellence.” Patrick discussed, “While facing adversity I still got stuff done. Yes, even though I’m facing this trial, I do have to do my homework and my academics also. Realizing just because I’ve gone through adversity, I have an excuse not to do this, but I have a responsibility even though I’m going through something.”

Discovery of a faith-informed problem-solving method. Each student in the qualitative interview was asked to provide details about their specific method of problem-solving. Forty-two references were recorded in table 18. Two themes emerged from

within their responses, including a methodology informed by their faith. Each of the respondents recognized that hardship was to be endured as a stimulus for personal and spiritual growth. Other commonalities shared between multiple respondents included seeking God through prayer, meditating on the Word of God, and asking for godly counsel. David stated,

I think step one is to take a step back, distance yourself a little bit. I think for me personally, I kinda withdraw physically, mentally, emotionally to a place where it is just you and God. Then analyze the situation and then try your best to apply Scripture that fits. Just look after specific promises that God has. Try to apply those to the situation. Pray. Pray and surround yourself with community.

Two young men identified with the difficulty of surrendering the hardship over to the Lord. Eight students responded that they sought specific promises of God or applications of Scripture. Expressions of gratitude and recognition of a learning process taking place led to a reorientation of faith. Cheryl used creative ways to dialogue with the Lord through her journal entries that were “raw and untamed.”

Some students responded that they would avoid adversity, while others gratefully engaged with problems and dealt with them head on. Jean admitted to indulging in activities that brought comfort, such as watching a movie, reading a book, or taking a walk. She verbalized that those activities are means that she used to avoid the problem and emotionally withdraw but that she would eventually turn to God in a position of faith. Leslie asked herself whether the problem would conclude in five minutes, one day, next week, or one year. She allowed herself to be concerned about the problem for a moment, then attempted to find a solution in the moment and investigate what the Lord was accomplishing. Trevor reported a system in which he had to stop, breathe, remember, pray, and then be thankful. He shared that this five-step process was initially meant to address his anxiety which allowed him to reflect and, thus, be in God’s presence.

Table 18. Discovery of a faith-informed problem-solving method

Theme	References
Discovery of a faith-informed problem-solving method	42

Life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth. Participants in this study provided approximately 180 references regarding life within communities of faith that contributed to their spiritual growth and resilience (see table 19). These communities included familial, church, close-knit, and on-campus communities as well as mentorship relationships. Parents, grandparents, and siblings were reported by 11 respondents as supportive relationships in their first year. Parents were described as wise, understanding, and trustworthy. Leslie reflected on her father, stating, “Since I went to Boyce, I realized how wise he really is. He’s had a rough life, and we’ve gone through similar issues together. And so whenever I have the doubts about my future or about my faith, I try to turn to my dad and he always has, like, such sage advice.” In 6 references, the home community also offered strong support to students when they initially came on campus. Three students struggled with homesickness and making new connections in their first year.

Involvement in the local churches in Louisville promoted opportunities that impacted spiritual growth in 8 references. Kevon recalled, “I felt a sense of belonging at the college ministry at the church I have been going to, especially in recent months. The people working there are very kind, warm, and welcoming. They seem to take an interest in my spiritual life, as well as in other areas like that.” Attendance at small groups, Bible studies, and serving events gave Jim opportunities to have “relationships where you have someone to go to, if you’re struggling you have someone to go to, share your struggles with, or your delights in the Lord. To know that there’s a place you can go and people you can have to express those things with who will listen to you really well.”

In 24 instances, first-year students at Boyce shared that close friendships were vital to overcoming personal struggles. Six responses mentioned that these friendships served to redirect the individuals' focus back to God amid difficulty. Leslie discussed, "We all had to stand together because this is what the Bible says. We need to face this problem with prayer and caution. Let it make us better, if that makes sense. We just come together and keep each other accountable with it, in the realm of adversity."

Accountability from tight-knit friendships helped 5 students recognize that they needed someone, or a group of people, to honestly address and confront sin in their lives.

Winston confessed, "Just staying as open as possible, and not trying to keep to ourselves with much that way. We don't necessarily judge each other, but it's more of just, like, when one fails, well, take them back up. And then, you know, move from there and help each other through harder times."

The theme of vulnerability was referenced by 6 students as a means of connecting with others. Gabe verbalized, "There's power in transparency. Not just transparency for the sake of connecting, but real fellowship with fellow humans who are also struggling equally, who have a desire to chase the Lord at the same time." Meeting on a consistent basis, regular phone calls, and intentional conversations were reported to move 90 percent of the sample from the surface level toward deeper relationships. Gabe remarked, "You gotta press into them. You have to initiate those relationships. You have to. Relationships are a two-way street. If I don't press in, then they can't press in. Making sure you're intentional with meeting with that person. Developing relationships requires work and time." The students responded in 34 instances that when they were wrestling with a decision, facing adversity, or interacting with doubt, they were able to reach out to others for the support and perspective they needed. Winston said, "It's just getting to hear other people's points of view and seeing their experiences there. Just seeing how God works in your life is really quite inspiring, to say the least."

Deep bonds between students were often attributed to living in close proximity

in the halls of the dorms. Students described the depth of relationships as that of a sibling or best friend. Winston shared, “You get a lot of connections because the first few weeks at your school, it can be kind of hard, because you don’t really know anyone yet. So that’s why people are willing to take the time to get to know you; it really does help.” David added, “When we were just talking to each other about our struggles, or needing encouragement, or reading God’s word together, I think that’s where we got connected. That was really encouraging and challenging at times.”

Students identified that mentorship contributed to the most significant impacts on their spiritual growth within 67 references. Cheryl stated, “I think the biggest benefit is having somebody older and wiser that kind of already walked through this particular season of life. And I know loves the Lord, is deeply involved in Scripture, and having almost, like, a measure by which to kind of see where I’m growing.” Six students identified that their mentorship came from a pastor from their home community. Five students reported a lack of mentoring relationships prior to their first year, but they were able to cultivate such relationships through church involvement, the resident assistants at Boyce, and the faculty and their spouses. Gabe recalled, “I did not have the mentorship that I needed in high school, and I think the Lord has blessed me with this. Making up for lost time is the wrong word. Because the Lord brought these people into my life at the right time. But it does feel like I’m making up for lost time. Those benefits are reaching out to me.”

Table 19. Life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth

Theme	References
Reaching out to others	34
Friends	24
Specific advice	21
Benefit of mentoring	18
Deepen community	16

Theme	References
Roommates and live-in community	16
Church community	15
Family	13
Professors as mentors	13
Pastors as mentors	10
Putting others first	9
Local church involvement	8
Vulnerability	6
Home community	6
Accountability	5
Classmates-coworkers	5
Lack of mentorship	5
Worship	5

Note: Total responses were 180

Relationships between professors, their wives, and students were noted in 10 instances. Cheryl stated, “All of the professors at Boyce are very intentional about, well, not all of them, but most of them are very intentional about pouring into each student individually as well as in the classroom.” First-year students were invited to bring their doubts, struggles, and questions, and then they received encouragement in the classroom, during a meal, or during an intentional encounter. In 21 references, professors provided specific advice to students, which served as a means of comfort and encouragement and would point students back to Christ. In several responses, some professors provided practical advice about constructing an inner circle with friends capable of edification, focusing on sanctification over grades or accomplishments, and allocating time devoted to God. Kevon noted concerning the mentorship experience,

Well, it helps to have somebody who is a bit older and wiser than I am to give me insight into how I can live life better, especially in regards to my spiritual life and my relationship with God. It’s definitely a great experience for me to have somebody like a wiser person to be able to talk to and go for advice. And also just to have fun and talk about things together. Yeah, I definitely really appreciate the time and effort that he’s put into me.

God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere. Each of the first-year students who were interviewed identified an internal resolve that despite difficulties, they knew they were living according to God's plan for their life. Expressions included "God will show me," "That's his plan, and that's okay," "I don't have to be anxious about this because God placed me here," "I'm hoping that will draw me to rely on God," "He's told me and let me know this is what I want you to do," and "Knowing confidently that this is what the Lord wants me to do right now." Even when the future was uncertain, students anchored themselves to the purpose they felt was instilled in their hearts. Gabe verbalized, "Doubts will come up periodically, but you just have to show those scriptures. And then also remember what the Lord has done for me in the past too. I know that was the Lord that worked in the past. Why wouldn't he in the future?" Moreover, in 19 specific instances, students felt that attending Boyce College would equip them for what God would call them to do in the future. David stated, "It was one of the top five best decisions I ever made. My mentor says, 'I've seen you grow in so many ways, and I think that the school is really good for you.'"

The sovereignty of the Lord was a theme experienced in 14 instances. Students specifically recognized that "God is in control" and is teaching his children that he is present throughout the trials. Nikki recognized, "It's just a matter of persevering, realizing he's doing a work in me or he's going to work out the external or internal, whatever issues are going on. He's gonna work it out. He's designed everything. Providence really is real." Abiding in God's love produced satisfaction described in 5 references. As Crissy expressed,

I just accept what I have and remained faithful in those circumstances. Contentment is the word. Contentment can only be taught. You're not born with contentment. But through each and every one of those trials that I've been through, the Lord was really building contentment. Now, I'm pretty content. I'm sure there's more contentment to be worked on. But I just find contentment in the fact the Lord still cares for me. His Word still stands, and I'll be okay.

Table 20. God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere

Theme	References
God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere	40
God's sovereignty	14
Personal satisfaction-contentment	5

Note: Total responses were 59

Convergent Strand Analysis

The results from the quantitative and qualitative strands must be merged to determine the extent that the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results.²⁴ The quantitative assessment provided substantial data that is useful in understanding the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity. The qualitative themes that emerged were enumerated and given values based on how many times a student referenced a theme or subtheme (see table 21).

Table 21. Quantitative transformation of themes

Theme	Theme name	References
1	Spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a common experience	147
2	Life's difficulties and trials are temporary, but the reward is worth the sacrifice	45
3	Consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity	145
4	Students encountered a personal transformation	79
5	Students discovered a faith-informed problem-solving method	42
6	Interviewees recognized that life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth	180
7	God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere	59

²⁴ The content areas of quantitative and qualitative data were compared, contrasted, transformed, merged, and synthesized. Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 128.

The repeated frequency resulted in the experience or phenomena to be seen as a group occurrence. The average scores provided the baseline for the statistical measurements and the means to produce visual representations that diagram patterns of spiritual maturity and resilience (see, e.g., figure 8).

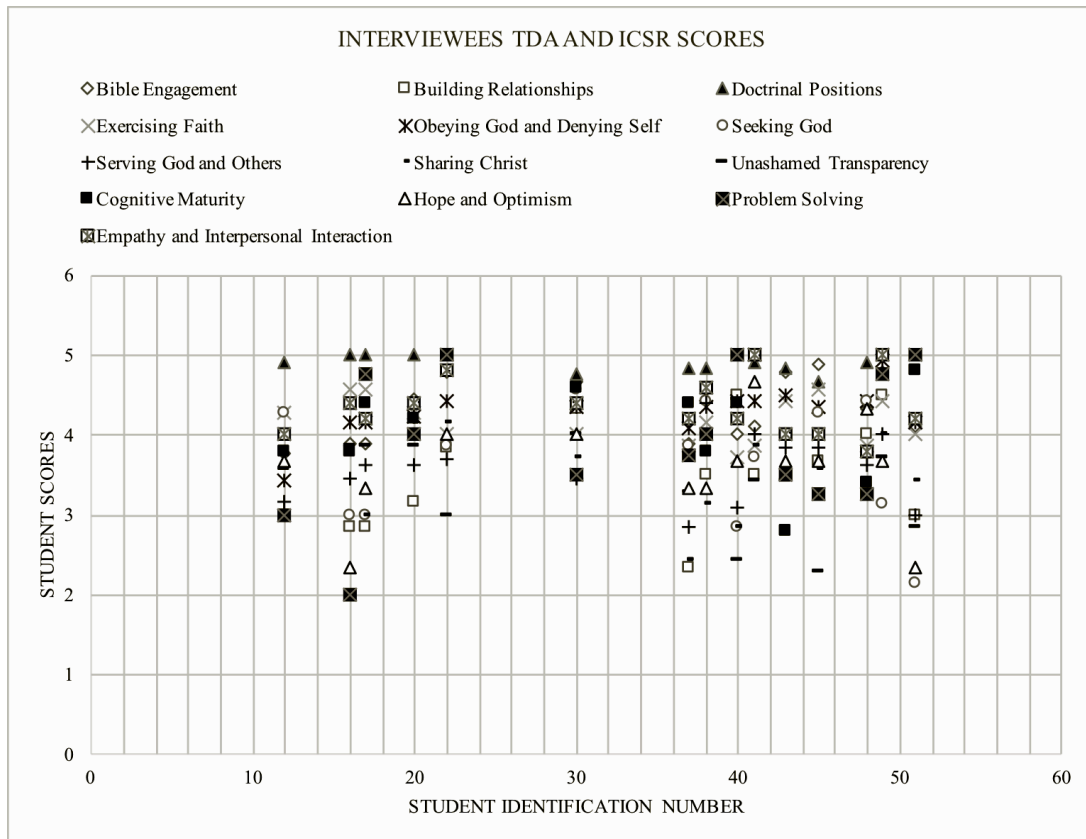


Figure 8. TDA and ICSR scores of interviewees

A combination of consistent and moderate scores were reported from first-year students at Boyce College. The quantitative responses formed a statistical profile that can be merged with qualitative data and then examined. Overall, the students scored in the consistent resilience/spiritual maturity (CR/CS) to moderate resilience/spiritual maturity (MR/CS) range. The qualitative interview responses reported in this study were given a

negative or positive ranking based on the experience of the first-year student (see table 22). This table was created after compiling the data for the theme section, and though it is subjective, casual observation suggests that students with higher resilience recounted more positive experiences.

Table 22. Statistical resilience/spiritual maturity profile

#	Student		TDA Profile		ICSR Profile		Positive Responses	Negative Responses	Theme Response #
13	David	M	4CS	5MS	1CR	3MR	2	1	1, 5, 6
17	Patrick	M	4CS	5MS	1CR	3MR	1	—	4
18	Sara	F	3CS	6MS	3CR	1MR	2	—	2, 3
21	Justice	M	6CS	3MS	4CR		1	—	2
23	Leslie	F	5CS	4MS	3CR	1MR	5	1	1, 2, 4, 5, 6
31	Gabe	M	7CS	2MS	3CR	1MR	5	—	2, 6, 7
38	Winston	M	2CS	7MS	2CR	2MR	2	—	4, 6
39	Kevon	M	7CS	2MS	2CR	2MR	3	3	1, 4, 6
41	Tia	F	3CS	6MS	3CR	1MR	—	1	1
42	Cheryl	F	4CS	5MS	4CR	—	2	3	1, 3, 5, 6
44	Jean	F	6CS	3MS	1CR	3MR	—	1	5
46	Crissy	F	5CS	4MS	2CR	2MR	1	—	7
49	Jim	M	5CS	4MS	—	4MR	2	2	1, 2, 3, 6
50	Trevor	M	7CS	2MR	3CR	1MR	1	2	1, 5
52	Nikki	F	4CS	5MS	3CR	1MR	1	3	1, 7

Note: Consistent spiritual maturity (CS), moderate spiritual maturity (MS), consistent resilience (CR), moderate resilience (MR). The data in the first five columns were provided by the quantitative strand of the study while the data in sixth through eighth columns are provided by the qualitative strand. Interview participants are also referenced by the identification number linked with their quantitative survey data.

The data might support that more consistent experiences with spiritual maturity contribute to higher positive responses when lower resilience is evident. Comparison between gender suggests that when members of the female group scored higher in resilience, they related more positively to adversity. In contrast, males seemed to articulate more positive experiences in the interview than their female classmates during the interview.

The convergent research design sought to have the qualitative confirm the quantitative findings. Table 23 is a convergent list that summarizes specific responses from students based on their experiences with adversity.

Table 23. Convergent quantitative and qualitative responses

Name	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
Sara	3CS 6MS	3CR 1MR	When you have faced adversity this year, what has specifically provided you with hope?
			In the Bible, it talks about how trials bring about perseverance and it ultimately brings us closer to God. And so whenever I was going through tough times, I was like, okay, at the end of this, I'm going to be able to look back on this and see growth in my spiritual life. And, like, I really, really loved that because the relationship I have with God, I really wanted to grow. And with that link, unfortunately, growth always comes under trials, but that really gives me hope in that. And just the idea of sanctification and becoming more like Christ. That gave me hope as well that God is using this. God is going to use what I am going through to help me deal and to counsel others better as a counselor.
Kevon	7CS 2MS	2CR 2MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			Adversity, especially in my first year, at Boyce has been very formative. Especially in my growing up, and especially in high school, I would try to avoid adversity as much as possible. And I always found that when I did face adversity, it was a terrible time with no redeeming qualities. But in my time, at Boyce, I found that even though adversity is unpleasant in the moment, it shaped me into becoming a better person, and more specifically, a more devoted follower of Christ. So I've been trying in my life to, not exactly seek adversity, but when adversity does come, to be able to try to see how it is impacting me, and not focus simply on the negative.

The overall sentiment of the majority who responded to the assessment is that they were unaware of how they handled adversity. Many respondents paused at some stage during the interview and remarked, “I’ve never thought about that!” In fact, Sara emailed me before her interview and wrote, “Thank you for doing the survey because while I was taking it, it really brought conviction for different areas of my spiritual life.” Through compiling the quantitative and qualitative findings I was able to make assertions based on the converged data. See appendix 5, table A1 for a full summary of each participant.

Summary of Findings

The objective of this convergent mixed methods research study was to explore the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity in first-year students at Boyce College. Fifty-three students completed the 120-item joined TDA and ICSR assessments within the quantitative strand, representing 20 percent of the population. The statistical mean was calculated for each attribute of discipleship (TDA) and resilience factor (ICSR), totaling thirteen variables. The sample scores ranged from consistent development (4.0–5.0) to moderate development (2.0–3.9). The Spearman rho correlational coefficient determined that there was a statistical significance between the population means of resilience and spiritual maturity. In addition, three sets of variables from the assessment were discovered to have a statistically significant association: (1) hope and optimism (ICSR), building relationships (TDA), serving God and others (TDA), and sharing Christ (TDA); (2) problem-solving (ICSR), building relationships (TDA), obeying God and denying self (TDA), and serving God and others (TDA); and (3) empathy and interpersonal interaction (ICSR) and exercising faith (TDA). A significant association between biblical engagement, female, and male group variables was determined by a *t*-test which examined the means. The statistical results were plotted,

providing a visual representation of each student's comparative rank according to the data.

Fifteen semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive sampling of the population. Ten resilience-based questions sought to gain an understanding of first-year student experience. After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following 7 themes emerged to inform the research question: (1) spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience (147 total references); (2) life's difficulties and trials are temporary, but the reward is worth the sacrifice (45 total references); (3) consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity (145 total references); (4) students encountered a personal transformation (79 total references); (5) participants discovered a faith-informed problem-solving method (42 total references); (6) interviewees recognized that life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth (180 total references); and (7) God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere (59 total references). The results from the quantitative data and the qualitative data were interpreted separately and then converged to produce a greater understanding of the patterns that exist between resilience, a student's spiritual maturity, and the assessments that measure these factors.

Research Question Synopsis

This study sought to answer three research questions. After collecting and analyzing the data, the following answers were provided for each question.

Quantitative Strand

RQ: How do respective measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among first-year Boyce College students?

Descriptive statistics applied to analyze the data determined that the averages of the resilience and spiritual maturity variables are statistically associated. Statistical significance shows that the correlation was not by chance. The median scores suggested

that there was not a broad range of variability in scores of the TDA attributes or ICSR resilience factors as initially thought. Thus, the students who completed the survey globally responded consistently. The interviewees noted that they scored as they expected when they received their score report.

Qualitative Strand

RQ: How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

After analyzing data from the qualitative interviews, the following themes emerged to inform the research question:

1. Spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience.
2. Life's difficulties and trials are temporary, but the reward is worth the sacrifice.
3. Consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity.
4. Students encountered a personal transformation.
5. Participants discovered a faith-informed problem-solving method.
6. Students recognized that life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth.
7. God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere.

Convergent Strand

RQ: To what extent do the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results?

A statistical profile emerged from the quantitative strand which was compared to the qualitative responses in order to understand the students' experiences at Boyce. Qualitative codes and themes were transformed into quantitative figures to enumerate shared experiences of the students. An evaluation of genders provided suggestions as to how male and female first-year students experienced adversity based on their emotional responses.

Evaluation of Research Design

This study applied a convergent mixed methods research design in two strands in order to enumerate the experience of first-year students enrolled at Boyce College. The quantitative strand collected and analyzed survey data that was able to provide a rating of consistent, moderate, and low evidence of resilience and/or spiritual maturity. The qualitative strand used qualitative interviews to provide an in-depth analysis of how the students articulated their experiences with resilience and spiritual maturity. The convergent strand combined the previous strands by transforming qualitative data into quantitative data and vice versa. The design was sufficient for this purpose.

Strengths

The primary strength of the convergent research design is that both the qualitative strand and the quantitative strand yielded an abundance of data that help understand resilience and spiritual maturity in first-year students at Boyce College. Combining the TDA and ICRS assessments allowed for the maintained reliability and validity of the original surveys. After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee, the distribution of the survey was seamless and had the potential to reach a large number of the research population. Using an online survey instrument allowed for answers to be collected and analyzed immediately after submission. Data analysis had minimal difficulties with the aid of statistical templates and calculators. Scoring the assessment provided a statistical profile that students were able to observe their position relative to both spiritual maturity and resilience development. The descriptive analysis allowed for the exploration of the significance and how each variable relates to the other. Statistical measures allowed for the comparison between groups and demographics. Plotting the results gave an overall picture of the position of the entire sample and permitted visual comparison between students (see figure 2).

The qualitative design allowed for the confirmation of results of the quantitative strand. The semi-structured interviews also allowed for more comprehensive

discussions with members within the sample about their individual experiences, offered insight about shared experiences between students, and provided contrasts between responses. The second strand also allowed for the development of themes based on the experiences of the respondents. These themes were allowed for an evaluation of shared experiences. The convergent portion of the design allowed for comparing the data within each strand to ensure or interrogate consistency between survey and interview responses.

Challenges

The survey focused on a small sample within the population of one small SBC school. Getting the participation of first-year students was considerably complicated due to distance between researcher and student population; the need for faculty, staff, and administrative permission to recruit students; and a general lack of student response. Only 20 percent of the first-year population participated. Fifty percent of the interviewees admitted that the incentive was a primary motivator to complete both survey and interviews. The measures of the TDA and ICSR are self-reported and might not truly reflect the truth about students' responses. Certain demographic information not included in the assessment, such as marital status, number of years lived as a believer in Christ, and hometown affiliation, might allow for alternate analysis and conclusions of factors contributing to resilience and student formation. I had to carefully select the statistics involved in the design to fit the small sample. Confirmation of appropriate formulas, calculations of significance, and associations between variables was necessary to answer the quantitative research question.

Attaining a higher student response for the interview could have attained stronger associations of themes and higher validation of this research design. I was surprised that there was no correlation found with the cognitive maturity resilience variable. The interview asked structured questions that might have led students to answer in prescribed ways. The qualitative data collection process (i.e., scheduling interviews,

performing transcription of the interviews, and coding themes) was tedious and time-consuming. Moreover, the data analysis can fragment personal narratives, losing the essence of the experience and personal meaning that the individuals assigned to their responses. Data that does not fit into themes might be overlooked or discarded. Discussions that seemed inconsistent between an interviewee's response and TDA/ICSR profile status needed a triangulation or secondary source to confirm that their answers were consistent among strands of data.

Conclusion

The quantitative strand of this study collected quantitative data from fifty-three first-year students at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. There was a statistical correlation between the measures of the TDA and the ICSR assessments. The qualitative strand provided themes about resilience and spiritual maturity from an interview with fifteen students and aided in understanding how they articulated their freshman experience. The convergent strand compared, contrasted, and examined inconsistencies within the qualitative findings that confirmed the results of the quantitative assessment. These findings represent an initial attempt to investigate the unexplored relationship between Christian formation and resilience theory. Applications to this study will influence the formation of students at confessional Christian institutions and local congregations toward the integration of spiritual maturity and resilience in young adults. The following chapter discusses the implications of the findings and suggests further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This convergent mixed methods research study explored first-year students' personal assessment of spiritual maturity and their comparable experience with resilience at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky, and their corresponding experience with resilience. Prior to the research, a review determined that the relationship between Christian formation and resilience was an unexamined facet within the precedent literature. Engaging with resilience theory through biblical and theological foundations represented a second aim of this study. Fifty-three responses were acquired using the *Inventory of College Student's Resilience (ICSR)* to measure resilience and the *Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA)* to measure spiritual maturity. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with first-year students in order for them to articulate their experience, a process which produced themes that aided the understanding of the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity. This chapter provides insight into the conclusions drawn from the analysis of findings; includes research implications, applications, and limitations; and suggests areas of further research.

Research Question Synopsis

The intent of this study was to examine the statistical measures and articulated responses of first-year college students regarding resilience and spiritual maturity at Boyce College. This purpose was based on three strands of research guided by three research questions:

Quantitative Strand

1. How do respective measurements for spiritual maturity and resilience relate among

first-year Boyce College students?

Qualitative Strand

2. How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

Convergent Strand

3. To what extent do the qualitative results confirm the quantitative results?¹

Research Implications

This section addresses the findings and implications of the present research in relation to the research questions addressed in this study. The following list is a summary of implications ascertained from the evaluation of the analysis of findings:

1. A statistical association existed between the measures of resilience (ICSR) and spiritual maturity (TDA).
2. Attendance at a confessional Christian school likely contributed to the consistently high scores of the sample in the doctrinal positions category.
3. There was a statistical association between the survey responses regarding hope and optimism, building relationships, serving God and others, and sharing Christ.
4. There was a statistical association between the survey responses regarding problem-solving, building relationships, obeying God and denying self, and serving God and others.
5. There was a statistical association between empathy and interpersonal interaction and exercising faith.
6. First-year college students have not utilized spiritual maturity or resilience assessments in their first semester.
7. Spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience in first-year students at Boyce College.
8. Many students attending confessional Christian colleges selected Boyce College to

¹ John Creswell and David Creswell suggest developing “a unique mixed methods question that ties together or integrates the quantitative and qualitative data in a study.” John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 191; John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 257.

pursue their personal passions.

9. During the first year, students developed or refined a faith-informed problem-solving method.
10. First-year students at Boyce College who consistently read Scripture experienced hope and personal transformation.
11. Engagement in relational community was pivotal for spiritual growth and resilience development in the first year of college.
12. Discrepancies existed between the students' assessment scores and their actual experiences.
13. There is a need for a first-year course to measure resilience, spiritual maturity, and articulate experiences with adversity for incoming students.
14. First-year student experiences at Boyce College were consistent with a biblical model of resilience.

Implications from Quantitative Strand

A statistical association existed between the measures of resilience (ICSR) and spiritual maturity (TDA). The combined means for the attributes of discipleship and the factors of resilience are statistically correlated according to the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient r_2 and Spearman's rank correlational coefficient (see table 9). The findings that reported the means for spiritual attributes on the TDA with a consistent score include Bible engagement (4.31), doctrinal positions (4.89), exercising faith (4.03), and obeying God and denying self (4.30). First-year students scored moderately on building relationships (3.73), seeking God (3.87), serving God and others (3.68), sharing Christ (3.29), and unashamed transparency (3.49). The median scores suggest that there was not an extensive range of variability in scores. Thus, the data suggests that the participants in this sample exhibited qualities consistent with spiritual maturity. The findings for means of resilience factors indicated moderate scores on hope and optimism (3.51) and consistent scores with cognitive maturity (4.14), problem-solving (4.07), and empathy and interpersonal interaction (4.23).

The data served to identify areas of sustained well-being as well as those needed for growth in first-year students. The American Counseling Association has noted

empirical studies that monitor trends and strategies to promote protective factors of resilience; therefore, Boyce College can strategically begin to monitor trends in the maturation of first-year students.² The data from this study suggests that the sample population of first-year students exhibited characteristics consistent with resilience. A statistical profile emerged from the students' responses (see table 22). Students who had a high measure of spiritual maturity seemed also to have a high measure of resilience. This association does not imply causation but does reveal that they share a common variance. Therefore, this variance might suggest that students at Boyce selected similar responses when compared with other participants in the sample.

Attendance at a confessional Christian school likely contributed to the consistently high scores of the sample in the doctrinal positions category. On the assessment, the statistical mode for doctrinal positions was a 5 on the Likert-scale, indicating that the ideal response was the most often selected choice in the sample. The median scores for the sample population at Boyce College scores on doctrinal positions was a 4.92, with a standard deviation of 0.15, signifying that most of the participants selected the same answers consistently. This data implies that the students share similar views to one another concerning the deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the teaching of the church, the infallibility of the Bible, and how salvation is obtained. This study implies that students attend confessional Christian schools due to the selected institution's emphasis on a comprehensive Christian worldview and consistency in teaching biblical doctrine. Richard Rymarz contends that maturing spirituality enables the believer to distinguish between the dogma of traditional denominational belief and personal exegesis of Scripture.³

² American Counseling Association, *The ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), 458.

³ Richard M. Rymarz, "Direct Instruction as a Pedagogical Tool in Religious Education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 35 (September 2013): 326–41. Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne

There was a statistical association between the survey responses regarding hope and optimism, building relationships, serving God and others, and sharing Christ. The resilience factors of hope and optimism entail enjoying present challenges, maintaining tranquility during difficulty, and looking to others for help with frustration. Jean Clinton postulates that hope is a principal characteristic of resilience which helps in adaptation, viewing oneself through strengths over weaknesses, and providing meaning in life.⁴ The associated attributes of discipleship intersect with intentionality. Serving God and others consists of intentionally using one's spiritual gifts, helping others, and putting God and others before oneself. In sharing Christ, an individual intentionally interacts with others to invite them to know Christ or to share about that relationship. Building relationships consists of intentionally making time for, and getting to know, others as well as sharing about one's own difficult experiences. The responses on the assessment suggest that students found hope, sought out intentional relationships, and shared about Christ despite experiencing challenges.

There was a statistical association between the survey responses regarding problem-solving, building relationships, obeying God and denying self, and serving God and others. Problem-solving treats challenges as opportunities to use various resources and methods, with full effort, without giving up. The association with the attributes of discipleship also intersect around the intentionality involved. Intentionally making time for, and getting to know, others and sharing one's difficulties in life with others build relationships. Obeying God and denying self is intentionally choosing God's way and

King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed., Christian Association for Psychological Studies (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

⁴ Jean Clinton, "Resilience and Recovery," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 13, no. 3 (August 2008): 221; Robert J. Haggerty, *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Processes, Mechanisms, and Interventions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvii. Frequency and progression of adverse events in short intervals of time coupled with socio-cultural context and developmental stage of an individual are frequent contributors to higher risk factors and problematic behaviors.

positioning oneself to decrease sin. Serving God and others consists of intentionally using one's spiritual gifts, helping others, and putting God and others before oneself. Angela Duckworth has identified that a key to a passion for something higher than oneself is the long-term loyalties and deep commitments maintained over many years that expand perseverance in an individual.⁵ The assessment responses suggest that students employed personal resources and self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

There was a statistical association between empathy and interpersonal interaction and exercising faith. Empathy and interpersonal interaction is the grateful expression of appreciation for the care, support, help, and advice received from others. Exercising faith entails believing that God has a purpose for all circumstances—regardless of one's perspective—honoring and expressing gratitude, knowing that God is loving, and knowing that he will provide. The responses from assessment participants suggest that they were grateful toward the love of God and that they demonstrated appreciation toward others.

First-year college students have not utilized spiritual maturity or resilience assessments in their first semester. In the precedent literature, John Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey propose that profiling the level of resilience, capacity to adapt, and psychological challenges of first-year students might boost their achievement and assimilation into higher education.⁶ A correlation was found between academic success and outcomes from students who demonstrated resilience characteristics.⁷ Conversely, none of the first-year students sampled at Boyce College have assessed their level of resilience or spiritual maturity with a quantitative instrument until the present research

⁵ Deborah Perkins-Gough, "The Significance of Grit: A Conversation with Angela Lee Duckworth," *Educational Leadership* 71, no. 1 (September 2013): 14–20.

⁶ John F. Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey, "Degrees of Resilience: Profiling Psychological Resilience and Prospective Academic Achievement in University Inductees," *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 9.

⁷ Allan, McKenna, and Dominey, "Degrees of Resilience," 9.

endeavor. All of the students vocalized that an awareness of their epistemological dispositions regarding their relationships with God, others, and the local church was helpful. Christian spiritual maturity is defined as identifying with a life ethic that emphasizes growth toward being more like Jesus Christ. Likewise, the resilience assessment served to help students identify interpersonal issues with themselves and their outlook for the future.

Prior to this study, there was no known quantitative design that measured the relationship between resilience and Christian formation. Descriptive statistics applied to analyze the data determined that the averages of the resilience and spiritual maturity variables are statistically associated. The survey responses are quantitative values. The statistical associations between the resilience and spiritual maturity are expressed as sentiments that show how they relate based upon the student's selection of values (e.g., "Strongly Agree"). Therefore, this study addressed the gap in the precedent literature by enumerating the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity, finding statistical significance between the ICSR and TDA assessments.

Implications from Qualitative Strand

Spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience in first-year students at Boyce College. Common spiritual and psychological struggles students faced in their first year included overwhelming anxiety, depression, isolation, fear, and feelings of inadequacy. One-third of respondents verbalized that they avoided adverse situations by ignoring problems, distracting themselves with entertainment, or diverting their attention away from present difficulties. Four interviewees attributed maladaptive struggles to false beliefs and lies they told themselves. A tangible evaluation assessing spiritual or psychological growth was unaddressed during the students' first year of college. Students interviewed were born between 1990 and 2001, the latter representing 53 percent of the sample. Developmentally, these students experienced psychological

changes as they transitioned into early adulthood, social changes (such as the departure from friends and family of origin), and spiritual changes that led to personal ownership of their faith.⁸ When Nikki reported struggling in isolation, she experienced greater frustration and prolonged distress until she sought help from others. First-year students who engaged with the faculty on campus, in the residence halls, or in their home community were able to receive the psycho-spiritual help they needed.⁹

Many students selected Boyce College to pursue their personal passions. Each student discussed that he or she enrolled at Boyce College to prepare for a particular vocation or ministry emphasis. Students temporarily divested in relationships, such as their home church, friends, or family, to invest in the pursuit of their passions. The students unanimously reported that the trials and difficulties they experienced redirected their focus toward God, activated engagement with their faith, and played an essential role in their collegiate experience.¹⁰ The students nurtured their attentiveness to mission by personally seeking God for direction, interacting with peers and professors, and engaging in service opportunities. When faced with adversity in their first-year, the students demonstrated grit, perseverance, and passion for long-term goals.¹¹ The

⁸ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 238; Johnathan H. Kim, "Personality Development and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010): 117.

⁹ The American College Health Association found that "fifty-six percent of college students surveyed reported feeling 'overwhelming anxiety' within the past 12 months" in 2014. Jaclyn M. Stoffel and Jeff Cain, "Review of Grit and Resilience Literature within Health Professions Education," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 82, no. 2 (February 2018): 124; Alicia H. Nordstrom, Lisa M. Swenson-Goguen, and Marnie Hiester, "The Effect of Social Anxiety and Self-Esteem on College Adjustment, Academics, and Retention," *Journal of College Counseling* 17, no. 1 (April 2014): 48-51; Sandra Prince-Embury, Donald H. Saklofske, and David W. Nordstokke, "The Resiliency Scale for Young Adults," *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 35, no. 3 (June 2017): 276-90.

¹⁰ Tim Clydesdale, *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*, Morality and Society Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 3, "On the Role of Family, Faith, and Community," para. 4, Kindle.

¹¹ *Grit* entails working strenuously toward challenges and maintaining effort and interest over the years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 50.

expectation for spiritual growth was implicit yet present with each participant surveyed.¹² Members of the sample discussed a teleological focus and the process of enduring present trials, confident in the direction in which the Lord was preparing to refine them.¹³ Students adapted the perspective of the apostle Paul, who contrasted the future “weight of glory” with the temporary and insignificant “light afflictions,” determining them to be incomparable (2 Cor 4:17).¹⁴

During the first year, students developed or refined a faith-informed problem-solving method. Students undoubtedly experienced “syllabus shock”—an overwhelming and jolting reaction to the initial workload of a college course. Seventy percent of students interviewed reported that they expressed faith and trust that God would bring them through their academic challenges. Each participant interviewed was unaware of his or her specific method of problem-solving; but, through intentional probing, they verbalized their process during the conversation. James Estep notes, “Problem solving, scaffolding (building one learned concept on another), development of language, and linking of theory with key ideas results in self-directed learning and expansion of learning capacity over time.”¹⁵ The ability to step back, adjust one’s attitude, evaluate alternative perspectives, then take appropriate action (e.g., prayer or seeking guidance) was a shared response consistent with emerging maturity in first-year students. The

¹² John David Trentham states, “This may suggest that students who commit to pursuing vocational ministry prior to college or early in college most often determine that Christian institutions are most ideally suited to offer them the most beneficial college experience and training in light of their career intentions.” John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme,” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 145.

¹³ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 25.

¹⁴ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 272.

¹⁵ James Riley Estep Jr., “Spiritual Formation as Social: Toward a Vygotskian Developmental Perspective,” *Religious Education* 97, no. 2 (2002): 141–64. See also Rymarz, “Direct Instruction as a Pedagogical Tool,” 326–41; Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*.

majority of students discussed that their demeanor toward distress and the college workload changed once they completed their first semester. They were able to adjust their expectations in order to push through feelings of being overwhelmed.

First-year students at Boyce College who consistently read Scripture experienced hope and personal transformation. Brad Waggoner found that the “number one factor, or characteristic, most correlated to the highest maturity scores is the practice of ‘reading the Bible.’”¹⁶ Daily Scripture reading was practiced by 75 percent of first-year students. They reported that when facing adversity, reading passages of Scripture stimulated a sense of peace and an emotional connection to God. Students discussed that understanding who God is came through reading Scripture, which matured their perspective. A key to resilience is to analyze and apply a text, adjust one’s perspective, then return to the text.¹⁷ Over 80 percent of students during their first year noted that despite personal failure or falling short after a trial, the Word of God was instrumental in transforming their mind, faith, and patterns of behavior.¹⁸ Kevon verbalized,

My first year at Boyce has been the biggest time of change that I’ve experienced in my life in terms of growing up and being formed into an adult . . . My experiences have definitely shaped me and changed me into a different person. I can definitely see that from my first year that I’m a different person than I was a year ago when I first came on campus.

Engagement in relational community was pivotal for spiritual growth and resilience formation in the first year of college. Overcoming personal struggles, changing perspective, and fostering supportive bonds was achieved through deep friendships at

¹⁶ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 68.

¹⁷ Estep, “Spiritual Formation as Social,” 158.

¹⁸ According to Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, “Transformation is more than a surface-level alteration; it’s actually becoming something else entirely . . . [T]ransformation only comes through the discipleship that is centered on Jesus.” God works to shape an individual’s character through the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in increased obedience, spiritual activity, and transformation within a community of faith.” Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 9–10.

Boyce College. According to James E. Francis, spiritual support from the faith community is a necessity for growth and adaptation to occur.¹⁹ A sense of belonging curtailed the temptation for students to remain isolated in their first semester. Students noted that building relationships required intentional time and energy. They would reap the benefits of that investment when they had to make difficult decisions or needed to be encouraged through challenges. Guidance from mentors, who provided feedback that evaluated students' experiences while highlighting their effectiveness in overcoming hardship, contributed to spiritual maturity and the construction of resilience. Mentoring relationships with professors allowed students to receive wisdom from older and wiser individuals; these relationships promoted hope and optimism through the sharing of stories, struggles, and successes.²⁰ Local church involvement gave students a family-like setting and place of acceptance where many flourished as their physical and emotional needs were met. Jack Balswick, Pamela King, and Kevin Reimer explain that "the faith community provides an intergenerational network of enduring, caring relationships through which youth may wrestle with issues pertinent to identify exploration as well as offer experiences in which they can explore personal gifts."²¹

Boyce College students were able to articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity through the following themes that emerged in the qualitative findings: (1) spiritual and interpersonal struggles were a collective experience; (2) life's difficulties and trials are temporary, but the reward is worth the sacrifice; (3) consistent Scripture reading is a source of hope and key to spiritual maturity; (4) students encountered a personal transformation; (5) participants discovered a faith-informed

¹⁹ James E. Francis, "Integrating Resilience, Reciprocating Social Relationships, and Christian Formation," *Religious Education* 114, no. 4 (July 2019): 503.

²⁰ Gordon T. Smith, *Called to Be Saints: An Invitation to Christian Maturity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 217.

²¹ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 329.

problem-solving method; (6) interviewees recognized that life in relational community is pivotal for spiritual growth; and (7) God's call and sense of purpose inspired endurance to persevere. These findings produced a greater understanding of the patterns that exist between resilience, students' spiritual maturity, and the assessments that measure these factors.

Implications from Convergent Strand

Discrepancies existed between the students' assessment scores and their actual experiences. The mean scores from the ICSR and TDA assessments were consistently high (between 4.0–5.0). This might reflect the culture of Boyce College, a confessional Christian school rather than measuring the students' actual maturity.²² The assessment was distributed by the dean's office, the registrar, the student life department, and professors at Boyce College. Students might have felt pressure to select the ideal response that would align with the values of the college. The assessments of resilience and spiritual maturity were forced responses, whereas the interview allowed students to share their experiences freely. On several occasions, students noted that they avoided adversity or struggled with self-reliance; yet, they scored consistently with obeying God and denying self (4.0–5.0), for instance. I inquired about this discrepancy when it was articulated during the interview process. The shared responses from students who fit this pattern conveyed that since they had not previously thought about the question, a sense of conviction caused them to select a more ideal response. They reflected that the articulated answer was more accurate once they were able to assess their responses more thoroughly. The implication of this inconsistency is that either triangulation or a secondary source is

²² Kimlyn J. Bender argues, "A Christian worldview becomes an ideology itself, a cloak of invisibility hiding other ideological commitments, a mantle shielding them from critical examination. The result is a university's particular failure of receiving and exercising critical examination and discernment." Kimlyn J. Bender, "The Confessional Task of the Christian University," *Christian Scholar's Review* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 9.

needed to validate the responses between assessments, interviews, and a third party's witnesses.²³ A mentor or more mature member of the student's church would provide more objective evaluation of spiritual maturity than the student self-reports. This would take into consideration the journey of maturation over time that can be overlooked or unrealistically scored by a first-year student.²⁴

There is a need for a first-year course to measure resilience, spiritual maturity, and articulate experiences with adversity for incoming students. The majority of first-year students at Boyce College exhibited an unawareness of the adversities that they would face in college or the skills they would need to develop in order to be successful.²⁵ Some lacked the necessary skills to study, manage their time, and be more involved on campus. A first-year study course would provide an overview to prepare students for the challenges that they would face in their first semester. Many students articulated that they learned coping skills from mentors and former students in an unsystematic way—but only subsequent to undergoing struggles and hardships that might have otherwise been mitigated. Assessing their maturation before they commence their studies can prepare them to grow or seek support in areas of weakness. Nevertheless, first-year students were able to articulate that they increased their capacity to overcome hardships and adapt to difficulties after their first semester.

²³ Creswell and Plano Clark state, "A third strategy consists of reporting disconfirming evidence. Disconfirming evidence is information that presents a perspective that is contrary to the one indicated by the established evidence. A report of disconfirming evidence in fact confirms the accuracy of the data analysis because in real life we expect the evidence for themes to diverge and include more than just positive information." Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 325.

²⁴ Research confirmed that students need more help than ever in academic and personal development as well as in adjusting to the pressures of higher education as compared to previous generations. Diana F. Wood, "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano: Student Well-Being and the Development of Resilience," *Medical Education* 50, no. 1 (January 2016): 120–22.

²⁵ Clydesdale, *The First Year Out*, chap. 3, "On the Role of Family, Faith, and Community," para. 4.

First-year student experiences at Boyce College were consistent with a biblical model of resilience. Students exhibited characteristics consistent with resilience and spiritual maturity in their first year. Each student encountered adversity, but most responded that they looked forward to the end of the trial because such a trial was the means which God was using to grow them. In Psalm 66, the psalmist describes the work of God in testing and refining the believer as intended to reveal and develop the character he wants. God allows difficult circumstances to test whether his people will be obedient to him despite their circumstances. Resilience theorists postulate that adaptation is a response to one's challenges, life contexts, home, school, family, culture, and community. For the first-year student at Boyce College, difficulties in life are more than an interruption; they produce growth and maturity in the believer.

A statistical profile emerged from the quantitative strand and was compared with qualitative responses to understand the students' experiences at Boyce College. A first-year course is proposed to help students identify their strengths and areas of needed maturation. The adversities students experienced were consistent with the proposed biblical model of resilience confirmed by the qualitative themes. Discrepancies in interview responses were recognized and triangulation was proposed to ensure fidelity in the articulation of student experiences.

Research Applications

This study explored how the measures of resilience and spiritual maturity were related to first-year students at Boyce College. In the process of applying the research design, the responses of fifteen first-year students at Boyce College offered useful commentary about experiences on a Christian college campus. The results of the assessment provide students with a tool for the evaluation of their first-year experience, self-diagnosis of their psychological level of resilience, and introspection concerning

their spiritual maturity.²⁶ The outcomes provide Boyce College with opportunities to help students expand their interpersonal growth and to prepare them for ministry in the church and the world. This section seeks to apply psycho-spiritual assessment to Christian education and the local church.

Christian Higher Education

Spiritual maturity and resilience assessments can reveal areas of growth needed in students. Surveying such areas can provide an institution with a focus beyond the mastery of academic content, one which may benefit the holistic development of character competency through resilience characteristics.²⁷ Responses acquired from surveys can quickly supply administration with logistics to allocate resources and training for faculty to address deficits in student learning. The data might also suggest areas of dissatisfaction experienced by students or guide in the identification of student hardships previously unknown to the administration.²⁸

Student services in Christian higher education may profit from the use of spiritual maturity and resilience surveys for academic guidance, mental health counseling, peer mentorship, and curriculum design. The student services office provides resources to assist students when they face hardships. Academic guidance counselors trained to conduct follow-up interviews to the spiritual maturity/resilience assessment could compile the results from predictive assessments, assist students to select courses,

²⁶ Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 218.

²⁷ Wood, "*Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*," 21; Stoffel and Cain, "Review of Grit and Resilience Literature," 20–23; Enes Rahat, and Tahsin İlhan, "Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construct, and Resilience in Predicting Students' Adjustment to University Life," *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 16, no. 1 (February 2016): 189; Mark Pearson, "Building Bridges: Higher Degree Student Retention and Counselling Support," *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management* 34, no. 2 (April 2012): 187–99.

²⁸ The data should be applied with caution because the results cannot be generalized beyond the sample population.

and develop psycho-spiritually informed growth plans. Results from an assessment might suggest a consultation with a mental health professional to address potential issues. According to Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin, “Research has shown that social and emotional dimensions of development have a great bearing on academic performance.”²⁹ Residential living professionals can use resilience/spiritual maturity inventories to inform their policies, room arrangements within halls, and encouragement of student interaction in social support networks. Resident staff trained in assessing maturity serve in teaching students to develop resilience and might aid in student retention in college as well as long-term satisfaction with their studies. Spiritual maturity and resilience measures might be part of an application process for a student-mentor position.³⁰ This individual may serve as a role model and facilitate discipleship relationships. The assessment tool, along with spiritual gift assessments, can lay the foundation for a first-year course that teaches students to manage their learning environment and acquire coping styles necessary to thrive.³¹

Faculty can use this assessment tool for the diagnosis of an incoming class to tailor their focus within a curriculum. For instance, an incoming class that has an under-average score in sharing Christ might have unique assignments that emphasize that attribute of discipleship. For an apologetics course with students who score poorly in cognitive maturity, the students might need additional instruction on cognitive

²⁹ Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin, *Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys*, Youth Development and Education Series (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2014), 169. The instruments used by the authors were constructed with a specific focus on African American and Latino youth which are typically underrepresented groups. Their findings are generalizable from a K–12 to a Christian higher education context since students in their first year typically have recently transitioned from high school. Although the authors do not write from a Christian worldview and are not professing believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, their findings are useful in the study of resilience on the basis of common grace.

³⁰ Pearson, “Building Bridges,” 187–99.

³¹ Rahat and İlhan, “Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience,” 202–203.

applications. According to Karen Estep, “The design of evaluation tools used to assess student learning need to correspond to ministry objectives and desired outcomes. While traditionally, we have viewed assessment as seeking an understanding of what students know, we should also use new forms of assessment to discern their developmental progress, skills, and dispositions.”³² This course will prayerfully create an awareness in the students about ways in which they can develop their resilience attitudes and spiritual maturity through stated objectives. Teachers’ assistants can be proactive in engaging with students who tend to struggle and can adapt an individualized academic plan before the student begins to fall behind. Professors can use pre- and post-tests to measure the effectiveness of their relational connections, facilitating intellectual development and the promotion of spiritual growth in students.³³ The professors’ roles might include teaching resilience characteristics to lower-level students. This initiative could fill a gap in Christian education philosophy to help educators connect education, Scripture, maturity, and adjustment toward a more comprehensive program. Estep notes, “Curriculum evaluation should discern strengths and weaknesses in order to drive program improvement using data analysis.”³⁴ When the students enter college, they will demonstrate an understanding and be equipped “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood” (Eph 4:12–14).

The Local Church

A gap exists between perception and reality in the subjective ways in which

³² Karen Estep, “Charting the Course: Curriculum Design,” in *Mapping Your Curriculum: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, ed. James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep (Nashville: B&H, 2012), chap. 9, sec. 5, para. 3.

³³ Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,” 219.

³⁴ Estep, “Charting the Course,” chap. 9, sec. 5, para. 2; Smith, *Called to Be Saints*, 245.

individuals evaluate themselves and others. In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner hypothesizes that church attendance and involvement in activities often erroneously constitute spiritual maturity.³⁵ Based on the outcome of this study, an assessment tool is more objective in measuring the spiritual maturity of members than traditional means of subjective examination. The local church desires congregants to grow spiritually, yet it has historically struggled to integrate social change, popular culture, and developmental stage theory in the holistic development of its members.³⁶ An assessment measuring resilience and spiritual maturity has a crucial application for leaders, volunteers, new members, discipleship activities, youth groups, and small groups in particular.

Leaders are called to shepherd the flock of God and ought to be the foremost members demonstrating spiritual maturity and resilience (1 Pet 5:2). Maturity assessments can aid in the placement and development of pastors. Often, members of the congregation follow the patterns of their leaders, and an assessment can hold them accountable to demonstrate growth in areas of limitation. A church-wide assessment could potentially provide insight toward needed education through Bible study topics, sermon series, classroom courses, and small group discussions. Discipleship processes could become more focused, guided by measuring growth within specific discipleship attributes while incorporating psychological development in needed areas such as hope and optimism.

The embrace and spiritual development of new members are often at the whim of the particular church structure to which they submit. The Word of God mandates discipleship (Matt 28:19–20) but is not always executed efficiently, if at all. New members who take this assessment can identify areas where spiritual growth, learning, obedience, and psychological awareness is needed. Volunteers can benefit from training

³⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 271.

³⁶ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 343.

and coordinating problem-solving assessments to hone their abilities in tandem with their spiritual gifts. These measures allow for the potential development of a well-rounded staff led by those who have scored and demonstrated resilience and spiritual maturity.

Resilience and spiritual maturity have been described as enhancing group dynamics through this study. Women's and men's accountability groups have opportunities to allow one-on-one relationships to address deficits in maturation. Community-focused groups can use the statistical profiles of members to encourage growth by suggesting outreach activities, offering training, and a prescription for service opportunities. Youth pastors might assign mentors in specialized areas of discipleship based on the statistical profiles of students. Mentors can leverage their position to respectfully insert questions, elicit responses, and evaluate the youth through a discipleship relationship purposed toward spiritual growth.³⁷ A predictive assessment might provide insight to high school seniors about areas in which they are sure to experience adversity upon graduating. These scales use resilience characteristics as descriptive and/or predictive measures of phenomena such as college student adaptation or adjustment to classroom stressors.³⁸ Parents might more accurately evaluate the distance between the head, heart, and ownership of faith experienced by their children. This study revealed that a self-assessment might not be the most accurate means of determining spiritual maturity or resilience, even with a survey. Therefore, a third tier of evaluation—after assessment and interview—could add a mentor, objective friend, or teacher to answer identical survey questions in a separate evaluation to ensure the

³⁷ Francis, "Integrating Resilience, Relationships, and Christian Formation," 508; Tommy Davis, III, and Vera S. Paster, "Nurturing Resilience in Early Adolescence a Tool for Future Success," *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 15, no. 2 (December 2000): 17–33; Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 126.

³⁸ Allan, McKenna, and Dominey, "Degrees of Resilience," 9.

student's fidelity in responses.³⁹ The converged outcomes provide a triangulated measurement most accurately representative of a person's actual score of maturity. This methodology may serve the body of Christ as a discipleship mirror rather than a window.

Future Research

This study represents the first known major research endeavor that addressed the integration of spiritual maturity and resilience among first-year college students at Boyce College. Several recommendations are suggested based on the findings, conclusions, and limitations associated with this research for significant research studies and secondary supplemental research inquires.

1. Using a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, separate studies may be undertaken to explore the variances of the demographic categories of race, gender, ethnicity, age, class rank, major, and marital status.
2. Utilizing a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, separate studies may be performed to assess variables within the context of geographical location, length of time as a Christian, denominational affiliation, and previous college experience.
3. Using a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, a predictive assessment may be uniquely designed, expanded to include more resilience variables, and tested for construct validity.
4. Using a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, an assessment may be designed and validated to measure the magnitude, statistical direction, and causation between measures of resilience and spiritual maturity.
5. Using a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, a study may undertake a comparison between Boyce College and other schools in the SBC.
6. Using a similar design and method demonstrated by this research, a study might commence within the institutional contexts of Bible colleges, liberal arts colleges, and secular universities.
7. A study may be designed to assess this same population in this study with a longitudinal study following interviews at regular intervals during their collegiate experience.
8. A study may be proposed to introduce a new standardized interview protocol based

³⁹ Creswell and Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 325.

on resilience and spiritual maturity.

9. A study may be proposed to introduce a *Transformational Discipleship* qualitative interview protocol.
10. A study may be recommended to compare the TDA quantitative and TDA qualitative instruments.
11. A study may be designed to assess resilience factors, attributes of discipleship, and the articulated experience in adolescent groups.
12. A study may be proposed to investigate the relationship between resilience and Christian formation with pastors and congregational leaders.
13. Further research is warranted to construct a predictive instrument that measures resilience and spiritual maturity in high school seniors.
14. Further research is reasonable to draw distinctions between resilience and spiritual maturity in three contexts: churches, organizations, and denominations.
15. Further research and empirical study are necessary to refine a standardized definition, or theory, of resilience.⁴⁰
16. Further research and empirical study are necessary to generate a paradigm that incorporates resilience, Christian formation, and reciprocating social relationships.⁴¹
17. Extending from the findings of this research study, a Scripture-based empirical study that engages within a biblical framework of resilience is needed.⁴²

Conclusion

This study explored how the measures of resilience and spiritual maturity were related to first-year students at Boyce College. Assessment of first-year students is beneficial to provide insight into psychological and spiritual issues that students will endure during their first year. While students at Boyce College did experience adversity,

⁴⁰ George A. Bonanno, Sara A. Romero, and Sarah I. Klein, "The Temporal Elements of Psychological Resilience: An Integrative Framework for the Study of Individuals, Families, and Communities," *Psychological Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (April 2015): 139–69; Glenn E. Richardson, "The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, no. 3 (March 2002): 307–71; Steven M. Southwick et al., "Resilience Definitions, Theory, and Challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5, no. 1 (January 2014): 6; Cornelis F. M. van Lieshout, "Lifespan Personality Development: Self-Organising Goal-Oriented Agents and Developmental Outcome," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 24, no. 3 (September 2000): 276–88.

⁴¹ George A. Bonanno and Erica D. Diminich, "Annual Research Review: Positive Adjustment to Adversity—Trajectories of Minimal-Impact Resilience and Emergent Resilience," *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 54, no. 4 (April 2013): 395.

⁴² Francis, "Integrating Resilience, Relationships, and Christian Formation," 503.

hardship, and spiritual, psychological, and interpersonal distress, such difficulties did not characterize their journey in their first year of college. Consistent Scripture reading was a resilience building factor that provided hope in God's future promises and a personal transformation rendering them less self-reliant and more dependent on the faithfulness of God. When students became aware of their interpersonal strengths and faith empowered problem-solving method their perspectives were adjusted and their distress diminished.

The shared experience of the students is comparable to the proposed biblical definition of resilience—God purposefully assigns and allows adverse events to produce the character in believers that he desires.⁴³ The testing and refining process is often arduous, yet it is temporary. Believers engage in the process of resilience by maintaining a joyful attitude, trusting, and hoping in God's future promises despite trials (Rom 5:1–5). The results of such perseverance are more refined and mature believers who are capable of bearing a heavier load than before their encounter with adversity.

First-year students at Boyce College persisted through adversity in their academic career because they were confident that God was refining their character and producing maturity. The students interviewed recognized that the trials and difficulties they faced compelled them to redirect their focus toward God. Like a muscle that becomes strong after repeatedly working through resistance, the students described an expanded capacity to endure their personal and academic challenges. Engagement in the community on campus and in the church enhanced a sense of belonging in first-year students and was essential for spiritual growth, pursuit of Christian maturation, adaptation to adversity, and established habits that promote wellness throughout their academic journey.

⁴³ David Forney, "A Calm in the Tempest: Developing Resilience in Religious Leaders," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2010): 4; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 184.

Assessments are helpful for understanding experiences of resilience and evaluation of spiritual maturity, but should not be used outside of a biblically centered community of faith that serves to confirm the scores through observation and connected relationship.

APPENDIX 1
QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT CONSENT FORM

Agreement to participate:

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to assess the spiritual maturity and resilience in first year college students. This research is being conducted by James Francis for purposes of dissertation research. You will be asked to share information about your spiritual practices and social reactions. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential. At no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participants must be 18 years or older. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

APPENDIX 2

THESIS STUDY PARTICIPATION FORM¹

Instructions: Thank you for your consideration to be a participant in this research study. In Section 1, read the “Agreement to Participate” statement in its entirety. Next, confirm your willingness to participate in this study by checking the appropriate box and entering the requested information in the answer fields provided.

In Section 2, respond to each of the prompts and questions by entering your information in the answer fields. Please enter responses for every box, even if “not applicable” is most appropriate.

[Section 1] Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to assess the spiritual maturity and resilience in first year college students. This research is being conducted by James Francis for purposes of dissertation research. You will be asked to share information about your spiritual practices and social reactions. Any information you provide will be held as *strictly confidential*. At no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participants must be 18 years or older. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

I agree to participate I do not agree to participate

[Section 2] Demographic information.

Gender:

Year of birth:

What is your ethnicity or ethnic origin?

Anticipated month and year of graduation:

Current semester: First year, first semester First year, second semester

Second year, first semester

Degree program: Associate’s Bachelor’s Certificate

Commute: Would you describe yourself as an on campus (Lives within .5 miles),
commuter or distance student?

Which best describes your course load? Full-time Part-time

Are you considered an international student?

Do profess faith in Jesus Christ? Y N

Do you maintain active membership or involvement in a church during college?

What are some particular areas of ministry or service in which you were personally involved in at your church?

What other church, para-church or humanitarian ministries (if any) are you involved in?

¹ John David Trentham, “Epistemological Development in Pre–Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross–Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme,” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 224. This version has been revised and digitally rendered as an electronic document with fillable fields that allow the participant to respond.

Have you decided to pursue vocational ministry? ____ No ____ Before college
____ During college.

Thank you!

Thank you for your participation. Your responses are anonymous. The results will not be available until the conclusion of the research this fall 2019. If you are interested in receiving your scores at that time, please indicate so below. You must provide your email and complete the survey in its entirety.

I would like my scores sent in fall 2019

____ I would like my scores ____ I do not want my scores

Providing your email address will allow you to be considered in a weekly raffle for a free Chick-fil-a gift certificate and potentially a follow-up personal interview.

____ I agree to participate ____ I do not agree to participate

Please provide your email address

APPENDIX 3

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Qualitative Phone/Video Interview Question: How do Boyce College students articulate the relationship between resilience and spiritual maturity?

The interview questions were composed to further study the resilience factors of empathy, interpersonal relationships, hope and optimism, cognitive maturity, and problem-solving featured in the ICSR assessment.¹

Interpersonal Interaction (Focus: Engagement with Others)

1. Can you describe any experience serving others during your first year? (Probe) Did you serve alone or on a team? What is your current level of involvement at Boyce?
2. Can you describe any mentoring relationships that you have on campus or in your community? What was the benefit to you? (Probe) Can you share how you have experienced appreciation, gratitude, or support given from others around you? Can you describe any advice you received that has helped you to be successful in your first-year?

Empathy (Focus: The Experience of Receiving Empathy)

3. Can you describe in detail where you feel a sense of belonging with others? (Probe) Can you describe anytime you felt alone or isolated from fellow Christians? What did you do? How did you emotionally connect to God or with others.²
4. When you face adversity, what social support system have you looked for? What type of help or support did you receive? (Probe) What have you done to develop or deepen these supportive personal relationships in your community?

¹ Factors of spiritual maturity from the TDA were incorporated into the probes to identify patterns that exist between resilience and student's Christian formation among first-year students at Boyce College. These question sequences emerged from the themes converged through Scripture, notable concepts from resilience theory, resilience factors present in the ICSR, and attributes of discipleship TDA comparisons from the literature.

² Rick Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit: A Journey into Endurance, Character, Confidence, and Hope* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2018), 202.

Hope & Optimism (Focus: Attitude and Perspective)

5. When you have faced adversity this past year, what has specifically provided you with hope? (Probe) How do you share when you have doubts about your future?
6. What are your strengths? How do your strengths motivate you? (Probe) Do you feel your strengths move you toward obedience or self-reliance? How have you expressed faith and trust in God while experiencing difficulty?

Cognitive Maturity (Focus: Intellectual and Ethical Development)

7. How has facing adversity impacted your thinking? Your academic journey? What did you learn? (Probe) How would you describe the spiritual transformation that has taken place in your life since coming to college?
8. In what ways has reading your Bible impacted how you give meaning to your world? (Probe) How do you know God loves and cares about you when things are going badly?³

Problem-solving (Focus: Personal Pursuit and Methodology)

9. When you have faced a difficult situation in this last year, how did you adjust? What is your specific process or method of problem-solving? (Probe) How did your faith inform the method? Describe one difficulty you've had pursuing Jesus.
10. Can you describe a time you desired to give up in a situation that was difficult in your first year? (Probe) Have you ever thought about giving up on school? Where are you in your decision today? How did you get to that conclusion? What were some of the factors that contributed to continuing your education despite difficulties?

Final question

To wrap this up, I've asked you questions about several different experiences and issues during your college years. . . .

11. If your experiences were written as a book, what would you title the book? (Probe)
Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would say has been really significant or life-changing through your time as a college student?

³ Lawrence, *Spiritual Grit*, 12, 202.

Interview Debrief

The interviewer allows the interviewee to ask any clarification questions and about his or her experience with the interview.⁴ Lastly, the interviewer reviews the quantitative score report that lists the average of the attributes of spiritual maturity and the constructs of resilience in a similar manner as the Lifeway TDA report.

⁴ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 129.

APPENDIX 4

RESILIENCE AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY SCORE REPORT

Date:

Dear [Participant name or email]

Below are your scores for the resilience and spiritual maturity assessment. This information is not to be shared, copied, or distributed without permission.

The Assessments:

The questions for resilience were taken from the Inventory of College Students Resilience (ICSR 2013) to measure resilience. The Transformational Discipleship Inventory (TDA) is an assessment of attributes of discipleship that identify transformation present in a believer's journey. The TDA is taken online (via LifeWay.com), and the results provide an analysis of the domains of spiritual development and suggestions for growth.

The following section explains the attributes of discipleship that was included in the assessment tool that was combined with the resilience assessment. These scores are not comprehensive but are a significant attempt to quantify a work that only the Holy Spirit can truly measure. Therefore, be encouraged. Let these scores be an indication of where growth might be necessary. As believers, we are always progressing into union with Christ and his likeness.

Scores:

All scores are based on a five-point scale. Attributes are colored using the following system.

Average Score

4.0 to 5.0 (GREEN) – Consistent in Spiritual Development

2.0 to 3.9 (YELLOW) – Moderate in Spiritual Development

0.0 to 1.9 (RED) – Limited Evidence of Spiritual Development

The Attributes of Spiritual Maturity:

Bible Engagement	4.25
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An individual's view on the Bible is what determines all other aspects of his or her faith.¹ Claiming to be a follower of Christ implies the embrace of a Christian worldview, a strong correlation between the claim of belief in Jesus over time, and "an understanding and belief in what the Bible teaches."² Waggoner states that "we cannot separate spiritual formation, or spirituality, from matters of worldview and beliefs."³ Learning truth is an "active process," habitual lifestyle, pursuit of truth that demands our time, and requires humility.⁴ Reading and studying the Bible result in wisdom, growth, maturity, and a transformed life. In fact, as Waggoner writes, "Exposure to God's revealed truth, and this truth, when clarified by the Holy Spirit and received by faith results in transformation."⁵ It is not a surprise that there will be no spiritual growth exhibited in the life of a believer who does not regularly spend time reading the Bible.

Building Relationships	4
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The community of faith plays an essential role in the spiritual maturity of a Christian through loving support, edification, interdependence, encouragement, service, and intimate relationships.⁶ Waggoner emphasizes that there cannot be spiritual maturity without significant relationships through which trust is fostered.⁷ Transparency and openness are the doorway to "Christians experiencing deep, meaningful, mutual fellowship."⁸ Waggoner highlights that offering forgiveness is a mark of spiritual maturity, regardless if the offender seeks to be made right or not.⁹ Waggoner affirms that spiritual formation cannot be separated from living faithfully within the Christian

¹ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 32.

² Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 31.

³ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 24.

⁴ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 57.

⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 76.

⁶ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 233–34.

⁷ This domain draws a distinction between mere "intellectual assent to doctrinal statements" and loving, honoring, and showing compassion for others in the faith. Waggoner writes, "As trust deepens, we move to more intimate levels of friendship, exposing our inner feelings, opinions, core values, and even struggles or hurts." Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 241, 245.

⁸ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 245.

⁹ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 253.

community, a local body of believers that demonstrates all the essential biblical characteristics of a true church.¹⁰

Exercising Faith	3.85
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Exercising faith is the most difficult attribute of discipleship to measure because of subjective, objective, attitudinal, and behavioral aspects.¹¹ Waggoner asserts that “God has designed the Christian life in such a manner that we must often act on His Word without physical manifestations from God [S]piritual formation happens by exercising faith, obeying God’s Word even when we are not sure where it leads.”¹² Strength is found in the posture of weakness of the believer that is made strong through faith in Christ. Doubt is not a deterrent to faith development but an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to guide the believer into deeper faith. Faith is not optimism, dependence on our emotions, or whether our prayers get answered; “it is rooted in the conviction that God is in full control of all things and that He has a purpose in every situation.”¹³

Obeying God and Denying Self	4.16
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Our obedience requires self-denial, struggling with the tension between our fallen nature and the will and ways of God.¹⁴ Waggoner declares that yielding control of our lives to God is fundamental to our Christian faith. The posture of self-denial is not natural; it must be learned through the Word of God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the assistance of the community of faith.¹⁵ The key to this domain is the believer shifting from a focus on self to a focus on God.¹⁶ Waggoner describes that “the gospel exposes our self-centeredness and creates in our hearts love for others” and even laying down one’s life for them.¹⁷ Submission to the truth leads to greater spiritual understanding and transformation.

¹⁰ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 257.

¹¹ Waggoner states, “The attitudinal aspect is confidence that everything God says is true. The behavioral aspect lies in the specific action a person takes in obedience to God.” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 180.

¹² Hebrews 11:1, 6 renders faith to be the reality of what is hoped for, proof of what is invisible, and faith makes it possible to please God. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 178.

¹³ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 183.

¹⁴ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 84. Obedience is not just a human endeavor, but divinely enabled with God’s purposes of spiritual formation.

¹⁵ Waggoner writes, “following Christ—including the realities of sacrifice and self-denial—must be viewed from an eternal perspective to be understood completely. . . . In the end self-denial is never a loss.” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 85.

¹⁶ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 86–87.

¹⁷ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 94.

Seeking God	3.85
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The domain of worship is where true disciples engage in both corporate and private lifestyles of worship.¹⁸ Waggoner discusses that “praise and thanksgiving are essential to seeking God and growing as a Christian.”¹⁹ True worship is empowered by the Holy Spirit through salvation, is directed toward God alone, resists “going through the motions,” includes gratitude, and is a good indication of spiritual health.²⁰ Seeking God is the attribute of discipleship that focuses on sanctification and spiritual disciplines.²¹ Waggoner affirms that “attending to the Word of God, prayer, praise, and confession, coupled with a teachable heart and a repentant attitude, leads to spiritual transformation.”²²

Serving God and Others	3.46
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Christians have a responsibility to commit to and to endorse participation in service to others (Eph 2:10). The apostle Paul states, “And our people must also learn to devote themselves to good works for cases of urgent need, so that they will not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14 HCSB). The purpose of our spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:4–7 is to use what God has given us to redirect our hearts and priorities to serve others and build God’s kingdom. Waggoner states, “Jesus calls us to do more than just project an outward image of godliness; we’re called to live out what we profess to be true.”²³ We are called to be stewards of our time, talents, and treasures, moving from self-centered to others-centered with an attitude of gratitude.²⁴ In addition, churches have found that “meaningful involvement is critical to avoid young adult attrition.”²⁵

¹⁸ The expectation is rooted in persistent pursuit of a genuine relationship with God, not just his blessings. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 208.

¹⁹ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 210.

²⁰ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 213–14.

²¹ Waggoner states, “At the core of sanctification is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can transform a person’s mind, heart, and character; but God also places significant responsibility on each of us to take part in this spiritual formation process.” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 217; Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 119.

²² Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 218.

²³ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 116.

²⁴ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 117–18.

²⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 121.

Sharing Christ	2.28
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Waggoner posits, “Sharing Christ is essential to true discipleship and spiritual formation.”²⁶ A key point of spiritual maturity is the outward focus of a disciple. Evangelism is the responsibility of all believers. Paul explains God’s intention that the gospel should be presented verbally in Rom 10:14–17. Through prayer, we become sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance as God directs us toward divine appointments.”²⁷ Believers are encouraged to invest in presenting the gospel as well as encouraging unbelievers to attend church. Waggoner reminds us that “God convicts and saves. Our job is to obey God, which includes praying for others, living a consistent life, building relationships, and seeking opportunities to witness.”²⁸

Unashamed Transparency	2.57
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Disciples have to engage in the public identification and sharing of the gospel message of Jesus Christ.²⁹ Waggoner proclaims, “Living a consistently godly life in front of a watching world is important but not to the exclusion of a verbal witness.”³⁰ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation state, “Confessing sin to God, choosing to obey His Word no matter the personal costs, and reading other material that enhances our biblical knowledge are actions believers can take to mature.”³¹ Waggoner responds, “A clear sign of spiritual transformation is closing the gap between what one professes and how one lives. Maturation is a process.”³² Spiritual maturity leads to mobilization of believers and inclines them to share about their transformative experiences in word and action.

Doctrinal Positions	4.33
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²⁶ “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 173.

²⁷ Waggoner states, “God’s ambassadors help create a readiness for the gospel of peace by praying for the salvation of nonbelievers, asking God to prepare their hearts for hearing, and then receiving, the good news (Eph. 6:15).” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 156–57.

²⁸ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 169.

²⁹ The public identification with Christ “can lead to more faith. Stepping out in faith fosters more faith. Small steps can lead to bigger steps.” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 163.

³⁰ “The longer a Christian waits to bring up his or her faith to a friend, the harder it becomes.” Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 164.

³¹ Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 83.

³² Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 98.

Based on the research of George Barna, these questions describe doctrinal positions that born-again believers affirm regardless of denominational affiliation.³³

Constructs of Resilience:

Empathy and Interpersonal Interaction	3.4
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Empathy. Emotional availability and responsiveness to others.³⁴

Interpersonal interaction. “Behaviors needed to develop and deepen supportive personal relationships”³⁵ while finding an identity within social groups and involvement in the community.³⁶

Hope and Optimism	3.33
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Hope. A principal characteristic of resilience helping in adaptation, viewing self through strengths over weaknesses, and providing meaning in life.³⁷ Also, confidence and faith in the promise of God is attained in the future.³⁸

Optimism. Positive interpretation, initiation of communication, and community connection skills structured to help an individual manage their behaviors in cognitive and affective processes that lead to a successful adjustment.³⁹

Problem Solving	4
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Exploring solutions or opportunities to mitigate setbacks or adverse experiences.⁴⁰

³³ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 17.

³⁴ Isabella McMurray et al., “Constructing Resilience: Social Workers’ Understandings and Practice,” *Health & Social Care in the Community* 16, no. 3 (May 2008): 299–309.

³⁵ Yun–Chen Huang and Shu–Hui Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 473.

³⁶ Sungok Shim and Allison Rvan. “What Do Students Want Socially When They Arrive at College? Implications of Social Achievement Goals for Social Behaviors and Adjustment during the First Semester of College,” *Motivation & Emotion* 36, no. 4 (December 2012): 504–15.

³⁷ Jean Clinton, “Resilience and Recovery,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 13, no. 3 (August 2008): 221.

³⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 263.

³⁹ Enes Rahat and Tahsin İlhan, “Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience in Predicting Students’ Adjustment to University Life,” *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 16, no. 1 (February 2016): 202–203; John F. Allan, Jim McKenna, and Susan Dominey, “Degrees of Resilience: Profiling Psychological Resilience and Prospective Academic Achievement in University Inductees,” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 42, no. 1 (February 2014): 21.

⁴⁰ Glenn E. Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” *Journal of Clinical*

Cognitive Maturity	3.8
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“To think things through, to discover what is going on, why an event is happening, and assigning meaning.”⁴¹

For Further Information

Geiger, Eric, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation. *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*. Nashville: B & H, 2012.

Huang, Yun-Chen, and Shu-Hui Lin. “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience and Evaluating the Measurement Invariance.” *British Journal of Guidance & Counseling* 41, no. 5 (November 2013): 471–86.

Waggoner, Brad J. *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship*. Nashville: B & H, 2008.

Psychology 58, no. 3 (March 2002): 308.

⁴¹ Huang and Lin, “Development of the Inventory of College Students’ Resilience,” 473.

APPENDIX 5

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES
TO ADVERSITY

Table A1. Summary of interview responses to adversity

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
David	4CS 5MS	1CR 3MR	How has facing adversity impacted your academic journey?
			When I was experiencing it, I was like, oh, man, this is this is really horrible. Afterwards, being able to look back, I think that situation grew me a lot. So I think that's helped me take comfort in knowing that whatever experience I go through, my circumstances are less important than the fact that Christ is in me and he's using, what I'm going through whatever it is, to strengthen me, to sharpen me. Being pruned, being sharpened, that hurts, it doesn't feel good. But, pruning makes the tree more beautiful. So, now I've been able to look at it that way.
Patrick	4CS 5MS	1CR 3MR	How has facing adversity impacted your academic journey?
			I wouldn't say it affected me too much. While facing adversity I still got stuff done. Yes, even though I'm facing this trial, I do have to do my homework and my academics also. Realizing just because I've gone through adversity, I have an excuse not to do this, but I have a responsibility even though I'm going through something.
Sara	3CS 6MS	3CR 1MR	When you have faced adversity this year, what has specifically provided you with hope?
			In the Bible, it talks about how trials bring about perseverance and it ultimately brings us closer to God. And so whenever I was going through tough times, I was like, okay, at the end of this, I'm going to be able to look back on this and see growth in my spiritual life. And, like, I really, really loved that because the relationship I have with God, I really wanted to grow. And that link,

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
			unfortunately, growth always comes under trials, but that really gives me hope in that. And just the idea of sanctification and becoming more like Christ. That gave me hope as well that God is using this. God is going to use what I am going through to help me deal and to counsel others better as a counselor.
Justice	6CS 3MS	4CR	When you have faced adversity this year, what has specifically provided you with hope?
			It's just the realization that this life is short, and the life to come is eternal and so, I need to be more concerned with the life to come than I am with this life. And that takes my mind away from the present trials. So that's, that's a really big one. And then also, another one of some of the difficulties that everyone faces, but I've been I've been facing, I mean, specifically, important, people close to me, and relationships. And so one of the things that give me hope is also recognizing that the Lord works in His people, sanctifies them and helps them to grow, and helps me to grow and change also. Even though it might be conflict in the moment, we can count on continually being changed and growth in sanctification.
Leslie	5CS 4MS	3CR 1MR	When you have faced a difficult situation in this last year, how did you adjust?
			That's something that I've learned. I think every single time I go through a trial it adjusts me in a certain way to make me stronger and better. That's a way I adjust. I have so much vulnerability that allows the Holy Spirit to work on me best when I'm vulnerable from the trial.
Gabe	7CS 2MS	3CR 1MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			Trials can get me so down that the only place I can look is up just because I'm on the ground. Trials are humbling. Trials are very humbling. Sin struggles are humbling. External things that are out of my hands and out of my control, those are humbling. Trials bring humility or at least should.
Winston	2CS 7MS	2CR 2MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			It's definitely shown me that I was far more naive when I was younger. Cause when I was wrong about something I was like, I'll never do that there's no way to do this or that or whatever. And definitely facing through it, I've realized that people struggle with those things because they are hard to fight against. So I'd say that's definitely one way of

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
			changed through facing adversity is just realizing that the battle is hard. But awesome knowing that there is always a way out. Because we are never tempted beyond what God allows today.
Kevon	7CS 2MS	2CR 2MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			Adversity, especially in my first year, at Boyce has been very formative. Especially in my growing up, and especially in high school, I would try to avoid adversity as much as possible. And I always found that when I did face adversity, it was a terrible time with no redeeming qualities. But in my time, at Boyce, I found that even though adversity is unpleasant in the moment, it shaped me into becoming a better person, and more specifically, a more devoted follower of Christ. So I've been trying in my life to, not exactly seek adversity, but when adversity does come, to be able to try to see how it is impacting me, and not focus simply on the negative.
Tia	3CS 6MS	3CR 1MR	When you have faced adversity this year, what has specifically provided you with hope?
			I guess, knowing that God was doing some things, with the adversity, it was really hard sometimes. Just knowing that God has a purpose for whatever he's putting me through. I had a lot of complications during the summer. It was really hard, but just knowing that God is doing something, he has a purpose.
Cheryl	4CS 5MS	4CR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			Facing adversity? I think it's strengthened it. I think before adversity; I can be very easily satisfied with the status quo in the company I have in life. But because of having to work through adversity, it forces me to engage with my faith better. It's not surface level; it's got to go deep to find roots to stay rooted in my faith. When adversity happens, all of a sudden, the cliché answers aren't satisfactory anymore. So I think it's just sharpened my ability to think. It's forced me to think through what does God actually mean here? What does it mean? How does that change the way that I see this? Or how does that change the way that I live? If this is true, if he's saying that, then what does that mean? Instead of just like listening to it be like, Oh, yeah, God loves me and not actually engaging with it at all.

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
Jean	6CS 3MS	1CR 3MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			It's impacted it a lot. Especially this year, of course getting into college. It really forced me to think about hard things in a different way, even in the classroom setting, but also outside. It's like you start thinking about things slightly in a bigger way. It's not just like you and your tiny little world. It's a big world. It's so hard, we say adversity. My adversity seems so small compared to just the adversity people have faced in the past and even now. A lot of times I do sort of ignore adversity, try to ignore it, or push it to the side. So it doesn't interfere with the job, I think I'm supposed to be doing or the person I'm supposed to be. I really have been impacted by faith. I do feel like some doubts have been raised. I've started doubting different things. Even just for a day or a moment. And then I've had to deal with those. I think ultimately, that my faith is stronger, just because I've worked through that and found out how much bigger God is.
Crissy	5CS 4MS	2CR 2MR	When you have faced a difficult situation in this last year, how did you adjust?
			Just accept what I have and remained faithful in those circumstances. Contentment is, the word. Contentment can only be taught you're not born with contentment. But through each and every one of those trials that I've been through, the Lord was really building contentment. Now, I'm pretty content. I'm sure there's more contentment to be worked on. But I just find contentment in the fact the Lord still cares for me. His Word still stands still and I'll be okay.
Jim	5CS 4MS	— 4MR	How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?
			Initially, I saw trials as just something to grow you and your faith and something that was good, and something that we should want as Christians, and that we should be looking for. Rather than just things of the Lord, which is true, but not being hungry for those. So I think going through trials has almost given me more real realistic perspective of what trials are and what the Lord uses them for. They're not fun. They do cause stress, they cause unrest. They're hard to go through, hard to endure. And that's not really going through a lot of trials. Growing up having kind of a very mild, safe childhood, having a few injuries here and there, but never serious loss other than grandparents experiencing some trials that kind of give me

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
			that perspective, like, Oh, these aren't fun. This isn't something we should necessarily be looking for, but not reject when the Lord brings them into your life.
Trevor	7CS 2MR	3CR 1MR	<p data-bbox="597 380 1354 415">How has facing adversity impacted your thinking?</p> <p data-bbox="597 422 1354 1289">How is facing adversity impacted my thinking? It's definitely showed me that life isn't full of butterflies all the time? Yeah. I think one of the biggest things about college is that you will face adversity. So I guess the thought process of like Romans 8:28 is true, that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him. But you're not always going to be that. And you're not even going to see it on this side of eternity sometimes. So yeah, understanding. Yeah, my thought process, I think changes because I always felt like, Oh, yeah, this is all supposed work out for my good. And that was just kind of a stamp that you put on things. Instead of going, I have no clue how God's going to use this for good. He will. Because there's still things in my life that like he's done. And I still wonder, 'Why in the world did you do that?' Obviously, something that can look back, and I'm like, I'm glad that God put me through that. So I can learn some things from like, why. I think my heart has definitely changed in a way that realizes that life just sucks sometimes and God's going to be there for you. But it's not always easy. A bigger expense than I ever would have without going to school. I'm sure like missing family. Because that was my biggest struggle of realizing that I can't be self-reliant even though I do often fall into that sin.</p>
Nikki	4CS 5MS	3CR 1MR	<p data-bbox="597 1335 1354 1402">How have you have expressed faith and trust in God while experiencing difficulty?</p> <p data-bbox="597 1409 1354 1829">That's a really broad question. Dealing with current issues, and coming to the school and different isolation and rejection, different issues like that just really bring me down. They bring me to a level of hurt and I just sort of lay there and go, 'this hurts! Why does it have to be this way?' But you just trust God that he designed everything to be this way. Everything you go through now, is hopefully going to help somebody later on. So whether there's a conversation that comes up whether it lasts for a minute, or it is a discipleship type relationship, I'm hoping that everything that I have gone through and that I'm going through now at school will prepare me for work</p>

ID#	TDA	ICSR	Qualitative response to facing adversity
			relationships being in the secular world. And trusting that God does everything for a reason.

Note: The responses are taken from the qualitative interviews in response to selected questions that informed me about the student's experience with adversity and spiritual formation during their first year at Boyce College.

APPENDIX 6

STATISTICAL MEANS FROM
ASSESSMENT RESPONSES

Table A2. Statistical means from assessment responses

ID#	BE	BR	DP	EF	OG	SG	SGO	SC	UT	CM	HO	PS	EII
3	4.44	3	5	3.71	4.43	3.71	3.54	3.14	2.43	3.6	2.67	3.25	4.2
4	4.33	4	4.92	3.57	4.14	4	3.38	2.86	2.86	3.6	4.33	3.75	3.2
5	4.67	4.33	5	4.29	4.57	4.57	4.69	4	3.86	4.8	3	4.75	4.2
6	3.89	2.83	4.42	4	3.43	3.57	3.92	3.57	4	5	4.33	5	4.4
7	4.22	2.83	4.92	3.43	3.93	3.29	3.69	3	2.57	4.2	2	3.5	4.6
8	4.89	4	5	4.14	4.71	3.86	4.23	3	4	4.2	3.67	4.75	4
9	4.44	3.33	4.58	3.86	4.57	4.57	3.15	3.43	4.43	4.6	3.67	4	4.2
10	4.56	4.17	5	3.86	4.64	4.86	3.69	3	4	3.6	3	3.75	3.8
11	4.33	3.67	5	3.86	4.14	3.57	3.77	3	4	3.2	3.33	4	4
12	4.33	4	4.92	4.86	4.57	4.57	4.54	4	4	3.6	3.67	4.5	4
13	3.78	3	4.92	4.29	3.43	4.29	3.15	4	3.57	3.8	3.67	3	4
14	4.33	3.6	4.83	4	4.5	4.14	3.54	2.29	3	3.8	3.33	3.5	4.2
15	4.33	4.33	5	3.43	4.36	3.71	2.92	3.71	2.71	3.6	3.33	3.5	4.6
16	4.89	4.17	5	4.43	4.57	3.86	4.54	3	3.86	4.6	4.33	5	4.4
17	3.89	2.83	5	4.57	4.14	3	3.46	2.29	3.86	3.8	2.33	2	4.4
18	4.67	4	5	4.57	4.5	3.86	3.62	3	3.86	4.4	3.33	4.75	4.2
19	2.67	2.83	4.67	2.86	3.14	2.43	1.92	2.86	3.43	4	2.67	3	3.6
20	3.89	3	4.5	3.29	3.93	3.29	3.92	2.86	2.71	4.2	2	3.75	4
21	4.44	3.17	5	4.29	4.21	4	3.62	4.14	3.86	4.2	4	4	4.4
22	4.44	4.5	5	4	4.64	3.71	3.69	3.86	4	4.4	4	3.5	3.6
23	4.78	3.83	5	4	4.43	3.86	3.69	4.14	3	5	4	5	4.8
24	4.44	4.17	5	4	4.43	3.86	4.15	3.86	3.43	4.2	4	4.25	4.2
25	3.78	3.83	5	3	4.21	3.86	3.62	3.14	3.86	4	3.33	4	3.6
26	4.67	4.33	5	4.14	4	4.14	3.38	3.57	3	3.4	3.67	4.25	3.8
27	4.22	3.67	4.67	3.43	4	4.14	4	3.14	3.43	3.8	3	3.75	3.8
28	4.33	3.83	4.83	3.86	4.36	3.57	3.69	3.14	3.43	4.2	4	4.5	4.6
29	5	3.33	5	4	5	5	4.62	4.14	3.29	4.6	4.33	5	3.8
30	4.11	3.67	4.75	4	4.29	3.57	3.46	3.43	3.43	3.6	3.33	3.5	3.8
31	4.67	4.33	4.75	4	4.36	4.57	3.46	3.71	4	4.6	4	3.5	4.4
32	4.67	4	4.92	4.57	4.57	4.71	4.15	4.14	4.29	4.8	4.33	4.5	4.8
33	4.78	4.67	5	4.43	4.71	4.43	4.54	4.14	4	3.6	2	4.5	4.6
34	3	2.67	4.83	2.43	2.79	1.57	2.85	2.14	2.29	4.4	3	3.75	4
35	4	4.5	4.92	4	4	2.71	3.46	3	3.43	4.6	4.67	4.75	4.6
36	4.33	3.5	4.42	3.86	3.93	4.14	3	2.57	3.43	4.2	2.67	4	4.8
37	4.44	3.67	5	4.14	4.64	4.29	3.46	2.43	3.71	4.8	2.33	4.25	4.8
38	3.89	2.33	4.83	3.86	4.07	3.86	2.85	2.43	3.29	4.4	3.33	3.75	4.2
39	4.56	3.5	4.83	4.14	4.36	4.43	4.38	3.14	4	3.8	3.33	4	4.6

ID#	BE	BR	DP	EF	OG	SG	SGO	SC	UT	CM	HO	PS	EII
40	4.44	3.6	5	4.83	4.64	4.33	3.69	2.86	4	4	2.67	3.75	4.8
41	4	4.5	5	3.71	4.43	2.86	3.08	2.86	2.43	4.4	3.67	5	4.2
42	4.11	3.5	4.92	3.86	4.43	3.71	4	3.86	3.43	5	4.67	5	5
43	3.78	4.33	4.83	3.71	4.21	3.43	3.62	3.14	3.86	4	4	5	3.4
44	4.78	4	4.83	4.43	4.5	4	3.85	3.57	3.43	2.8	3.67	3.5	4
45	4.33	3.83	5	4.29	4.36	4	3.85	3.14	3.86	4	4.67	4.25	4.6
46	4.89	3.67	4.67	4.57	4.36	4.29	3.85	3.57	2.29	4	3.67	3.25	4
47	4.67	4.83	4.83	4.71	4.71	4.86	4.46	2.57	3.14	5	4.67	5	5
48	3.89	2.67	4.58	3.71	3.86	3.57	3.77	2.43	3.14	3.8	3.33	3.75	4.2
49	4.33	4	4.92	3.86	4.43	4.43	3.62	3.29	3.71	3.4	4.33	3.25	3.8
50	4.78	4.5	5	4.43	4.93	3.14	4	4	3.71	5	3.67	4.75	5
51	4.67	4.5	4.92	5	4.43	4.71	4.15	3.57	4.14	4	3.67	4	4
52	4.11	3	5	4	4.14	2.14	3	3.43	2.86	4.8	2.33	5	4.2
53	4.78	4.33	5	4.71	4.79	4.71	3.77	4.29	3.71	4.6	4	3.75	3.8
54	3.78	3.67	4.83	4.43	4.21	3.86	3.54	4.29	3.57	4	3.67	4	4.2
55	4.11	3.17	5	4.29	4.79	3.29	3.15	2	3.29	3.4	3.33	4	4.6

Note: Bible Engagement (BE), Building Relationships (BR), Doctrinal Positions (DP), Exercising Faith (EF), Obeying God and Denying Self (OG), Seeking God (SG), Serving God and Others (SGO), Sharing Christ (SC), Unashamed Transparency (UT), Cognitive Maturity (CM), Hope and Optimism (HO), Problem Solving (PS), Empathy and Interpersonal Interaction (EII). Headings were abbreviated to conserve space.

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ABSTRACT

RESILIENCE THEORY AND CHRISTIAN FORMATION: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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This study explored the unexamined relationship between resilience and Christian formation in first-year college students. The study took place at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky. A convergent design was used to quantify the variables of spiritual maturity and resilience using pre-existing assessments. Themes from Scripture, precedent literature on resilience, and Christian formation were used to design semi-structured interview questions wherein students were able to articulate and help further understand their lived experiences.

A review of precedent literature presented scriptural foundations of Christian formation and biblical-theological resources that postulated a biblical framework for defining resilience. The *Transformational Discipleship Assessment* (TDA) was presented as a tool that provides an analysis of discipleship attributes, measurement of spiritual maturation, and suggests areas for needed growth. The precedent literature revealed that a comprehensive psychological definition of resilience theory is absent. Nevertheless, the *Inventory of College Students Resilience* (ICSR) was proposed as a valid and reliable assessment to measure and enhance personality traits associated with resilience in college students. The final section described points of interaction between higher education, resilience, and Christian formation to address the spiritual and psychological struggles that college students face.

The research design consisted of a three-strand approach using quantitative, qualitative, and convergent data analysis. The quantitative strand addressed first-year students' personal assessment of spiritual maturity attributes and factors of resilience through an instrument that combined the TDA and ICSR. A descriptive analysis was performed and statistical significance was found between the variables of the TDA and ICSR. First-year students at Boyce College exhibited consistent scores in both fields.

Seven key themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews during the qualitative strand that were analogous to the proposed biblical framework of resilience—God purposefully assigns and allows adverse events to produce the character in believers that he desires. The testing and refining process is often arduous, yet it is temporary. Believers engage in the process of resilience by maintaining a joyful attitude, trusting, and hoping in God's future promises despite trials (Rom 5:1–5). The results of such perseverance are more refined and mature believers who are capable of bearing a heavier load than before their encounter with adversity.

The convergent strand examined the extent that the qualitative results confirmed the quantitative outcomes. Inconsistencies were identified within the convergent strand that revealed challenges and provided recommendations for the flourishing of spiritual maturation and resilience characteristics. The findings yielded that converging qualitative and quantitative data were able to help further understand the relationship between Christian formation and resilience theory in first-year students at Boyce College.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation, adversity, biblical resilience, biblical foundations of resilience, Christian formation, college student development, confessional Christian colleges and universities, discipleship, endurance, first-year student, grit, hardship, higher education, Inventory of College Students Resilience, mentor, perseverance, reciprocating social relationships, relational community, resilience, spiritual formation, spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, spiritual maturity assessment, steadfastness, TDA, Transformational Discipleship Assessment, undergraduate development

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