A GLOBETROTTING PILGRIMAGE: AN EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

A Dissertation in
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by

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ working in least developed countries. To address this purpose, a qualitative study using narrative inquiry and in-depth semi structured interviews were employed to illuminate how participants grew and developed spiritually and interculturally in becoming effective participants within their host communities.

A purposeful sample (N=11) of U.S. American adults, aged 38-76 years, who lived and worked in a least developed country of southern Africa over a span of 5-47 years participated. Though not intentional, all participants were Caucasian, including seven men and four women. As professional doctors, nurses, educators, and administrators, they maintained daily, direct contact with host culture members. To ensure consistency with a discussion of spiritual growth, participants espoused a Christ-centered worldview and identified themselves as followers of Christ.

Seven main themes emerged from participants’ narratives. Participants (a) perceived God’s calling to work abroad, (b) desired to help host communities, (c) approached their host culture respectfully, (d) cultivated relationships purposefully, (e) embraced social values of the host culture, (f) experienced a deepening relationship with God, and (g) sensed understanding working abroad. Findings show spiritual growth and intercultural competence, with an emphasis on meaningful relationships, are interconnected as symbiotic learning processes, each one feeding off the other for sustenance and development. This study is significant as pioneering research that illustrated a non-prescriptive journey to function effectively in a host culture by accentuating the reciprocity between these two constructs.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION/RATIONALE

According to local legend, Zambia’s geographic shape looks like a fetus. Zambians believe their country is experiencing a transformational birth and is beginning to grow in its economic, social, cultural, and political significance around the world. One Zambian attributed his country’s growth to a process of individual effort working in community with others, which may be similar to how adults grow spiritually and develop intercultural competence. Through the lens of sociocultural theory, spiritual growth and intercultural competence can be examined through interactions between individuals, their communities, and their context. Employing narrative inquiry as a methodology, this research sought to understand how adults learn in the context of a country different from their own by exploring the relationship between spirituality and intercultural competence. Informed by Vygotsky (1978), learning is a social process of co-constructing meaning, mediated by context, which contributes to a person’s growth and/or development.

Spirituality

The silence regarding spirituality in adult learning environments has been due largely to the emphasis on rationality and the scientific method in academia (Tisdell, 2003). Yet incorporating spiritual dimensions may bring life and vitality into a learning environment by offering “strategies for hope, peace, and justice in an inclusive and unified world” (de Souza, Durka, Engebretson, Jackson & McGrady, 2008, p.xvii). Spirituality is about worldview (Chan, 2008), connection to others (Tisdell, 2006; Yaconelli, 2003), contemplating identity and meaning (Jung, 1964; 1965; Tisdell, 1999), developing values that serve others as productive members of society (Horton & Freire, 1990), and learning (English, 2000; 2001). Adult education literature
has begun to recognize its importance and shows a recent reversal in the attention given to spirituality (English, 2001).

While the corpus of literature relating to spirituality is large and broad (Marcic, 2000), scholars agree that spirituality is an elusive yet prominent topic that deserves continual investigation because many view the world through a spiritual lens (Chan, 2008; English, 2000; Tisdell, 1999). For some, at the very center of human life lies spirituality (Tisdell, 1999), therefore adult educators may find value in tending to the spiritual dimensions of learning as a holistic approach that tends to the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of learners (hooks, Koetting & Combs, 2005).

Explained further in chapter two, this paper conceptualizes the broadness of spirituality as a continuum that spans from a Theo-centric to a non-Theo-centric perspective of spirituality. Though one-size-fits-all definitions that attempt to satiate subscribers on both ends of the continuum are problematic (Moberg, 2002), spirituality has been generally defined as an active pursuit of relevance and meaning through living and being (English, 2001; 2005).

More specifically, this study operates out of the Theo-centric end of the spectrum by exploring the narratives of those who pursue relevance and meaning from a Christ-centered worldview of spirituality. Often referred to as followers of Christ (Barna, 2001; Niebuhr, 2001), this identification transcends organized religious denominations. Followers of Christ define Christ-centered spirituality as a deepening relationship with God through a total reliance on the sovereign, divine trinity where relevance and meaning is found in the Bible, and the glory of God is acknowledged as the supreme guiding principle in one’s life (Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2003).
The Bible is at the center of a follower of Christ’s ontological worldview (Keller, 2008). It is revered as a text inspired by God but written by human beings created in God’s image, which assumes the gospel of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection, as Truth (Bevans, 2002; Chan, 2008; Hodge, 2004; Keller, 2008; Schaeffer, 1985). Many translations of the Bible exist (i.e. King James Version, New Living Translation, New American Standard, and The Message); however this research is informed by the New International Version (NIV). This version was chosen for several reasons. First, the NIV has been translated into easily understood contemporary English. Second, hundreds of transdenominational scholars from around the world participated in a thorough research and revision process that relied on trustworthy Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Next, they consulted original manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and ancient scribal traditions with aims of accuracy, clarity, and literary quality. The translators of the NIV were committed to the authority and infallibility of God’s word, yet they acknowledged their translations were made as imperfect humans. Finally, their diligent efforts at being faithful stewards of scripture guided their goal of leading readers toward a fuller understanding of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of a Theo-centric or non-Theo-centric perspective, empirical studies have shown the ways in which spirituality is developed is inextricably linked to one’s sociocultural context (Manglos, 2010; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). This means studying the sociocultural context can illuminate the development of spirituality, or spiritual growth. Sociocultural context includes one’s social, historical, and cultural environment, which is inextricably interconnected with adult learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus the assumption is that spiritual growth in a home culture will transpire differently than spiritual growth in a host culture. Along with the opportunity for spiritual growth, a further assumption is that immersion
in a foreign culture for an extended period of time will likely begin to facilitate the process of cultural adaptation and awareness that leads to the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). While little if any literature exists that links spirituality and intercultural competence, more must be known about the relationship between these two constructs as their development may be reciprocal.

**Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence is defined as a learning process of broadening worldviews through adaptation as the interactive, ongoing development of skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values for effective participation in a culturally different context (Deardorff, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Though never wholly obtained, developing intercultural competence is a significant tool for understanding and functioning in today’s culturally diverse society, particularly for those from the United States working in least developed countries.

Due to increased global interaction, international organizations have been giving more attention to intercultural competence because learning how to adapt and relate to people from different backgrounds is a significant issue (Chang, 2007; Diller & Moule, 2005; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Nishigori, Otani, Plint, Uchino, & Ban, 2009; Sierra, 2008; Van Dyne, Ang & Koh, 2009). Intercultural competence is valued for empowering “individuals to raise their understanding and appreciation of differences within, among, and between varied races, nationalities, and ethnicities” regardless of the field of practice (Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez, & Scott, 2008, p. 190). Drawing from the disciplines of psychology, education, medicine, healthcare, business, and intercultural research, studies on intercultural competence show epistemological implications for building meaningful relationships and improving practice.
For those practitioners who work in an intercultural context outside of their home culture, developing intercultural competence enhances roles by adapting to the attitudes, behaviors, and values of the host culture (Diller & Moule, 2005). Intercultural understanding that may result through the adaptive process potentially enhances relationships with host members and leads to effective participation (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). While some intercultural skills may transcend context, being interculturally competent in one culture does not necessarily mean intercultural competence in another context. For example, developing intercultural competence as an American engineer in Haiti may require different skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values than an interculturally competent social worker in Cambodia. Thus, “there is no prescriptive set of characteristics that inevitably guarantees competence in all intercultural relationships and situations” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.59).

The literature on intercultural competence crosses a wide spectrum of disciplines and purposes, with studies ranging from short-term study programs to permanent residency abroad (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2008). Discussed further in chapter two, four major themes that emerge from the literature include: intercultural competence as the capacity for adaptation, the transformational nature of intercultural competence, the relational components of intercultural competence, and the impediments to the process of developing intercultural competence. Findings in the literature show intercultural competence develops problem-solving capabilities in diverse sociocultural contexts through adaptive transformations that may occur in the relational interplay of people within their respective cultures (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Edmonds, 2010).

The vast majority of intercultural competence literature centers on adult practitioners and students in the United States providing or receiving educational or healthcare services to those
who immigrated to the U.S. (Storti, 2009). A paucity of literature exists regarding Western or U.S. American sojourners fostering intercultural competence by living and working abroad (Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez, & Scott, 2008). Furthermore, intercultural competence literature lacks a focus on longer-term immersion experiences (Wiest, 1998). Across the literature, researchers do not have a consensus on the amount of time that qualifies short- and long-term immersion. In general, anything over three months appears to be regarded as long-term, and few studies examine populations who spent more than three months abroad.

This study examines intercultural competence from the perspective of U.S. American sojourners, who identify themselves as follower of Christ and espouse a Christ-centered worldview, living and working abroad. Used throughout the literature, the term sojourner is defined as a person who relocates to a foreign country for a limited, albeit extensive period of time for a specific purpose, with tentative intentions of returning to their culture of origin (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, Szapocznik, 2010).

To understand how intercultural competence may develop, this study is informed by the Deardorff (2006) process model, which explains intercultural competence as a life-long process of adaptation that promotes personal growth and understanding through meaningful relationships for effective participation in a host culture. This model was selected for its credibility, as its design was the result of a grounded-theory approach that synthesized “consensual aspects of intercultural competence agreed upon by leading intercultural experts” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.31). Furthermore, Deardorff’s (2006) model emphasizes process and is noted for its adaptability to research purposes. It addresses intercultural competence holistically, as a causal path that allows for examining motivation/attitude, knowledge/skills, and desired internal and external outcomes for facilitating effective interactions with host culture members.
Themes from the findings of the spirituality and intercultural competence literature are similar. Both constructs emphasize the importance of relationships, culture, and growth through adaptation and/or transformation. Along with valuing community and respect for others, they both incorporate experience and reflection for learning. Yet a significant gap in the literature exists that connects spirituality and intercultural competence. An impetus for this research was to address this gap by exploring how the development of these two constructs, spirituality and intercultural competence, are related and the implications for adult learning and practice. This study found that developing spirituality, or spiritual growth, in a host culture was a significant factor for developing intercultural competence, and vice versa.

Spirituality is rarely mentioned in the intercultural competence literature which led to a curiosity about whether or not spiritual growth could play a role in developing skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors for effective participation in a host culture (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). No study has been found to examine intercultural competence with a focus on sojourners who profess a Christ-centered worldview and how their spiritual growth in the context of a least developed host country relates to intercultural competence.

While examining spirituality and/or intercultural competence are broad concepts with a range of research possibilities, this study limited its scope to the gap in the literature that explores how these two areas interconnect. If the social, historical, and cultural context shapes spirituality (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003) and immersing in a culture can lead to adaptation and the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), then more must be known about how spirituality and intercultural competence may be linked. Another unique limitation was the study’s focus on a population originating in the United States whose host culture includes a least developed country. Furthermore, unlike a bounty of previous studies that examined short-term
immersion experiences, this study was bounded by those who have lived and worked abroad for at least two years. A longer immersion experience of two years or more allows sufficient time for building relationships with those from host cultures, which is crucial to the adaptive process of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009; Kim, 2009). This study took a specific lens of spirituality, a Theo-centric orientation that espouses a Christ-centered worldview, to seek understanding about spiritual growth in a culturally different context and its relationship to the development of intercultural competence.

**Problem Statement**

Spirituality (Tisdell, 2006) and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009) have been increasingly significant topics throughout the literature in adult education. A consensus exists throughout the spirituality literature that spirituality is an elusive yet prominent topic that deserves attention in adult education because of its relationship to learning. Likewise, due to increased globalization, the need for intercultural competence is also significant for learning how to relate to others of different cultural backgrounds.

While some studies have shown the link of spirituality to culture (Manglos, 2010; Tisdell, 2003), a paucity of empirical research has addressed spirituality’s role in developing intercultural competence and vice versa. Little is known about how these two constructs interconnect. Few if any studies have been conducted on U.S. Americans living and working abroad for an extensive period of time, and how spiritual growth may have contributed to the adaptive process of developing intercultural competence. The gap widens notably when the focus is on followers of Christ who espouse a Christ-centered view of spirituality. If the social, historical, and cultural context shapes one’s spirituality (English, 2001; Tisdell, 2003), and immersing in a culture can
lead to adaptation and the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009), then more must be known about how spirituality and intercultural competence may be linked.

**Purpose of Research**

Operating out of a sociocultural theoretical framework and employing narrative inquiry as a methodology, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ working in least developed countries.

**Research Questions**

Based upon the purpose of this study, this research was guided by three questions:

1. How do followers of Christ describe spiritual growth in the context of a least developed country?
2. How do they describe their development of intercultural competencies in a least developed country?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence?

These three research questions addressed the role of a social, historical, and cultural context on the adult learning process through the inextricable connection of spiritual growth and intercultural competence for U.S. American sojourners in a host culture. Using sociocultural theory as a framework, and the lenses of Christ-centered spirituality and Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence, the impetus of these questions was to explore the role of a social, historical, and cultural context on the learning process.
Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theoretical framework. Used in conjunction with Christ-centered spirituality and the Deardorff (2006) model of intercultural competence, sociocultural theory allowed for an exploration of spiritual growth and its relationship to developing intercultural competence by examining the interplay between people and their social, historical, and cultural contexts. This section defines sociocultural theory, outlines its function as a framework for understanding how spirituality and intercultural competence may be developed, and highlights how its application can contribute to the field of adult education.

Overview of Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is built upon the Vygotskian premise that learning occurs in a social context (Eun, 2010; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). It explains learning as a social process where knowledge is co-constructed through the interplay of a learner’s social, historical, and cultural contexts that incorporates experience, belief, cultural history, values, and worldview (Alfred, 2002; Shweder, 1991). Lambert (2002) determined:

All of these factors influence how we interact with and interpret our encounters with new ideas and events. As our personal perspectives are mediated with the world through inquiry and language, we construct and attribute meaning to these encounters, building new knowledge in the process. This constructive, interpretive work is facilitated and deepened when it is undertaken with others and with reflection. (p.xvi)

A sociocultural theoretical framework allows for an investigation into how adults make meaning of their experiences. Meaning represents the world (D’Andrade, 1987) and is defined as “a perception, thought, or feeling that a person experiences and might want to communicate to
others” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.29). Sociocultural theory intertwines cognition with context, mediated by cultural tools, where meaning is socially constructed.

Context is defined as the ever-present factors that influence meaning (Alfred, 2002), such as experience, culture, history, identity components, physical environment, and people around us (Alfred, 2002; Edwards, 2005; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Because sociocultural theory is anchored in context and insists meaning is socially constructed, what people bring to learning experiences contributes significantly to the learning process. Thus, according to sociocultural theory, learning through the interplay of people and their context occurs as the “cognizing individual interacts with other members of a community” (Cobb, 1994, p.14).

According to Bakhtin (1981) these social interactions may be mediated by language. Wertsch’s (1985) work strengthens the link between Vygotsky and language by asserting cognition results from engaging in forms of cultural mediation integrated into social interactions. With a focus on language as a mediator, Bakhtin (1981) emphasizes the primacy of context, and equity of all voices, where the interaction of all components contributes to meaning and is understood as part of a greater whole. The notion of constant interactions between cultural tools with and within a context is known as a *dialogic interplay*, and sets “into motion a process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and interillumination” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.12).

Bakhtin (1981) illuminates language as a contextual component of sociocultural theory. Enhanced by his work, sociocultural theory explains learning as an active, co-constructive, dialogic process of interaction with people and context, comprised as a whole, inseparable interplay mediated through language. The experiences of followers of Christ with and within a diverse cultural context actively engage in a complex process of meaning making that involves a narrative reflection on their social, historical, and cultural interactions (Eun, 2010). Adult
education researchers operating within a sociocultural framework seek to understand how learners develop within their own cultural context; how learners process and interpret their worldview; and also how learners interpret their identity in relation to others (Alfred, 2002).

The impetus for employing sociocultural theory as a framework for understanding how adults learn was strengthened by its contribution to adult education. Discussed further in the next chapter, sociocultural theory contributes to adult education in four main ways. First, sociocultural theory hints at a relationship between spirituality and intercultural competence because it examines the dynamic interplay of people and context. Second, the integral nature of context in the learning process allows for an examination of how culture is mediated to the individual through sociocultural elements (i.e. language, symbols, writing, art, etc). Since sociocultural theory asserts learning occurs through internalizing the interaction with the external sociocultural context and vice versa (Estep, 2002; Wertsch, 1991), context must be considered for understanding how spirituality and intercultural competence are developed. Third, sociocultural theory emphasizes a co-learner environment. As evidenced in the spirituality and intercultural competence literature, developing both of these constructs occurs relationally. And fourth, sociocultural theory provides the potential for building community, honoring voices, and promoting equity by paying attention to all the factors that contribute to learning.

**Sociocultural Theory as a Framework for Exploring Spirituality**

Sociocultural theory provided a fitting framework for examining spiritual growth within least developed countries. As developmental beings, spiritual growth occurs within a developmental process (Ward, 1995). A foundation on Vygotsky’s (1978) concepts of cognition as a non-systematized interaction with the social context was useful for understanding how spirituality can be developed. Vygotsky’s (1978) work offers six significant factors that can be
related to spiritual growth as a developmental process (Estep, 2002): (a) the interrelationship of cognition and social interaction; (b) relevance for an interdisciplinary and holistic approach; (c) cognition described as non-linear development; (d) the complex relationship between human thought development and the material aspect of human culture; (e) the variety of ways learning occurs; and (f) the mind is not exclusively rational, individual, internal, and innate, but rather extends beyond the individual and begins in society.

Considering sociocultural theory and Vygotsky’s developmental factors provided insight into the processes of spiritual growth and intercultural competence for followers of Christ working abroad. Through the framework of sociocultural theory, the succeeding study sought to explore both of these constructs as deeply personal and socially communal learning processes, and how they interrelate to each other.

**Sociocultural Theory as a Framework for Exploring Intercultural Competence**

Sociocultural theory was also a fitting framework for exploring intercultural competence as a process that can occur for those spending significant time in a host culture. As Eun (2011) summarizes, “Being able to solve real-life problems effectively [is] seen as an important indicator of intercultural competence, which [is] the main focus of Vygotsky’s developmental research” (p.414). Thus, a sociocultural theoretical framework helped illuminate intercultural competence as a learning process.

Since the development of intercultural competence does not occur in a vacuum, paying attention to the interactions of people and their social, historical, and cultural context was significant. And because intercultural competence is a complex epistemology that views learning as a “joint venture with many partners” (Magala, 2005, p.29), sociocultural theory allows for thorough consideration of the contextual factors, including relationships between
sojourners and host culture members, inextricably linked to the learning process. Yoon et al. (2011) contend “that attention to contextual factors would clarify the influencing mechanisms and forces on [adaptation] and would provide a more holistic view” of the learning process (p.85). Their content analysis of immersing in a host culture recognizes multiple dimensions of learning, where dynamic interaction leads to adaptation. With a sociocultural theoretical framework the process of intercultural competence echoes these assertions of multiplicity and interplay, particularly as it applies to meaningful relationships.

Grounded in the notion that the mind is publicly and culturally formed, Vygotsky (1978) looked at the internalization and externalization of contextual factors as a process of development within a social situation (Edwards, 2010). This was mirrored by Deardorff (2006) who proposed internal and external outcomes of intercultural competence result from interaction within the context of a host culture. Sociocultural theory asserts “relationships change as learners take in what is culturally valued, consequently interpret their social worlds differently, and therefore act in and on them in newly formed ways, which in turn impact on the social situations” (Edwards, 2010, p.64). This Vygotskian notion, like the Deardorff (2006) model of intercultural competence, suggests learners are actively involved in shaping and being shaped by their sociocultural context.

**Methodology Overview and Design**

This study operated out of a qualitative research paradigm to explore Christ-centered spirituality and intercultural competence as conveyed through participants’ stories of their experiences. Because people and their life experiences comprise “the backbone of the study,” a qualitative design offered rich insight into how these two personal constructs are related and developed in a social, historical, and cultural context (Janesick, 2007, p.71).
Requiring the researcher to become the research instrument, qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena while acknowledging other interpretations exist and that there is no one correct interpretation. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) recognize its importance for attempting to make sense of experiences by examining the meanings people bring to them. The appeal of qualitative research lies in its “discourse on the personal, on what it means to be alive” to which anyone can relate (Janesick, 2007, p.71). It is a holistic approach that values people and their experiences for understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002). While relying on a “passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people” and their unique experiences (Janesick, 2007, p.71), a qualitative paradigm allows for an examination of the elements that contribute to learning, particularly with regards to spiritual growth and intercultural competence.

A qualitative research paradigm had also been chosen because of what it is not. It provides an alternative to a quantitative approach, which has the tendency to decontextualize and depersonalize participants and phenomena. Furthermore, quantitative studies seek to count, calculate, and control (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), which contrasts with this study’s primary interest to honor voices and narratives while gaining insight into adult learning processes relating to Christ-centered spirituality and intercultural competence. A strictly quantitative approach, which aims to predict and quantify, cannot adequately articulate experience, nor can it satisfactorily answer the research questions related to this study’s purpose (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988). Furthermore, quantitative research may impoverish meaning by abandoning nuance and reducing experiences to limited, “sterile”, and “untrustworthy” calculations (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.17).
Within a qualitative paradigm, this study’s purpose aligned consistently with a narrative inquiry design. Rooted in Dewey (1938) who valued life experience for learning, narrative inquiry is defined as an approach that studies the ways humans experience the world as a source of knowledge and understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It uses inductive reasoning to describe and interpret narratives in an effort to make meaning. Narrative inquiry was worthwhile for exploring the relationship between spiritual growth and intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ who work in least developed countries. Employing an introspective framework presented by Clandinin et al. (2007) provided a rationale for choosing narrative inquiry for such an exploration. Their framework suggests researchers examine three dimensions: the personal; the social; and the practical dimension to justify the use of narrative inquiry.

First, providing personal justification for using narrative inquiry involves situating the researcher and conveying his or her interest in the inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2007). This inquiry about followers of Christ working abroad emanated from personal experiences living abroad and an interest in spirituality. This research sought to create a space and honor the stories of people with comparable experiences to give them a voice and understand their perceived spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence as inextricable interactants in a particular sociocultural context.

Second, the social dimension for employing narrative inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2007) facilitates understanding about how intercultural and social narratives contribute to spiritual growth and intercultural competence. “Communities understand their spiritualities through narrative,” but followers of Christ “braid their communal story out of thousands of personal narratives of transformation” (Neff, 2011, p.26). This fit neatly with a sociocultural theoretical
framework with its emphasis on co-constructing knowledge and served as a core rationalization for choosing narrative inquiry as a research methodology in studying the spiritual growth and development of intercultural competence for followers of Christ abroad.

Narrative inquiry also addresses larger social issues. These issues include awareness and sensitivity to other cultures, which are products of developing Christ-centered spirituality and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Yaconelli, 2003). Narrative inquiry at its core is “sensitive to the cultural milieu” within which learning occurs (Rossiter, 1999, p.80). Narratives are based on experience, and experience intrinsically involves culture as part of a social, historical, and cultural context (Andrews et al., 2008; Mishler, 1986). Context also comes with the assumption that events, people, places, and time are always in transition, which suits research that examines the adaptive qualities of intercultural competence, as well as its relationship to spiritual growth. Another larger social issue accessed through narrative inquiry is identity. Summarized succinctly, our “identities are narratives” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.202).

The third and final rationale for choosing narrative inquiry as a research methodology is the practical dimension (Clandinin et al., 2007). The practical justification provides insight into practice. With a sociocultural theoretical framework that emphasized interactive relationships for learning, narrative inquiry was a consistent design for exploring the co-construction of spiritual and intercultural knowledge to improve practice for adults as global citizens. Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings that inform this study, narrative inquiry is grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of learning where understanding comes from socially constructed knowledge (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Thus, employing narrative inquiry as a research design can advance the field of adult education by exploring how adults describe their spiritual and cultural development.
This study selected a purposeful sample (N=11) of U.S. American adults, ages 25 years and older, who have lived and worked in a least developed country (LDC) or a country listed on the failed states index for a minimum of two years. For this study, host cultures were all in southern Africa, including Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Beginning with those already known, participants were identified through snowball sampling. Though not intentional, participants were Caucasian, including seven men and four women. Ten of the participants currently remain living abroad, and one man returned to the U.S. just over one year ago.

Consistent with the criteria of the study and the definition of spirituality that informed this research all participants espoused a Christ-centered worldview, signing they agreed to the operational definition of spirituality that guided this study; and they identified themselves as followers of Christ.

The procedure for data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews, with sample questions shown in Appendix A (p.290). To analyze and interpret data, this study employed a two-fold approach to (a) keep the stories intact, and (b) use constant comparative analysis for the emergence of themes and patterns. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, findings were verified through an audit trail, member checks, data audits with peer examinations, and triangulation, both theoretically and analytically. Further explanation and a rationale for these selections are offered in chapter three.

**Definition of Terms**

1. **Christ-centered spirituality** represents the center of a follower of Christ’s ontological worldview as a deepening relationship with the divine triune of God through a total reliance on Jesus Christ for salvation where relevance and meaning are found in the Bible, and the glory of God is acknowledged through the work of the Holy Spirit as the
supreme guiding principle in one’s life (Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2003).

2. **Context** is defined as the ever-present factors that influence meaning (Alfred, 2002), such as experience, culture, history, identity components, physical environment, and people around us (Alfred, 2002; Edwards, 2005; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009).

3. **Faith** translated from the Greek word *pistuo* from the New Testament means *believe* (Strong, 2007). Thus a community of faith is equivalent to a community of believers. For followers of Christ, faith emphasizes belief in God and His son Jesus Christ as the exclusive way to eternal life (Keller, 2008).

4. **Followers of Christ** are those who profess a Christ-centered worldview and strive to emulate the example of Jesus Christ presented in the Bible (Barna, 2001; Niebuhr, 2001).

5. **Host Culture** for this study is the southern African community where sojourners live, work, and maintain daily contact with its members.

6. **Intercultural competence** describes a learning process of broadening worldviews through adaptation as the interactive, ongoing development of skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values for effective participation in a host culture (Deardorff, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

7. **Meaning** represents the world (D’Andrade, 1987) as “a perception, thought, or feeling that a person experiences and might want to communicate to others” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.29).

8. **Narrative**, used interchangeably with *story* (Clark, 2010; Riessman, 2008; Rossiter, 1999), is defined as a “fundamental unit that accounts for human experience” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4).
9. **Narrative Inquiry** is a qualitative research approach that studies the ways humans experience the world as a source of knowledge and understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

10. **Sociocultural theory** explains learning as a social process where knowledge is co-constructed through the interplay of a social, historical, and cultural context that incorporates experience, belief, cultural history, values, and worldview (Alfred, 2002; Shweder, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

11. **Sojourner** describes a person who relocates to a foreign country, outside their passport country, for a limited, albeit extensive period of time for a specific purpose, with tentative intentions of returning to their culture of origin (Schwartz, et al., 2010).

12. **Spiritual growth** a learning process of developing spirituality that refers to the perceived, positive changes in spirituality that transpires over time. For followers of Christ spiritual growth deepens a relationship with God through prayer, devotion to the Bible, and community with others (Chan, 2008).

13. **Spirituality** is broadly defined as way of finding meaning and purpose (English, 2001; Tisdell, 2008).

14. **Worldview** is “the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 25-6).

**Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

This study on the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence was based on several specific assumptions and limitations.
Assumptions

The following assumptions were embedded in this research:

1. Followers of Christ hold similar core beliefs in biblical authority and the gospel of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.
2. Followers of Christ can identify and express the components that contribute to their spiritual growth.
3. The components for spiritual growth depend on cultural context, which can be different in a host culture.
4. Meaning is co-constructed in a social, historical, and cultural context, and therefore followers of Christ are influenced by their relationships with members of a host culture.
5. Developing intercultural competence is beneficial for adapting to a host culture and relating to others.
6. The story, or narrative, is “the fundamental unit” that accounts for the spiritual and cultural experiences for followers of Christ living in a host culture (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4).

Limitations

The limitations of this study included:

1. Narratives are not static. Rather they are constantly evolving, fluid, influenced by context, and perspectives change with time.
2. The constructivist approach of sociocultural theory and the claim of absolute Truth espoused by followers of Christ can pose questions about the nature of reality. If reality is socially constructed, as sociocultural theory asserts, then reconciling the tension with the belief in an absolute reality may be problematic. Bakhtinian (1981; 1986) concepts of
learning within a context, mediated by cultural tools (i.e. language) gives a license to examine spiritual growth holistically by borrowing from Vygotsky's notion that learning is a social process shaped by a social, historical, and cultural context (Wertsch, 2007).

3. Both spirituality and intercultural competence lack universal definitions within their respective fields. Spirituality includes a range of Theo-centric and non-Theo-centric perspectives. And universal models of intercultural competence do not exist because of the difficulty applying the term across varied cultures and contexts (Deardorff, 2009).

4. The researcher’s voice is threaded throughout the study. As Shweder (1991) notes, “when thinking through cultures, there is no place else, no neutral place, for us to stand” (p.23). Geertz (1973) echoes these sentiments by declaring the contestability of cultural analysis. Therefore, because this study examined the role of cultural context for learning, separating the influence of the researcher’s cultural background as it interplays with the narrative of participants was impossible.

5. This study was conducted in English, which does not allow for the potential nuance of the primary language of the host culture.

6. Participants’ backgrounds and the experience brought into their spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence prior to moving abroad was not included at the expense of a full understanding of context.

**Significance of Study**

As mentioned previously, little if any literature exists on the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. This lack of research alludes to the significance this study has for understanding both constructs.
The prominence of spirituality in many people’s lives makes a study that explores its role and how it is developed a significant endeavor for understanding how adults learn and make sense of the world. Many people view the world through a spiritual lens (Chan, 2008; English, 2000; Tisdell, 1999). To some, spirituality is at the core of human existence (Tisdell, 1999) and can explain the meaning of life, as well as bring healing and purpose. For followers of Christ, spirituality is deeply personal and represents their worldview centered on Christ. By exploring how spirituality is developed within the context of a host culture, this study resulted in greater understanding of how followers of Christ adapt and become effective participants in a host society.

Thus, this study found spiritual growth is inextricably related to the adaptive process of intercultural competence. Exploring this relationship was significant because it provides insight into how followers of Christ develop the relational skills and cultural knowledge to adapt to a host culture. Due to increased globalization and awareness of international needs, many people are spending more time away from their home cultures and immersed in a host culture (Deardorff, 2004; Nishigori, Otani, Plint, Uchino, & Ban, 2009). For some, this may mean living and working in a least developed country. Whether for business, humanitarian work, education, or other reason, this study addressed a growing need for adults to develop intercultural competence for effective participation in a host culture. As an adaptive process, intercultural competence transforms people from national to global citizens (Ashwill & Du’ong, 2009) who build community through meaningful relationships and perpetuate the process of awareness and knowledge that develops through interactions with host cultures (Hofstede, 2004). By exploring how intercultural competence develops through spirituality, and how spirituality develops through intercultural competence, this study examined how followers of Christ related to and learned from their host culture members to function productively in their host communities.
For the field of adult education, since spirituality is central to human life (English, 2000; Tisdell, 1999; Yaconelli, 2003) exploring how it relates to the adaptive process of living and working in a host culture was a worthwhile endeavor. Furthermore, understanding spiritual growth and its relationship to intercultural competence was significant in its potential to help those who work in a host culture, particularly followers of Christ, make meaning of their experience. Because most research on spirituality focuses on non-Theo-centric perspectives (Marcic, 2000), this study will enrich the field by examining a Theo-centric perspective. Christ-centered spirituality has been ignored in adult education; therefore this study was important for addressing the gap.

Along with contributions to understanding spirituality as a way of making sense of the world, this study explored how people adapt and function effectively in a host culture, which can assist others through the process. To function effectively means to engage in “behaviors that lead to the achievement of desired outcomes” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.59). Determining what that means for a particular cultural context will provide a valuable roadmap for navigating a host culture. Because both spirituality and intercultural competence view learning as relational, this study builds on these epistemological views by its examination of interactions between sojourners and host culture members.

Through the lens of sociocultural theory, which informed this study, these interactions represent the co-construction of knowledge. Examining spiritual growth and intercultural competence developed through the interplay of social, historical, and cultural contextual factors highlighted the relevance of sociocultural theory and Vygotskian concepts to adult education. Perhaps more than contribute to this theory, this study used its firm foundation to understand the learning process as relational, socially constructed, and mediated by cultural tools as a construct.
that incorporates an inseparable interplay of experience and context (Eun, 2010; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978).

Using the Deardoff (2006) model of intercultural competence in conjunction with sociocultural theory allowed for a discussion on how intercultural competence and spirituality are shaped by the context of a host culture. This model was important for understanding the processes of identity and cultural orientation, which are components for making meaning of experience (Tisdell, 1999). Most models of intercultural competence ignore context (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), but the Deardorff (2006) model considers the social, historical, and cultural components of context. This study aimed to support and expand the importance of examining context as part of the learning process. Though designed for exploring how people relate and adapt to cultures different from their own, understanding spirituality in relationship to Deardorff’s (2006) model contributed to underscoring the importance of Christ-centered spirituality for learning in other areas. Furthermore, with an emphasis on process, this model provided understanding about the interactions that develop spirituality, as well as illuminated the relationship of spiritual growth to intercultural competence.

Along with broadening an understanding of spirituality and intercultural competence, this study provided epistemological insights for practice by placing “a heightened emphasis on culture and a corresponding interplay of forces that both encourage and discourage accommodation and understanding among different people” (Lustig, 1996, p.3). For followers of Christ living and working in least developed countries, understanding this interplay of forces is important for learning how to adapt and function effectively in a host culture. This study provided insight into how spiritual growth plays a role in developing intercultural competence and vice versa, as well as participants’ descriptions of these dual learning processes.
Furthermore, the narratives of followers of Christ illuminated spiritual growth away from the home culture and honored the voices of a population widely ignored in the field of adult education.

Another significant aspect of this study addressed the primary concentration of intercultural competence literature on the individual. Deardorff (2009) calls for more focus on relational aspects of intercultural competence, beyond the individual to incorporate all interactants, including context. Using sociocultural theory allowed for an examination of intercultural competence as a social process of co-constructing knowledge in the interplay of social, historical, and cultural contextual forces. Furthermore, no study has been found that examines intercultural competence through the lens of Christ-centered spirituality. Therefore this study addressed that research gap and contributed to new understandings of how spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are symbiotic learning processes, inextricably linked in their dependence on the other for sustenance and development.

Finally, this study had personal significance. Having lived in Nassau, Bahamas as a daughter of missionaries, this research aimed to honor the voices of those who share similar experiences. By exploring their experiences, this research satiated long-held curiosities about how fellow followers of Christ have cultivated their spirituality and developed intercultural competence in the context of a host culture. Furthermore, a specific focus on Christ-centered spirituality began to fill a void in the adult education academe that is dominated by marginalizing, one-size-fits-all descriptions of spirituality (Moberg, 2002).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the purpose of the study to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. Along with presenting the
problem, providing an overview of the study’s foundational areas, introducing the research methodology, identifying key terms, and outlining limitations and assumptions, this chapter established a rationale and its significance to the field of adult education. Chapter two examines the relevant conceptual and empirical literature on sociocultural theory, spirituality, and intercultural competence.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the landscape of the literature relevant to a study on the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ working in least developed countries. As a foundation for a study that addressed this overarching exploration, this literature review begins with an examination of sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework. After exploring the conceptual literature to establish the foundational origins of sociocultural theory, this section considers its contributions to adult education and outlines the challenges of its application.

The literature review continues into the conceptual literature for the major foundational areas of the succeeding study: spirituality and intercultural competence. First, spirituality is framed as a Theo-centric/non-Theo-centric continuum across the field of adult education. After defining Christ-centered spirituality, which serves as a foundation for the succeeding study, the differences between spirituality and religion are outlined. Next, spirituality is examined as an epistemology, followed by a discussion of the four themes that emerge from the literature involving spirituality’s relationship to identity, wholeness, connection, and culture.

A brief overview of the empirical literature on spirituality is followed by a section that identifies and discusses the following three themes that emerge from the findings of the studies: (a) spirituality has value for exploring life’s meaning and purpose, its contribution to psychological well-being and values, and relationships that build connection and community; (b) spirituality relates to identity; and (c) spirituality connects to culture. Finally a critique on
spirituality in adult education is offered before a section that relates spirituality to intercultural competence.

The second major foundational area of intercultural competence begins with a definition and overview. Themes of intercultural competence are discussed next, and include: the capacity for adaptation, a transformative nature, relational components, and impediments to the process of developing intercultural competence. After an examination of its assumptions, a discussion of the Deardorff (2006) model demonstrates intercultural competence as an ongoing process of adaptation and interaction with a sociocultural context.

Intercultural competence themes from the empirical literature are examined next, including outcomes, transformative nature, and evidence of how intercultural competence is developed. Finally, this literature review concludes by identifying a gap in the literature that guided this study on the relationship between spiritual growth and intercultural competence, and how adults learn through the interplay of these constructs and their social, historical, and cultural context.

**Sociocultural Theoretical Framework**

“All adult educators are theorists” (Brookfield, 2010, p.71)

To demonstrate sociocultural theory’s function as a framework for understanding spirituality and intercultural competence as epistemological constructs, this section draws on the literature to show its foundational origins and establish definitions of sociocultural theory and context. Assumptions and contributions to adult education are also examined, which underpin how sociocultural theory can bring a study of spirituality and intercultural competence into sharper focus.
Foundations of Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, also referred to as social constructivism, is founded on the work of many scholars including Dewey, Lindeman, Piaget, and Vygotsky. The latter, Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky deserves attention as a pioneer who examined the dynamic relationship between cognition and the sociocultural environment. As previously established in chapter one, sociocultural theory, relying heavily on Vygotsky (1978) asserts learning occurs in a social, historical, and cultural context (Eun, 2010; Gee, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Mediated through cultural tools, signs, and symbols (such as language), sociocultural theory defines learning as an active, co-constructive, dialogic process of interaction with people that incorporates an inseparable interplay of experience and the social, historical, and cultural aspects of context (Cobb, 1994; Lambert, 2002; Shweder, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

Adult educators draw on Vygotsky’s research to explain how the individual human mind developed in its autonomous, creative, and rational form by looking at the social context of that development (Bakhurst, 2007; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Vygotsky succinctly believed “the individual becomes for himself what he is in himself through what he manifests for others” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.105). This is why comprehensively analyzing contextual components is so important for understanding how individuals learn. Applying sociocultural theory to this study on spirituality and intercultural competence provides the necessary lens that allows for careful attention to the role of culture as context in adult learning theory (Alfred, 2003; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Because examining learning is abstract and intangible, sociocultural theory provides an epistemological focus on those who interact with the cultural, historical, and social context (Schauffele & Baptiste, 2000). After all, according to Saussure (Berger, 2005), things do not give meaning to things; rather *people* give meaning to things.
Much of Vygotsky’s (1978; 1986; 1997) work focused on the social primacy of cognitive development. His ideas, with emphasis on context and interaction, have a powerfully broad application particularly for adult learners in diverse contexts (Eun, 2010; Novak, 1998). Novak (1993) proposes meaningful learning as the basis for human constructivism without delineating children and adults. Learning patterns are complex, but the assumption is that those patterns apply to all humans. Lambert (2002) asserts that the learning needs of children and adults are similar, and “patterns of learning must repeat themselves through the lives of individuals if our personal, professional, and community endeavors are to make sense to us, to have coherence and meaning” (p.xvi).

Regardless of sociocultural theory’s roots in Vygotsky’s research on child learning and development, Niewolny and Wilson (2009) categorize sociocultural theory as a social learning discourse anchored in constructivism. Adult educators are increasingly engaging sociocultural frameworks as an alternative to past concentration on individualism (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Research in concepts like experiential learning (Fenwick, 2000) and situated cognition (Lave, 1988), describe sociocultural theory as a phenomenon amalgamated by “social behavior, experience, activity, mediation, positionality, and context” (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009, p.260). Therefore, sociocultural theory has powerful implications for adult learning, particularly with its insights into the value of context and interaction that comprise a community and its influence on other adult learning theories.

This idea of learning in community saturates adult education. A learning community has been defined by Maxine Greene “as the shop in which thoughts are constructed and deconstructed and about how cognition, perception, imagination, and memory must be conceived as themselves, and directly, social affairs” (as cited in Lambert, 2002, p.ix). Employing
Vygotskian (1978) concepts help adult educators understand the interplay of the social processes that occur in learning communities. When external and internal factors intertwine, knowledge is co-constructed through the dialogic nature of thought and language (Vygotsky, 1978).

The role of language beyond purely cognitive and linguistic terms is an inextricable realm of sociocultural theory because it is considered a symbolic mediator of meaning. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, “verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning” (p.259). Language is a non-neutral tool for interaction (Hofstede, 2001), and development occurs when language is shared in a social environment. A word has meaning only when it is spoken and given context and intention (Bakhtin, 1981). He asserts words are conceived and shaped in dialogic interaction. This is also consistent with John Dewey’s proposal that language allows learners to sort their thoughts about the world (Bruner, 1990). Since the world and our contexts are always changing, meaning then is “a dynamic, fluid, complex whole” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.245). Sociocultural theory elaborates on concepts of language and dialogic interactions with epistemological implications. Teaching and learning actively engages people in bi-directional influences as co-constructors of knowledge (Eun, 2010). For adult education, teachers and learners become participant-observer-inquirers where all are actively intertwined in the learning process. The collaborative nature of sociocultural theory is a theme found throughout the literature and informs the succeeding study on how spirituality and intercultural competence are developed through dialogic and dynamic interactions with all that comprises a host culture.
Assumptions of Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory operates under several assumptions. Outlined in this section, these assumptions illuminate a perspective of learning that describes how spirituality and intercultural competence are developed. They are organized into three overlapping categories: (a) assumptions related to a sociocultural focus; (b) epistemological assumptions; and (c) contextual assumptions.

First, a sociocultural focus within the sociocultural theoretical framework moves away from the individual and toward the collective cultural and social experiences. The assumption here is that an individual’s higher functioning cognition is a derivative of the social life (Thompson, 2010; Wertsch, 1991). While physiologically cognition occurs internally, Estep (2002) notes that sociocultural theory views the mind as also public and external, thus emphasizing the role of social context. Therefore, an additional assumption related to a sociocultural focus is that all individuals have a cultural identity and are members within a defined culture. Operating out of this assumption, sociocultural theory focuses on the social nature and social processes of learning, inseparable from the role of culture (Bruner, 1990; 1996).

Second, epistemological assumptions, or those assumptions relating to ways of knowing, also underlie sociocultural theory. Examining how individuals and social context intertwine in a complex dynamic to make meaning is the epistemological thrust of sociocultural theory. In analyzing Vygotskian concepts, Estep (2002) noted “society and culture are the conduits and contents of learning and development” (p.154). It assumes that an individual’s engagement in learning is a function of their cultural identity (Alfred, 2002). Because context incorporates so much for learning, a holistic approach is crucial for optimizing meaning making. Along with
experience, identity (including faith, economic status, age, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) also forms an epistemological foundation. This demonstrates a deeper assumption that relationships and socialization patterns form the primary building blocks for human growth and development (Lambert, 2002; Lee & Sheared, 2002).

Third, sociocultural theory operates out of contextual assumptions. Context includes all aspects of a learning environment. It is not just a physical, specifiable space; rather it includes the entire social context, and the all encompassing worlds of learners where the individual and context mutually constitute each other (Wertsch, 2007). Sociocultural theory assumes education is a “natural process of growth within an environment” (Estep, 2002, p.154). As Niewolny and Wilson (2009) note, context is not merely a “container” but a crucial, inevitable member in the dialectical relationship for co-constructing knowledge (p.33). The learning environment recognizes the presence of hegemony, and seeks to minimize marginalization to foster equity. As alluded earlier, sociocultural theory assumes the importance of positionality and the significance of cultural and historical contexts. It allows for considering how learners with varied positions and experiences interact and relate to make meaning.

**Contributions of Sociocultural Theory to Adult Education**

Sociocultural theory makes several contributions to understanding how adults learn, which are foundational for studying spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. This section looks at how this lens (a) explains context in the learning process, and (b) emphasizes social learning as a co-learner environment.

First, sociocultural theory explains learning is never free of context (Alfred, 2002; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Vygotsky’s foundational work allows an understanding of “cognition through context” (Edwards, 2005, p.12) by emphasizing the dialectical relationship of
learning with, and not separate from, their context (Lave, 1988). Fluid and always changing (Alfred, 2002), context is more than a physical location or a brick and mortar educational institution. Though an educational setting such as the classroom is a contextual element, other contextual factors are the history, culture, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability of students and teachers; roles, responsibilities, and prior knowledge of participants within the learning community; the course design, including the curriculum and learning activities; the learning environment; and the history, culture, and structure of the educational institution to name a few. Since these recurring contexts constitute the dominant cultures of a person’s world, the interaction of these contextual factors influences the meaning that the learner makes of the learning process (p.8).

In this, sociocultural theory allowed for an examination of all these contextual factors because they comprise the fertile ground to cultivate individual development, particularly spiritual growth and intercultural competence. Through the interaction of followers of Christ as learners with their context, particularly through connecting and dialogue with others, meaning is socially constructed. Understanding is further perpetuated as followers of Christ glean a harvest of “tools, symbols, resources, and strategies to manage the learning process” in a host culture (Alfred, 2002, p.5). This skillful bounty helps individuals relate to their context and also develop identity and self-awareness, defined as “understanding of who we are and why” (Cranton, 2003, p.153).

Scholars in the field of adult education are insisting on “the importance of social and cultural contexts in determining what and how we know and learn” (Alfred, 2002, p.4). As mentioned earlier, sociocultural theory examines the interconnections between people, as well as the social, historical, and cultural aspects of context. Contrarily, some current practices in adult
education are geared toward an individual/cognitive view of constructing knowledge that “presents a static view of learning and fails to account for how issues of positionality influence learners’ experience” in adult education (p.4). Sociocultural theory offers an approach that incorporates the multiple worldviews that are formed by varied social contexts, which were key components of the study.

Since there is always a learning context (Jacobson, 1996; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009), employing sociocultural theory as an epistemological framework for understanding spiritual growth and intercultural competence complemented a holistic approach to learning. Because of its integrated nature, sociocultural theory allows for an examination of the interrelationship of affective and cognitive components of learning (Eun, 2011). In this study sociocultural theory situated the follower of Christ as a developing person within a social, historical, and cultural context and examined how they interrelate. The intricate development of cognitive and affective components (Eun, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978), along with the interdependence of interpersonal relationships comprise context and deserved attention for gaining insight into spiritual growth and intercultural competence.

Sociocultural theory offers a second reason for its application to spiritual growth and intercultural competence in its emphasis on social learning as a co-learner environment. A co-learner environment is defined as an approach to learning that maximizes learner participation by sharing the responsibility for learning (Cranton, 2003). In a co-learner environment, “people work together, each with different understandings and experiences, to generate knowledge” (p.45). It is built on respect, trust, and equity; where learners can feel safe and all voices are valued in an effort to achieve community (Graziano, 2008).
Alfred’s (2002) critique of adult education notes discourse empowers some learners while silencing others, according to their sociocultural context. She says “sociocultural theory holds promise for informing a more inclusive adult education” and provides the opportunity to pay “attention to how the values, practices, and resources inherent in a community validate some and marginalize others” (p.11). Furthermore, sociocultural theory, as rooted in a Vygotskian approach, contends education is not merely student-centered; rather education is “student-in-society/culture-centered” (Estep, 2002, p.154). When applied to U.S. American followers of Christ living abroad, such a perspective provided a stronger impetus for analyzing spiritual and intercultural development in the context of a host culture.

A co-learner environment, sometimes referred to in the adult education field as a democratic approach to education (hooks, 2003) relies on the assumption that learning transcends the institutionalized classroom. Under sociocultural theory, democratic teaching values real world experience from within and without classroom walls and regards learning as a pathway toward a fuller and more enriched life. Guy (1999) refers to “cultural democracy” as a goal for our classrooms and societies where “a multiplicity of cultures not only co-exists but thrives” (p.13). In a democratic, or co-learning educational setting, educators are not authoritarian, but rather, he or she respects freedom, openness, and justice (Freire, 1997; Gibson, 2004). With a holistic perspective that considers the whole person and the whole context, this study was theoretically framed by a co-learning approach that examined the social process of making meaning of spiritual and intercultural experiences within host cultures.

Similar to sociocultural theory’s holistic consideration of context and the notions of reciprocity and community, spirituality involves connections between people as expressions of the dialogic interplay, mediated by cultural tools, where the co-construction of knowledge
occurs. The next section looks deeper into the conceptual and empirical literature on spirituality as a major foundational area for this study.

**Spirituality**

This section begins by framing spirituality in the field of adult education. Presented as a continuum of non-theological and theological spirituality, elements of both ends are discussed, as well as a shared space occupied by spirituality plotted on the middle of the continuum. Because spirituality is universally known as being deeply personal, whether as an individual or collective endeavor, this portion of the literature review examines more specifically what spirituality describes for followers of Christ since they constitute the purposeful sample of the succeeding study. This lens, referred to forward as “Christ-centered spirituality,” is derived from spirituality literature written by those who profess the inerrancy of the Bible as followers of Christ, as well as Biblical scripture, and generally regards spirituality as a way of fulfilling God’s purposes and the meaning of life. The next section distinguishes spirituality from religion, followed by the significance of spirituality in adult education, spirituality as an epistemology, and themes of spirituality across the field. A critique on spirituality is offered, as well as empirical studies relevant to this study, before a concluding section that relates spirituality to intercultural competence.

**Framing Spirituality in the Field of Adult Education**

Framing spirituality in the field of adult education implies the presence of boundaries. Herein proposes a challenge because spirituality has different meanings to different people. McGinn’s (1993) literature review on spirituality yielded 35 different definitions. Spirituality is a muddled, slippery term, making it difficult to grasp with a universal, consensual definition (Moberg, 2002; Tisdell, 1999; 2003; Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, Hipp,
Scott, & Kadar, 1997). A broad definition for attempting to apply spirituality to all practices and beliefs is that spirituality is about living and being (English, 2001). A one-line attempt to define spirituality, however, is insufficient because it lacks the substance and descriptiveness to be meaningful (Moberg, 2002). Furthermore, trying to satisfy everyone may leave everyone unsatisfied, even to the point of marginalization. As Moberg (2002) notes, universal measures oppress “spiritually sensitive persons and those deeply committed to a particular faith…[by] ignoring, labeling, or stereotyping the views as fanaticism, narrow- or closed-mindedness, bigotry, ethnocentrism, intolerance, fundamentalism, dogmatism, or antiquated orthodoxy” (p.55). Adult education, in its effort of inclusivity regarding spirituality, should not ignore difference at the expense of creating universals that isolate and marginalize (Hodge, 2004).

This section frames spirituality by outlining its broad landscape, presenting a figure that demonstrates spirituality as a non-theological/theological continuum, and discussions that highlights the three parts of the continuum: non-theological spirituality; the shared space in the middle; and theological spirituality.

**The broad landscape of spirituality.** The landscape of spirituality across adult education is broad. Spirituality has been linked to morality (Kohlberg, 1984), faith (Fowler, 1981), and values of compassion (McCormick, 1994). Some adult educators such as Freire (2000), Horton (1990), hooks (2003), and Tisdell (2003) see spirituality as the impetus for social change, with foundations in the social gospel and liberation theology. Others such as Palmer (2000; 2007) see spirituality as a vehicle for better understanding of self and personal growth. Spirituality has included the pursuit of “a higher sense of self” (Tisdell, Brown-Haywood, Charaniya, & West Walsh, in press) and a lower sense of self (Keller, 2008; Yaconelli, 2003), which demonstrates the broad landscape of spirituality.
Some scholars (Coleman, 1997; Marty, 1997) have presented spirituality as binary orientations that reflect sacred and secular values conveyed as Theo-centric and non-Theo-centric spirituality. Though written over a decade ago, Marcic’s (2000) literature review of over 200 books and articles on workplace spirituality found less than 20% of them mentioned God or a higher power as part of spirituality, which shows a majority of scholars are oriented toward a non-Theo-centric approach to spirituality. One way to understand the spiritual landscape in adult education may be to represent it as a continuum with a theological perspective on one end and a non-theological perspective on the other. Figure 1 demonstrates this continuum in an attempt to interpret the broad landscape of spirituality in adult education. Toward one end is an orientation toward Theo-centric spirituality and at the other is a non-Theo-centric orientation to spirituality. The next three sections explain this continuum.

Figure 1

Non-Theological/Theological Continuum of Spirituality in Adult Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Theological Spirituality</th>
<th>Theological Spirituality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values of Spirituality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Shared Values of Spirituality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Respect</td>
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<td>Love</td>
<td>Caring</td>
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<td>Compassion</td>
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<td>Contentment</td>
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<td>Forgiveness</td>
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<td>Peace</td>
<td>Hope</td>
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<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-dimensional</td>
<td>Open</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centrality to life</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowing self
Higher sense of self
Ego-centric
Relative truth
Looks inward for truth and meaning
Independent
God may be significant
Other gods may exist
Concerned with human spirit
Morality comes from within

Knowing God
Lower sense of self
Theocentric
Absolute truth
Looks outward for truth and meaning
Dependent on God
God most significant
One triune God
Concerned with Holy Spirit
Morality comes from above
**Non-theological spirituality.** Plotted as a non-theological perspective toward one end of the continuum, Astin (2004) describes spirituality as an interior focus on our subjective lives (as opposed to observable behaviors), our human consciousness that touches on the private experience of our subjective awareness, our values and identities, our purpose for living, our sense of connectedness, and the mysterious and abstract. He concludes that spirituality is a cornerstone for building community to combat marginalization and foster meaningful lives.

Based on the conceptual literature, Figure 1 depicts non-theological spirituality as an exercise of knowing oneself or achieving a higher sense of self. As an egocentric process, truth is relative and meaning and morality are mined by looking inward (Keller, 2008). While building community is valued, independence is also a cornerstone. God or gods may or may not exist or play a significant role, and the spirit within spirituality tends to focus on the human spirit.

**Shared space in the middle of the continuum.** Moving toward the middle of the continuum, spirituality has been described as an awareness of a “life force” or “flow” that may include activities such as prayer, yoga, and meditation (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). It is an active process of discovering “the extraordinary in the ordinary business of life” (Tisdell, 1999, p.88). This discovery involves both inward and outward expressions. We survey what is inside and expand to what is outside. Exploring one’s spirituality allows the excavation of relevance and meaning that transcends our individual being. English (2005) describes spirituality as an “awareness of something greater than ourselves…[that] moves one outward to others as an expression of one’s spiritual experiences” (p.1171). For adult education, because of its outward nature, spirituality can foster a genuine concern for people and how they make meaning.
Spirituality may also be defined by what it is not—it is not denominational (though it may be fostered within a denomination), nor about pushing a religious agenda (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). Spirituality is not a Pharisaical activity, nor is about condemning or judging. Spirituality may not be religious either, and this distinction will be discussed in a later section. Rather, spirituality may be described as “personal belief and experience of a divine spirit or higher purpose, about how we construct meaning, and what we individually and communally experience and attend to and honor as the sacred in our lives” (Tisdell, 2003, p.29).

This description highlights the blurred vision between the sacred and the secular (English, 2005). The middle position on the continuum allows for flexible interpretations of spirituality. It attempts to find common ground for both non-theological and theological orientations. The table and continuum summarize the recurring language throughout the literature that reflects shared values of spirituality. This summary includes: community, respect, love, caring, compassion, gratitude, contentment, patience, tolerance, kindness, forgiveness, identity, harmony, happiness, peace, hope, responsibility, awareness, multi-dimensional, open, active, sacred, centrality to life, and others.

**Theological spirituality.** A perspective that views God as sacred may plot spirituality toward the theological end of the continuum. An orientation toward this end illustrates spirituality as the “nurturing of the eternal amid the temporal, the lasting within the passing, God’s presence in the human family. It is the life of the divine Spirit in us” (Nouwen, 2001, p.48). Referring once again to the table, theological spirituality is an exercise in learning to know God, which demotes self through the practice of humility. As a Theo-centric process, truth is absolute and meaning and morality may be revealed by looking outward to sacred texts.
Dependence on God is paramount, and the *spirit* within spirituality is concerned with the Holy Spirit.

This theological view provides a springboard into Christ-centered spirituality, discussed in detail later, which is necessary for framing the succeeding study on the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. On this end of the continuum, Christ-centered spirituality offers eternal hope through a deeply personal relationship with Jesus Christ, as an omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent Savior (Carson, 2008; Keller, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2003).

**Christ-Centered Spirituality**

Schaeffer (1985) establishes a Christ-centered worldview and spirituality as one, undistinguishable entity. Referred to as *Christ-centered spirituality* from this point forward, this worldview professes Jesus Christ as central to life, whose teachings are found in sacred Biblical scripture. Many who identify their spirituality as Christ-centered refer to themselves as followers of Christ. They recognize that they “are not accepted by God because of their moral performance, wisdom, or virtue, but because of Christ’s work on their behalf” (Keller, 2008, p.20). Therefore, one’s spirituality does not depend on religious attainments, but rather an ontological view rooted in the gospel. The *gospel* may be defined as the hope of one true, loving, sovereign God who sacrificed his Son to be crucified, buried, and resurrected as a gift of eternal salvation to all humankind who trusts in Him.

As mentioned earlier, some define their spirituality exclusively on the premise of the gospel (Chan, 2008; Keller, 2008). Life begins and ends with God. The Catholic writer Thomas Merton eloquently expresses this sentiment by encouraging immersion in the “rivers of tranquility that flow from God into the whole universe and draw all things back to God” (as cited
by Goetz, 2011, p.53). Spirituality signifies the soul vitalized by the Holy Spirit, which initiates a complex process of deepening a relationship with God to make meaning. It is the “celebration of discipleship under construction...[and] the delirious consequence of a life ruined by a Jesus who will love us right into his arms” (Yaconelli, 2003, p.27). It is about life, passion, joy, and unbalance that prompt a perplexing and perpetual quest for connection and relationship.

Spirituality takes the focus off of ourselves and seeks God’s presence, right where we are, in the midst of our flaws and imperfections.

**Defining Christ-centered spirituality.** Establishing a concise, operational definition of Christ-centered spirituality is a crucial foundation for understanding the succeeding study of spirituality and its relationship to the development of intercultural competence. Thus, a Christ-centered worldview defines spirituality rooted in the gospel (I Corinthians 15:3-4, NIV) as a deepening relationship with the divine triune of God through a total reliance on Jesus Christ for salvation, where relevance and meaning are found in the Bible, and the glory of God is acknowledged through the work of the Holy Spirit as the supreme guiding principle in one’s life, which empowers us to (Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2007; I John 5:6-8, NIV; John 15:5, NIV; Isaiah 9:6, NIV; Revelation 1:8, NIV):

- **Receive the gift of eternal salvation and heavenly citizenship** (Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Philippians 3:20, NIV; Romans 6:23, NIV)

- **Cultivate the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** (Chan, 2008; Schaeffer, 1985; Galatians 5:22-23, NIV; John 15:16, NIV; Proverbs 11:30, NIV)
• **Build meaningful relationships within a community of faith** (Bergmann, 2003; Estep, 2002; Yaconelli, 2007; Acts 4:32-35, NIV; Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV; Proverbs 27:17, NIV)

• **Fulfill the great commission of sharing the gospel and ultimately bringing glory to God** (Bevans, 2002; Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Schaeffer, 1985; Matthew 28:19-20, NIV; Revelation 4:11; 5:11-12, NIV)

Thus, this definition of Christ-centered spirituality, synthesized from literature written by followers of Christ and Biblical scriptures, is the cornerstone of Christ-centered spirituality and informs this study. Christ-centered spirituality, as a relationship with God then, is inherently about spiritual growth (Yaconelli, 2003), which is developed by deepening that relationship through scripture, prayer, community with others, and worship (Chan, 2008; Keller, 2008).

**Situating Christ-centered spirituality on the theological continuum.** While peripheral doctrinal differences exist, these main tenets form a foundation for spirituality across many denominations—Protestant, Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, to name a few—and situates Christ-centered spirituality as accessible to all (Keller, 2008). God and Jesus do not just belong to the Protestants and Catholics, but to everyone. Christ-centered spirituality does not claim a monopoly on Truth. It does not claim that Christ-centered spirituality leads to “omniscience or absolute knowledge of reality. Only God has that” (Keller, 2008, p.127). Christ-centered spirituality is about a personal relationship with Christ, which is “often the only apologetic we can offer. Our lack of knowing is the beginning of humility and the very essence of the spiritual life” (Yaconelli, 2003, p.71). As Palmer (2000) notes, humility is central to spiritual life, and the way to God is down. Going down does not mean having a low self-esteem; rather it means to think of self less and fulfill the greatest commandment of loving
one another (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV). When we express the inward capacity to love, we regard others by looking outward. Jonathan Edwards summarizes that only if God is “our ultimate good and life center, will we find our heart drawn out not only to people of all families, races, and classes, but to the whole world” (Keller, 2008, p.175). Hence, spirituality is about connecting to others through humble expressions of love.

Schaeffer (1985) summarizes that spirituality is internal, but manifests itself externally. His description of a Christ-centered worldview demonstrates spirituality as an active process of humility and connecting to others. This perspective of Christ-centered spirituality allows a discussion of spirituality rooted in the gospel and a departure from confusing this view with religion. After all, the gospel is a narrative that proclaims hopeful news of freedom, hope, and unconditional love. It is not a list of doctrines and moral principles, but a life of communion with a personal God by relinquishing one’s own ethnocentricity and recognizing Christ as central to all aspects of life (Bevans, 2002; Hodge, 2004). This communal relationship with God is openly offered to all, and those who accept Christ as their summum bonum (supreme good), are called to humbly love and serve others, or risk being labeled religious (Keller, 2008).

**Distinguishing Spirituality from Religion**

In the early years of adult education Basil Yeaxlee (1925) equated spirituality with religion. Over the last few decades the field has shifted toward “a humanistic focus on meaning making and personal development, which might include spirituality” though not necessarily an explicit focus on religion (English, 2005, p.1173). To better understand the historical trends in adult education, this shift has evoked an examination of the differences between spirituality and religion, however, no clear consensus exists for distinguishing the boundaries of the spiritual and the religious (Day, 2010).
Some may relate religion to spirituality, but others such as Tisdell (2003) note a difference. She defines religion as “an organized community of faith that has written doctrine and codes of regulatory behavior” (p.29). As defined earlier, she contrasts spirituality as personal belief in a divine spirit or higher purpose and includes meaning making and honoring what is sacred. hooks (2003) also outlines the difference between religion and spirituality when she quotes the Dalai Lama,

Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual, prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness both to self and others (p.178).

This might explain why Christ-centered spirituality has been confused with religion. A Christ-centered worldview is certainly concerned about salvation. And yet through faith as an expression of one’s spirituality, God produces the fruits of the Spirit—such as love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV). The difference is in motivation. The follower of Christ, rooted in the gospel, is driven by gratitude for the hope offered in Jesus Christ and strives for his glorification. By contrast, someone who is religious may be motivated by attempting to adhere to divine standards out of fear of chastisement for violating religious laws (Yaconelli, 2003).

**Biblical translations of religion and spirituality.** Investigating Greek translations provides richer insight into how Christ-centered spirituality is different from religion, The Greek
word often rendered “religion” in the New Testament of the Bible is “threskeia” which translates “reverence” or “worship” (Carson, 2008). What receives a person’s “threskeia?” For early followers of Christ, “threskeia” was applied exclusively to Christ. Their reverence to Christ was the essence of their spirituality. They were devoted to a divine savior, not a set of rules or laws that constitute “religion” today. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “spirit” is “pnuma” and “spirituality” is “pnumatikos” (Strong, 2007). Like the English words, pneumonia or pneumatic, spirituality in the Bible refers to breath or air, and lacks the physical or material. Therefore the Greek translation of pnumatikos does not refer to religion, but rather, as the breath of life (Genesis 7:22, NIV) that inhabits those who have a personal relationship with God (John 14:17, NIV; I Corinthians 2:10-16, NIV).

This study was informed, not by religion, but by Christ-centered spirituality, rooted in the gospel, which is the loving message of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection for hope. While its relationship to religion is nebulous and debatable, the focus is not on a denomination or ritual, but rather, Christ-centered spirituality focuses on a relationship with Christ. It explores the narratives of those who describe themselves as “followers of Christ,” and whose identity is in him. In a discussion of Mark Galli’s (2011) column SoulWork, one reader implores followers of Christ to maintain a gospel center as integral to spirituality. “When we are the primary initiators of ‘witness,’ then God is displaced and we are in charge. This is what many within and without the church find so offensive: not Christ crucified, but those who identify with him in a most non-cruciform manner” (p.50).

Keller (2008) equates spirituality with embracing the gospel as central to identity and hope. He differentiates Christ-centered spirituality from religion by analyzing human effort versus God’s grace. Accordingly,
Religion operates on the principle of the gospel ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by
God.’ But the operating principle of the gospel is ‘I am accepted by God through what
Christ has done—therefore I obey.’ Two people living their lives on the basis of these
two different principles may sit next to each other in the church pew. They both pray,
give money generously, and are loyal and faithful in their family and church, trying to
live decent lives. However, they do so out of two radically different motivations, in two
radically different spiritual identities, and the result is two radically different kinds of
lives (p.186).

In a religious framework, one feels as though they are acceptable if they are living up to their
chosen religious standards. With spirituality grounded in the gospel, one may gain awareness
they are so flawed that Jesus had to die to release them from their unworthiness (Keller, 2008).

**The stigma of religion.** While Christ-centered spirituality may be developed within
organized religions from a range of denominations, as mentioned earlier, careful distinction
between Christ-centered spirituality and religion is ascertained because of the stigma associated
with religion, especially for followers of Christ who have been associated with Christianity.

While Christianity proclaims a faith of equal opportunity accessible to all, the religious church is
filled with an abundance of playwrights who are more than eager to proclaim that Christianity
does not have room for people with tattoos or earrings, or divorced, or cohabitate, or describe
themselves as homosexual, or who drink alcohol, or have purple hair, or dance, or ask questions,
or vote democrat, or vote republican, or are too liberal, or are too conservative (Yaconelli, 2003).

Many contemporary followers of Christ use ‘religion’ in a pejorative sense because it eclipses
the “biblical emphasis on grace” (Carson, 2008, p.147). Referred to as “a relic of superstitious
barbarism,” religion stifles spiritual growth by evoking images of arrogance and violence
(Baynes, as cited in Jung, 2005, p.vii). Also, others have become disillusioned by organized religion and Christianity in particular (Elkins, 1998; Rieger, 2010; Yaconelli, 2003).

The reason for such disillusionment is Christianity’s association to fascism and elitist agendas (Elkins, 1998). It has been seen as a stumbling block to those who want to develop their spirituality because of its perception as a system of rigid rules. Religion is associated with the repellents of judgment, condemnation, rejection, separation, and withdrawal (Yaconelli, 2003). Religion, later distinguished from spirituality, tends to close minds and view difference in terms of tolerance and division, and the religiousness thinly veiled by associations to Christianity has the “lamentable record of slavery, racism, colonialism, and intolerance” (Sanneh, 2003, p.34). Christianity as a religion has a history of bigotry, intrusiveness, and hate, which explains the widespread aversion. This despicable reputation is the result of fallible humans missing the mark on what the gospel actually teaches—that Christ reigns over all, and we are to love Him and others.

As Keller (2008) insists, spirituality rooted in the Christ-centered gospel is radically different from religion. He argues that every other major religion has or has had teachers, not saviors. Their messages involved doing something to find the divine. But Jesus, though he was a teacher, came as a savior. He came to the earth to do what we could not do for ourselves, which means we are not saved by our efforts, but by accepting Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Schaeffer (1985) punctuates this point when he says spirituality is not achieved by our own energy, but through “active passivity”—faith in Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit (p.253). We cannot live by our own strength or our own goodness, rather a total dependency on the finished work of the crucified and resurrected Christ. This is the Christ-centered spirituality that yearns for an irrevocable dissociation from the religious Christianity that historically
violated its own principles. Religious Christianity has been masochistic, and distancing a Christ-centered worldview from its stigma releases it into the realm of authentic spirituality. Rieger (2010) observes the Christian faith has been most antagonized by distortions of the Christian faith, and not by the struggle between atheism and other beliefs. Accordingly, a Christ-centered spirituality encourages a focus on Christ, not on His flawed human followers.

**Spirituality as an Epistemology**

Learners construct knowledge in different ways and spirituality as an epistemology, or way of knowing, drove this exploration of spiritual growth and adaptation to foreign host cultures. Though his work did not inform this study, Fowler (1981) presents a broad, linear, stage-type of faith development often applied to spirituality. He theorizes development as “a qualitative change in the operations of knowing...constructing more inclusive, more internally complex, and more flexible ways of appropriating the contents of one’s religious tradition” (Fowler, 2000, p.114). Fowler has been criticized for ignoring culturally diverse populations and for his presentation of universal faith (Tisdell, 2003). By contrast, spirituality as an epistemology has also been described as a meaning making endeavor that is varied, multidirectional, and unique to each and every individual across cultures and experiences (Yaconelli, 2003). Because the heart of spirituality emphasizes relational connections, our personal experiences and contrasting perspectives, ever within a shifting social context, shape new ways of producing knowledge (Bergmann, 2003).

Spirituality as an epistemology is an active process and the antithesis of what Freire (1970) called the banking system of education, where students passively receive information deposited by the teacher. Recalling the tenets of sociocultural theory, spiritual growth occurs when a commitment to biblical principles are internalized through “explorative intergenerational
and intercultural” contexts where “multiple perspectives are respectfully heard and openly discussed” (Gibson, 2004, p.301). Learning and spiritual growth is thus developed when spirituality is mediated between active individuals and culture within a community of faith (Estep, 2002). Thus, the sociocultural relational dynamic is crucial for spiritual development. Forming the thrust of this study, a curiosity arises regarding how and what spiritual growth occurs when a deepening relationship with God is mediated through the relationship of an individual and the sociocultural context.

Along with social relationships, spirituality recognizes “the connection between soulfulness and our ability to learn” (Grey, as cited in hooks, 2003, p.183). The idea of the soul as the subject of spirituality is recurrent in the adult education literature (Dirkx, 1997; Elkins, 1998; hooks, 2003; Schaufele & Baptiste, 2000; Tisdell, 2000). For example, Dirkx (1997) says the “soul beckons to a relationship between the individual and his or her broader world” (p.82). He argues that learning is not a product of the individual, nor of sociocultural structures, but rather through a process within the dynamic relationship of an individual and the other. Again, the mélange of relationship, connection, identity, and context surface as themes for spirituality and learning. Schaufele and Baptiste (2000) assert that including the soul in acknowledging humans’ spiritual dimension holds significant potential for enhancing teaching and learning situations. More concisely, paying attention to the soul is important for adult learning. Putting this into action, Dirkx (1997) advocates for a nurturing approach, not merely teach about the soul as a topic.

The implications for adult education become evident to create a space where the soul and its longing for connection are satiated. This spiritual space is the workplace for the soul. It is a wild search for meaning and purpose in the tangled jungle of our innermost being (Yaconelli,
What does space for soul work look like? According to hooks (2003) this environment for learning is radically open that goes beyond acceptance to a safe place where risks can be taken and voices are empowered. Belief in people, a raised consciousness, and evolving awareness are integral. This open space does not mean it has to be filled (Palmer, 2007). The quiet, open space can be fertile ground for cultivating meaning through inward reflection.

Open space also fosters a learner-centered environment. The teacher as facilitator has the responsibility to create the space, but not to fill it. After all, spirituality as a search for meaning and purpose does not follow a formula or procedure. Spiritual growth as a way of understanding the world cannot be systematized or manipulated, which is a critique of applying Fowler (1981) and adapting Kohlberg (1984) as models of spiritual growth. If plotted on a graph, the line would not be straight, but rather a jagged representation of ups, downs, circles, and irregularities. And the number of patterns of spiritual growth is equal to the number of people in the world (Yaconelli, 2003.)

In Vella’s (2000) discussion of a spirited epistemology, the heart of an accountable pedagogy is learning tasks, not teaching tasks. This is based on the belief that learning moves the spirit into deeper awareness of one’s meaning and purpose. After all, teaching is the process of helping people discover and reflect on their own ways they relate and thrive in the world (English, 2001; Horton & Freire, 1990). The teacher does not discover for the learner. By considering individuals’ experiences, educators are charged to start where people are and partner in an educational community which journeys through a permanent process of curiosity and connection to something greater than ourselves (Horton & Freire, 1990; Yaconelli, 2003).
Themes of Spirituality across the Field of Adult Education

So far, the landscape of spirituality in adult education has been framed as a non-theological/theological continuum, the significance of spirituality has been established, and spirituality as an epistemology has been presented. While spirituality remains an elusive topic, regardless of how it is plotted, it allows for an exploration of relationship and purpose. This section examines four universal themes that emerge throughout the literature, relating spirituality to identity development, tending to the whole person, connection, and culture.

Spirituality plays a role identity development. Spirituality may play an important role in the development of adult identity (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000; Poll & Smith, 2003; Schaeffer, 1985). Hays (2001) provides a description of identity that involves our perception of who we are based on social constructs. Her ADDRESSING model presents personal identifying factors through an acronym that stands for age, developmental (or acquired) disabilities, religious/spiritual orientation, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender. Adult educators have the opportunity to help people develop these components of their identity within the realm of spirituality (Horton & Freire, 1990). This means allowing space for learners to foster a deep understanding of personal and/or spiritual values and being as they develop self-awareness while being cognizant of the external social context (Koetting & Combs, 2005; Palmer, 2000; Schaufele & Baptiste, 2000; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003).

Because spirituality has an inward component, tending to our spirituality as part of our identity means examining ourselves to honor our created nature (Palmer, 2000). This may mean reflecting on how we make meaning, or taking inventory on what we hold sacred, which may lead to self-awareness within a community. Purposefully looking inward may also mean
developing an awareness of all aspects of our identity and positionality with regards to race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Tisdell, 2003). A later section discusses the relationship of spirituality to culture, which is also a significant area for reflection and developing identity.

In relating identity to a Christ-centered spirituality, the Bible as a sacred text teaches an identity built on God and his love. Humans are viewed as eternal beings, connected to God through the soul by the Holy Spirit (Poll & Smith, 2003). An identity in Christ rests on God’s value of humanity and provides a foundation for “harmonious and just social arrangements” (Keller, 2008, p.188). Drawing on Kierkegaard and Becker, Keller (2008) notes that “our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identity and value on, we essentially deify (p.188). Because Christ-centered spirituality insists on God as the sole deity, those with a Christ-centered worldview anchor their identities in him.

**Spirituality tends to the whole person.** Tending to the spiritual implies tending to the whole person. Spirituality covers the entire range of human faculties including affective, intellectual, and behavioral components. In Hebrew shalom describes the “perfect, harmonious interdependence among all parts of creation…we translate it as ‘peace,’ but the English word is basically negative, referring to the absence of trouble or hostility. The Hebrew word means much more than that. It means absolute wholeness—full, harmonious, joyful, flourishing life” (Keller, 2008, p.177). Education as a process targets shalom. Like spirituality, the process of learning can offer hope and wholeness with the potential to create a sense of joy, fulfillment, and understanding. It involves the whole person and seeks to validate purpose, meaning, and the vitality of life (hooks, 2003; Horton & Freire, 1990; Palmer, 2007).

**Spirituality involves connection.** Spirituality is about connection—a connection to all that identity encompasses and to each other (Keller, 2008; Schaeffer, 1985; Tisdell, 1999;
Yaconelli, 2003). Spirituality is deeply personal, yet from a theological perspective, spiritual growth is an individual and collective phenomenon within the sociocultural context of a Christ-centered community (Estep, 2002; Gibson, 2004). Growing spiritually can be enhanced through the process of internalizing the interaction of an individual with and within community. English (2001) defines spiritual dimensions of adult learning as relational, people-centered, and a source of social fulfillment. Because spiritual dimensions of adult learning are relational, spirituality is also about connecting with others as an opportunity to foster a deeper understanding of personal values, which may develop identity and build community. Allowing for spirituality in adult education insists on respecting, embracing, and celebrating culture (differences, similarities, and uniqueness) as an expression of genuine care and service to one another.

As discussed earlier, spirituality moves outward to others. Connection with people leads to compassion (Chan, 2008; hooks, 2003), and being compassionate develops a genuine concern for people and their whole being. Effective educators love people and connect with them by respecting their abilities and valuing their experiences (Gibson, 2004; Horton & Freire, 1990). Palmer’s (2000) work, *Let Your Life Speak*, is titled after a Quaker saying that inspired him to live a life of high purpose. A high purpose holds others in high regard. It involves service and love, respect and value, compassion and selflessness. These qualities contribute to spiritual growth and build community through a core practice of connecting with others (hooks, 2003).

**Spirituality relates to culture.** Considering how culture informs spirituality is vital and is consistent with a holistic approach to teaching and learning (hooks, 2003; Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 1999). Establishing a definition of culture builds an important foundation for understanding the relationship between spirituality and culture. A foundational definition for culture is established comprehensively in the succeeding section on intercultural competence;
however, Guy (1999) defines culture as the “shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language within a social group” (p.7). These components shape how we relate to the world and endow learners with the opportunity to learn in the context of cultural diversity. Paying attention to spiritual and cultural aspects of learning helps build connections to people and their valued experiences. This also has refreshing epistemological implications, in that culture and spirituality are never static (Tisdell, 2003). The perpetual interplay offers renewed insights. Teaching and learning within a spiritual and cultural framework is a continual process of discovery, reflection, dialogue, creativity, and making meaning.

In looking at Christ-centered spirituality and its relationship to culture, Sanneh (2003) notes the adaptability of a Christ-centered worldview to diverse cultures. As a Gambian who converted from Islam, he has criticized the imposition of European culture on African traditions, yet affirms the effort to incorporate African cultural practices with Christ-centered spirituality. As an example, he explains his observations of West Africans when they began reading the Bible in their own language:

People sensed in their hearts that Jesus did not mock their respect for the sacred nor their clamor for an invincible savior, and so they beat their sacred drums for him until the stars skipped and danced in the skies. After that dance the stars weren’t little anymore. [A Christ-centered worldview] helped Africans to become renewed Africans, not re-made Europeans (p.43).

While some may feel this illustration interferes with culture, here is evidence that identity in Christ, the essence of spirituality rooted in the gospel that declares a living God, may transcend cultural delineations. For West African converts, union with Christ is not due to external effort
or cultural tradition, but rather an acceptance of a savior that offers a transformational sense of
worth and meaning in their everyday lives (Hiebert, Shaw, & Tienou, 1999).

Simply stated, developing Christ-centered spirituality strives to respect, embrace, and
celebrate culture (differences, similarities, and uniqueness) as an expression of genuine love and
service to one another. Culture affects all aspects of our social lives, and as members of various
cultures interact, followers of Christ are guided by the advice of the apostle Paul. He encouraged
Gentile followers of Christ to develop their faith within their culture, without forced assimilation
to Jewish culture. Yancey (2009) called Paul’s approach “a call to develop intercultural
competence” for all followers of Christ in any sociocultural context (p.377).

Critique on Spirituality in Adult Education

Critiquing spirituality in adult education raises several issues with which to grapple.
First, as previously discussed, spirituality is an elusive topic permeated with complex dimensions
(English, 2000). It is deeply personal and broadly conceptualized as a way of relating and being
in the world. Thus examining spiritual growth, through a one-size-fits-all approach may be
ineffective and marginalizing. Adding to the difficulty, spirituality may entail “aspects of our
experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the
mysterious, and the mystical” (Astin, 2004, p.34). The challenge is allowing inclusivity, and yet
fostering connections to build a learning community where people with different cultural and
spiritual orientations can interact in meaningful ways (Tisdell, 1999).

Second, a paradox emerges. If spirituality is deeply personal, a question is raised about
how one grows spiritually among people of such different perspectives. After all, consistent with
sociocultural theory, Brookfield (1983) has emphasized knowledge is a continuously
collaborative construct. And yet some scholars (English, 2000), in addition to recognizing the
importance of community, encourage components of self-directed learning for adult learning practice to address spirituality. This study explored how the personal nature of spiritual growth was reconciled within a context that includes the interactions with a culturally different host community.

Third, isolating a discussion of spirituality negates a view of spirituality that it transcends and permeates cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and affective dimensions of learning (English, 2000). Therefore, discussions of spirituality incorporate vast elements, which may introduce logistical, pedagogical obstacles. In relation to this study, contextual elements were explored to examine their intricate relationship to spiritual growth. Tisdell (1999) suggests beginning a dialogue of spirituality in adult learning environments in an attempt to “inform our knowing in ways that are beyond conscious awareness” (p.94). Through narrative inquiry, this study facilitated the necessary dialogue to examine the interactions between followers of Christ and host culture members in an effort to understand spiritual growth and the core components of intercultural competence.

**Empirical Studies on Spirituality**

This section discusses empirical studies on spirituality beginning with an overview of the empirical literature. Next, the findings of the spirituality studies are examined and organized into three major themes: (a) spiritual growth has value; (b) spirituality relates to identity; and (c) spirituality connects to culture. Concluding thoughts reveal several gaps in the literature that led to the development of this study’s research questions.

**Overview of Empirical Studies on Spirituality**

A paucity of empirical studies on spirituality, spiritual growth, and spiritual identification exists across disciplines such as education, social work, psychology, and business, particularly
with a focus on those who identify themselves as followers of Christ. While a vast majority of articles written on the topic of spirituality are conceptual, many of the studies related to spirituality rely on these conceptual pieces with few empirical counterparts.

Virtually every study first acknowledges the difficulty of examining spirituality (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). As established previously, definitions of spirituality are extraordinarily broad, thus allowing for both Theo-centric and non-Theo-centric perspectives. Some lump spirituality with religion and use the two terms interchangeably (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008; Hsu, Krageloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009; Kumpikzaite, 2009), and others are careful to dissect the two (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Boone, Fite, & Reardon, 2010; Tisdell, 2000). Yet others, such as Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found spirituality and religion overlap, though they are considered different concepts. Despite valiant efforts attempted at “unfuzzying the fuzzy” (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, title page), fuzziness about spirituality abounds throughout the literature.

The empirical literature on spirituality tends to be more quantitative, though the authors of quantitative work acknowledge this as a limitation of their studies and call for more qualitative research (Moberg, 2002; Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010; Poll & Smith, 2003; Sherr, Singletary, & Rogers, 2009). Many attempts to measure spirituality across a variety of disciplines require employing rubrics of spiritual well-being. Hill and Pargament (2008) provide some examples of spirituality assessments including the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982) and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall and Edwards, 1996). Scores of measurement tools are available, but common critiques cite concerns such as “sampling bias, self-report bias, ceiling effects, validity issues, and especially difficulties regarding the conceptualization of the construct itself” (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). Furthermore, these
measurement scales tend to oversimplify spirituality, which is why the richness of qualitative
data can further enhance our understandings of spirituality. Thus the succeeding study’s
significance is deepened because it has the potential to provide a narrative to spiritual growth.

Regardless of the research design, a consensus exists throughout the literature that
spirituality is a prominent topic that deserves continual investigation. The attention given to
spirituality in adult education leads to three main themes synthesized from the findings in the
literature: (a) spiritual growth has value; (b) spirituality relates to identity; and (c) spirituality
connects to culture.

The Value of Spiritual Growth

A common thread throughout all of the empirical studies on spirituality is a first theme
that spiritual growth has individual and collective value for human beings. Though a collective
value may refer to social benefits, much of the literature focuses on spirituality from an
individual perspective. Findings of the studies reveal three main sub-themes that demonstrate
the value of spiritual growth for exploring: life’s meaning and purpose; its contribution to
psychological well-being and values; and relationships that build connection and community.

Exploring life’s meaning and purpose. In exploring the role of spirituality in higher
education, Rehm and Allison’s (2009) qualitative study reported participants’ expressions of
spirituality gave them a deeper sense of meaning and guided their career paths. Their findings
reveal the importance for university programs to engage students in spiritual practice as a way to
explore greater meaning and purpose in life. Conversely, focus group and individual interviews
with college student personnel led Rogers and Love (2007a) to the conclusion that just because
faculty address purpose, meaning, and identity does not necessarily mean they are fostering
spiritual growth. They do, however, call for increased visibility of spirituality on college
campuses because it directly addresses life’s ultimate questions, contributes to developing an authentic identity, and advocates for social justice and intercultural understanding.

Other studies found that participants relied on spirituality to answer big questions about life, such as why we are here and what is our purpose (Astin et al., 2011; Kiesling et al., 2008). While some spiritual journeys are a continual quest for the meaning of life (Kiesling et al., 2008), the Malawi participants in Manglos’s (2010) study found purpose in life more immediately through the spiritual experience of conversion to a “born-again” lifestyle (p.417). And while participants report a sudden understanding of the meaning of life as a relationship with the divine, Manglos (2010) finds spiritual growth, as a process of cultivating intimacy with the divine, is a lifelong endeavor.

**Exploring spirituality’s contribution to psychological well-being and values.** Throughout the empirical literature, findings show that spirituality is beneficial for psychological well-being and developing personal values (Hsu, Krageloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009; Kiesling et al., 2008; Manglos, 2010; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). In looking at how spirituality gives voice to the marginalized and contributes to the work of feminist women emancipatory adult educators, Tisdell (2000) found spirituality may involve a higher power that facilitates holistic healing. Furthermore this study conveys the message that spirituality is not about coercion, but about wholeness, cherishing life, and valuing social justice. Spirituality recognizes the soul and allows for “re-membering” and examining deeply held core values (p.317). In short, while purposefully distancing spirituality from religion, the findings encapsulate spirituality as significant for healing and wholeness.

Hsu’s et al. (2009) study combines religion and spirituality and finds significant correlations between religion/spirituality and psychological/social quality of life for domestic
and international students in New Zealand. Also, they find religion and spirituality function as a coping mechanism, or “buffer” for international students in response to the stress of acculturation and other psychological challenges (p.386). While the findings are helpful for understanding the psychological benefits of spirituality, this study was limited in that it did not distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of spirituality; it did not consider gender; it utilized secondary data for assessing stress levels; and did not record the length of stay for international participants. The study finds that spirituality is less necessary as a coping mechanism for those spending more significant time abroad, though length of time was not quantified. Ergo, the findings suggest that tending to spiritual components often occurs in times of acculturative stress. This exploitive view of spirituality is hinted at elsewhere in studies of spirituality and the workplace. Findings show participants fostering spirituality as a resource for career success (Kumpikaite, 2009; Rehm & Allison, 2009). This view of spirituality seems to ask what spirituality can do for an individual. Alternate views of spirituality ask how fostering spirituality may help others, serve a larger purpose outside of the individual, and cultivate intimate relationships with others as well as the divine (Kiesling et al., 2008; Manglos, 2010).

Psychological well-being emanating from spiritual growth may help overcome personal difficulties and ultimately attain inner peace (Kiesling et al., 2008; Rehm and Allison, 2009). Furthermore, findings show spirituality contributes to resilience through the healing process and has the “ineffable,” or indescribable, power to transform challenges into something meaningful (Kiesling et al., 2008, p.58). According to Rehm and Allison (2009), achieving a sense of healing and wholeness comes through active spiritual practice. Their study provided a narrow view of spiritual practice, by citing just two examples, prayer and religious services. Other findings show spirituality as a way of achieving psychological well-being through reading sacred
texts, expressions of worship or reflection, art, ritual, symbol, song, and dance (Astin et al., 2011; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003).

Along with psychological well-being, spirituality contributes to the development of personal values. Rogers and Love (2007b) assert spirituality comprises our values, ideals and beliefs; therefore, fostering spirituality is congruent to fostering values. In discussing the workplace, Rehm and Allison (2009) see spirituality as a conduit for energizing “commitment and service” (p.13). While Rogers and Love (2007a) discovered a fear in college faculty to incorporate spiritual dimensions in their pedagogy, they also recognized that there are multiple avenues for spiritual growth, particularly from a non-Theo-centric approach in terms of self-reflection, social justice, awareness, and personal growth.

Regardless of a non-Theo-centric/Theo-centric spiritual orientation for participants in Kiesling’s et al. (2008) study, they determined that spiritual growth is an active process and a deliberate discipline for developing personal values. Those described as “foreclosed” participants focus on internalizing divine truths as part of an ongoing endeavor to develop personal values and foster spiritual commitments. Those participants identified as “in moratorium” describe their spiritual journey as a freedom to explore values and ideologies and rely on themselves as the sole judge of truth. The “achieved” participants are the third group in this study, and they subscribe to the belief that spirituality is a journey that makes meaning and cultivates values in experience. Participants view spirituality as a pliable vehicle for developing values through reflection and movement, particularly in a direction different from their childhood experiences with spirituality (Kiesling et al., 2008).

This turn away from parental influences regarding value development was also a finding in Tisdell’s (2000) study, though childhood experiences with spirituality were also regarded as
“life giving” and impacted meaning throughout adulthood (p.318). On the other hand, Kumpikaite’s (2009) study on how Lithuanians understand spirituality revealed seventy-six percent of adult participants maintained their belief in God since childhood. This quantitative study raised concerns about validity with a small sample (n = 79), and also, while ninety-four percent of the population indicated they were Roman Catholic, just eighty-six percent indicated they believe in God. Perhaps this discrepancy is a result of identifying with Catholicism nominally, as in a family tradition. Despite these concerns, this study identifies the main pillars, or values, of spirituality according to this Lithuanian sample (p.274). These pillars include morality, faith, ethics, support, sincerity, truth, and honesty, and results show just sixty-seven percent of participants agreed that these values should transcend private lives and be brought into the work place.

Manglos’s (2010) study did not delve into the impact of childhood experiences of spirituality, but it did explore pre- and post-commitments to a converted spiritual lifestyle. Her findings in Malawi about Pentecostal and Catholic conversions, both described as being “born-again,” showed changes in moral practice, but not belief or ideology. Rooted in the foundation that conversion empowers people to live “devout, moral” lives (p.413), the study implies spiritual growth is about the practice of adhering to a new set of principles. The author concedes a weakness of this study is the lack of conclusive evidence that attitudes are indeed consistent with actual lifestyles after converting.

**Exploring relationships that build connection and community.** The conceptual literature about spirituality is riddled with words such as connection and community. The empirical literature offers support that spirituality is about connectedness and building
community through relationships. Hsu et al. (2009) found those who describe themselves as spiritual and/or religious believe connection and community are highly relevant to their lives.

Boone et al. (2010) sought to understand the connection between spirituality and effective teaching qualities of fairness, humility, and a commitment to serve others. They suggest teaching competence incorporates these components and also includes: professional knowledge, such as subject matter and pedagogical skills; interpersonal skills, meaning relationship to students, community, and professional colleagues; and intrapersonal skills, such as self-awareness and spiritual perceptions of self that lead to caring attitudes. The relational connections between students and teachers, fostered by recognizing and tending to spirituality, ultimately build community and lead to effective teaching practice.

In another study on spirituality and teaching, Rogers and Love (2007b) found that college settings give faculty significant influence on how students explore their spirituality. And though their research acknowledged widespread perspectives on spirituality due to a diverse population sample, all perceptions of spirituality acknowledge the importance of building relationships to create community. Their conclusions lead them to call for a common language to discuss spirituality, stress the need for faculty to look inward for self-awareness, and encourage faculty to explore spirituality with students to create safe communities “where all voices on the spiritual/religious continuum could be heard, and where deeply personal and emotionally charged issues could be examined in a respectful environment” (p.704).

**Spirituality Relates to Identity**

A second theme relates spirituality to identity. In examining spirituality as an exploration of self, Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, and Colwell (2008) grounded their mixed methods study in Erikson’s (1962) notion that “healthy adults nurture their spiritual tendencies” by
understanding themselves (Kiesling et al., 2008, p.50). In other words, tending to spirituality may bring understanding to one’s identity. Engaging spirituality in the pursuit of understanding identity seeks “a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual’s core values” (Kiesling et al., 2008, p.51). To answer their key research question on the impact of spirituality on their self-perceptions of identity they employed Marcia’s (1966) spiritual identity framework, which categorizes individuals’ spiritual identities as: foreclosed, those who are highly committed or conformed; in moratorium, those who have experienced crises without arriving at a place of commitment; and achieved, those who navigated a period of exploration and made defining commitments. Kiesling et al. (2008) outline three sub-themes of spiritual identity that emerge from their study: (a) salience and meaning; (b) influence and investment; (c) reflection and change. These three sub-themes allow for a comprehensive discussion of spirituality and identity from the findings of other studies.

The first sub-theme relating identity to spirituality is salience and meaning. Salience describes spirituality’s prominence and value, while meaning refers to the applicability of spirituality to daily life (Kiesling et al., 2008). Findings show spirituality is regarded as foundational, asynchronous, and/or indescribable as it relates to identity. The idea of salience is also echoed by Manglos’s (2010) study on the spiritual experiences of Pentacostal and Catholic believers in Malawi. She found spirituality as “highly salient,” which she defined as a prominent life experience. Participants’ spiritual experience of entering a reciprocal relationship with God centered on personal decision and divine intervention, thus resulting in a “meaningful identity transcending denomination” (p.426). Rogers and Love’s (2007a) findings also reflect spirituality as a meaningful component of identity. In examining higher education faculty perceptions about
the role of spirituality in curriculum and pedagogy, they found spirituality is addressed by curriculum because faculty perceived spirituality as crucial to developing an authentic identity.

The second sub-theme emerging from Kiesling’s et al. (2008) study regards influence and investment as spiritual components of identity. Influence and investment looks at what motivates others to grow spiritually and the role of spirituality in forming an identity. Motivational factors for spiritual growth may include psychological benefits, connections with others, and an intimate relationship with God. Themes from the literature commonly recognize the centrality of spirituality in identity formation driven by participants’ search for meaning and more authentic, centered selves (Boone et al., 2010; Rehm & Allison, 2009; Rogers and Love, 2007b; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Kiesling’s et al. (2008) findings are consistent and would add that spirituality offers a lens for assessing self-worth, attitudes, and behavior.

The final sub-theme of identity emerging from Kiesling’s et al. (2008) study on spirituality concerns reflection and change. Based on the findings throughout the empirical spirituality literature, reflection appears to play a significant role in understanding identity (Boone et al., 2010; Rogers & Love, 2007a; Rogers & Love, 2007b). Regarding change, this study surprisingly neglected to relate its findings beyond the individual and their interaction with others to discuss spirituality in a broader sociocultural context. This criticism extends to the study by Astin et al. (2011), which assessed spirituality using their newly developed measurement tool. Their questions regarding personal goals of spirituality disregarded larger society, thus ignoring the sociocultural context and potential for social change. While the succeeding study does not focus on social change, some studies reveal spirituality as an impetus for social change and as a force that fosters tolerance and even celebration of difference (Boone et al., 2010; Kiesling et al., 2008; Rogers & Love, 2007a; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, 2002).
Spirituality Connects to Culture

A third theme found throughout the literature is spirituality’s connection to culture. In examining the role of spirituality for developing a positive cultural identity, Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) found some people deliberately seek intercultural experiences for tending to their spirituality. Grounded in the assumptions that spirituality is rooted in cultural experience, and identities develop through the “continuous process of interaction between the individual and the sociocultural milieu” their study found that close relationships with people of color and/or other faith traditions contribute to making meaning of cultural and spiritual identities (p.373). While this study focused on immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, as well as white European Americans in the United States, their findings pique curiosity about how followers of Christ working in least developed countries facilitate spiritual development and cultural identity. Does meaning from spiritual and cultural identity and awareness foster adaptation to a host culture that may lead to intercultural competence? How? Because studies are scant, more must be known about the relationship between spiritual growth within an intercultural context and its significance. The next section delves into the empirical studies on intercultural competence, which reveals gaps in the literature for understanding how these major areas intersect.

This section examined the conceptual and empirical literature on spirituality as a foundational area related to this study. But how are the processes of spiritual growth and intercultural competence related? The conceptual research reveals many similarities. For example, spiritual growth may produce outcomes such as respect and concern for others. It may yield compassion, or enhance awareness of self and other. Tending to spirituality transforms and broadens worldviews, which is the essence of developing intercultural competence. But in researching the literature, deeper curiosities were piqued such as the interplay of context for
spiritual growth and intercultural competence. How might spiritual growth play a role in developing intercultural skills? How is intercultural competence developed by spirituality? How are spirituality and intercultural competence described in the sociocultural context of a least developed country? This study explored these questions about the perceived relationship between spirituality and intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ who work in least developed countries. The next section examines intercultural competence as a second major foundational area.

**Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence is examined here as a foundational concept for understanding how a follower of Christ working in a least developed country became an effective participant in their host culture. Becoming interculturally competent implies effective participation in a host culture by learning various cultural skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors. The research question that drove this study sought to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence as learning processes for followers of Christ interacting with the context of a host country’s cultural milieu.

This section begins by defining intercultural competence and also presents synonymous terms for intercultural competence found throughout the literature. Next, assumptions of intercultural competence are outlined, followed by themes and an introduction to Deardorff’s (2006) conceptual model to bring intercultural competence into sharper theoretical focus for the purpose of the study. Finally, themes from the findings of empirical studies on intercultural competence are discussed.
Defining Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence has been defined as the ability to interact with those “who come from cultures other than your own. It entails mastering complex awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills” for successful functioning (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.5). In their book titled *Intercultural Competence*, Lustig and Koester (1996) emphasize communication as a cornerstone for intercultural competence to create shared meanings for effective interaction with those from another culture. It is a mentality that respects and embraces differences and commonalities through intercultural relationships (Kim, 2009). For adult education practice, intercultural competence may be described as a continual striving for effective work within a context that requires a cultural encounter, awareness, knowledge, and skills (Campinha-Bacote, 1999). A definition that has informed much of this research summarizes intercultural competence as the development of empathy, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge, flexibility, and the skills to interpret and relate to others while valuing their beliefs, values, and behaviors through the process of interaction, adaptation, and an expanded worldview (Deardorff, 2004; 2006; 2009).

Deconstructing the term *intercultural competence* may further illuminate its meaning and help establish a functional definition for the succeeding study. Webster’s Dictionary (1996) defines *inter* as between or among; mutually; together. The term *intercultural* has been described as “two endpoints of a continuum denoting the presence of individuals who are culturally different from each other” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.51). Definitions of culture abound, but more simply, culture is the “lens through which life is perceived” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.5). It is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” based on thoughts, feelings, and actions that influence
beliefs, attitudes, skills, and values (Hofstede, 2001, p.5). As already established in the earlier section on spirituality, culture for the purpose of this study looks beyond concrete behavior patterns such as customs and traditions, and instead provides a context within which members can be described (Geertz, 1973). Synthesizing from Geertz (1973) and Guy (1999) culture is contextual and symbolic, and refers to the “shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and language within a social group” (Guy, 1999, p.7).

Socialization in a culture may guide toward a particular set of values (D’Andrade, 1987). According to Hofstede (2001) value is an interdisciplinary term expressing non-rational tendencies to prefer one end of a continuum over another. The value continuums may:

- Involve what a culture regards as good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust, beautiful or ugly, clean or dirty, valuable or worthless, appropriate or inappropriate, kind or cruel. Because values are the desired characteristics or goals of a culture, a culture’s values do not necessarily describe its actual behaviors and characteristics (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.97, italics original).

While values signify preferences, a belief describes an idea assumed to be true about the world (Lustig & Koester, 1996). In their foundational work on intercultural competence, Lustig and Koester (1996) assert beliefs, subsumed within culture, are learned, perceptual, guides behavior, and is expressed as interpretations of shared symbols.

The term competence can be contested, debated, and refuted because of the difficulty assessing its existence, degrees, and transferability across contexts (Ang et al., 2009; Kumas-Tan, Beagan, Loppie, MacLeod, & Frank, 2007; Ward, Fischer, Lam, & Hall, 2009). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) suggest competence is equated to understanding, relationship development, satisfaction, effectiveness, appropriateness, and adaptation expressed through a set
of skills, abilities, or a subjective evaluation. Similarly, Lustig and Koester (1996) regard competence as “a social judgment about how well a person interacts with others…specific to the context and interpersonal relationship within which it occurs” (p.55). Because intercultural competence is contextual (Lustig & Koester, 1996), it “is not an individual attribute; rather it is a characteristic of the association between individuals” (p.57). The succeeding study considers competence as the “attempt to account for the process of managing interaction in ways that are likely to produce more appropriate and effective individual, relational, group, or institutional outcomes” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.6).

Based on these deconstructions and synthesis from the literature, putting the terms inter and cultural and competence together establishes a foundational definition on which to build the succeeding study: intercultural competence describes a broadening worldview through adaptation as an interactive, ongoing process of developing skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values for effective participation in a culturally different context (Deardorff, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Intercultural competence has many different names. “Cultural competence” occurs commonly throughout healthcare/nursing/medical journals, as well as throughout studies focusing on pre-service teachers. Bennett (2009a, p.122) provides a comprehensive list of synonymous terms synthesized from the literature: a “global mindset” (Bird & Osland, 2004); “global competence” (Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006); “global learning” (Hovland, 2006: Musil, 2006); “culture learning” (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002); “intercultural effectiveness” (Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe, & MacDonald, 2001); “cultural intelligence” (Earley & Ang, 2003; Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2004); “global leadership competence” (Jokinen, 2005); “intercultural communication competence” (Collier, 1989; Dinges, 1983;
Dinges & Baldwin, 1996; Hammer, 1989; Y.Y. Kim, 1991; Spitzberg, 1989, 1994); and “intercultural competence” (Deardorff, 2005, 2006; Graf, 2004). Despite these varied terms, a consensus exists concerning the dimensions of intercultural competence: the cognitive, or mind-set; the behavioral, or skill-set; and the affective, or heart-set (Bennett, 2009a). The term intercultural competence is used throughout this research because it is consistent with the most common term in the literature for sojourner populations working abroad for extended periods of time. Additionally, the prefix “inter” harkens back to sociocultural theory with its focus on interrelationship and interactions as epistemological foundations.

Assumptions of Intercultural Competence

This section organizes the assumptions of intercultural competence into three categories. They include assumptions relating to: culture; people; and the process of intercultural competence.

Assumptions relating to culture. There are four main assumptions of intercultural competence relating to culture. First, culture is “a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and institutions” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.13). While the existence of cultural universals are debated and contested (Geertz, 1973), a consensus exists that culture is integrated into the complex thought and behavior patterns of humans (Bourne, 1991; Diller & Moule, 2005; Geertz, 1973; Lustig & Koester, 1996). Culture is learned through the interactive process of socialization with other members within the culture (Lustig & Koester, 1996).

Second, intercultural competence assumes cultural differences exist, though each culture is equally valid and influential for making meaning. These cultural differences are viewed positively and are accepted as a rich complexity for building intercultural awareness and understanding (Diller & Moule, 2005).
Third, cultural values cannot all necessarily be observed. Friedman and Antal (2005) offer a metaphor for approaching culture like an iceberg, “whereby the assumptions about how the world works and the role of individuals, on which the culture is based, remain invisible” (p.71). An iceberg is not completely visible from the surface. The part of the iceberg above the water represents what is visible in a culture, such as certain behaviors, symbols, and rituals. These visible components are manifestations of deeper, underlying values, norms, and assumptions that may be easily misinterpreted.

And fourth, culture is a part of our individual and/or our collective identity. While a member of one culture may orient their views of self as an individual being, he or she may also orient their self views as part of a greater collective as an extension of themselves (Brown & Lindrum-Brown, 1995).

**Assumptions about people.** Intercultural competence makes four main assumptions relating to people. One foundational assumption is that all people are equal (Diller & Moule, 2005; Lustig & Koester, 1996). With a foundation of equality, a second assumption is that all people deserve respect (Deardorff, 2009; Kim, 2009). A sojourner may begin the journey towards intercultural competence when encountering a host culture with respect and appreciation for the uniqueness of the host country culture with which they interact. When anchored in respect for a host culture, the process of intercultural competence leads beyond cultural knowledge and ethics toward understanding and meaningful relationships (Diller & Moule, 2005).

Third, intercultural competence is relational. Much of the adult education literature on intercultural competence discusses relationships in terms of a sojourner interacting with members of a host country (Berry et al., 1989; Deardorff, 2006). Relationships are developed through
immersion experiences that require verbal, via language, and/or nonverbal communication, which made sociocultural theory a fitting lens for this study. Whether strangers, acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, or family, “all relationships imply connections” that allow for meaningful interactions to foster intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.241).

And fourth, as an implication for practice, particularly for those who have left their home country to work in a host country, the assumption is that people are best served by those in tune with their culture (Diller & Moule, 2005; Magala, 2005; Ellis, Edwards, & Smagorinsky, 2010). This assumption plays an important role in the curiosity of the succeeding study on the experiences of followers of Christ who work in a least developed country.

Assumptions relating to the process of intercultural competence. There are four key assumptions relating to the process of intercultural competence. First, developing intercultural competence is an epistemological process of learning to function in a host culture by discovering how to relate to others when intercultural differences are present. As a sojourner adapts to a host culture, they are learning how to participate effectively in that culture through the practice of recognizing and applying the symbols of a host culture (Hofstede, 2004). Interactions between sojourners and members of a host culture may be meaningful for understanding differences and similarities by way of awareness and cultural knowledge, which may enrich relationships and adult learning (Deardorff, 2009; Diller & Moule, 2005; Hofstede, 2004; Jandt, 2010; Yoon et al., 2011). Thus, intercultural competence is an interactive process of learning that also assumes the incorporation of flexible thinking, a positive attitude toward people of other cultures, and the ability to adjust to the values of a host culture (Lustig & Koester, 1996).

A second assumption relating to the process of intercultural competence is an outcome of understanding. Immersion and interaction with a host culture brings understanding of self, others,
and society. Deardorff’s (2006) model, discussed later, demonstrates how the process of adaptation, intrinsic to developing intercultural competence, leads to awareness and intercultural understanding with an aim of effective participation in a host culture.

Third, intercultural competence also assumes acculturative stress will occur for those who spend significant time abroad (Bennett, 2009; Berry, 2005; Diller & Moule, 2005). A sojourner immersing in a host country for an extended amount of time will experience a level of disorientation as they adapt to their new intercultural context. As an implication to acculturative stress, the process of intercultural competence could be impeded.

Finally, intercultural competence assumes an outcome of improving intercultural relationships. Koester and Olebe (1988) outline eight categories to examine intercultural competence development. These are assumed to represent comprehensively what may be universally valued on a humanitarian level and include: respect; knowledge; empathy; problem-solving abilities; relational harmony; interaction management; tolerance for ambiguity; and appropriate interaction posture. Cultivating these values will improve intercultural relationships and may ultimately contribute to societal consonance that comes from fostering intercultural competence.

Themes of Intercultural Competence across the Field of Adult Education

This section looks at four major themes that emerge from the adult education literature on intercultural competence. These themes include: (a) the capacity for adaptation within the context of a host culture; (b) a transformative nature; and (c) relational components. While these first three themes describe what occurs throughout the process of developing intercultural competence, a fourth theme discusses impediments to this process.
The first theme is the capacity for adaptation within the context of a host culture. Adaptation in its various forms permeates the lexicon of intercultural competence literature, particularly with regards to cultural orientation, identity, and one’s ability to function effectively in the context of a host culture (Bennett, 2009; Berry et al., 1989; Deardorff, 2006; 2009; Kim, 2009; Lustig & Koester, 1996). Adaptation may be defined as “the interdependence and alteration of behavior in episodes of interaction, such that the actions of one interactant influence the actions of the other interactant(s) in the context” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p.6). Widely ignored in Western intercultural competence literature, context includes the physical environment, as well as political, historical, and social components (Deardorff, 2009). Those who spend a significant time in the context of a host culture, long enough to experience adaptation (Martin, 1987), often increase their intercultural competence, as well as broaden their perspective on the world, particularly with travel to least developed countries from developed countries (Tung, 1998). Thus one outcome of adaptation may be a broadened, or transformed, worldview.

This leads to a second theme of intercultural competence, its transformative nature. Taylor (1994) associated intercultural competence with transformative learning and described it as “an adaptive capacity based on an inclusive and integrative worldview which allows participants to effectively accommodate the demands of living in a host culture” (p. 154). An inclusive or broadened worldview may refer to one who has experienced transformation in cultural sensitivity through adaptation. Intercultural competence is viewed as a learning “process by which individuals move beyond the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of their initial cultural framework to incorporate other cultural realities” which may result in developing a fluid cultural identity, open to continued transformation and growth (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.343).
Cultivating intercultural competence occurs through the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between people where meaning is dialectically empowered to transform people from national to global citizens (Ashwill & Du’o’ng, 2009; Shweder, 1991). Thus, relationships play an integral role in the transformative nature of intercultural competence.

A third theme relating to intercultural competence refers to relational components. In a synthesis of the literature, Deardorff (2009) calls for more focus on relational aspects of intercultural competence beyond the individual to incorporate all interactants, including context. Intercultural competence is developed at the intersection of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, cultural skill, cultural desire, and cultural encounters through relationship with others (Campinha-Bacote, 1999). As an example, someone may be highly knowledgeable of the history, literature, cuisine, and sociopolitical facts of China without ever having met a Chinese citizen. But that same person would likely not know how to navigate the daily realities of Chinese life. They would not have the experience of encountering and relationship, which would deprive them of a core element of intercultural competence: developing an understanding and awareness (of self and others) through the interconnectedness of multidimensional relationships (Ashwill & Du’o’ng, 2009).

Intercultural competence is commonly described as an ongoing process of understanding over an extended period of time (Caffrey, Neander, Markle, & Stewart, 2005; Diller & Moule, 2005; Munoz, DoBroka, & Mohammad, 2009). Developing an awareness of other cultures is not a quick endeavor, and requires more than formal knowledge. Reading a book or watching a documentary on a culture may pique interest in a culture, but such exercises are merely a springboard for diving deeper into the vast ocean of intercultural enrichment. Immersion into a
cultural group’s daily experience for an extended period of time offers an interactive way to build relationships and foster intercultural competence.

Building relationships suggest an active, deliberate quest for developing intercultural competence, rather than a passive exercise that simply happens. Throughout the literature, intercultural competence is presented as a concept that brings understanding of each other as members of a global community interact. Deardorff (2006) emphasizes the importance of developing intercultural competence and warns our very survival as humans depends upon acting on this premise.

While the first three themes describe what may occur throughout the process of developing intercultural competence, a fourth theme discusses impediments to this process found throughout the adult education literature. These impediments include culture shock, language barriers, and ethnocentric attitudes.

The degree of cultural difference, as well as status, power, and economic differences, can lead to what Oberg (1960) classically coined culture shock. A more current term is cultural disequilibrium (Kim, 2008), which is induced when dealing “with a barrage of new perceptual stimuli that are difficult to interpret because the cultural context has changed” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.323). Sojourners preparing to leave a developed country for the first time to embark on a long-term living/working situation in a least developed country are susceptible to culture shock, which can evoke several responses that may lead toward processes of adaptation or separation.

The Berry et al. (1989) model of acculturation, which did not inform this study but is commonly referenced in the intercultural competence literature, presents four responses to intercultural immersion: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. These responses suggest an individual’s attitude plays a significant role in understanding the stress of
culture shock for adapting and developing intercultural competence. To overcome the stresses of negativity and anxiety that may accompany culture shock, Deardorff (2006) suggests an attitude of respect, along with observing and relating to host members as part of becoming interculturally aware. Sojourners caught in assuming similarity instead of difference are often disoriented by culture shock (Friedman & Antal, 2005). Therefore, maintaining a sense of openness to intercultural possibilities, while seeking intercultural knowledge, is helpful. Developing intercultural competence is difficult emotional work that involves a lifelong process of sharpening skills to minimize the acculturative stress and anxiety caused by culture shock and to maximize meaningful interactions with others (Bennett, 2009; Diller & Moule, 2005; Jandt, 2010).

Seeking knowledge of language is also important, since sociolinguistic barriers may be a second impediment for developing intercultural competence. The ability to communicate interculturally, where “people are interacting with at least one culturally different person” has been described as “unknown, unpredictable, ambiguous, weird, mysterious, unexplained, exotic, unusual, unfamiliar, curious, novel, odd, outlandish, and strange” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.302). This may result in a lack of security, comfort, and understanding. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that “the linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background” of personal experience and sociocultural factors (p.281). As the Deardorff (2006) model of intercultural competence addresses, sociolinguistic awareness is crucial for meaningful interaction. Lustig and Koester (1996) concur when they state language plays a “central role in the ability to function, to accomplish tasks, and most important, to interact with others” (p.154).
A third impediment to intercultural competence is an ethnocentric attitude, which is defined as a judgment that assumes one’s own group is superior to another (Hofstede, 2001), or “a learned belief in cultural superiority” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.85). Proven throughout history, ethnocentric attitudes reflect stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and racism (Jandt, 2010; Lustig & Koester, 1996). This also includes the tendency to view ourselves as members of a group and others as outsiders, or nonmembers, which stunts the growth of intercultural competency.

By contrast to ethnocentrism, ethnorelativism leads to ideals of intercultural understanding (Bennett, 1993). As Shweder (1991) describes, “relativists are committed to the view that alien idea systems, though fundamentally different from our own, display an internal coherency that can be understood but cannot be judged” (p.114). Bennett (1993) developed a model that describes movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism through stages that occur over time and experience with difference. While ethnocentrism assesses culturally different behavior “in relation to one’s own cultural standards”; ethnorelativism understands behaviors relative to the intercultural context (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.23). Developing ethnorelativistic attitudes, and thus minimizing ethnocentrism, may develop intercultural insights and sensitivities. And as ethnocentrism wanes, the journey toward intercultural competence may be underway.

Overview of Intercultural Competence Models

Many models for understanding the development of intercultural competence exist, and their use typically depends on the discipline. For instance, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) provide a synoptic overview of conceptual models most recently developed. Their overview is helpful for understanding the landscape as well as the models’ distinctions. They are categorized
as follows: compositional models convey analytic schemes or typologies (e.g. Howard Hamilton, Richardson, and Shuford, 1998); co-orientational models conceptualize interactional components of intercultural competence (e.g. Fantini, 1995); developmental models specify stages or progression toward intercultural understanding (e.g. Bennett, 1986; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005); adaptational models reflect interdependence and mutual adaptations (e.g. Berry et al., 1989); and finally, causal models emphasize interrelationships among competence components (e.g. Deardorff, 2006). This literature review and succeeding study narrow the focus on the Deardorff (2006) and Berry et al. (1989) models because of their prominent use, reliability, and holistic approaches to intercultural competence.


Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence deserves attention for its credibility and comprehensiveness in conceptualizing how intercultural competence is developed. It was created through the collaboration of two dozen intercultural experts and exists in two forms: a pyramid model to emphasize compositional stages that scaffold intercultural competence; and a circular model to emphasize process and easily adapt to research purposes. The latter was chosen as the theoretical focus for this study to avoid hints at hierarchy and rather to highlight intercultural competence as a perpetual process. Additionally, the process model as shown in Figure 2 attempts to address intercultural competence holistically. The succeeding study relied on Deardorff’s (2006) model to examine the various components for developing intercultural competence, such as attitudes, knowledge, skills, and outcomes. It provided a platform for exploring the narratives of followers of Christ in an effort to gain insight into their intercultural experiences and how they contributed to their spiritual growth.
As shown in Figure 2, the model begins with attitudes that explain cognitive aspects of motivation, such as curiosity and discovery. It also conveys the qualities, such as respect and openness which suggest a posture for developing awareness. As immersion over time and potential adaptation continues, cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness may increase. As this happens, the skills necessary for knowledge and
comprehension, such as listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating, are honed for further development. Internal outcomes include informed frames of reference that shift through adaptability and flexibility. Empathy, “the capacity to behave as if one understands the world as others do” develops (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.331). Views become ethnorelative, which means “cultures can only be understood relative to one another” and (Bennett, 1993, p.26). Ethnorelative views lead to desired external outcomes of effective and appropriate communication and behavior as expressed through interaction. Thus the process serves as a compass toward intercultural competence, and with its focus on interaction, this lens of intercultural competence dovetails with sociocultural theory and the relational components of spiritual growth.

As chapter six presents, the Deardorff (2006) model allowed for a discussion on the relationship between intercultural competence and spiritual growth. The next section examines the empirical studies on intercultural competence.

**Empirical Studies on Intercultural Competence**

This section examines the findings from the empirical intercultural competence literature, which are valuable for understanding effective participation with and within an increasingly global community. Three main themes of intercultural competence emerge throughout the findings: (a) the outcomes of intercultural competence; (b) the transformative nature of intercultural competence; and (c) evidence of how intercultural competence may be developed. This section analyzes each theme to explore intercultural immersion experiences as a way to develop intercultural competence, while also offering a critique to enhance further studies.

**Outcomes of Intercultural Competence**
The journey toward intercultural competence yields profound personal and professional outcomes for an individual as well as relationships within the global community. As seen continually in the findings of the studies, the chief outcomes of intercultural competence include: learning to relate to members of a host culture; developing an awareness of one’s home culture; and challenging stereotypes.

The first outcome of intercultural competence is learning to relate to members of a host culture. Building relationships with host members develops intercultural competence and leads to sensitivity of other cultures as well as a recognition of personal biases (Canfield, Low, and Hovestadt, 2009; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999; Wood & Atkins, 2006). In a study by Canfield et al. (2009), personal biases of counseling students surfaced after immersion experiences in Mexico and Thailand. Participants reported that their experience changed their views of others, helped identify their own biases, and made them a more interculturally sensitive and competent counselor. The results of the study expressed student growth with regards to intercultural awareness. The levels of growth were subjective; however, based on student perceptions of their own increased sensitivity. Perhaps quantifying or offering richer qualitative descriptions concerning participant growth would provide more meaning. Likewise, Wood and Atkins (2006) discovered how a cultural immersion experience shed light on American students’ biases and cultural beliefs, but their findings were based on student reflections. In their study, nurses traveled to Choluteca, Honduras and worked in a labor and delivery setting for one week. The short nature of the trip invokes curiosity about the significance of time spent away from one’s home country and how time correlates with intercultural awareness. This critique is not to insist the employment of quantitative or mixed methods. Rather the suggestion is for these qualitative studies to offer clearer, more holistic data for understanding intercultural competence gains.
A nursing student serving abroad summarizes this outcome of intercultural competence when she professes, “This experience has made me rethink what is important in life, what I value, how I relate to others, how I understand and am sensitive to others, what I need to be culturally competent” (St. Clair & McKenry, 1999, p. 232). Resulting from this heightened awareness, interculturally competent practitioners gain effective communication skills, without conveying condescension or patronizing attitudes, as they learn how to relate to members of a host culture (Arthur, 2002; Walsh, 2003).

Along with learning to relate to members of a host culture, a second outcome of intercultural competence revealed throughout the findings of the empirical studies is developing an awareness of one’s home culture. Such awareness comes into sharper focus particularly for those who travel from a developed country into a least developed country (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Nishigori, Otani, Plint, Uchino, & Ban, 2009). A study by Nishigori et al. (2009) rested on the assumption that sojourners from a developed country will make more significant gains in intercultural competence when immersed in a least developed country. They found significant economic differences led to meaningful reflection of their home culture and their own economic privilege. Liang and Zhang (2009) assert that these understandings of economic privilege, through awareness of one’s home culture, are at the core of intercultural competence.

Because many of the studies investigated participants from developed countries immersing in cultures of least developed countries, significant economic contrasts were obvious for study participants. Despite economic differences, intercultural competence insists on equality and respect for all humans (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). For study participants from a Western culture traveling to poverty-stricken Thailand and a developing region in Africa,
cultural immersion resulted in an awareness of their home culture values, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as a heightened sense of their own economic privilege (Canfield et al., 2009; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). Utilizing group processing of individual and collective experiences, Canfield et al. (2009) reported participant’s perceptions of their home culture. Speaking on behalf of the group in Thailand, one counseling student “felt as though we stood out with all of our privilege and that was unsettling at times” (Canfield et al., 2009, p. 320). This study also found significant growth in intercultural competence as participants entered into Thai cultural activities rather than import selective elements into their own realms of familiarity. Such direct confrontation with their own privileged status contributed to becoming a more interculturally sensitive and competent counselor.

In a quantitative study of 489 pre-service teachers, Liang and Zhang (2009) found professional beliefs, self-reflections, expectations, and actions to ameliorate stereotyping and discrimination describe intercultural competence as “an evolving process from cognition, to affection, and then to action” (p.26). The researchers acknowledge the limitations of their quantitative study, particularly the lack of field observation and the complexities of measuring intercultural competence constructs as part of the “soft barbarity of assessment” (Dervin, 2010, p.8). Yet their findings are useful for emphasizing the value of intercultural immersion experiences for developing an awareness of one’s home culture and the importance of ameliorating prejudice and discrimination through reflection on sociocultural and economic privileges. This leads to a third outcome of intercultural competence—challenging stereotypes.

A third outcome of intercultural competence is the opportunity for individuals to challenge stereotypes by examining their own assumptions and values that guide behavior, particularly through an immersion experience (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Arthur,
Traveling away from a home culture places an individual in an unfamiliar environment and may initiate thoughts of previously held cultural values. Munoz, Dobroka, and Mohammad (2009) report on how nursing students recognized their personal tendencies to stereotype others through regular opportunities for intercultural encounters, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness. Their mixed method study administered “a statistically reliable” instrument to provide a measurable baseline of intercultural competence (p. 499). While lacking an emphasis on immersion, this study was helpful for conveying the significance of developing courses in intercultural competence. Intercultural encounters combined with reflection provided the opportunity for human service professionals to look for commonalities, rather than focus on differences as a way to break down stereotypes. Similarly, Edmonds (2010) found immersion experiences allowed participants to recognize their own ethnocentrism by seeing themselves as “other” (St. Clair & McKenry, 1999; Walsh & DeJoseph, 2003). Self-awareness in a diverse sociocultural context reveals biases and preconceived notions and spotlights the propensity for stereotyping. When the tendency to stereotype dissipates, the implication is a productive collaboration between the care provider and client and overall improved professional practice.

In a study of students who participated in an exchange to an undisclosed country in Africa, Mwebi and Brigham (2009) found another strategy to challenge preconceived stereotypes by regarding Africans as subjects, not objects. Their study provides an important ingredient for fostering intercultural competence for groups traveling abroad. They credit the presence of an “insider” for leading their group of pre-service teachers to this developing part of the world and maximizing the potential for growth (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009, p. 425). An insider is native to the host country and may provide guidance and allow for open questions and frank discussions.
about a particular culture. This study finds confronting stereotypes and the opportunity for personal change occurs more readily when one is immersed in a culture different from his or her own and granted a safe environment for honest discourse. Addressing preconceived attitudes and stereotypes demonstrates positive growth toward intercultural sensitivity and the promotion of intercultural adaptation (Arthur, 2002; Canfield et al., 2009).

As sojourners interact in an intercultural environment for an extensive time, the adaptation that may lead toward intercultural competence is underway. Practitioners often become more effective as they learn to negotiate the daily experience of a host culture (Canfield et al., 2009; Deardorff, 2006; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). The adaptive changes that occur represent the essence of intercultural competence, and demonstrate another theme that emerges from the findings in the literature: the transformative nature of intercultural competence.

The transformative Nature of Intercultural Competence through Adaptation

The findings throughout the studies of intercultural competence suggest a second major theme of individual transformation that occurs with adaptation to a host culture. After immersing in a culture for an extended period of time, participants across the studies often experienced an enlightened consciousness that re-oriented their primary worldview (McPhatter, 1997; Taylor, 1994). A re-oriented or altered worldview may yield cultural discoveries that transform values, attitudes, and behaviors as intercultural competence is developed (Carter-Black, 2007; McPhatter, 1997). This section looks at two components of transformation through adaptation as evidenced in the studies: an altered worldview and personal and professional growth.

Altering one’s worldview can occur by critically reviewing individual beliefs and aligning personal views with new realities (McPhatter, 1997). Taylor (1994) found intercultural
competence is a learning process that occurs through perspective transformation. Enhanced by critical reflection, an expanded worldview and intercultural competencies increase by engaging in immersion experiences (Taylor, 1994; Walsh & DeJoseph, 2003). The study by Walsh and DeJoseph (2003) underscored the transformative nature of intercultural competence by revealing new realities of global awareness for individuals. Their exploratory, descriptive study explored how a short-term immersion experience to San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala transformed ten nursing students and two faculty members. After two weeks abroad they found students had become more open to new meaning, saw life in a different light, and changed their perspectives on time and scheduling. They realized how much they took for granted in the U.S. and also learned about the role of family in Guatemala’s social structure. Because this study included many first-hand accounts of participants, its strength was providing a raw account of how nursing students and faculty were transformed. Spending two weeks abroad, fully immersed in a culture, was a powerful contribution to the study’s main outcome of increased intercultural competence through a transformed worldview.

When Carter-Black (2007) embarked on an “enlightening journey” to Zambia, her ethnographic, qualitative study showed how story-telling and folklore assist intercultural competence by providing intimate knowledge of Zambian culture (p. 40). Not only did Carter-Black learn the lived experience of Zambians, she also identified storytelling as an “epiphanic event” that sparked a passion to help others transcend cultural boundaries (p. 39). Though this research on story-telling is an intriguing modality for achieving intercultural competence, little attention was given to prior experience of the audience. More research would need to be done to know whether story-telling and folklore conveyed out of environmental context, or heard without prior knowledge of the culture, would have the similar impact of transforming perspectives.
Acquiring intercultural competence causes an intriguing, transformational (Canfield et al., 2009) shift in attitudes from regarding oneself as a local practitioner to a global worker (Arthur, 2002). Mimicking this experience in the U.S. would be a difficult task. As St. Clair and McKenry (1999) strongly assert, immersion abroad fosters understanding of our own prejudices, assumptions, and beliefs, thus moving an individual from narrow to open to new meaning with a recalibrated worldview through the process of adaptation (Deardorff, 2006). Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of re-orienting one’s primary worldview “is to create a belief in, and acceptance of, others on the basis of equality solely because of a sense of shared humanity” (McPhatter, 1997, p. 262).

Another component of the transformative nature of intercultural competence through the process of adaptation is the resulting personal and professional growth. On a personal level, intercultural competence offers improved racial identity and enhanced relationships (Geron, 2002; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). A study involving Japanese and British medical students credits intercultural competence for personal development that transcends improved doctor-patient relationships (Nishigori et al., 2009). Also regarding medical disciplines, Geron (2002) asserts intercultural competence allows for culturally appropriate, hence improved, patient care due to intercultural understanding that fosters meaningful interactions. Carter-Black’s (2007) enthusiastic encounter in Zambia explains how researchers may employ impromptu story-telling as a method of cultural understanding in the workplace. Such narratives reflect collective realities and provide a rich source of cultural knowledge to assist social workers in becoming exemplary practitioners. And in another study, Allen and Young (1997) discover the value of international exposure for enhancing on-the-job performance. They find that an immersion
experience in Mexico City fosters intercultural sensitivity and creates improved managers for graduates of MBA programs.

The transformative nature of intercultural competence is reminiscent of the findings in the spirituality literature and begins to pique an interest in the relationship between these two constructs. The next section examines a third theme as revealed in the findings of the studies: fostering intercultural competence, which continues to provoke a curiosity in its relationship to spirituality.

**Developing Intercultural Competence**

Two main ways for developing intercultural competence emerges from the literature: integration through immersion experiences and reflection with dialogue. Just because someone has had exposure to three or four people of a culture, does not mean they know the culture (Campinha-Bacote, 1999). Furthermore, knowledge about a culture is merely intellectual in contrast to learning intercultural competence by interacting with members of a host culture through immersion experiences (Arthur, 2002; Caffrey et al., 2005; Ingram, 2005).

Knowledge obtained through media and encounters on home soil can serve as an impetus to improve intercultural competence; however the most effective tool for achieving intercultural competence and an enhanced awareness of the global community is through the interaction that occurs within an immersion experience (Canfield et al., 2009; Edmonds, 2010; Hofstede, 2001; Nishigori, et al., 2009; Walsh & DeJoseph, 2003). St. Clair and McKenry (1999) employ more dogmatic language when they conclude intercultural competence cannot be achieved without living in another culture, even if only for two or three weeks. Furthermore, individuals have a limited ability to grasp and overcome their own ethnocentrism without actually living in another culture (Caffrey et al., 2005).
Long-term intercultural immersion has a strong influence and far-reaching effects by placing individuals in an environment that forces them to process, interpret and react, while instilling knowledge, attitudes, language, communication, empathy, patience, and compassion (Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez, & Scott, 2008; Wiest, 1998). An environment away from the home country offers an opportunity for sojourners to interact with host culture members, and consequently, they may assess their views of the world. Walsh and DeJoseph (2003) stress intercultural views from abroad are different from the intercultural views offered at home. While their study offered no a priori qualitative data to demonstrate intercultural competence gains for nurses, they found the interaction from immersion experiences led to improved practice and intercultural understanding.

Along with the prospect of improved practice and awareness, the interaction of immersion experiences addresses the difficulty connecting with diverse populations and allows the rehearsal of adaptive functioning skills through direct confrontation of contrasting cultures (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Edmonds, 2010). In a study on the lived experiences of nurses who worked abroad, Edmonds (2010) found “adapting, navigating, or negotiating behaviors required to live in a new/different environment” was a key theme for developing intercultural competence (p.559). Because the findings did not distinguish from nurses working in the developed country of England or the least developed country of Dominica, but rather lumped the findings together, the assumption is the universal nature of adapting and developing functional skills regardless of where the intercultural interaction takes place.

One way to enhance interactions with host culture members is to begin an immersion experience with the help of an “insider” (Alexander et al., 2005). Alexander et al. (2005) studied counselor educators who spent three weeks in Trinidad and found initial interaction with the
personnel from the Ministry of Education resulted in rich opportunity for growth and understanding within the intercultural context. This led to the achievement of their study’s goals to enrich school counseling course work, address standards for intercultural training, develop intercultural awareness and knowledge, develop an interculturally relevant counseling curriculum, and promote dialogue for an international exchange of ideas.

Ingram’s (2005) research also supports the value interactions through immersion into a culture. Like the Nishigori et al. (2009) study, Ingram examines participants from a developed country to a developed country. The findings, however, revolve around similar themes for those who interacted with host members from a least developed country, and include intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Students participating in a study exchange program in Avignon, France increased their levels of intercultural competence and linguistic proficiency because of their interactions with the daily reality of the host country’s culture (Ingram, 2005; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). Thus the process of intercultural competence is intrinsically active through an immersion experience (Allen & Young, 1997).

Reflection with dialogue is the second main component for fostering intercultural competence as expressed in the findings of the literature. In a study of humanitarian workers serving on a medical mission to least developed countries, Chang (2007) determined three progressive levels of influence on intercultural competence. These include the peripheral level, where a person encounters and recognizes a culture; the cognitive level, where a person becomes familiar and adjusts to his or her cultural surroundings; and the reflective level, where an individual is transformed and enlightened. Ingram (2005) supports the importance of this third level by explaining immersion is not enough to guarantee intercultural competence, and that an individual must make sense of experience through reflection with dialogue. Students in France
illustrated sensitivity to being an outsider and began thinking about their cultural identity as evidenced through reflective journals and group dialogue. They began to understand the sometimes difficult experiences of American immigrants and also faced their preconceived stereotypes of French people and French regard for Americans. Though Ingram (2005) suggests implementing journals as a reflection tool, little guidance is offered to participants and instructors. Including guiding questions within the discussion section would be helpful in fostering reflective dialogue and focusing thoughtfulness.

Immersion experiences abroad promote self-reflective learning, and this reflection brings self-awareness, often considered the first step toward intercultural competence (Canfield et al., 2009; Edmonds, 2010; Walsh & DeJoseph, 2003). Liang and Zhang (2009), assert self-awareness comes from self-reflection. They define self-awareness as a consciousness “of one’s own beliefs, values, and attitudes, [and] being willing or able to think critically about them” (p. 18). Their discussion emphasizes reflection as a key component of fostering self-awareness (and subsequently intercultural competence), yet their quantitative approach seems to atrophy the data on evaluating the indicators of pre-service teachers’ intercultural competence.

Ingram’s (2005) study also determined the value of reflection and dialogue as a vehicle for self-awareness. He found participants engaged in reflective practice, both informally and in structured group settings, fostered a healthy identity by understanding themselves (He & Cooper, 2009). Similarly, the qualitative study by Brindley, Quinn, and Morton (2009) suggested meaning is made through narrative reflections where participants could engage in dialogue about their own beliefs and make sense of experiences abroad as a way of raising self-awareness through considering multiple perspectives. Frequently referenced in the nursing education
literature, Campinha-Bacote (1999) extols the “know thyself” mantra as encouragement to reflect on our own prejudices and biases as a primary step toward intercultural competence (p. 204).

Self-awareness in the context of intercultural competence is a product of reflection and dialogue on individual developmental issues that may create fear, discomfort, ambivalence, and resistance to different cultures (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005). Alexander et al. (2005) worked with counselor trainees in Trinidad to build intercultural competencies through interactive experiential activities, personal process journals, and a multicultural counseling portfolio. Perhaps publication space was a consideration, but a helpful inclusion would have been to identify the assumptions that guided participants’ attitudes, as well as comprehensive examples of participant reflections from these portfolios. Nonetheless, the findings from this study contributed to understanding the importance of reflection and dialogue for developing self-awareness.

McPhatter (1997) also found value in reflection for participants in Trinidad. An honest assessment of how one interacts with others of different cultures can be executed introspectively through journals, or in a group setting, such as discussion. Canfield et al. (2009) encourage group processing to make meaning of an experience to alter worldviews and increase intercultural competence (Meaney et al., 2008). Buying into this assertion, Meaney’s et al. (2008) study was framed around Bandura’s (1986) social-cognitive theory to emphasize the importance of fostering intercultural competence in a social environment. Regardless of how reflective dialogue is executed, either individually or collectively, an important feature is to make connections to practice to optimize change and foster growth (Munoz, DoBroka, & Mohammad, 2009).
**Chapter Summary**

This review offered a journey through the literature relating to sociocultural theory, spirituality, and intercultural competence. Beginning with an examination of conceptual research as a foundation, this review then funneled through the empirical literature. As evidenced in the literature review and introduced in chapter one, the corpus of literature on spirituality and intercultural competence covers broad aspects of their respective areas, but the literature does not run deep. Findings from the studies revealed many gaps in the literature, which this research study addressed. More needed to be known about the relationship between spiritual growth and intercultural competence. Under the lens of sociocultural theory and employing the Deardorff (2006) model of intercultural competence, this study explored Christ-centered spiritual growth and its relationship to how sojourners learned to adapt while working in a culture different from their own.

The next chapter presents narrative inquiry as a methodology for investigating the problem of the unknown relationship between the constructs of spirituality and intercultural competence. The goal was to honor the experiences of followers of Christ working in a host culture and by exploring the following three research questions: (a) how do participants describe their spiritual growth in the context of a least developed country; (b) how do participants describe the development of intercultural competence; and what is the nature of the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence?
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach and narrative inquiry in particular, illuminates new ways of thinking by examining how others have navigated and negotiated daily realities (Clandinin, 2007). This research methodology can be useful for understanding the experiences of those who have left a home culture to work and reside in a host culture. Such times of transition in life spark learning and stimulate “the narrative impulse” (Rossiter, 1999, p.83). This is where this study seeks to capture meaning.

For some, and for followers of Christ in particular, the processes of fostering spirituality and learning to adapt to locales abroad may provide a catalyst for co-constructing knowledge, negotiating identities, and externalizing the internal as an effort to honor experience and voice. The choice to employ narrative inquiry as a research methodology for this study emanates from a sociocultural, constructivist mindset that seeks to engage in dialogue for the mutual purpose of making meaning from experience. Narrative inquiry provides space for telling and re-telling as a way to facilitate meaning making.

This chapter briefly introduces a qualitative research paradigm and discusses narrative inquiry as the research design for exploring the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ working in host countries. Next, this discussion examines its underlying assumptions, emphasizes narrative inquiry as an epistemology, and addresses the challenges of employing this research design. Along with the researcher’s background, participant selection, and data collection/analysis, this chapter also explains the premises of verification, credibility, dependability, and transferability.
Qua\n\litative Research Paradigm

Halcolm’s Laws of Inquiry (as cited in Patton, 2002) introduces qualitative research by stating, “There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience” (p.2). Defined as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world,” qualitative research consists of “interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.4). By studying spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence, this qualitative research aims to interpret or make sense of events by the meanings followers of Christ attribute to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

A qualitative research approach includes an umbrella of methodologies that examines human action through systems of interpretation that may employ phenomenology, heuristic studies, case studies, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The qualitative data derived from these approaches spans a broad spectrum, such as field observations, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, journals, family histories, personal experiences, various art forms (such as poetry and graffiti), and interview transcripts. The purpose and product offered by qualitative research is a better understanding of “how social experience is created and given meaning” through the interpretation of interconnected images and representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13).

Qualitative research is built upon assumptions regarding the role of the researcher and the nature of knowledge. The researcher in qualitative research assumes the role of research instrument (Janesick, 2003). The aim is a strategic interpretation of phenomena that requires “sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2009, p.177). This study follows qualitative research protocol by engaging with followers of Christ in natural settings to collect data through interviews and observation. Throughout the research process, the qualitative
researcher takes measures to ensure interpretations are consistent with the meanings intended by the participant.

Because qualitative researchers assume no single correct interpretation exists, the nature of knowledge is regarded as “subjectivist” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.34). Multiple interpretations co-exist with multiple realities. With the acknowledgement of multiple realities, knowledge is socially constructed. Thus, qualitative research emphasizes learning as a relational process that emanates from an intimate relationship between the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2009; Janesick, 2003). Subsumed under a qualitative approach, this study employs narrative inquiry. Its description and related set of assumptions are discussed next.

**Narrative Inquiry Research Design**

Situated within the paradigm of qualitative research, narrative inquiry is defined as a qualitative research approach that studies the ways human experience the world as a source of knowledge and understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In other words, the capacity to learn is cultivated by finding meaning in experience through inquiry (Patton, 2002). Narrative inquiry’s origins are traced to Dewey (1938), who espoused education as life. His ideas about learning through the experiences of life are foundational for Mitchell’s (1981) examination of narratology, Polkinghorne’s (1988) narrative analysis, and the heavily relied upon work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who established narrative inquiry as a significant research methodology. Not to be confused with phenomenology, which extracts the essence of experience, narrative inquiry makes sense of and gives meaning to the “lived experience” of the individual (Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr, 2007, p.22). Because experience may contain affective, cognitive, somatic, and environmental components, narrative inquiry has
a holistic quality that allows for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of followers of Christ.

Narrative inquiry is an epistemology, or way of knowing, that serves as a tool for exploring life experience to validate and give meaning to our lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Put simply, human meaning making is a subjective, narrative process (Clark, 2010; Rossiter, 1999) that puts “knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.46). When narratives are told, as in a researcher-researched relationship, stories are externalized, situated in a social context, and can be co-constructed to make meaning (Clark, 2010; Rossiter, 1999). As personal renditions are expressed, the selected, rejected, and omitted content becomes a part of the story. When these stories are told and re-told, the conversations can go beyond events, and perpetuate a process of self awareness that signifies learning and identity development (Rossiter, 1999; Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). Thus in exploring spirituality and intercultural competence with followers of Christ, understanding does not come from the observable outside, but rather it comes from bringing the inside out.

Some debate swirls around the differences between narrative and story. While some scholars make a distinction (Boje, 2008; Tyler & Rosen, 2008) others use narrative and story interchangeably (Clark, 2010; Riessman, 2008; Thompson, 2010). Clark (2010) mixes the terms when she explains narrative inquiry as a process of understanding experience through “narrating it, constructing it as a kind of story” (p.3). Similarly, Rossiter (1999) asserts that meaning is expressed as a “story” throughout the process of narrating an experience (p.78). The succeeding study adopts the views of Rossiter (1999), Riessman (2008), and Clark (2010) where the terms narrative and story are used interchangeably.
Narrative inquiry moves from general to particular stories, from the universal to the local. For exploring the stories of followers of Christ, inductive reasoning is emphasized by moving away from explanation and toward description and interpretation of spiritual and adaptive experiences within host cultures. Generalization is replaced by transferability in the process of negotiating a shared narrative consonance (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Ultimately, narrative researchers interpret stories by exploring the realm of human experience and meaning according to the sociocultural context.

Rossiter (1999) identifies four key characteristics of narrative inquiry woven together by the notion that meaning is co-constructed relationally (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). First, narrative inquiry considers context as an environmental component where meaning is made by reconstructing a person’s experience in relation to others and their cultural or environmental surroundings. Narrative inquiry contributes to the ongoing process of understanding by helping people make sense of their experience within various contexts (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Second, narrative inquiry is interpretive, where experience is interpreted by, or according to, sociocultural values. Geertz (1973) declares interpretations as second- and third-hand descriptions. Descriptions of culture, for example, from another’s point of view “must be cast in terms of the constructions we imagine…[and] the interpretations to which persons of a particular denomination subject their experience, because that is what they profess to be descriptions of” (p.15). Therefore, making meaning of spiritual growth and intercultural competence through interpretation “varies according to the pattern of life by which it is informed” (p.14). Third, narrative inquiry is retrospective. Applied to this study, followers of Christ will thus look backward on events that occurred in the past to make meaning. And
finally, narrative inquiry is identified as temporal. Narratives are fluid, moving, and change across time and place, which implies the capacity of stories to shift meaning.

**Underlying Assumptions of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry as an epistemological process is built upon several assumptions. These assumptions are discussed in this section and relate to experience and meaning; language; the interaction of context; identity formation; the fluidity and temporality of time; the relationship of the researcher and the researched; and ontological assumptions.

At the core of narrative inquiry is the assumption that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). The story, or narrative, of followers of Christ, is “the fundamental unit” that accounts for their spiritual and cultural experiences in a host culture (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.4). These two foundational assumptions explain why narrative inquiry values human experience and the impetus to investigate how that experience is meaningful. Because narratives make up the context of meaning, and narratives are derived from experience, using narrative inquiry in research means adopting a particular view of experience (Clandinin et al., 2007). Throughout the literature on narrative inquiry, that particular view regards narrative as “the primary structure through which human beings organize and make meaning of their experience” (Rossiter, 1999, p.78). Thus, in an effort to co-construct meaning with followers of Christ, employing narrative inquiry targets the rich resource of experience. The succeeding study operates under the assumption that a person is “a specialist or expert on some aspect of human experience” (Shweder, 1991, p.108).

A second assumption emphasizes the significance of language. Narrative inquiry gives space for voice and language is the tool, constructed by culture, through which perspectives are conveyed, molded, and interacted (Bakhtin, 1981). Language is conceptualized as
“exteriorizing” thoughts (Bakhtin, 1981, p.62). The transaction of words provides the dialogic voice that is inseparable from sociocultural factors. Employing narrative inquiry as a research methodology relies on the assumption that linguistic meaning is active. A listener does not merely mirror the words spoken, rather,

In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement (Bakhtin, 1981, p.282).

Thus, linguistic meaning is not passive, nor is it purely receptive. The dynamic interaction of language and context with speakers and listeners is an active learning process.

Clark (2010) addresses this interaction by identifying learning at three levels with narrative inquiry. First, people learn from hearing. Narrative inquiry is employed as a vehicle for entering the follower’s of Christ thinking or their way of perceiving by actively engaging in their stories through inquiry and listening (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). When Bakhtinian theory is applied to narrative inquiry, the role of the listener’s imagination, which is always in dialogue with thought processes, become a valuable tool to explore others’ worlds (Andrews, 2007). In hearing others, our imaginations “assist us in seeing beyond the immediately visible” and “without this imagination, we are forever restricted to the world as we know it, which is a very limited place to be” (p.510). A second level of learning comes from the act of telling narratives. Each word is an expression of who a person is as a follower of Christ in a social, historical, and cultural context. Bakhtin’s (1981) insight declares a person can be outside and inside their language. He declares “the word in language is half someone else’s” (p.293). Thus, in the succeeding study, the words of narratives of followers of Christ become intertwined with
the researcher’s experiences, intentions, and interpretations. While experience is pre-linguistic, language is an accessible channel through which meaning can be made through narration (Clark, 2010). And the third level of learning occurs when people, in this case the researcher and the follower of Christ, recognize their own position in narratives as shaped by sociocultural influences.

A third assumption is formed around the interaction of context with the narrative—both as experience and inquiry. The assumption is that knowing is embedded in the context (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), which implies the co-construction of knowledge through the interactive dialogue that occurs. Context refers to place, time, and the integration into sociocultural factors in which followers of Christ are immersed. Narratives embody cultural values as part of the context, and because narratives are also social, an audience always exists (Clark, 2010). The contextual audience may be a group or an individual, or it could include the self or one’s imagination. Research participants are not static, nor do they exist in a vacuum. They are not bound or decontextualized. Rather, narrative inquiry assumes context is crucial to the story and an essential consideration in making sense of spiritual and cultural experiences in a host society.

Fourth, narrative inquiry assumes narrative or story as an ingredient in identity formation. Because narratives allow for telling our stories and reconstructing experiences, they also help us understand ourselves and ultimately our identities. With constantly shifting contexts and constantly accumulating experiences, narratives and identities of followers of Christ are both considered “dynamic and fluid” (Clark, 2010, p.4). The mission of narrative inquiry in this study is to understand how spirituality and intercultural competence is developed through experience, and to explore byproducts of meaning itself and the processes of self-awareness and identity formation.
Just as identity is considered dynamic and fluid, so is time. A fifth assumption of narrative inquiry regards time as temporal. Narratives of followers of Christ are changeable and can be described differently at any given time. Narratives involve reconstructions that may never be repeated the same way twice (Andrews et al., 2008). How the past and future is understood continually evolves in the present. Thus, time and meaning engage in a dynamic process of interaction that is constantly being reconstructed and may be investigated for new meaning (Rossiter, 1999).

Another assumption of narrative inquiry addresses the relationship between the researcher and those who are researched. The relational crux of narrative inquiry is that narratives do not exist in isolation, but rather they represent the socially constructed, story-shaped world in which we live (Clark, 2010). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) view research as a collaborative endeavor between the participant and researcher. Just as narratives are socially interactive and entangled in sociocultural contexts, this study represents the interactions between the researcher and followers of Christ in a mutual process of constructing and reconstructing a shared narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry takes on a relational view of the participant and researcher relationship, where power is shared (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Therefore, a researcher’s own engagement with participants’ narratives is intrinsic to the co-construction of knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe this interaction as “intersubjective” which implies all those involved shape their interpretations and understandings by the experiences brought into the dialogic inquiry (p.10). Both the researcher and the follower of Christ as participant bring their own identity, experience, and imaginations into the dialogue, and the interaction informs the inquiry process and outcomes (Etherington, 2009; Trahar, 2006).
Finally, narrative inquiry is built upon ontological assumptions. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) emphasize narrative inquiry’s conception that “reality can be known” (p.44). Reality is not grounded in empirical observation, but rather, is socially constructed in “the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.13). The caveat then is for the narrative inquirer to recognize the possibility that other interpretations and explanations about the experiences may exist (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In honoring the individual stories of followers of Christ, the existence of other interpretations represents additional opportunities for learning about spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence.

**Challenges of Narrative Inquiry**

Though the many strengths of narrative inquiry make it worthwhile for research, this methodology for learning also has its challenges. Along with its infancy as a research approach in an academy dominated by positivism (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), narrative inquiry’s challenges include: meaning as fluid and temporal; the trap of the “Hollywood narrative” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.10); the demand for researcher expertise; and a critique from the quantitative camp.

The first challenge of narrative inquiry rests on the assumption that meaning is fluid and temporal. It recognizes that meaning may shift and change, and that the same event can have multiple interpretations from different people or the same person over space and time (Rossiter, 1999). Because experiences are reinterpreted repeatedly throughout one’s life, the meaning of those experiences also changes. Narratives should be interpreted with the ontological understanding that the meaning may be specific for a particular time and place. In a dramatic example, someone might describe their wedding day as the happiest day of their life. But
decades later, if they have been through a divorce or experienced a sour relationship with their spouse, the meaning attributed to that day would most likely have shifted.

The potential trap of the “Hollywood narrative” is another challenge of narrative inquiry. The “Hollywood narrative” seeks a happily-ever-after ending. Consciously or unconsciously, what is spoken by the participant might be spun by the researcher to fit an expectation that everything should ultimately work out and conform to a prescriptive chronicle with a coherent beginning, middle, and end. While falling into this trap is not inevitable, it serves as yet another caution for the narrative inquirer. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn of becoming too “committed to the whole, the narrative plot, and to one’s own role in the inquiry and to lose sight of the various fine lines that one treads in writing of a narrative” (p.10). Being overly committed to the bigger picture not only misses nuance and subtleties, but it could tempt a researcher to predict or aim for a particular meaning. This temptation is also called “narrative smoothing” where selections are chosen or omitted to maintain the commitment to the expected whole (Spence, 1986 as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.10). Researchers engaging in narrative inquiry are cautioned to be cognizant of this potential pitfall.

Certainly narrative inquiry requires much sensitivity and awareness of the researcher. It is not merely a haphazard conversation of sterile questions and answers, which brings up a third, and rather elusive challenge of narrative inquiry, researcher expertise. The weaknesses of the researcher are the weaknesses of narrative inquiry, which is dependent on each individual inquirer. Narrative inquiry requires “wakefulness”, patience, active listening, engagement, and conversational skills (Clandinin et al., 2007, p.21). These qualities are the tools for sound qualitative research. Furthermore, inquirers must acknowledge the role of their own positionality (i.e. sociocultural factors such as faith, race, class, and gender) and experience that is brought
into the interactive dialogue. Failure to do this does not give a complete picture of an experience at the expense of knowledge construction and meaning.

A fourth challenge of narrative inquiry emanates from the critique of those who favor quantitative methodologies. This camp of researchers seeks to count, calculate, and control (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and deems qualitative work unscientific. From this view, qualitative researchers are regarded as “journalists” or “soft scientists” who are criticized for being exploratory and subjective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.12). They have interrupted the positivist tradition with research that is riddled with values and impossible-to-verify truths. By contrast, positivistic sciences such as chemistry and physics claim objectivity and “are often seen as the crowning achievements of Western civilization where ‘truth’ can transcend opinion and personal bias” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.12).

**Background of Researcher**

My grandparents are world travelers. I have always admired their sense of adventure and their interest in visiting foreign lands. Along with obscure gifts from around the globe, they have endowed me with a curiosity and deep respect for cultures different from my own. The global mindset instilled by my grandparents equipped me for my parents’ decision to become missionaries and move my sister and me to Nassau, Bahamas. We had to learn to navigate new systems of currency, language, transportation, social mores, and schooling. We also attended church services in the Baintown ghetto three times each week, which were very different from what we knew in our Pennsylvanian home culture. The music was different; the preaching was different; and being interrupted by the occasional intoxicated passer-by was also very different. Though these differences existed, one thing united us all—the gospel message of Jesus Christ. As followers of Christ, our common faith places Christ at the center of our worldview and rests
on cultivating loving relationships with God and others. While the worldview and mission are the same for all who identify themselves as followers of Christ, the ways in which spirituality is developed in the context of another culture can be vastly different.

As a U.S. American who had the unique opportunity to grow up abroad, I often reflect on how that experience was reflected in my spiritual growth as well as how I adapted to Bahamian ways of life. This experience abroad represents the confluence of my interests in spirituality and intercultural competence. I am interested in knowing how other U.S. American followers of Christ make spiritual and intercultural meaning from their experiences in host cultures. As a researcher with a shared background of participants in this study, I can relate to their experiences of being an outsider adapting to a host culture and the efforts to embrace a new context for learning. While my experience abroad was pre-adult as a dependent of my parents, I am interested in how adults navigate the daily realities of a host culture and how their spiritual growth and development of intercultural competence are related.

My personal interest and subjectivity in this study is apparent in my shared faith as a follower of Christ and shared experience living abroad. Christ-centered spirituality as a deepening relationship with God is meant to be developed in each and every sociocultural context as evidenced by the Great Commission (Chan, 2008; Matthew 28:16-20, NIV) to further the gospel of Jesus Christ all over the world. I understand the stresses and frustrations as well as the enrichment and excitement of living abroad. Yet every follower of Christ has their own journey for spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence specific to their unique social, historical, and cultural context. Along with contributions to understanding adult learning through the interplay of these processes and the nature of their relationship, honoring
the narratives of followers of Christ may provide insight into my experience as well as others who have spent significant time abroad.

**Participant Selection**

In exploring the experiences of followers of Christ living and working abroad, a purposeful sample size (N=11) allowed for deep understanding, rich insight, and an informative exploration of the relationship between spiritual growth and intercultural competence. Consistent with a qualitative approach that values depth over breadth, a purposeful sample was strategic for addressing the specific research questions pertinent to this study (Patton, 2002). Thus, adults 25 years and older were selected as this age group distinguishes itself from most adult students who study abroad for one semester or one year as part of an undergraduate degree program. With regards to race/ethnicity, participants were Caucasian and included seven men and four women. Table 1 presents a summary of participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Years Abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Nurse, Teacher</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barney</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJ</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Administrative Director</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Zambia</td>
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<td>Zambia</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Malawi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Teacher, Administrator</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While not heuristic, this study’s personal significance was best served by including only U.S. American citizens. Participants lived and worked in a least developed country (LDC) as
identified by the United Nations (UN). According to the UN, LDCs “represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, 2011, p.v). Currently, forty-eight countries claim this status by meeting criteria based on economic, trade, social, and environmental indicators. Participants also lived and worked in a country with “failed states” status, identified by the Fund for Peace as countries in danger of collapse with economic decline, inequality, demographic pressures, war, and corruption (“Failed States Index,” 2011). LDCs and failed states were selected as host countries because of the many socio-economic contrasts with the U.S. According to the literature on intercultural competence and acculturation, more significant contrasts (often referred to as cultural distance) between home and host cultures require more adaptive skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors (Berry et al., 1989; Mwebi, 2009; Searle & Ward, 1990; Tung, 1998; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Adaptation in these cases most likely takes longer than, for example, an American living and working in the United Kingdom, where home and host cultures share similar language and economic factors (Migletta & Tartaglia, 2008).

Thus, this study looked at participants who have lived and worked abroad in an LDC for a minimum of two years, which departs from the intercultural competence literature saturated with short-term immersion studies (Diller & Moule, 2005; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). This study did not include military personnel who may have been geographically immersed, but lived on a U.S. base. Rather participants lived amongst and maintained daily, direct contact with host culture members, which were important components for developing intercultural competence (Chang, 2007; Deardorff, 2006).

Beginning with participants already known, snowball sampling supplied a “chain of recommended informants” who currently live abroad or returned to the U.S. within the last three
years (Patton, 2002, p.237). This time criterion recognized the impact of current world affairs on one’s time spent abroad. For example, someone who lived in a remote African village prior to the 1980s would most likely have different spiritual and cultural experiences than someone in this half decade. Increased globalization and advances in technology has made obtaining products from the U.S. and maintaining contact with home cultures easier. Followers of Christ living abroad can interface via computer to friends and family, order U.S. American products, and attend live streaming church services via the internet. The increased access to home cultures may impact the acculturation process regarding home and host culture identity orientations, as well as spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. Finally, since this study focuses on cultivating Christ-centered spirituality, participants espoused a Christ-centered worldview. To ensure participants met this criterion, they were presented with the definition of Chris-centered spirituality as outlined in this paper and asked if their views are consistent.

Influenced by Harris (2004) who presents a four-year, developmental model for integrating a Christ-centered worldview, this study recruited followers of Christ who have espoused this worldview for a minimum of four years. Intentional effort was made to recruit followers of Christ, not necessarily affiliated with a church, but those who work in professional fields outside of explicitly evangelistic work.

**Data Collection**

Narrative inquiry allowed for various modes of collecting data such as journals, artifacts, observations, surveys, and a range of interviewing techniques (Clandinin, 2007). This study’s research questions were best explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed for direct interaction with participants and the flexibility for obtaining meaningful data. Thus, the primary instrument for collecting data was the researcher herself (Merriam & Simpson,
2000), who observed and stimulated responses by asking open-ended and clear questions for interpretation (Patton, 2002).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen because of their provision for a holistic interest in how followers of Christ learn spiritually and interculturally. As dialogue ensued between alternating and/or reciprocating speakers and listeners, new contexts of dialogic interplay “reveal[ed] ever newer ways to mean” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346, italics original). Interviewing provided a platform for recognizing the cognitive, affective, motivational, and contextual dimensions of meaning making (Rossiter, 1999). An interest in the whole person emanated from the assumption that all adults are valuable sources of information about their own learning, which comes from social, historical, and cultural contexts and experiences. Learning is an outcome of telling and retelling these stories, and in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed for the social nature of narratives and meaning-making for followers of Christ living in host cultures.

In-depth semi-structured interviews also emphasized space and voice for those who may not typically be noticed, which is important for greater diversity and understanding global contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Murphy, 2007; Cortazzi & Jin, 2007). As mentioned earlier, narratives are social in nature, and thus may be described as “plurivocal” where multiple voices are heard and respected out of a genuine concern and respect for people (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.9). Again, Bakhtin (1981) contributes to understanding the value of voice and dialogic interplay when he asserts “one’s own language is never a single language: in it there are always survivals of the past and potential for other languagedness” (p.66). To allow for the follower’s of Christ voice, in-depth semi-structured interviews created
flexible space to foster interaction in the co-construction of narratives (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007; Andrews et al., 2008).

The rationale for selecting in-depth semi-structured interviews was further bolstered by their potential for empowerment perpetuated by cooperation, collaboration, and a deep seated interest in honoring people. To empower followers of Christ is to legitimize them through a focus on equality, connectedness, care, and mutual respect (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). Not to be neglected, in-depth semi-structured interviews included analysis of “the oppressive effects of macro-social conditions” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p.50). Therefore, narrative inquiry as an empowering methodology may advance principles of social justice for a more equitable society. Though social justice and equity were not a focus of this study on Christ-centered spirituality and intercultural competence, in-depth semi-structured interviews, couched within narrative inquiry as a research methodology, contain these values intrinsically in its respectful regard for people and their voices.

The format and location of in-depth semi-structured interviews varied. All interviews were one-on-one. Face-to-face interviews took place in quiet conference rooms, in the participants’ homes (abroad and/or the U.S.), and virtual telecommunication via the internet for those presently in southern Africa. Deliberate care was taken to ensure the participant was comfortable describing his or her spiritual and intercultural experiences in the location they specified for our meeting. Interviews were audio recorded on two apparatuses, which ensured safety and quality of the data. Length and time of interviews varied from one to two hours, and the researcher met with each participant at least twice. Appendix A (p.290) includes a list of questions that guided the interview. Samples of questions included: How would you describe your spiritual growth since living in a host culture? What aspects of your home culture do you
still rely on for developing spiritual growth? What have you learned about your spirituality having lived abroad? How do members of the host culture, who also describe themselves as followers of Christ, develop their spirituality? Describe everyday life in your host culture. How would you describe your relationships with host culture members? What have you adopted/rejected from the host culture? How would you describe your experience with regards to learning interculturally and spiritually?

**Informed Consent and IRB Compliance**

Informed consent aims to ensure protection and address the ethical issues associated with human participants (Creswell, 2009). The entire research process operated in compliance with the policies set forth by Pennsylvania State’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to the start of collecting data through in-depth semi-structured interviews, this study utilized an informed consent form pre-approved by IRB. This form described the study and required the participant’s signature, which served as evidence of informed consent. While participation in the study was voluntary and free from coercion, pseudonyms were used to establish anonymity. Participants were informed that interviews will be recorded, and all media, transcripts, and notes were kept in a secure environment to ensure confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of gleaning meaning from texts and images (Creswell, 2009). This study strived to keep stories intact, while also employing a constant comparative method for analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis is an ongoing process of continually revisiting, reflecting, and analyzing data for interpretation throughout the collection process. This study constantly compared interview transcripts and notes for emerging themes and patterns pertaining to the research questions and overall purpose. Throughout the interview
process, categories were tentatively established, and memos recorded related insights to guide further inquiry (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Creswell (2009) offers a hierarchical approach for data analysis in qualitative research. The researcher adhered to Creswell’s (2009) six steps of analysis include: (a) organizing and preparing the data for analysis; (b) reading through all the data to obtain overall meaning; (c) establish a detailed coding process that organizes material into segments; (d) generate descriptions of people and themes and identify connections; (e) determine how themes will be presented in the findings of the analysis; and (f) interpret, or make meaning, of the data.

The analytic quality of data rested upon “the methodological skills, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (Patton, 2002, p.5). Thus employing in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection and the constant comparative method for analysis required the implementation of tools to optimize meaning making such as time for reflection, patience, listening, and conversational skills (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Honing these attributes throughout the process led to productive researcher-participant relationships, which allowed for dialogue that elicited rich responses. Additionally, Bakhtin’s (1981) notions of intersecting languages and meanings were a reminder that, despite an effort to keep stories intact, the researcher’s voice is always present in the qualitative interpretation.

Thus a caveat of narrative inquiry was that participants’ stories were never in their purest form, rather they are an unpredictable, immeasurable blend of multiple perspectives as a product of dialogic interplay. Shweder (1991) notes “the process of representing the other goes hand-in-hand with a process of portraying one’s own self as part of the process of representing the other, thereby encouraging an open-ended, self-reflexive dialogic turn of mind” (p.110). He suggests
thinking through others as a means of interpretation and discovery to represent a person’s involvement with the world.

Engaging in narrative inquiry via in-depth semi-structured interviews required transporting the researcher into the story, or imagining wholeheartedly what being in another’s shoes may mean. Andrews (2007) asserts “If we wish to access the frameworks of meaning for others, we must be willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know” (p.489). This was part of the exciting appeal of narrative research. With imagination as a conduit for understanding, narrative inquiry commissioned this journey to discovery.

Data can seem overwhelming and “susceptible to endless interpretation” (Andrews et al., 2008, p.1). Because narrative inquiry is so versatile and fluid, no comprehensive set of rules for studying narrative exists. Therefore the researcher must synthesize, convey, and defend their own stance, including assumptions and positionality, for critiquing narratives. One of the ultimate aims and strengths of narrative inquiry was to give voice, yet the challenge lurked in representing these voices authentically and accurately (Cortazzi & Jin, 2007).

Verification and Trustworthiness

Authenticity is defined as “reflexive consciousness about one’s own perspective, appreciation for the perspectives of others, and fairness in depicting constructions in the values that undergird them” (Patton, 2002, p.546). In qualitative research, authenticity combined with verification strategies ensures a study’s validity and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). Because qualitative inquiry aims at the nuances of meaning and concedes the existence of various and multiple interpretations, readers may be persuaded in the trustworthiness of a study by presenting ample data that has undergone rigorous verification (Merriam and Simpson, 2000; Pinnegar &
Daynes, 2007). This study accomplished trustworthiness by taking steps to establish credibility, dependability, and transferability, as outlined below.

**Credibility**

This study that explored the relationship between Christ-centered spiritual growth and intercultural competence aimed to establish credibility, or believability, by providing descriptive, valid explanations (Janesick, 2003). To ensure a credible study, Patton (2002) offers three inquiry elements: (a) “rigorous methods” for executing interviews “that yield high-quality data that are systematically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility;” (b) researcher’s credibility established by training, experience, and presentation skills; (c) the “philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry” (p.552-3). While this researcher may have lacked prior experience conducting qualitative studies, she believes in the value of qualitative inquiry and made deliberate effort to ensure rigorous interview methods to allow insight into the research questions that drove this study.

The ways in which findings emerged further bolstered credibility through four primary methods. First, an audit trail was maintained that details data collection, coding and category choices, and the decision-making process throughout the inquiry (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Second, member checks were implemented immediately after the interview and again after data collection to request feedback and clarify meanings (Janesick, 2003). The researcher also consulted with participants to determine agreement between the researcher’s interpretation and participants’ intended meaning. Though careful effort was made to keep narratives intact, the researcher will paraphrase narratives from the transcripts and allow the participant to confirm accuracy. Third, a data audit by colleagues and consultations with the researcher’s committee members provided alternative insights and the possibility for negative cases or anomalies. After
the first interview, the researcher consulted with the thesis advisor to discuss the qualitative process and determine necessary changes. Finally, triangulation strengthened the study’s credibility by offering multiple data sources through multiple interviews to interpret data and gain deeper insights. This study triangulated theoretically by using sociocultural theory and lenses of Christ-centered spirituality and intercultural competence to interpret data. Furthermore, peer examinations offered analyst triangulation (Patton, 2002) to bring multiple perspectives on the findings and perpetuate this study’s credibility.

**Dependability**

Associated with credibility is the notion of dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe dependability as systematically following a systematic process. Along with systematically maintaining audit trail and triangulation, another way dependability was accomplished was by including participants’ direct quotes. Though chapter four includes paraphrased narratives verified by each participant, chapter five returned to the original transcripts and incorporated direct quotes to support emerging themes. With more credibility and dependability than paraphrasing, verbatim accounts offered authenticity (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). When not quoting directly, rich information and thick descriptions of findings contributed to dependability, and further contributed to the study’s credibility. Additional dependability was established by identifying and clarifying researcher bias, shaped by contextual sociocultural forces (Creswell, 2009). Behind qualitative research lies “the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.29). By acknowledging this and reporting any information that may have impacted data collection, analysis, and/or interpretation, the dependability of the study is strengthened (Patton, 2002).
Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree in which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts or settings. A purposeful sample was “selected and studied precisely because they have broader relevance” which contributed to the study’s pragmatic utility and generalizability (Patton, 2002, p.581). Thus, determining transferability is dependent on the subjective judgment of the reader, and, consistent with the sociocultural theoretical framework that informs this study, his or her dynamic interaction with a social, historical, and cultural context. Another way to enhance transferability was to include thick, rich descriptions that provided access for readers into the follower of Christ’s setting. Incorporating a holistically descriptive context, such as affective components, along with a thorough account of this study’s methods and procedures further contributed to this study’s transferability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an introduction and overview of a qualitative research paradigm, including a rationale for selecting this approach to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. After discussing narrative inquiry as an appropriate research design for answering this study’s research questions, this chapter examined its assumptions; its role as an epistemology; and its challenges for implementation. The background of the researcher was then disclosed. Next, a rationale for participation selection was outlined, followed by a discussion on data collection, informed consent, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter concluded by establishing the trustworthiness of the study with regards to its credibility, dependability, and transferability.
CHAPTER FOUR  
PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES  

Chapter four includes participants’ narratives to make sense and give meaning to their experiences (Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr, 2007). These narratives contain stories with the potential to inform, entertain, and transform. Though they were paraphrased from original transcriptions, thus incorporating the researcher’s voice, the narratives as they are included in this chapter have been verified by each participant to convey an accurate account of their experiences living and working in least developed countries. In seeking to honor participants’ voices and experiences, meticulous care was given to present their stories exactly as they wanted. Engaging in participants’ stories provides the opportunity for co-constructing knowledge as the story interplays with the reader’s own experiences. Replicated from chapter three, Table 1 summarizes each participant’s name, age, job title, host country, and number of years abroad. 

Table 1 
Participant Summary 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
<th>Years Abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Nurse, Teacher</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barney</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJ</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Administrative Director</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
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<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
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<td>Zambia</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Leo</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
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<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Teacher, Administrator</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amy

“Be Strong and Courageous”

Amy grew up on a modest Pennsylvania farm in a family of hard workers. Though unaware at the time, God was preparing Amy for the basic living conditions of rural Zimbabwe she would encounter after college. Her upbringing gave her the confidence to live and thrive in a country where hard work is required for survival. With a close-knit family and parents who taught her to value a relationship with God, Amy was inspired by stories of others who had lived abroad. Her husband had spent two years in Zimbabwe (then called “Rhodesia”) prior to their marriage, and he was eager to return. Despite these influences, Amy was adamantly opposed to moving to Africa. Yet, her open posture and willingness to do whatever God was calling her to do, along with a year of prayer and careful consideration, began to change Amy’s heart. In contemplating a move to Zimbabwe, Amy spoke to friends, sought godly counsel with others who moved abroad, and soon felt convinced that God wanted her to go to Zimbabwe. She desired to flourish in the role God positioned her, as a wife and young mother to an infant daughter regardless of her geographic location. She also wanted to share in her husband’s previous experience. Furthermore, moving to Zimbabwe presented a unique opportunity to use the nursing skills God had given her.

Having never left her immediate home area, the initial agreement was to work in Matopo, Zimbabwe for three years. Similar to her home in Pennsylvania, Matopo is a rural setting where the vast majority of villagers were born, raised, worked, and died in the same area. The population was very poor. Villagers worked hard to feed and clothe their families. Life was difficult with hardships of AIDS and child prostitution. Prior to arriving, Amy expected the worst regarding her living arrangements. The environment was tolerable, despite the obvious
differences from what she knew at home. There were bullet holes in the walls, residual from the political turmoil in Zimbabwe’s successful pursuit of independence from England. The grounds were overgrown. Grass three feet tall camouflaged a yard riddled with poisonous snake nests. Noticeably missing were doors for the cupboards, a toilet seat, plumbing fixtures, and glass in some of the windows. The previous tenant kept chickens in the house and used bookshelves for their nesting boxes, which required extra cleaning. The exterior of the house, however, was constructed of sturdy brick, and Amy was pleased the floors were cement, as opposed to dirt.

Despite a positive attitude, Amy quickly realized she would not be able to live in this environment on her own. The props she relied on at home such as family and every day conveniences were gone. She realized God was her support and protector. She had a little baby daughter, and she began learning that even her most diligent effort could not ensure protection for her family. God was teaching her early during her tenure in Zimbabwe that everything belongs to Him, which has been a significant lesson in her spiritual growth. Amy became thankful that God cares more for her daughter than she does and rested in the knowledge of His protection and control.

Amy’s biggest challenge in those first six months was her fear of leaving the house. She was afraid of meeting locals and the potential lack of reciprocal comprehension. Though English is the official language, people also spoke Ndebele, a local tribal language. Amy did not want to appear foolish in her inability to communicate. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, intervened by giving her husband the idea to suggest Amy become a school nurse. This meant Amy would have to leave the house every day and face her fears. Joining the throngs of pedestrians on the main road, Amy was forced outside the isolating comfort of her home. She began interacting with others and developed relationships with fellow commuters, students, and staff at the school.
Along with working as a school nurse, Amy had a diverse job description. She partnered with a nationally registered nurse at the local clinic, operated mobile village clinics, and served as an ambulance driver. She also offered second medical opinions, administered vaccinations to children in the surrounding villages, provided various treatments for local villagers, and performed pre- and post-natal checks on expectant mothers. Amy felt God was using her, and she enjoyed the constant awareness of being appreciated by villagers for her presence and devotion. With all the rewards, nursing in Zimbabwe also came with challenges different from home. The environment was not sterile, bugs would fall from lighting fixtures, windows had no screens, water was suspect, and the AIDS epidemic and tropical diseases meant the prevalence of death.

Though nursing brought an awareness (and fear) of cholera, typhoid, and the potential dangers of drinking water, the challenges of living in Zimbabwe transcended Amy’s work as a nurse. When she first arrived, she was annoyed by a rooster that stole her sleep by crowing in the middle of every night from the tree by her back door. Amy was so mad at one point that she threw (and consequently broke) her frying pan at the rooster. Adjusting her attitudes about family also challenged Amy. She was newly married with one daughter. A second daughter was born in Zimbabwe during her first term. With two young children, she faced persistent concerns for their safety. A close friend reminded her of God’s love for them and provided the perspective that kids are portable and resilient, which alleviated Amy’s worries. Beyond her immediate family, Amy was challenged by being away from relatives and aging parents. She was resigned to the idea of being absent when her parents passed away. God’s perfect timing, however, allowed her to be physically present when her father died of a heart attack and also when her mother suffered a massive stroke that took her earthly life. The passing of Amy’s
parents reminded her that death is not the end. This world is not her home, but a temporary place to show God’s love through service. Amy was becoming more firmly anchored in the hope of God’s promise of eternal life.

Amy credits her relationship with God and the friendships He provided for helping her adapt to living in Matopo. Her first friend was their “house girl” who performed odd chores and helped care for her daughter. Their friendship was distant, however, because apartheid had recently ended. Racial differences initially caused Black Zimbabweans to hesitate engaging intimately with Whites. But in living and working in Zimbabwe over the next few decades, that would change. Amy experienced the transition first hand. Today Blacks and Whites eat meals together, share the same glasses, reciprocate generosity, play together, and dialogue openly, which has led to bonded, lasting relationships.

One of Amy’s closest friends was Emma. A Zambian native, Emma and her husband taught at the same school where Amy and her husband worked. Along with the same education and language, Emma also had two daughters the same ages as Amy’s children. Emma and Amy talked freely about everything and quickly became close friends. When Emma’s sister died, Amy’s sympathy encouraged her healing. Amy also helped Emma launch a successful textile business. Yet their friendship was mutually beneficial. With a straightforward approach, Emma helped Amy adjust by teaching her the nuances of the culture and how to act appropriately in certain situations. Amy valued Emma’s input and learned how to interact respectively with Zimbabweans.

Another close friend who helped Amy adjust to the culture was Bessalina. They enjoyed conversing about anything and celebrated holidays, birthdays, and other fun activities together. Bessalina was a source of encouragement, and like Emma, she could also confront her about
appropriate behavior. While Amy has always accepted people as they are, Bessalina validated her effort and gave Amy a sense of security to be herself in the midst of her host Matopo culture.

Emma and Bessalina were conduits to relationships with other women. Amy treasured her time with female students, staff, and community members. Though she sometimes felt awkward as the lone white face, she felt no separation between them. She fit in by wearing assimilating long skirts, hosting and being hosted, sitting on the ground like everyone else, and eating like everyone else. Amy adjusted to life in Zimbabwe through gradual willingness to ask questions. Along with informally learning the Ndebele language, interacting with fellow Matopo women taught Amy the values of generosity and community.

Amy also began understanding their worldview, which was drastically different from her own. The prevalent worldview in Matopo is fear. Mediated by witch doctors, villagers are afraid of evil spirits, being cursed, family pressures, and community expectations. For example, no one should advance economically or socially beyond someone else within a community. Maintaining the status quo is important for a fair, equitable society. If something good happens, and someone prospers in any way, neighbors will see, get jealous, and request a curse.

Immersed in a culture of fear where the presence of evil was palpable caused Amy to reflect on her faith in God. In her first years, Amy was focused on training her children in the ways of Christ. Once they were grown, however, Amy became more intentional about studying the Bible. She spent more time in prayer throughout each day and deliberately engaged in spiritual conversations with others. The women in the community were examples of faithfulness Amy wanted to emulate. Despite being beaten by intoxicated husbands and threatened by curses, the village women who believed in Christ as their savior taught Amy to depend on God.
Compared to her spiritual life in the U.S., Amy felt less distracted in Zimbabwe. She was immersed in a culture that facilitated relentless reliance on God.

She realized that God was at work in her life and the Matopo community. Witnessing miracles, medically and socially, showed Amy that God was actively present and protecting her. On one occasion, God used Bessalina to spare Amy’s family from hostile nationals who belonged to a militant political party. The militants forced Bessalina to guide them, and when she came to Amy’s house, she told them it was empty. They rounded up every neighbor, stripped them naked, stole everything, cut communication lines, and shouted a rousing political speech while Amy and her family slept. God protected them a second time when sixteen reconciliation farmers who were working to improve race relations six miles down the road were axed to death.

With hazards all around, Amy has placed her trust in God’s command to “…Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, NIV). This verse was meaningful because it reminded Amy that God is present. In the Matopo culture of fear, she had no reason to be afraid. She trusted God would see her through any task He called her to do. In courageously trusting God daily, Amy witnessed His power and accomplishment. She understands that everything belongs to God, and that she is merely a steward of the resources He has given her. Amy’s next assignment will be to the Portuguese-speaking country of Mozambique. Regardless of the challenges she may face there, she feels equipped to go anywhere God may call her.
Barney

“Preach Where Christ Was Not Known”

Originating with a sense in college, Barney felt called to frontier work. A frontier is unchartered territory, and Barney wanted to teach the Bible in the unchartered territory that had never been exposed to the gospel of Christ. Having spent time doing leadership training in Guatemala, Barney was open to working overseas. He wanted to continue exploring cross-cultural opportunities. After a colleague who worked in Thailand suggested Malawi, Barney began to pray about God’s direction there. As a country with frontier villages, Malawi had educational needs that suited Barney’s strengths. His wife, however, appreciated the sentiments of the musical “Please don’t send me to Africa,” which their home church was coincidentally presenting. In time, they both knew that all of their prior experience had prepared them for Malawi, and so they eagerly moved there twelve years ago with the purpose of teaching in Yawo villages.

Barney learned from his time in Guatemala to immerse himself completely and instantly upon arriving in Malawi. Just like a newborn baby arriving in a new world is immediately placed on his or her mother’s chest to bond, Barney felt he needed to interact with the local villagers as quickly as possible. His instant involvement with the community gave him quick insight into the local culture. Though the population is dense, Barney found the people of Malawi to be patient. Their pace of life is slower with a laid back temperament. Daily activities are more relational, and the cultural practice of greeting everyone is evidence of a friendly population. Called the “warm heart of Africa,” people are friendly on the surface; however the warmth may be superficial as deception and mistrust lurk beneath the smiling pleasantries.
While Barney lived in a peaceful community, jealousy, superficiality, and promiscuity were common attributes.

Despite these social conditions, developing trust through learning to respect community members opened the doors to building meaningful relationships. In turn, Barney began to see the generosity of the people, despite glaring economic disparity and high unemployment. Engaging in the common practice of reciprocal visitation, Barney would often receive gifts of fresh maize, pumpkins, and complete meals. Yet early in his time there, Barney noticed a cultural clash. While Africans share their physical space and material resources, they are secretive with knowledge. By contrast, Westerners (Australians, British, U.S. Americans) share knowledge, but tend to guard their physical space and hoard their material resources. The implications have been to overcome the suspicions of the community by becoming intentionally relational and ensuring a commitment for the long-term. The transience of Westerners in and out of villages in Malawi, due to the difficulties and challenges of every day life, makes community building and effective participation in the culture a difficult endeavor. Barney noted a significant conundrum. Westerners with white faces and even foreigners such as Barney’s black Nigerian colleagues, are immediately associated with wealth. Choosing to live so far below one’s means in a village is deemed deceptive causing Africans to wonder what someone is trying to prove. Yet, a standard of living significantly higher than the people with whom one is working also creates disparity. Like overcoming community suspicions, reconciling living conditions takes time and relational investment to minimize stress.

Many of Barney’s relationships with local villagers came through his work. As a teacher and administrator in Muslim villages, Barney translated lessons into the Yawo tribal language and facilitated Bible classes. Barney’s teaching strategy began with an introduction to the chief,
or village head man. After asking questions to gauge their understanding and determine areas of curiosity, weekly meetings were scheduled for informal gatherings. These were not religious engagements, rather educational opportunities for open dialogue about world religions, beliefs, and the Biblical teachings of Christ. Along with broadening his perspective, Barney found teaching the Bible rewarding because the process of preparing lessons also solidified his foundational knowledge base. Though the majority of villagers are illiterate, their thoughtful questions were evidence of developing insights. Seeing their understanding of the Bible was deeply gratifying and encouraging to Barney.

Having a job to do helped Barney adjust to the culture in Malawi. Adjustment and effective teaching, however, required learning the Yawo tribal language. This was accomplished by spending daily time with a local language helper. Barney’s approach was to emulate a childlike learning posture, ready to absorb and eager to learn. He asked questions and sought help to understand the intricacies, rules, and grammatical patterns. Cloaked in humility, Barney took risks and learned from his mistakes. Because Barney understood that learning Yawo was imperative for effective participation in the culture, he tried to be teachable. Enlisting the help of his students and villagers, in turn, was an opportunity for Barney to dignify them. The teacher-student relationship was reciprocal.

Along with understanding the importance of language acquisition, Barney credits his adjustment to Malawi culture to several other factors. Most importantly, adaptation has been easier because Barney knew he was working where he was meant to be. Next, a positive experience in Guatemala gave him the tools for understanding how to bond in a new culture. Upon being warmly welcomed, Barney’s approach was to learn from others and solicit advice from colleagues and friends who were always willing to offer practical help. Barney also moved
to Malawi at an older age, compared to many of his colleagues, which has meant he has had time to know himself. Being true to God and himself has demonstrated his authenticity, which has subsequently earned the respect of his African associates. His wife was homeschooling their five children in the U.S., and since the curriculum remained the same, the transition to Malawi was easy for his entire family. Cross-cultural training classes also helped Barney adjust because they gave him confidence in his own strengths of resilience and his capacity for working overseas. Barney’s servant attitude in wishing God’s best for everyone he met, and his desire to be used by God as a blessing to people was another reason for a smooth adjustment.

Having lived in Malawi twelve years now, Barney recognizes working in another culture involves a whole different set of dynamics and challenges. He has learned how to be culturally respectful through friends who feel free to criticize him and offer corrections. Thus, finding friends and having a support network has been crucial for Barney’s adjustment. Life abroad has not been about surviving, but learning how to thrive. He has worked to find a lifestyle where his needs are met; time is allotted for self-care; solitude is deliberately sought; attention is given to the discipline of prayer; family togetherness is a priority; and escapes to the city are planned once a month for refreshment. Barney’s priority has also been keeping some evenings free for mental, spiritual, and emotional health. Finding rest for his soul has helped him devote more of himself to his work, his family, and his relationship with God.

Malawi has been a forum for significant spiritual growth. Societal antagonisms, such as the presence of witch doctors and suspicions of Westerners, have awakened Barney’s senses to a different kind of spiritual atmosphere in Africa. Devoting time to prayer is a major priority for garnishing spiritual armor to combat the psychological pressures and interpersonal struggles. Prayer is a matter of life and death for Barney because of the intense spiritual warfare that
infiltrates Malawi’s culture. Thus the need for God is obvious, and Barney has learned to rely on God’s sovereignty daily. Since much of his educational work is relational, Barney has focused on God and His transforming power, rather than on the work itself. Thus a constant dimension of spirituality has been to depend on God and each other mutually, which subsequently builds community. Challenges to Barney’s spiritual growth abound. Temptations to discourage him have come through accidents (one of which necessitated his wife’s permanent use of a wheelchair), illness, conflict, and corruption. Yet Barney has practiced I Peter 5:7 and Matthew 11:30, which encourages followers of Christ to cast all of their cares on God; because His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Attending Yawo fellowships on Sunday mornings, as well as participating in expatriate services has helped Barney grow spiritually. Sharing experiences, engaging in mutual accountability, and worshiping corporately have been rejuvenating. Barney spends time in men’s Bible studies every week with people from organizations all over the world (i.e. NGOs and other non-profit organizations). Depending on God as a group of people with common faith has led to spiritual growth and a tighter community. Furthermore, Barney has maintained a relationship with his church back in the U.S. With today’s technology, he is grateful for the ability to upload current worship services, keep his home congregation informed, and receive encouragement through correspondence and assurance of prayer support.

Barney currently lives in Malawi with no immediate plans to return to the U.S. Placing a positive spin on a cliché, Barney says he has burned his bridges by making a long-term commitment to teaching in Malawi. Following the Apostle Paul’s example as conveyed in Romans 15:20, Barney desires to serve God in the frontier lands of Malawi and make an impact through loving people and teaching the Bible. He attributes his positive experience to good
preparation, a strong spiritual base of prayer and support, effective tools for approaching language and culture, and trusting God. While Barney understands God may uproot him or redirect him, for now Barney is peacefully home in Malawi.
BJ

“You Are the Body of Christ”

One day, shortly after BJ’s wedding, she and her husband Paul sat down and looked through slides and pictures that belonged to her father-in-law. Paul had grown up in Zambia, and he strongly desired to take BJ there, so she could better understand him. The pictures piqued an interest, and soon, with an 18-month infant in tow, they decided to do a two-year term of voluntary service there. Paul was a medical doctor, and BJ worked as a scrub nurse, language tutor, and hostess, while raising a family and maintaining the house. Though the initial intention was one term and then a permanent return to the U.S., BJ had a friend who prayed the “star” would some day be removed from her name. In a local publication, the star was an asterisk next to Paul and BJ’s names that signified temporary service. Names without a star meant an indefinite tenure working abroad. Throughout her first term, however, BJ knew the star would be removed because she had fallen in love with the people and country of Zambia. God had opened doors for BJ and Paul to continue working there, and the star had fallen from her name.

Life in Zambia was full and exciting. In her earlier years, BJ worked as a scrub nurse in the operating theater, which meant assisting with scheduled surgeries twice a week, plus emergencies. This was balanced with the difficulties of trying to maintain a clean, orderly house. BJ lived in a rural part of Zambia that gets very dusty, particularly in the dry season, so dirty floors were a constant battle. All cooking was done from scratch, and obtaining ingredients was also time-consuming. Adding to the challenge, BJ had to adjust to the Zambian culture which values visitation. Neighbors from the community would drop by at all times of the day, unannounced to visit. Relating to the biblical story of Mary and Martha, where Mary could set aside her tasks to focus on people while Martha yielded to the distractions of the tasks at hand,
BJ could identify with Martha. At first she struggled with the notion of unannounced visitors at all hours. One morning, she woke up and opened the curtains of her home. Within minutes she had a visitor. The visitor said, “I saw your curtains were open, so I thought I’d stop for a visit.” At first BJ was distraught and thought she lived in a fish bowl, with no privacy. But she came to understand and embrace that visiting was a gesture of care and love.

When she became pregnant for a second time, handling the demands at the hospital and home became more difficult. In the operating theater, the circulating nurse would make sure BJ had a stool when surgery took hours. At home, BJ finally decided to hire a housekeeper. She had resisted the thought for a long time because she did not like the idea of having a servant in her house. She never had a housekeeper before, and it felt wrong. But one day, a bold Zambian woman named Theresa came to her door and asked for a housekeeping job. Continuing to resist, BJ said no. Theresa then asked BJ if she was afraid. She asked her if she did not like having someone in her house. BJ then realized that the perception of her refusal to hire help made her appear cold and unwelcoming. This had not occurred to her until she was confronted. She re-examined her feelings and decided to hire Theresa, which blossomed into a beautiful partnership and dear friendship.

Along with initial resistance to hiring a housekeeper, BJ felt as though she bucked the system when she first arrived in Zambia. She needed time to get used to unannounced visitors and to learn the honor in visiting and being visited. The cultural practice for woman to kneel when they served was another adjustment. While she did not mind kneeling in service for others, like the village head man or other elders, BJ felt very uncomfortable having someone else kneeling in front of her. She also resisted the practice of wearing a uniform, which is how Zambians identify themselves through their church affiliations. There are many Zambians,
However, who are so poor, they cannot afford a uniform. In one conference, those who were not wearing a uniform were banished to the periphery of a building. Despite living in Zambia for over 30 years, BJ still would like to see an amendment to this practice that marginalizes the poorest population.

Though BJ admits she may have bucked the system initially, she gradually began assimilating to Zambian culture. Over time, BJ became more open and willing to adopt new ways of living. She rebelled against ethnocentric notions of the U.S. doing things right. In the U.S., BJ’s personality may be described as gregarious and outgoing. In Zambia, however, BJ retreats to a quieter version of herself. While she remains genuine, somewhere over the Atlantic en route to the African continent from North America, BJ becomes more reserved. This has been the expectation of Zambian women, and BJ is careful not to reflect anything badly on the medical work being done by being too outspoken. She grew to understand and allow those in her community to be who they need to be. BJ attributes her adaptation to disciplining herself to observe and listen. When she was with a group of people from the community, she would carefully observe interactions and behaviors. She would choose her moments to ask questions, and she would listen intently. BJ never wanted to cause trouble or turmoil, and she happily adjusted to cultural values out of deep-seated love and respect for the people she serves.

Adjusting to the culture was greatly aided by her housekeeper, Theresa, but also by her neighbor and friend Queenie. They both had children around the same ages, so their families did many activities together. Though English is the primary language, Queenie taught BJ the local tribal language as well. Since life in Zambia meant walking everywhere, she showed her the geography of the surrounding area on foot, which gave them abundant opportunities to visit members of the community. These visits cultivated lasting friendships. BJ learned that
hospitality is ingrained in Zambian culture, and visitation is a sign of honor and respect. Though she felt inconvenienced and awkward at first, BJ learned to embrace this value. She was grateful for her community, and her house became a revolving door for visitors. By the example of others, she learned to drop her agenda and receive visitors graciously. The awareness of her acceptance and comfort with unannounced guests came when she had family from the U.S. staying at her house. They were shocked by the number of people who came to the house throughout the day, yet BJ had become accustomed to the practice. She valued the mingling of cultures and felt blessed to live in a wonderfully tight-knit community.

The beauty of doing long-term work in Zambia is the relationships. BJ has many close friends, who not only helped her adjust to the culture, but who allowed her to be herself. Along with Theresa and Queenie, she developed meaningful friendships with the Kalombos, Bina Chilobi, Mrs. Mohongo, Bina Ezra, and many more to name a few. These friendships taught her Zambian politeness. They showed her the interdependence and value of community, which greatly contrasted BJ’s U.S. approach of individualism and doing things her way. They taught her to think on behalf of the community and the reality of being spiritually interconnected. The friendliness of her community showed BJ the reciprocity of being approachable. This meant she could both ask and be asked questions as she engaged with others. BJ’s friendships also confirmed her values for family.

Since BJ’s husband was a doctor in Zambia, life was different from what would have been in the U.S. Though Paul worked long and hard days, they still enjoyed much more time together. Already busy with a toddler, BJ became pregnant shortly after arriving in Zambia during her first term. She often heard comments about how big she looked, but despite her differing opinion, she felt she had gained about the same weight as with her daughter. She had a
c-section with her first, so a c-section was scheduled for her second, too. The delivery scene was a gathering of friends and family. BJ’s husband, along with his colleague and friend, Lon, were the doctors preparing for delivery. Queenie served as the scrub nurse. Given a spinal anesthetic, BJ was awake for the procedure, but she could not see beyond the curtain that separated her from the busy doctors. They delivered her son, and she was happy at the news. Suddenly, however, Lon announced he discovered another baby in there! BJ had been pregnant with twins! The whole scene made everyone, including BJ, laugh. Prior to delivery, she did not have the luxury of medical technology, like she would have in the U.S., to help her prepare. She did not have an ultrasound. Rather during her pregnancy, they would employ a black, metal, cylindrical instrument to hear the baby’s heartbeat. Detecting a second heartbeat would have been almost impossible. BJ’s biggest concern at the news of a second son was deciding on a name. She and Paul had such difficulty with the first boy’s name, and now they had to think of a second. Expressing this decision as a primary concern made Lon and Queenie laugh all the more.

But soon both boys had names, and life took a drastic turn for BJ. The comedy was over and the dramatic reality began. She was in survival mode with three young children. As is customary, the community visited and brought BJ food as a gesture of support. Theresa was an indispensable help around the house and with the kids. Caring for the twins deprived BJ and Paul of much sleep during the first six months, but eventually, they developed normal sleeping habits and life became fun. Without television and all that life in the U.S. offers for entertainment, BJ and her family learned to create their own fun. They had picnics, enjoyed an almost weekly ritual of making homemade ice cream, and the boys were active in the community, particularly with soccer. BJ’s oldest daughter, Penny, preferred reading, and she had friends who would join her.
BJ is grateful for the opportunity for her children to grow up in Zambia. While they did not have the privilege of close proximity to biological grandparents, others in the community filled the gaps. When Penny was entering the 9th grade, BJ and Paul had to make arrangements for her education. The program in which she had been enrolled only went through 8th grade. So, BJ and Paul decided to send Penny to the Rift Valley Academy in Kenya. Despite Penny’s willingness, sending her away to school was the most difficult thing BJ had ever done. She and Paul had always viewed their life’s primary mission as raising their children to love God and serve others. And now Penny would be attending boarding school so far away. How could BJ fulfill her mission and care for her? Penny only attended two thirds of the year because BJ and Paul planned to return to the U.S. and re-enter as a family. After staying in the U.S. for several years while all three children finished high school, BJ and Paul returned to Zambia.

The earlier years, and then the return to Zambia, have been times of spiritual growth for BJ. It began with the birth of the twins. Already vulnerable and primed with the challenges of living in a rural African community, the twins restricted BJ’s life. She fed them, cared for them, and did nothing beyond providing for her family’s basic needs. Prior to this time, she relied on her own good works of service as a barometer of God’s favor and love. But her efforts to serve others were halted by the demands of her new responsibilities and her relentless exhaustion. She had become short-tempered and impatient. One woman kept coming around to the house asking for things. BJ would be so annoyed by her constant requests that she began to hate this woman. Suddenly, in ways she cannot explain, BJ had a moment of enlightenment. In her helpless, frazzled state of what felt like idleness, she realized that God still loved her. She was not doing anything outside of her house, yet she knew and felt God’s love. She could not earn it. The reality of God’s unconditional love came in a tangible way, too. The hate toward this woman
dissipated and yielded to love. To this present day, BJ considers that woman a dear friend. She was never annoyed by her again. BJ’s head knowledge of Christ’s love was now backed by personally experiencing His saving power.

BJ’s Zambian relationships gave her an awareness of God’s presence and work. She began to realize that God is the one who provides. She was not going through life and raising a family on her own. Rather, the love of Christ was strengthening her. She depended on God in ways that would not have presented themselves if she lived in the U.S. Though BJ worked in Zambia to serve, she may have taken away more than she gave. Her relationship with Christ became more intimate through the Zambian people. They take life as it comes, one day at a time. BJ embraced this attitude and learned to be content with whatever and wherever God would have her.

With an inclusive, intergenerational community that lived, played, and prayed together, she began to learn that relationships trump tasks. A doer like the biblical Martha, BJ recognized that Zambians excel at being, like the biblical Mary. God’s grace was apparent in the ways community members interacted, as they treated each other graciously. And while BJ has always had a generous spirit, giving away personal stores of food and clothing, she experienced Christ in the generosity of her Zambian community. Consistent with their values of hosting visitors, any Zambian would give away their last morsel of food to honor a guest.

For BJ, the values of family, community and the interdependence on one another exemplify the body of Christ. Interestingly located just before the “Love Chapter” (I Corinthians 13), a verse that has been meaningful to BJ states, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (I Corinthians 12:27, NIV). BJ recognizes she has a role, as part of Christ’s body of believers. Whether God has her in the U.S. or in Zambia, BJ longs to serve Him
and show His love to others. On one special occasion, when her kids were younger, BJ and Paul took
them to Cape Town, South Africa. BJ stood on top of Table Mountain, awestruck at the splendor of God’s
creation. She could not have imagined in her wildest dreams that she could experience all that Africa
has given her. BJ’s apparent fish bowl had become a vast ocean of loving friendships and lasting
memories with value for all of eternity.
Eric

“Take Delight in the Lord”

Eric had always felt the only thing that could draw him away from the directorship position he loved at Paxton Ministries was an opportunity to return overseas, preferably to Southern Africa. Little did he expect that something would ever open up. Then, while spending a sabbatical in Zambia in 2007, Eric learned of the need for an Administrative Director at Macha Research Trust, Ltd. (MRT). The board at MRT was looking for someone with many of the same strengths and experiences Eric had. Because the fit was almost seamless, Eric decided to pursue the opportunity further. Additionally, he wanted to be the first to know when the time had come to move on from Paxton, rather than wait until his effectiveness waned and others noticed his blind spots. As he contemplated God’s will, Eric wanted to avoid a difficult separation as he and Paxton transitioned forward. After much prayer, discussion with family and trusted confidants, and deliberating what appeared to be God opening doors, Eric made the decision to move to Zambia and serve as the Administrative Director at MRT.

The nature of Eric’s work is to provide oversight to several departments: Maintenance, Vehicles, Hospitality, Accounts, Human Resources, Information Technology, and various building projects. Essentially Eric’s job is to keep the entire facility running efficiently and effectively so his team’s research can proceed unencumbered by breakdowns and other antagonisms. He also gives attention to long-term planning to ensure MRT’s sustainability. For the past year and half he has closely supervised Maintenance by consequently hiring a new Maintenance Supervisor. Eric trained his Maintenance Supervisor on making schedules, preparing spreadsheets, and orienting him to the expectations of the position. With a hands-on approach, Eric has closely supervised several building projects. More recently, however, now
that building projects are nearing completion and the new Maintenance Supervisor is basically up to speed, Eric may now focus his efforts on Human Resources and Accounts. Always busy, Eric’s typical day involves writing and responding to email queries, attending meetings, monitoring repair jobs, and coordinating transportation. He is also gradually working through revision of MRT’s Personnel Manual and revising outdated policies.

Eric’s full work load and busy schedule are a testament to how he hit the ground running upon arrival in Zambia. Being fit for the work and having a role in enhancing the productivity of MRT has been helpful in transitioning and adapting to the local culture. Perhaps even more significant contributions to Eric’s adaptation have been his prior experience in Zambia, as well as having grown up in Zimbabwe. Eric loves every facet of Zambia—the people, the culture, and the climate. Additionally, his living arrangements are quite comfortable, especially compared to those in the surrounding villages. He and his wife enjoy a brick house with concrete floors, running hot water, and regular electricity. Despite all of the positive aspects of living in Southern Africa, Eric has been adjusting to some of the more subtle cultural values and practices that appear as burdensome to a society that wants to move forward. For example, government bureaucracy has been an impediment to the progress of the Zambian people. Though this is frustrating, Eric has managed to maintain a perspective of life’s big picture that God is in control. He has consciously guarded himself against cynicism through understanding that changes to improve the ways and quality of life may take several generations. Upon careful examination and reflection, Eric has become aware that the totality of his own cultural norms and values brought in from the West may not necessarily benefit the African community in which he lives, work, and interacts.
The process of adapting to Zambian culture has also been enhanced by Eric’s personal relationships. Primarily, he is married to a wonderful woman who has embraced Zambian life. With an easy-going personality, his wife has adapted smoothly, which has immensely helped Eric feel at home in Africa. Outside of the home, he is particularly close with his colleagues Dr. Jhuma and Mr. Topango. They are both seasoned veterans who have been extremely instrumental in Eric’s understanding of the complex policies and history behind MRT’s success. Eric also genuinely enjoys a strong rapport with the men in Maintenance; and he has experienced a continued sense of fulfillment working together with them on projects. Especially rewarding has been Eric’s mentorship in teaching his employees new techniques. He observed them sharpening their skills, broadening the scope of their abilities, and grasping innovative concepts, which has also been satisfying. The successes at work and relational bonds being forged have facilitated Eric’s adaptation and assured him of his value to the mission of MRT. Acknowledge Eric recognizes that adapting to life abroad would have been impossible if he knew he should be somewhere else. On the contrary, he trusts that God ordained the opportunity for him to work in Africa. When he first arrived in Zambia, Eric had strong feelings that God was asking him to lay down his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He felt he needed to empty myself completely by acknowledging and surrendering any preconceived notion that his prior experiences, his identity, his abilities and capabilities could offer any value to the people in his community. Praying daily for God’s guidance, Eric also asked God to fill him anew with strength and wisdom to equip him for daily tasks. Doing so has been painful, but his spiritual growth since working at MRT has been remarkable. Eric has spent more time reading the Bible and other spiritual material. He has devoted more time to prayer, sometimes literally weeping as he cries out to God on behalf of local issues and friends at home. He and his wife enjoy morning
devotional time, reading scriptures and praying together, which have also contributed to significant spiritual growth. Ultimately, out of some deep pain and tears Eric has become aware of God’s presence more strongly than he has ever been for many years. In realizing that he gleaned much of his value and enjoyment of life through significant friendships, physical exercise, and his work as an administrator, Eric began to give up his dependency in those areas and turn his heart to God for genuine fulfillment. In the process, Eric has experienced God’s mercy and faithfulness, along with a sense of peace in knowing he has been acting in obedience to the work God has called him to do.

Acting in obedience has required Eric to completely surrender his will by placing his trust in God. Working and living in Zambia has taught Eric to live according to the Bible verse, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3: 5-6, NIV). He understands that God is in control and deeply desires to follow the greatest commandment to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, NIV). These verses have been meaningful to Eric as he has devoted his talents and abilities to working wherever God sends him. He has seen first-hand the scripture that ensures, “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4, NIV). Amazed at God’s grace and provision, Eric has felt completely unworthy of the many blessings that have come his way.
Felix

“Heal the sick”

Attending college during the tumultuous 1960s and the conflict in Vietnam, Felix was drawn to the idea of voluntary service as an alternative to the draft. He had finished medical school and learned of an opportunity for doctors to serve in Africa. While he declined the invitation initially, after understanding more clearly the need and that his family could survive in Africa, Felix decided to go for two years. In response to God’s call to heal the sick, Felix’s first term turned into three and a half years, and eventually the bulk of his 30-year medical career.

During his time at Macha Hospital in rural Zambia, Felix developed a passion for surgery. He had only completed one year of a five-year surgical residency prior to moving to Macha, so learning to perform surgery was on-the-job and through Dr. Calvin, the older mentor who founded the hospital. Because most in the Macha community believed Dr. Calvin had the gift of healing and was so highly regarded, Felix’s association with him gave him instant credibility, even if it was not totally deserved. When Dr. Calvin retired and his son Will took his place, Felix and Will were the only two doctors at the hospital for the next two years.

Macha is a 200-bed hospital, and Felix and Will cared for patients with any and every ailment. They administered care in pediatrics, obstetrics, the full range of surgery, tropical diseases of all sorts, and general medicine. The demand at the hospital was seasonal, which meant a busier time during the rainy season due to malaria. During the seasons of planting, plowing, and harvesting, the pace at the hospital would slow down.

Regardless of the season, Felix had a wonderful experience as a doctor at Macha hospital. Compared to his time-consuming medical career in the U.S., he was able to spend significantly more time with his wife and two children. Felix credits his move to Zambia as possibly saving
his marriage. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were family times at his home, which was just 200 yards from the hospital. Time in the wards and operating theater was busy, but he would be home every evening. Along with learning a wide-range of medical disciplines, he enjoyed the collegiality with Will and the hospital staff. The Macha community was friendly, which gave Felix an abiding sense that his presence and service was welcome. Felix was struck by the gratefulness of the Zambian people. Even in the midst of the Zimbabwean War, which was a racial conflict between Blacks and Whites for which Zambia was a staging ground, Felix did not detect any racial tension while at Macha. Rather, Felix felt appreciated. He felt as though he was making a difference in the lives of people.

As a young doctor, Felix had much to learn. On one occasion, Dr. Calvin asked Felix to perform a procedure on a patient. Though Felix admitted he had no experience with that particular procedure, Dr. Calvin assured him they could work together successfully. But when they got into the operating theater, and Felix asked Dr. Calvin how to proceed, Dr. Calvin looked at him and said, “You’re the surgeon!” Felix was constantly learning in the moment through hands-on experience. He would frequently consult medical books and was thankful for his professional partnership with Will. Together they would solve problems by conferring with each other and consulting medical books. Felix also learned from short-term doctors who would visit from the U.S., as well as other Zambian doctors passing through.

Though the learning curve was steep, Felix had earned the community’s trust by his genuine concern for the Macha people. The overall improvements in the vitality of the community attest to the contribution of his service. During the years when malaria was at its worst in the early 2000s, 1500-1800 children under five years of age were admitted to the pediatric ward for malaria each year. With all of the malaria research conducted at Macha,
however, malaria is now almost non-existent. Neonatal tetanus was another disease that initially baffled Felix. But after learning to immunize mothers, doctors at Macha have not seen a single case in more than ten years. Leprosy also was a common diagnosis. When Felix first arrived, Macha maintained a leprosy clinic of 75-100 patients, but he has seen just two cases of leprosy in the last ten years. Perhaps the biggest improvement to life in the Macha community has been the availability of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) to treat AIDS patients. With an enrollment of over 7,000 people, the HIV clinic has dramatically changed people’s lives for better. They are not dying like they did in the past. They can live normal lives.

Outside the hospital, Felix enjoyed spending time with his wife and two children. They developed many friendships throughout Macha by interacting with the community at church meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, birthday parties, game nights, and other family-oriented events. Felix also played in a soccer league. In his earlier years, Felix observed that Zambians played very few games of catching and handling balls. They did not participate in sports like basketball or baseball—two sports Felix had played, which gave him an advantage as a goalkeeper. The combination of his hand-eye coordination and tall stature made Felix an outstanding goalie, through which he earned the respect and admiration of the younger generation at Macha.

The friendships Felix developed on and off the soccer field helped him understand the values of Zambian culture. His first impression of Zambians is their friendliness and graciousness. Though sometimes the Zambian expression of friendliness made Felix feel uncomfortable. For example, unannounced visits to a neighbor’s home are the social norm. Calling ahead or scheduling a visit does not occur. Zambians have no regard for privacy and confidentiality. In the hospital wards, nearby patients would listen and chime in. If someone came to visit his wife, and she was not home, Felix would be asked questions about where she
was and when she would return, which would be offensive in North America. Because English is the official language, and Tonga translators were always available, communicating with Zambians was not an issue. In the hospital, Felix learned enough Tonga, the local tribal language, to function, but he lacked the fluency to pray in church or carry much of a conversation outside of the hospital.

Contrary to U.S. culture, he learned that being overweight in Zambia is valued over being slender and trim. A person who carries extra pounds is appealing because in an area with marginal food supply, he or she is well-fed with access to abundance. He also learned that Zambian culture is not time-oriented. The pace of life is slow, and though that could be frustrating at times, it was generally a welcome adjustment from the frantic pace back home.

Also different from the U.S., advanced age, with its implied wisdom, is valued over youth. Felix was impressed by the inclusivity of intergenerational members and the respect for older generations.

As evidenced, much of what Felix learned throughout his time in Zambia is understood in contrast to life back home. In the U.S., medical doctors earn higher incomes and typically enjoy a materially comfortable life. By choosing to serve the needs at Macha hospital, Felix sacrificed all that being a doctor at home entailed. Adding to the sacrifice, he heard the occasional second-hand rumbling that perhaps he was practicing in Zambia because he could not perform well in the U.S. Some people did not quite grasp his motivation for serving and the life he could have chosen.

Yet, Felix was compelled to serve the Macha community by his faith in God. Having grown up with a father and mother who administered a Christian children’s camp for thirty years, Felix’s parents raised him to express God’s love through service. His spirituality permeated all
aspects of his life. Along with attending church, regular Bible studies, and daily interaction with the community, Felix worked with the hospital chaplains. They prayed together for patients’ healing, for wisdom in diagnosing problems, and for skills in surgery. By using his profession as an expression of his faith, Felix grew spiritually. He witnessed medical miracles, both through the medical care given at the hospital and dramatic changes in patients’ health through prayer. Felix knew God was using him to make a difference and serve the kingdom, simply by being present and caring medically for people. Felix developed an awareness of people, and culture, and how difficult life can be for some people in the world. Such awareness connected his thoughts to Jesus Christ’s concern for poor people. He began to understand the biblical emphasis of caring for the poor and sick. His deepening faith perpetuated the desire to emulate Christ’s example by devoting his talents to caring for the needy and marginalized villagers of the Macha community. And through caring medically, the Zambian people taught Felix reliance on God. Zambians lack technology and money and overall resources so abundant in the U.S., which is why they acknowledge their dependence on God daily. If God does not provide rain, they do not eat. Healing, rain, and sustenance all come from God, yet Felix learned that some Zambians, in contrast to his faith in Jesus Christ, believe in ancestral spirits as a mediator.

Despite these spiritual differences, Felix continued to rely on God and serve the poor and sick. Occasionally, doubt and wonderment would creep into his thoughts. At times, he wondered if he really was making a difference in the lives of people. In the first few months of his first term, Felix made a mistake that caused him to evaluate his presence at Macha. He was the only doctor at the hospital and needed to perform his first solo cesarean on an expectant mother. Most likely due to improperly administering anesthesia, the mother and baby died on the operating room table. The sadness was difficult. And yet there was no recrimination by the
Felix sometimes wished they would have complained, or yelled at him, or asked questions about why such a tragedy could happen. But those who came to the hospital for care were thankful for whatever assistance could be offered. While this was not the only instance where someone had suffered an ill effect from Felix’s lack of knowledge and/or experience, this particular event shaped his perspective. He was human. Humans make mistakes. He had to come to terms with the fact that even though mistakes were made, and people may have suffered, on the whole, people lived better lives because he was there.

Felix learned to deal with his humanity and the potential for mistakes. In the decades since, no one else has died during a cesarean section while he was present, partially due to what he learned from that first experience. The collective, long-term nature of his service demonstrates phenomenal changes in the health of the Macha community. But Felix acknowledges that errors occur regularly and challenges abound. Two to four doctors for every 150,000 people cannot know or be able to do everything. In the U.S., patients and doctors seem to find an answer for any condition eventually. But in Zambia, many cases go unknown. Labs, support, specialists, and technology are limited. Yet Felix employs the resources at hand and continues to express his faith through service because like Jesus, he cares about people.

In between serving multiple terms in Zambia, Felix returned to the U.S. and spent 14 years working at an emergency room (ER). Maintaining an attitude of service, he applied much of what he learned in Zambia to his medical practice back home. Along with integrating his faith with his profession, Felix had learned about the spiritual nature of people. He had dealt extensively with death. He was comfortable with sick people. He was comfortable with the responsibility of making life and death decisions. If someone died in the ER, Felix would offer
to pray with the families. No one ever turned him down. He received more positive feedback to the hospital about the care he gave through prayer with families than performing any medical procedure. Hospital staff and administrators, too, often asked him to pray with their own family members in the hospital. Bringing his faith into his medical practice touched people’s lives in meaningful ways, which Felix concedes may not have happened had he not lived in Zambia.

Felix wants to serve as an act of obedience to God’s calling. In following Christ’s example, he abides by the verse that says “when you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10:8, 9, NIV). Whether at Macha hospital, in an ER in the U.S., or anywhere God leads, Felix is thankful for God’s promise “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6, NIV).
James

“Submit Yourselves Therefore to God”

Having spent much of his life in Zambia, James considers himself more African than American. His wonderful experience in rural Africa, filled with family memories, service, professional accomplishments, friendships, difficulties, and rewards, has been most fulfilling. James grew up in Zambia in the 1950s during apartheid. Racial divisions meant his White family and their colleagues, lived on a separate campus from the Black local villagers. Being fenced in kept James isolated and prevented intimate awareness of the surrounding culture. The climate changed drastically when he returned in the 1970s, post-apartheid. He loved intermingling with the local Zambians and felt blessed to be a part of their culture.

James chose to live and work in Zambia because God put the children of Africa on his heart. Upon finishing medical school, James and his family spent two years in Zambia. He left to finish his pediatric medical training, and then returned for seven years. After another furlough in the U.S. so his children could attend high school in the U.S., James and his wife returned to Zambia full-time. To this day, James works in Zambia ten months each year.

While originally not intending to study pediatrics, James became passionate about whatever affects children’s health in Africa. His pediatric interests parallel the most predatory ailments. First he studied malnutrition. Upon realizing that malnutrition is a complex social problem, rather than primarily a medical issue, James began studying measles. Measles was deadly and claimed hundreds of children’s lives each year in his area. After extensive research, he experimented with administering two vaccinations, as opposed to the prior practice of just one vaccination. His pioneering endeavor enticed visits by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). They were so impressed; they began implementing
this vaccination regimen in poor nations around the world. In fact, without given credit, James’s data was used in a CDC study, published by the New England Journal of Medicine, which celebrated the successful decline of measles as a result of James’s efforts.

With measles under control, James moved into the next biggest killer—malaria. Presently, James is the director of the Macha Malaria Research Institute (MMRI), a U.S.-based non-profit organization he founded which supports the malaria work in Zambia. The Zambian entity is now known as Macha Research Trust (MRT). Attracting worldwide recognition, the success of MRT has resulted in a drastically reduced number of malaria deaths and serves as a model for other global communities that are plagued with this disease.

James is driven by God’s love and call to serve people. In following Christ’s example, he employs his talents and aptitude to improve society, rather than his individual quality of life. He enjoys caring for sick children and finds utmost satisfaction in preventing untimely deaths and seeing their health restored. While the work can be emotionally draining, it is also stimulating and fulfilling. James credits God for giving him stamina to endure his long, varied days. Usually around 6:00 am, James begins to tackle his busy schedule. His duties at MRT entail careful attention and responses to 30-40 crucial emails each day. As a hunt-and-peck typist who is aware of the de-contextualized nature of electronic correspondence and the importance of detail, he devotes much of his time to the computer. He is the principal investigator on four or five projects at MRT. The funding, including his own salary, is secured through the grants he writes. His medical reputation also has given James the opportunity to become involved at the national level on several different committees, which takes him away for days at a time to other Zambian cities such as the capital of Lusaka. In between all of these tasks, James volunteers four days a week in the pediatric ward of the local hospital. One of those days is spent at the
AIDS clinic caring for children diagnosed with HIV. In addition, throughout his time in Zambia, James was responsible for all administrative work. If a pump broke, he handled the arrangements to fix it. Recently, a full-time hospital administrator has relieved him from those duties, for which he is grateful.

Gratitude is a ubiquitous virtue in Zambia. Patients and community members continually express their thankfulness for James’s medical service. Accompanying their graciousness, Zambians also value politeness and hospitality. Zambians drop everything to host impromptu guests. They are remarkably friendly and love reciprocal visitation. Hosting guests is considered an honor, and visiting one another is a gesture of caring and respect. An interesting correlation exists between the value of hospitality and the purpose of a hospital. Both involve caring for people. James cares for Zambians in a hospital, and he is shown care through Zambian hospitality. When his children were born, people came to the house and offered rest by holding the children and bringing meals.

The Zambian value of hospitality has allowed the development of close friendships. James’s friends are those with whom he can have intimate conversations and emotional support. Zambianizing the hospital, the process of gradually turning over work and leadership by closely working with members of the local community, is one way friendships have developed. Outside of his medical service, he has built relationships through church, community activities, spending time in villages, and a prayer partnership with a local pastor. Raising children who grew up playing with Zambian children also cultivated meaningful friendships. And James also attributes his friendships to the mutual dependence built upon each other. For example, James asked a local farmer for milk from his cows. Just as James became dependent on this Zambian man for
milk, this man was also dependent on James for income. Over time, relationships such as this have blossomed into treasured friendships.

Not all friendships are forged easily. While he admits cross-cultural friendships require more work than mono-cultural ones, James loves cultural diversity. God in His wisdom made us all different. James appreciates getting to know people of all social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. In his early years he learned lessons on how to get along with different personalities. As one of just two doctors at the hospital, long hours were normal. Working cohesively was important. No other doctors were present to share the burden, which sometimes increased tension. When close friends became ill, the emotions of being surgeon and friend were difficult. In one case, a close friend at the end of her pregnancy needed an emergency c-section. Hopes to get the baby out alive quickly diminished. The baby had died in utero and was delivered still-born. Caring for his friends through this tragedy was tough. In the tight-knit community where James worked, the struggle between doctor and friend was not uncommon.

The reality of death in rural Zambia taught James the value of funerals that last a week. Even through medical school, James was indifferent to funerals and rarely attended them. He was accustomed to American efficiency with mourning. But living in Zambia changed his attitude. He began to value funerals for their expressions of grief and support. (The only drawback occurred if a patient died at the hospital while the doctors were mourning in a village.) Funerals and the lengthy mourning process also underscored the value of relatives. Zambian culture stresses the importance of being responsible for extended family, even if it requires draining all available resources. Economically and socially speaking, a basic tenet of African culture is that society moves up and/or down together. James saw this first-hand when he named two “employees-of-the-year” to promote a productive work environment by recognizing
exemplary staff. The result backfired as fellow employees did not emulate, but rather antagonized them for daring to get ahead of everyone else. Thus, James has been frustrated by the tendency for progress to be slow and difficult in underdeveloped Africa.

Overcoming such frustrations, as well as the adjustment to drastically different living conditions, relationships, medical successes, attitude changes, stamina, and the ability to flourish in a culture so different from the U.S. would not have been possible apart from James’s relationship with God. Though he grew up with parents who followed Christ, James went through a period of being agnostic. He took the proverbial basket of beliefs, handed to him by his parents, and dumped them out. Over time, he began re-adopting most of those beliefs and personalizing them, which developed his own, authentic relationship with God, rather than one mediated by his parents.

James’s spiritual journey prepared him for a lifetime of service in Zambia. While attending Johns Hopkins, James and his wife attended a church in Baltimore. They were displeased with the church’s internal strife and planned to tell the pastor their decision to go elsewhere. While having dinner together, an anomaly of events prevented James from making his announcement. He and his wife suddenly realized that the purpose of attending church is to worship God. They had been thinking church was not meeting their needs. In one evening, however, their attitude changed. They began to wonder what they could contribute. Moving from an egocentric approach to a Theo-centric approach to his spiritual growth laid the foundation for James to handle a career of service in Zambia.

The experience in Baltimore showed James that he could choose his perspective. Though a natural attribute of his personality, he has chosen to view the world optimistically. He has chosen to maintain an open posture to others’ beliefs and understandings. With credit attributed
to the transforming power of God, James recognizes he needs God daily. His relationship with God has taught him grace, patience, and the potency of prayer. James continues to learn love, expressed by his service to the children in Africa.

As a follower of Christ, James is motivated to serve other people and help them know Christ as their savior. He summarizes his purpose in life with the scripture, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, KJV). Submission means giving up one’s own desires to follow Christ’s calling. James had never aspired to spend his career as a pediatrician in rural Africa. He could have had a comfortable life as a doctor in the U.S. But through open submission, God transformed his aspirations and supplied him with the energy to perform. James has learned to drop societal expectations and to make the most of the resources and aptitude God has provided for the benefit of society. His focus is not on making himself and his family better; rather his energy is directed at improving the whole community. Across most cultures, the assumption is that people will use their capabilities to the extreme benefit of themselves. This “prosperity gospel” thrives in both the U.S. and Zambia. From a Biblical perspective, which cuts across culture, we all have responsibilities to promote justice and fairness as part of the church body by submitting to the example of Christ.

After submission, the verse encourages resisting the devil. In Zambia, where belief in evil spirits is especially prevalent, if someone gets into an accident, the devil, or an evil spirit associated with him, is blamed. Witchdoctors, bewitching, cursing, and charms are social realities. This gives the devil and the spirit world un-entitled power and stifles spiritual growth. In “resisting the devil,” followers of Christ rely on the sovereignty and supreme power of God. This also means resisting behaviors that are contrary to Christ’s teachings. For example, James finds the U.S. fascination with money bothersome. American wealth has eclipsed the need for
God. Resisting the lie that money leads to happiness places the focus back on the gospel of Christ’s love and the fulfillment of service. James’s spiritual growth has also led him to resist the image of being an empty vessel looking to be filled. Rather his life is about worshipping God. Primed in Baltimore, James has grown spiritually as part of his Zambian church family. Though some U.S. Americans have found the church experience in Zambia lacking, James has never felt that way. He finds the singing, worship, and music meaningful. Sermons are relevant and appropriately aligned with the Bible. The relationships built through his church have also allowed for open discussions of polygamy and ways the community can actively resist the devil’s influence so spiritual growth may continue.

Whether in the U.S. or Zambia, James seeks to submit to God’s calling. He has learned not to force things. If a door is closed, he may knock, but he will not kick it down. Right now the door is cracked for the hospital and malaria research center to be Zambianized. James has incorporated local Zambian people and is training them to take his place some day. Institutions tend to rely heavily on their founder, so James is taking time to resign his responsibilities gradually. Playing the role of puppet master and keeping his high expectations tempered, James has turned over the hands-on research, and as mentioned previously, spends much of his time coordinating from his computer. By employing local Zambians, James has been encouraged to see the cycle of poverty being broken through regular paychecks earned by the work opportunities at the research center.

Reflecting on his life in Zambia, James has found being a doctor extremely fulfilling. The perception of doctors in Zambia is immediate trust. Competency is assumed. By contrast, though comparable at one time, the initial perception of doctors in the U.S. has changed to skepticism and mistrust. Along with feeling trusted and valued by his gracious host culture,
being a doctor in Zambia gave James the opportunity to spend more time with his family. He ate meals with them, spent evenings at home with them, and traveled together to many game parks for an occasional weekend get-away. Spending time with his children and seeing them now as adults who love the Lord has been James’s biggest blessing. Submitting to God’s call has given James a fulfilling life that continues to benefit his African community and beyond. With all the rewards of a life in Zambia, no wonder he considers himself African.
Joanne

“Run and Not Grow Weary”

As a former cross-country runner, Joanne had come to understand commitment and endurance. These two principles transcended the realm of training and racing to her relationship with God and her marriage. Thus, when her husband was offered a position in Zambia, she related to the Biblical story of Ruth that said “where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay” (Ruth 1:16, NIV). Along with eager support of her husband’s work, adventurous Joanne had always loved traveling and trying new things. She spent time praying and talking to others about the move; and soon she felt full confirmation that moving to Zambia was where God wanted her to be. Her first move to Africa was to Sikalongo, Zambia in 1982, followed by a return in 2010 to Macha, where she and her husband currently reside.

Prior to leaving the U.S. Joanne happened to meet a Zambian woman named Bonita who was attending graduate school at Joanne’s alma mater, Kansas State University. In hearing of Joanne’s impending move to Zambia, Bonita insisted she meet her husband, Friday, and their four-year old daughter who were still living in Zambia. Plans to meet them were made and affirmed when Joanne learned through two cross-cultural preparatory courses that people who move to a new country often quickly bond to whoever meets them at the airport. Because Joanne desired to cultivate bonds immediately with native Zambians, she was happy to meet Bonita’s family as opposed to fellow Americans already living there.

When they arrived in Lusaka, Friday was waiting at the airport to greet them. He quickly sensed Joanne’s unease about Zambian driving habits and made every effort to comfort her. Not only do Zambians drive on the left side of the road, but they also wait until pitch black conditions to turn on their headlights. Like all Zambians who value hospitality, Friday turned on
his headlights prematurely to care for his guest, despite oncoming cars continuously flashing their lights at him in bewilderment. Joanne and her husband subsequently spent their first night abroad with a man they had never met. The next morning he took them to the bus station in Lusaka, where they hopped on a bus for the several-hour journey to Choma.

The first few days transitioning from life in the U.S. to life in Africa were difficult. Still jet-lagged and famished, Joanne wondered about what was safe to eat because she heard stories of people getting sick from bacteria and other mysterious sources. At one of the bus stops, she opted for hard-boiled eggs. Though safe to her digestive system, this snack proved barely enough to sustain her. When she finally arrived in Choma, the person picking her up came several hours late causing her to miss the first meal of a conference she was attending. Joanne’s frustration was exacerbated by her fatigue and hunger. She was in a new and very different environment where she knew very few people. After three days subsisting on Zambia’s traditional dish of nshima, a cornmeal staple, she did not think she could endure much more.

Then someone gave her the best fresh orange she had ever tasted. She had a good night of sleep; and she met new friends. With three days of living in Zambia behind her, Joanne had crossed a threshold to embrace her new country and to flourish in the life God had given her. The next year she realized how God was with her in missing that first meal. For dinner on the first day of the conference, the custom is to butcher one or two oxen. The parts of the ox that perish the quickest are used first, which would be the intestines and other less desirable organs. After her first year living in Zambia, Joanne expected this and was fine with partaking of such a meal. To experience that meal within 48 hours of arriving, however, may have put her over the edge. Reflecting on this story over the years has shown her God’s presence, humor, and omniscience.
While the first three days in Zambia were overwhelming, Joanne did not need much time to feel like this was where she belonged. Trusting that she was where God wanted her helped her adapt the most to her new culture. Joanne knew life would not always be easy, but she has enjoyed the unique opportunities God has provided. She has a gift of adapting to new situations and can handle interruptions and novelties with poise. Joanne’s parents worried that her husband had dragged her off to Africa, but when they visited, they witnessed her happy disposition and genuine contentment.

Applying what she learned in the courses prior to arriving in Zambia also positively impacted her adaptation. Joanne wanted to become culturally oriented through a village experience, rather than through other Westerners who were already working there. The translation of this request and what she intended may have been initially misinterpreted by her Western colleagues, who hinted at their apprehension. In the first few days, however, after getting to know Joanne and her husband better, their fellow colleagues saw their sincerity to apply what they had learned, and graciously supported them.

Thus, after the first few days in Zambia, when the conference they were attending concluded, Joanne and her husband spent three and a half weeks in a village near Sikalongo, where they were immersed in the language, food, and culture without any Western influence. The villagers butchered a pig for them, though after a few days the meat was starting to rot. Joanne humbly asked permission to ride her bike for fresh food on occasion, and naturally, the accommodating villagers would not say no. The son of the headman (tribal leader) in Sikalongo, named Richard, was educated and understood Western ways of life. He was aware of how little his family had compared to the resources Joanne would have had in the U.S. Though a gesture of their generosity, this was also bothersome because Richard influenced the villagers to
prioritize making life comfortable for their guests, rather than keep their living arrangements authentic.

The village experience was still momentous. Richard spoke English and helped Joanne learn the local language. The prior training Joanne had received in the U.S. for learning a language was not relevant. Her training assumed villages had many shops teeming with people. In this part of rural Zambia, however, this setting did not exist. Thankfully, Richard’s tutorial gave her a foundation for communicating in the local language that would help her meet people and continue to overcome feelings of disorientation and anxiety as she proceeded to adapt to her new life.

Joanne learned enough of the local tribal language to begin spending time with other Zambian women. And since many people also speak English, she could communicate rather easily. Socializing with other women contributed to Joanne’s adaptation and sense of belonging. She enjoyed sitting with them in the cooking shelters, where they would show her how to cook nshima over a fire. One of her closest friends is Beauty. They have tea together, sew together, and enjoy each other’s company throughout the week. Though she is employed as Joanne’s housekeeper, their friendship goes beyond an employee-employer relationship.

The friendship and service provided by Beauty have been rewarding. Along with companionship, Beauty takes care of the laundry, ironing, and house cleaning. Joanne had always taken care of these tasks on her own, but in Zambia, the cultural expectation is to hire somebody to help with chores if everyone in the household has a job. Therefore, Joanne’s job allows her to provide income for Beauty, too.

Joanne works at the nearby ART (Anti-Retroviral) clinic for AIDS patients, Monday through Friday. She tracks patients and their treatments; monitors patients’ status if they died,
moved, or transferred to another clinic; and follows through with mothers who have babies and young children with HIV. After compiling the files of patients who have defaulted on their ARV (anti-retroviral) medications, Joanne passes a list of names to the ART driver who then travels into surrounding villages to contact people and remind them they are due for their medicine. The most rewarding aspect of her job is coming across a file where an HIV-positive mother followed protocol. In this case, the mother would have given birth to a baby, and followed through with ensuring the baby received a week’s worth of ARV medications within 48 hours of birth. The new mothers would have then continued on the ARVs while nursing, which meant their baby would test HIV-negative. The case for that infant can now be closed, and he or she now has a chance at a normal life.

The rewards of life in Zambia transcend the work environment. For example, Joanne spends Monday afternoons with five or six young girls, ages 10-13. They play games like UNO and engage in various creative projects such as origami, embroidery, and coloring. Their time together has been meaningful. Another reward has been the slower pace of life. Days are not frantic and evenings are free. Most activities are scheduled during the day because people need to travel by foot, which is difficult after dark. Sheltered from the political mudslinging of this election year and the materialism of Western cultures, Joanne has learned to be content with less. Yet she is thankful the access to basic staples has greatly improved since her first arrival in the 1980s.

Though resources are limited compared to what is available in the U.S., Joanne has found this reality helpful to her spiritual journey. In the U.S., the tendency to rely on material things for a fulfilling life is a distracting mirage. By contrast, the need to rely on God in Zambia is obvious for daily provision. One example of Joanne’s reliance on God was when she and her
husband were trying to conceive. They were hoping to start a family while living in Sikalongo. While many people around her were having babies, Joanne could not get pregnant. She was disappointed and did not have answers. Back in the U.S. they could have seen a specialist, embarked on a battery of appropriate tests, and given a course of action. Without those resources in Africa, however, they had to wait for God’s timing. Their attitude to trust God influenced others around them. The woman working for them at the time, who was single with a small child, initially wondered why Joanne’s husband did not take a second wife who might conceive a child quickly. She began to see Joanne’s faith and later expressed how she was strengthened and encouraged at how Joanne and her husband handled their situation. Eventually, Joanne did conceive, twice, blessed with a son and daughter by God’s provision and timing.

Along with an awareness of God’s constant provision, growing spiritually in Zambia was facilitated by attending Bible studies on the weekends and church on Sunday mornings. Church services are in English and the local dialect to accommodate the native Zambians from neighboring villages who may not speak the tribal language. Joanne also spends quiet time reading the Bible each morning, listens to local radio from the U.S. via the internet for worship music, attends women’s meetings on Saturdays, and participates in other small groups. People have said to Joanne that they could never do what she does. They would tell her they could never work in Zambia with the basic conditions she endures. To this Joanne would respond this is just life. She feels she is not stronger or more equipped than anybody else. She just happens to be living her life in Zambia. There is work to do in Zambia, and so she chose to work there. Her perspective is that God gifted her to work cross-culturally, and the work just so happens to be in Zambia instead of the U.S. Joanne has loved living in Zambia. She has been strengthened by a Bible verse that inspired her since her days running cross country back in
Kansas. That verse says, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (NIV). Living in Zambia has taught Joanne to wait on the Lord, to press on knowing He is sovereign. The trivial problems of this present life may try to distract her, but Joanne trusts God will see her through and provide what she needs each day so she can continue in the work He has entrusted her.
Leo

“No Evil Shall Befall You”

From the time Leo was ten years old he knew he wanted to live and work in Africa. He did not have a specific country in mind, but he had always been drawn to the needs and mystique of the African continent. By the time Leo was in high school, he deliberated the most appropriate learning tract, agricultural or academic, to prepare him for working there in some capacity. He chose the academic tract and proceeded into a small, four-year college. His initial interest was strictly Bible study, but his advisor suggested enrolling in professional courses.

Aware of Leo’s interest to work in Africa, his advisor knew that most countries eagerly issued visas for people with skills in medicine, education, agriculture, and other professional fields. Since Leo excelled at math and science, he pursued a secondary teaching certificate in general science. This allowed him to complete a fascinating student-teaching requirement, working with students who were forced to attend summer school for remediation. This experience prepared him for an opening at a school in Matopos, Zimbabwe. So Leo moved to Africa in 1958, and he has been there ever since.

The initial move to Zimbabwe involved an elaborate, yet exciting itinerary. Beginning in central Pennsylvania, Leo’s family and friends accompanied him to the port in New York. They sent him off with prayer and assurance that God would take care of him. After sailing five days across the Atlantic to Southampton in the United Kingdom, Leo embarked on another vessel, for a two-week cruise to Cape Town, South Africa. The final leg of the journey carried Leo by train from Cape Town to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, with captivating views of the African landscape. Leo felt he had come home.
Upon his arrival, Leo thought the city of Bulawayo was very small. The farm land he knew so well back in the U.S. was different from the noticeable rock formations and large granite boulders. Temperatures were comfortably cooler than the rest of Southern Africa due to the higher altitude. Along with these environmental observations, Leo was especially impressed by the kindness of the people. He became immediately aware of their understanding, acceptance, and friendliness. Yet, though the economy was much better than it is today, the Zimbabwean people were materially very poor. Once he began his teaching assignment, Leo noticed his students had a great desire to learn because education was viewed as an escape from poverty.

Leo taught science to African students who came from rural villages. Under the British system that prevailed in Zimbabwe during that time, grades issued by the school were irrelevant; and student success depended solely on passing one final standardized exam. The science exam had four levels of attainment, from highest to lowest: distinction, credit, pass, and fail. In all of his years teaching, not one of Leo’s students failed. Rather they earned remarkable scores of distinctions and credits. Because Leo was such an effective teacher and well-liked by his students, they began to call him endearingly, “The Scientist.” The Scientist enjoyed his students as much as they enjoyed him.

Leo’s work in Africa transcended the science classroom. He engaged in evening studies with students, served as sports master, and was relied upon for any repairs around the campus. Since they did not have electricity, one of Leo’s tasks included keeping the kerosene Tilly lamps functioning. Weekends had no time for rest either. Because Leo was involved with multiple churches, he attended three services in three different suburbs of Bulawayo. Upon returning home Sunday evenings, he still had to prepare lessons for the upcoming school week.
Refusing to sit idle, the busy and active lifestyle he maintained in Africa suited Leo. He employed his varied talents to serve as the regional administrator for a non-profit organization, where he hosted workshops, taught seminars, and facilitated leadership trainings. Leo has also been a financial secretary, an assistant to an agricultural program, and filled an assortment of positions at the school. One of the biggest rewards of his work, as God has used him, has been to see the growth and development within his community. Leo partnered with his African colleagues to set goals, engage in strategic planning, and implement mentor models to build a sense of commitment and fulfill a vision of oneness and unity. Bathed in prayer, he has helped communities work together to become more self-sufficient.

The prevailing attitude among Leo’s Zimbabwean villagers has been referred to as their “dependency syndrome.” Because the population is severely impoverished, many feel they should be given things. There is a saying, “The child who doesn’t cry, making his wants known, will die in the sling on his mother’s back.” Leo’s retort has been to ask, “How long does the child remain in the sling on his mother’s back?” He developed strategies for helping people do things independently. For example, he created a dollar-for-dollar program to encourage responsibility and ownership. When new seating was needed for a building, Leo’s organization offered to match every contribution equally. Therefore, if someone donated ten dollars, the organization also donated ten dollars. The results of the dollar-for-dollar program have been a significant success. Combined with other initiatives, Leo has seen impressive progress in the overall culture as they continue to move away from the attitude of dependency and entitlement.

Such positive changes have been a process over time. Leo’s role in fostering change and building community began with the relationships he established more than 50 years ago. One of his first friends was a national teacher with whom he shared an office. He would become one of
many colleagues and friends with whom Leo could learn the culture. He quickly became aware of cultural differences, such as the role of witch doctors in society and ancestral spirit worship. When Leo’s left-handed wife brought materials for a science experiment to his classroom and handed them to him with his left hand, Leo’s students informed him that his wife must not respect him. In Zimbabwe, delivering something with the left hand is viewed as an offensive gesture of disrespect. While Leo came to understand his village’s culture, he continues to find the concept of time, with the prevailing disregard for punctuality, bothersome.

The most important aspect of learning the culture has been to learn the language. Leo’s outgoing personality and sincere interest in his community members provided the impetus for an earnest commitment to learning the language. He wanted to avoid misunderstandings and equip himself with the capacity to develop deep relationships. Subscribing to the idea that one’s first language offers the most genuine insight into how and what people are thinking, Leo also believed that learning the language would also help him understand the nuance of the culture. With an analytical mind and a flair for learning languages, Leo listened intently to how the language was spoken. He began to notice patterns, ask questions to understand why something is said in a particular way, take notes, and then test his theories for consistency to make a grammatical rule. Using an old Zulu book, which had similarities to his tribal language, Leo gained a full understanding of language intricacies. He proceeded to write a grammar book, which has since been used at the university level.

On one occasion in his early years, Leo had to give an unexpected, impromptu speech in the tribal language for a large audience. Typically he would have written the entire speech verbatim to ease the pressure of speaking correctly. Since he did not have the opportunity for that, he was forced to speak without such props. His successful speech became a launching pad
experience that gave Leo confidence for future speaking engagements. He began to understand
the importance of not waiting to speak the language perfectly, but to adopt a willingness to make
mistakes and accept correction. He now speaks the tribal language impeccably, even fooling
people over the phone that he is a native speaker.

Along with a natural affinity for language acquisition, Leo credits his ability to learn the
tribal language to advice he was given prior to moving to Zimbabwe. Other friends who have
lived abroad told him to keep his eyes and ears open, and his mouth shut. He was told to
observe, ask questions, and assume valid reasoning dictates cultural practices. With an open
mind to new meaning and eager to communicate in the first language of his host culture, Leo
adjusted to life in Zimbabwe easily. Having grown up on a farm in rural Pennsylvania, Leo had
already been accustomed to walking everywhere and living without indoor plumbing. As an
avid hunter, Leo found a bond with the bush men and has enjoyed all the exotic flora and fauna
Africa offers. He lived in the present and interacted with people without forcing himself on
them, which helped him develop meaningful friendships for a smooth transition to life outside of
the U.S.

The most important aspect of living in Africa has been Leo’s spiritual growth. His
African life has been extremely rewarding because God has used him to serve others. Leo has
experienced a great sense of joy in knowing God and witnessing His provision. During the wars
for independence, Leo’s wife and villagers often worried for his safety. Freedom fighters were
known for kidnapping and killing people, but Leo trusted in God’s sovereignty. The story of
Jesus before Pilate was his source of strength. Jesus says, “You could have no power at all
against Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11, KJV). This scripture helped
Leo understand that no one would harm him unless God allowed it. While the Zimbabwean
people attribute problems to evil spirits, demons, and curses, Leo was convinced that Jesus Christ is the ultimate power.

Leo’s relationship with Christ has given him a sense of freedom and deliverance that has prompted him to obey whatever God has for him. Though obedience may have been contrary to what Leo has wanted, he has remained eager and loyal to his responsibilities. As an example, one time Leo was comfortably working in a village when his organization asked him to take another assignment. Though not Leo’s preference, he complied willingly because he trusted God wanted him to move. Similar situations have contributed to Leo’s understanding that spiritual growth is directly proportionate to obedience. Poised to go anywhere and do anything in obedience to God’s will have yielded an indescribable joy and fulfillment.

While many verses encouraged Leo throughout his decades in Zimbabwe, he has always held close the words read to him before embarking on his trans-Atlantic cruise. In the verse, God promises,

\[
\text{No evil shall befall you,} \\
\text{Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;} \\
\text{For He shall give His angels charge over you,} \\
\text{To keep you in all your ways.} \\
\text{In their hands they shall bear you up,} \\
\text{Lest you dash your foot against a stone.} \\
\text{You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,} \\
\text{The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot (Psalms 91:10, KJV).}
\]

This blessed assurance has carried Leo through difficult situations. He has been threatened, and violence and evil have surrounded him. Knowing God has been with him, however, has allowed
Leo, the teacher, The Scientist, the sports manager, the farmer, the hunter, the administrator, to enjoy every situation in which God has placed him.
Nathan always had an interest in Africa. He was born in the Congo during his parents’ four-year term with the Mennonite Central Committee. Though his family moved back to the U.S. when Nathan was still a toddler, he remained open to returning to Africa as he grew older. Thus, the decision to work in Africa was a long-term process that began very early in his life. After college Nathan sensed God was calling him to move overseas, and he made a public commitment to exploring how he could use his talents abroad. He began preparing for such a move by enrolling in cross-cultural training and service-type opportunities in the U.S. As time progressed, Nathan felt God continuing to confirm that he was gifted to work in a cross-cultural environment; and he received affirmation from influential people in his life, who had also worked overseas, that he was suited for cross-cultural work. With a heart for Africa, Nathan remained open to any culture, but he was presented with an opening in Malawi that matched his strengths. In 2004 Nathan moved to Malawi with his wife and one-year old daughter. He worked in a rural village for three years, returned to the U.S. for 18 months, and then went back to Malawi to work in an urban setting for another year and a half.

By material standards, the Muslim village community where Nathan and his growing family lived was extremely poor. Living and surviving consumed most of anyone’s time, and very few people had electricity or an automobile. Despite the dense population, only a few houses within a five-mile range had running water. Many mornings Nathan woke up to a line of people at his door. Some were looking for odd jobs around the property, and others had practical requests for a variety of resources such as food and medicine. Responding to the needs of his
village and contributing to community development, however, was the nature of Nathan’s work. So he eagerly helped his village neighbors whenever he could with the resources he had.

Though much of his time was devoted to cultivating relationships and surviving physically in this remote part of Africa, Nathan used his mechanical engineering background extensively to improve the quality of life in his village. He fixed and maintained the gravity-fed watering system, which was broken upon his initial arrival. With a baby daughter, having running water in the house was a top priority for drinking and bathing. Though boiling all water was necessary for safe consumption, Nathan appreciated the convenient access to running water in his home. He shared his water with others in his village who typically relied on streams and public wells for their daily supply. Being trained as an engineer allowed Nathan to advise the construction of a new maternity clinic in his village. With an affinity for mechanical things, Nathan was also able to help build a hand-powered bicycle for a local man who did not have use of his legs. With a new way of mobility, this man started a small tea shop business. He would ride his hand-powered bike seven miles into town to purchase sugar and canned milk, which significantly improved his quality of life. Nathan’s handiness kept electricity, water, and vehicles running, and he was open to using his skills wherever they were needed. He provided medical support, food, water, and transportation to anyone in his community. The villagers also counted on his services for agricultural assistance, construction, and a variety of health emergencies.

Sickness and diseases were a daily reality for Nathan’s village. An estimated 20-30% of the population was sick at any given time. With an average life expectancy in the 30s for men and women, and astronomical percentages of HIV cases, sickness and death permeated the community. Nathan’s village of 598 people averaged one funeral per week, and the mourning
process could not be ignored. If someone died in the middle of the night, living so close to one another, everyone became aware because of the loud wailing.

While gratefully spared from any deaths in his immediate family, Nathan experienced much tropical sicknesses. His daughter contracted typhoid, though the diagnosis was inconclusive because of a lack of technology and advanced medicine. Early in their years in Malawi, Nathan’s entire family was sick for a long time until they realized the source. Nathan lived in a grass-roof house. With holes throughout, the rotting roof was home to throngs of breeding mosquitoes. After bouts of malaria and attempts to treat the roof with a spray that would cause swarms of mosquitoes to scatter temporarily, Nathan decided to employ his engineering skills to fix the roof. Besides, he was fearful it would collapse during the rainy season. With the help of his friend Mohammed, they made bricks by hand to add structural stability, braced the walls, and completely replaced the roof.

Along with sickness and survival, another challenge was the awareness of what some of the children had lived through regarding the cultural practice of initiations. An initiation represented the transition in the eyes of the community from being a child to an adult. It was an opportunity for parents to flaunt their status because initiations cost money. New clothes and certain gifts had to be purchased. The age a child is initiated has become younger and younger. Some girls and boys were under the age of 12. For young boys, initiation meant circumcision. Often young girls were raped during these ceremonies. One year the initiation hut for the young boys was built very near Nathan’s home. It was extremely difficult for Nathan to be aware of what was happening in these initiations because he cared so much for the people. Furthermore, with so much of the population dying from AIDS, seeing the disease perpetuated in young girls through initiation practices was horrific.
Despite the difficult realities, life in Malawi had its rewards. One of the most rewarding aspects was developing interdependent relationships that resulted in positive changes in the lives of villagers that will impact their families for future generations. For example, Mohammed had a younger daughter. With rape and early pregnancies rampant, he worried that she would not have the opportunity to choose whether or not she wanted to become a mother. Nathan was able to transition Mohammed’s daughter to her aunt in the city where she could be harbored from village mores and given a better life. Another example of making lives better for people, even saving a life, occurred when their young neighbor, Abulay, was diagnosed with meningitis and malaria at the same time. Because Abulay belonged to a minority group, and the hospitals were run by a different tribe, getting appropriate care was difficult. Prior to going to the hospital Abulay had been convulsing and had become nearly unresponsive. Nathan took him to the hospital, and finding someone to help was difficult. Finally Nathan found a nurse who started an I.V., but she only administered a saline drip. After persisting, Nathan convinced the nurse to add medicine, which eventually saved Abulay’s life.

As relationships within the community deepened, looking out for each other became reciprocated. One night Nathan took someone to the hospital. Just before he embarked on the journey, his friend warned him to drive straight home. He was cautioned that people will ask him for rides and try to flag him down for help, but Nathan was advised not to stop. He appreciated the protective gestures of his friends in the village, yet the resulting intimacy had its challenges. Nathan became friends with many people, and he also saw many of them die. Becoming friends with people and knowing how many funerals they most likely would experience was a difficult reality.
Nathan’s friendships were forged over time. He learned to approach someone, who may have had a different set of life experiences, as a learner and a listener. Taking caution against pretending to have all the correct answers, Nathan established relationships by walking in the village and learning to greet people. He would make them laugh when he made mistakes by trying to practice the language. Because Nathan enjoys mechanical things, he would sometimes sit with the bicycle repairman and watch how he would repair a bicycle tire with a corn cob, used inner tube, and a little package of glue he kept hidden somewhere. Nathan’s house was also inviting. He would host friends from the community for a meal and visits would last through the evening. When a certain kind of tree was fruiting in his yard, Nathan distributed the fruit to enthusiastic children.

These interactions became language learning opportunities and contributed substantially to Nathan’s adaptation to Malawi culture. Because he worked in a Muslim community that valued modesty, Nathan always wore long pants despite temperatures often above 100 degrees. He consciously endured a lifestyle that was not out of the means of his village friends. For example, he was careful about how often he used the vehicle; and when he did use it, he was willing to offer a ride to anyone he knew. When Nathan brought groceries into the house, he would use a box to avoid flaunting the food he could afford that others may not.

Nathan’s cultural sensitivity and deep care for the people allowed friendships to flourish. He was a guest in homes where he was honored by meeting extended families. Along with invitations to funerals, villagers shared stories with Nathan to let him into their lives. For example, they told him about land disputes and how they affected their relationships in the community and with the chief. Tribal chiefs had some government-granted authority to mediate disputes, and villagers would sometimes explain those issues and invite Nathan into the dialogue.
One of Nathan’s closest friends was Abassi, a Muslim neighbor who tutored him in the local language. Nathan estimates having spent 600-800 hours together, mainly in the afternoons, throughout his first year in Malawi. They would walk together in the community and visit other villagers. Abassi had a grove of banana trees on the periphery of his vegetable garden, as well as a rice field, and Nathan enjoyed partnering with his agricultural projects.

Friendship with Abassi was meaningful to Nathan’s spiritual growth because it provided a glimpse of what he may have been like if he was born into a Muslim tribe with very few financial resources. It made him ponder why he was given so many comforts and opportunities when others have not. Apart from his personal relationship with Christ, Nathan could relate to Abassi very much. One time the chief made an attempt to take Abassi’s family land. With burning anger, Abassi went to the chief and said, “I will kill you if you ever take our land. I might get killed, or I might go to jail. But you’ll be gone. And that’s all that will matter to me.” Nathan could appreciate Abassi’s stance if land is the only possession that has allowed his family to survive for generations why he would defend it so passionately.

Abassi used Islam to fit into the community without actually having the religion touch his soul. Islam gave Abassi a place in the community and helped him feel a part of a group. But Islam did not change Abassi’s life for the better. Rather, following Islam was superficial. It was just a known, quantifiable thing in his life. Abassi had an end goal in mind, and he was content to use whatever means required to obtain that goal. Disenchanted by the absence of certain fundamentals that could form a global ethic, such as trust and honesty, Abassi was frustrated by society. Nathan understood Abassi’s view, however, his faith in Christ has been a transforming release from a temporal earthly perspective and toward an eternal heavenly perspective that offers hope.
Working in rural Malawi revealed Nathan’s dependency on God. In the U.S., Nathan felt in control and as though he deserved credit for his hard work that led to concrete solutions. But time in Malawi showed him that everything belongs to God. The blessings Nathan has been given, whether aptitude or material, have been given to him by God to bless others. He did not earn them. God chose his family and birthplace, therefore Nathan has the responsibility to be prepared to give a reason for the hope he has in Christ. Nathan began to realize that apart from Christ, he has nothing of eternal value to contribute to any community.

Leaving the comfortable life of a mechanical engineer in obedience to God’s guidance to move to Malawi has been a difficult yet worthwhile experience. Nathan’s relationship with God grew stronger as he felt God’s protection and rested in knowing he was where he should be. Nathan learned that God requires more of us than just caring for ourselves, and working in Malawi gave him the opportunity to reach across cultures as a humble servant.

Though Nathan is committed to responding to God’s leading, his spiritual journey has been treacherous at times. Perhaps the biggest difficulty throughout Nathan’s years in Malawi was his experience with a home invasion. With about one month left in his first term, while Nathan and his family were sleeping, between six and eight men were screaming outside of their window. At first Nathan thought they needed medical attention or that someone had died. When they started talking about money, however, he quickly figured out what they wanted. At that point, Nathan yelled to his wife to lock herself in the bedroom. The men kicked down the exterior door, entered the house, and grabbed Nathan. Waving their machetes and threatening to kill him, the men barreled into Nathan’s daughters’ bedroom. Nathan yelled at them, promising that there was no money in their bedroom. In a terrifying ordeal that lasted about 20 minutes, the men stripped the house of most valuable items.
Despite the material loss and horror of that night, Nathan saw God’s presence and protection. First, no one was injured. His daughters were not touched, and the machetes at his face were an intimidation tactic. Next, the same door that these men kicked down to get into the house was the same type of door stopping the men from getting to Nathan’s wife. Despite numerous attempts to kick the door down, they were unsuccessful. It was a hollow core door that should not have taken much effort to break. With boot and foot prints stamped all over the door as a testament to their failure, they resorted to using a pry bar in the jamb. And still they could not penetrate. As a result, Nathan’s wife remained safe.

More evidence of God’s presence was the rarity of cell phone reception that night. Cell phone service was unreliable. While the men were in the house, however, Nathan’s wife was able to make a phone call. She called an American friend who lived 11 kilometers away. He just so happened to be awake because he was watching a presidential debate being broadcast from the U.S. Their friend notified the police, but because none of the police vehicles worked, their friend picked up the policemen and brought them to Nathan’s house. The incident also showed Nathan who his true friends were in the community. Before the police arrived, as the men left the house, single mothers in the community came to the rescue with their hoe handles. The scene was touching.

Nathan’s friend Mohammad also rushed to the house in the middle of the night and warned him that these men would return again at some point. So Nathan decided to take up an offer by some friends to live with them in town until he and his family moved back to the U.S. the next month. Nathan later learned that the same perpetrators had struck another nearby community ten days after his ordeal. Though the police allegedly caught one of the men eventually, the others escaped any punishment.
Within the four weeks after the home invasion and just prior to moving back to the U.S., Nathan and his family hosted a Christmas party for their friends in the village. They sent out 17 invitations, but around 70 people attended. They killed a goat, boiled 50 pounds of rice and nshima, and cooked nearly a dozen heads of cabbage to feed everyone. Getting together with his friends before returning home was a powerful experience because so many honored them by their attendance. Followers of Christ sat side-by-side with their Muslim neighbors. Assimilating to the village tradition, Nathan sat the elderly and his closest friends in the dining/living areas of his home, while children sat in the carport. Peripheral friends and acquaintances sat on the porch and surrounding property. The Muslim chief of a nearby village also joined the celebration, which was meaningful to Nathan. During the celebration one woman read a passage from Ezekiel 33. This chapter shows the prophet Ezekiel, the watchman of Judah, in transition from warning people who persist in rebelling against God to a message of promise and hope for those who are faithful to God. Because Muslims in that area respect the Old Testament, they expressed curiosity in the message, which opened opportunities to share the gospel with some of the people in the community.

This special time with his village community reminded Nathan of a verse that has always been meaningful to him concerning unity for followers of Christ. Right before Jesus was crucified he said, “I have given them glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23, NIV). As the Bible teaches, Nathan valued unity as a way of testifying to others that Jesus is truly the Son of God. And though living in Malawi was the most difficult three years of his life, Nathan is utterly convinced that obedience to Jesus Christ has been worth it.
Paul

“The Very Nature of a Servant”

Upon graduating from college, Paul spent two years in what was then called “Rhodesia” (present-day Zimbabwe) as a teacher. When he returned to the U.S., he got married and later had his first daughter. Yet he missed the country and people of Zimbabwe. Paul wanted to return with his young family to share the experience with them. This desire, combined with an adventurous spirit that aspires to see different places, do different things, and collect different experiences guided his prayers for God’s direction. Paul felt God blessed him with the personality, gifts, and abilities to work cross-culturally, and he was eager to use them. When the opportunity for a teaching position opened up, Paul joyfully accepted it as God’s provision. Over the next three decades, Paul, his wife, and two daughters moved back and forth from Zimbabwe working in education and reconstruction efforts that were taking place subsequent to independence. For the past four years, Paul has served as a principal and teacher at a school in rural Zimbabwe.

Paul arrived on the African continent on a Sunday and began teaching on Tuesday. For a farm boy from Franklin County (PA), living on a totally new continent, immersed in the foreign culture of a developing country, Paul’s adjustment to life in Zimbabwe was surprisingly easy. The rural setting was similar to home, where people worked hard to sustain life. With less distractions and technological invasions, the pace of life was slow. Another refreshing change that made the adjustment easy was the lack of peer and/or societal pressure. In a culture that is non-materialistic, there was no competition to have the newest gadgets. Ultimately, the rural ways of life were much simpler than life in the West.
As Paul was beginning his work abroad, he was given advice to force himself not to make any conclusions for the first six months. He learned that he should pay attention and observe how people interact, behave, and what they value. This lesson taught him that observation over time brings understanding. On one occasion, Paul was helping to construct a building. Because it was a tall structure made of brick, the workers had to move mortar up the scaffolding. Paul initially thought to offer the suggestion to fix a pulley for transporting buckets of mortar, until he observed their technique. One guy on the ground would fill a shovel with mortar, and toss it to another guy on the scaffolding who would lay the mortar and return the emptied shovel. It worked efficiently! Paul was fascinated by the local culture and enjoyed the social interaction. By getting involved in the village community, Paul’s appreciation for the people grew immensely. The people with whom he worked were patient, gracious, and encouraging without a hint of condemnation.

Daily life in Zimbabwe was varied. Along with teaching and administrative duties, Paul kept the electric and water running. When something broke, he either fixed it himself or found a person who could. Paul’s energy and affinity for accomplishing tangible tasks suited his jack-of-all trades’ position. His type A personality contributed to his grand visions of making a difference in the lives of his African students, most of whom have been orphaned by the ravages of AIDS. While Paul has compared himself to the accelerator of a car, he has learned to express gratitude for his wife, who serves as the brakes, to help him think through his ideas and make decisions.

Still, living in Zimbabwe gave Paul the opportunity to make a difference in small ways. He sought to facilitate anyone who was willing to help themselves. On one occasion, Paul helped three students who were orphans and needed assistance. Paul worked with the three
young men to develop a plan for providing the school with vegetables. Bringing them into the
dining hall had been a significant expense for the school. Being a problem solver, Paul offered
the students his garden to grow vegetables for the school, which would eliminate transportation
costs, provide fresh vegetables, and direct funds to the needy students. Through the work of
these three ambitious men, the garden flourished. The school saved money, and not only could
these young men pay for their own school fees, but they shared income above the cost of their
tuition. This experience taught Paul that he does not have to change the whole world, but he can
make a difference in the life of the person who is in front of him.

The rewards of living in Zimbabwe were bountiful. Paul experienced incredible
satisfaction in knowing he was making a difference in the lives of people. He enjoyed peace of
mind knowing that his life in Zimbabwe was consistent with God’s will. The way Paul’s
strengths dovetailed with the needs of his village allowed him to feel valuable. Paul was content
because he knew God was using him to serve others and advance the gospel of Christ.
Furthermore, the people with whom Paul worked diligently expressed their gratitude, which
added to his sense of fulfillment.

Despite all of these rewards, living on the boarding school campus meant Paul was
always at work. He could be called upon at any and every hour for assistance with anything. So
Paul and his family deliberately scheduled vacations every three or four months to enjoy the
splendor of God’s African creation and seek refreshment. They would travel throughout
Zimbabwe to national parks, Victoria Falls, the Eastern Highlands, as well as shopping trips to
South Africa.

Even with all the natural beauty Zimbabwe offers, Paul has always felt the country’s
greatest resource is its people. They are impoverished by U.S. standards, but impressively
friendly. Their generosity, peaceful dispositions, contentment, and joy are disproportionate to their material resources. Such a posture has drawn Paul closer to the people. He has enjoyed being immersed in his community and has developed relationships very naturally and very intimately. Built on trust and respect, Paul’s relationships have been cultivated one person at a time, deepening by attending family gatherings, funerals, weddings, and other significant events. As the level of comfort has increased over time, Paul has been incorporated into the community. His friends have hosted him in their mud hut dwellings, complete with grass thatched roofs, to show they want him to be a part of their lives. Giving and receiving had become reciprocal between Paul and his friends.

At work, his students have become like adopted children; and the village elders have become like adopted parents. Such closeness has highlighted the graciousness of the Zimbabwean people. On one occasion, the school needed to expand its dining hall. A very large tree measuring 100-feet tall and a diameter of six feet, however, stood in the way. To save thousands of dollars, and after a sufficient dose of peer pressure, Paul was persuaded to cut the tree down himself, with the help of some other men. Despite careful deliberation and planning, the tree fell on the roof of the dining hall causing significant damage. Paul was distraught and felt terrible. Expecting backlash, he was humbled by the gracious condolences offered. People did not criticize him, but maintained a thankful spirit that soothed Paul’s soul.

The greatest blessing Paul has received has been the relationships developed with the Zimbabwean people. His most valued possessions are letters of gratitude from villagers, which have offered him encouragement, appreciation, and loving sentiments. Paul credits his friendships for helping him adjust to life in Zimbabwe and also for his spiritual growth. Living amongst the people of Zimbabwe gave Paul an awareness of God’s presence and taught him
lessons of tolerance, patience, and forgiveness that have allowed him to grow closer to Christ without restriction. He witnessed prayers being answered with sick people restored to health and the mysterious provision of money for various needs. Though he used to think he had some control, Paul began to realize the extent of God’s sovereignty. He came to acknowledge that he cannot do anything apart from God. Paul came to terms with God’s decisions to intervene in a situation or not. Such realizations may not have occurred had Paul stayed in the U.S. American values of individualism and independence are hindrances to spiritual growth and the consequential sense of community and mutual care for each other. The affluence in the U.S. blinds us to God’s work and fosters dependence on our material possessions and our own resolve, rather than on God. The tendency to make God a last resort in the U.S. contrasts significantly with the dependence on God first and foremost in Zimbabwe.

Another significant aspect of Paul’s spiritual growth was learning that everything belongs to God. This perspective has taught him that he does not own anything; rather he is a steward of everything God has entrusted him. He has learned to hold possessions lightly and make himself available to use the talents God has given him. This was tested three consecutive New Year’s Days. For three years straight, families came to Paul in need of a casket. Because everything was closed for the holiday, coffins could not be purchased. Transportation was shut down, and there was no refrigeration for corpses. So while everyone in the U.S. was watching football and parades, Paul was making a coffin for grieving villagers. Yet Paul was honored to serve his community by using scraps of lumber and his token woodworking talents. He learned that making himself available in such a way allows God to work through him, and blessings follow.

Paul’s worldview is based on Christ’s example and being obedient to what God has called him to do. Like Revelation encourages, Paul keeps his sights beyond life on earth to
eternity in heaven. He feels privileged that God, the Creator of the universe, has used him abroad and finds complete fulfillment in his work in the village God called him. Paul strives to serve selflessly, give generously, and act compassionately by helping the poor, oppressed, orphaned, and widows so prevalent in Zimbabwe. One way he has emulated Christ’s generosity has been to help his friends fulfill their dowry obligations. The latest, yet also odd, trend has been the request for a trench coat, which is difficult to find anywhere in Africa. Whenever Paul returns from the U.S., he always brings trench coats back to Zimbabwe to help his friends meet their dowries.

Paul is a servant motivated by the life of Christ and supported by the Scripture that he has always found meaningful: “Rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8, NIV). With humble admission, Paul has been blessed and cannot think of anything he would have rather done over the past forty years. Yet God is not finished with him. Paul returned from Zimbabwe this past May. His life of service abroad, however, will continue as he prepares to work as an educational trainer in Mozambique. Paul looks forward to this transition and trusts in God’s proven faithfulness. He realizes that he is still far from attaining his goal of becoming like Christ. For Paul, growth, and spiritual growth in particular, is a process that takes a lifetime of aim. He trusts God is in control, and that He is able to use mistakes and failures for good, through His priceless gift of grace.
Sarah

“Labor in the Lord Is Not in Vain”

Sarah grew up in a family that loves Jesus and values service. When she and her husband first married, they knew they wanted to serve others in some capacity as a demonstration of God’s love. Having graduated from college during the Vietnam conflict, the events of this time solidified Sarah’s views on peace and nonresistance. Also, her focus had been broadened to recognize the needs of others. When her husband graduated from medical school, and the original intent to serve a Navajo community in New Mexico had fallen through, they learned of a need for doctors in Africa. Over time, and in talking to others who had been there, she and her husband became more open to the idea of working in Africa. So sensing God’s leading, they agreed to serve two years at Macha Hospital in Zambia. The initial two-year term eventually turned into twelve years. And after a 14-year hiatus spent in the U.S., Sarah and her husband returned to Macha ten years ago where they continue to show God’s love by caring for the Zambian people, both medically and educationally.

Living in rural Africa with two young children had many challenges, and adjusting to life in Zambia took many years. Along with the scare of a miscarriage, the threat of deadly malaria, and her husband contracting hepatitis, Sarah had to learn to cope with the lack of technologically advanced medicine that was so accessible back home. Electricity and water were unreliable. Though having a home with concrete floors (as opposed to most that had dirt floors) was a luxury, keeping them clean was a constant battle. Housekeeping was very time consuming. Basic commodities such as sugar, flour, and cooking oil were in short supply. All cooking was done from scratch, including the distasteful task of killing chickens, which was followed by
plucking and gutting them. Once cooked, chicken was typically served with *nshima*, a Zambian staple made of ground maize flour locally known as *mealie meal*.

The cuisine, which could include the sometimes gritty kapenta fish and the acquired taste and texture of *ibwatu*, a popular beverage of mildly fermented root with bits of maize, required an adventurous stomach. Other digestive antagonisms were dried meat, which could taste rotten if cured during the rainy season, and intestines, described as resembling pieces of inner tube best consumed in rapid succession to keep the morsels going in a downward direction. Sarah recalled one challenging meal in a village, where everyone was eating outdoors around a fire. Thankful for the dark protection of night, and a seat toward the periphery of the firelight, Sarah avoided offending her hosts by inconspicuously tossing the inedibles into the nearby bush. Dogs would no doubt devour the evidence before anyone could find a trace.

The challenges of adjusting to life in Zambia were significantly diminished through Sarah’s growing relationship with Meena. A Macha woman employed by Sarah to assist around the home, Meena taught Sarah much about how to live in Africa and relate to Zambians. Despite her difficult life, Meena was a very gracious and compassionate person. She was a diligent worker around the house and related well with Sarah’s two children. Meena also facilitated Sarah’s Tonga language acquisition with an hour of study in the mornings. While Zambia’s official language is English, Tonga is also spoken in the Macha area. When Sarah taught in the villages, Meena would accompany her to assist with language and appropriate behavior. As they walked to villages and interacted in the home, Meena taught Sarah much about the Zambian culture. She was a wealth of cultural knowledge about how to greet people, what to do, what not to do, and how to behave as a married woman in this African community.
Older women in the Macha area also served as cultural mentors for Sarah. In teaching them various courses in theological education, Sarah also learned from them. She learned where to gather firewood, what type of firewood to use, and how to cook on firewood. The Macha women graciously taught Sarah African values, such as respecting age and authority. She also learned the value of living with less. As an example, gifts at Christmas were a modest exchange, compared to the extravagance found in the U.S. But Sarah’s children seemed to develop an imagination and creativity, even with dirt as a plaything, that may not have transpired back home. Another value Sarah learned was being accustomed, or used to something. Routine is treasured in Zambia, whereas novelty and innovation are important in the U.S. And while Americans tend to be time-oriented and hurried, Zambians are not time-oriented and value a slower paced way of life.

Understanding these values helped Sarah embrace Zambian culture. Engaging with such gracious, forgiving, and thankful people helped her adjust to life in Macha. Having spent time in Philadelphia prior to moving to Zambia, Sarah had a primed sensitivity to race relations. Yet, despite actively looking for cues, Sarah and her family never experienced any hints of racism or resentment in the Macha community. By contrast, they were welcomed, their work was appreciated, and they developed meaningful friendships.

Sarah’s friendships were deepened by the communal life so common throughout Africa. The Macha villagers live, socialize, and worship together. The church community was a central part of life, yet for the first four or five years, Sarah’s involvement with the church was nominal. She preferred sitting in the back rows, where she could tend to her children. She and her husband, a doctor at Macha Hospital, declined any invitations to serve at the church to avoid imposing an American perspective on Zambian church culture. They both chose to refrain from
church affairs, until their pastor approached them. A young Zambian, their pastor encouraged Sarah and her husband to act as part of the church body. Sarah felt a sense of release. She became intentionally active with Saturday women’s meetings, which was an informal time fellowship. While studying scripture and building relationships, they ate, wove grass bracelets, and chatted with each other.

Along with learning Zambian culture, participating fully in church activities and becoming more integrated into the church community have been significant factors in Sarah’s spiritual growth. These experiences taught her to value what the villagers at Macha value, such as the exuberance of dance as a posture of worshipping God. Sarah also learned the African value of cordial, face-to-face relationships. She learned that in giving her time and talents within the community, she was also receiving the gift of fellowship—a oneness with friends. God gave Sarah the opportunity to receive, and broadened her senses to value what was being received.

Sarah saw God expressed in ways that would not have been possible back home. Along with an awareness of God’s presence through dance and song and the fellowship of community, Sarah learned that God is greater than the pervasive evil that accompanies African traditional religion. Despite the blatant enmity of God, particularly with practicing witch doctors and the widespread fear of evil spirits, Sarah knew that God was at work in their midst. She witnessed medical miracles in the hospital. One woman whose hemoglobin counts were substantially below what would allow her to function was able to walk around and interact with her family.

God became bigger to Sarah during her time in Zambia. On one occasion, early in her term, a drought forced the Macha community to face the end of their water supply. The dam was dry, the pump had broken, and Sarah was bathing five children in the last bucket of muddy water. She did not know what she would do next for water. Yet, Sarah trusted that somehow,
God would provide. And God did. The next day it rained. It rained abundantly for three straight days and filled the dam. That next Sunday the church community celebrated by ceremonially placing a pile of rocks at the dam. This would allow people to perpetuate the story of how God had provided rain when everyone was desperate for water. To Sarah, this was a meaningful personal experience, but more than that, she recounts God’s provision as a wonderful communal experience.

The discomforts of village life in rural Zambia have been a fertile ground for Sarah’s spiritual growth. She learned to rely on God daily and for basic needs. God will provide. One year, a Zambian member of the Macha medical staff visited the U.S. His observation that Americans do not need God made an impression on Sarah. He noticed the material, educational, and governmental resources accessible in the U.S., which makes the reliance on God seem less prevalent. Such an assertion has made Sarah evaluate her beliefs. A spiritual lesson has been to place her trust and reliance solely in God, and not in human constructs that crumble and fade. Sarah has further come to recognize, that despite our human efforts to control our lives, we cannot. Rather, in His sovereignty, God is in control, and He is faithful.

Sarah discovered the rewards of God’s faithfulness as He guided her through those first strange and difficult years at Macha. Before moving to Zambia, Sarah’s husband worked long shifts at a U.S. hospital. Their marriage was suffering because he was seldom at home. They lacked quality time together. But God gave them the opportunity to work in Zambia, where her husband could be present as a spouse and father. Their home was footsteps away from Macha Hospital, where her husband worked. They ate three meals each day together as a family. Sarah’s husband was able to spend time with the kids. And though the work load was tremendous, Sarah felt God took her to Zambia primarily to save her family. What felt strange
and difficult may have been God’s provision for abundance and healing. Interestingly, living with less felt like abundance, and healing came from an area with relatively primitive medical resources.

Throughout her years at Macha, the Bible had been a source of sustenance for Sarah. She found I Corinthians 15:58 particularly meaningful: “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (NIV). To her, this verse helped her overcome the doubt of whether or not her work in Zambia was worthwhile. On the occasional time she wondered if she was doing more harm than good, she understood her role to keep doing what God has told her to do—to maintain a posture of service, to build relationships, and to keep listening. A former colleague once told her, when you listen, you learn. And when you learn, you can then begin to trade. Trading means giving, receiving, and valuing what is being offered by those around you. When you can appreciate the communal exchange of trading, then you can become a story teller. Sarah has become a story teller.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence through the experiences of followers of Christ working in least developed countries. As discussed in chapter three, this study follows a qualitative research paradigm by employing narrative inquiry to examine the ways humans experience the world as a source of knowledge and understanding (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The procedure for collecting data was conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews of participants (N=11) who met the criteria for a purposeful sample. This study was driven by three research questions:

1. How do followers of Christ describe spiritual growth in the context of a least developed country?
2. How do they describe their development of intercultural competencies in a least developed country?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence?

These three research questions address the role of a social, historical, and cultural context on the adult learning process through the interplay of spiritual growth and intercultural competence in a host culture. Thus, themes of findings presented in this chapter provide thick, rich descriptions of participants’ experiences to illuminate their spiritual and intercultural learning processes.

Seven main themes emerged from participants’ narratives. The organization of the themes suggests a chronological progression, which illustrates spiritual growth and intercultural competence as developmental learning processes. Participants (a) perceived God’s calling to
work abroad, (b) desired to help others, (c) approached host culture respectfully, (d) cultivated relationships purposefully, (e) embraced social values of the host culture, (f) experienced deepening faith in God, and (g) sensed understanding working abroad.

**Data Display**

I. Perceived God’s calling to work abroad
   
   A. Gained awareness of needs that matched qualifications
   
   B. Received affirmation from others
   
   C. Read biblical scripture

II. Desired to help host communities
   
   A. Integrated spirituality with professional work
   
   B. Aimed to benefit society more than individuals
   
   C. Practiced responsible stewardship of resources God entrusted

III. Approached host culture respectfully
   
   A. Entered host culture as a learner
   
   B. Refrained from imposing Western values
   
   C. Developed awareness of contextual realities

IV. Cultivated relationships purposefully
   
   A. Sought relationships with host culture members
   
   B. Engaged in host culture activities

V. Embraced social values of the host culture
   
   A. Every day visitation
   
   B. Local community
   
   C. Language
D. Simplicity

VI. Experienced deepening faith in God

    A. Engaged in spiritual disciplines
    B. Gained understanding of God’s character
    C. Realized dependence on God

VII. Sensed understanding working abroad

    A. Professionally
    B. Socially
    C. Spiritually

Participants Perceived God’s Calling to Work Abroad

The first theme that emerged from this study was participants’ perception that God had called them to work in a least developed country. All eleven participants attributed their decision of moving abroad to God’s calling in three main ways. God’s calling was made manifest through (a) gaining awareness of needs that matched qualifications, (b) receiving affirmation from others, and (c) reading biblical scripture.

Gained Awareness of Needs that Matched Qualifications

    The first subtheme of participants’ perception of God’s calling to work abroad was the awareness of needs in a least developed country that matched participants’ professional qualifications. Participants became aware of needs for medical personnel, administrators, and teachers. As a pediatrician, James perceived God’s calling through awareness of children’s medical needs in Africa. Believing his compassion for African children was initiated by God, James was led abroad to use his skill set as a physician to meet the medical needs of children in Zambia. He explained:
I looked at the data and the burden of disease was in children. And so I decided to be a pediatrician. Something I never planned to do. So I did simply because we were going to work, and like I said, God put the kids of Africa on my heart…So whatever affects them, I’m interested in.

Similarly, Eric’s administrative experience in the U.S. matched the need for a hospital administrator in Zambia. He recalled his perception of God’s call to Africa:

I learned of the need for an administrative director. They were looking for someone with many of the same gifts and experience I had….It looked like a good enough fit to pursue further. After much prayer, discussion with family and trusted confidants, and when it seemed that the Lord was opening doors, we made the decision to come to Africa.

In college, Leo learned of a need in Zimbabwe that matched his qualifications as a certified science teacher. Attributed to God’s calling, Leo described how his interest in Africa developed over many years and led to his move abroad:

I understand my responsibility in a sense of obedience to fill whatever assignment God calls. That’s a part of my commitment. I was called into cross-cultural work at a very young age. I suppose I was probably about ten years old, and the call was very clear. The call was just to Africa. And from that point on, everything I did just led in that direction…When I finished college I had a degree with a Bible major and a minor in general science and a teaching certificate in science. And it turned out that’s exactly what was needed here, at Motopo. So I came to Motopo to teach African students science and Bible.
Received Affirmation from Others

A second subtheme of perceiving God’s calling emerged, in which the affirmation from others led participants to go through with the decision to work abroad. Coupled with prayer, participants’ perceived God’s calling, and consequently moved to a least developed country, when they received affirmation from others. “Others” refers to people who had been to the host country, colleagues, influential acquaintances, and older mentors. Sarah initially thought Africa sounded challenging and was hesitant to commit. Though the need also matched her qualifications, the affirmation from those who had been there, however, changed her mind. She recalled:

Two hospitals in Africa needed doctors and we said oh we don’t think we’re up for that. And you know God had much better ideas than we did. As we went through the next couple of years of medical training, we became more open to the thought. We talked to people who had worked there. We prayed about it. We talked to administrators who helped us understand the need. So we agreed to go to Africa and work at Macha Hospital.

While also acknowledging that his qualifications matched the needs for a position in Malawi, Barney perceived God’s calling through the affirmation of a colleague, which became increasingly evident as he spent time in prayer. He described:

We got talking and he spontaneously, unexpectedly said I might be suitable for Malawi. There were needs in Malawi that he thought I was suited for. And we seriously prayed about it. This was unexpected…and then the following year, God laid on our hearts, this calling…I spent a lot of time praying together with my friend. But he was the one, I
guess that really encouraged me, and said I really think this is what God has been preparing you for.

Like Barney, Nathan also perceived God’s calling to Malawi through others. He recalled the influential acquaintances in his life and the time he spent in prayer:

There was always an interest in Africa. I really sensed God saying that at some point I had a long-term calling to work overseas. And so, primarily just sensing that God was saying to go, and then getting affirmation from influential people in our lives who had been involved in cross-cultural work. And then through being open…Praying. Asking God, do you agree with that calling, and if so where do you want me to go? So that’s how I got to Malawi.

Amy relied on the affirmation of older mentors to deliberate her perception of God’s calling to Africa. Though initially hesitant, spending time in prayer and ultimately seeking the counsel from others guided her decision to work as a nurse in Zimbabwe. She recounted:

My husband started talking about returning to Africa. I said, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Not going to do that. But I said I would pray about it. Because I really knew that I needed to be willing to do whatever God was calling me to do. And if that meant going to Zimbabwe, then that’s what it would be. After praying, really almost a year…we spoke with some older mentors, and got their advice, their input, their godly counsel. But, we decided to go. I felt that God was calling me to use the skills he had given me, which was nursing, to go to Zimbabwe…I went there because I felt God had called me to be there.
**Read Biblical Scripture**

A third subtheme of perceiving God’s calling to work abroad was through reading biblical scripture. The scripture that had an impact included topics of Jesus sending His disciples, wives supporting husbands, the church body functioning through its various members, and the comfort that accompanies trusting God. For Felix, his perception of God’s calling was based on what he had read in the Bible about Jesus command to care for others. He gave an emotional account of how he decided to work as a doctor in Africa:

> My faith was certainly the motivation for going to Africa. And I don’t know that I can tell you the reference, but there’s a place where Jesus was sending out His disciples. And he said, go into these homes, the villages, and eat with the people, and heal their illnesses, and tell them the kingdom of God has come. And I think that’s sort of been my verse, as I’ve gone there.

As a hospital administrator, Joanne followed her husband to Africa. She also perceived God’s calling through biblical scripture that encourages a wife to support her husband. She talked about a verse from Ruth that says, “Where you go, I will go.” Similarly, Paul applied a passage in the Bible about the church body functioning through its various members to his perception of God’s calling to work as a teacher in Zimbabwe when he said:

> I just very strongly feel that, like I Corinthians 13 the body is composed of various members. Not everyone has the personality, the gifts, the abilities to work cross-culturally. For whatever reason, God has called me to cross-cultural settings and I have some ability to relate well to people of different cultures and develop relationships very naturally, very deeply. And so if those are the gifts God has given me, then I’m going to
use them in that way…So what do you do? You respond to God’s call in the scriptures.

You absolutely make yourself available to help others.

Though initially hesitant to move to Africa, BJ found comfort in biblical scripture. The verses she shared helped her trust God had called her to work in Zambia. The decision to move was then confirmed through her growing affection for the Zambian people. She described:

Proverbs 3:5 and 6 [about trusting the Lord] has always been special. During that time God opened some doors, and He made some other things clear for us to go back some day. Well, you just have to go once, and you’re in love with the place and the people and I think I was crying harder than anyone when it was time to leave.

As shown in this section, participants perceived God’s calling to work abroad through awareness of needs in a least developed country that matched their qualifications; affirmation from others; and biblical scripture. In each of the three categories, participants’ decision to move to a least developed country in Africa was perceived as God using employment opportunities, friends and family, and the Bible as instruments to guide them.

**Participants Desired to Help Host Communities**

A second theme that has emerged from the findings was that participants desired to help their host communities. They wanted their professional work to improve quality of life, and they were conscientious about being contributors, rather than liabilities. Their desire to help their host communities was expressed in three main ways, through: (a) integrated spirituality with their professional work; (b) aimed to benefit society more than individuals; and (c) practiced responsible stewardship of the resources, skills, relationships God has entrusted them.
Integrated Spirituality with Professional Work

The first way participants desired to help their host communities was expressed through integrating spirituality with their professional work. Because all participants espoused a Christ-centered worldview, their spirituality was centered on faith in Jesus Christ. Integrating spirituality in their professions meant using Jesus Christ as an example of serving others; practicing compassion for the poor, oppressed, and sick; and teaching others about God. Thus, participants expressed their desire to help their host communities by emulating the servant nature of Christ. Paul explained his view of service and compassion:

If Christ is our model, then we should be servants. We should be giving. We should be practicing compassion. We should have a particular affinity with the poor, the oppressed, the orphaned, the widow. My goal is to follow Christ and model a servant lifestyle throughout the work He has chosen me to do…A disciple is one who is similar in appearance to his leader…And in the end, I hope they see a friend. I hope they see someone who is compassionate. I hope they see someone who is willing to help them if there is any possible way.

Felix discussed service as a way to care for the sick and poor in his host community as the impetus for integrating spirituality with his profession as a medical doctor:

I think spiritual growth happens more when you’re serving people…And then thinking of Jesus’s concern for poor people. And understanding probably why He made, he put such an emphasis on caring for poor people because they really need that… So faith, the whole faith issue was very much a part of our medicine.

Also desiring to help his host community, James connected his God-given concern for sick children in Africa to using his medical profession as service. He stated, “we need to be
motivated to serve people.” Barney shared similar sentiments concerning service, the desire to improve life for his host community, and teaching others about God. Integrating spirituality with his work as a teacher in Malawi he summarized, “It’s having that attitude that we’re here to serve. And we’re here to wish God’s best for people and to be a blessing through our work…to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and God’s love for the world.” Barney’s comments, like the others, suggest concern for the collective community, which leads to the second subtheme.

**Aimed toward Benefiting Society More than Individuals**

In desiring to help host communities a second subtheme emerged suggesting participants’ professional work was aimed toward benefiting society more than individuals. Professional work aimed at benefiting society was expressed by participants modeling Christ, valuing people over higher income potential, and focusing on their overall impact on society. As a teacher in Malawi, Barney imagined improved quality of life for members of his host culture. He observed, “In a developing country there’s so much good we can be doing for the larger community.” Perceived as a spiritual aspect of identifying oneself as a follower of Christ, Nathan clarified, “I think we’re trying to make decisions with our life that there is more that God requires us to do. More than just take care of ourselves. And to try to instill kind of a servant, humble spirit in our children…to reach across cultures…in the community.” James agreed that the principle of caring for the greater society is consistent with what being a follower of Christ should look like. He explained why he valued people over higher income potential:

Yes, I can go out and be a doctor in the states and make a lot more money, but that’s not important. What does it mean to be a follower of Christ and do we focus on just ourselves getting better or do we focus on communities getting better, or people we serve getting better?...So if you have certain capabilities or abilities, whether it’s intellectual or
you can work and make a lot of money, people assume you’re always going to use them to the extreme to benefit yourself and your family. And to me, that’s not what being a follower of Christ is. It’s using what God gives you and doing the best you can, but not centering on how much can I benefit out of this.

In caring for his society, Felix saved thousands of lives as a doctor in rural Africa. His work has given countless adults and children a chance for healthy lives. On one occasion early in his career, however, Felix miscalculated anesthesia for a cesarean procedure, which claimed the lives of a mother and her soon-to-be-born infant. Despite the tragedy, Felix found peace knowing his work as a medical doctor in rural Africa was ultimately focused on his overall impact to benefit society. Felix recalled with emotion:

I had to come to terms with the fact that even though I made mistakes, and some people suffered from that, on the whole, people were better off because I was there. And I had to deal with that and learn to live with that.

Over the past 30 years that he was involved in the community, Felix saw the “phenomenal value” of the long-term changes in the health of the community. He said that:

People just aren’t dying like they did. They can live normal lives. So that over time, you see that you really can make a significant difference in people’s lives. And I think part of where the mission is, the spiritual aspect of this comes in is that working at the hospital is an expression of faith. That means you go the extra mile. It’s not just a job.

Practiced Responsible Stewardship of Resources God Entrusted

A third subtheme emerged that suggested participants expressed their desire to help their host community by practicing responsible stewardship, or care of the resources God entrusted. These resources included the ability to relate to people, material possessions, professional skills,
and energy to accomplish the demands of work. In working with young girls in her community, Sarah summarized her desire to use the relational skills God has given her: “I wanted to use my gifts, which I think God has called me to do.” As a teacher in Zimbabwe, Paul “related well to people” and donated articles of clothing, built coffins, removed trees, donated food, and offered countless hours of time to those in need. He explained:

> It has to start with your worldview that is foundational to you. As a follower of Christ we firmly believe that bottom line—I don’t really own anything. I’m only a steward of what God has entrusted to me. And therefore that makes it very easy to hold your possessions lightly. And to be able to be eager to provide opportunities for someone else to benefit.

Similarly, Leo described his commitment to stewardship when he talked about giving to others as a way of giving to God. He understood his “responsibility in a sense of obedience to fill whatever assignment the Lord gives [him].”

> While Paul and Leo perceived responsible stewardship to relating to people, Amy specifically felt material possessions were “gifts from God.” She expressed her desire to share food and clothing with others in an effort of responsible stewardship:

> I wanted to try to help them. Over there, it was so hard to feed and clothe your family…And part of their culture is that it is a blessing to be able to give because that means that you have more. So someone may ask, do you have a sweater that my daughter could have? That was an opportunity for you to be blessed by giving. To be a steward.

Joanne felt God had given her professional skills that perfectly suited her detail-oriented strengths. As a hospital administrator in Africa, using those skills provided the opportunity for responsible stewardship, as she stated, “I’m just doing what God has gifted me to do. And it
happens to be in Zambia instead of in the states.” James explained stewardship in terms of the physical energy God gave him to endure the difficult work as a pediatrician and malaria researcher in Africa:

It’s exhausting living over there! Until you’ve done all your work, even if you have some help, you’re exhausted. So I think it takes stamina. Being service-oriented as a follower of Christ, and being committed to service requires stamina. And I would say that God has blessed different people with different amounts of stamina. But we have been blessed with a lot of physical energy all of our years.

Expressed through integrating spirituality with professional work, aiming to benefit society, and practicing responsible stewardship, participants desired to help their host communities improve their ways of life. Enhancing their roles within their communities, the next theme showed participants approached host cultures respectfully.

**Participants Approached Host Culture Respectfully**

A third theme that emerged from the findings of this study is participants approached their host cultures respectfully. Two subthemes illustrate how they did so: (a) by entering their host culture as a learner; and (b) by refraining from imposing Western values. A third subtheme, participants developed awareness of contextual realities, illustrated how approaching a host culture respectfully resulted in knowledge of the culture.

**Entered Host Culture as Learners**

In an effort to approach host cultures respectfully, participants entered their host cultures as learners. This meant being observers, listeners, and maintaining an open mind to new meaning. It also meant asking questions, refraining from drawing quick conclusions, and understanding that there are often logical reasons behind most cultural practices. Nathan
explained how he encountered the members of his village in Malawi as a learner, “When you approach someone who’s had a totally different set of life experiences than you, approach them as a learner and a listener rather than a person who has all the right answers to everything they’ve gone through.” Yet as Barney noted, the process is “not automatic. You have to work at it…learn from others. Get advice from others…Listen to find a way that we can not only survive but thrive.” With similar thoughts about learning and listening, BJ advised:

You’re going to learn and take away a whole lot more than what you’re bringing.
Observe. If possible, try not to be in such an ethnocentric mode of our Western, you know, we’re right in the U.S. and the always/never thing. Ask questions. But listen to the answer…I would just listen. And it really helped just to observe and listen for language and culture issues, to learn my way around.

Like BJ, Sarah learned the value of observing and listening as key components to the process of entering the host culture as a learner. Sarah’s posture opened her eyes to reciprocity, or “trading,” where she gained awareness that she was not only giving to her host community in terms of her work, but she was also receiving. She offered her views:

Observe. Listen. Learn. And then the next thing is trade. And this is where I learned about valuing what’s being traded from the other side. That I’m not just giving, giving, giving. But actually I’m trading. As I receive and learning to watch for what is being offered. And to value and appreciate what’s being offered. So learner and trader.

According to James, being a learner in a host culture meant maintaining an open mind to new meaning. He explained:

Be very open. Learn to roll with the punches…I think it’s important, as followers of Christ, to understand where other people are coming from. So rather than condemning
those cultural beliefs, I first ask questions. I’m not sure I do it well all the time, but that’s a goal I strive for. Is to be able to be open to other people’s beliefs and understandings. Also striving to maintain an open mind to new meaning, Leo entered his host culture in Zimbabwe inquisitively. His stance as a learner taught him to assume a logical reason behind the cultural practices in Zimbabwe. He recollected:

I was advised, keep your eyes and ears open, and your mouth shut. Just to observe and try to see what people are doing. One of the things that I think to me made it relatively easy to adjust was that I had an open mind. I was listening…trying to understand what they were saying. And I took the advice to keep my mouth shut quite a bit. And just listen. Keep my ears open. My eyes open. Observe. And if I see them do something in a certain way, I would watch it and then I would ask somebody. There was usually a reason for doing things the way they do.

Likewise, Paul expressed his commitment to observing and assuming a reason behind cultural practices in an effort to approach his host culture respectfully:

Those first few years, I was more interested in just looking and observing. Probably the best orientation advice I was given was, when you’re going into a new setting, force yourself, do not make any conclusions for the first six months. Just simply make observations. Don’t allow yourself to draw conclusions until you have been there and have made observations and have begun to understand why things are done the way that they’re done. You get there and you see. But just learning that in every culture things don’t develop without a reason. Whether it’s cultural traditions, if you go back far enough there’s usually a reason for them.
Determining rational reasons behind cultural practices helped James understand how to approach his host culture as a learner. He explained, “One of the things I say is in any culture, when least developed, there’s usually some rational reason for their beliefs or customs. So you’d have to go back in the history to understand, in any culture, why they decide to start doing that.”

**Refrained from Imposing Western Values**

A second subtheme described approaching host cultures respectfully as refraining from imposing Western values. Participants refrained from their Western inclinations, regarding housekeeping, dress, hosting parties, and living arrangements. BJ summarized, “When I’m out and about, I try not to be too overly Western.” She continued by recalling how she refrained from imposing her Western values when she hired a housekeeper after much reluctance:

> I never had in my life a housekeeper…One very bold woman came to me one time and asked for a job. And I said no, I’m not going to hire anyone. And she said, are you afraid of having someone in your house? Or do you not like having someone in your house? And I never thought about it that way—that I was cold or unwelcoming. It hadn’t occurred to me. I was looking at it totally from a Western attitude about servants.

> So then I re-thought that, and I hired someone to help with housekeeping.

Like BJ, Sarah and Amy did not have hired help in their home cultures. In these cases, refraining from imposing Western values meant overcoming their initial awkwardness and hiring a woman from the host culture rather than perform their own housework.

Dressing appropriately was another way to refrain from imposing Western values. Amy described her mindfulness, “Dress is probably one of the most obvious things I did to fit in. Over there, and especially out in the villages, I wore skirts—long, modest skirts all the time.”
Nathan was also selective about how he dressed, especially when he realized his and his wife’s influence. He recalled:

I wore long pants. Even though the temperatures were often over 100 degrees…but it was a Muslim community and modesty was a very important thing. And my wife wore long skirts. But they were the type of skirts were maybe the skirt was slit 3 or 4 inches. We were only there a couple of weeks, we were told that some of the young girls in the village were slitting their skirts—not the kind of impact, or the kind of reputation we wanted to have. So my wife stitched up all of her skirts.

Along with conscientious dress, Nathan hosted a party in which he refrained from imposing the Western value of equality. Equality is not an African value like it is in the West, which Nathan learned as he planned to seat more than 70 people in his home. He remarked:

In Malawi, in that group of people, it’s really important that you tell people where to sit when you invite them to your home. So they told us we should give the best places to certain special people. We brought in all the older and closer of our friends and sat them in the house. The others sat on the porch and kids on the carport.

While participants refrained from imposing Western values in approaching their host culture respectfully, Barney offered an account of how ignoring one’s Western origins regarding living arrangements can backfire in developing community with host culture members:

We had some colleagues who wanted to live simply. And so they found kind of like a village house, didn’t have electricity, not sure about running water, and people in the community came and criticized their supervisor and said, why? Why are you letting them live that way? When are you going to give them a proper house? And it was hard for the local people. Those kind of things can lead to interpersonal conflicts.
Refraining from imposing Western values was an example of how participants approached their host cultures respectfully. Combined with entering their host cultures as learners, they began to develop awareness of the contextual realities, which is the third subtheme.

**Developed Awareness of Contextual Realities**

As just presented, participants approached their host cultures respectfully by entering as learners and refraining from imposing Western values. A third subtheme consequently emerged from the findings that showed participants developed awareness of contextual realities as a result of approaching their host cultures respectfully. Contextual realities refer to the holistic environment of southern African life and include participants’ cultural observations such as: the friendliness of host culture members; the prevalence of poverty; the presence of evil spirits; and the pervasiveness of sickness and death. Having described themselves as open to new meaning, participants discussed their observations about the contextual realities of their respective host cultures. Particularly noticeable during participants’ first few years abroad, these contextual realities laid the foundation for cultivating meaningful relationships, which is a theme presented later.

One of the most prevailing contextual realities for participants was the friendliness of host culture members throughout the respective countries of southern Africa. Felix observed, “The first striking thing was the friendliness of the people…People were genuinely warm and welcoming and friendly.” Working in Zambia, Sarah remarked, “We were so amazed at the warm reception that there was in the African bush for a white doctor family.” Amy’s experience in Zimbabwe was similar, “The people are so friendly, so gracious.” As a teacher in a rural village, Paul noted, “The people of Zimbabwe, they were incredibly friendly.” Barney was also a teacher, but he worked in Malawi. Like the other participants, he found the host culture
members to be friendly, but he observed superficiality, “On the surface people seem very
friendly—the warm heart of Africa. A lot of people are peaceful, yet there’s a lot of fear,
jealousy, and superficiality to the friendliness.”

Along with the friendliness of the people, all 11 participants mentioned the prevalence of
poverty as they developed awareness of contextual realities. Paul summarized, “Materially the
people of Zimbabwe were very, very poor.” Nathan’s observation of people in Malawi was
similar, “By material standards, very, very poor community. Not many people with electricity
or cars. I’m not sure anybody, well maybe two of us within a five mile range would’ve had
running water in our homes.” Leo recalled his first impression of Zimbabwe, “I was impressed
with the poverty of the people…Poverty and need. But in the school there was a great desire to
learn. People here saw that as the primary way for them to get out of their poverty.”

A third contextual reality participants observed was the presence of evil spirits. Leo
described his experience in Zimbabwe, “We learned a lot about the ancestral spirit worship…evil
spirits…There were other things about the witch doctor and how he played a role.” As a medical
doctor, Felix presented his dilemma:

One of the things we face there, was evil spirits and their affect on people’s lives. And
for me that was something a little bit difficult to sort out because being medical and
thinking psychiatric illness—how do you separate a psychiatric illness and an evil spirit
manifestation? And it’s still not entirely clear to me. But it is clear to me that both
happen. And that evil spirits are real. And you see, and people in Zambia are very aware
of them.

Also a medical doctor, James acknowledged the presence of evil spirits and explained how host
culture members used evil spirits as scapegoats for everything that transpires:
You can’t live and work in Africa without coming to believe in this huge spiritual world. And I’m sure there are many evil spirits. But anything that happens, it seems, is attributed to that. There was just a death. Already people are saying someone bewitched them. In other words, no matter what happens, it’s not an “accident,” someone must’ve bewitched you.

The pervasiveness of sickness and death was the fourth contextual reality participants discussed as learners/observers approaching their host cultures respectfully. Nathan described the hardships:

People were sick almost all the time. My family, too…One of the things that was making us sick was the old rotting grass roof that had all of these mosquitoes breeding in it. So we dealt with malaria quite a bit…I think becoming friends with people and then seeing them die was very difficult…When you know how much of the population is HIV-positive and you see people dying of that. That was a very difficult thing.

Amy also observed the hardship of sickness and death. She would get together with friends from her village and talk about the difficulties of “caring for your father as a 13-year old while he dies from AIDS with no one willing to help you. No relatives to help you. No neighbors willing to help you. And then being diagnosed with AIDS yourself as a 29-year old.” As doctors at rural hospitals, Felix and James were on the front lines of the AIDS battle. Acknowledging both difficulty and advancement, Felix summarized his work with HIV-patients, “When you’re one of just two or three doctors per 150,000 people, we dealt with all the deaths in the hospital…Now with ARVs, we’ve enrolled over 7,000 people in our AIDS clinic, and people just aren’t dying like they did.”
Approaching host cultures respectfully by entering as a learner and refraining from imposing Western values led to participants’ awareness of contextual realities. Observations of friendliness, poverty, evil spirits, and sickness and death laid a broadening foundation of cultural knowledge for building meaningful relationships, which is discussed as the next theme.

Participants Cultivated Relationships Purposefully

A fourth theme that emerged from the findings of the study is that participants cultivated relationships purposefully. Cultivating relationships purposefully occurred in two main ways: (a) participants sought relationships with host culture members; and (b) participants engaged in host culture activities.

Sought Relationships with Host Culture Members

In cultivating relationships purposefully, participants sought relationships with host culture members, rather than relationships with other Westerners. Participants also expressed the importance of establishing these relationships immediately upon arrival, which was important for adjusting to the host culture and developing friendships. Emphasizing immediacy, Barney explained how he sought relationships with host culture members in Malawi:

A lot of getting out with the people as soon as possible as a new visitor. Just like a technique—that psychological bonding like with a baby on his mother’s chest. Rather than whisking a baby away to the nursery, or whatever, that psychological bonding that helps. You’re jumping in with two feet, rushing yourself. So it’s purposefully finding friends, finding a support network.

Amy followed the advice of a mentor to seek close relationships with host culture members, which helped her adjust to her new life in Zimbabwe. She explained her approach:
I had an older mentor tell me that she felt it was really important to find a friend, a national friend…I prayed specifically that God would give me that type of friend. And He did. Emma quickly became a friend who I could count on…My relationship with Emma and her girls helped me very much adjust to life in Zimbabwe.

In seeking relationships with host culture members, Sarah also credited her early friendships for helping her adjust to the Zambian culture. She recalled, “There were older women at Macha who helped me adjust…They took me under their wings and taught me well…Meena especially was a wealth of cultural information…and she became my language mentor.” Similarly, Paul explained how placing “a very high value on people” and “deepening relationships” led to his adjustment in Zimbabwe. In his Malawi village, Nathan also sought relationships with host culture members through his work and sharing resources such as food, water, and services with the community. He recalled:

What we did was try to build relationships in that community. And because we had resources, most mornings there was a line of people outside our house asking for help, medically or food related or transportation related. So we did everything from being the local ambulance to bandaging wounds and taking care of children who had just fallen into a fire to agricultural help to helping to build a maternity clinic to leading Bible studies…Some friendships were established just by taking a walk in the village and learning to greet people and make them laugh by trying to practice the language. Some of them like the bicycle repair man…asking if I can sit there on a rock with him as he shows me how he repairs a bicycle tire with a corn cob and a used inner tube and a little package of glue he hides somewhere. And him introducing us to his family. We made friends in lots of different ways.
Like Nathan’s purposeful involvement with the people in his community, Leo described how he cultivated friendships with host members in Zimbabwe:

It was an issue of sitting with people. Getting next to them. Not forcing yourself on them. But just visiting. Being their friend when they needed you. All of that kind of thing is absolutely essential if you’re going to fit into a society. And listen to what they have to say. Be open for correction…If you’re going to be next to people, make friends, you have to listen to what they say…When I was at Motopo, I always shared an office with at least one national teacher. We got to be good friends.

Also encouraging relationships within the host community, James offered the following advice in an effort for developing mutual dependence to establish deeper relationships with host culture members:

Get to know the local people. As difficult as the cultural gap is, the economic gap is, the educational gap it, there are places, there are ways in which, you have to force yourself to get involved. You have to push yourself to go spend time visiting someone…When you live in a village with someone, and see how they live day to day, you develop very strong relationships with them…you develop a mutual dependence on one another. Whether it’s emotional or physical or whatever. So we purposely would go to some local Zambians and say look, we need you. Can you milk your cow and give us milk? And then we were dependent on them. And they were dependent on us to get some income from that. And so we purposely looked at developing mutual dependence. And I think that establishes very deep relationships in any society.
Engaged in Host Culture Activities

In cultivating relationships purposefully, a second subtheme emerged. Participants engaged in host culture activities such as hiring help, attending gender-specific gatherings, church events, and celebrations. In an effort to fit in and make friends BJ summarized her engagement, “I was involved in the community, with the church, with the women. And as I said earlier, after much hesitation I hired a housekeeper because that’s what you do.” Joanne clarified the host culture’s expectation of hiring help around the house, “If you have a job, a steady income, you’re expected to hire somebody to help you around the house.” Though uncomfortable at first, Sarah also hired help in an effort to engage in her host culture’s practices, which consequently led to a meaningful relationship. She remembered:

I had once said I would never feel comfortable having someone work in my house, but I soon learned that if I was ever going to get out of my house and interact with other people, I needed some help in the house with housework and the kids. So I learned to appreciate having a wonderful older woman who became sort of a mentor for me and was a wonderful help in the house and with the kids.

Engaging with her host community in a similar manner, Amy hired a woman to help around her house who became her first friend in Zimbabwe. She recalled, “They call them ‘housegirls’ or ‘maids’...But it was a way to get involved...She was probably my first friend.”

Along with hiring house help, another way participants engaged in host culture activities, particularly for women in the study, was gender-specific events. Amy described her engagement with her host community and how she enjoyed the female camaraderie:

I used to love just sitting with a group of women. You know, there’s a different atmosphere when it’s just women. And the men aren’t there. Then you see the true side.
You see their humor. You see their joy in the simple things…We had a Bible study. We would have tea, and I would always make some cake or cookies and it was just girls’ time, so it was all the female students and any of the wives of the students, the staff. And some of the things they would talk about. I mean everything.

Joanne wanted to engage with the women in her Zambian community because she was eager to learn how to cook local dishes. She recalled, “They let me sit with them in the cooking shelter. And then they showed me how to cook nshima over the fire. And so they realized that I wanted to spend time with them.” Sarah treasured the relationships she was cultivating with host culture women. Her experiences illustrated the reciprocal benefits of engaging in host culture activities. She described:

My presence and participation meant a lot to those women. And they in turn gave a lot to me, just in their friendship…I had to persist in getting over that strangeness and to learn what they desired oneness. In Africa, nothing perhaps is more valuable than cordial, easy, face-to-face relationships. Here I was allowing myself to be known by them. And to interact with them in their activities, and again, I just came to see how important the give and take was.

Participating in church activities was another avenue for engaging in host culture activities and cultivating relationships purposefully for both women and men in the study. Initially hesitant but later rewarded by engaging in church activities, Sarah recalled:

When our pastor, who is Zambian, approached me and asked if I was a part of the church body, I just felt like he really let us more fully participate. He just let us out of the box then to fully participate, which was a significant step in our spiritual growth. I became intentionally active.
Energetic and eager for involvement, Leo was also active in church activities. He accounted for his busy days, “I helped with the church program here in Bulawayo. I attended three services on Sundays and helped with Sunday school. Sunday evenings we would get together for tea, prayer time, and then Monday I was back in the classroom again.”

Along with church activities, Felix explained his participation in a variety of community celebrations and events:

We were involved in sports, we were involved in church activities, we were involved in all sorts of things…Sunday evening Bible study, prayer meeting, and a Wednesday evening meeting…Whatever event we had, a birthday party, a game night, or whatever, their children always came. I mean it was an intergenerational thing.

In gathering together with members from his village, Nathan hosted a memorable party that served as a testament to the relationships he had cultivated. He remembered killing and cooking “a goat…and 50 pounds of dry rice and nshima and ten or eleven heads of cabbage. And that was really neat time…with our friends from the village.”

Not all activities were sanguine occasions. By participating in the grieving process when someone in the community died, James came to understand the value of attending funerals, which deepened his relationships with members of his host community. He described:

I’ve learned to see the value in funerals that last a week. Attending a funeral means a lot in terms of building relationships…And so I would tell you in my young years, growing up, I didn’t go to funerals. I didn’t go to viewings. I mean they’re dead. Who cares? It’s too late was my attitude. I now think that’s a very bad attitude. There’s value in mourning. And I think there’s value in mourning outwardly. So funerals are one example where I think we have learned to adopt.
As the data has shown, participants cultivated relationships purposefully by seeking relationships with their host culture members and by engaging in host culture activities. The next theme that emerged from the findings included the social values participants embraced as they continued to live and work in southern Africa.

**Participants Embraced Social Values of the Host Culture**

The fifth theme that emerged from the findings was that participants embraced the social values of the host culture. These social values comprise four subthemes: (a) the value of every day visits with members of the host community; (b) the value of local community; (c) the value of learning the host culture language; and (d) the value of simplicity.

**Value of Every Day Visits with Members of the Host Community**

Participants embraced the value of every day visits with members of their host community. Visitation was reciprocal, with participants both receiving guests and being received as guests. Nathan recalled “visiting members of his community” and also he would “have friends from the community visit in the evenings.” Participants described every day visits as an occasion to drop agendas, display honor, and relate to each other. James commented on Zambian hospitality and how host culture members drop everything to visit:

> I don’t know if we could ever do hospitality as well as the Zambians, but they are extremely hospitable. When you go to visit them, they drop everything. And help to take care of you. I’m still learning about how to be hospitable. And the Zambians and their culture have certainly taught me that.

BJ also described how she embraced the value of visitation in her Zambian community and learned to drop her agenda:
Queenie would drag me around everywhere and we’d go visiting. We’d visit older friends in the villages. The whole idea of receiving visitors is so ingrained in them and their culture. They come to your door a lot…People come over and say hi or need something or just want to visit. Zambians love being visited, and you don’t wait for an invitation. You just go. And the reverse happens. That’s part of the beauty of it…It’s not always convenient. But…I’ve learned to drop my agenda and receive my visitors graciously.

Like BJ, Felix learned over time to embrace every day visits in his host community as a way to relate to each other. He explained:

In their culture, you don’t invite people to come visit you. You expect a person to just come and visit without an invitation. And just show up. And that was both receiving people and going to visit people, very uncomfortable…In time, we felt more comfortable going to visit people. And having people in our home. I mean people were always coming into the home to visit and to talk and to relate to each other.

**Value of Local Community**

The second subtheme of participants embracing the social values of the host culture is that they embraced the value of local community. This meant they learned how to interact with each other, live communally, and question individualism. In describing how Sarah valued local community she said, “It’s an amazing thing to live and worship and socialize all with the same sort of large group of people…[I] came to really appreciate it.” In comparing her village in Zimbabwe with her home culture, Amy explained how she valued the interactive nature of her host community:
The communities there are much more interactive. Most people don’t move very far from their home…People grow up, are born and live and die in that community. Everybody in that village knows what their job is from the time they are small, what their contribution will be to keeping that little community going…You know we tend to be separated out. Here we’re fearful of what our church family might think, or our immediate family. But our neighbor, maybe we care or maybe we don’t. But there it’s very important. And I valued that.

Paul also made a comparison between the individualistic lifestyles of the U.S. and the communal lifestyle he experienced in Africa. He observed:

What sense does it make for every house in a housing development, to have their own riding lawn mower that they use once a week maybe. Explain how that’s rational. Does it not make more sense to live in community and if you have four or five families, say ok, we’ll pitch in together? We’ll buy one riding lawn mower. I’ll mow the lawns this week, you do them next week. It makes so much more sense. But we’re much too independent. Much too individualistic. So we miss out on those opportunities to build community in the U.S.

Finding a communal lifestyle an easy concept to embrace, BJ testified to the benefits of her African community and also made a comparison to the individualism of her home culture:

I’m thankful to have a supportive community. When the twins were born, they brought meals. Women would come visit…I miss that sense of community when I come back to the states. In Africa, they understand interdependence within the community. The rewards of that. They’re just not so individualistic like our culture.
The Value of Learning Host Culture Language

Learning the host culture language was a third social value participants embraced. Though English was widely spoken in participants’ host cultures, learning the local language emerged as a subtheme for developing friendships, learning the culture, and communicating where English was sparse. Barney emphasized how language helped him develop friendships:

Language is everything. It helps you relate to people…Knowing their language and their culture. That has helped me to interact with everybody and find favor. Having invested in my language acquisition helped me develop a lot of friendships.

Leo shared a similar enthusiasm and commitment for learning the host culture language. His account explained how embracing the language helped him develop relationships, learn the culture, and avoid misunderstandings. He asserted:

One of the first things that I am totally, totally committed to—you will never get next to people until you learn their language. Even if [host culture members] know English, I still find that most people, as soon as they talk about problems they’re facing, they slip into their mother tongue. Language, you get to follow a lot of thought patterns. You get a lot of cultural concepts. So I was determined to learn Ndebele. Learning the language is so important. I started working on that immediately. There were a lot of things you had to pick up along the way to avoid misunderstandings.

Likewise, Joanne also understood the value of learning her host culture language. She “wanted to learn the language to become functional and be able to communicate.” Living in a remote village of Malawi, Nathan needed to communicate with host culture members to accomplish his work in the community. He explained how he embraced language acquisition:
Only one of the staff people of the four or five people who were working there could speak much English. So they helped us learn the language, which was important for the work there. I would often have a young man who was my local language helper come, and we would either do language projects together, or we would go for a walk together in the community, or we would go visit his field. Some of those conversations would become language learning opportunities.

Initially Amy was nervous about interacting with host culture members because of the language barrier. She was afraid of looking foolish and “didn’t want to leave the house the first six months there.” But her nursing job forced her to face the challenge and she began to “pick it up here and there.” Though she did not have the opportunity for formal language learning, Amy eventually learned enough “to communicate, but I would’ve like to become much more fluent.”

Value of Simplicity Compared to Life in the U.S.

A fourth value participants embraced was the value of simplicity, particularly when compared to life in their U.S. home cultures. Simplicity was described as a slower pace of life, the dependence on well water, cooking from scratch, and the absence of television. Regarding the slower pace of life, Felix noticed Zambians’ “lack of time orientation. The pace is much slower.” Barney made a similar observation in Malawi when he said, “Life takes longer to live. Just services, or whatever, like we do at home. Life is a little more laid back. I’m not sure if this is all developing countries, but life is just a little slower.” In Zimbabwe, Paul noticed the slower pace of life and did not miss technology such as television and phones:

Adjustment to living over there is easy! Pace of life is so much slower. The diversions, the pressures from peers both for us and for our children are much less. The technological innovations, which are so invasive in our life are just not there. My wife
and I grew up in rural settings, so living in a less sophisticated lifestyle felt very good for us…Life is much simpler.

Sharing a similar sentiment, Leo said “the slower pace…the simplicity of life was important.”

Along with a slower pace of life, the value of simplicity also meant cooking from scratch. Sarah was amused at how her children embraced simplicity through the innovative ways they entertained themselves. She described:

I learned how to cook from scratch. When I ordered my first chicken and it came to me live, I didn’t know what to do with it! We had to get used to a pretty basic life….When we went back to the states, the kids had gotten used to watching television and I wondered if they would miss that. And one time I went out back and found my son and one of his little friends just sitting staring at a pile of bricks they had piled up in the back porch. What are you doing? Shhhh. We’re watching television! So the kids learned to use their imagination and creativity. And we learned the value of things like dirt as a play thing. Dirt is a wonderful imaginative play thing. If it’s dry it’s one thing. And if it’s wet its one thing and you never lose the pieces. Not only did we learn to get along without all of what we expect to have here, but I think we learned to appreciate getting along without.

Participants Experienced a Deepening Relationship with God

A sixth theme that emerged from the findings of the study is that participants experienced deepening relationship with God during their time living and working in their least developed host culture. Three main subthemes suggest how participants deepened their relationship with God: (a) engaging in spiritual disciplines; (b) gaining an understanding of God’s character; and (c) realizing dependence on God.
Engaged in Spiritual Disciplines

Participants engaged in spiritual disciplines regularly, which attributed to their deepening faith in God. These disciplines included Bible study, prayer, church attendance, and music and dance. James experienced a deepening faith in God because he “spent daily time in the Bible.” Joanne and her husband also spent daily time studying “the Bible in the mornings before breakfast.” As Amy adjusted to life in Zimbabwe she described how she became spiritually disciplined with studying the Bible, which enriched her professional work. She said, “I became much more intentional about my Bible study…Not just reading the Bible, but studying it. Searching the scripture for the little nuggets in there that God has and being able to use that in my classroom time.”

A second spiritual discipline in which participants engaged was prayer. Defined as communication with God, prayer deepened participants’ relationship with God by strengthening their core beliefs. Barney emphasized the importance of prayer as a matter of life and death:

Prayer has always been a priority…But here in some ways it’s a matter of life and death. I mean, literally. So I’ve grown in the area of spiritual warfare. I’ve grown in the area of intercession in praying for people that I don’t know, people of a different culture… In [Malawi], you’re continually on your knees and seeking the Lord for direction, which in turn draws you closer to Him.

James also spent regular time in prayer, which developed his relationship with God and others. He recalled, “I was a prayer partner with our local pastor. We met once a week. We shared our hearts and prayed for each other. And those developed relationships…with God and others I still have many, many years later.” Burdened by the social problems of his Zambian community, Eric relied on prayer as a crucial component of his relationship with God. He said, “I spent more
time in prayer, sometimes literally weeping as I cried out to God on behalf of local issues or friends.”

A third spiritual discipline that deepened participants’ faith was church attendance in their host culture. All 11 participants attended local churches. Joanne was at church “every Sunday morning.” Leo also attended church regularly and was “very involved” in church activities. In discussing how his Zambian church contributed to his spiritual growth by changing his attitude about the purpose of attending church, James described:

We changed our attitude. Instead of looking at this church, what can we get out of it? What can we put into it? So it’s changing from this sort of egocentric approach to a Theo-centric approach. We’re going to church to worship God. If you open yourself up, you can be spiritually fed. Once we changed our attitude, we grew.

Music and dance was a fourth spiritual discipline that contributed to participants experiencing deepening faith in God. Joanne spent her mornings “listening to praise and worship” as part of her morning Bible study. While “music had helped [Joanne] grow spiritually,” Sarah experienced cultural expressions of music and dance she would not have seen in her home culture. She recalled, “I saw God expressed in ways which, had I stayed in my own culture, I would have never looked for God to be present and active in different expressions—the exuberance of dance in worship.” Similarly, at his church in Zambia, James said, “We love the music over there. The singing and worship services are very, very meaningful to us.”

**Gained Understanding of God’s Character**

Along with engaging in spiritual disciplines, participants gained an understanding of God’s character, which also attributed to their deepening faith in God. The findings from the
themes revealed four primary traits of God’s character, which included God as (a) protective, (b) present, (c) powerful, and (d) trustworthy.

Facing the lethal dangers of snakes, disease, and civil unrest, Amy gave an account of how she gained understanding of God’s protective character:

There were snake nests everywhere. Poisonous snake nests! Independence happened in 1980. We moved into a home where there will still bullet holes in the walls. You know, concern for [infant daughter] Joy’s safety…The bad water. Cholera was a problem. Typhoid could be a problem. And being a nurse, of course, all of that’s in your mind…And to leave the country. And I think having those props, sort of pulled out from under me, made me realize that God was my support. He was my protector. He was my safe place…So meanwhile in the U.S., our families are hearing Americans have been killed 30 miles south of Bulawayo. That was us! They were trying to get in touch with our embassy and find out the names of the people who were killed. And we didn’t even know that it had happened. God protected us through that. We don’t know why. I understand that it is God fighting for us. It’s not us doing it.

Standing on the dock, just prior to embarking a trans-Atlantic cruise en route to Africa in 1959, Leo was given a comforting verse that served as a constant reminder of God’s protection throughout his time in Zimbabwe, including a time when he traveled into a dangerous area of civil unrest. He remarked:

One of the things that has always been a comfort to me was, “There shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come nigh your dwelling. And He shall give the angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone”…It was as if the Lord was saying that’s your promise. I will protect you.
For Nathan, even though he experienced a horrific home invasion, he “felt God was protecting [his family].” When his wife became pregnant during their time in Malawi, again he was reminded that God was protecting them. He remembered:

God took care of us, too, in that for my wife, we had a second child during our first term there. And when you’re pregnant, the risks with malaria are much higher. But she didn’t get malaria during the first trimester at least...And our second daughter is a very healthy little girl. So we’re grateful that even though we were somewhat naïve, God took care of us.

Joanne also credited God for protecting her and her husband as they entered Zambia for the first time and encountered a situation with immigration officials. She recalled:

Customs only looked at one of our chest x-rays because they’re only good for six months. We went in August, and we got our chest x-rays in January. Fortunately, my husband’s chest x-ray was the 7th of January, and mine was the 14th. But the difference in how they write the dates. In America it was written 1-7-82. So it looks like July 1, 1982. Where it was actually January 7, 1982, which means it was more than six months old. They only looked at his. And we were like, thank you, Lord! God sees the big picture. He watches out for us.

A second character trait participants discussed was God’s presence. Eric said explicitly, “I feel God’s presence more strongly than I have for many years working in Zambia.” Nathan felt the same way in Malawi when he exclaimed, “God was with us.” When Sarah recalled how God provided water after a long drought, she sensed His presence in ways that may not have been visible living in her home culture. She recalled, “God was present. I just think that God
became bigger to me.” Similarly, Amy explained God’s presence, through the Holy Spirit, in her work as a teacher in Zimbabwe:

Students would come up after class and say, and I knew it wasn’t me because of what they said! You know, wow, that was a great class! Well I knew it wasn’t me doing that. It was the Holy Spirit doing that. And just seeing the change that the Holy Spirit brought about in their lives through those classes was just really awe-inspiring. Because I knew I didn’t do it.

Thirdly, participants gained an understanding of God’s power as part of His character. Though God’s power also relates to His protection and omnipresence, participants discussed God’s power explicitly in the context of their host cultures where the traditional African worldview includes the belief in evil spirits. Leo explained:

As I’ve been here, I am very convinced that Jesus Christ is the power. And one of the things that we’ve had to get people to understand here is He is much more powerful than any evil spirit. And a relationship with Christ brings liberty, freedom, deliverance. And I think that’s one of the big areas of spiritual understanding that I’ve developed. That I find a great sense of joy in knowing the Lord. In His power.

Sarah also saw God’s power in contrast to the presence of evil spirits in southern Africa. She described:

The pervasiveness also of evil and the expressions of evil, the the kind of blatant enmity against God that’s very present and active in African traditional religion. The malevolence of the spirit world. That also grew my concept of God. God as being the one who is faithful and that we never have to fear the malevolence that is out there, both materially and spiritually, because God is greater than whatever is.
A fourth character trait that emerged from the findings is God’s trustworthiness. Relating to God’s other traits, in which participants trusted His protectiveness and presence, participants also trusted that God was omniscient—the source of all knowledge, and sovereign—in control of everything. James explained:

He is trustworthy. He is faithful. God in His wisdom made us all different. My favorite saying I remind everyone when we clash with each other, that God in His wisdom made us all different. So whether it’s different culture, or different race, or different beliefs, it’s wonderful. And that’s what I enjoy over there…So when things don’t work your way, don’t force it. I often say if the door is closed in front of you, you can knock, and you can push a bit, but don’t kick it down. God has reasons for closing certain doors in our lives.

Relating to the biblical story of Abraham, Barney trusted in God’s omniscience, sovereignty, and faithfulness in his life abroad. He discussed how he learned to flourish throughout his time in Malawi:

Just trusting that God knows where we’re best suited. And I mean He’s got a plan for us. And it’s a mystery sometimes how we figure out what that is, and it’s not so much that we have to know all the details, but that we know Him. I mean, God called Abraham to go and leave. And he didn’t know where he was going. But he knew God was going with him.

**Realized Dependence on God**

A third subtheme relating to participants’ deepening faith in God was participants realized their dependence on God. Dependence on God was presented by two realizations: (a)
the increased need to depend on God in their host culture; and (b) the decreased need for God in their U.S. home culture.

First, participants discussed the increased need to depend on God in their host culture for navigating the social realities of living in a foreign culture, coping with limited resources, and cultivating relationships with God and others. For Barney, navigating the social realities of living in a foreign culture meant depending on God to overcome the language barrier and the challenges of being geographically separated from family and friends:

The situations themselves force us to depend on God—learning a language, being away from your family and your friends. You’ve positioned yourself where naturally if you’re not dependent on God, you’re not going to make it…And to me that’s a very constant dimension of spirituality—to see how we depend on God and depend on each other mutually…You have to find a way with God’s help. You find that easy yoke that Jesus said, my yoke is easy my burden is light. And then you find rest for your soul.

With a toddler in tow, surrounded by the uncertain context of a village in Zimbabwe, Amy also acknowledged her dependence on God when she said, “I had this little 15-month old toddling around. That pretty much was the beginning of me realizing I’m not going to be able to do this on my own…It has to be God.” Similarly, Nathan realized his dependence on God as he navigated the difficult realities of life in Malawi. His dependence on God was a source of growth: “I’m very dependent on God. I felt like God was also expecting me to grow and I realized there are a lot of difficult realities in the world. And depending on God to do everything that needs to be done without me being obedient is [pause] I’m very dependent on God.”

Coping with limited resources was another subtheme that explained an increased need for participants to depend on God in their host culture. When considering the lack of resources in
Zimbabwe Paul admitted, “I’ve learned to depend on God. Just realizing with the limited resources that you often work with, you encounter situations where you really have to acknowledge I can’t do anything.” Sarah remembered her dependence on God for basics like electricity and water. She offered the following example of God’s provision when her Zambian community faced a severe drought:

I learned to rely on God and learned He is faithful. Being in a situation when you don’t control what’s happening. Like the times when you’re without electricity and you know everything in the fridge is going to be compromised. Or worse yet, being without water for days on end. I remember giving five kids a bath in our last bucket full of water; and it was dry; and the dam was dry; and the pump was broke; and you don’t know when your or where your next bit of water is coming from and trusting that somehow God is going to provide. But He did. And the next day it rained. And it rained for three days straight and filled the dam. It did not just rain, but it rained abundantly. It was just a wonderful experience. I don’t think we have opportunities here in North America to rely on God in that same way and for God to come through like he does.

Also acknowledging dependence on God for providing rain, Felix observed:

Their faith in God is so much stronger because they don’t have technology and money and everything to rely on. You know, their reliance on God taught me, I mean, it put my reliance on God to shame. Because in some ways they are totally dependent. The rain. If the rain doesn’t come, they don’t eat. You know. And when things happen, it’s, they’re dependent on God.

The increased need to depend on God in a host culture was also evident in cultivating relationships with God and others. BJ shared a testimonial of her relationship with God and the
nature of salvation, or eternal life. Prior to moving to Africa, she felt as though she had to earn her salvation through her good works. Giving birth to twins in her African community, however, when she could do nothing more than care for her newborn boys, taught her dependence on God. She testified:

It was like a light bulb went off. And Oh! I get it! And that was huge in my life. But I think I sort of missed a little bit of the boat on the actual saving power of Jesus and what that all meant. I was still coming at it from a works, you know, I mean to be doing these things. So after the twins were born I felt like that was just a real tangible change for me…And just that kind of awareness that I’m not doing this by myself. I was totally dependent on God, and not the things I was doing. Because I couldn’t do anything except care for those boys.

James recognized dependence on God for relationships with others, particularly with other doctors at the hospital. His relationship with God through prayer fostered a cooperative work environment. He noted:

I would say every day over there you need God. I’d say you need God in relationships over there. Relationships with other people because it’s again, back to the thing of living and working all together is, you [need to] have the grace of God…and rely on God…Working together with other doctors, it took awhile to figure out each other. What I learned early on, is if you’re having a relationship problem, what you do is start praying for them. Make your daily commitment to pray for them. Not to become something you want them to be, but just pray for them. It’s transformational.

Second, participants realized the decreased need for God in their U.S. home culture, which underscored their dependence on God while working in their least developed host
countries. The decreased need for God in the U.S. was credited to abundant resources, and also the distractions of life in the U.S. James recalled the perception of his host members concerning the need for God in the U.S.: “Some of our Zambian friends said you don’t need God in America. You don’t need God in this society. Because we have managed, because we are a very wealthy society, we have managed to fulfill all of our needs.” Sarah also noted the apparent lack of needing God in the U.S., which was aided by the perception of her Zambian friend:

We tend to rely on everything else before we rely on God because we have so many resources—our education, our material resources, the government. We tend to rely on those things first and only rely on God when we get to the end of the rope, which isn’t too often. We had a Zambian friend who visited us here, one of our medical staff, and he said, Americans just don’t need God…that was his observation. I think that when you’re in a situation, even when it’s uncomfortable, where God is the only resort, that it grows your faith. And also, it gives you a second evaluation of these resources that we tend to put our faith in. These are things that crumble and fade.

An abundance of resources was also Joanne’s observation for why there is a decreased need for God in the U.S., which consequently piqued her awareness of depending on God in her host culture. She observed:

There’s more resources in the states. But that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s better I think. It’s just different. In some ways I think we are more, it’s easier to rely on God here because there is nothing else. And in a sense, that would be a reward for living here. To be able to grow spiritually and not need lots of things to do it.

With a similar assertion, Paul identified some of the distractions in the U.S. that prevent dependence on God. He asserted:
We miss so much of that in our affluence. We’ve come to depend so much on our material possessions…our first inclination is I can do this myself. And then as a last resort, if I can’t do this myself, ok then I’ll take the matter to God. Well, the people that I was working with, they didn’t have the other options. They had to pray. That was the only avenue that they had for relief from whatever problem they were facing. And time and time again we just saw in what seemed to be totally hopeless situations that God came through in one way or another. And just met whatever need needed to be supplied.

BJ also attributed a decreased need for God in the U.S. to distractions and busyness:

I think it’s much easier to be dependent on God in Zambia than it is here. There are so many distractions here. We do so many things. A good Zambian friend of ours said one time when he visited the U.S. for the first time, now I understand you better. He said, in the west you don’t need God. You have everything. And that really hit us. Wow. He observed that very quickly. He wasn’t here that long.

Amy saw life in Zimbabwe as less distracting than life the U.S. Through her relationships with women in her host culture she realized dependence on God was more apparent. She stated:

There’s less distraction over there…To distract us from God…The attitude of the women there is so different from the attitudes that I had seen in the U.S. Not only is it so easy to become dependent on money and availability and that kind of thing—we feel like we can do it ourselves. We don’t need God! But the women over there knew they needed God. They really demonstrated that. Their faith is important. Their utter dependence just saying, I can’t do this without God is what really spoke to me. That’s how I make it through ever day. Is that where you are, Amy? Are you still doing it on your own? And
I think, more than anything, I think that’s what God has shown me through the years there. That I am utterly dependent on Him.

**Participants Sensed Understanding Working Abroad**

Finally, the seventh theme that emerged from the findings was that participants sensed understanding working abroad. They sensed understanding in three main ways: professionally, socio-culturally, and spiritually.

**Professional Understanding**

Participants sensed professional understanding through enriching and prolonging lives, making a difference in their host culture, and achieving academic success. As a doctor in Zambia, James described his sense of professional understanding as witnessing children who were once sick restored to health; watching his employees, who were once impoverished by an agrarian lifestyle now earning a paycheck, which enriches their quality of life; and applying his knowledge to preventing premature deaths in children. He described:

> It was extremely fulfilling being a doctor over there. People appreciated whatever you did. If I were to choose my favorite aspect of the work I do, there are several favorites. One is seeing children who once were sick, and now are doing very well. That probably fills my emotional tank. I get emotional talking about it, more than anything else. Even working, like when I do the day there at the ART clinic, seeing the AIDS patients. It’s emotionally draining, and yet it’s emotionally stimulating and fulfilling. Because many of those kids were really, really sick at one time in the hospital, and we took care of them, and now they’re doing well. Extremely fulfilling. I guess I would also say that working with the employees, many of the people we have employed, mainly at the research center were local peasant farmers who basically were trapped in a cycle of poverty for
generations. And now they’ve started getting a monthly paycheck. And it’s been wonderful to see how that will lead towards better lives…I enjoy using my knowledge and ability to take care of sick kids and prevent them from dying an untimely death. So being able to care for sick kids over there is very, very satisfying.

Also a medical doctor, Felix explained his sense of professional understanding as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of his host community. Felix enjoyed the work and all he learned throughout his time in Zambia. He recalled:

I was able to make a difference in their lives in a way that I was never aware of making that significant of difference here in the states. Because here you’re one part of a big system that treats people. There, there were two of us. And we did everything. And so, when people got better, it was largely the results of you and your staff, not lots of other people. And people were grateful and thankful…I just had a wonderful time. I just learned so much. I learned from other doctors in Zambia. I learned from reading. I learned from doing. But it was fun. It was exciting.

Likewise, Joanne found her work in the AIDS clinic fulfilling, particularly when the files of young mothers were closed due to their adherence to protocol. She explained:

When the baby’s gotten a week’s worth of ARVs [anti-retroviral treatments] within 48 hours of birth, and then the mothers continue on the ARVs while nursing. So those babies born to HIV positive mothers, their files are closed because they are HIV negative. So that’s the favorite part of my job is when I come across a file closed because the child now has a chance because the mother got the treatment and followed the protocol. And the babies will have a chance of a normal life.
As a science teacher in Zimbabwe, Leo attributed his professional satisfaction to the relationship he had with his students and their academic success in the classroom. He recalled:

At the end of the year, when they wrote their exam, they all passed. There were four levels of attainment. All of my students were in the top two—credits and distinctions. I taught for four years, and I never had one fail. After awhile they started calling me “the scientist.” That was my nickname, the scientist, because they were all passing their sciences subjects. I enjoyed science, and so did they…The work to me has been a great thrill. I’ve had a lot of time mentoring leaders in the various countries. That’s been a great, great blessing.

With expressions of gratitude Paul remarked generally about how he sensed understanding in his work:

To me, I am just so honored to have had the opportunities that I’ve had. There’s nothing special about me. I guess that I’m just a Franklin County farm boy and I had the opportunity to go to college. I had the opportunity to work overseas. And God has just chosen to, like he says in Corinthians, this is another one of my favorite passages where Paul is talking about how God chooses to use the weak and the, not ugly, but I forget the words that he uses. The things which are less impressive to confound the wisdom of this world. And I’ve seen that to be true. I firmly believe that God has used my wife and I to work in Zimbabwe and that’s just a privilege. And we’re just so thankful for it. I can honestly say there’s nothing I would have rather done for the last 40 years. We’ve been blessed, and God honors that.

Nathan also sensed understanding through his work in Malawi. He recalled several example of how his efforts in the community improved the lives of people in his host culture:
The work in the community. I think developing relationships that were interdependent and where some of the things that we did were able to help people make changes to their lives that will impact their families for eternity. That was the most rewarding thing. And able to impact their families in the near term. Like with my friend Mohammed, he had a young daughter who he didn’t, he wanted her to have the opportunity not to become a mother until she wanted to. And so we were able to take her to live with an aunt in the city and then able to see her come back three years later as an older teenager, and at least at that point she hadn’t been pushed into becoming a mother. Being able to take some of our friends to the hospital and stay with them and help them get treatment.

**Social Understanding**

Participants also sensed social understanding living and working in a least developed host country. The findings revealed three main contributions to sensing social understanding: (a) the pleasant disposition of host culture members; (b) feelings of appreciation by host culture members; and (c) the togetherness participants experienced with their immediate families.

BJ expressed her gratitude for the experience of living and working among host culture members known for their remarkable hospitality and generosity:

I’ve been so grateful to live in Zambia. The people are so hospitable. So generous. They will give you their last morsel of food… I think the graciousness of the Zambian people, and their interdependence on one another—family, community—is such an example of what followers of Christ should look like.

Impressed by the kindness of the people in his host culture, Leo explained how he felt accepted and ultimately fulfilled by what he observed throughout his last 50 years in Zimbabwe:
But we were generally impressed with the kindness of the people. They are very kind, very understanding. Very outgoing. And they’re still pretty much that way. But we were very impressed at the way they accepted us…Seeing people move away from that old dependency thing and starting to accept responsibility, that to me has been a great thrill. Just a lot of things that, for me, it’s been a very fulfilling life.

The sense of acceptance and appreciation by the Zambian people led Sarah to express her understanding: “I was just amazed at how we were unfolded by the African people. They were just so happy to have us here.” Amy’s expressed a similar experience when she said, “Just constantly being aware of the appreciation that the local people had for the fact that you were there. I had a lot of good experiences there. I would do it all over again.” Likewise, Felix said, “It was a wonderful time for me. It was a time of learning lots of things. Of growing. I was appreciated. My presence there. People were so thankful. So grateful.” In Zimbabwe, Paul described how the close relationships with host culture members contributed to his sense of understanding. Extending to Paul patience, tolerance, and forgiveness, members of his community were considered part of his family. He described:

The relationships that we’ve been able to develop with others have just been the greatest blessing. We have students that have become our adopted children. We have elderly people that have become our adopted parents that we care as much for as we do our own parents. So we have family all over the world at this point…The best gift that we were given was patience. People were patient with me especially. When I made a mistake. Very forgiving. Not condemning and just encouraged me to become a stronger follower of Christ—had the end result of helping me to grow in my faith. I have been on the
receiving end of an awful lot of tolerance and patience and forgiveness that has allowed me to grow without restriction.

Along with the welcoming disposition of African people, participants also sensed social understanding through togetherness with their immediate families. In comparing what life as a physician in the U.S. would have been, James expressed his thoughts on how spending time with family contributed to a fulfilling life in Zambia:

It’s been a very fulfilling life. I would say raising a family, as a physician in Zambia, it was wonderful. There was no way in the states as a physician I would’ve had breakfast, lunch, and supper with my family, which we generally do, essentially every evening with the family over there. There’s no way we could’ve had that lifestyle, as a physician, if I was working in the states…I cannot recall difficult or bad times. It was wonderful. Now people have accused me of not realizing the rough times. And maybe it’s a coping mechanism, but I can’t think of difficult times. You know, it’s an adjustment. There are cultural differences. You miss friends and family. But I would say life was great. I enjoy living over there.

BJ’s sense of understanding was evident in her gratitude for the opportunity to raise her children in an African environment. Like James, BJ also understood the demands on medical families in the U.S., which were not an issue in southern Africa, as she explained:

I’ve been so grateful that our children grew up there because it gave them a whole different childhood experience than they would’ve had here. Yes, we gave up some things, but the gratefulness I feel for having had that experience for them and for us as a family, knowing what normal medical families might look like in the U.S. But there was
this wonderful community. And we were mingling with cultures and people. And I’m just so grateful for that. That was such a blessing.

Surrounded by the natural beauty of Africa, BJ continued with an account of her feelings from the panoramic views of Table Mountain while on vacation with her family:

It’s just been fantastic. I remember standing on the top of Table Mountain and thinking I never in my wildest dreams imagined this girl from such a small town in the U.S. would ever be here. I always thought that was fantastic. Never imagined this would be something I would ever do. Wow, God! Amazing!

Paul also sensed understanding in having the opportunity to vacation with his family throughout his host country. His zeal for Zimbabwe was evident when he remarked:

We love Zimbabwe. It’s an incredible country. Places to visit like Victoria Falls. Wanke National Park, which was just loaded with animals. Well managed. Very cheap. If you had foreign currency to pay for things with. The Eastern Highlands. The border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. They grew a lot of tea. A lot of coffee. Much higher rainfall. Grow timber. Grow grapes to make wine. Eight hundred year old ruins to visit and explore. All of the time we were in Zimbabwe, we never did a family vacation outside of the country because there was so much inside the country. Just a lot of great memories.

Similarly, James commented on the blessing of exploring God’s African creation with his family, which also contributed to his sense of understanding:

It was just a fulfilling life. The good memories I have are being able to get away with our family every few months for a weekend and experience God’s beauty. And usually it
was game parks. We would go to game parks for a weekend. And so, I have many wonderful memories.

**Spiritual Understanding**

Along with professional and social understanding, participants living and working in a least developed country of southern Africa sensed understanding spiritually. Spiritual understanding was sensed through God’s blessing, obedience, a focus on God, and application of biblical scripture. Explaining spiritual understanding as a reward for moving to Zambia, Sarah attested:

If you have the strength to persist through those first strange and difficult times, the rewards are incredible…And what seems strange and difficult, may just be God’s provision for abundance and healing in ways that we’re only going to see much later…God had much better ideas than we did because I think we found the blessings that we have experienced from service in Zambia to be so much more than we ever anticipated. We thought we were going to do something for God, and we didn’t anticipate what God was going to do for us.

Leo’s sense of spiritual understanding came from knowing he was obedient to God’s original calling to work in Zimbabwe. He asserted:

[God] will give you a great sense of joy and understanding. I’m very strong on that because I feel very fulfilled in what I’m doing…I have enjoyed everything that I’ve done. And I think obedience is the key. Walk obediently, serve diligently, and enjoy God’s presence and a sense of understanding.

In emphasizing the value of spiritual understanding, Paul also discussed obedience to God’s calling in terms making a difference in whatever opportunity has been presented:
It’s not rewarding materially. But it’s rewarding in more satisfying ways—peace of mind, knowing that you’ve made a difference in someone’s life. When someone you’ve helped comes to you and is just totally at a loss for words as to how to say thank you, the satisfaction that comes from being obedient to what you believe God is calling you to do. There’s nothing better than that. And I won’t trade that for anything.

Like Paul’s emphasis on obedience for spiritual understanding, Joanne’s sense of spiritual understanding came from the rewards of knowing she was where God had called her to be. She said, “It didn’t take long for me to feel like this is where I belong. That initial feeling of being overwhelmed—it passed. I think knowing where we were supposed to be, where God called us, is very rewarding.” With a focus on God to live a spiritually fulfilling life, Barney asserted, “Our focus has got to be the Lord. Our focus is not us, and what we’re doing. Our focus is on the Lord God, what are you doing in me? So I would say that has made our experience very positive.” Similarly, Eric described his amazement “at God’s grace” and felt “completely unworthy of the many blessings that have come my way.”

Like Eric, James summarized his sense of spiritual understanding in terms of God’s blessing, which is endowed through applying biblical scripture to “submit” and “resist”:

There’s a verse that says “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” That to me wraps it all up. It’s submitting. A lot of us have trouble really submitting. You have to learn to submit, and give up your own desires…We have been blessed by living in other cultures.

Comparing her experience to the biblical account of Joshua, Amy sensed spiritual understanding knowing that God had used her in Zimbabwe. Amazed at God’s work, she described:
I think I would just say that when God’s with you, it’s like Joshua. When God is with you, we have to be willing to not be afraid. And I look back over the years, and I think of the times I was afraid. And the times when I said, ok, God, I’m not going to be afraid. I’m going to trust you. And I wish I would’ve been able to do that all the time. I wonder what God would’ve done. Because I’ve seen what amazing things He’s done in the times when I’ve been willing to not be afraid.

Also citing biblical scripture, Sarah related her spiritual understanding to the apostle Paul and compared her spiritual journey to how she learned to adapt to the African way of life God called her. She explained:

I never stop learning, too, that becoming culturally competent is something that’s never done. But that continues. And I think always, always going into each situation with the idea that, you know, what am I going to learn out of this. Like [the apostle] Paul said, not that I’ve achieved, but I continue to press on with whatever life and experience God gives me to do. And that has been very fulfilling.

Working more than 20 years in Zimbabwe, Paul’s sense of spiritual understanding came from keeping Christ as his example for stewardship, service, and love. He summarized what he has learned as a follower of Christ:

To me, I would sum it up in terms of obedience and having a servant lifestyle. One of my favorite passages is from, I think it’s Philippians 2 or 5 where Paul is talking about how Christ is our example, descended from heaven, took on the form of a human baby and lived the perfect life among us. And I try and keep that as my standard. I’m no better than any of those people living in Zimbabwe. And I’ve had 20 years to practice that. And in the course of those 20 years, I’ve made probably every mistake that is
possible to make. I know that there are people I’ve offended. I’ve tried to reconcile with them, but that doesn’t always happen. But just keeping Christ as our example. Trying to be a good steward. Trying to practice servanthood. Putting other people first.

Demonstrating true love. Those are the things that I’ve learned.

Finally, in cultivating a relationship with his close friend in Malawi, Nathan sensed spiritual understanding as he became convinced that his work abroad for the sake of serving Jesus was worthwhile. He described:

My friendship with Abassi and…living in Malawi showed me that…I have a huge responsibility…to acknowledge that apart from Christ I don’t have anything of eternal value to contribute…I think that followers of Christ are all just a bunch of crazy people. Some of them are. But that they do crazy things because they’re utterly convinced that Jesus is worth it. I’d like my story to convey I think Jesus is worth it.

Chapter Summary

As the data presented, themes that emerged from the findings suggest participants: perceived God’s calling to work abroad; desired to help host communities, approached host culture respectfully; cultivated relationships purposefully; embraced social values of the host culture; experienced deepening faith in God; and sensed understanding working abroad. The next chapter analyzes how all seven themes that emerged from the findings of the study relate to spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence as adult learning processes, and the implications for theory, practice, and further research.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence within the context of a least developed country. Three research questions guided this study: (a) how do participants describe their spiritual growth; (b) how do participants describe their development of intercultural competence; and (c) what is the nature of the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence?

In an effort to answer these questions this chapter examines the meanings of the study’s findings in light of the literature and the theoretical frameworks that informed this research to explain why this study is important for the field of adult education and to understand spiritual growth and intercultural competence as learning processes. Organized according to the research questions, the first section discusses participants’ perceptions of spiritual growth, followed by the second section, which addresses participants’ perceptions of intercultural competence. The third section of this chapter targets the central focus of the study by exploring the relationship between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence. After the fourth section on theoretical implications for sociocultural theory and the Deardorff (2006) model of intercultural competence, the chapter closes with implications for practice and research in adult education, as well as concluding remarks.

Participants’ Description of Spiritual Growth

In response to Marcic (2000) who found that less than 20% of the spirituality literature mentions God or a higher power (thus, conceptualized as non-Theo-centric), this study provides new insight into a Theo-centric view of spiritual growth in the context of a least developed
country through the lens of adult education. This section discusses the findings in relation to the literature on spirituality while addressing the first research question that guides this study concerning participants’ description of spiritual growth.

Within the adult education literature, spirituality is defined broadly as a way of finding meaning and purpose (English, 2001; Tisdell, 2008). For participants in this study who identify themselves as followers of Christ, spirituality is Christ-centered and represents their ontological worldview as a deepening relationship with God through a total reliance on the sovereign, divine trinity for salvation where relevance and meaning is found in the Bible, and the glory of God is acknowledged as the supreme guiding principle in one’s life (Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2003). Thus, from this Theo-centric perspective, spiritual growth is a process of deepening a relationship with God through prayer, devotion to the Bible, and community with others (Chan, 2008).

Participants in this study described their spiritual growth as developing a deeper, or closer, relationship with God. This finding is congruent with the operational definition of spirituality that guided this study, yet it may also be subsumed under the broader definition of spirituality found in the literature (English, 2001; Tisdell, 2008) in that the search for meaning and purpose takes place by deepening a relationship with God. The findings reveal two primary ways participants described their spiritual growth as a deepened relationship with God: (a) an increased dependence on God; and (b) an enhanced understanding of God’s character.

**Increased Dependence on God**

Participants grew spiritually when they increased their dependence on God. The operating definition of Christ-centered spirituality asserts a total reliance on God (Chan, 2008; Gibson, 2004; Keller, 2008; Nouwen, 2001; Schaeffer, 1985; Yaconelli, 2003). This definition
is consistent with the experiences of the study participants, as they perceived spiritual growth through their deepening relationship with God, which manifest in their utmost dependence on Him. Realizing their dependence on God was significantly enhanced by the context of a least developed country in southern Africa. They faced limited resources, unreliable electricity and water, civil unrest, language barriers, and the challenges of being geographically separated from friends and family still living in their home culture. For example, video teleconferencing from Malawi, Barney explained “the situations themselves force us to depend on God.” He described the challenges of living in Malawi, such as tropical diseases, evil spirits, the skepticism of his Muslim community, and climate issues as reasons to seek God more diligently than he would have in his home culture. Similarly, in coping with bouts of malaria and a life-threatening home invasion, Nathan “acknowledged [he is] very dependent on God.”

Participants’ dependence on God comforted them with the perspective that God is sovereign (in ultimate control of the universe), and He provides. Sarah explained she “learned to rely on God and learned He is faithful” when she realized through a severe water shortage she was not in control of “what’s happening.” Rather, she learned to trust in God through difficult times by relying on His promise that her work in Africa was not in vain (I Corinthians 15:58). Along with difficult trials, the rewards of witnessing medical miracles, provision, and protection, also contributed to their dependence on Him. Participants credited God, according to His will, for healings that baffled doctors, providing water in desperately dry conditions, and ensuring safety amidst civil unrest, which increased their dependency on Him. Thus, participants realized their dependence on God in ways they could not have if they never moved abroad. This became increasingly apparent in their interactions with host members who had been to the U.S. and after observation concluded that U.S. Americans do not need God because of the abundance of
resources and overall affluence of the country. This increased dependency translated into a deepening relationship with God that led to perceived spiritual growth and a broadened view of God’s presence.

**Enhanced Understanding of God’s Character**

Participants also grew spiritually, or deepened their relationship with God, through an enhanced understanding of God’s character. Paul described God’s character as “loving,” while Leo and Amy described God as “faithful” and “caring.” Nathan added God is “trustworthy,” and James discussed God’s “grace.” This finding is especially significant because it adds to previous literature that describes spiritual dimensions of adult learning as relational (English, 2001). While this study aligns with previous literature that referred to spirituality’s connection to relationships between people (English, 2001; Tisdell, 2000), this study also refers to relationships with God. Participants gained an understanding of God’s character, thus deepening their relationship with Him, by spending time in prayer and devoting time to personal Bible study. Prayer allowed participants to speak to God, and reading the Bible allowed God to speak to them. For example, when Barney sought God through biblical scripture he gained “an understanding of God, and who He is, to hear from God Himself.” As a teacher in Malawi, Barney said “cross-cultural work has taught [him] much about God.” Likewise, Eric and Joanne, in seeking to know God’s character, spent their mornings in quite times of prayer and reading the Bible. Witnessing God’s healing power at the hospital and experiencing God’s miraculous provision made Sarah determine “God became bigger” to her in Zambia. Therefore, in addition to supporting the literature in the sense that participants viewed the adult learning dimension of spirituality as being underpinned by relationships, this study adds to this literature as well. What this study adds is that viewing the spiritual dimension of adult learning through a Theo-centric
worldview involves not only human-to-human relationships but also the relationships that individuals develop with God as they enhance their understanding of His character.

In becoming aware of God’s presence and character, participants began to understand their identity as followers of Christ, which gave meaning to their work and purpose in life as servants of God and others in their host communities. For instance, Nathan learned he has the “responsibility to care for more than just ourselves.” BJ began to understand that her purpose is to show God’s love by serving her African neighbors with the resources God has given her. Leo sensed he “belonged to God” and experienced a “great sense of joy” in knowing Him, which enhanced his desire to “serve diligently” in Zimbabwe. Leo’s account epitomizes participants’ view that increased awareness of God’s character was part of their spiritual growth because it led to a deepening relationship with God and meaningful relationships with host members.

**Participants’ Description of Intercultural Competence**

Like spirituality, a universal definition of intercultural competence has been elusive (Deardorff, 2009). Influenced by several researchers in the field, this study relied on Deardorff’s (2006) model and other scholars to define intercultural competence as a learning process of broadening worldviews through adaptation as the interactive, ongoing development of skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values for effective participation in a host culture (Deardorff, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Considering this definition and the findings of the study, this section examines how the adaptive experiences of participants intersect with three major themes from the intercultural competence literature. This intersection described intercultural competence as a process in which participants (a) adjusted to their host culture, (b) developed awareness of their home culture, and (c) realized an altered worldview.
Adjusted to their Host Culture

Consistent with the literature, becoming interculturally competent meant participants adjusted to their host culture. Learning skills to navigate the host culture, acquiring the language, and becoming aware of one’s home culture through immersion, relationships, and time promoted intercultural adaptation and transformed participants from national to global citizenship (Ashwill & Du’ong, 2009; Deardorff, 2006). Developing intercultural competence led participants to sense belonging in their host culture. They felt accepted, appreciated, and effective in their jobs. Qualifying participants’ experiences as positive is understated. Participants used words such as “wonderful,” “amazing,” “blessing,” “joy,” and phrases such as “there’s nothing else I’d rather do;” “I’d do everything all over again;” “I have such wonderful memories;” and “I’m just so content.” They described mutual feelings of their host cultures who embraced them in return.

The findings are significant because of the noticeable cultural distance between the home and host cultures. Greater cultural distance between home and host cultures requires more adaptive skills, attitudes, and behaviors (Berry, et al., 1989; Mwebi, 2009; Searle & Ward, 1990; Tung, 1998; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Participants in this study were selected from the U.S., an affluent developed country, yet they chose to live and work in a least developed country. Despite vast cultural differences, participants developed adaptive skills, attitudes, and behaviors to function effectively in their host communities. As doctors, administrators, and educators, participants received affirmation from their African host members that they were making a positive difference. Participants enjoyed the simplicity of African community life, as well as engaging in host culture activities. James’s example of providing income in return for milk from a man in a nearby village demonstrated the prevalent community value of mutual
interdependence that led to meaningful friendships and facilitated the adaptive process of intercultural competence.

**Developed Awareness of their Home Culture**

A second way the findings of this study intersect with the themes from the intercultural competence literature was that participants developed awareness of their home culture. Being away from a home culture allows sojourners (those who relocate to a foreign country) to assess their views of the world (Walsh & DeJoseph, 2003), leading to participants’ valuing simplicity of their host culture as a rejection of opulence and excess in their home culture. They often compared their affluent lifestyles of the U.S. to their simple lives in Africa. Reflecting on the wealth of their home culture, participants noted their spiritual growth was stunted, and they learned their need for God in America was nominal compared to their need in Africa. Yet this awareness was viewed positively as it shaped their dependence on God. As a result, a closer relationship with God was cultivated, which led to spiritual growth in ways not possible in the U.S.

Interestingly, no one considered their choice to live in Africa a sacrifice, and all participants favored their lives in Africa over what they had in the U.S. Paul and Amy did not miss television, cell phones, or consistent electricity and internet access. Joanne was especially happy to be removed from U.S. television since she was spared from the bombardment of political ads during a major election year. While Barney, BJ, James, and Paul noted missing their extended families, the value of community offered relationships that filled the emotional gaps. They considered the children of their community like their own, and the older generation became like their own parents and grandparents. Paul said his daughters, while growing up away
from biological family, had dozens of African cousins, aunts, and uncles who facilitated an “easy” adjustment to living in Zimbabwe.

The contextual realities of the host culture also helped participants develop awareness of their home culture. Again, a greater cultural distance made contextual realities such as preventing/contracting tropical diseases, the AIDS epidemic, the presence of evil spirits, and an unreliable water supply more apparent. Thus, these negative contextual realities of the host culture helped participants appreciate the healthier environment of their home culture. The reverse was also true—the positive contextual realities of the host culture offered a critique of their home culture. For example, participants viewed the value of community and a collective way of life as a positive contextual reality, which led them to critique the individualism of their U.S. home culture. Another related example is how aging has been regarded in the U.S. After living in an African culture that values advanced age, participants recognized the difference from their home culture that values youth.

The point to these examples is that developing awareness of one’s home culture is important for adult learning. For participants in this study, negotiating the daily realities of their host communities brought greater awareness of their home culture. Personal reflection and the nature of narrative inquiry allowed participants to discuss cultural differences in light of how they learned to become effective members of their host culture. Thus findings are consistent with the literature that says cultural differences are a rich complexity for building intercultural understanding (Diller & Moule, 2005). Though cultural differences were dramatized for participants in this study coming from the U.S. and living in impoverished areas of Africa, the implications for adult education can apply to other environments where social, historical, and
cultural differences may be less obvious—emphasizing the importance of critical reflection in all contexts (Chang, 2007).

**Realized an Altered Worldview**

Third, becoming interculturally competent meant participants realized an altered worldview. Not only did they experience an altered worldview, but they *realized* how living in a host culture altered their worldview by broadening their perspective of how people from different cultures live. An “altered worldview [is the] process by which individuals move beyond the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of their initial cultural framework to incorporate other cultural realities” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.343). As participants adapted to their host culture, they broadened their worldview by understanding different ways of life. Findings of the study showed participants learned new ways to spend their time, to interact with others, to develop their spiritual growth, and not only to survive but to thrive in their host culture. Furthermore, findings aligned with the literature that asserts an altered worldview occurs by critically reviewing individual beliefs and aligning personal views with new realities (McPhatter, 1997). For example, participants’ view of God broadened as they confronted and adapted to the new realities of their host culture, which explicitly ties spiritual growth to intercultural competence. Discussed in detail later, the transformative nature of participants’ altered worldviews was a crucial component for developing intercultural competence and for their spiritual growth.

While consistent with the literature (Deardorff, 2006; Martin, 1987; Munoz, DoBroka, Mohammad, 2009) that suggests intercultural competence requires immersion, relationship, and time, this study goes deeper. As followers of Christ, participants’ intercultural competence was enhanced significantly by their relationship with God and their desire to grow spiritually. This
has not been previously researched. Therefore this study is unique in addressing the role of spirituality for developing intercultural competence. Discussed further in a later section, developing intercultural competence was inextricably intertwined with participants’ spiritual growth.

Relationship between Spiritual Growth and Intercultural Competence

The findings of this study revealed spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are related processes that occur simultaneously and reciprocally. Intercultural experiences enhanced spiritual growth for participants. Consistent with the sociocultural theoretical framework that informed this study, spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are inextricably linked to each other. This study is pioneering in examining the role of spirituality in its approach to intercultural competence. Previous research and models of intercultural competence have ignored spirituality. Narratives of participants described the relationship between these two constructs in three ways as (a) transformative, (b) relational, and (c) interconnected and continual processes.

Transformative Processes

As interconnected learning constructs, spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are transformative processes. Lustig and Koester (1996) describe the transformative nature of intercultural competence as a “process by which individuals move beyond the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of their initial cultural framework to incorporate other cultural realities” (p.343). Though transformative in adult education often relates to Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning theory, transformative is used liberally throughout the intercultural competence literature, even for short-term immersion experiences (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; Lustig & Koester, 1996; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). This section examines
spiritual and intercultural transformation as participants (a) broadened their worldview, (b) learned ways to navigate contextual realities, and (c) deepened their relationship with God through adaptation to their host culture.

First, the transformative nature of intercultural competence according to previous literature suggests those who are immersed in a host culture for an extended period of time experience a broadened, or re-oriented, or transformed worldview that leads to effective participation in a host culture (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). A broadened worldview transforms individuals “beyond the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of their initial cultural framework to incorporate other cultural realities” (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.343).

The transformative processes experienced by participants were in the form of spiritual growth and intercultural competence as they interacted with their host cultures. With regards to spiritual growth, followers of Christ who lived in a least developed country for an extended period of time gained awareness of assumptions that constrained their original perceptions of God. For instance, prior to moving abroad, participants believed that God is present and sovereign, and that He protects, provides, and asks for obedience to His will according to biblical scripture. Much of these assumptions of God were theoretical. Moving to a least developed host country, however, transformed participants’ home culture assumptions in ways they admit could not have been possible had they stayed in their home culture. Employing Lustig and Koester’s (1996) conceptualization of transformation as a broadened worldview beyond one’s initial cultural framework, Table 2 summarizes the transformation of participants’ core values and illustrates participants’ original perspective as a theoretical home culture perception being transformed to an experiential host culture perception.
Table 2
Transforming Spiritual Core Values from a Theoretical to Experiential Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Perspective: Theoretical (Home Culture Perception)</th>
<th>Transformed Perspective: Experiential (Host Culture Perception)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God is powerful</td>
<td>God is all-powerful (e.g. over evil spirits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God protects</td>
<td>God protects in dire circumstances (e.g. during violent home invasions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God provides</td>
<td>God provides sustenance for life (e.g. during severe drought)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is sovereign</td>
<td>God is sovereign over everything (e.g. in healing the sick without explanation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is trustworthy</td>
<td>God is trustworthy above all else (e.g. material possessions are distractions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God requires obedience</td>
<td>Obedience to God is fulfilling (e.g. experiencing God’s blessing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The transformative experience of living in another culture may broaden worldviews by taking core values from theoretical to experiential, and simultaneously appreciating the worldview of others. Previous literature focusing on transformations in relation to intercultural competence suggests that becoming interculturally competent requires a paradigmatic shift in one’s worldview (Lustig & Koester, 1996; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Often initiated by the process of overcoming cultural disequilibrium, such an explicit disorienting dilemma associated with the transformative nature of intercultural competence (Taylor, 1994) was not identified by participants. Rather, this study found that participants’ experienced a broadened worldview that reinforced and strengthened their core beliefs. Based on the findings of this study, participants described their transformation as a deepening relationship with God. Inextricably connected to immersion in the host cultural context, participants were thus transformed by gaining an understanding of God’s character and realizing greater dependence on God.
Findings also showed that participants had a transformed understanding of their host culture. With immersion over time, participants engaged in host culture activities, which led to meaningful relationships and understanding of the host culture’s values. They engaged in everyday visits with host members, appreciated communal ways of living, learned the local language, and valued simplicity. As a result, respect led to embracing cultural practices; communication led to connection; observation led to adaptation; and interactions led to meaningful relationships.

Table 3 conceptualizes the transformation of intercultural core values from a theoretical to experiential perspective.

Table 3

Transforming Intercultural Core Values from a Theoretical to Experiential Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Perspective: Theoretical (Home Culture Perception)</th>
<th>Transformed Perspective: Experiential (Host Culture Perception)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect cultural practices</td>
<td>Embrace cultural practices (e.g. visitation, worship styles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate through language</td>
<td>Connect through language (e.g. fluency in Ndebele, Tonga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>Adapt (e.g. sense of belonging, feeling African)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with host members</td>
<td>Relate meaningfully to host members (e.g. intimate friendships)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, participants transformed as they learned ways to navigate their contextual realities. In a least developed country, participants confronted contextual realities not present in their host culture, such as lack of water, electricity, scarce resources, language barriers, and civil unrest. These findings parallel previous research on sojourners traveling to least developed countries where a greater cultural distance is evidenced by contrasting living conditions (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Nishigori et al., 2009). For participants in this study,
transformation to their perspective, or worldview occurred when they sensed God’s presence in these situations. Along with God’s presence, participants became aware of God’s provision, protection, and sovereignty in ways that would not have been possible in their home culture. Thus, becoming interculturally competent involved expanding their Christ-centered worldview through the awareness of God’s presence and reliance on Him to provide in new ways.

Though not explicitly or implicitly evident in the data, participants may have had moments of questioning their faith, and ultimately their Christ-centered worldview. As the data shows, however, transformation did not require these questions, nor did it require abandoning or changing core beliefs. Rather, in expressing an expanded worldview, participants’ experiences showed that transformation can reinforce core beliefs. For followers of Christ, these core beliefs include: Christ’s sovereignty or supreme authority in the world; the glorification of God as the meaning of life, which is manifested by loving and serving others; and the reliance on the Bible and prayer as modes of bi-directional communication with God. As participants immersed in their host cultures, these core beliefs were strengthened as they became aware of the contextual realities such as the friendliness of host culture members, prevalence of poverty, presence of evil spirits, and the pervasiveness of sickness and death. Gaining awareness expanded their view of the world by showing how other cultures live, work, and survive, as well as their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. By approaching host cultures respectfully, as learners and listeners, participants appreciated these cultural elements of their host communities, yet at the same time, they became aware of God in new and exciting ways that reinforced their core beliefs. Put concisely, the transformative nature of becoming interculturally competent can mean the reinforcement of core beliefs.
Third, participants experienced transformations in the form of a deepened relationship with God through adaptation by gaining awareness of host culture realities that gave them a new perspective consistent with core beliefs. Through a more intimate relationship with God, cultivated by engaging in spiritual disciplines and reliance on Him, participants expanded views of their spirituality without abandoning their core belief that Christ is the center of their ontological worldview. This is an interesting finding. Though participants experienced transformation, their faith in God remained intact. For example, when Leo visited a school for aspiring witch doctors, he gained awareness of ancestral spirit worship. This experience helped him understand his Zimbabwean neighbors while affirming his beliefs that “God is stronger.” Sarah, James, Nathan, and Felix each mentioned the presence of evil spirits as an element of their spiritual growth and adaptation. Thus, participants experienced a simultaneous double transformation, spiritual and intercultural, as they developed awareness of such contextual cultural realities. Gaining awareness of the historical, social, and cultural context of their host culture not only deepened their relationship with God, but also helped participants relate to host culture members. The next section discusses the relational process of spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence.

Relational Processes

Consistent with the literature that has conveyed the importance of relationships for spiritual growth (Chan, 2008; Yaconelli, 2003) and intercultural competence (Arthur, 2002, St. Clair & McKenry, 1999; Taylor, 1994; Walsh, 2003), findings showed participants deepened their relationship with God and adapted to their African host communities through meaningful relationships with host community members. This section discusses participants’ (a) deepened relationship with God and (b) their meaningful relationships with host members and how the
findings suggest an inextricable connection between sojourner-God, sojourner-host relationships and the development of spiritual growth and intercultural competence.

First, for followers of Christ, spirituality is about a personal relationship with God (Yaconelli, 2003). Spiritual growth means deepening that personal relationship with God through prayer, devotion to the Bible, and community with others (Chan, 2008). Themes from the findings of this study show participants developed their spiritual growth with host community members by engaging in prayer, personal and group Bible study, church activities, and various host culture gatherings. Several participants mentioned having close friends with whom they prayed, studied the Bible, and confided struggles. For example, Amy and her friend Emma “prayed together” and talked about “faith issues.” James “was a prayer partner with a local pastor.” And Felix “attended regular Sunday evening Bible studies with the men in the community.”

The findings of this study suggest that participants developed meaningful relationships by integrating spirituality into their professional work. For example, Felix and James prayed with patients. Joanne and Amy mentored young girls. Paul and Nathan used their handyman expertise by fixing pumps, roofs, and electricity. Relationships in this way aimed to benefit society as a whole more than individuals by modeling Christ’s character, valuing people over the higher income potential of their home culture, and focusing on the overall impact their work. This finding is consistent with Boone et al. (2010) who connected spirituality with a commitment to help others.

Along with professional work, meaningful relationships led to spiritual growth through acts of service. Though participants were doctors, administrators, and teachers, they strongly desired to serve their host community members. Participants volunteered their time in clinics,
donated food and clothing, provided transportation, and supported their host friends with whatever resources God had entrusted to them. Engaging with the community in this capacity led to deeper relationships with God and host members. As BJ noted, her relationship with God grew closer through her friendship with a woman she served from her community.

The contextual realities of their least developed host culture contributed to participants’ motivation for seeking a closer relationship with God. Participants faced the prevalence of poverty, presence of evil spirits, pervasiveness of sickness and death, as well as the challenges of civil unrest, limited resources, and antagonistic climate conditions. Engaging in spiritual disciplines in this context as a way to cultivate their relationship with God reminded participants of God’s sovereign character, which consequently allowed them not only to survive, but thrive. Thus, cultivating a relationship with God helped participants grow spiritually and adapt to their host culture.

Second, just as spiritual growth reflects its dependence on relationships with God and others, a theme across the intercultural competence literature is that its development is a relational process between sojourners and host culture members. Previous studies have shown intercultural competence is developed at the intersection of cultural knowledge, awareness, skills, motivation, and immersion through relationship with others (Campinha-Bacote, 1999). Findings from this study emphasize the importance of relationship with host culture members for understanding contextual realities, building meaningful relationships, and adjusting to live effectively in a host community. Meaningful relationships are described as maintaining direct contact with host culture members through “support for others that helps to solidify feelings of participation” and belonging (Lustig & Koester, 1996, p.331). Immersion surrounded participants with the sights, sounds, and smells of their African communities, but relationships
with host members connected them intimately to the culture. Advised by mentors or others with similar experiences living in least developed countries, participants had purposefully sought meaningful relationships with host culture members, which allowed them to ask questions about the language, cultural practices, and social mores. Consistent with previous studies, relationships with host culture members were paramount to participants’ development of intercultural competence (Alexander, et al., 2005; Deardorff, 2006; Mwebi & Brigham, 2009). The model that informed this study, however, did not explicitly address relationships rather it referred to “interaction” between sojourner and host culture member (Deardorff, 2006). The use of interaction is vague and can include a range of interpretation from passers-by to intimate friends. By contrast, this study found meaningful relationships, such Amy’s friendship with Emma where they could talk about “everything,” led to spiritual growth and intercultural competence.

Based on the findings of the study, meaningful relationships also meant interdependence on one another. For example, Paul provided space for boys from the local village to cultivate a garden. In exchange for vegetables, they earned income to pay their school fees. As their relationships and interdependence grew these boys became like “sons” to Paul. Other occasions included hiring house help. Female participants hired women from the host culture, which offered reciprocal benefits of employment for the host member and services for the sojourner. More significantly, the hired women became female participants’ closest friends. Sarah and Meena, BJ and Chilobi, and Amy and Terenda built meaningful relationships that developed through their interdependence on one another.

This notion of mutual interdependence in learning to relate to host members has significance to adult education. If individuals are learning to relate to each other as part of the process of developing intercultural competence, at what point, if ever, does a sojourner move
from being an outsider to an insider? Can a sojourner ever fully integrate? At what point might a sojourner feel like a member of a host culture? While these questions were outside of the scope of this study, they emphasize the importance of relating to members of a host culture for understanding intercultural competence as an ongoing process.

Meaningful relationships also meant being able to communicate with each other and talk about deeper issues, feelings, and shared experiences with children and family. Thus, learning the language for nuanced communication was another component to developing meaningful relationships that were mutually beneficial. Lustig and Koester (1996) found language plays a “central role in the ability to function, to accomplish tasks, and most important, to interact with others” (p.154). Previous studies have shown learning to relate to others by observing and communicating in the local language builds meaningful relationships (Arthur, 2002; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999; Walsh, 2003). Participants found this to be true and stressed language acquisition as a priority for building relationships, adjusting, and as Barney noted, “beyond surviving to thriving.” This is an example of Hofstede’s (2004) assertion that the practice of recognizing and applying the symbols of a host culture, such as language, contributes to a sojourner’s intercultural competence for effective, and in this study, fulfilling participation in their host culture.

Informed by sociocultural theory, these findings suggest that intercultural competence is a relational learning process that can include developing relationships with God as well as host community members. Therefore, for those who identify themselves as followers of Christ, spirituality must be acknowledged when studying intercultural competence through the lens of adult learning. For example, as Paul perceived his adjustment and acceptance by his host
community in Zimbabwe, he commented, “The people encouraged me to become a stronger follower of Christ, and had the end result of helping me to grow in my faith.”

**Interconnected and Continual Processes**

This study showed that spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are interconnected and continual learning processes. While participants deepened their relationship with God, they also developed cultural knowledge, skills, and relational components of intercultural competence. Conversely, while participants developed intercultural competence they also experienced knowledge of God, spiritual disciplines, and relational components of spiritual growth. Occurring simultaneously and reciprocally, the same factors that contributed to participants’ spiritual growth appears to have a relationship to their development of intercultural competence, which is a significant implication for adult education. If a follower of Christ is moving to a least developed host culture from a developed home culture like the U.S., these findings suggest the importance of deepening their relationship with God to develop spiritual growth and intercultural competence. Both are developed together by engaging in host culture activities, developing relationships with host members, and embracing the social values of a host culture.

These two constructs do not occur in isolation, rather they are inextricably interconnected. Keller (2008) explained the result of Christ-centered spirituality is conscientiousness for regarding the whole world through humble expressions of love. Becoming interculturally competent is also about becoming conscientious for the world’s cultures as a global citizen. As followers of Christ, participants in this study perceived God’s calling to work abroad by gaining awareness of needs that matched their professional qualifications, receiving affirmation from others, and reading biblical scripture. In all cases, participants obeyed God’s
calling as a way to practice responsible stewardship by immersion in the world’s least developed countries where medical and educational needs were most apparent. Over time, meaningful relationships were cultivated as participants engaged in spiritual disciplines as well as host culture activities.

Following through on God’s calling was an opportunity for obedience; and deepening a relationship with God requires obedience to His calling. When participants perceived God’s calling to work abroad and desired to respond obediently, they understood the value of learning how to participate effectively in the host culture as responsible stewards of the opportunity God had presented them. Consistent with the literature conveying the assumption that people are best served by those in tune with their culture, findings from this study suggest effective participation began with observation, attentiveness, and an attitude of respect to learn social values and better understand contextual realities (Diller & Moule, 2005; Magala, 2005; Ellis et al., 2010). Thus, as participants acted obediently, consequently deepening their relationship with God, they also mastered “complex awarenesses and sensitivities…and a set of skills” for building meaningful relationships with host culture members as well as successful functioning in their host culture (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.5).

Along with interconnectedness, spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence are continual processes. Taylor’s (1994) study found participants had an evolving intercultural identity as a component of becoming interculturally competent. An evolving intercultural identity is defined as “an ongoing process where the participants’ cultural identity is no longer linked to one culture, in that they are able to identify and understand the perspectives of the host culture” (p.170). The continual nature of intercultural competence for participants in this study was evident in their evolving identities as members of their host communities, as well
as their identities as followers of Christ. Participants expressed spiritual growth as the pursuit of a closer relationship with God through the continual process of seeking to be more like Christ. The Deardorff (2006) process model that informed this study explains intercultural competence as a never-ending circle where skills, attitudes, and behaviors are constantly revised and altered, sharpened and refined for better understanding. Similarly, followers of Christ, through engaging in spiritual disciplines, are constantly examining themselves and investigating how to be more like Christ and draw closer to Him.

The link between one’s deepening relationship with God and his or her adaptation to a host culture is significant for the study of adult learning because for participants in this study, each construct depended on the next for development. While previous research has investigated the ways in which individuals develop intercultural competence through learning and adaptation (Deardorff, 2009); such studies have overlooked the ways spirituality underpins and intersects such learning. As such, how people describe their spiritual growth has not been a topic of research as it relates to the adaptation that accompanies development of intercultural competence. This finding that participants grew spiritually by increasing their dependence on God, leading to the development of intercultural competence is therefore significant. Furthermore, this study provides new insight into the ways in which sojourners to a least developed country learned spiritually and interculturally in an interconnected way.

**Theoretical Implications**

Theoretical implications of the study are presented here by examining how the findings intersect with the two theoretical frameworks that informed this research: sociocultural theory rooted in Vygotskian thought; and Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence. Along with relating the findings to the basic tenets of each theory, consistencies and differences are
analyzed for better understanding of how these theories explain adult learning for study participants in the context of a least developed country.

**Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory defines learning as an active, co-constructive, dialogic process of interaction between people and their social, historical, and cultural context that incorporates the interplay of experience, belief, cultural history, values, and worldview (Alfred, 2002; Cobb, 1994; Lambert, 2002; Schweder, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s (1978) pioneering work emphasized the dynamic relationship between cognition and social context in the learning process. Applying sociocultural theory to this study on spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence provided the necessary lens for careful attention to the role of a host culture in adult learning theory. There are three, overlapping tenets of sociocultural theory that informed this study on how adults learn spiritually and interculturally: (a) learning is social; (b) learning is inextricable from social, cultural, and historical contexts; and (c) learning is mediated through cultural tools, signs, and symbols.

First, consistent with the tenet of sociocultural theory that learning is social, findings of the study revealed relationships between participants and host members were integral to spiritual growth and intercultural competence. With an emphasis on social learning as a co-learner environment, sociocultural theory looks at collective cultural and social experiences to explain how participants co-constructed knowledge through social interactions with host members (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Participants stressed observation as a way to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and practices of host culture members, yet participants were not disengaged bystanders. Rather, by approaching respectfully they sought relationships with host culture members purposefully. One participant, Joanne, recalled asking to sit in the cooking tent with
other women where she observed them making the Zambian staple nshima (corn porridge). Though initially the verbal exchange was minimal, socially interacting with the women in her village not only taught her how to cook the local cuisine, but she also began developing meaningful relationships with the women in her community. Beyond meaningful relationships, through interacting with these women, Joanne was given the opportunity to construct her understanding of her physical and spiritual identities within the context of her host culture.

Meaningful relationships were also developed as participants embraced the value of local community, through reciprocal visitation and involvement with their host culture’s activities, celebrations, and events. These social interactions taught them cultural nuance, language, and the value of living simply. Findings in this study support sociocultural theory’s assumption that relationships and socialization patterns form the primary building blocks for human growth and development (Alfred, 2002). The social nature of participants interacting with members of their host culture cultivated mutual interdependence, which led to meaningful relationships that perpetuated their adaptation and spiritual growth. In southern Africa where the notion of community is a social value, host members’ ways of life provided a platform for emulating Christ’s example of service, depending on God, and seeking to understand God’s character.

Thus the social aspect of spiritual growth became evident in how participants accounted for their deepening relationship with God. James provided an example of the connection between his social interactions and spiritual growth. In discussions with his Zambian friends, who also espoused a Christ-centered worldview, they would “examine closely how the Bible cuts across culture.” James said those conversations helped him “understand where other people are coming from. So rather than condemning cultural practices…[he is] open to other people’s beliefs and understandings to see where the Bible cuts across here.” Consequently, James
credited his reliance on the Bible for determining how to treat people and to question his Western views, which led to cultural understanding, meaningful relationships with host members, and a deepened relationship with God.

Adult educators draw on sociocultural theory and Vygotsky’s research to explain how the individual human mind develops in its autonomous, creative, and rational form by looking at the social context of development (Bakhurst, 2007; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Though presented separately for emphasis, the social component is a significant part of the context that deserves careful emphasis. As Wertsch (2007) determined, the notion of context includes the all-encompassing worlds where learners and context mutually constitute each other. The next section looks at how participants’ spiritual growth and intercultural competence developed through interaction with the other components of these all-encompassing worlds.

Second, learning is inextricable from social, historical, and cultural contexts. To understand adult learning using sociocultural theory, the unit of analysis is the learner-in-culture to emphasize the importance of examining the context as part of the learning process. Context is defined as the ever-present factors that influence meaning (Alfred, 2002). These factors include the social component discussed in the previous section, as well as the experience, culture, history, identity components, and physical environment (Alfred, 2002; Edwards, 2005; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009). Sociocultural theory asserts knowledge is co-constructed in the interaction between learners within context, which means “society and culture are the conduits and contents of learning and development” (Estep, 2002, p.154).

Findings from the study support this claim. For example, participants brought their experiences from their U.S. home cultures. They had a relationship with God ranging from 13-41 years prior to moving abroad. The process of spiritual growth is summarized by participants’
transformation from theoretical knowledge of God to experiential knowledge of God after interacting with their host environments. This is not to say that people in the U.S. who never had an experience abroad do not know God. Rather, participants in this study noted drastic differences in their knowledge of God because of their context as presented in Table 2. The context in southern Africa is different from their home culture with regards to tropical diseases, limited resources, unreliable electricity and a questionable water supply. By interacting with this context through daily living, however, participants reported to have learned to depend on God in ways not necessary in the U.S. as they learned more about His protection, presence, and power.

Spiritual growth in terms of dependence on God was more pronounced in the least developed countries of southern Africa. Participants noted comparatively they had no need for God in their U.S. home cultures. Therefore context was significant for growing their relationship with God as well as fostering interdependence on host community members.

Participants also learned how to navigate contextual realities by embracing their host culture’s values and learning local history. One strong theme that emerged from the findings was participants’ assumption that logical reasoning underpinned most cultural practices. Thus, in approaching their host cultures respectfully, this previously held assumption was intertwined in new cultural information that helped them ultimately develop intercultural competence.

According to a sociocultural theoretical framework, where the mind is public and external, knowledge is co-constructed when external factors (i.e. cultural practices) and internal factors (i.e. thoughts) intertwine and are internalized and made a part of the learner (Vygotsky, 1978).

Third, sociocultural theory also asserts learning is mediated through cultural tools, signs, and symbols. These can include the cultural practices and mores participants in this study acknowledged, such as the forbidden use of the left hand, the awareness of the spirit world, the
authority of a village chief, and gender role expectations to name a few. Perhaps the most attention in the sociocultural literature, however, has been given to the role of language as a symbolic mediator of meaning (Bakhtin, 1981). Similarly, findings from the study show language acquisition was an important social value participants embraced for communicating, developing meaningful relationships, and learning the nuance of the culture.

Though English was widely spoken due to the colonialism of the previous century, participants expressed a commitment to learning the local dialect. Language as a tool for interacting with context is an important component of sociocultural theory and as this study has shown for informing adult learning. Yet knowing the language is just the beginning since a word only has meaning when it is spoken and given context and attention (Bakhtin, 1981). Here the tenets of sociocultural theory overlap. Language was a vehicle for interaction between participants and host culture members, which implies a social component, all of which are an inextricable component of the context.

Vygotsky (1978) contended learning occurs in the process of internalizing the external. With language as a mediator between the interactions of people, words become internalized and become a part of them. Knowledge is co-constructed in the interaction, mediated by language. This departs from Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence, discussed next, which suggests a one-directional movement of learning where desired internal outcomes such as adaptability become externalized outcomes in the form of effective and appropriate communication and behaviors. Using Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence in conjunction with sociocultural theory, however, emphasizes the bi-directional component of developing intercultural competence by acknowledging the interplay of participants with the social, historical, and cultural context of their host communities.
With regard to spiritual growth, spirituality as a relationship with God is also mediated by language. Findings in this study suggested participants deepened their faith in God through bi-directional communication with Him via the Bible (God’s Word) and prayer. They also attended church and Bible studies with members of their host culture who also identified themselves as followers of Christ. Whether participants spent time alone with God or time with others, language was an important cultural tool for cultivating relationships with God and others. Though Schaeffer (1985) contended spirituality is internal, but manifests itself externally, this study, through the lens of sociocultural theory, explains spirituality as a relationship with God as much about internalizing the external. In other words, what is learned externally from interactions with God and others, through language as part of the context, is internalized and becomes a part of a person. For participants in this study, throughout this process, knowledge was co-constructed in the transformative form of spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence.

Applying sociocultural theory to this study was helpful for understanding the co-construction of knowledge through the dynamic relationship of participants and their host culture contexts. Yet a critique of sociocultural theory is that it is very broad, malleable to an endless range of studies and interpretations. Since sociocultural theory addresses the interplay of people and context, however, it balanced the deficiencies of Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence for a more holistic examination at how participants became functional in their host cultures as well as their spiritual growth. Deardorff (2009) calls for more focus on relational aspects of intercultural competence beyond the individual to incorporate all interactants, including host culture members; sojourners; and the social, historical, and cultural context itself. Though her model neglects to address relationships explicitly, Deardorff’s (2006) work
illuminates intercultural competence as a continual process of learning how to participate effectively in a host culture.

**Deardorff (2006) Model of Intercultural Competence**

Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence provided a lens for exploring participants’ narratives in an effort to gain insight into their intercultural experiences and adaptation. It also illuminated parallels between the development of intercultural competence and spiritual growth by showing effective participation as a continual process of learning. Attempting to approach intercultural competence holistically, this model focuses on an individual interacting with their host culture. It has four basic components arranged in a circle with clockwise arrows: (a) attitudes; (b) knowledge and comprehension; (c) desired internal outcomes; and (d) desired external outcomes. This section takes each component and relates it to the findings of the study regarding the development of intercultural competence as well as participants’ spiritual growth.

First, developing intercultural competence includes an attitude of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Displayed by valuing other cultures, refraining from judgment, and tolerating ambiguity, the “attitudinal element in this process model is the most critical” (Deardorff, 2006, p.257). Findings in this study showed participants developed over time an interculturally competent attitude in approaching their host cultures respectfully. They entered as a learner, carefully observing, maintaining an open mind to new meaning, refraining from quick judgments, and assuming logical reasons behind cultural practices. For example, as Barney entered his culture he stressed the importance of being “respectful…and teachable to be effective in cross-cultural work.” Paul, James, and Leo, who worked in three different African countries assumed a “logical reason” for cultural practices that prevented them from “making
quick judgments.” Similarly, in tending to their spirituality, participants embraced new ways of worshipping God through music and dance, attended local churches with similar Christ-centered teaching, and engaged in Bible studies. Rather than seek community with others from their home culture, they purposefully sought to cultivate relationships with host culture members, which perpetuated both their intercultural competence and spiritual growth.

A second component to developing intercultural competence is gaining knowledge, comprehension and skills to navigate the host culture. Building on the attitudinal element and adding immersion in a host culture, skills of listening, observing, evaluating, and analyzing are necessary for cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness (Deardorff, 2006). For participants in this study, knowledge and comprehension of their host culture as well as gaining an understanding of God’s character resulted from meaningful relationships. Neglecting the explicit role of meaningful relationships is a noticeable deficiency of the Deardorff (2006) model. While the model labels interaction, presumably between host member and sojourner, participants in this study emphasized meaningful relationships, developed as a result of interaction, as the main factor for gaining cultural knowledge. For example, Paul explained how he gained an understanding of African weddings and funerals through “closer relationships” with members of his community. Similarly, Leo learned the language from a host member who was his teaching colleague and “good friend.”

As mentioned previously, employing sociocultural theory in conjunction with this model addresses this gap. Regardless of the model’s negligence for adequately explaining how knowledge and comprehension is attained, it does acknowledge the importance of language and cultural understanding as important components for developing intercultural competence.
Findings from this study were consistent in showing how language acquisition and embracing the social values of the host culture led to both adaptation and spiritual growth.

A third component to developing intercultural competence includes the desired internal outcomes of informed frame of reference shift. As an internal process, an informed frame of reference shift refers to adaptability; flexibility; an ethnorelative view, which means understanding a culture relative to itself; and empathy, which means understanding the world as others do (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 1996). The narratives of participants reflect a frame of reference shift as a broadening worldview. Living and working in southern Africa exposed them to contextual realities far different from their home culture. Building on the model’s openness and observation, participants embraced the social values of their host culture, which cultivated relationships and led to their adaptation. Regarding spiritual growth, as previously discussed, an informed frame of reference also included participants reinforcing their core beliefs in God. Facing the contextual antagonisms of a least developed country contributed to participants’ dependence on God, as well as enhanced their flexibility, ethnorelative views, and empathy within their host cultures. While cultural knowledge such as language may be specific for a particular culture, several participants explained how these internal outcomes have helped them in other intercultural situations. Thus, findings suggested that the skills for developing intercultural competence and spiritual growth in a context different from a home culture were transferable.

The fourth component of this model is the desired external outcome of intercultural competence. This includes effective and appropriate communication and behavior in an intercultural situation. Deardorff’s (2006) model shows the possibility of an individual achieving “the external outcome of behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in
intercultural situations without having fully achieved the internal outcome of a shift in the frame of reference. However, the degree of appropriateness and effectiveness would be more limited than if the internal outcome had also been achieved” (p.257). All participants in this study reported an informed frame of reference shift, which demonstrates a greater degree of intercultural competence according to the model. This “natural process of growth” conveyed by sociocultural theory may also be explained by the significant amount of time participants in this study have lived abroad, which ranged from 10-52 years (Estep, 2002, p.154). Qualitatively, the narratives of participants conveyed effective and appropriate participation in their host cultures both in adjusting to living abroad and learning to cultivate their spiritual growth in a context different from their home culture.

In summary, the Deardorff (2006) model was helpful for understanding the process of intercultural competence, but it failed to explain adequately how each of the four components were achieved by participants in this study. With its emphasis on the individual, this model would be greatly enhanced if it addressed the role of context and the social nature of developing intercultural competence through relationships. These refinements could also further explain how sojourners in a host culture cultivate their spiritual growth. Furthermore, this model suggests internal outcomes lead to external outcomes. An arrow on the model points in one direction, showing a unidirectional relationship between the internal and external. This is why the study’s findings have been enhanced by the use of a sociocultural framework. Vygotsky (1978) contended the internalization of the external co-constructs knowledge, yet enhanced by Bakhtin (1981), the perpetual and bi-directional interplay between people and their social, historical, and cultural context mediated by language further explains how participants in this study grew spiritually while simultaneously developing intercultural competence.
Implications for Practice in Adult Education

This section discusses the implications of the findings for practice in the field of adult education. The implications are to (a) prepare people to work abroad, (b) explain the connection between adult learning and context, (c) incorporate spirituality in learning environments, and (d) employ narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

The first implication of this research is to prepare people to work abroad, particularly for sojourners from a developed country like the U.S. who were moving to a least developed country where cultural distance is greatest. Findings show participants developed intercultural competence, consequently adjusting to their host culture, by entering their host culture as learners. Those who move abroad would benefit by applying what participants in this study have learned, such as maintaining an open mind to new meaning, listening, observing, and refraining from imposing Western values. With a posture of respect, sojourners would transition easier if they sought relationships with host culture members and embraced the social values of their host community. The attitudinal elements of respect and openness are addressed as starting points for intercultural competence in Deardorff’s (2006) process model. Careful review of this provides a framework that illuminates the process of adaptation. Sojourners preparing to work abroad could use this model to anticipate how they will learn the skills, knowledge, and behaviors for adjusting to their new host culture. Furthermore, with increased globalization non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations, and mission organizations could reference concepts such as attitudes, knowledge, comprehension, and internal/external outcomes to prepare their employees for successful participation in their host countries.

A second implication for the findings of this research is to explain the connection between adult learning and context. A sociocultural theoretical lens allowed for examining how
participants in this study learned through interacting with their social, historical, and cultural context. Thus, Vygotsky’s (1978) work, which focused on the social primacy of cognitive development, has broad application for the field of adult education. By examining the dialogic interplay of participants with their host members, their environment, the language, cultural practices, and spiritual disciplines, findings in this study revealed the importance of the social context for learning. For example, the interactions between participants and host members taught them host languages. Participants did not learn Ndebele or Tonga from a book or from classes. Language was acquired through immersion and interaction with host members over time. Likewise, cultural knowledge was co-constructed, each person learning from the other, mediated by cultural tools and symbols. Adult education practice would be enriched by examining the role of contextual factors on the learning process, and findings from this study provide a roadmap for how learning might occur, particularly with regards to spirituality.

Findings from this study reveal a new frontier for understanding the role of spiritual growth, conceptualized by participants as developing a relationship with God, for adapting to a host culture and becoming interculturally competent. Additionally, concepts of Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence explain how adults learn to adapt to a host culture, which would again be helpful for private and public sector organizations seeking to improve intercultural understanding.

A third implication of this study is to incorporate spirituality in learning environments. Adult learning will be enhanced with increased attention to spiritual growth, particularly from a Christ-centered worldview and its reciprocity with the development of intercultural competence. Research in adult education, Theo-centric and non-Theo-centric, has not focused on Christ-centered spirituality in the context of spirituality. For participants in this study who identified
themselves as followers of Christ, spirituality was inextricably integrated in all areas of their lives. Though facilitating spirituality in adult education is challenging (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010) adult educators must find a way to address spirituality because of its prominence in many people’s lives. This may mean providing space for engaging in spiritual disciplines, or a forum for reflecting on the role of spirituality for learning. Just as participants entered their host cultures as learners to understand their host community members, adult educators should approach learners in their educational environments with openness, observation, attentiveness. As followers of Christ, participants maintained an open mind to new meaning, yet transformed their worldviews by seeing God in new ways. This strengthened their core faith and cultivated their relationship with God, which is an example of how openness in adult learning can reinforce beliefs yet provide a broadened view of how others perceive the world.

A fourth implication of the findings of this research is to employ narrative inquiry as a research methodology. As a qualitative approach, narrative inquiry provided participants’ thick, rich descriptions of their experiences in least developed countries which allowed for learning on four different levels. First, adult educators engaging in narrative inquiry will learn much about individuals’ experiences throughout the process. Semi-structured interviews teach questioning and listening skills; transcribing the data allows intimate knowledge of participants’ experiences; and synthesizing narratives challenges researchers to achieve accuracy in what participants would like their stories to convey. Second, participants in narrative inquiry research learn through the reflective process of responding to questions. Narrative inquiry provides the opportunity to look backward in time and make sense of their experiences. Third, since this research was informed by sociocultural theory, learning takes place in the co-construction of knowledge that results from the interaction between the researcher and participant. And fourth,
the non-participant/non-researcher who reads the narratives engages in a learning process. The outside reader and the text represent the dialogic interplay that constructs new knowledge relating to that person’s unique cultural, historical, and social context (Bakhtin, 1981).

Recommended for deep analysis and nuanced research, narrative inquiry offers insight into adult learning on a personal level. Additionally, narrative inquiry honors voices and individual experiences that give dignity to people while facilitating learning.

**Implications for Future Research in Adult Education**

This exploration of the relationship between spiritual growth and intercultural competence is a flint stone that piques an interest for further research. This study points to a void in the literature that relates spirituality and intercultural competence that must be addressed. Three suggestions for further research are proposed.

First, while this qualitative study provided meaningful insight from participants’ experiences to explore their spirituality and cultural adaptation, a quantitative or mixed methods approach could substantiate the relationship between these two constructs. Perhaps with the use of assessment tools, a correlation between spiritual growth and the development of intercultural competence could be determined. Data could include the number of years abroad, time spent in spiritual disciplines, and Likert-type scale surveys to describe relationships, spirituality, and intercultural interactions. Such calculations could have a domino effect for more research to allow comparisons of different geographical areas, spiritual and cultural practices, and outcomes.

Second, findings of this study supported the transformational nature of spiritual growth and intercultural competence. While viewing these participants’ experiences from a transformative learning perspective was outside the scope of this study, employing this theoretical lens would be a worthwhile investigation for understanding the meaning of
transformation. Could transformative experiences serve to reinforce previous beliefs rather than cause people to abandon them? How does immersion in a host culture with a variety of different cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors allow for an expanded worldview while simultaneously maintaining core values? Though considering participants’ experiences as transformative could be argued, findings from this study suggested transformation meant a new perspective of faith in God and reinforced core values of a Christ-centered worldview. Thus a new perspective can be consistent with core spiritual beliefs. While this research study broadens the understanding of transformation, it has only begun to scratch the surface. More needs to be known about the relationship between transformation and the reinforcement of core beliefs and whether or not being interculturally competent requires a change or even abandonment of core beliefs.

A third suggestion for further research, initiated by an interest in sociocultural theory and Deardorff’s (2006) model of intercultural competence is to use these two models to understand learning from the host culture’s perspective. In other words, how could this study be replicated to explore the African host member’s perspective on spiritual growth and intercultural competence? Many empirical studies on intercultural competence examine U.S. Americans as the host culture learning to relate to others of different social, historical, cultural backgrounds. Perhaps a similar study in Africa would broaden understanding about how adults learn.

**Concluding Remarks**

The spiritual heritage instilled by my grandmother intertwined with my grandparents’ contagious appreciation for other cultures incubated over three decades and hatched into the purpose of this study. Further piqued by the experience of growing up a daughter of missionaries in Nassau, Bahamas, and emanating from the confluence of my interests, I was
deeply curious about how adults learn, spiritually and interculturally, in the context of a least
developed country.

This exploration of spiritual growth and intercultural competence is important for the
field of adult education because it emphasizes the reciprocity between the two constructs in ways
that have never been done before. Findings have shown as participants grew spiritually they
developed intercultural competence. Conversely, as they developed intercultural competence
they grew spiritually. Thus, spiritual growth and intercultural competence are symbiotic learning
processes, each one feeding off the other for sustenance and development.

For sojourners who identify themselves as followers of Christ, spiritual growth means a
closer relationship with God that yields more meaningful relationships with others, including
those from other cultures. Intercultural competence is then a product of these meaningful
relationships between sojourner and God and sojourner and host member. Likewise, with
regards to intercultural competence, followers of Christ will experience spiritual growth as they
maintain a posture of respect and an open mind to new meaning in adapting to their host culture.
This interculturally competent approach will allow for a transformed worldview in the form of
reinforced core values that Jesus Christ in His sovereignty is present, protective, powerful, and
trustworthy. Awareness of God’s character in the new ways presented in the process of
developing intercultural competence contributes to spiritual growth as a relationship with God is
deepened.

Perhaps this section should be called “Continuing Remarks” because like spiritual growth
and intercultural competence, this study and its implications for me personally and professionally
as an adult educator will continue to make new meaning with time, reflection, and experiences.
When I embarked on this journey over three years ago, I thought I would study how adults learn.
I thought I would study how other adults learn. I did not consider I would also be learning in the process. As naïve as that sounds, I viewed the doctoral program as a series of tasks to complete regarding how others learn. Research this. Write that. Check off my to-do list. Suddenly, as I proceeded deeper into this exploration of spirituality and culture, I realized I was learning. In other words, I learned as I studied how others learn. Specifically and to my surprise, while conveying through this dissertation how others perceived spiritual growth and intercultural competence, I was developing in these areas, too.

Participants in this study taught me to seek application of I Peter 4:10-11 which says “serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace…so that in all things God may be praised.” And while I have neglected this in unimaginable ways, and will continue to do so, my participants echoed what my grandmother has always taught me, that I need Jesus. I did not anticipate how much God would use the Adult Education program at Penn State to teach me more about His character and purpose in life. What I initially thought was an academic pursuit continues to be a meaningful spiritual endeavor that has fortified my relationship with God in ways that transcend a conferred degree.

True to its mission, this program has taught me much about how adults learn. The intertwining of theory and practice over semesters of study sculpted my philosophy of teaching to value the uniqueness of individual learners, including their spirituality, and to acknowledge the social, historical, and cultural context that is inextricably linked to learning.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research question one: How do followers of Christ describe their spiritual growth in the context of a least developed country?
   A. In what ways do you foster spiritual growth?
   B. How would you describe your spiritual growth? Since living in a host culture?
   C. How has spirituality played a role in adapting to your host culture?
   D. What aspects of your home culture do you still rely on for fostering spiritual growth?
   E. What have you learned about your spirituality having lived abroad?
   F. How do members of the host culture, who also describe themselves as followers of Christ foster their spirituality?
   G. Would you attribute your spiritual growth to individual effort or corporate/community? How or why?
   H. What do you perceive helps or hinders your spiritual growth?
   I. How are those obstacles different from obstacles in the home culture?

Research question two: How do followers of Christ describe their development of intercultural competence in this context?
   A. Tell me about your every day life in _____ (host culture). What is daily life like there?
   B. Describe how you have adapted to your host culture?
   C. How would you describe your relationships with host culture members?
   D. How have you built relationships in your host culture?
   E. Where/how did you learn most about adapting to life in your host culture?
   F. What has been the most significant aspect in adapting to the host culture?
   G. What have you adopted/rejected from the host culture?
   H. How do you need to function effectively in your host culture? What does functioning effectively look like?
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