Sacrificial Dynamite: The Convergence of Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God: A Grounded Theory

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SACRIFICIAL DYNAMITE: THE CONVERGENCE OF DEVELOPED EMPATHY AND ONGOING RELATIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH GOD: A GROUNDED THEORY

by

Toran Scott

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational Leadership, Research and Technology Western Michigan University April 2018

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This grounded theory study examined how participants described and reflected on their lives and what led them to choose sacrifice. The study was grounded in a Christian understanding of sacrifice, defined as the willful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. Using in-depth, open-ended interviews and follow-up interviews to co-construct meaning, participants were asked to reflect on their childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood to reflect on and describe any messages, relationships, or experiences that they thought contributed to their eventual choice to sacrifice. The interviews were free-flowing and filled with beautiful and engaging stories.

The data were analyzed using a constructivist approach to grounded theory. There were five major and five secondary themes that bubbled up, with the top two major themes laying the foundation of the grounded theory that was developed. Although many of the themes played a role in the eventual choice to sacrifice, it was the combination of the top two major themes that, when combined, seemed to be the catalyzing ingredients needed to make the choice to sacrifice. These two themes were the development of empathy (most often through the experience of suffering) and an experience with God that led to an ongoing and growing relationship. This was not only born out in the data but was also cited as causal reasons for sacrifice by participants.
The grounded theory developed from the research is titled “Sacrificial Dynamite: The Convergence of Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God.” The findings added to and affirmed a number of studies that have been undertaken in the field of prosocial psychology. Prosocial behavior, generosity, and altruism are all similar concepts to what I have described as sacrificial action. This is still a relatively new field of inquiry and there is a need for further research on the concept of sacrificial action and what helps develop, encourage, and catalyze the action.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a follower of Jesus and one who has been given the privilege of serving His Church, I am most grateful for His compassion, kindness, and love throughout my life. I am keenly aware that most people do not have the access or means to experience the education I have received and I take this as another grace that He has given and recognize the responsibility to spend this strength on behalf of the weak and vulnerable, just as He has done for me.

I am incredibly grateful to my wife Brenda, who encouraged me on this journey before we had children and continued to encourage me throughout this journey even four kids later. She is a model of perseverance and the main reason I have been able to persevere as well. She has supported late nights and times away from the family, and when I was tired and unsure of continuing, her love and belief in me allowed me to stay the course. To my kids, Tayton, Isabella, Kingston, and Maximilian, my desire for each of you is that you would grow in your love for others and your love for God and that it would show through lives of sacrifice and love.

I am grateful to the modeling of my parents, who live lives of sacrifice that are leaving ripples around the world. I began this project in many ways because I wanted to understand better what made you click so I can be more like that. Thank you.

I am so grateful to Dr. Reeves and Dr. Palmer and other professors at WMU for their teaching and encouragement. It really allowed me to believe I had something valuable to offer. Dr. Reeves was a catalyst to some of my early research thoughts and I am so grateful that she was willing to sit on my committee.
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A final thank you to the participants of this study whose lives are salt and light, a model to follow, and are now some of my personal heroes. You exemplify the best of what it really means to believe that the upside-down kingdom of Jesus is actually a better way to live. Thank you.

Toran Scott
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Many, if not all, of the major world religions have as one of their core principles the need for personal sacrifice. Though sacrifice is not always defined in exactly the same way, the basic idea of giving up something for your fellow man is seen in Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and others. I will show how many of these world religions discuss personal sacrifice or what social psychologists call “prosocial behavior.” Because of my vocation as a Christian minister and the potential help this study may offer to other Christian ministers, this study will be anchored in the Christian religion. While the definitions, elements, characteristics, and nuance of the self-sacrifice construct cut across religions and even many secular philosophies (to some extent), this study will be confined to dealing with only those that connect or derive directly from the Christian religious traditions and doctrines. This restriction also facilitates the establishment of a defined context for the study, which is important due to the very fact that the understanding of self-sacrifice is so contextual.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus begins to explain what Christian self-sacrifice must look like.

Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever wants to lose their life for me will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?” (Luke 9:23-25, Today’s New International Version [TNIV])
When first-century Jews or Gentiles living in Rome heard these words, a picture was instantly lodged in their minds. It must have sounded strange at first because those that went to the cross did not rise the next day to do anything. The cross meant death in the first-century Roman world and Jesus’ words must have dealt a heavy blow to all who heard them. Jesus called those who would claim to be followers of his to a figurative death, the death of one’s will, one’s desires, and one’s selfishness because “whoever loses their life for me will save it.” It is the call to live in an upside-down kingdom where the first are last, where the king is a servant of all, and where the meek inherit the earth. The life of self-sacrifice is one of the core concepts of the gospel Jesus modeled and called his followers to.

If this is truly one of the core concepts of the good news Jesus brought, the question of what it looks like in practice must be answered. Jesus desires to set up a very different way of living, one that leads by serving (John 13), loves even enemies (Matthew 5:43-48), and finds life by losing it (Mark 8:34-38). This is the sacrificial ethic that Christ not only asks of those who would follow him but also modeled in the ultimate act of love.

There are two extremes that I believe must be understood to grasp the idea of self-sacrifice. To some extent, the concepts are difficult to understand because they deal with motives of the heart; however, I will attempt to describe them by describing a continuum. On one end of the continuum are those who care only for themselves and live their life to please their desires. On the other end are those who throw off all creature comforts and become a doormat with the thought that it makes them better than others. Both of these extremes have, at their core, selfishness. The difficulty that any researcher finds is that of motive. There is no way, other than through subject self-disclosure, to measure motive or to know exactly how it influences every sacrificial action. Action that is done only with the self in mind will be defined as not being
sacrificial. While there are extremes of wealth (hoarded) and poverty (where real need is unable to be met) that scripture deems unjust, the Bible neither condemns the godly rich nor praises the ungodly poor (Blomberg, 1999). Finding the balance Jesus called his followers to is difficult and potentially uncomfortable in a self-centered culture similar to ours, but it is not impossible. Once this sacrificial life is defined, the real difficulty actually begins: learning to live it day by day.

Though others have defined it many ways, Kraybill (2003) called this living in the “Upside Down Kingdom.” A kingdom requires a king, which is how Jesus is described. Jesus came to set up his heavenly kingdom on earth, of which he is the ruler. The Apostle Paul describes Jesus’ kingly authority in Colossians 1:15-18 (TNIV), in which he states that all things were “created through him and for him” and that “he is before all things and in him all things hold together.” In his book How God Became King, N. T. Wright (2012), one of the foremost New Testament scholars in the world, has devoted an entire book to the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) to explain how they present Christ as the King. Kings are allowed to decide how the kingdom should function. If one of the main points of the gospels is to show how Christ is the King and that Christians are living in his kingdom, then the onus on Christians is to understand not only what the king commands but how to actually obey those commands.

Thankfully for Christians, Jesus (the King) was described as being full of grace and truth (John 1:14), so although the truth of living the way Jesus modeled and commanded is not watered down, grace is always extended to those who invariably fall short. Christians must still pursue sacrificial love regardless of how difficult it may be to do so. This sacrificial striving is not done merely out of duty but should flow out of love for God and others (Matthew 22:37-39). The Bible also indicates that life is found when we live sacrificially, and though difficult and
costly, biblical sacrifice is better for all, including the one sacrificing (Matthew 16:24-26; John 10:10).

Problem Statement

If my role as a Christian minister is to help people understand and live the gospel (good news), if it is to teach them to live in this “upside down kingdom” Jesus has called his followers to, I must understand how best to facilitate this day-by-day growth. The Bible teaches that people have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1, TNIV) and therefore have various faculties, such as reason and intuition, to help people understand how decisions are made, why decisions are made, and what influences decisions. Therefore, as one who believes I have a responsibility to help people know and live the good news of scripture, I must do my best to understand what types of experiences, messages, and relationships might help a person to “take up their cross” and follow Christ (or anything else that the research indicates).

Through a review of the biblical theology of sacrifice in the Old and New Testaments, I constructed a Christian definition of sacrifice as “the purposeful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others.” By reviewing developmental psychology, I constructed appropriate developmental stages to study that included childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. By reviewing behavioral psychology, I realized that there has been research regarding prosocial behaviors that have many connections to sacrifice. I constructed three areas necessary to study when trying to identify similarities among the participants: experiences, messages, and relationships. This led to recognition that, although some pieces of this puzzle have been researched, no one has tied it all together, not even within the closest field of study, that of behavioral psychology.
Sacrifice is described throughout the Old and New Testaments. There is a strong ethic of sacrifice both for those within the faith community as well as for those outside of the faith community. In the book of Genesis, Abraham is asked to leave his land and go to another land that he did not know of. In the Jewish law of the Old Testament, there were commands about leaving the edges of your fields unharvested for the poor to harvest. Aliens and strangers in the tribal lands of Jerusalem were to be treated with kindness and shown hospitality.

In the New Testament, it is said that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend, the ultimate act of sacrifice. Taking care of widows and orphans was described as “religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless” (James 1:27, New International Version [NIV]). Jesus was the ultimate example of emptying himself (sacrifice of position) when he humbled himself to become a man (Christians call this the hypostatic union of Christ, that he was fully God and fully man) and ultimately humbled himself to die in our place.

For the purposes of this dissertation, self-sacrifice will be fully defined as the purposeful choice of relinquishing one’s rights or opportunities for temporal personal gain of possessions or positions for the sake of serving others. Many sociologists believe that altruism “characterized by an emphasis on the needs of the other, concern about his or her well being” (Bierhoff, 2002, p. 10) is possible and motivated by the other, not the self.

Christians are called in many biblical passages to imitate or become like Christ and He both taught and gave an example to follow that included self-sacrifice of temporal personal possessions and position. By identifying the two ideas of possessions and positions, I can more clearly identify those that have (though imperfectly) chosen this road, allowing a deeper understanding of how and why.
Developmental psychologists have determined that there are various stages of development that all humans need to pass through. Jean Piaget’s groundbreaking work on stages of cognitive development are often used as ways to help identify these stages. His stages of cognitive development—0–2 years old defined as Sensorimotor, 2 to 7 years old as Preoperational, 7 to 11 as Concrete Operations, and 11 to 18–20 as Formal Operations—helped the stage for developmental psychology. These stages are often referred to as childhood from ages 0–11/12, adolescence from 12/13–18/19, and now a newer developmental stage that Jeffrey Jensen Arnett has coined “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2007a). Although Piaget’s theory has held up remarkably well over the years, there was a limit in that his theory ended at formal operations around the age of 20. Arnett’s research, along with research from others, has shown that development actually continues, though in a new way, from the early 20s through the late 20s. This stage is called postformal thinking and is generally referred to as emerging adulthood. Those engaging in postformal thinking are learning to use pragmatism and reflective judgment, modes of thinking unavailable or not fully formed in adolescents (Arnett, 2007b). This is how I find the stages of childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood as good periods to mine for clues.

In addition, there is a growing body of research on prosocial behaviors, a behavioral psychology term closely related to the idea of self-sacrifice (sometimes described as altruism). Self-sacrifice could be considered a subset of prosocial behaviors; all self-sacrifice would be considered prosocial, but not all prosocial behaviors would be considered self-sacrificial. Over the last 40 years, the field of behavioral psychology has been producing a growing body of research, “which is no longer fragmentary, but contributes to a deeper insight into the psychology of altruism, empathy, and prosocial behavior” (Bierhoff, 2002, p. xi). There is still a
lack of qualitative study on adult participants regarding non-emergency prosocial behaviors (Bierhoff, 2002).

Some studies have asked similar questions, such as the Common Fire study by Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996), as well as the Holocaust Rescuer study (Oliner & Oliner, 1988) and Children of the Equal Rights Movement study (Rosenhan, 1972). The Common Fire study spent time interviewing people who they determined lived for the “common good” to see what characteristics they had in common. They found that many had a positive experience with someone outside their “tribe” (i.e., race, culture, socioeconomic sphere), which was described as a positive experience with “otherness.” The other two studies discussed above found recurring themes with regard to family relationships and how altruism was both modeled and messaged. Other findings are discussed in further detail in Chapter II. None, though, have looked specifically at what messages, relationships, or experiences individuals might have in common during the developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood.

Much of the prosocial research has focused on children. I have been unable to identify many studies dealing with adolescents or emerging adults and self-sacrifice other than those mentioned above and a handful of others. This leaves a number of questions unanswered, which will be addressed in this study.

My study will contribute to understanding whether there are experiences, messages, or relationships during childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood that are beneficial or necessary to embrace self-sacrifice. This will hopefully shed some light on how and why some are able to follow the model and calling of Christ and His Church to sacrifice positions and or possessions for the sake of serving others.
Significance

My hope is that this study will be significant for a few groups of people. For Christian ministers, this research may help identify certain messages, relationships, or experiences that are necessary to grow or shape individuals’ willingness or desire to engage in sacrificial living. It may also be helpful for both Christian parents as well as parents of other faith traditions that value the ethic of willful sacrifice for the sake of serving others for the same reasons mentioned above. I also hope that this may have significance for educators who are either required or allowed to include values-based education within their classrooms. If sacrificial living is a value seen as positive and worth pursuing, I can see how this study may be beneficial in helping those educators possibly frame or create various developmentally appropriate experiences, messages, and possibly even relationships for their students. Lastly, based on the fact that every major religion sees sacrificial service for others as positive, I would expect that many people the world over would find this research potentially helpful in understanding if there are certain messages, relationships, or experiences that may help us learn to live in this way.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate why, when, or how a person chooses self-sacrifice by looking for discernible similarities in experiences, messages, and relationships during childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood that may help to understand his or her choice. Self-sacrifice is defined as the purposeful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others and is closely related to the behavioral psychology field of prosocial behavior and the term often used within that field called altruism. Therefore, I will ask the following questions:
1. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors (often described as altruistic or prosocial behaviors) reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during childhood?

2. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during adolescence?

3. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during emerging adulthood?

4. How do those who reflect on those meaningful interactions and experiences think they helped them become the person they are today?

**Methods Overview**

This research is qualitative in nature, using grounded theory research. In-depth interviews were used to gather data, constant comparison was used to help identify emerging themes, and emerging themes were redistributed to participants to review in an effort to co-construct the meaning of their insights.

I used the framework of biblical theology as one lens to narrow the definition of self-sacrifice and to show the need for sacrificial behavior in those who claim to follow Jesus. I also used the lens of developmental psychology, which allowed me to focus on the developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. I also used the framework of behavioral psychology (specifically prosocial psychology) to help identify which three areas were looked at in each developmental stage, specifically, relationships, messages, and experiences. See Figure 1 for an illustration of the conceptual framework.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.
Christian self-sacrifice is being defined as “the purposeful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others.” Relationships are being defined as the personal interactions one has with other humans. Messages are being defined as the verbal and nonverbal cues individuals believe they are given regarding how they are to act, think, or feel. Experiences are being defined as the physical, logical, and emotional acts that happen to a person. Childhood is being defined as the approximate ages of birth through 11/12 years of age, Adolescence as 12–20 years of age, and Emerging Adulthood as 21–29 years of age.

Based upon the research discussed in Chapter II as well as personal life experience, I expected to find a number of important experiences formed in the midst of relationships and messages that will aid people in developing a lifestyle of self-sacrifice for the sake of serving others. As much as I think this may show up in my research, I also expected to find things that are unexpected since this area of inquiry is quite shallow. I also expected to find that there is no “magic concoction” of the three (or possibly more) areas that we will be looking at (experiences, messages, relationships) that guarantees a self-sacrificial lifestyle. With that said, there must be some things that are necessary or at least important to possess in order that humanity might be better equipped or more willing to sacrifice for the sake of those in need.

Summary

Nothing seems to be more powerful to the watchful observer than seeing an act of selfless sacrifice. For a Christian, there is no greater sacrifice than to willingly lay down one’s life for the purpose of sharing the love of Christ. In the late 1950s, a group of missionary families began trying to make contact with an unreached tribe in Ecuador. This Waorani tribe was known to be cannibalistic, violent, and aggressive, especially to those outside of the tribe. The missionaries felt called to reach out to these individuals to share the love of Christ. After a number of flyovers
in which gifts were dropped to the tribe in an attempt to show they had no hostile intentions, the missionary men decided it was time to attempt personal contact. They left behind their wives and children and landed their plane on a small strip of sand along the river. Sometime around 3 p.m. that day, the men were attacked by 10 Waorani, and though they were armed with rifles, no shots were ever taken. The story became a national news frenzy, with many major magazines publishing accounts and pictures of the martyred men. While these men were not the first to sacrifice their lives trying to reach a hostile jungle tribe with the love of Christ (a group of missionaries had been killed about 10 years earlier in Brazil), the coverage their story received allowed tens of thousands of Christians to hear of their sacrifice. As a direct result, there were over 600 people who sacrificed positions and possessions to become full-time missionaries to share the love of Christ with those who had not yet heard. They attributed their decisions to hearing of the sacrifice that these men made (Bjorlie, 2009).

As we are able to understand what types of messages, experiences, and relationships the group of subjects interviewed have in common as we listen to their stories, we may be able to know better how to inspire the action of sacrifice in those with whom we are privileged to share our lives.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is in three main sections: (a) sacrifice as defined in the major religious traditions, with a specific focus on how self-sacrifice in the western Christian tradition has been defined through the ages in biblical theology (in the Old and New Testaments) and historical theology (writings regarding self-sacrifice from church history); (b) developmental theories: cognitive, moral, and faith; and (c) sociological and psychological studies of prosocial behavior and related praxis or applied research, which will show from the literature why I am choosing to look into messages, relationships, and experiences.

Sacrifice in Major Religious Traditions

The tenets of the world’s major religions often provide abstract ethical principles to be applied and followed by the faithful. Some of these tenets are explained with concrete rules for behavior so they are not easily misunderstood or misapplied, but even in these concrete examples, we can follow similar themes through most of the world’s religions. The themes often show similarity; however, there are still very specific reasons or applications of the tenets (the underlying why) that can differ radically. For this study, however, I focus on the most common of these tenets that have application to the call for personal sacrifice, and I spend more time specifically addressing this theme in the western Christian tradition.

One common theme that can be traced is the importance of concern for others. The Talmud, which is a collection of commentaries and interpretations of the Torah (the first five books of the Jewish scripture), says that “Benevolence is one of the pillars upon which the world
rests” (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006, p. 10). In Islam, the Qur’anic word Zakah refers to charity and voluntary contributions as expressions of kindness and a means to comfort the less fortunate. The teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.) seem to teach a similar idea when he says, “Wisdom, benevolence, and fortitude, these are the universal virtues” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 10). Lao-Tze’s (604-517 B.C.) teachings, which are the basis of Taoism, also said that we should deal positively with others. Lao-Tze taught that to be a good person one must “help others in their straits; to rescue them from their perils” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 10). Fools Crow, one of the most revered medicine men of the Lakota nation, had this to say about the importance of concern for others: “We put the well-being of other people and of all nature first. We cling to this like a person clings to a raft on a roaring river” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 11).

The beliefs of benevolence and love for others are often discussed as the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would want them to do to you. This idea of a common rule of social behavior is found in many of the world’s major religious traditions. It is clearly seen in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Torah’s Leviticus 19:18 (NIV) says that you are to “love your neighbor as yourself.” In Luke 6:31 (NIV) of the New Testament, we again see the Golden Rule very clearly when Jesus says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Given the close relationship between Judaism and Christianity, it is not surprising to find such similarity (Dovidio et al., 2006).

We also see similar teaching in the teachings of Confucius when he says, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 12); from Taoism’s Lao-Tze: “To those who are good to me, I am good. And to those who are not good to me, I am also good. And thus all get to be good” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 12); from Buddhist teaching, “Consider others as yourself” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 12); and Hinduism, “Do naught to others
which if done to thee would cause thee pain: this is the sum of duty” (Dovidio et al., 2006, p. 12). The way the teaching is worded may vary from tradition to tradition, but the underlying theme of prosocial behavior with the obvious application of sacrifice being a normative response is easily seen. It is not surprising that the human tendency to “look out for number one” is often at odds with the Golden Rule and is often therefore applied in greater detail in most religious traditions. The fact that such specific prescriptions for prosocial behavior are needed points to the fact that there is a natural tendency for people to behave selfishly. Both religious and civil laws emerge typically because there are problems that need to be solved or behaviors that need to be changed (e.g., Schroeder, Steel, Woodell, & Bembenek, 2003). When social institutions such as religions find it necessary to develop specific rules of conduct to ensure correct behaviors and discourage inappropriate ones, it is reasonable to surmise that people are not conforming to the highest moral and social standards spontaneously or consistently (Dovidio et al., 2006). With this in mind, we will move on to a deeper discussion of sacrifice in the Christian tradition as we look through the lens of biblical and historical theology.

**Biblical Theology in the Old and New Testaments**

**Old Testament**

The idea of sacrifice is found throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. These concepts of sacrifice have been understood for years and are not new to biblical scholars. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Orr, 1915), actually shares these ideas in an easy-to-understand manner over 100 years ago. The encyclopedia says there are two ideas of sacrifice found in the Old Testament (as well as for the ancestors of Israel and primeval humankind). The first was an offering (or sacrifice) to restore broken relationships between God and mankind and between individuals. This is seen most effectively in the sacrificial system set
up by God (through Moses) and spelled out in detail throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The close relationship between this redemptive or restorative function of sacrifice and offering and the expulsion (from the garden of Eden) and separation of human beings from the Creator (Genesis 3:24) is emphasized by the writer’s close placement of Genesis 3:22-24 (the expulsion) and 4:1-4a (the gesture of good will/restoration through the offering of a sacrifice). This indicates a major function and meaning of sacrifice for the author of Genesis, that is, sacrifice and offering are as old as religion, and it appears that religion is as old as humankind (see Genesis 4:26). While there were many types (guilt, sin, peace, praise) and forms (animal, grain, fruit, drink) of sacrifice in the Old Testament, the most prevalent use of offering and sacrifices was for the purpose of restoring a relationship (Orr, 1915).

Although the sacrificial system is an interesting topic of study and one that must be at least mentioned due to the connection of the sacrificial system and the eventual sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (and therefore the ensuing commands to live and sacrifice as Christ did), it is the sacrifice of one’s possessions or positions for the sake of others found throughout the Old Testament that is more in line of what I will focus on in the study. This is the second idea of sacrifice found in the Old Testament. The sacrificial system set up by God to restore relationship between Himself and his people prefigures the sacrifice that Christ would ultimately make on behalf of humanity. It is based on the forward-looking act that we realize all sacrificial action is, for the Christian, a response to the model and teaching Christ left us. In the Old Testament, we have a number of passages that describe the need for self-sacrifice for the sake of serving others.

It is helpful to understand that the Old Testament can be broken into four major pieces: the Torah (the first five books that deal with the law and formation of Israel as God’s chosen people); the historical books (that deal with the formation of the kings of Israel as well as their
placement in the promised land and eventual captivity); the wisdom books (such as Job, Psalms, and Proverbs); and the prophets (major and minor). These books are always written (with the exception of some of wisdom literature) for the nation of Israel, which is where an individual would gain his or her understanding of sacrifice. A number of passages deal with sacrifice on various levels, and I will look at a few of these, grouping them within the four major sections of the Old Testament as previously discussed. Before we can jump into this, though, it is necessary to understand the mission of God and how that applies to Israel. Why did God choose Israel as a nation? What was his intent and purpose? Was it merely so that Israel could develop an identity distorted into a narrow doctrine of national superiority (which many argue has happened)? In his paper “Christian Mission in the Old Testament: Matrix or Mismatch” (n.d.), Wright has explained that God’s choosing of Israel was meant to be a blessing to all of humanity. He would bless Israel that they might be his hands and feet to bless the nations. Wright says this:

God’s declared commitment is that he intends to bring blessing to the nations: “all the families of the earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3). Repeated six times in Genesis alone, this key affirmation is the foundation of biblical mission, inasmuch as it presents the mission of God. The creator God has a purpose, a goal: blessing the nations of humanity. The same Genesis texts which affirm the universality of God’s mission to bless the nations also and with equal strength affirm the particularity of God’s election of Abraham and his descendants to be the vehicle of that mission. The election of Israel is assuredly one of the most fundamental pillars of the biblical worldview, and of Israel’s historical sense of identity (as N.T. Wright’s books on Jesus and the New Testament have shown very clearly). . . . The affirmation is that the Yahweh, the God who had chosen Israel, was also the creator, owner and Lord of the whole world (Deut. 10:14f), and that
Yahweh had chosen Israel in relation to his purpose for the world, not just for Israel. The election of Israel was not tantamount to a rejection of the nations, but explicitly for their ultimate benefit.

Wright is affirming that Israel was not simply to be an insular nation basking in the delight of God’s blessing; rather, they were to be an outward nation, blessing the rest of humanity through the blessings they receive from the hand of God. Israel was chosen at the outset to be prosocial and sacrificial, as we will see in the following texts. It was who they were supposed to be; it was part of their national DNA, what they were created to do and be. Let us now turn our attention to some of the texts that outline and give meaning to the idea of sacrifice of possession or position for the sake of serving others found in the Old Testament.

The idea of land redistribution is found in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 15 (as well as Leviticus 25) through the “year of canceling debts” and the celebration of Jubilee. The “year of canceling debts” was every seven years (the Sabbath year), while Jubilee was celebrated every 50 years or seven Sabbath years (scholars still debate whether it was actually the 49th year or the 50th year that was celebrated as Jubilee). Both of these years entailed laws that required sacrifice by the wealthy on behalf of the poor among all Israelis (although it did not apply exactly the same to foreigners residing among them). The following quotation from Deuteronomy 15:1-2 and 7-8 illustrates this canceling of debts and shows that those who had more were expected to sacrificially give property to those who had little.

*The Year for Canceling Debts*

> 1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. 2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD’s time for
canceling debts has been proclaimed . . . 7 If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. 8 Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.

The text goes on to command Israelites to be kind to fellow Israelites, to “give generously” because God had blessed them generously. It even discusses the fair treatment of foreigners living among them, and God commands them to be “openhanded” toward the poor and needy that lived in their land. People that had sold themselves into slavery to a family were to be set free, and not only set free but also given some of the family’s flock, some of their supplies of grain and wine, so the former indentured slave could begin again. There is no discussion as to how much from the flock or grain or wine supplies one was to give, but that it was to be generous because God had been generous to them.

We find a similar text in Leviticus 25 that describes not simply what was to be done every 7 years (as the Deuteronomy passage above does), but what else was to take place during the year of Jubilee (every 49th or 50th year). It is possible that there was the Sabbath year (year 49) and the year of Jubilee (year 50), where the land was to be returned to the original family that owned it, and for 2 years it was to lay fallow (rest). This was to be a time of celebration and a time for the land to rest. Israelis were to allow the land to produce fruit on its own, and they were allowed to live off of the produce but not harvest and sell the fruit. The land belonged to everyone, the poor (who just became less poor) and the rich (who had just sacrificed for those who were poor), and they both were granted equal access to the land along with animals that might also repopulate. We see another example of this sacrificial expectation taking place in Leviticus 25 (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994).
The need for the care of the poor among them was not something someone else was supposed to take care of. God explicitly says it is the people nearest the poor that are expected to sacrifice. They are to sacrifice what they have or what they are legally entitled to so they might help those in need. It is also interesting that they were supposed to help them (fellow Israelis) as they would “a foreigner or stranger.” This assumes that the people were expected to help foreigners and strangers, which again indicates some form of sacrifice. Matthew Henry’s Commentary had this to say about the text:

Poverty and decay are great grievances, and very common; the poor ye have always with you. Thou shalt relieve him; by sympathy, pitying the poor; by service, doing for them; and by supply, giving to them according to their necessity, and thine ability. Poor debtors must not be oppressed. Observe the arguments here used against extortion: to fear thy God; to relieve the poor, so that they may live with thee; so they may be serviceable to thee. The rich can as ill spare the poor, as the poor can the rich. It becomes those that have received mercy to show mercy. (Bible Gateway, n.d.)

In Deuteronomy 19, we see God telling the Israelites that they need to set aside “cities of refuge.” The culture of the day allowed for an “avenger of blood” who was a relative that was supposed to exact revenge for the murder of another relative. There was no police force set up so it was up to citizens to exact revenge for all sorts of issues, murder being one of the (if not the) most egregious. These cities (six in all) were set aside for a person who accidentally murdered someone.

This arrangement applied only to cases where the death was not premeditated. The case had to be investigated by the authorities of the city, and the willful murderer was on no account to be spared. He was regarded as an impure and polluted person, and was
delivered up to the avenger of blood (Deut. 19:11-13). If the offence was merely manslaughter, then the fugitive must remain within the city till the death of the high priest (Num. 35:25). (Biblical Proportions, 2005)

This early account of sacrificial (what social psychologists call prosocial) behavioral expectations shows how Israel as a nation was to sacrifice for the well-being of their citizens. The level of sacrifice is shown in what was expected for the setting up and maintaining of these cities. The innocent person could be Israeli or foreign, and no distinction was to be made between the two. According to the Talmud (an ancient Jewish commentary on the Torah), roads were to be made double the width of normal roads and were to be maintained and all obstacles removed. All roads to the cities of refuge were to be marked with large signs saying “refuge” and pointing in the direction of the closest city. The city was to protect any innocent person, regardless of the sacrifice it might require to do so. The citizens of the city were to allow the person to live among them until the death of the High Priest (which would free the accidental murderer and allow the individual to return home without fear of retribution). They would have to provide the person a means to provide for himself, a place to live, and any other basic necessities.

This is one of the ways that God was showing the nation of Israel that it was their duty to sacrifice for the well-being of others. The sacrifice may or may not have been the same for the citizens of the six cities, but it was absolutely expected. Many Christian scholars see parallels to the cities of refuge and the sacrifice of Christ on behalf of humanity (who can flee there, why they flee there, what the death of the High Priest represents, among others). Hess (1996) explains it this way:
For the Christian, the relation of the high priest to the practice of asylum, as much as any of the high priest’s roles, anticipates the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His death is explicitly tied with the removal of sin and guilt once for all (Heb. 9:11–10:18). Joshua 20:9 allows anyone, Israelite or alien, the right to take advantage of these havens. The forgiveness of Christianity is also open to anyone, without regard to their background (Gal. 5:6).

(p. 307-308)

In Leviticus 19:9-10, Israel is commanded to sacrifice for the poor and the foreigner (the other) by leaving some of the harvest for them. They were told not to “reap the very edges” of their fields and not “go over [their] vineyard a second time” but “leave them for the poor and foreigner” (2001, NIV). This command is repeated in Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:29-21.

These sacrifices were applied in real life through the story of Ruth. This is the story of Ruth, a non-Israeli woman, who married an Israeli man in her own country. When Ruth’s husband dies, her mother-in-law Naomi releases her to go back to her hometown (she is young and could easily remarry and have a family). Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law even though Naomi must return to Israel and decides to leave everything behind to be with her (unlike Naomi’s other daughter-in-law who decides to leave and go back to her hometown). Ruth eventually finds love and marriage through the distinguished and honorable Boaz. This classic short story has been called the “most beautiful short story ever written” (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994, p. 368).

In this beautiful story we see sacrifice in action through two separate events. The first is the gleaning of the fields. Apparently, even though Israelis were commanded not to reap their entire field but leave some for the poor and foreigners, many were not following this command
to sacrifice. Ruth was aware of the attitudes many land owners had and, in Ruth 2:2, hoped she would locate a field in which she would “find favor” (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994). Boaz not only was kind to Ruth but went far beyond what was expected of him. He ordered his servants to protect her and not “touch her.” A single woman who was both foreign and poor was particularly vulnerable to all kinds of terrible treatment, even in Israel. She was also allowed to drink from the water jars the men had filled (which was a privilege not usually given to gleaners), she was allowed to share in the noon meal (in which Boaz himself served her), she was allowed to glean from the sheaves of grain collected (not simply that which fell to the ground), and Boaz also ordered his servants to pull stalks from the bundles they hadn’t tied up and leave them for her to pick up. In basically one day, Boaz had allowed Ruth to gather enough food to last for a few weeks; this was very sacrificial on his part (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994).

Boaz begins to take a liking to Ruth, and though he is much older than she is, she seems attracted to him as well. Boaz is a kinsman (related to her deceased husband) but not the closest. It was the duty of the kinsman redeemer to do a number of different things, but three things are of importance in this story. The kinsman redeemer was supposed to buy back land that a relative had sold, as the land was supposed to stay in the family. The kinsman redeemer was to marry a relative’s widow who had no children and provide an heir for the deceased, and the kinsman redeemer was also supposed to provide for the poor in their family. While there was a closer relative to Naomi (and therefore Ruth) who had the duty to be the kinsman redeemer, he asked to be relieved of his duty and Boaz was both willing and able to step in and fulfill the duty. This meant that he was to purchase the land of Ruth’s father-in-law (Naomi’s deceased husband), he would marry Ruth and provide her deceased husband with an heir (their first child), and he would also provide for Ruth and ultimately Naomi as well. While this is a beautiful love story, it
is also a beautiful story of sacrifice (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994). This story was recorded for all Israel for all time so that they would recognize the providence of God as He spurred people on to love and sacrifice for “the other.”

King David was a man of great faith, great victory (see David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17), and great leadership (still revered as the greatest king in the nation’s history). He was also a man of great failure (see David and Bathsheeba in II Samuel 11) and ultimately great redemption. David was called a “man after God’s own heart,” and while there are many stories in the Old Testament that point to why he was called this, there is one that shows the kindness and sacrifice of this man. Though it was common in the culture of that day to kill off all remaining heirs to the throne when a new king came into power, David nearly does the opposite.

In II Samuel 9:1 (NIV), David asks, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathon’s sake?” Jonathon was Saul’s son and one of David’s closest friends. They find one son of Jonathon’s named Mephibosheth, who “was lame in both feet” (II Samuel 9:3). David has Mephibosheth brought to him and Mephibosheth is afraid of what is going to happen. David shows him kindness by giving him all the land that was owned by his grandfather Saul. He goes one step further and allows Mephibosheth to eat at the king’s table for the rest of his life. David did not have to sacrificially give all of this land to Mephibosheth (it was undoubtedly very valuable) and certainly did not need to give a standing invitation to eat with him at the king’s table, but David was “a man after God’s own heart” (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994). This again is another text in which sacrifice and care for others was lived out and preserved as a model for future generations.

The book of Proverbs is wonderful collection of wise sayings and instructions for living a useful and effective life. Though Proverbs lies within the larger group of biblical writings known
as wisdom literature, the short pithy statements on effective and good living give it a flavor
different than other biblical wisdom literature. Proverbs are quite straightforward in their wisdom
and have been described as short pregnant sentences or phrases whose meaning is applicable in
many situations. As with all Hebrew poetic discourse, the proverbs use different types of
parallelism. It is the constant playing one statement off of its negative or opposite sister
statement or one idea being paralleled with a slightly different expression that allows the reader
to understand quite quickly the purported wisdom being given out (Ross, 1991). With this
understanding of the proverbs, I will share just two passages, with others to be found in
Appendix A.

Proverbs 3:27-28 (NIV) – Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in
your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back later; I’ll give it
tomorrow”— when you now have it with you.

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV) – Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the
rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor
and needy.

These two texts (along with the many others found in Appendix A) show that there was a
strong ethic of prosocial behavior expressed through sacrifice within the wisdom community of
Israel. These texts show that sacrifice was an expected part of living a good and godly life.

The prophets are used by God to communicate His words and are most often found
chastising the nation of Israel for her adulterous ways and calling her to repentance. It is within
this context that we are often told of the expectations that God has for the nation regarding
sacrifice on behalf of those in need. There are two texts in particular that I would like to look at
that show what God is referring to. It is important to note that sacrifice was not the only issue (or
even the main issue) that the prophet calls Israel to repent of, but rather the broader need for justice toward those who deserved and needed it. It is within this broader issue of justice that the ethic of sacrifice for others is shown as an important piece of what it means to be a God-fearing Jew (or Christian). The call to the people in both of these instances is to do what is expected of them and one of those things requires justice and sacrifice on behalf of others. While there is certainly a need for repentance and atonement for sins, often God tells them to stop sacrificing animals (for the sake of restoring relationship or atoning for sins, as was discussed earlier) and start living rightly (sacrificing on behalf of those in need and standing up for what is right and just).

We see this in Isaiah 58:1-12 (NIV), where God speaks to Israel, telling them that he is not impressed with their praise or their acts of righteousness (like fasting and praying). God speaks in verses 6-9:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

We see here what God is after. He is not impressed with their outward acts of righteousness; he knows that they are doing the outward act but their hearts were not yet willing to do what was right. They are fasting as a means of gaining favor with God as they purposefully
withhold food as a spiritual discipline, but God is not interested in a meaningless fast. When they are unwilling to do what is right, the withholding of food has no meaning, no spiritual connection. He calls out to them to declare what a good “fast” looks like: “to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke . . . to share your food with the hungry, to provide the poor wanderer with shelter” and clothe the naked (vv. 6-7). Social concern was not meant to be an isolated episode but a way of life for God’s people. They were to spend not just their money but their lives as well (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994).

We see a similar theme in the book of Jeremiah the prophet. God speaks through Jeremiah to the nation of Israel, chastising them for their wickedness and rebellion. In at least three places in Jeremiah, we see the sin of the people (and especially the leaders) is their unwillingness to “administer justice every morning; rescue from the hands of their oppressors those who have been robbed (Jeremiah 21:12, NIV). We are told in Jeremiah 22:16 of the king who followed God and was blessed: “He defended the cause of the poor and the needy.” In Jeremiah 5:26-28, God speaks this through the prophet:

Among my people are the wicked who lie in wait like those who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch people. Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not seek justice. They do not promote the cause of the fatherless; they do not defend the just cause of the poor. “Should I not punish them for this?” declares the Lord.

God is clear that being His people required justice on behalf of those that could not defend themselves, and justice always requires sacrifice—of time, of possessions, even sometimes of life. You cannot have justice without sacrifice. God was angry at their rebellion
because it was an affront to His holiness, but it was also because it meant that one of the main reasons He had chosen to dwell among and bless the nation of Israel was so they could be His hands and feet to His creation, especially that which was created “in His own image” (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

**New Testament**

In the New Testament, one finds the idea of sacrifice applied in two major ways. The first is in regard to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In this application of sacrifice, Jesus becomes the restorative or redemptive sacrifice that restores the relationship between God and man once and for all.

The one central idea of New Testament writers is that the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross is the final perfect sacrifice for the atonement of sin and the salvation of men, a sacrifice typified in the various sacrifices of the Old Testament, which are in turn abrogated by the operation of the final sacrifice. (Orr, 1915)

The second main idea is that of Christian living as sacrifice. This idea guides the definition of Christian self-sacrifice as the willful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. This idea begins with the model set forth by Christ himself in the gospels (see Matthew 20:25-28) and is picked up by the rest of the New Testament writers, being especially noticed in the Pauline epistles (see Philippians 2:5-8 and II Corinthians 8:9). “By Jesus, Paul, the author of Hebrews, Peter, and John, life is viewed as the life of sacrifice. Christ’s death is at once the cause, motive, measure, and the dynamic of the Christian’s sacrificial life” (Orr, 1915). According to Orr, the Christian’s life of sacrifice is the logical consequence of Christ’s sacrificial death, which becomes the persuasive call for the Christian’s sacrificial life (see Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:21):
For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (II Corinthians 5:14,15 NIV)

According to Orr (1915), there are at least three ways that the New Testament calls for Christ followers to sacrifice for the sake of God and others:

1. The Christian is to present his personality (Romans 15:16) to God. Paul commends the Macedonians for “first” giving “their own selves to the Lord” (II Corinthians 8:5, King James Version [KJV]).

2. Christians must present their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1, KJV). In the old system of sacrifices the animals were offered as dead; Christians are to offer their bodies, all their members with their powers, to God a “living sacrifice,” that is, a sacrifice that operates in lives of holiness and service (see also Romans 6:13,19).

3. Christians must offer their money or earthly possessions to God. Paul speaks of the gift from the church at Philippi as “a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18, KJV). This gift was to the apostle a beautiful expression of the sacrificial spirit imparted to them because they had the “mind” of Christ who “emptied himself . . . becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, KJV). The author of Hebrews (13:16) exhorts his readers, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Orr, 1915).
The Christian tradition of sacrifice rests on the teachings of scripture as they reveal Jesus the Christ to us. For the sake of narrowing the scope of inquiry to something manageable and easy to identify, outward or public acts of sacrifice are summed up as sacrifices of positions or possessions. These are two outward acts of sacrifice that coincide with the Christian view of sacrifice as following a model laid down by Christ in the gospels and more fully explained by the rest of the New Testament writers. I will first look at texts found in the four gospels, where Jesus instructs and models the need for sacrificing possessions and/or positions for the sake of others, and then I will move onto other texts throughout the New Testament written by the apostles concerning the application and call for such sacrificing.

**Gospels (the eye-witness accounts of Jesus teaching and ministry).** One of the main stories that illustrate Jesus’ instruction regarding sacrifice of positions or possessions for the sake of serving others is recorded in the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The story involves a conversation Jesus had with a Jewish religious leader. The text follows as such from Luke 10:25-37 (NIV):

> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “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.” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man,
he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus (a Jewish man and a follower of the Jewish scriptures) illustrates to the Jewish religious leader the overriding ethic of the Christian tradition. It is in the sacrificial “doing” that the Samaritan man (a people group hated by Jews at this time) becomes the model for godliness and sacrifice. The Samaritan man was more than an unlikely hero; this act of compassion and sacrifice was unheard of and completely caught the audience off guard. It was the Jewish priest and Jewish Levite that should have been the obvious hero and model of godliness, but they forfeit this opportunity because of their unwillingness to sacrifice, while the Good Samaritan sacrifices both time and possessions (not to mention potential cultural standing) to care for the hurt man. Jesus was in many ways prefiguring his own sacrificial death on behalf of the world (described by scripture as the spiritual enemies of God).

Acts (early church history as recorded in the Bible) and Epistles (letters of instruction to early churches). The next text we will look at begins by explaining the initial sacrifice of Jesus. Though he was absolutely God (“in very nature”), he was willing to humble himself to take on flesh and become human (linking Himself forever with humanity). It moves
into his final sacrifice of allowing Himself to experience death on a cross (the most humiliating way to die in ancient Rome) at the hands of those He has come to save.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV)

He sets the example of sacrificial service with the earth-shattering event (literally there was an earthquake at his death, as described in Matthew 27:51).

The next text we will look at (II Corinthians 8) is using Jesus as the example of why others, in and around Corinth, ought to give sacrificially to other believers, the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem, that are in need. Paul writes to these churches that the Macedonian churches had given generously and in spite of their extreme poverty. In fact, Paul says that their sacrificial giving was done with joy and that they urged him to take it to those suffering in Jerusalem. He is making a case as to why the Corinthian churches should also give generously and uses the sacrifice of Jesus as his main reason for encouraging their sacrificial behavior.

Though the entire passage has application for Christians to sacrifice on behalf of others, special attention to verse 9 is important, as it is the reason Paul gives for this sacrifice. The following quotation helps to explain the II Corinthians 8 passage, particularly verse 9.

In turning his attention to Christ in 8:9, Paul wants to remind the Corinthians (“for you know”) that Jesus himself is the example of how grace joyfully expresses itself in love. Paul’s references to Jesus’ being “rich” and “poor” do not signify his economic status, but his preexistence with the Father (cf. Gal. 4:4; Phil 2:6) and his entering into the humble circumstances of this world, including death (cf. Rom. 15:3; Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Tim.
3:16). Decoded, this means that Jesus underwent his incarnation (i.e., his becoming “poor”), in spite of his position in heaven (i.e., the fact that he was “rich”), in order that we might be saved (our justification through Jesus’ death means our becoming “rich” through his “poverty”; cf. Rom. 10:12; 11:12; 2 Cor. 5:21; 6:10).

Jesus’ incarnation illustrates that the “grace” expressed in love is the willingness to give up one’s own rights for the sake of meeting the needs of others. The “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which is usually a benediction (see 13:14; cf. Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; Philem. 25), is therefore employed in 2 Corinthians 8:9 as Paul’s defining example of what it will mean for the Corinthians to be like Jesus in this circumstance: to consider the needs of the saints in Jerusalem more important than their own. What Christ has done for the Corinthians (the “grace of Christ” as a benediction), the Corinthians are to do for the Jews (the “grace of Christ” as a model). (Hafemann, 2000, pp. 337-338)

In this text the apostle Paul explains that Jesus gave up what He had (and we needed) so that we might have what He had, namely peace with God the Father and eternal life. This becomes Paul’s main argument for why the churches in Corinth ought to give, and ultimately not simply why they need to give, but why we need to give as well. When we sacrificially give, we become “more like Christ” as we follow the example He set.

It is interesting to note that Paul is not speaking of a sacrifice that abuses the giver. He is speaking of sacrifice so there might be equality. He says that sacrifice (in this case, possessions) should not make them “hard pressed” so others are relieved. He does use the Macedonian church, though, as an example of sacrifice that indicates their giving did come at a cost to themselves (in verses 1-5), but it was worth the cost to help. Paul is not saying that we should
become poverty-stricken so others can live in luxury, but that it is still acceptable to give to the point of pain as the “privilege” of sacrificial service is worth the pain. Sacrifice is expected and praised in the early church (and now as the text is applied to us today) both out of their excess as well as to the point of giving “beyond their ability,” which came from a generous heart and a desire to help with the “goal” being “equality.”

Although there are other passages in the New Testament that describe the need to sacrifice, these examples lay out the general case for the willful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. This ethic of sacrificial living has been seen throughout the history of Christian living from the earliest followers (the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, John the Baptist, Justin Martyr, Origen, Hippolytus, and Augustine, to name a few) through recent history (David Brainerd, Benjamin Bannaky, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Wilberforce, Mother Theresa, Sarah Flower Adams, Maximilian Kolbe, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many, many more). Sacrifice of positions or possessions has been understood by Christians from around the world as a prevailing ethic from the time of Christ until today.

**Developmental Theories**

There are four major developmental theories that need to be addressed: Jean Piaget’s Cognitive Developmental Theory, Lawrence Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development, James Fowler’s Stages of Faith Development, and Jeffrey Jansen Arnett’s Postformal Development.

**Cognitive Developmental Theory**

Jean Piaget wanted to understand how people (specifically infants) learn and grow in their learning. For Piaget this meant “the ability to more accurately represent the world, and perform logical operations on representations of concepts grounded in the world” (Ivancevic & Ivancevic, 2007, p. 72). It was Piaget’s desire to understand how schemata (schemes with which
a person views the world) emerge and are acquired. He developed a four-stage theory of
cognitive development. The first stage is sensorimotor, which happens roughly between birth and
2 years of age. Piaget asserted that the main task of this stage was the development of essential
spatial abilities. These special abilities were broken down into six subcategories that are
irrelevant to the study at hand. The second stage is preoperational, which lasts from
approximately 2 years old to 7 years old and is characterized by symbolic functioning (using
symbols to represent something that is not physically present), centration, egocentrism, intuitive
thought, and an inability to conserve. The third stage is concrete operational, which occurs
between ages 7 to 11 and is characterized by the appropriate use of logic. The final stage covers
years 12 through adulthood and is called formal operations. This stage is characterized by the
ability to think abstractly and make decisions based upon information available (Ivancevic &
Ivancevic, 2007). Piaget is important not so much because of the content of the developmental
theory, but more because, in many ways, he is the father of developmental theory.

Moral Development Theory

James Kohlberg was a developmental theorist and admirer of Piaget. In his doctoral
dissertation, he developed Moral Development Theory. Although Piaget had discussed moral
development, he allowed for two stages that change at the beginning of the formal operations
period (between 10 and 12 years old). Kohlberg came to find three stages, with two levels in
each stage. Kohlberg interviewed a cross section of society in his original findings, sharing with
them a hypothetical story in which a man (Heinz) steals a drug to try to save his dying wife after
the druggist refuses to sell it to him at a price he can afford (which is still five times higher than
the cost to the druggist). Kohlberg was less interested in whether respondents thought it was right
or wrong, but why they felt that way (Crain, 1985). The six stages found in the three levels are discussed below.

**Level I: Preconventional morality.** Level I consists of the first two stages.

**Stage 1: Obedience and punishment orientation.** Kohlberg’s first stage is very similar to Piaget’s first stage of moral thought. Children assume that powerful authorities decide what is right and wrong, and they must obey these authorities without question. A child in stage 1 typically says that it is wrong to steal because stealing is bad or that you will get punished if you steal. It is possible for a child to say it is all right to steal as well, if their reasoning is that Heinz asked and he didn’t steal something big so he won’t get punished. The consequence of the action to the individual is what matters most here (Crain, 1985).

**Stage 2: Individualism and exchange.** In this stage, children begin to recognize that different authorities might hand down different rules. Different people have different viewpoints. It incorporates the idea of fair exchange, or “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”

“Heinz,” they might point out, “might think it’s right to take the drug; the druggist would not.” Since everything is *relative*, each person is free to pursue his or her *individual* interests. One boy said that Heinz might steal the drug if he wanted his wife to live, but that he doesn’t have to if he wants to marry someone younger and better looking (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 24). (Crain, 1985, p.119)

Kohlberg calls this stage *preconventional* because the children see everyone as individuals and do not speak as members of society. Morality is external to them; right and wrong comes from authorities and is not up for debate.

**Level II: Conventional morality.** Level II consists of stages 3 and 4.
**Stage 3: Good interpersonal relationships.** Children entering their early teen years begin to see morality as more than simple deals between people. They can see themselves as belonging to a family and community and think they should live up to the expectations of the community and behave in “good” ways.

Good behavior means having good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust, and concern for others. Heinz, they typically argue, was right to steal the drug because “He was a good man for wanting to save her,” and “His intentions were good, that of saving the life of someone he loves.” Even if Heinz doesn’t love his wife, these subjects often say, he should steal the drug because “I don’t think any husband should sit back and watch his wife die” (Gibbs et al., 1983, pp. 36-42; Kohlberg, 1958b). A typical stage 3 response is that of Don, age 13: “It was really the druggist’s fault, he was unfair, trying to overcharge and letting someone die. Heinz loved his wife and wanted to save her. I think anyone would. I don’t think they would put him in jail. The judge would look at all sides, and see that the druggist was charging too much.” (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 25). (Crain, 1985, p. 120)

Don looks at the character’s motives and traits by using labels like “loving,” “unfair,” and “understanding,” and Kohlberg calls this conventional morality because Don assumes that the entire community would share similar attitudes (Crain, 1985).

**Stage 4: Maintaining the social order.** Crain (1985) says that stage 3 reasoning works best in two-person relationships with family members or close friends who can make a real effort to get to know the other’s feelings and needs and will try to help. However, in stage 4, he says that Kohlberg uncovers that individuals become more broadly concerned with the society as a whole. The emphasis moves to obeying laws, respecting authority, and doing one’s duty so that
order is kept in the society as a whole. Subjects in stage 4 begin to understand that, although Heinz’s motives were good, they cannot accept theft since chaos would ensue in a society where people were allowed to do whatever they wanted (even) if their “motive” was good. Although a person at stage 1 might sound similar to a person in stage 4, there is a huge difference in the underlying thought process. The person in stage 4 sees himself as a full-fledged member of the society and understands the function of laws for a society (that being order) (Crain, 1985).

**Level III: Postconventional morality.** Level III consists of the final two stages.

**Stage 5: Social contract and individual rights.** Crain (1985) sums up Kohlberg by saying that those in stage 4 morality are concerned with keeping society functioning well, while those in stage 5 recognize that a smoothly functioning society is not necessarily a good one. At stage 5 people begin to ask the question, “What makes for a good society?” Society is something that they can separate themselves from and evaluate on a theoretical level. The questions of what values a society should have and what rights individuals should have within that society begin to shape the moral thinking of a person in stage 5.

Crain (1985) again explains Kohlberg by saying,

Stage 5 respondents basically believe that a good society is best conceived as a social contract into which people freely enter to work toward the benefit of all. They recognize that different social groups within a society will have different values, but they believe that all rational people would agree on two points. First they would all want certain basic *rights*, such as liberty and life, to be protected. Second, they would want some *democratic* procedures for changing unfair law and for improving society. (p. 121)

**Stage 6: Universal principles.** While stage 5 respondents wish to move toward the conception of a good society by suggesting that there are certain individual rights that must be
protected and that we ought to settle disputes through democratic process, there is a missing link for the stage 6 responder. In stage 6, a person recognizes that democratic processes do not always result in decisions that we sense are entirely just. The majority may, for instance, vote in a law that somehow suppresses the minority. Stage 6 thinkers want to think through what defines the principles we use to achieve justice. In stage 6 morality, all individuals must be treated equally and impartially, respecting the basic dignity of all people as individuals. The principles of justice are universal, applying equally to all. To think in stage 6, one must see the situation through the other party’s eyes in an impartial manner. Kohlberg sees stage 6 as more of a theoretical stage, and even in his scoring schemes, he stopped scoring stage 6 entirely (Crain, 1985).

Although Kohlberg’s scale has to do with moral thinking and not moral action, there is some support for the hypothesis that there are correlations between the two. Blasi (1980) reviewed 75 studies of the relationship between moral thought and moral action and concluded there is a relationship between the two. While there are other variables that need to be addressed to fully flesh out the relationship, it is important to note the connection. One variable that is worth noting may be the simple desire for an individual to feel consistent in what he or she thinks and does. This is the reason that it is important for a study such as this to be aware of Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory, as it shows the necessity of studying adults (those capable of higher-level moral reasoning) with an eye toward where they may fall on Kohlberg’s scale. If we see that only those who are able to think in stage 5 or 6 are able or willing to sacrifice for the sake of others (as some might surmise), we will then know there is a need for helping people engage with situations that will push their thinking beyond whatever level they are currently at (taking into consideration their appropriate cognitive developmental abilities to do so). According to Crain (1985), there have been studies done that show that students (who are
generally interested) benefit from a facilitated discussion that challenges them to think beyond their current moral stage. Crain goes on to say,

The Kohlberg-Blatt method of inducing cognitive conflict exemplifies Piaget’s equilibration model. The child takes one view, becomes confused by discrepant information, and then resolves the confusion by forming a more advanced and comprehensive position. The method is also the dialectic process of Socratic teaching. The students give a view, the teacher asks questions which get them to see the inadequacies of their views, and they are then motivated to formulate better positions.

(p. 134)

These data are important to apply if we are to move people through the stages, as appropriate, through dialogue and challenge to their current frames of thinking, so they may one day engage in self-sacrifice for others.

Faith Developmental Theory

The easiest way to explain Fowler’s (n.d.) faith stages is to simply include this helpful chart (Table 1) that lays out the theory in its most basic means. Since Fowler’s initial work, a stage 0 has been added by some psychologists. It is not necessary to discuss why a Stage 0 has been added since the original publication, or to discuss the explanation of stages 1 and 2, as these have little or no bearing on the research I have conducted. I would, however, like to explain stages 3-6 a bit more to explain how they will help in understanding some of the responses and stories later in the study.

Stage 3 faith is what Fowler (n.d.) believes most adults hold to. This stage begins usually around the time of adolescence and is very much concerned with what “we” believe. That is, what does the community people belong to believe about right/wrong and good/bad? Individuals
in this stage have an ideology but may not realize it, and those who differ with their ideology are considered “the Other” (John Mark Ministries, n.d.). It seems a possibility that some might embrace self-sacrifice as a lifestyle in this stage if it is one of the social mores of the community. According to Fowler’s explanation of stage three faith and distinctness from “others,” it would seem difficult to put into practice for an extended period of time. Hopefully the research may shed some light on this.

Table 1

*Fowler’s Faith Stage Theory*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>~Ages</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>3–7</td>
<td>Intuitive-predictive</td>
<td>Egocentric, becoming aware of time. Forming images that will affect their later life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>6–12</td>
<td>Mythical-literal</td>
<td>Aware of the stories and beliefs of the local community. Using these to give sense to their experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>12–</td>
<td>Synthetic-conventional</td>
<td>Extending faith beyond the family and using this as a vehicle for creating a sense of identity and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>early adult</td>
<td>Individuative-reflective</td>
<td>The sense of identity and outlook on the world are differentiated and the person develops explicit systems of meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>adult</td>
<td>Conjunctive</td>
<td>The person faces up to the paradoxes of experience and begins to develop universal ideas and becomes more oriented toward other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>adult</td>
<td>Universalizing</td>
<td>The person becomes totally altruistic and he or she feels an integral part of an all-inclusive sense of being. This stage is rarely achieved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

((Fowler’s Faith Stage Theory, n.d.)
Stage 4 faith is described as a stage of angst and struggle. I like how it is described here:

This is a stage of de-mythologizing, where what was once unquestioned is now subjected to critical scrutiny. Stage four is heavily existential, where nothing is certain but one’s own existence, and disillusionment reigns. This stage is not a comfortable place to be and, although it can last for a long time, those who stay in it do so in danger of becoming bitter, suspicious characters who trust nothing and no one. But most, after entering this stage, sense that not only is the world far more complex than his or her stage three mentality would allow for, it is still more complex and numinous than the agnostic rationality of stage four allows. (John Mark Ministries, n.d.)

Stage 5 faith moves on from the rationalism and angst of stage 4 to the recognition of paradox and transcendence. Fowler (n.d.) says this is the stage that a person grasps the reality behind the symbols of the inherited system he or she was raised in and acknowledges and is often drawn to the symbols of other’s systems. What stage 4 seemed to rob us of, stage 5 seems to re-infuse a new beauty into the system of belief, even with its apparent or potential flaws.

Again, I like how it is described here:

In stage five, the world, demythologized in stage four, is re-sacrilized, literally brimming with vision. It is also imbued with a new sense of justice that goes beyond justice defined by one’s own culture and people. Because one has begun to see “the bigger picture” the walls culture and tradition have built between ourselves and others begins to erode. It is not easy to live on the cusp of paradox, and due to its radical drive towards inclusivity, the mind struggles to assimilate and integrate faster than it can work through its cultural and psychological baggage. It is an overwhelming, ecstatic stage in which one is radically opened to possibility and wonder. (John Mark Ministries, n.d.)
Stage 6 is similar to Kohlberg’s stage 6 in that it is universalizing and only the elite seem to be able to attain this level. Interestingly enough, they seem to be the same people mentioned as examples: Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Ghandi. Fowler (n.d.) explains it like this:

Persons described by stage six typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality. In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. In their penetration through the obsession with survival, security, and significance they threaten our measured standards of righteousness and goodness and prudence. Their enlarged visions of universal community disclose the partialness of our tribes and pseudo-species. And their leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of nonviolent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance (p. 200). (cited in John Mark Ministries, n.d.)

It would seem logical that we would find those who have sacrificed positions or possessions for the sake of serving others as being in a stage 5 faith (if not stage 6). It seems to be possible, though, that the catalyst for making the decision to sacrifice may have been induced while a person was still in a stage 3 faith. It seems hard, however, to imagine that one who was actively sacrificing could continue to live in a stage 3 faith, as it can be difficult, if not impossible, to love the “other” through sacrificial service and maintain their absolute “otherness.” If continued self-sacrifice is desirable (which seems logical to me) and we find that stage 3 faith cannot support continued sacrifice, then we will want to look into ways to move
people through stage 4 and ultimately into stage 5 (and 6 if possible). There seems to be little research as to how this is effectively done, but there has been some surmising by Fowler himself. Fowler (1981) says, “I believe that when a community expects and provides models for significant continuing faith development in adulthood its patterns of nurturing the faith of children and youth will change and become more open-ended” (p. 295). The difficulty for religious institutions is that, as Fowler (1981) says, they “work best if they are people with a majority of committed folk best described by Stage 3” (p. 164).

This makes sense when we remember the dominant characteristics of individuals in stage 3 faith. They are interested in what the community believes rather than what they or others believe, and the focal point of authority resides in the group’s consensus often realized in the leadership. Thompson (1999) explains this well when he says, “These types of people have strong allegiance and identification to the institution. They are willing to commit themselves to it. They will follow its leaders and deeply value the social contact and approval of its members.”

Thompson (1999) goes on to explain how stage 4 individuals are not nearly as useful to the institution. They will accept the leadership’s direction and the norms of the community only when it matches their own judgment, and they tend to be loyal to self over institution. Their desire to deconstruct myths and symbols can be devastating to those at the core of the institution that are at stage 3 and rely on symbol and myth as the bedrock of their faith. Thompson says that the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) church in some ways has “gone so far as to bind ourselves, institutionally, to Stage 3 with doctrine and policy.” He says that the LDS church does its best to exert peer pressure to return them to the fold (and I think this is true of most, if not all, religious institutions). If they become too vocal, they are often called out or coerced to silence, and the community worries that they are “losing their testimony,” which Thompson sees as a
predominantly Stage 3 concept “and not entirely consistent with ‘faith,’ which can carry us on to higher stages.”

Those in stage 5 may not be as slavishly loyal in devotion as those in 3, but they do value the institution and tend toward a more deeply rooted faith, and one cannot move to Stage 5 (or 6) faith without moving through Stage 4 (Thompson, 1999). It is interesting to note that Fowler (1981) himself has addressed this issue about the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith. Fowler says,

While unable to speak for others, I am convinced that the normative image of adulthood envisioned in Christian faith leads out toward Universalizing [Stage 6] faith. That is to say, discipleship to Christ, if radically followed to full maturity, would bring persons to a way of spending and being spent in their lives that would express loyalty to the rule of God and in covenant relations with a commonwealth of being. In light of this, we ask ourselves, how can faith communities avoid the coerciveness of the modal development level, and how can they sponsor appropriate and ongoing lifelong development in faith?

. . . My vision for such a community as this begins with taking ongoing faith development in adulthood seriously. I believe that when a community expects and provides models for significant continuing faith development in adulthood its patterns of nurturing the faith of children and youth will change and become more open-ended.

(p. 295)

Postformal Development Theory

The final piece to our developmental review comes from the recent work of Jeffrey Jansen Arnett and others who have been expanding on Piaget’s groundbreaking theory of cognitive development to discover a whole new developmental stage that takes place after
adolescence. It was commonly understood that adolescence led into adulthood sometime around the age of 20, when Piaget’s stage of formal operation was complete. “In fact, research indicates that cognitive development often continues in important ways during emerging adulthood. This research has inspired theories of cognitive development beyond formal operations, known as postformal thinking (Sinnott, 1998; 2003)” (Arnett, 2007b, p. 72).

There are two aspects of postformal thinking that occur in emerging adulthood that are most notable: pragmatism and reflective judgment. Many theories of postformal thinking that emphasize pragmatism have been developed by individuals such as Basseches in 1989, Labouvie-Vief in 1990, 1998, and 2005, as well as Sinnott in 2003. “These theories have in common an emphasis that the problems faced in normal adult life often contain complexities and inconsistencies that cannot be addressed with the logic of formal operations” (Arnett, 2007b, p. 72). The pragmatism of emerging adulthood can be differentiated from the logical thinking of adolescence by the recognition that life brings a growing awareness of how social factors as well as factors specific to a particular situation must be taken into account when trying to approach problems and difficulties (Arnett, 2007a).

Reflective judgment is another piece of cognitive development in emerging adults. William Perry has proposed this theory as early as 1970 and again in 1999. Reflective judgment is the ability to “evaluate the accuracy and logical coherence of evidence and arguments” (Arnett, 2007b, p. 73). He studied college students in their late teens and early 20s and found that they tended to engage in dualistic thinking; that is, they generally see situations and issues in polarized terms with little room for in-between views. He noticed that the ability to use reflective judgment tended to occur more in the mid to late 20s and allowed individuals to be able to recognize that there are always at least two sides to every story and often more than one
legitimate view of an issue in debate. Even the biblical book of Proverbs speaks to reflective judgment when it reminds that “in a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines” (Proverbs 18:17, NIV). Because there is still so much cognitive development happening during emerging adulthood, it seems important to see how these new ways of thinking may help individuals develop in their ability to sacrificially give up of their positions or possessions for the sake of serving others.

Social and Behavioral Psychology

Biology

The study of prosocial behavior is a mix of two disciplines (social and behavioral psychology) and seeks to understand “behavior that benefits others” (Hinde & Groebel, 1991, p. 5). Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) define prosocial behavior as “voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals” and are “defined in terms of consequences for others; they are performed voluntarily rather than under duress” (p. 3). This is a newer field of research, albeit a growing one. They quote Fetchenhaur et al., saying that while antisocial studies have “long been the subject of investigation, interest in the development of prosocial behavior only started in the 1970’s” (pp. 93-94). They explain that starting with sociological and anthropological studies done by Turnbull in 1972, Latane and Darley in 1970, Bar-Tal in 1984, along with others, researchers began to ask the questions of where prosocial behaviors come from and how this behavior grows and manifests itself (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). The research has gone in a number of directions in the last 40 years, but most flows out of either biological considerations or cultural considerations, that is, nature and nurture. I will look at the two fields briefly here and what they have added to research, as well as some of the underlying assumptions each seems to bring to the research.
According to Eisenberg and Mussen (1989), biological factors have been researched for some time, with some of the most prominent research being conducted by Edward Wilson, a prominent biologist at Harvard University. In 1975, Wilson published a book, *Sociobiology*, in which he had studied insects and animals that appeared to exhibit prosocial behaviors. According to Wilson, chimpanzees are the most altruistic of all animals, often sharing food that had been acquired, by donating it to other chimps that asked and sometimes sharing without even being asked to do so (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

How animal altruism can be explained has been a point of discussion for some time now. Wilson and some other biologists invoke the evolutionary concept of *kin selection*. This idea is a broadened view of natural selection, where animals make self-sacrificing actions to increase the probability that close relatives will survive, thus preserving the sacrificer’s genes. Other sociobiologists, like Trivers, who published works in both 1971 and 1983, suggest *reciprocal altruism* as an explanation. The underlying idea is that the behavior might be altruistic in that it entails danger and no immediate benefit to the altruist but may invoke a reciprocal act at some future time (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

While there is no doubt that humans have the biological potential for altruistic actions—otherwise they could not perform them—this fact is not sufficient evidence that individual differences in altruism result from evolution or are genetically controlled. Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) explain that while there has been empirical evidence that some forms of prosocial behavior may have a genetic basis, as Rushton, Fulker, Neale, Nias, and Eysenck published in 1986, and Matthews, Batson, Horn, and Rosenman did in 1981, even Wilson himself maintained that human genes “have ‘given away most of their sovereignty,’ believing that perhaps 10% of human social behavior has a genetic basis” (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 39).
Stephen J. Gould, though admiring of Wilson’s work, has posited a social evolutionary approach to altruistic behavior. This has been discussed more in the work of Campbell (1982, 1983, as cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989), where he states that

through social mechanisms of child socialization, reward and punishment, social restricted learning opportunities . . . and the like . . . sufficient retention machinery exists for a social evolution of adaptive social belief systems and organizational principles to have taken place (Campbell 1975, p. 1107). (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 40)

Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) concur with a 1981 work by Lumsden and Wilson (the same Wilson spoken of earlier) in their belief that both genetic and cultural factors influence the development of social behavior, including prosocial actions. Eisenberg and Mussen say that humankind inherits certain temperamental personality characteristics and the potential for learning a wide variety of social behaviors (nature or social biology). Individual differences in socially adaptive cooperative and altruistic behaviors are, by and large, the products of social evolution and social learning.

Culture

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, many studies were done to evaluate how well children of different cultures cooperated and shared. Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) offer an overview of many different studies to explain how they revealed a consistent pattern that children of all cultures will cooperate with others if the group is rewarded as a whole. If the instructions were changed so that only individuals were rewarded (and not the group as a whole), cultural differences became pronounced. Children reared in traditional rural subcultures and small, semi-agricultural communal villages cooperate more readily than children reared in modern urban subcultures. Eisenberg and Mussen shared, for example, how studies showed that
Mexican school-aged children from rural villages and small towns were far less competitive than their urban middle-class Mexican, Mexican-American, and Anglo-American peers (Kagan, Knight, & Martinez-Romero, 1982; Kagan & Madsen, 1971). Furthermore, studies done with children raised in Kibbutzim and Arab villages in Israel were shown to be more cooperative than their urban counterparts (Shapira & Lomranz, 1972; Shapira & Madsen, 1974). Eisenberg and Mussen shared similar studies (cited in their 1989 work) that have been done on rural and urban children in Columbia (Marin, Meija, & DeOberle, 1975), Korea (Madsen & Yi, 1975), Australia (Sommerlad & Bellingham, 1972), New Zealand (Maori children) (Thomas, 1975), Zambia (Bethlehem, 1973), and the list could go on.

Culture plays an obvious role in defining the prosocial behaviors of children. Numerous studies show us the messages of the culture that children are raised in seem to be a dominant force in shaping their behaviors (at least as it was studied with regard to competition and cooperation). To know accurately why we have the differences, we need descriptions of the socialization techniques that stimulate or restrict the development of these tendencies. “Cross cultural investigators usually make only very general references to socialization practices, assuming that children acquire the norms, values, and behavior of their own culture by imitation, identification, or reinforcement” (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 48).

The late Beatrice and John Whiting of Harvard University did significant research in the field of prosocial behavior. Their research in 1973 and 1975 was some of the first to systematically pool data from various cultures so that correlations between cultural variables and individuals’ personalities and behavior could be investigated. After studying 134 children ages 3-11 in six cultures (Kenya, Mexico, Philippines, Japan, India, and the United States), the Whitings were able to find that cultures that were more altruistic in their behaviors tended to live together
in extended family groups, held female roles as important, and came from simpler societies with less centralized government.

[In] simpler kin oriented societies, with economies based upon subsistence gardening, altruistic behavior is highly valued and individual egoistic achievement frowned upon. Women must work in the fields, and the children must help in order for the family to subsist. To offer help, to support others, and to be responsible are taught both by precept and practice. . . . On the other hand, in the more complex societies, where no child knows what he is going to be when he grows up, individual achievement and success must be positively valued. To help a friend sitting next to you in an examination is defined as cheating. To ask for help from specialists such as mechanics, dressmakers, shopkeepers, psychotherapists, priests, or servants is expected and paid for in cash rather than in reciprocal services. (Whiting & Whiting, 1975, p. 64)

The cultural variable the Whitings found that was most closely associated with altruism was early task assignment or the expectation of taking on responsibility for tasks related to the family’s economic security. According to Eisenberg and Mussen (1989), this finding has been replicated in the laboratory setting. They state that children induced to assist others on one occasion are more likely to assist others in the future. Children who were not asked to help another were less likely to do so on their own in the future. If children were provided with their first prosocial experience, they were more likely to repeat the prosocial behavior at a later time.

Again, Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) share how Urie Bronfenbrenner’s study of children in the Soviet Union in 1970 offers further evidence to support this hypothesis. Bronfenbrenner found that Soviet school curriculum was designed to instill a sense of social responsibility by asking older students to help younger students with their work. This assignment seemed to
achieve the intended outcome, as Bronfenbrenner said that the children developed a strong sense of consideration and responsibility for others.

Most of the studies done with regard to prosocial behavior in children revolved around measures of cooperation that benefit the actor and the other person or of prosocial actions that were at a low cost to the actor. In most of the studies, the prosocial behaviors were directed to family members or with reciprocity from others. It is therefore wholly possible that cultures that seemed to indicate a higher level of altruism in their children may not differ at all in performing these acts when there is direct sacrifice on their part or if the prosocial behavior is done on behalf of a stranger. The literature indicates that culture plays a role in shaping the roots of prosocial behavior through socialization; however, there are too many variables left unaccounted for to see culture as the dominating or main influencer of prosocial behavior. There is still a wide range of prosocial actions within each culture, and some children are consistently cooperative and generous while others are not. According to the literature, there is a stronger influence than culture in socialization, that being the family (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

**Family**

According to Eisenberg and Mussen (1989), the family is the main contributor to socialization in the early years. I will look at what the literature says about how the family promotes or inhibits prosocial behavior, as well as how the family strengthens or weakens children’s internalized motivations for altruistic action. Eisenberg and Mussen look at three areas that I have changed slightly, which will be the basis for my areas of inquiry. Eisenberg and Mussen argue that while there are a number of self-conscious attempts by families (parents, specifically) to teach children prosocial behaviors, there are as many, if not more, subconscious teachings through imitation or identification (what I call *messages*), as well as nature of the
family milieu and parent-child interactions (what I call *relationships*) that contribute directly to a child’s progress toward (or away from) prosocial behaviors. I have combined Whiting and Whiting’s 1975 study that showed that cultural experience matters in forming altruistic behavior, along with Daloz et al.’s (1996) findings that experiences with “otherness” and group experiences help people live for the “common good,” to create the final category that I used as a basis for my research questions (I call this *experiences*). It is important to note that messages, relationships, and experiences are often closely tied together, sometimes even overlapping, as will be seen in the following literature. They still seem to be the best categories with which to observe and identify various themes.

**Messages**

Messages can be verbal and nonverbal, purposeful and accidental. Much of what has been discussed previously with regard to culture’s influence on prosocial behavior falls into the category that I am labeling messages. I am defining relationships as ongoing interactions a person has with another person, which makes relational connections impossible with “culture” and therefore fits best in the category of relationships. I am defining experiences as some event that individuals have with others or by themselves, which may be viewed in a positive or negative light.

Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) cite a number of studies that have tried to determine how modeling and identification play a role in the sending of messages of prosocial behavior to children in the family setting. Numerous studies have been done to understand whether modeling impacts a child toward prosocial behavior, as well as what types of modeling tend to work best. Many of the experiments allowed two groups of students to observe an adult model playing a game and winning some tokens as a prize. The experimental group observed the adult model
donating half of her winnings to poor children, whereas the control group only saw the model win and receive the prize but did not observe the model donating anything (the model was usually called out of the room and therefore did not donate). Those in the experimental group were very generous, matching the model’s behavior closely, while the control group gave very little (Rice & Grusec, 1975, as cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Eisenberg and Mussen shared that although not every study yielded clear cut results (Lipscomb, Larrieu, McCallister, & Bregman, 1982), most other studies were able to replicate the findings of Rice and Grusec (Bryan & Walbek, 1970; Grusec, Kuczynski, Rushton, & Simutis, 1978), among others. They explain that the majority of the findings indicate that children are likely to imitate the prosocial behaviors of models they observe. They even share some research (Rice & Grusec, 1975; Rushton, 1975; Rushton & Littlefield, 1979) that suggests that even relatively brief exposure to prosocial modeling can have some generalized and lasting positive effects.

There were a number of experiments that also helped to identify the types of modeling that were most successful. Models who had the power to grant prizes of some sort or who were nurturing and caring had more influence over the behaviors of aloof, matter-of-fact, and unresponsive models. None of these experiments are able to replicate the family environment, as the model was a stranger and observed only for short periods of time, whereas in the real world a child will experience nurture much more frequently and over extended periods of time. In a real family environment, “nurturance may well be expected to have more profound and lasting effects on imitation” (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 71). Yarrow et al. conducted a study in 1973 (cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989), that, although too in-depth to discuss here, had some very interesting findings. When children were modeled symbolically (through pictures) and “lived” through an actual helping experience by a nurturing model, they found that 84% were able to
imitate the behavior 2 weeks later in a different environment, whereas only 24% did so in the pretraining situations. Seeing a model engage in prosocial behavior both symbolically and in practice seemed to be the optimal condition for the development of prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Models seem to work on two levels: an informational level (competencies, knowledge, aspirations, etc.) and a motivational level. By transmitting performance standards of what is possible in the face of specific difficulties in environmental tasks, the model actually exerts a motivational influence on the subjects (Bierhoff, 2002). Bierhoff also comments on the power or influence that a model has as well, referencing research from Grusec in 1971, where powerful models exerted more influence on prosocial behaviors than less powerful models.

Research indicates that retention processes that work in our cognitive representational system are important. Social values can guide an individual toward prosocial behavior when they are activated from memory.

Values of benevolence may elicit prosocial behavior under appropriate circumstances when they are pre-activated by priming (Macrae & Johnston, 1998). The powerful effects of priming have been demonstrated with respect to memory processes and decision making, leading to the conclusion that much of social behavior is under the control of retention processes (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). (Bierhoff, 2002)

Modeling, or what we do, has often been believed to be more powerful than what we say; however, this is not necessarily the case. Studies have shown that modeling is an invaluable tool for the shaping of prosocial behaviors in children, but whether it is more important than words has been a point of inquiry for some time. In fact, early investigators did indicate that what people did was more important than what they said in influencing subsequent behavior. While
earlier studies (early 1970s) have shown that modeling (indirect messages) seems to have a
greater immediate impact on prosocial behavior, the better indicator for long-term effectiveness
actually may be in what was said, not what was done (direct messages). Eisenberg and Mussen
(1989) state,

According to more recent research, direct suggestions and instructions may have as much
immediate influence as modeling and may perhaps, in the long run, have more marked
and enduring effects. . . . It may be inferred that clear verbal communications serve as
cognitive mediators—knowledge encoded as general rules, principles, or norms—that are
recalled and applied later and in other situations. (pp. 87-88)

In one study of children ages 7-10, attribution theory was examined as a motivator for
prosocial behavior. Attribution theory applied to prosocial behavior basically says that those who
are intrinsically motivated will be more likely to behave prosocially to themselves and others
with long-lasting effects than those who are extrinsically motivated (Weiner, 2006). After the
children donated some of their winnings (from a game) to charity, the experimenter-model told
one group, “I guess you shared because you’re the kind of person who likes to help other
people,” thus helping the students to believe that they were intrinsically motivated to share. To
another group, she said, “I guess you shared because you thought I expected you to. . . . When
I’m here with people playing the game, I expect them to give while I’m watching,” thus helping
the students to believe that they were extrinsically motivated. To a third and final control group,
the model simply said, “You shared quite a bit.” Later, when the children were left alone to play
the game by themselves, those who (as attribution theorists would predict) believed the
motivation to give came from within donated more to charity than either of the other two groups
(Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). This lends credibility that both non-direct and direct messages
influence prosocial behavior, but direct messages seem to aid in long-term movement toward prosocial behaviors, and direct messages that are internalized have even longer-lasting effect.

Studies have also been done on adult altruists dealing with gentile rescuers of Jews during World War II and “Freedom Riders” of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s. One such study was conducted by Oliner and Oliner (1988), who studied 406 rescuers of Jews and a matched sample of non-rescuers. Oliner and Oliner had this to say about their findings:

What distinguished rescuers was not their lack of concern with self, external approval, or achievement, but rather their capacity for extensive relationship—their stronger sense of attachment to others and their feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others, including those outside their immediate familial or communal circles. . . . The help they extended to Jews was rarely the result of a perception of Jews as particularly worthy, but was rather a reflection of their characteristic way of determining moral values and actions. . . . Although no one developmental course inevitably produces an extensive person, we can provide a composite portrait from the significant differences that distinguish rescuers and non-rescuers. It begins in close family relationships in which parents model caring behavior and communicate caring values. Parental discipline tends toward leniency. . . . It includes a heavy dose of reasoning. . . . Dependability, responsibility and self-reliance are valued because they facilitate taking care of one-self as well as others. Failures are regarded as learning experiences. (pp. 249-250)

Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) walk through a few other studies done with adults that had been Freedom Riders during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Those who made great sacrifices to the cause (tagged as “fully committed”) were studied alongside those who participated but were not fully committed (tagged as “partially committed”). Both groups were
found to be equally strong advocates for the equality of whites and blacks, but they had experienced different kinds of parental modeling. Those who sacrificed much (active for a year or more in the struggle, often sacrificing homes or jobs, or postponing education) had excellent modeling from parents who talked about altruism with them as children but also lived it out in front of them. Those who were partially committed had parents who talked about the injustice but did not necessarily do anything about it. These partially committed participants talked of parents who “preached one thing but practiced another” (Rosenhan, 1972, cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Relationships

A number of authorities believe that prosocial behavior is directly related to the strength of relationship a child has with his or her parents, as well as the overall family environment and the type of child-rearing practices exercised. Several studies have been conducted on the relationships between parents and children with regard to prosocial development and can generally be placed into two categories: those that focus on general parent-child relationship with regard to nurture (warmth, affection, attachment, harsh treatment, etc.), and those that focus on prosocial consequences of specific disciplinary practices such as reward, punishment, and reasoning (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Different studies have been conducted using the Answorth Strange Situation test, which examines attachment of infants to their mothers at 12, 15, or 18 months of age. The procedure consists of eight brief episodes in which the infant is introduced to an unfamiliar room, toys, a strange adult, and two short separations from the mother and then reunions with her. The infant’s behavior during the two reunions with mother is used to assess attachment. Securely attached children seek proximity to and contact with mother at her return. Insecurely attached infants
seem to not care or actually avoid contact. Mothers of securely attached children were described as sensitive and appropriately responsive to their infants’ needs and signals (i.e., crying, smiling, glances, etc.), whereas mothers of insecurely attached infants do not manifest these characteristics (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Ainsworth, 1979, cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Further studies indicated a strong connection with infant attachment and the long-term maturity toward prosocial behavior. Eighteen-month-olds who were securely attached were social with peers and strangers, readily obeyed parents, and showed more concern for a crying adult than did insecurely attached peers. Securely attached infants also showed continued growth in prosocial behavior through preschool, where these children were social leaders, generally sensitive to peers’ needs and feelings, and sympathetic to others in distress. Unfortunately, children who were insecurely attached as infants tended to be hostile and socially isolated in preschool (Londerville & Main, 1981; Sroufe, 1983; Waters, Wippman, & Sroufe, 1979; Weston & Main, 1980, cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Furthermore, a study done in 1985 among economically disadvantaged 1-3 year olds, some from abusive environments and some who were not abused, were observed at a day-care center. More than half of the non-abused children responded with concern, sadness, or empathy to a peer in distress, but no abused child ever showed these responses. In fact, abused children often reacted to a distressed peer with fear, aggression, or anger. All of these responses were very rare among the non-abused children (Main & George, 1985, cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

The only thing that I was unable to find is the long-term connections between those infants that are securely attached to their parents and the nature of their relationship to their parents as adults. If there was research that followed these children into adulthood, it could be
helpful in evaluating the responses I received from my adult subjects. As it stands now, there would seem to be only limited ability to recall this information when interviewing the subjects, as memory only goes so far. Even if I could interview each subject’s parents, we would have to rely on subjective self-analysis from the parent (and what parent wants to say that they had insecurely attached children?). There were also a number of studies done on disciplinary styles and their ability to move children toward prosocial behavioral responses. Parents who were considered authoritative but not authoritarian who used loaded emotional reasoning with their children when disciplining seemed to have the greatest impact on increasing altruism with their children. When they strongly and emotionally reasoned with their children, asking them to recognize what they had done to the other child (what they did that caused stress and required discipline), it was found that those children were more likely to make reparations and apologies (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Again, while very interesting and worth taking note, it did not come up much within the interviews that I conducted. There was some minor discussion of this as interviewees talked about the relationships they had with parents, but nothing that led to any conceptual categories and nothing that seemed to have any bearing on the grounded theory.

Although family relationships are some of the strongest relational influences an individual receives (as well as the most researched), they are not the only socialization agents a person interacts with. Peer influences on prosocial behavior, though not widely studied, have been shown to make a difference. I was able to find only a few studies cited in Eisenberg and Mussen (1989) that are shared below. One study showed that aggressive action, if reinforced by peers, is strengthened (Patterson, Littman, & Bricker, 1967) and, if modeled by peers, is often imitated in children (Bandura, 1973). Positive peer influences have also been seen in severely withdrawn nursery school children when they were exposed to televised models of peer
interaction, helping them become markedly more sociable (O’Connor, 1969), and children who had a strong fear of dogs even approached and petted dogs after observing peers playing with the animal (Bandura, Grusee, & Menlove, 1967). Although peer influence wasn’t discussed extensively in the interviews, it did come up a few times, which makes these studies cited by Eisenberg and Mussen worth noting.

Modeling of peers is one of the main ways peers influence prosocial tendencies. Strong and plentiful evidence supports the idea that children who see peers model prosocial behaviors are much more likely to imitate those actions, especially if those models are rewarded for those responses (Strain, Cook, & Apolloni, 1976, cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Certainly there is much more study needed, especially how peer influence works during adolescence when youth are beginning to form their own identity and consciously (and unconsciously) breaking away from their parents.

Experiences

Early assignment of responsibility was discussed earlier but needs to be addressed more in depth as it seems to have a big impact on the promotion and internalization of prosocial behaviors. Baumrind’s 1971 and 1988 studies (cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989) showed that parental pressures put on children to act maturely by taking on appropriate household chores were associated with instances of social responsibility, altruism, and nurturance to others.

Whiting and Whiting (1975) also had similar findings in their cross-cultural study. In cultures where children were assigned responsibilities to care for younger siblings or work to contribute to the family economy, it was found that these children were more helpful and supportive of peers and family members than children in other cultures. Bronfenbrenner’s 1970 study (cited in Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989) of children in the former Soviet Union also suggested
an association between assigned helping tasks and continued prosocial behavior. Eisenberg and Mussen also refer to several experimental studies (Eisenberg, Cialdini, McCreath, & Shell, 1987; Staub, 1970, 1979) that were consistent with the previous two naturalistic studies. One creative study in particular (Maruyama, Fraser, & Miller, 1982) asked groups of Halloween trick-or-treaters to donate some of the candy they received to hospitalized children. In some groups, no one was designated as being responsible for collecting the donations; in other groups, one child was randomly selected as responsible for collecting donations from the group, and in other groups all of the children were made personally responsible. As predicted, the assignment of responsibility to everyone in the group elicited the most generous contributions (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Daloz-Parks (1996) wrote a book, *Common Fire*, about people who lead “lives of commitment in a complex world” (the subtitle of the book), seeking to understand what made them “tick.” In the book, a number of themes emerged from the over 100 interviews with people chosen for their commitment to the common good. The writers struggle to define the term *common good*, recognizing that those involved in the study may even have contradictory ideas of what this phrase entails. At a minimum though, they describe common good as having a

- global scope, a recognition of diversity, and a new vision of society as composed of individuals whose own well-being is inextricably bound up with the good of the whole
- [and] also suggests broadly shared goals toward which members of the community strive—human flourishing, prosperity, and moral development. (p. 16)

The authors have backgrounds that include political science and educational psychology, constructive-developmental psychology, theology, and international development, and they were
educated and also educators in prestigious universities such as Princeton and Harvard. They were aware of their perspectives and how they have interpreted their various perspectives and did expect to find that home life for children, intensive group experiences in adolescence, and mentors in young adulthood (among a number of other things) would probably play key roles in fostering this commitment to the common good. They found a number of surprises in their research: The importance of didactic moral lessons, elaborated content of religious belief, and events that created a dramatic shift in life direction seemed to make little difference. One of the most powerful patterns to emerge was completely unexpected, that of the need to have a pattern of engagement with “otherness.” This means that the people they interviewed had a positive relationship with someone outside of their “tribe” or community, someone who was “other.” These were not usually isolated singular experiences but patterns of relational connections in which empathy and understanding were fostered. Though there are many important nuances to each of the themes they describe in the results of the research, only the major ideas will be touched upon.

First, they found that those who were committed to living for the common good had, on the whole, solid roots in a community. Community could have the connotations of family, and/or a group of people that cared for the needs and well-being of the person. They felt as though they had a place or “tribe” to which to belong that they could call home or family. Mentors also found a large role in the idea of community as well as mentoring groups. They also found that most participants had some sort of positive relationship or experience that took them out of their community (or tribe) and gave them an “engagement with otherness” (Daloz et al., 1996, p. 71). This positive relationship or experience with someone different from themselves allowed them to move beyond the centrism of their tribe to a more global awareness and acceptance.
Second, Daloz et al. (1996) found that there were a number of “habits of the mind” that needed developing, namely the practice of dialogue (“the reciprocal exchange with our environment” [p. 109]), interpersonal perspective taking (“the ability to sense feelings and put myself in someone else’s shoes” [p. 111]), critical systemic thought (“the capacity to identify parts and the connections between them as coherent patterns” [p. 113], and dialectical thought (“the ability to recognize and work effectively with contradictions” [p. 120]).

The last major idea that they brought out from this study was the ability of many respondents to identify the messages (both positive and negative) they received and have the courage to “reimagine” those messages that were negative. Many simply were able to begin imagining the move beyond the current culture or ethos they found themselves a part of into something greater. It was the recognition of symbols and stories and their effect upon the respondents that allowed them reimagine the messages they received and gave them the ability to live for the common good (Daloz et al., 1996, pp. 131-152).

I stumbled upon this research a year or so after desiring to engage in my area of research regarding sacrifice, and it was so helpful in defining much of what I had yet to put down in words. Dr. Larry Daloz, one of the authors of the book, has been very encouraging of my desire to engage in this study. On at least a couple of occasions through our few conversations, he told me how important these studies are and the need for continued study in this area of sacrifice for others, as there has not been much research into this line of inquiry. There continues to be research done on children and prosocial behavior (Mares & Woodard, 2005; Wilson, 2008), but the trail goes cold with regard to how sacrificial adults reflect on the messages, relationships, or experiences that led them toward their adult choices. It is my desire to add something to this field of study that would make the authors of Common Fire proud.
Summary

There has been quite a bit of research into prosocial behaviors over the last 50 years. This research has looked into possible biological and sociological links, and the research seems to indicate that both play a role, although sociology seems to be the dominant shaper of prosocial behaviors. Much of the research has focused on children through the use of test and control groups, leaving a vacuum in the research of adults, especially about how they reflect on the messages, relationships, and experiences they encountered growing up. Little research has been done on adults, and even fewer studies yet regarding adults and self-sacrifice. This seems to be such a necessary topic of study considering the new nature of the global “flat” world we live in today.

Much of the research has pointed out sociological variables such as culture, family, modeling, teaching or preaching, etc., and how they affect prosocial behavior (especially in children). There has also been a lot of research into the different input that individuals need and different tasks they must master during developmental stages in order to advance into the next developmental stage. There is, however, still a hole in our knowledge on (especially in the adolescent and emerging adult stages) on what exactly might contribute to the choice to live a sacrificial life for others. There is certainly a hole in how adults who have chosen to act sacrificially for the sake of serving others reflect upon the messages, relationships, and experiences they had in their pre-adult lives and what they think contributed to their choices.

The Christian religion has built a strong case for its adherents’ need to sacrifice for others, both in its sacred texts as well as in writings and models throughout its history. It seems to make sense in light of this that looking at what messages, experiences, and relationships those who are living sacrificial lives for the sake of serving others had during their various
developmental stages might help us better understand how they were able to make the decision to do so. We know that not all who self-describe themselves as Christian are actively sacrificing for the sake of others. Studying those who have or are doing this on a grand scale might help us understand how we might help the masses engage in more sacrificial behavior for the sake of others.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Purpose and Methods

In this chapter, I explain the specific method of grounded theory that I used for this study, what it looks like, what it hopes to accomplish, and what makes it credible research. I do this by explaining the method of grounded theory used in this study, its general goals, development, theoretical underpinnings, and general make-up. I look at the population used to make up this study, understanding why they were chosen and how that fits into the methodology used. I also discuss how data were collected, what procedures and processes were employed in the collection and coding of the data, and, finally, the approach to the data analysis.

Grounded Theory

I used grounded theory concepts and methods to understand how some adults choose to live a lifestyle of self-sacrifice rather than succumbing to cultural tendencies of putting self first. The goal of grounded theory research is the development of a theory. The researcher seeks to ground the theory in the data, hence the name “grounded theory.”

Grounded theory research emphasizes discovery through description and verification (Imel, Kerka, & Wonacott, 2002). In grounded theory, the investigator “assumes an inductive stance (that is, to reach a conclusion based on observation) and strives to derive meaning from the data, a theory that emerges from, or is ‘grounded’ in, the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 17). The resulting theory is characteristically specific rather than universal, characterized by analyzing a
Grounded theory is a relatively new line of research first discussed in the seminal work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) called *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. It was this book that first explained the idea of grounded theory and explained the frustration they were feeling as qualitative researchers. One of the main reasons for writing the book was to challenge the “hypothetico-deductive approach” that demanded the development of clear, precise theories or hypotheses before data collection could ever take place (Kelle, 2005).

Glaser and Strauss were determined to call into question, as they put it, the “overemphasis in current sociology on the verification of theory, and a resultant de-emphasis of the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research.” They wanted to free the “proletariat testers” from the “theoretical capitalists” who were holding them prisoners and turning many sociology departments into “mere repositories of ‘great man’ theories” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They also state:

> We are also trying, through this book, to strengthen the mandate for generating theory, to help provide a defense against doctrinaire approaches to verification. . . . It should also help students to defend themselves against verifiers who would teach them to deny the validity of their own scientific intelligence. (p. 7)

There have been a few changes to grounded theory as it has evolved over the past few decades. Two that I will delve into a bit deal with the “emergence” versus “forcing” debate that has split grounded theory practice into two camps, one lead by Glaser and one led by Strauss and his new writing associate, Corbin. The other evolution has been that of epistemology (how we know what we know) and therefore the underlying philosophy of how we generate theory and
what the knowledge (from the theory) actually is. First, I provide a short introduction to the split between Glaser and Strauss and how that affects this dissertation.

As to “emergence,” in 1990 Strauss and Corbin wrote the book *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. It was this book that spurred Glaser to write a pointed critique of that work that led to the differences in the two grounded theory camps. The book was titled *Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*, published in 1992. The main difference between the two hinges on epistemology and methodology. Glaser argued that he has a stronger commitment to the principles ordinarily associated with a qualitative paradigm viewing grounded theory as an inherently flexible process guided primarily by the subjects of the research and what they called socially constructed realities.

For Glaser, the subject’s world should emerge naturally from the data with little effort or detailed attention from the researcher. He liked to say that his approach to grounded theory allows for emergence, whereas Strauss and Corbin tend to “force” the data into preconceived structures (Babchuk, 1997). Glaser saw no reason to do any background study, including a review of pertinent literature, so that there are few or no preconceived ideas that are brought to the research.

Babchuk (1997) says Strauss, on the other hand, was more concerned with producing a detailed description of the cultural scene of the participants and wanted to see grounded theory retain “‘canons of good science’ such as replicability, generalizability, precision, significance, and verification” (n.p.), which appears to place him closer to the quantitative camp than Glaser is comfortable with. One example of this difference is Strauss and Corbin’s systematic guidelines for dealing with the coding processes of open (initial coding that includes breaking down analysis, comparison and categorization of data so they can be grouped together via constant
comparison), axial (subsequent coding that represents the delineation of hypothetical relationships between categories and subcategories), and selective (also subsequent coding, whereas the categories from open coding are related to the core category which, ultimately becomes that basis for grounded theory) (Babchuk, 1997).

Glaser believes that the preconceived framework that is laid out (especially in axial coding) causes the researcher to force the data instead of allowing them to emerge. Strauss and Corbin, as well as other notables such as Kathy Charmaz and Adele Clark, believe that it is impossible to free ourselves from the lenses we have, and therefore it is better to have a good understanding of the scene that is to be studied (hence, literature review) and some preformed understanding of how data might fit together (hence, axial and selective coding). Strauss and Corbin seem to have moved away from the positivist leanings of the Discovery book (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but Glaser seems to try and hold a bit more tightly to the ideal of emptying oneself to be as close to *tabula rasa* as possible.

Both knew the problems of inductivism (moving from specific observations to general conclusions) and the impossibility of being a blank slate, so they coined the term *theoretical sensitivity*. The difficulty is that theoretical sensitivity, the ability to grasp empirical phenomena in theoretical terms, requires a good deal of training in sociological theory. Therefore, the “coding families” proposed by Glaser in 1978 are of limited help for the novice empirical researcher. Glaser’s theoretical terms are more or less a hodgepodge of ideas from various sociological and epistemological backgrounds (Kelle, 2005).

Glaser seems to hold more tightly to this idea and believes it is the key to keep from falling into the inductivist trap, while Strauss and Corbin move on to more structured thinking about how theory is generated, pulling them even farther away from the positivist leanings of the
seminal *Discovery* book. Strauss and Corbin push for a more systematized analysis that Glaser wants to label “full conceptual description” rather than grounded theory. Because of the near impossibility of the novice researcher following Glaser’s method of doing grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin’s concept of a “coding paradigm” allows for the novice to navigate the waters of theory emergence and the necessary construction of theoretical frameworks to build theory. They argue that by drawing on this concept, researchers with limited experience applying theoretical knowledge are able to use the grounded theory methodology without getting lost in the sea of data (Kelle, 2005). It is interesting that the very critique that professors are turning students into “proletariat” masses, merely proving great man theories that Glaser levied in the *Discovery* book, is now being levied at him when Strauss and Corbin find his use of grounded theory accessible to only the “great men” of Glaserian grounded theory.

The issue of epistemology has also led to a few different camps in grounded theory methodology. Epistemology (how we know what we know) has a spectrum that will determine the scope of the findings as well as their generalizability. Qualitative methodology tends to be more inductive (or abductive, as will be argued here) in its approach to theory generation versus quantitative methodology being more deductive (the process of drawing a conclusion from available information).

In quantitative methodology, a person takes a hypothesis or theory and tests it indirectly by deriving from it “consequences that are themselves amenable to direct empirical test(ing)” (Haig, 1996). These “happy guesses” (as Kelle calls them) of theory and hypothesis that are prescribed by hypothetico-deductive (H-D) methodology have come under fire since the 1970s, when a number of empirical investigations into the history of science showed that this model of inquiry (H-D) does not adequately explain the process of scientific discoveries, even in the
natural sciences. One result of these findings has been a lively discussion on the role of logics of discovery and rational heuristics that has challenged the view put forth by proponents of the hypothetico-deductive methodology that these hypotheses or theories emerge through mere speculation (Kelle, 2005).

Kelle (2005) argues the use of intuition and creativity are always contained in discovery and the generation of hypothesis can be “reconstructed as a reasoned and rational affair” (n.p.). This is what led Hanson (1965) to show logical inferences that led to the discovery of new theoretical insights that were neither inductive nor deductive but rather what he called retroductive inference. Kelle, Charmaz (2006), Haig (1996), and others use the term abductive reasoning (first coined by Charles Peirce) to describe what Hanson was talking about. Abductive reasoning typically begins with an incomplete set of observations and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation, doing its best to make the most logical inference without assuming it must be true (Butte College, n.d.).

The reason this matters is that Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that grounded theory inductively (as opposed to deductively) emerges from the data and have been criticized that they believe in a “Baconian” inductivism. If this were true of Glaser and Strauss, they would be purporting to be able to observe and interpret the data without being dependent upon outside theories or concepts (Haig, 1996). In today’s academic environment, this naïve inductionism would not be accepted. So where does this leave Glaser and Strauss on the epistemological spiral? Thankfully neither Glaser nor Strauss find themselves in the camp of naïve inductivism as they explicitly say that “the researcher does not approach reality as a tabula rasa. He must have a perspective that will help him see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
However, in subsequent publications, Glaser does seem to hold to a more idealistic rendering of theory generation, where he discusses the discovery of truth that emerges from the data and how it is representative of a “real” reality (Glaser, 1978). Strauss and Corbin (1998) do not mind using the term *inductive* but insist on an interplay between deduction (the process of drawing a conclusion from available information) and induction (generalizing to produce a universal claim or principle from observed instances). They rightly state that any interpretation is a form of deduction and that interpretation is always needed when developing hypotheses or conceptualizing data. They also argue that statements of relationship or hypothesis do evolve (are induced) from the data. Strauss and Corbin explain the dilemma in this way:

We are not saying that we place our interpretations on the data or that we do not let the interpretations emerge. Rather, we are saying that we recognize the human element in analysis and the potential for possible distortion of meaning. That is why we feel that it is important that the analyst validate his or her interpretations through constantly comparing one piece of data to another. (p. 137)

Charmaz (2006) says that grounded theory research brings new ideas and surprises and makes a researcher hone his or her analytic skills. She tends to gravitate toward Strauss and Corbin’s side of grounded theory research but still pulls from whatever is necessary. She states that “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). Charmaz does a nice job of giving some historical context as to why Glaser and Strauss eventually went down divergent paths, explaining the contrasting and at times competing traditions of sociology the two originators represented: Glaser from “Columbia University positivism and Strauss from Chicago school pragmatism and field research” (pp. 6-7).
Charmaz (2006) says that Strauss’s Chicago school heritage dominates the field of grounded theory methodology. This perspective of grounded theory “assumes that the interaction is inherently dynamic and interpretive and addresses how people create, enact, and change meanings and actions” (p. 7). Grounded theory continues to evolve and be developed by others such as Charmaz, Bryant, Clarke, Seale, and others. Charmaz says, “Like any container into which different content can be poured, researchers can use basic grounded theory guidelines such as coding, memo-writing, and sampling for theory development and comparative methods are, in many ways, neutral” (p. 9).

Charmaz (2006) reminds us that in Glaser and Strauss’s original statement of the method, readers were reminded to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way. She says that she (along with others) continue to take Glaser and Strauss up on their invitation to focus on “examining processes, making the study of action central, and creating abstract interpretive understandings of the data” (p. 9).

I myself was drawn to the interplay of researcher and subject found in the Strauss method of grounded theory research, as it has continued to be developed by individuals such as Charmaz, Bryant, and Clarke, and I endeavored to utilize this side of the grounded theory divide. I did so by starting with a basic list of questions to ask each participant, and as the interviews continued and themes emerged, I looked for those themes in subsequent interviews, constantly comparing the data from previous interviews. I made the study of action central to the analysis, constantly pursuing the stories shared for clues and connections, while asking the participants if the themes that seem to emerge correlate with their experience and understanding. I endeavored to allow flexibility in my analysis, as Charmaz recommends, for the purpose of allowing theory to bubble
up, recognizing that I play a role in the theory’s development, while still trying to stay as neutral as possible.

**Population, Sample, and Site**

“Sample size is deemed to be satisfactory only when the key concepts that have been identified from the collected data have reached saturation point, in other words, when no new data emerges” (Hunter, Hari, Egbu, & Kelly, 2005, p. 60). Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that sample size cannot be accurately determined until the researcher is involved in the data collection and analysis. According to Thomson (2011), “There is very little written on appropriate sample size” (p. 45).

While it is true that saturation of data is the determining factor for sample size and not necessarily a predetermined number, Thomson (2011) argues that “knowing an approximation of the required number of interviews” will assist researchers “in the design, execution and budgeting of a research project” (p. 45). In an article in the *Journal of Administration and Government* (JOAAG), Thomson reviewed over 100 grounded theory studies to help grounded theory researchers find an approximate number of interviews needed to reach theoretical saturation. His aim was to “provide some empirical guidance for estimating an appropriate sample size” (p. 46). Thomson found that the average of the 100 studies was 25 interviews, with 31 studies having sample sizes between 10 to 19, while 33 studies had samples between 20 to 30. Thomson states that the “literature review demonstrated that saturation normally occurs between 10 and 30 interviews” (p. 50).

Since saturation normally occurs sometime after 10 interviews (and normally before 30), I began the study expecting to interview 12 adults who were identified as embracing self-sacrifice (the willful giving up of positions or possessions) for the sake of serving others. I
planned to interview three to five more individuals if saturation had not yet occurred. Ultimately this was not necessary, as saturation seemed to begin around participant 10. I interviewed two more participants to make sure that was the case and finished with 12 participants in all. Participants had demonstrated the willful sacrifice of positions or possessions in a way that a reasonable person would say was life-altering. This population represented an elite group that had clearly given up positions and/or possessions for the sake of serving others.

I wrote an email/letter to organizations such as International Justice Mission, and other mission organizations helped me identify such individuals. I also invited individuals I was already aware of that met the qualifications to be a part of the study. Before sending these organizations a letter, I contacted someone from the organization via phone to let him or her know of the email/letter and to give a brief explanation of the study and how I was hoping they might be able to help. I expected the potential of a snowball effect, where one potential subject might also recommend others. This is ultimately how I found over half of the participants.

After receiving suggestions of people to include in this study, I shared with my committee chair short biographies of each of the potential participants and my reasoning about why I wanted to include each participant. The letter that was sent out to the organizations can be found in Appendix B.

None of the participants had prior interactions with me regarding the research questions. These adults were a relatively diverse population from different continents, races, sexes, and cultures, although most were located within the continental United States. These adults had in common that they met the definition of self-sacrifice (the willful giving up of positions or possessions for the sake of serving others), spoke English, and had access to a computer and phone for the initial interview and subsequent follow-up connections laid out above.
Data Collection Procedures

I followed all Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) procedures throughout the data collection process. The data collection process had six parts. First, I sent a letter or email to organizations that could help me find subjects to interview, such as International Justice Mission. Second, I directly emailed individuals I had already identified, as well as those whom the organizations suggested, asking if they would be willing to be a part of the study, with a list of the interview questions included. All of these potential candidates were pre-approved by my committee chair as viable research subjects who met the definition of sacrifice I sought to study.

Third, once they agreed to be part of the study, I sent participants a list of focused questions to spark reflection on the three developmental time frames that were used as a framework for trying to understand why they made the sacrificial choices they made. They also received the five actual interview questions, so they knew exactly what would be asked during our first interview (Appendix C). The hope was this would allow for more thoughtfulness in answers during the interview.

The fourth part of the study was what Charmaz (2006) calls an intensive interview, lasting approximately 45 to 120 minutes. Intensive interviews (also called in-depth interviews) permit in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and are essentially a directed conversation (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Initial questions as well as pertinent follow-up questions within the style of a “directed conversation” were asked during the initial interviews.

Once all initial interviews had taken place, the initial findings that emerged were written up in a short four-page summary and sent to the participants in an attempt to use member checking (Appendix E). Charmaz (2006) describes member checking, saying it “generally refers
to taking ideas back to the research participants for their confirmation” (p. 111). The fifth part of the study included asking the participants to read and reflect on the initial themes in preparation for the follow-up interview.

The sixth part was a follow-up interview with me that lasted 15-30 minutes depending on the individual. This final conversation was to see if the summary of the themes that arose in the initial findings were either confirmed (member checking) or brought out any more ideas or thoughts. This was done in an attempt to co-construct meaning with the participants.

Interviews and conversations were either videotaped (one interview) or recorded via Skype video-conferencing and then transcribed into a computer. The interviews took place face-to-face when feasible (one participant), and via video-enabled Skype as a secondary option. A final option for the interviews was via phone when the other two options were not possible (one follow-up interview had to take place via Skype audio). The interviews took place during a time that the subject deemed best for his or her schedule and in an environment in which the subject felt most comfortable, most often at home or in an office. All subjects were notified that the conversation would be recorded and transcribed.

**Data Analysis Plan**

I agree with Charmaz’s (2006) view that grounded theory methods are principles and practices, not prescriptions or packages. I have used some of the guidelines she lays out, which emphasize flexibility, “not methodological rules, recipes, and requirements” (p. 9). She reminds that rich data generate strong grounded theories and that a diversity of data, such as field notes, in-depth interviews, and information in reports and records, is often used within the method, even stating that researchers often “invoke varied data-gathering strategies” (p. 14). She likens the grounded theory data collection method to a camera with many lenses. There is the initial
broad sweep across the landscape, then subsequent “lens changes” to bring scenes closer and closer into view. This is a broad way to describe qualitative data collection, but Charmaz explains that grounded theory allows greater flexibility than many other qualitative methods because, when it is used well, “grounded theory quickens the speed of gaining a clear focus on what is happening in your data without sacrificing the detail of enacted scenes” (p.14).

Charmaz (2006) is quick to point out that methods alone cannot generate good research or astute analyses. “Mechanistic applications of methods yield mundane data and routine reports. A keen eye, open mind, discerning ear, and a steady hand can bring you close to what you study and are more important than developing methodological tools” (p. 15). I fully agree with Charmaz and have done my best to incorporate time-honored grounded theory methods while attempting to utilize a keen eye, open mind, discerning ear, and steady hand. This seems to be the key to valuable grounded theory analysis.

I have gathered data through in-depth interviews and then used focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) and a typological analysis (Hatch, 2002). Typological analysis is basically dividing up the data into groupings or categories based upon expected (and unexpected) general themes that emerged in the data. (Richards [2009] describes this as analytic coding, which I will explain in greater detail below). Foss and Waters (2007) lay out a similar coding procedure, and I will loosely follow their methods and suggestions. The first step in this type of analysis is to identify the typologies (or codes) to be analyzed. Focused coding permits the researcher the ability “to separate, sort, and synthesize large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 11). This basically allows the identifying of expected and unexpected themes seen in the data that flow from groupings or categories that come from coded data. Coding simply generates new ideas and gathers material by topic. All good qualitative research requires that the researcher sees “across
the data and above the individual documents, to themes and ideas” (Richards, 2009, p. 93).

Richards goes on to explain that in qualitative coding the goal is to learn from the data and to continue to revisit the coded extracts until the researcher begins to see and understand “patterns and explanations” (p. 94).

Richards (2009) explains three types of coding that are necessary in qualitative research. The first she calls *descriptive coding*, which is also used in quantitative research. It involves storing information about the cases (in my case, information about the individuals being interviewed) that describes them. This was done in the initial summary write-up of each potential candidate to be approved by my committee chair.

The second form of coding Richards (2009) calls *topic coding*. This is a distinctly qualitative form of coding and merely allocates passages to topics, usually involving little interpretation. I did this by coding various pieces of data with different highlights and underlines, and as codes began to form categories and eventually general themes, they were grouped with the same color highlight or form of underline.

The last and most important form of coding Richards (2009) calls *analytic coding*, which is coding “that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (p. 102). Richards does remind us that the three sorts of coding are not always clearly different and that, to some degree, analysis is involved in all three. Glasser, Strauss, and Charmaz remind us to stay flexible and always make the study of action central.

Analytic coding, as Richards (2009) calls it, is the most difficult and rewarding form of coding and is where we “take off” or “reflect up” from the data. This basically means that in analytic coding researchers find and create meaning from the data through our reflection on the various data excerpts that have been coded and placed into what Charmaz (2006) calls groupings
or conceptual categories. This is where emergence happens and where theory generation takes initial form. Foss and Waters (2007) would liken this to the creation of an explanatory schema, “the conceptual, organizing principle that allows you to tell the story of your data in an interesting and insightful way” (p. 196).

Foss and Waters (2007), along with Charmaz (2006), give a method of coding that I found helpful in its straightforward approach. I used pieces of these methods explained above to create codes that emerged into conceptual categories. From these conceptual categories, more specific major and secondary themes emerged, eventually leading to the development of a grounded theory.

I used a constructivist approach to the creation of meaning by using constant comparative methods. This is the constant interplay between my worldview, standpoints and situations, the data, the ideas that emerged, and how I reflect on all of this, along with how the subjects reflect on the meanings I create. This is the constant comparative method I chose to use based on the descriptions given by Charmaz (2006) on pages 178-180.

During the initial topical and initial analytic coding, I went through the data, marking various texts that related to the various codes and adding notes and insights found. This is often referred to “memo-writing.” These memos were written down as various concepts began to emerge and stories discussing these concepts were highlighted in various colors throughout the research. This provided ways to compare the data, explore ideas about the codes, and direct further data gathering. The memos and highlighted passages allowed for certain codes to grow in strength and eventually emerge into what Charmaz (2006) describes as conceptual categories. It is in memo writing that analytic coding often begins to take greater shape. It is important to remember that analysis of the data is often happening during the initial stages of data collection
and throughout the entire collection process. Memoing and analytic coding often go hand-in-hand.

I coded the material looking for what Foss and Waters (2007) call units of analysis. These coded excerpts were cut out from printed copies of the data and placed into what Foss and Waters call piles of like-minded units of analysis. Charmaz (2006) calls these conceptual categories, which is the term I will use moving forward. Based upon what I had learned from the literature review, I expected these conceptual categories would be easily grouped into the three major themes I initially expected to find (messages, relationships, and experiences), along with a few more themes that might emerge. This ultimately did not happen. Although the developmental stages were great for helping break down sections of life to reflect on and the triad of messages, relationships, and experiences that came from the literature review made the most sense for initial interview categories, they ultimately were not satisfactory in holding the data, categories, and themes that emerged. They were wonderful placeholders, which gave shape and structure to the initial data collection, but did not help define the contours of the final themes or emerging theory.

I then began to create an explanatory schema, “the conceptual, organizing principle that allows (me) to tell the story of (my) data in an interesting and insightful way” (Foss and Waters, 2007, p. 196). I then mixed up the piles of data in an attempt to take a fresh look at the codes, using some of the creative brainstorming ideas Foss and Waters (2007) suggest in an attempt to make sure that the final explanatory schema meets several criteria. These criteria are that the schema encompasses the major categories of the data, is marked by an organic and coherent relationship among the codes and major categories, has reasonable inference, brings insight to the data, and produces what Foss and Waters call an “ah-ha feeling” that feels correct to the
researcher. Ultimately, the mixing of coded data did not lead to any new or better conceptual categories.

As data patterns are identified in the coding, the goal is to then determine which patterns are really supported by the data. It is important to also look for anomalies during this time as well (Hatch, 2002, pp. 158-159). The researcher and his or her style of data processing determine the patterns and themes; again, Richards (2009) reminds that qualitative research is intensely personal. She says that is it important to find a style that suits the researcher, and she proceeds to give some good advice, namely, to start coding units of analysis as soon as data begin to come in (which was done) and make codes and broad conceptual categories, refining them throughout the process (which was also done).

She also says to continually revisit conceptual categories, recognizing that they may change as the data collecting continues. She recommends discussing the codes with others, which is why I shared my codes and initial thoughts with my chair for further insight. I found this approach from Richards—of starting to create broad conceptual categories and refine them throughout the process—to be even more beneficial than memoing, precisely because it allowed me to constantly compare data from previous participants with participants I was interviewing. This interplay allowed for the major themes to be explored more fully in preceding interviews and was able to inform my understanding of when saturation seemed to start to occur. In this case, saturation seemed to begin to occur around participant 10, but I continued to my 12th participant to make sure that was the case.

Richards (2009) also recommends that the researcher aim for a coding system that is the researcher’s own: “Don’t be afraid to try new ways of seeing new meanings in your data. Design and celebrate tricks and gimmicks of your own that work to alert you to interesting things and
spark new views on previous data” (p. 111). One of the scary and exciting things that grounded theory research affirms is the necessity for trusting your hunches, thoughts, and ideas as you co-create meaning from the data. Table 2 describes the instrumentation that illustrates how the interview questions relate to the research questions.

Table 2

Instrumentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages,</td>
<td>• As you reflect on your childhood, are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think influenced you to make the choice to sacrifice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they had during childhood?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages,</td>
<td>• As you reflect on your teenage to early 20s, are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think impacted you to make the choice to sacrifice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they encountered during adolescence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages,</td>
<td>• As you reflect on your early to late 20s, are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think led you to make the choice to sacrifice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they had during emerging adulthood?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do those who reflect on those meaningful interactions and experiences think they helped them become the person they are today?</td>
<td>• As you reflect back on those meaningful interactions and experiences, how do you think they impacted your decision to live sacrificially?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Any other thoughts or reflections that you think are relevant?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability

There are a number of different guidelines laid out by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Seale, 2002) that need to be addressed for the quality of research to credible and usable. Before
discussing standards for judging research quality, it is important to remember that “any articulation of criteria is tenuous . . . each piece of research must be judged within the context of the community of scholars it represents” (Garman, 1996). In the quantitative community, criteria for assessing the thoroughness or trustworthiness of research often include internal and external validity, reliability, and generalizability. Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999, as cited in Imel et al., 2002) offer a good quotation to remember: “Good qualitative research seeks disconfirmation” In other words, good qualitative research will try to dig deeper to see if the results are reliable; a goal of good qualitative research is to disprove, not merely affirm, one’s hunches.

Grounded theory often feels even “looser” than other forms of qualitative research, but that is part of its beauty. Charmaz (2006) reminds us that in Glaser and Strauss’s original statement of the method, readers were told to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way. This does not mean the grounded theory is less stringent than other qualitative methods but rather its aims might be slightly different. Charmaz tells us to focus on “examining processes, making the study of action central, and creating abstract interpretive understandings of the data” (p. 9). After describing each of the guidelines for reliability laid out by Lincoln and Guba, I will explain which ones I have purposely used to provide reliability for this study.

1. **Credibility.** How congruent are the findings with what is being observed? Ways to establish credibility include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, collection of sufficient data, triangulation (use of multiple raters, cases, theme interpreters), peer review, member checks (confirmation by participants), and a search for negative instances that challenge emerging hypotheses and demand their reformulation (Hull, 1997; Merriam, 2002; Seale, 2002).
In this study, I chose to use member checking by sending a summary of the initial findings (major and secondary themes) to participants before our follow-up interview.

2. Transferability. Detailed, rich (or “thick”) description provides sufficient information to enable readers to judge the applicability of findings to other settings that they know (Seale, 2002). Hull (1997) and James and Mulcahy (1999) add that the description must also include convincing analysis or interpretation. In this study, I allowed the detailed and rich stories of the participants to illustrate the major and secondary themes, as well as to illustrate the emerging theory.

3. Dependability. Are the results consistent with the data collected? Are there sufficient accounts of the data and the analysis? This is achieved through an “audit trail”—documentation of the methods, procedures, and decisions made; the sample selection; and explanation of the categories used (Hull, 1997; Merriam, 2002). Although replicability of findings may be impossible, if researchers study the same community of research participants at a similar time, the data sets obtained by these researchers and their interpretation should be largely comparable (James & Mulcahy, 1999). I attempted to do this throughout the dissertation leading up to the actual data collection.

4. Confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (cited in Seale, 2002), trustworthiness is always negotiable, not a matter of final proof that readers are compelled to accept. The confirmability of findings is based on the researcher’s critical self-reflection regarding his or her assumptions, world views, biases, theoretical orientations, values, and epistemological stances (Merriam, 2002). This reflection should also include acknowledgment of dilemmas encountered in the process, including ethical issues (Hull, 1997). In this study, I attempted to explain assumptions and values as well as epistemological stances, just as Charmaz (2006) does when
describing the work of Strauss and Corbin and their epistemological stances. All researchers do our best to look at the data without bias, but grounded theory, as Richards (2009) reminds us, is intensely personal.

5. Authenticity. Acknowledging that research reports represent a temporary consensus on what is considered true, researchers should show that they have fairly represented a range of different realities and help readers develop more sophisticated understandings of the phenomenon being studied and appreciation of the viewpoints of others (Seale, 2002). I attempted to address this through the (albeit brief) study of all major world religions understanding of sacrifice, knowing this study was grounded in a Christian understanding of sacrifice to help limit the scope of inquiry to a manageable (albeit still quite broad) chunk.

Credibility needs to be addressed with a little more depth. McMillan (2000) has laid out four principles of credibility: Triangulation, Reliability, Internal Validity, and External Validity. Triangulation is one of the more common techniques of bringing credibility to the qualitative research design. This technique uses different methods of gathering data or collecting data from different sources, at different times, or with different samples, or at different places. If the triangulated findings agree with one another, the study is said to be credible (McMillan, 2000).

Reliability is defined differently in qualitative studies than it is in quantitative studies. For the qualitative researcher, reliability is accuracy of what is recorded from the interviews, case study, group session, etc. Reliability is enhanced by detailed field notes, photographs, audio or video recordings, and teams of researchers, among other things. One particularly useful method of reliability is “member checking” (p. 273). The researcher shares the notes with the participant as a means of validation that the recording of data was accurate (McMillan, 2000).
Internal validity deals with issues of how the researcher is recognizing his or her own bias in the data collection and interpretation. Since the researcher is the instrument or medium that collects and analyzes the data, it is imperative that researchers are aware and honest with their own subjectivity and potential bias. External validity deals with how generalizable the findings are. Qualitative research is more interested in understanding a phenomenon and increasing knowledge of that phenomenon more than representing a large population. Qualitative researchers use terms such as “translatability and comparability as concepts related to external validity” (McMillan, 2000, p. 275). The emphasis is more on how well others can understand the analysis so that it may be used in other settings or studies (McMillan, 2000).

I focused on (a) Credibility—that findings are congruent with what is being observed through triangulation, member checking, and constant comparison through memoing and early coding, as explained by Richards (2009); (b) Dependability—that findings are consistent with the data collected; and (c) Authenticity—helping readers develop more sophisticated understandings of the phenomenon being studied and appreciation of the viewpoints of others.

Summary

I used commonly accepted practices for grounded theory research, aligning myself more with the Strauss and Corbin (1994), Charmaz (2006), and Kelle (2005) camp of grounded theory by utilizing a literature review, abductive reasoning, and commonly held practices of reliability. I used a constructivist approach to meaning while attempting to stay flexible and always make the study of action the central focus. I coded the data, constantly comparing it to see what conceptual categories and themes began to emerge, and I used member checking for validation. I allowed my grounded theory to “bubble up” from the data while recognizing my role as a co-creator of meaning.
If the theory that develops from this study rings true enough to some that it is used in certain circles to help in the spiritual, sociological, or theological formation of sacrifice, I will be very satisfied. Every worthwhile idea, theory, and philosophy comes into question at some point, and I would be thrilled to know that this one mattered enough to one day be debated or even debunked. As it is, I can only hope that in the meantime it might actually be useful in helping some to “take up their cross” and sacrificially love as we have been sacrificially loved. This is the essence of sacrifice, the essence of love in practice, the essence of God’s love for us. We are most like God when we love others enough to sacrifice for them. “No man has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friend” (John 15:13, NIV).
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Purpose and Questions

This chapter contains descriptions of the participants involved in the study, an analysis of the interviews conducted, and the themes that developed throughout the interview process. Each participant was preapproved by the chair of my committee to ensure that they met the criteria of demonstrating the willful sacrifice of positions or possessions in a way that a reasonable person would say was life-altering. These participants represent an elite group that has clearly given up positions and or possessions for the sake of serving others.

The purpose of this study is to investigate why, when, or how a person chooses self-sacrifice by looking for discernible similarities in experiences, messages, and relationships during childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood that may help to understand their choice. Self-sacrifice is defined as the purposeful giving up of one’s positions or possessions for the sake of serving others and is closely related to the behavioral psychology field of prosocial behavior and the term often used within that field, altruism. Therefore I asked the following questions:

1. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors (often described as altruistic or prosocial behaviors) reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during childhood?

2. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during adolescence?
3. How do those who develop self-sacrificial behaviors reflect upon the messages, relationships (meaningful interactions), and experiences they received during emerging adulthood?

4. How do those who reflect on those meaningful interactions and experiences think they helped them become the person they are today?

**Description of Unit of Analysis**

**Participants**

For this study, I used an elite sample: individuals who clearly met the definition of sacrifice determined earlier in the study. All participants were either those recommended to me by others or individuals that I thought fit the definition of sacrifice. After learning of potential participants, I contacted them via email with a letter, similar to the one shown in Appendix C, that included both an overview of the study, questions they would be asked in the interview, and HSIRB protocols. Upon agreeing to participate, I wrote up a brief biography that shared how their story would qualify them as part of the elite sample, which was sent to the chair of my committee for approval. Once they were approved and the HSIRB forms signed, an interview was scheduled and completed.

Twelve participants were interviewed and given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Pseudonyms were based upon when participants were first contacted and agreed to the study. The first candidate was given a pseudonym beginning with A, the next beginning with B, then C, and so forth. The pseudonyms correlate with the participant’s gender and culture, where appropriate. Four participants were women and eight were men. Age varied between early 30s and mid 70s. All but one participant was originally from the United States, although four of the participants currently live in other countries (Philippines, Thailand, Honduras, and India).
I will begin by sharing participant profiles with an eye not only to basic facts about each participant, but also to what themes they helped to develop through the narratives they shared as they answered the interview questions. Reliability often is achieved through detailed, rich (or “thick”) descriptions (Seale, 2002), and I will attempt to offer a small taste of this to help the reader develop a small connection to each participant. Each of the participants has a fascinating story, and as much as I would like to share large chunks of the reflections and stories they shared, I will limit my profiles to some of the themes they helped develop, along with some basic facts of their upbringing, basic life arc, and ultimately a sentence or two describing the sacrifice they made. The goal of these participant profiles is to acquaint the reader with the participants and to give an understanding of some of the important ways they contributed to the themes derived from the data.

**Participant 1.** Amy grew up in the Midwest in a conservative family, the oldest child in her family. She went to parochial schools throughout elementary, middle, and high school. She described herself as not having lots of friends, but having a few good friends. She described her family as “really poor” and thought of herself as not fitting in very well. She studied nursing and left her family after college to move out West. After a couple years, she chose to move back to the Midwest. This helped to begin to develop some of the ideas on empathy and empathy development that later came up as a major theme.

Amy felt a strong desire to be a mother but was not married and began to pursue adoption. Single women adopting in this Midwest state was unheard of in 1970, but some states (namely California) had set some precedence for this. Initially she was told no by a number of agencies, but one was willing to talk with her.
Amy was the first single woman to adopt in this Midwestern state, the first single woman to adopt transracially in the state. She has gone on to adopt 22 children, including five sibling groups, that were all deemed “hard to place” due to emotional, physical, or mental impairment, and she has fostered 75 children over the past 45 years. Amy also shared how moments of spiritual development and clarity eventually led her to make some of the decisions to adopt these wonderful, yet challenging, children. Amy has battled cancer three times now and has started an adoption support group. Amy has never married.

Participant 2. Bartolo grew up in a small Honduran town, the only child to his businessman father and dedicated mother. He grew up going to church with his mother and had the privilege of attending a bilingual school (English as his second language). After high school, Bartolo went off to college in Honduras. During this same time, his wealthy uncle had been kidnapped for ransom, but through the ordeal, his uncle was able to double-cross the kidnappers and alert police. Two of the kidnappers were killed in an exchange of money and hostage, and the family feared that retribution could come to anyone in the extended family. Since Bartolo was the only child of his parents (who were well known in the small town), his uncle thought he may be a target, so he decided to go to the United States to finish college.

While home on Christmas break, he and his fiancée were running errands for their upcoming wedding when he was abducted at gunpoint. After a 10-day ordeal, he was miraculously released and made good on a promise that he had made during his capture: to pursue ministry. He went on to seminary, became a pastor to a Spanish-speaking congregation in the Midwest, cared for the needs of the people he was called to serve, and loved what he was doing.
During this time, God began to put Honduras and the town he had been raised in, kidnapped in, and fled from, back on his heart. Even though he had the opportunity to become a U.S. citizen due to political asylum law (something Bartolo and his wife had been pursuing), after spending time seeking God’s will, they decided to sacrifice that privilege, keep their Honduran citizenship, and move with their three children to the very place to which they had never wanted to return.

Bartolo currently pastors a church, trains other young men, and has begun a feeding program for his city’s poorest children. He is currently beginning plans to build a health clinic and school that he hopes will meet the needs of some of the poorest citizens of the township. The craziest part of this story: the assumed (but never arrested or charged) mastermind of his kidnapping has turned his life around and now attends Bartolo’s church and has become almost a second grandparent to Bartolo’s three children. Bartolo was one of the earlier participants who helped the idea of a relational connection with God to emerge. This was something that many of the later participants began to describe as well; relational language was used rather than ritualistic or religious language.

**Participant 3.** Christina was the oldest of four children and grew up in the Midwest. Smart and driven, she was an honor student throughout high school, graduating at the top of her class. She had an interest in foreign cultures and missionary work from the time she was young, often reading stories of people who had sacrificed to go and serve those in other countries who may not yet have heard of Jesus. She assumed that this was what she too would do, but after meeting, falling in love with, and getting married to her husband, she assumed that would no longer be her life.
After marriage, Christina and her husband had three children and were basically following the normal middle-class American script. Her husband was working in corporate America, and Christina was starting to write and raise their three children. In her early 30s, she read a book that sent her down a different path. It was through this book that she sensed God was speaking directly to her.

Over the course of a few years, Christina and her family purposefully moved into an apartment complex where a number of refugee families had been relocated, and they began to serve those families. After hearing the plight of so many young girls that were trafficked into sexual slavery, the family decided they must do something about this and chose to move to Thailand to live among and serve some of the most vulnerable people there. Her husband now uses his computer and web design skills to earn a living in Thailand so they can care for the poor and vulnerable. Christina was helpful in the theme of developing empathy, the ongoing relational connection to God, and the theme of practicing sacrificial action.

Participant 4. Deborah was raised in the Northeast, the oldest of two daughters. She described her upbringing as being in a “middle-class neighborhood. . . . You know, one with the sidewalks, kids playing in the street all the time, decent school system, you know, that kind of thing.” She remembers being quite sensitive growing up, both about her appearance and also toward others.

Deborah went on to marry Frank (who was also interviewed for this project). The two settled into a normal American life, with three successful children, a dog, and a house with a white picket fence, but Deborah wanted more. After sensing God was calling them to a greater level of sacrifice, she convinced Frank to pursue the adoption of a child with special needs. Now 15 years later, Deborah and Frank have adopted 10 children from India, Romania, China,
Thailand, Ethiopia, and Connecticut; two boys were born with no arms, a girl with no arms or legs, another blind from birth, and others who have suffered the trauma of being orphaned. Deborah moved from her college desire of being a “big shot reporter” to a servant of the least of these.

Deborah described herself as an “empath” and her interview was really the beginning of this major theme. It had come up previously, but it was her engagement with the concept of empathy that really began to shape this major theme. She and Frank were two of the main contributors to the secondary theme of the ripple effect of sacrifice.

Participant 5. Esther grew up in the Midwest in a Christian household and was the oldest of five children. She has fond memories of growing up; she attended a small parochial school through high school. She remembers one teacher in particular that was a strong influence in her life. This teacher never married but, along with her sister, took in and eventually adopted some of their nieces. One of the nieces of her favorite teacher became her best friend growing up, cementing the relationship even further.

Esther married her husband at age 21 and hoped to start a family shortly thereafter, but after multiple miscarriages and eight years of trying to conceive, they decided to adopt. At age 34, they brought their oldest daughter home from Korea and found out just a couple of weeks later that they were pregnant. Their son was born the following year, and they decided to adopt two more children over the course of the next couple years. Esther and her husband had a full house of four children, exactly as she had dreamed some years earlier. Life was a challenge with four young and busy kids, but they had everything they needed and life was good.

About a year later, a family started attending their church who was fostering a sibling group with an 11-year-old, a 4-year-old, and a 1½-year-old. The children had a very difficult
home life and parental rights had been terminated. Getting all three adopted as a sibling group seemed nearly impossible, but Esther and her husband felt a call from God to step forward and add three more children to their family. Esther was helpful in developing the theme of an ongoing relational connection with God.

**Participant 6.** Frank grew up in the Northeast to a “very lower middle-class” family in a small town. He was raised as an only child until his sister was born when he was 15. He attended parochial schools through grade nine and went to church, but he described it as being a “cultural phenomenon” rather than a personal or relational phenomenon and as being “kind of a sham.”

Frank’s parents moved to New England near the end of his high school career, and after a “year of rebellion against moving,” he began attending college in Boston. He described the experience as something akin to Country Mouse, City Mouse. “It was crazy; the contrast was extreme. And I think that began to open my eyes that the world was much more diverse, much bigger than I ever imagined. I think that was a key moment.” Another key moment during this same time period that began to reshape his future was a night in jail, where he described a bar fight he and some friends decided to get into with some guys from a crosstown college. He sat in jail that night and began to reflect on his life. It was during this reflection that the seeds of a relationship with God were being planted. He described this night and his thoughts with these words:

[For some people] God’s literally got to take ya by the scruff of the neck and shake you.

[Chuckle] And how violently he shakes you, I think, based on his love, is how much is required to get your attention. And I look at that juncture as the moment he started to shake me by the scruff of the neck.
Frank met Deborah right at the end of his time in college and they began to date. She grew up in a similar family where religion was cultural, and near the end of her college experience, she began a personal relationship with Christ that led to her inviting Frank to a Billy Graham crusade at the stadium at Boston University. It was at this meeting that Frank heard about a God who loved him and sent Jesus to die for him and wanted to have a relationship with him. Frank said, “And I’m like, ‘poof’—it hit me like a hammer. . . . and it forced me to just wrestle with it all.”

Life went along for almost a decade for Frank and Deborah and life was good. That is, until a car ride home from church one Sunday with the family. A conversation began in which his wife suggested that they needed to act on what they had been learning through their study of the biblical book of James, and everything began to change that day. Now 15 years later, Frank and Deborah have adopted 10 children from India, Romania, China, Thailand, Ethiopia, and Connecticut; two boys were born with no arms, a girl with no arms or legs, another blind from birth, and others who have suffered the trauma of being orphaned. Frank was instrumental in developing the theme of a spiritual experience with God that led to an ongoing relationship. His stories often gave great insight into not only why he chose to sacrifice but also how his wife was moved in the same direction.

Participant 7. Greg grew up in the South. His grandpa was one of 13 children and had only a third-grade education; his father was the first in their family to get a college education, but he described his family as still quite poor. “We were very much a paycheck-to-paycheck family. I don’t know for sure, but I lived in this environment where I had friends who had a lot more resources.” Greg says he was “a real bully and a real SOB to some weaker kids.” In high school, Greg started attending a church youth group with a friend when he had an experience with Jesus.
In college, Greg’s understanding of his faith began to grow as a couple of mentors poured into his life.

Greg went on to law school, began practicing in Texas, got married, started a family, and the idealism of college began to lose way to the pragmatism of life and simply the demands of family and job and life in general. He settled into an upper-middle-class lifestyle, but something in his heart kept nagging.

Greg heard about this new organization that was helping fight for people who were being trafficked, enslaved, and overall fighting for justice. Something in his heart wanted to act on what he believed to be true about God, calling, people, and what really makes life worth living. He left his lucrative career and moved his family overseas to pursue justice for the weak and vulnerable.

Greg helped to develop the theme of empathy and even how it begins to manifest itself in various ways. For a couple of participants (Deborah and Amy), empathy seemed to be hardwired into them, while for others such as Greg, it developed through different difficult experiences.

Participant 8. Heath grew up in the Midwest, the middle child with an older and younger sister. His family was “not necessarily rich, but definitely not poor.” His father was an alcoholic who “was violent and abusive, not super violent, but enough and there was always the threat of that.” His family attended church when he was “a little tiny kid” but then they quit going. In middle school Heath started attending youth group (at the church his family attended when he was younger) and went through confirmation (a rite that “confirms” your entry into the faith). During this time his youth pastor really began to have an impact on his life.

After college and a stint working as a youth pastor, Heath realized that his passion was really in practicing law. He finished his degree and found himself quickly climbing the ladder at
a prominent Washington, D.C., law firm. Although his star was rapidly rising within the firm, he found himself increasingly burned out and passionless. It was during a church service that he heard about an organization that fights for exploited children who have been trafficked into slavery and something inside heart began to break. He left behind a promising career and lucrative salary and accepted a $35,000-a-year job to fight for the weak and vulnerable. Fifteen years later, Heath continues to labor for justice around the world and has just recently been asked to lead this organization.

Heath was probably the most influential participant in helping to develop the two major themes that were the foundation of the emerging theory. His description of the development of empathy through hardship and an experience with God that led to an ongoing relational connection that ultimately manifested itself in sacrifice for others became almost a prototype of the emerging theory.

Participant 9. Ian grew up in the Mid-Atlantic and South, the younger of two children in an upper-middle-class family. He moved a number of times but seemed to enjoy the adventure of a new place. He grew up Catholic, which he says imprinted on him the message of serving others.

In middle school, Ian remembers having a hard time as he was a late bloomer and on the smaller side for his age. This experience seemed to play an important role in his development of empathy as he remembers being bullied. He described this time like this:

I mean junior high school that was a big part of why it was difficult. And then the bullies and all kinds of . . . it was just hard to operate as a small kid back then. So what I think that did for me is make it so I don’t like bullies, at all.
After moving to Philadelphia with his family for his high school years, Ian went off to college in Virginia with a desire to be a lawyer. It was during his time in college that Ian became a follower of Jesus.

After finishing law school, getting married, and settling into a career, Ian found himself with an opportunity to move to India. He described their life before accepting the job to move to India:

We were quite happy in Roanoke. I liked my job and I liked my firm. They had offered me a partnership before I left. And then I loved our church, but it was like when I got to India, living in India was hard, but the work was pretty entertaining. Like every single day I was doing something interesting and happy and thrilled to go to work.

Although Ian thought he’d work a few years overseas and then resume his comfortable American life, he still works for the same organization and is now even more passionate about justice and caring for the poor and downtrodden. Ian was instrumental in the development of empathy as a theme, as well as the secondary theme of having an action orientation.

**Participant 10.** John was born the oldest of four in the Midwest. He grew up in a Chicago suburb and small Iowa town, eventually moving with his family to Muskegon, Michigan, where he attended high school. He described his upbringing this way:

I grew up in a home where my mom and dad were married and taught me to succeed in school and to help others. In Boy Scouts, service projects and stuff like that. . . . When I was a kid my mother went to church every week. My father wasn’t a believer until later in life. So I didn’t really meet a Christian man that I really respected until 16.

John graduated high school and went to the University of Michigan, eventually being accepted into medical school at Wayne State University. John had a flourishing orthopedic
practice, was raising his three children in a home on Lake Michigan, and life was good, but something began to stir in his heart. After going through a Bible study called “Experiencing God” and a couple other events, he decided to leave his practice, sell his home, and move his family to Africa to help establish a hospital in Kenya.

John has recently moved to the Philippines with his wife to hold clinics in the southern Island of Mindanao, an area where hospitals are not available to most of the island’s overwhelmingly poor population. John closed out our interview with words that I think summarize well his life for the past 17 years: “If you have the ability to take care of people and you don’t do it, how can the love of God be with you? It isn’t more about talk, it’s about actions.” John was instrumental in helping to develop the theme of an experience with God that resulted in an ongoing relational connection. He was also instrumental in developing some of the secondary themes of the ripple effect of sacrifice and opposition to sacrifice.

**Participant 11.** Ken was born into a Midwestern family with parents who had both attended a Christian university and were both ordained ministers. Ken spent his childhood in a rural community in Michigan where his dad was pastoring a church. He described the area as predominantly white and homogeneous and described his family as poor.

Ken says that, because of his involvement in athletics, he never felt different or left out, even though he was quite poor compared to other kids in his town. In middle school, Ken and his family moved to Cadillac, Michigan, where most of his friends were other athletes from school. It was during this time that Ken began to develop as a leader to his peers at school and within the church.

After college Ken went on to a successful career in chemistry, owning his own business, eventually selling it, and living well in the suburbs in a large home with his children and
grandchildren living close by. It wasn’t until his 60s that Ken made a drastic, life-changing decision to serve those who could use a hand. Ken and his wife sensed a strong calling from God to move into the most economically disadvantaged neighborhood in their city to simply serve those in the neighborhood.

Ken and his wife continue to live there, and he has started a nonprofit enterprise, helping small business owners in and around the city core to receive training and mentoring to grow their business or to help others from the core city interested in starting a business. Ken and his wife throw an annual neighborhood picnic, where they have seen community begin to develop in a neighborhood that was not known for such things. Ken sees himself as an ordinary guy who just did an ordinary thing and has the privilege of seeing some extraordinary things happening. Ken was helpful in continuing to develop the secondary theme of practicing, as well as the major theme of a spiritual experience with God that resulted in an ongoing relational connection. He also helped to develop the secondary theme that describes sacrificial action as often happening after emerging adulthood.

**Participant 12.** Liam grew up in the Midwest with both parents and an older brother and younger sister. Dad was involved in his growing-up years as a frequent sports coach (although a deeper relationship beyond sport is still not fully there), and his mother ran a daycare that he says allowed him to interact with a diverse group of other kids.

Liam grew up going to church, and as early as middle school, he remembered a world religions class he had at church that helped him gain a perspective that the rest of the world might not think as he did. It was during college that Liam said he had a spiritual awakening that reset the trajectory of his life. After spending some time overseas playing football, Liam eventually returned to the states where he met his future wife. They both had a growing passion
for children who didn’t fit in or who didn’t have stable home lives. After doing foster care for a relative’s child, they both sensed that there was more that God was calling them to do more.

Liam and his wife decided that, even though they were capable of having biological children, they wanted to care for children who didn’t have parents able to take care of them. They jumped into the deep end and adopted a sibling group of five children. They live intentionally in the city, striving to be an example of the life they think is the best, most exciting life to live. Liam is a teacher and coach, along with being a husband and father of five. He was helpful in the ongoing development of empathy as a major theme and the secondary theme of pro-sacrifice messages.

**Analysis of Themes: Explanation of How Data Was Analyzed**

I used a constructivist approach to the creation of meaning by using constant comparative methods based on the descriptions given by Charmaz (2006) on pages 178-180. This is the constant interplay between my worldview, standpoints and situations, the data, the ideas that emerge from it, and how I reflect on all of this along with how the subjects reflect on the meanings I create. Since there are various authors who use various words to describe similar movements in analysis, I think it will be helpful to very broadly define the process as coding/memoing, which led to conceptual categories (sometimes referred to as topical analytic coding, or units of analysis, or groupings, depending on the author), which led to major and secondary themes and, finally, a grounded theory. The entire explanation is detailed below.

I began by coding the interviews after reading and re-reading them. I received the first three interviews from my transcriber in a bundle and began with those. During the initial topical analytic coding, I went through the data marking various texts that related to the various codes and adding notes and insights found, commonly referred to as memos. This is what some
researchers refer to as abductive reasoning. Each new interview was transcribed, read and re-read, and then coded as themes emerged, along with making both mental and written memos. This was the beginning form of coding called open coding.

As various conceptual categories began to emerge and stories and dialogue discussing these conceptual categories arose, they were highlighted with various colors throughout the research. This provided ways to compare the data, explore ideas about the codes, and direct further data gathering. The initial conceptual categories began to arise after the first three interviews and then grew from there. Empathy was one of the first conceptual categories to emerge, so all of the data dealing with empathy were highlighted in yellow. Each category that began to emerge was highlighted or underlined (or both) in subsequent interviews. Interviews 4-9 began to show new conceptual categories emerging, which sent me back to the first three interviews to see if they contained data that fit in the newly emerging conceptual categories.

The memos and highlighted passages allowed for certain codes to grow in strength and eventually grow from conceptual categories into general themes, as Charmaz (2006) suggested they would. As I coded the material, I was looking for what Foss and Waters (2007) call units of analysis. These coded excerpts were highlighted in various colors so they could be identified as like-minded units of analysis, or what Charmaz calls conceptual categories. Once all data were collected, the various like-minded units of analysis, or conceptual categories, were then physically cut out of a printed copy of the interviews and placed together in piles for further evaluation. By the end of interview 9, no new conceptual categories seemed to be emerging, leading me to believe we were coming up on saturation. Interviews 10-12 confirmed this to be true.
I expected the conceptual categories that began to emerge to generally fall into the framework of one of the three themes that were created from the literature review, namely, messages, relationships, and experiences. This was not the case. Although a few of the conceptual categories did fit within the framework of messages, relationships, and experiences, too many of the conceptual categories were too nuanced to fit neatly into one of the themes, or required a mixture of two or more of those themes, or quite simply didn’t fit within the framework of those three initial themes at all.

I found it much more useful at this point to acknowledge the helpfulness of creating this initial framework (themes that emerged from the literature review) for the sake of shaping the interviews and for giving me some structure to begin the analysis. Ultimately, though, this initially expected framework (messages, relationships, and experiences) needed to be discarded. It ultimately couldn’t hold the data well enough to make the best sense of it.

Once I realized that the original framework of messages, relationships, and experiences would need to change, I began to create an explanatory schema. According to Foss and Waters (2007), this is “the conceptual, organizing principle that allows (me) to tell the story of (my) data in an interesting and insightful way” (p. 196). At this point there were actually 19 different conceptual categories. For a list of these conceptual categories, see Appendix G.

I tried to use Foss and Waters’ (2007) creative brainstorming ideas, such as mixing up the units of analysis, in an attempt to take a fresh look at the codes. I physically cut out all of the coded conceptual categories from color printed copies of the data and placed them into their piles. I tried to create new piles from the various categories, but ultimately didn’t find any better ways of organizing the data. It did help me to start thinking about whether or not some of the themes might best be combined to be more complete or coherent.
Foss and Waters (2007) actually describe this when they remind us that the schema will encompass the major categories of the data, is marked by an organic and coherent relationship among the codes and major categories, and has reasonable inference. They say that this will eventually produce what they call “ah-ha feeling,” which is what I began to feel while pulling together the various codes into the initial findings that would soon be summarized as major and secondary themes.

It was at this point that I began to analyze the various categories to see if some were really worthy of growing into themes and which ones might be combined to become a more coherent or complete theme. It was during this next step that I had to use my judgment on which conceptual categories were truly themes that described how or what drove these individuals to sacrifice positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. These themes were created from categories based on three things: (a) my analysis of whether the described phenomena (conceptual category) had led to their sacrificial action; (b) the degree to which a category seemed to resonate with a participant as they described it (often the speed and passion of their voice in relating a story or concept, as well as the emotion elicited by the participant, often shown in tears, shaking voice, and other nonverbals); and (c) the participants simply telling me that a category was a very important reason for their sacrificial action.

I really appreciated the reminder that Richards (2009) offers when she says that qualitative research is intensely personal. This gave me the courage to lay aside some of the self-doubt as I began to make some of the bigger decisions on which themes I believed were truly emerging from the conceptual categories. I used her advice at the beginning to start coding units of analysis as soon as data began to come in. I started creating codes and broad conceptual categories, refining them throughout the process. As she recommended, I tried to continually
revisit these conceptual categories, recognizing that they may change as the data collecting continues. She also recommended discussing the codes and early forms of the conceptual categories with others, which is why I shared these with my chair for further insight.

I found this approach from Richards (2009) of starting to create broad conceptual categories and refine them throughout the process to be even more beneficial than simply memoing thoughts and insights, precisely because it allowed me to constantly compare data from previous participants with participants I was interviewing. This interplay allowed for some of the major and secondary themes to be explored more fully in subsequent interviews (especially interviews 10-12) and was able to inform my understanding of when saturation seemed to start to occur. In this case, saturation seemed to begin to occur around participant 10, but I continued to interview through the 12th participant to make sure that was the case.

Since constant comparison of the data was used to identify and shape themes that arose from the coded data, I found near the end of the process that some categories were best combined to make for a more complete idea (such as relational language used to describe participants’ interaction with God and an initial experience with God; these two themes fit together better as a complete idea rather than separate themes).

Once themes were developed into major and secondary themes, the initial findings (Appendix E) were sent out to participants, along with an email asking them to read through the initial findings and asking for a time I could schedule for our follow-up interview. In this email I also included the follow-up questions I would be asking them (Appendix F). The follow-up interviews were very beneficial for receiving feedback and for member checking. I was really hoping that the second set of interviews might bring up some new ideas or concepts to engage with, but this did not happen. Although I was slightly disappointed that no new thoughts or
concepts emerged, the participants did routinely affirm the findings and some even added stories that were triggered by the initial findings that affirmed what they read in those findings. This helped to add validity not only to the major and secondary themes but also to the belief that saturation had been achieved.

Once themes were established, I wanted to show that there was some trustworthiness to the analysis. I went back to count the amount of data (the number of words used by each participant to describe a particular theme during the interviews) to establish further the importance of each theme based on how much each theme was discussed. This was done in an attempt to show that I was not giving undue power in my judgments that participants were not. In other words, if I determined that development of empathy and spiritual experience were the top two major themes, did the participants actually describe those two categories more than other themes? In each case, the figures presented near the end of this chapter add validity, not only to the themes developed, but also to their level of importance (with minor variations, also explained below). The worth and weight of the themes were not merely because I judged them to be so, but also because the participants actually gave the bulk of their interviews to describing these themes.

It is the job of the researcher to interpret the data and determine what is most meaningful, but the participants should fairly easily substantiate it as well. In this case, both through the affirmation of the follow-up interviews and the amount the dialogue used to describe each theme, I have attempted to show why I believe there are five major and five secondary themes, as well as to give credence to why I believe the top two major themes when interwoven actually created my grounded theory. The amount of dialogue cannot by itself show the importance of the theme;
this is, after all, a qualitative study in which the researcher bears the weight of these interpretive decisions, but it can lend some trustworthiness and credibility to the interpretive decisions.

From the development of themes, the reader will see below how codes, memos, and conceptual categories developed with constant comparison became the findings represented in the major and secondary themes. The top two major themes emerged from the data as a grounded theory. This is exactly what Glasser and Strauss (1967) expected would happen when they described delimiting the theory. Ke and Wenglensky (2010) describe Glaser and Strauss’s thoughts on this when they say, “The researcher begins to find ways to delimit the theory with a set of higher level concepts . . . [and as constant comparisons continue] . . . the number of categories [I am using the word themes to describe what they have just called categories] will be reduced” (Ke & Wenglensky, 2010). The themes that emerged from the data were developed and are explained below, but only the top two major themes made sense to use in forming a broader generalizing theory. Glasser and Strauss (1967) help identify when the theory is ready to be written:

When the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework form a systematic substantive theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use—then he can publish his results with confidence. (p. 113)

I felt as though this was accomplished with development of the top two themes into one substantive theory. While there is importance or interest in each of the themes with regard to why these individuals chose to sacrifice positions or possessions for the sake of serving others, the top two major themes made the most consistent impact and therefore the most sense for the creation of a theory. It does not mean that the other findings are not important, merely that the
top two seem to be the difference makers in whether a person would choose to sacrificially serve others (especially people they have no previous relationship with). Below are the findings, beginning with an overview of the major themes and secondary themes, then an in-depth engagement with each theme as grounded in the data, and, finally, the grounded theory that emerged from these beautiful stories. For a step-by-step explanation of the data analysis, see Appendix J.

**Major Themes That Emerged From the Data**

There were five major themes and five secondary themes that arose from the data. Major themes were themes that either seemed to have the greatest impact on why a person chose to sacrifice or were deemed by the researcher to simply be a significant finding. Secondary themes were themes that were important and interesting but did not seem to play as big of a role in the decision to sacrifice or were not deemed significant enough to fall into the major theme category.

The five major themes were The Development of Empathy (the ability to feel what others feel), A Spiritual Experience with Ongoing Relational Interactions, Pro-Sacrifice Messages (messages they heard or saw that were put sacrifice in a positive light), Practicing (actually practicing small sacrificial actions for the sake of serving others as they grew up), and, finally, Sacrificial Action Happening After Reflection (during the end of or after emerging adulthood). There were also a few subthemes for some of the major themes listed above. They were included in the findings of the major theme they supported. They were not significant enough to be a secondary theme and are discussed and supported, as necessary, to develop the major theme.

The secondary themes were A Desire for Action (an action orientation toward life); Finding Joy in the Work, Supportive Community, Opposition to Sacrifice (from family, friends,
or community); and Ripple Effect of Sacrifice (that their sacrifice positively impacted others in ways that had not been anticipated).

The themes are placed in the researcher’s interpreted order of importance based on the data from the 12 interviews. Again, these themes and their relative importance were developed in three primary ways: (a) my analysis that they played important roles in the participant’s choice to sacrifice, (b) the degree to which a theme resonated with a participant as shown by the emotion or passion expressed during the interview, and (c) the participants simply telling me it was very important in their sacrificial action. The themes were then additionally validated in two ways, from the participants in the follow-up interview as well as the amount of data used to describe each theme. More discussion on validation can be found near the end of the chapter.

**The Development of Empathy (The Ability to Feel What Others Feel)**

The development of empathy seemed to be the most significant finding that emerged from the data. Pretty much across the board all participants described the ability to feel what others feel and expressed a desire to act based on that empathy. Although the development of empathy happened in many different ways (from feeling like an outsider during childhood or adolescence, to being bullied or being forced to confront their own bullying behavior), it was a consistent theme that emerged. Being able to feel what others were experiencing seemed to be the most significant indicator of future sacrifice for serving others. An experience with diversity (or “otherness,” someone outside of one’s own “tribe”) is a subtheme of the development of empathy. It was often described and seems to be another significant way participants developed empathy.

The theme really began to come to the forefront of the research fairly early on in the interviews, but it was the fourth interview with Deborah that really cemented it. She described
herself as an empath, a term that is sometimes used to describe an “introvert that has empathetic tendencies.” Deborah said that from the time she was young she remembers being affected deeply when she would see someone being bullied or taken advantage of. She described a situation from first grade that illustrates these empathetic sensitivities:

This girl next to me that was kind of this chubby. Wasn’t very popular, got these brand new shiny shoes and kind of looked like boys’ shoes. You know back in the 60s there was a difference between boys’ shoes and girls’ shoes. So I guess she was kind of getting teased about her boys’ shoes and she started crying. I remember just being horrified for the rest of the day. And most people don’t get affected about things like that.

Amy described some similar feelings as she grew up. She described how her empathy developed, due to her family’s financial situation. She says that she always felt inferior to other kids due to not having the clothes they did, and some painful comments that were made to her as a result. Later in the interview, she went on to describe how that sense of not fitting in or not being as popular as others was a catalyst for her future decisions to sacrifice for others. She described these feelings and how she believes they were used to develop empathy for her later in life:

I already felt pretty inferior. “I wouldn’t wear my hair like that if I were you.” Things like that can make you much more sensitive (referring to other comments from kids on her acne as well as her hair). That’s what I tell my kids: “When someone does something (hurtful) to you, that is maybe going to help you sometime when you meet somebody who is going through something; you’ll understand because you’ve been there.” That’s why Jesus understands us; I mean one of the reasons. He lived here. He was a human. He walked through the same kind of things. He knew what we experienced. He could
understand us on that level, not just as our creator God. I think a lot of that formed who I was going to be.

Most attributed their development of empathy to experiences they had growing up, often associated with difficulty that they couldn’t control. Frank described a time when he was 13 and his parents were involved in a horrific car accident and his mother was 6 months pregnant. His dad was unable to work after that due the injuries he sustained and was resentful that Frank’s mother had fallen asleep at the wheel and things at home were tense—and for years into the future. Frank described how he reflected on this tragedy and how that developed his empathy moving forward. He described the situation in this comment: “And you know, they’d go at it and my father couldn’t work so income shut down and it kind of got crazy.” Frank felt out of control:

I remember (thinking), “Wow I could have just lost my parents and my unborn sister in 30 seconds.” And just like through, almost through God’s miraculous grace, I didn’t. But I think it was another time when I had that awareness of fragility of the universe.

Greg shared that he had actually grown up being a bully at times, attributing his desire to take some control over events (and other kids) due to feeling like an underdog. He said his family was relatively poor, and being Southern (“Everybody in the South has some sort of inferiority complex”) and being short gave him a bit of an underdog mentality. He said it was actually after bullying a kid in his middle school that he really felt empathy for the kid and so ashamed of what he had done. Greg actually got choked up during the interview simply thinking back on this story; it had obviously formed his development of empathy. Greg reflected on this story with these words:

But then in junior high I just like took the gloves off with this kid. On this kid, particularly feminine kid and I just humiliated him, publicly humiliated him. (Greg is
visibly choked up as he pauses with the memory.) I still feel that actually really deeply. I probably need to like, to like get over it, but it’s hard for me, to uh, sometimes to talk about it without wanting to tear up about it, but I got called on that as well, which was good for me as well. I got embarrassed in a good way for that. So I think those things were really shaping for me in terms of getting an understanding of some self-awareness about the power that we all have, whether it’s our looks, our communication, our, whatever it is, our influence. Like, oh, my goodness, what you can do with it for evil and what you can do with it for good. And I think some of those experiences were really shaping and began to develop a worldview of what this life is all about, if that makes sense.

Heath’s experience with the development of empathy arose from a home where his father struggled with alcoholism. He described his father as an alcoholic who “was violent and abusive, not super violent, but enough and there was always the threat of that.” He went on to explain how this difficulty developed empathy:

So I grew up in a situation where there was someone was doing the wrong thing, they were doing it to people weaker than them, and there was no one to step in and stop it and bring them to account. The only other person who could have didn’t. So that impacted my wiring and so I think out of that . . . On top of that I think it left me a little lost in the world. . . . By 5th-6th grade I was strongly wired to confront bullies, strongly wired to fight for people that were being bullied or abused. A certain fearlessness that I somehow developed growing up in my house, which was related to a lot of anger. You know, if you’re angry, you’re not afraid. And then also a great deal of compassion and empathy for particularly for children or anyone really who’s weak, who’s been hurt and abused.
Eleven of the 12 participants described the development of empathy through their growing-up years. All 11 were able to draw a straight line from that development of empathy to their ability or willingness to take the sacrificial action they chose in adulthood. During the follow-up round of interviews, all 12 participants agreed with the initial findings, with some even adding another story regarding the development of empathy, including the one participant that hadn’t addressed this theme in her initial interview. This and the next major theme were by far the two strongest themes and led to grounded theory found in Chapter V.

A Spiritual Experience With Ongoing Relational Interactions

Nearly every participant in this study described some time in life (for most during adolescence or early emerging adulthood) when they had a spiritual experience with God that they still remember quite vividly. These experiences seemed to adjust the trajectories of each participant’s life and was a touchstone moment that the participants referred to as a (or even “the”) reason for sacrificing for others.

God was often described in relational terms rather than religious or theological terms, indicating that participants felt a relational connection to God rather than merely a connection to dogma, theology, tradition, or even the communal nature of their faith. The touchstone experience grew into a relationship that was ongoing, where the participants seemed to have (or expect) back and forth interactions with God often in much the same way they would interact with a human friend.

Bartolo is one such example. Bartolo described the beginning of a relationship with God when he was younger, but it wasn’t until he experienced a dramatic kidnapping that this relationship was tested under the threat of death. Bartolo had grown up in Honduras, and due to an uncle who was wealthy by Honduran standards, he was told by his family that it was possible
he could be a target for kidnapping. Bartolo had one harrowing experience where a man was murdered in an attempted kidnapping just feet from where Bartolo was living. This shook Bartolo up and he was given the opportunity to move to the United States to attend college. During his junior year he was back in Honduras, recently engaged and out with his fiancée and her younger sister to do some wedding planning when two men approached the car with guns drawn. Bartolo was able to talk the men into leaving his fiancée and her 7-year old sister on the outskirts of town before they gagged, blindfolded, and tied him up. He was taken to a home for 3 nights and then another 7 days to someplace else. Bartolo shared how the relationship with God was being tested:

Now in the spirit of time of 10 days, I’m asking the Lord, “Lord, why me? I’ve grown up in the church, I’ve served you, I’ve tried to do everything perfect, I’ve tried to live a Godly life. I’ve attended school. God, I’m about to marry a Christian woman, why?” I could think of better people to be in this situation I’m in right now [Chuckle]. And of course, no response, no response, no response. I had that feeling God is in it with me, but yet I’m struggling with God and asking God why. Every single day they’re telling me, “Pray to God more so you will be released tomorrow.” So I had this fight between me and God, praying to him, and these people saying, “Pray harder.” So having that difficulty of relating to God in that way.

Bartolo shared how these conflicting emotions eventually drew him to test his relationship with God. If it was real and God was real, then he wanted an answer. And he described how God answered him as he continued this extraordinary story:

Finally, the 9th day I actually could not handle it anymore. I was tired of it and the entire situation so I sat there on the bed that I was at and I remember clearly that I started
hearing this child playing with the soccer ball or something. And I could hear this child playing. And the Lord just placed this perspective in my mind: “There’s that kid over there who thinks he has a huge life ahead of him, not knowing that I’m in control of life itself and here you are on the opposite end of the spectrum not knowing if you’re going to live another day. I’m in control.” As I’m thinking about that, He is in control, He is in control, I decided this is God, He is truly asking me to submit my entire life to him at this moment in time.

A few hours later Bartolo was woken, blindfolded, and driven someplace new where, to his shock, he was released. It was not how he expected the kidnapping to end, but he described how this unbelievably trying ordeal had actually grown his relationship with God in unexpected ways.

So, I ended up coming out of that and realizing God was in it the entire time. He allowed this for a reason. Now at the time I couldn’t understand what that reason was or what the reasons were as a whole, but I knew there was a reason.

Bartolo described how that ordeal grew his relationship with God. A few years later when God began to speak to him (and his now wife) about foregoing the U.S. citizenship that they could have received (asylum due to that very kidnapping), and instead to return to the very city where he was kidnapped, they said yes. Bartolo and his wife now pastor a church where they are meeting not only spiritual needs but physical needs of many kids and families in one of the poorest sections of that city. In a completely unexpected twist, the mastermind of Bartolo’s kidnapping nearly a decade earlier now attends his church and has become a friend of Bartolo’s family.
John is another such example. After building a thriving orthopedics practice in the
Midwest, owning a home on Lake Michigan, and being able to supply not just his needs, but
pretty much any wants as well, he left it all to practice medicine in Africa and now the
Philippines. John explained to me how his route to sacrificing his practice in the U.S. to serve
people in underdeveloped nations was not what he would consider typical.

I’ve gone to missionary conferences and I’ve listened as the guys come around and I’m
not as typical as those who have gone into missions. Mine’s more like the apostle Paul
(the apostle Paul was initially an enemy of Christianity but had an experience with Jesus
and became one of Jesus’ most ardent supporters), I was going one way and then went
the other. . . . A lot of my decision to leave my practice . . . came later in life and came
about [because of] my faith.

John later shared that it was a spiritual experience that was the catalyst for his sacrifice.
The story he shared illustrates how this experience propelled not only a spiritual encounter but
one that turned into an ongoing relationship. It was an event in Colorado where he says, “I went
there and I just felt like I was called.” This event and the spiritual experience that he had there
compelled him to take real inventory of his life. The home on Lake Michigan, complete with
pool and cars, and a thriving medical practice were no longer the legacy he wanted to leave for
his four children. He came home, got involved in his church, and took a course called
“Experiencing God.” He said it was through this course that he began to learn how to interact
with God through prayer, scripture, and listening. A spiritual experience at a large conference led
to a decision to get to know more about this God that he had an experience with and led to an
ongoing relationship. It was this ongoing spiritual relationship that led to his decision to
sacrifice.
Ian described a similar experience in college as he was reflecting on some of the experiences he had that he believed shaped his future sacrificial decisions.

The other thing is I became a Christian in college and that sort of changed my viewpoint on the world. So I grew up Catholic, as I said, and I hadn’t been going to church since middle school and I had never really met, in the Catholic Church [anyone] who I considered cool. You know, that were my age and wanted to follow Christ. That’s what I encountered in college that was very moving to me. So I became a Christian, I started reading the Bible more and more. I just became enamored with all the passages about serving the poor and, you know, seeking justice and things like that.

Frank shared a couple of experiences that led him to an experience of faith. The first story is one where he was in a bar fight in college and wound up in jail. It was in jail that he sensed God was starting to speak to him by grabbing him by the scruff of his neck to wake him up to the fact that there is more to life than what he was currently living. He described the incident this way:

One incident, I don’t know how much you want to go into these sorts of things, but one incident that I recall clearly was being in college and one of the guys I was with decided that the best thing to do for us on the way out of a bar was to start a big donnybrook with a bunch of guys from another college. And about 10 minutes later there was glass, and blood, and split heads, and people lying in gutters. It was just one of these drunken fistfight kick-in-the-heads and he got hurt pretty bad. But we all ended up in jail. And I remember lying in a cell looking up at the ceiling and thinking to myself, “There’s gotta be more than this.” You know, it was like: Drink as much as you can, get in some fist fights, go to class, scream a little bit at your friends, and do it all over again. I started to
get the beginning of the thought that there’s gotta be a higher plain of existence. . . . I just think God was bringing me to whatever my baseline was for being at the lowest point, right. God’s literally got to take ya by the scruff of the neck and shake you. [Chuckle] And how violently he shakes you, I think based on his love, is how much is required to get your attention. And I look at that juncture as the moment he started to shake me by the scruff of the neck.

There were a couple of other experiences along the way that Frank shared, but it was an evangelistic rally that his soon-to-be wife invited him to that led to this pivotal moment:

So we go together and it was Billy Graham. Billy Graham at Boston University. The only time in his life he ever went there. And he did it in the stadium, which is right in the middle of the city. And the place was packed out. And I’m thinkin’, “Who is this guy? What’s this guy about?” By golly just did the simple A, B, C thing that he does about: Jesus died for you, right? And this is what he was thinking about: He loves you. And I’m like, “[poof].” It hit me like a hammer.

And it took me, I think, a few weeks to sort of reconcile it all in my head. But I started to think, “Holy smokes, I never heard my own faith described in such poignant terms.” And it forced me to just wrestle with it all. And then [our faith] went from there so.

Frank and his wife Deb “went from there” to eventually adopt nine kids, many with special needs, and he attributes this to their mutual faith.

I don’t know, sometimes God’s weaving a tapestry and you don’t even know why. We just felt called. This was it. This was the thing we were supposed to do. Just that we were together. [Author] Francis Chan has this thing where he talks about marriage [that it] can
be like Nitro + Glycerin. So God puts the two of you together and you have different strengths and you have different attributes that you bring to the mix and the mix becomes much more powerful in the spiritual realm, than if you were both on your own.

Deborah shared a similar experience of meeting God and the change of life trajectory that began:

I met the Lord at one of those [bible] studies and became a believer at the end of college. And that totally, totally, I can say that the Holy Spirit being in me, just totally changed my whole orientation on how I wanted to spend my life and what I wanted to be.

Heath also shared a powerful moment in his life during middle school where his experience with God propelled him toward his eventual sacrificial decisions. He described the experience (a baptism service he experienced God through) and how it propelled him to know God. This experience was foundational to his sacrifice because it led him to a relationship with God. He described this movement with the following story:

I remember when I was in 8th grade, we took another weekend retreat [where] we had an experience together over a weekend that was very Pentecostal. We didn’t know what it was. I certainly had no idea what it was. No one had ever told us about the Holy Spirit or anything like that and it wasn’t for years and years until I began to understand what had happened.

Heath went on to describe how his friend was baptized in the lake by his friend’s father and then he shared how the experience became personal for him, and not just personal, but actually was a spiritual experience that propelled his relationship with God for years to come.

And then something happened. I, (Heath is getting emotional, wet eyes and voice shaky) we all ended up jumping in the water. . . . It occurs to me now that we were all getting
baptized, but we all jumped in the water, he got baptized . . . I don’t think I was able to talk for a couple hours after that. But I didn’t have a single box to put that in or anyone to explain what had happened. It just happened, it was an experience and unfortunately shortly thereafter our youth pastor left. But I would say it was an experience of God. And here’s the crazy thing about that, that experience for me was like the experience that a rocket ship has when it’s breaking out of the atmosphere, you know those thrusters just ignite for like 4 seconds but they propel the ship forever. So that experience happened, I’m still being propelled by that experience; it’s crazy, I’m 47. And it was just an experience and I was only 13, it was very emotional and my rational mind is, you know, [still] struggles with many things, but that experience was real to me. . . . So, I was just propelled by that.

Heath and most of the other participants described their experience with God as something that changed the trajectory of their lives, but it was not a one-time experience. Each of the participants described instances following the initial experience with God where there was a continual relational connection. They believed God guided them, gave them instruction (either through reflection on scripture as they read it or hearing someone teach on scripture), that they could speak directly to God and that he would speak to them (not necessarily an audible voice but a very real voice nonetheless). Heath described this relational connection to God in a time when he was frustrated by a choice he made: “I just say, ‘God, I don’t want to do this anymore.’ And I felt him say, ‘Okay.’” Another instance where Heath describes this relationship is when he was about to make a major life decision:

And I go for a jog and I say the same thing whenever I’d go jogging in Thailand, I’d go up into the mountains and be like, “Lord if there’s anything you want to say, here I am.”
And so I go running and I remember I stopped to take a breath and I look out over this valley and . . . God speaks to me or I perceive God speaking to me. [Laughter] Don’t ask me. I’ve only had this happen only one other time in my life where I felt like he actually was talking to me.

Amy described similar moments all throughout her interview; one in particular stood out. Amy was approached regarding two different children in need of adoption but was able to adopt only one. She described how her relationship with God helped her as she looked for direction:

So I prayed and I said, “I have to pray about it [pray about] both.” I’ve always thought about from day one, that the workers were as much; somebody God was putting in my life as the children. So many of them do not know the Lord, I just felt like that was my responsibility that I wasn’t preaching at them, but that I was showing them by my life by what was directing me. And so I prayed and I said, “God I don’t know, I think you want me to adopt a third child but I don’t know which little girl? Is it Kim or is it Margie? Okay, this is my fleece I’m throwing out; whoever calls me first will be the child.” And Kay called and, “Have you made a decision?” I said, “Just now.”

Ken discussed how God continued to speak to him about selling his nice home in the suburbs and moving with his wife into the inner city simply to care for those living there. Ken was retired, in his mid 60s, and had children and grandchildren all living close to their suburban home. He described a challenge from his church that some people ought to move into that area, but no one had done so. This challenge caused Ken to hear from God in a very personal way and have it affirmed through his wife’s own experience with God.

The sad part is I actually got angry [when I heard no one had moved into this part of the city]. Not angry, angry, but I thought somebody should be doing this. Now why I thought
that, I’m not sure, but I thought, “Somebody should be doing this.” Again, it wasn’t me, ’cause you know, grandkids, life style, and worked hard, blah, blah, all those rationalizations. Then about 3 months later, [I] wake up in the middle of the night, 2, 3 o’clock in the morning, and I’d be thinking about nobody moving to 18th Street... It was supernatural and I tried one more time to get out of it, as any healthy American guy might try to do. I thought, I’m going to tell [my wife] about this and she’s going to say, “No, we can’t do that.” So that morning I told [my wife]. Her exact words were, “Oh, Ken, I’ve been praying about this for 6 months but didn’t want to say anything to you because I knew you would say no.” [Laughter] There it went...

What I found throughout the interviews is that each participant discussed a spiritual experience with God that altered the course of his or her life. For almost all of the participants, it was this experience that brought them to a place where choosing to sacrifice was made possible. There are too many who claim similar experiences with God, who do not make easily noticeable sacrificial decisions, that it’s hard to quantify how much impact this experience has on the choosing of sacrifice.

What was interesting though with this group of elite participants was that the experience with God was followed with what can only be described as an ongoing relationship. This relationship was described much in the same way that one would have a relationship with another human, yet still different. They would speak to God and expect to hear back (not necessarily audibly, but internally). They read the Bible as if God were speaking to them directly in their time and place, seeing it as a living document, not simply as something antiquated. This seemed to be one of the major differences for the choice to sacrifice, even more than the initial experience (although all point back to that as the start of their sacrificial journey).
The first two major themes seemed to be the “secret sauce,” if you will, of what is necessary to help someone choose to sacrifice positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. The development of empathy, often through suffering or difficulty (although not exclusively), and an experience with God (commonly referred to as a conversion experience) that is developed into ongoing relationship seemed to be the two most dynamic forces that propelled the participants toward sacrifice. This was borne out through the interviews in that the participants showed the greatest amount of passion and emotion when discussing stories that supported these two themes and was often directly cited by the participants as the cause or reason for their sacrificial action.

**Pro-Sacrifice Messages**

Participants described many different ways that they received messages from others than sacrifice for the sake of serving others was a positive thing to do. Messages came from many sources: from parents, both verbally and through modeling behaviors; from religious texts such as the Bible; from mentors and guides who encouraged such action; and from stories they heard of others who had sacrificed for others.

The bulk of the messages seemed to come from the Bible during mid-late adolescence and especially emerging adulthood. The main conveyor of messages during childhood was a parent. The main conveyors of these messages during emerging adulthood were mentors (ministers, older friends), and it was a mix of both during adolescence.

Even though the messages were delivered in a number of different ways, every participant shared various messages they received during these developmental stages. In fact, most participants described both specific prescribed messages (blatant, black and white, concrete) and nonspecific described messages (abstract, nuanced) that played a role in how and
why they sacrificed to serve others. Knowledge of people in need (and the resulting empathy) coupled with pro-sacrificial messages seemed to be a catalyst for these participants to choose sacrifice. Modeling of behaviors by parents, clergy, and other mentors and the encouragement of other influential guides are two subthemes of this major theme.

Greg shared how a couple of mentors that he had in college helped him to better understand a biblical worldview, which helped him eventually understand what an appropriate response should be to injustice.

I feel like the good Christian advice I was getting, the good Christian council I was getting when I was (in) sort of late college, you know, making some choices about what to do next. This idea that all of life can be an act of worship, all of life is under Christ, it’s all unto him, from him and so if that’s true then . . . it actually doesn’t matter what you do, but do it with all your might, do it with excellence. So if you’re going to go be a lawyer, be a great lawyer. If you’re going to be tennis pro, be a great tennis pro. That made a real impression on me.

Greg also shared how he learned through these mentors as well as his pastors what the Bible had to say about the responsibility Christians have to serve others. These pro-sacrifice messages helped to shape how he understood his role in the world and ultimately how he used his law degree to serve others.

It was when I began to sort of understand what the Bible taught about that [seeking justice] and how much God cared about it, how much he cried out against his own people, for their abuse of power, for not coming to the aid of the weak. It just struck a really deep chord for me. Jesus is actually making all things new; you’re a part of that. And then I think as I began to grow as an adult to understand what needed to be made
new and what the root source of the brokenness really was, which is so much of our own abuse of power, the violence, and the taking, you know those kinds of things . . . that it all began to kind of take shape for me.

Liam shared a story of a couple mentors who spoke truth into his life, and it was the convergence of some foundational experiences with God and mentors who imparted messages of bravery and the willingness to do hard things. One mentor in particular he noted as playing a crucial role:

I had a relationship with a girl my freshman year whose dad was a youth pastor at a local church that I got plugged into. He actually discipled [Christian term for mentoring] me through some scripture memorization; we kind of had a little men’s mentoring group that sometimes was just one on one, sometimes there were four guys, but he really poured on my life and even spoke into me. I still remember the word, “You’re a brave heart” [he said] and [I said] “What does that mean?” “That means that you’ll bravely follow with your whole heart Jesus Christ.” So him saying that to me really spoke into my life. . . . I felt like all of these things were converging where I’m like, “I see a light that’s different than anything I had ever experienced up until then.” That was a big year.

Christina remembers receiving pro-sacrifice messages from a young age growing up in church and learning all about others who had left their homes to go and serve others overseas. She describes some of the pro-sacrifice messages she received from books and a “missions conference.”

Then at our church we went to a church in Dayton, Ohio. They have these really big missions conferences every year; it’s a big deal. Where the missionaries would come, each missionary would have a Sunday school class in charge of representing this
missionary. It’s kind of like a science fair or job fair where you would go around and sample the food from each country; you would talk to the missionaries that were there. Those were the highlight of my year at church, would be the whole week. We’d talk to the missionaries, meet their kids, listen to them talk in different languages. So I remember loving that growing up. And I would read, my grandma was the church librarian, and so I would read all the missionary biographies and anything else I could get my hands on.

Christina said it was in her early 30s though that God woke her back up to some of the general pro-sacrifice messages she had received as a child.

There’s a book called *Hope Lives* and I cannot remember how I found this book, but I started reading it and it was all about poverty around the world. It was all about how we’re just so focused on ourselves and the American dream and how much wealth we really have and how we think we’re really poor, but we’re really not. As far as I was concerned I was pretty much a model Christian and somehow, I was missing this whole big chunk of the Gospel. I remember reading it by the pool just thinking, “Oh, my goodness.” So then I couldn’t get enough of what does this mean [for me]?

Ken shared how it was the pro-sacrifice messages of his parents, specifically his father in what he talked about and what he did that really had an impact on him. He shares how his dad taught and modeled this with his behavior; he shared this story to illustrate:

The heart, the heart behind what made [my wife] and I decide that this was the thing, well, let’s leave it to me here, my part of the decision, the whole came from a lifetime of growing up under my parents’ tutelage, it was always give unto others. I’d see example after example of humility and example after example of steadfastness and believing in
God. Examples of integrity and . . . So that all became normal for me. As I went through my 20s it just seemed reasonable or fitting to carry on with service projects and things of that nature.

I followed up with Ken after he shared this and asked, “Did they, was that a message that was a given, not just in the way that they acted but also in the things that they actually said?”

Ken replied:

It was, but it wasn’t given as a point to be made. For example, my dad would say, “I’m going to the hospital to visit a couple of sick people in the hospital; do you want to come with?” [Or] “Hey I’m gonna be calling on some people from the church today. Do you want to go with me?” “Yeah I do, let’s go.” So I’d just go and sit and listen, observe him. So these things became natural to me. Uh, for example, let’s just use going to the hospital. My dad wouldn’t go to the hospital to preach, if you will, he’d go there and carry on conversations, but obviously about how are you feeling? But asking questions that didn’t seem to be rooted in religion, if I can use that word. “Is there anything I can do for you, take care of for you at home while you’re in the hospital?” Things like that: “oes your grass need to be mowed while you’re in here?” Just various things he would ask what he can do, how he can help them, if not physically, perhaps with their state of mind knowing that these things were being taken care of that they wouldn’t have to worry about them. So . . . and then he’d always read scripture and close in prayer. That might only be 3% or 5% of the conversation that was there, and yet as you learn in the scriptures, what he really was doing was doing the things that Jesus taught us to do, to take care of our neighbor.
Pro-sacrifice messages came in many forms, from what was celebrated (missionaries at a missions conference), to what was modeled (Ken’s parents sacrificial care of others), to what was taught in church or read by participants (Bible and books that challenged people to sacrificial action), to the words of mentors (who challenged and encouraged the participants to think about or even pursue sacrificial action through service of others). These messages were sprinkled into 10 of the 12 participant interviews and were affirmed by all 12 during the follow-up interviews.

**Practicing**

Many of the individuals who participated in this study had opportunities to practice smaller ways of sacrificial service for others during childhood and adolescence. These opportunities to practice sacrificial behaviors under the safety net of parents or mentors where the sacrificial activity was not life-altering may play a role in one’s ability to sacrifice later in life when the stakes are higher. Each of the major and minor themes was sent to participants to reflect on in the second round of interviews, and all of the participants that mentioned this theme agreed this helped them make the choice later in life.

Heath described a lengthy but important incident in his life while he was in high school. This sacrificial action “practice” came on the heels of a growing relational connection to God and the messages of the Bible, along with a developing empathy. This story shows the intertwining of these three themes merging into a practice moment that had a long-term impact on Heath. He told me the story of a kid he met in high school named Denny whose mother had passed away when he was younger. Denny was an outcast, strange-looking, never spoke, struggled with social situations, and was generally disliked by peers. Heath described how his relationship with God and a challenge from an older counselor at a Christian camp pushed him to
practice sacrifice during his senior year of high school. He described how these things led him to begin offering rides to a boy (and the boy’s sister) from the school who was often bullied and a notorious outcast. It was this practicing of self-sacrifice that Heath says led to more sacrifice later. It’s a longer story but shows how Heath mixes both an ongoing relationship with God along with action that comes from acquired empathy that causes him to sacrifice for this boy and his sister, even as his initial invitation is spurned. This instance of “practicing” sacrifice helps set a foundation for the future. This story is an early sneak-peek into what eventually develops into the grounded theory (see Chapter V). Heath shared this story from his senior year in high school:

My family is falling apart. And I start going to church by myself. I start reading the Bible for the first time in my life, never read the Bible before. And I think it had an impact on me. One of the reasons I say this is because during that year I drove to school and I would drive home and it’s winter and this kid Denny is a junior, and I have this old beat-up Volkswagen Rabbit, and I see this kid Denny walking down Bibi Drive from the high school to this little town of Bibi. You know, has no sidewalks and the snow is about 2-3 feet high. And he’s walking the 3 miles from the school to his house and his sister is following behind him. And I drive by them for several days and I know something’s wrong. You’re thinking, “Surely someone else will stop and take care of these kids, a teacher, somebody, not me, I gotta get to ski team practice.” I was just convicted and, um, it doesn’t go away. So one day I pull over and I say, “Hey do you guys want a ride?” And [I get] the response I was expecting: he doesn’t talk, just shakes his head, and he won’t even look me in the eye. And his sister, I can tell [she] wants the ride, but he won’t. She says, “We don’t want a ride.” And I drive away.
I start stopping every day, pulling over my car. And I’m embarrassed because everybody is tooling down this road after school and here I am pulled over next to this strange kid. All the kids are going by on their buses. I keep saying, “Let me give you a ride home guys, let me give you a ride home.” I know he’s like a dog who’s been kicked, right. Like he’s never been . . . he’s just expecting pain.

So eventually he begrudgingly gives in. He gets in the car next to me and his sister gets in the back seat. And we start driving just a couple miles into town. His sister says, “The other kids they just pick on us. And he just won’t ride the bus. He’s being bullied.” So I gave them a ride the rest of the school year whenever I saw them. He never talked to me. But I think in that moment you take a risk when you try to help somebody. If it goes reasonably well you experience something that is good. And so that had a big impact.

Greg also shared a longer story that weaves together the themes of reflection in the emerging adult years that leads to sacrificial action later. It was this very reflection that led to some of Greg’s first “practice sessions” for sacrificial action that led to his eventual significant (life-altering) sacrifice. He related this story to describe how he began to practice sacrificial action for a man who had developed aggressive Parkinson’s disease:

And this is maybe a bit of a longer story, but I began to experiment with actually loving people [laughter]. We had this family in the church, he was a college professor, math professor, and he developed Parkinson’s and it was aggressive. And oh, my gosh, man, I had no experience with that. Here’s this disfigured man sitting in this horrible chair, can’t talk anymore, grunts, looks awful; it’s just not what a human being is supposed to be, not what he’s supposed to look like. And then how am I supposed to sit with this guy? What
good’s this going to do? But over time that’s what we did. I wouldn’t say that I ever got to a place where I was 100% comfortable with it, but we’d sit and watch television, watch the game, find ways to kind of communicate. That was big for me. The principle of what Jesus is really asking of us is to move toward the pain and to sit in it, be willing to sit in it, that’s where he is, that’s what following him actually is. So it was in that context for me that somebody told me about IJM and described the job for a U.S. lawyer that actually might be of some use in India.

It was during this time of “practice” that Greg actually decided to leave his well-paid, prestigious law firm, and he and his wife moved their family to India to help the weak and powerless. There were many stories of practice, from service projects in Boy Scouts, to short-term service projects both locally and internationally with participants’ churches, to various acts of kindness to neighbors and those in need. One participant, John, actually began a program to help give medical attention to the residents of a home for the mentally and physically disabled. Although this was a major theme, it is harder to make a causal connection as only a couple of the participants described these past sacrificial actions in those terms. It is interesting to note, though, that all agreed this theme made sense and agreed with it during the follow-up interviews.

**Sacrificial Action Happening After Reflection During the End of (or After) Emerging Adulthood**

It was interesting to find that most of the individuals that participated in this study did not choose to sacrifice until they were either nearing the end of emerging adulthood (late 20s) and ironically had more to lose. For all participants, the sacrifice was not made without an understanding of what was being given up (even if the participant felt as though it was not a
sacrifice), but for most it seemed that life had just snowballed through adolescence into emerging adulthood and it wasn’t until the end of that time that they began to reflect on where they were.

It was at this time that many (through reflection and, for some, through another spiritual experience) began to evaluate if they were living the way they thought they ought to. It was during this time of reflection and evaluation (coupled with messages and knowledge gained earlier and during this same time frame) that allowed them to move toward the trajectory that their spiritual experience had started them on years earlier.

Greg gave a great insight into this phenomenon when he began talking about the gap that existed in his life “between what I said I believed and how I organized my life.” He went on to share this how reflection in his 30s led to a decision to make a change (and sacrifice) after emerging adulthood had ended; he shares this story to show how this transpired:

Yeah. So I do have these vague memories of trucking along in my 20s, being in a church in Austin, Texas, with a lot of really smart, wonderful people. Most of whom were affluent; I was working in a fancy law firm. My income potential was great, you know, all this and kind of having this sick feeling like, “Is this what this is about? Is this all there is?”

Greg went on to share how it was in his mid 30s that he started to actually begin to reflect on his life and start to ask the tough questions: Does what he says he believes and what he actually does line up? He shares this:

I think I began to realize that I actually believed all this stuff that I said I believed or appreciate the gravity of what it is that I said I believed. Because if you don’t act like you actually believe it, then you don’t actually believe it. So, it was kind of this thing like, oh, for so many years I’ve been saying, I’ve been believing that Jesus is on the move in the
world. His kingdom is on the advance. And I am more deeply loved than I could ever imagine, I can’t lose. In other words, you know, in Jesus I’ve won the lottery and it’s not even possible for me to spend it all. Wait, if that’s true, how should I then order my life? So, then there were all these if-then questions. And I’ll tell you that I didn’t come to the conclusion that I shouldn’t practice law anymore. What did happen is that I began to be convinced that life, it definitely called for a life of more outpouring and love.

Deborah was in her mid 30s when she and her husband Frank adopted the first of their special needs children. She described something similar to Greg when she described her emerging adulthood years:

Well, for those first few years we got married [early/mid 20s] shortly after I graduated from college, and started going to the same church as my parents, actually for a while. Got lots of good teaching and learning what the Bible had to say and I felt like it reoriented everything about us: what our goals were and how we wanted to spend our time.

Then in her 30s, living what most would consider the “American Dream” with three smart and healthy biological kids and a dog and a house with (literally) a white picket fence, she began to ask the question if they were actually living out their faith the way she thought they should. Frank shared that it was after a sermon at church that Deborah really began to evaluate their life as a family and began to pursue the sacrificial action of adopting kids with special needs. After describing to me her fear of risk taking and an aversion to courage, this interaction took place, in which she specifically explains that it was in her 30s when she finally thought she could do something sacrificial:

T: You’re not the risk, adventure seeker, huh?
D: No, I’m not really. And you know international adoptions involve planes and scary countries. And just things that I wouldn’t naturally gravitate toward at all if it weren’t for that I think the Holy Spirit just put that desire in me to want to do that. I just think I wanted to do something out of the box for God, but that fit my personality. I wasn’t brave enough to be a missionary and go live somewhere dangerous, but I was brave enough to bring a kid into my home.

T: And a kid with no arms who had already been marked for his date of death to the month and year. It’s funny that you didn’t see that as big of a risk as, say, moving some place. And yet for a lot of people, they’re like, “Hey, send me to Africa for a few years.”

D: Right. And I actually just looked at that as the most exciting privilege I could have is to help this little boy. It’s all how you perceive things, I guess.

John shared how his 20s (emerging adulthood years) were mostly a blur of school and marriage and life. He shared these words to describe this time in his life:

It wasn’t the most delightful time in my life. I made it through and most of my 20s are really kind of a blur. You’re doing a lot of it. I went to Michigan for 4 years, then I went to Wayne for 4 years, then I went to Grand Rapids and did a residency for 5 years. My 20s just sort of blew by. I met my wife when I was 27 and was married when I was 28. I had my first child when I was 31. So my 20s were really pretty focused on just getting through, getting my certificates and learning what I was doing.

For John it wasn’t until much later in life that he began to evaluate if what he said he believed and how he actually lived were actually one and the same. It was after a spiritual experience that he began to start moving towards his significant sacrificial action. He eventually
moved his family overseas to help open a hospital in Africa. He described the time leading up to this very big decision for him and his family:

J: So we started talking about it and praying about it and talking about it more because they were opening the hospital in 1998. And we had talked to Scott [hospital administrator] a few times on the phone and different things. We decided that if we do this, we’ll go for a year. Then we’ll do it. We prayed for unity with my kids.

T: Yeah, I was going to ask you how your kids were responding to all of this. Especially your oldest is a girl, right? So she’s finishing her freshman year going into her sophomore year.

J: Yep, so we prayed for unity and we had it. Everybody cried, nobody wanted to go. My brother thought I should give it a year, but one month a year for 12 years. But we just felt that this was something we should do. So we did.

I considered this a major theme (even though it was the 7th most discussed theme) due to the interesting nature of this finding. Major themes were considered major by either the frequency or amount of discussion by the participants or if the theme was seen as potentially significant (even if it wasn’t easily defined as causal). I did not expect to find that most participants (8 of the 12) did not begin a lifestyle of sacrifice or at least make a significant (life-altering) sacrifice until they were through this developmental stage. It is also noteworthy that Arnett (2007b) says that by the end of the last century, the esteemed developmental psychologist Erik Erikson’s term of “young adulthood” no longer fit the “normative pattern” described by him and many other psychologists of the time (p. 68). Arnett and others have found this new developmental stage as starting to come into existence near the end of the last century.
At least 2 of the 4 participants who began their significant sacrificial action during their emerging adulthood years (during their early to mid 20s) are under 60 years old and would have gone through this time period in their lives before most psychologists would say this developmental stage existed in industrialized society. It may not matter, as at least 2 of the 8 participants who made the choice to sacrifice in a significant way after emerging adulthood were in the same age range, under 60.

It is a potentially significant theme and it would be interesting to see if this pattern of significant sacrificial action happening after emerging adulthood applies to those who have experienced this developmental stage. Is significant sacrificial action generally something that mostly only young adults or adults can engage in? Is there some experience during emerging adulthood that is necessary for a person to take the step to make a significant sacrifice for the sake of serving others? This would be a worthwhile question to seek to answer.

**Secondary Themes That Emerged From the Data**

**A Desire to for Action or an Action Orientation**

Some participants seemed to indicate that something just needed to happen and they wouldn’t sit by while injustice, exploitation, or suffering was occurring. They had what I would call an “action orientation” to life, often driven by empathy. These individuals seemed to have this action orientation well before they made a life-altering sacrifice, and it was often seen through either sacrificial “practice” and/or empathy-driven action.

Amy described this when talking about her childhood and the desire she felt from a young age to adopt, which seemed to flow out of a strong sense of empathy. She simply recounts her thoughts here as she describes this desire for action, this “action orientation”: 
And I suppose in a way back then it had to do with helping some poor little child who
didn’t have a mom and dad. . . . But I’ve always thought, even way back when I was a
little kid, that I would get married, birth kids and adopt, I always thought that . . . I just
wanted to do it.

Ian described his desire to do something, not just talk about it, but to actually take action.
He described the thought process he had about his decision to pursue law and see how it might
make a difference for those in need, as well as the decision to move to an inner city
neighborhood after law school to simply care for his neighbors. He shared this story, often
saying that they just did it, showing this element of an action orientation:

I think it’s just the mission. Going back to school . . . like I want to do something. Jesus
called us to do something and I just want to be around people that are serious about doing
what Christ commanded . . . [After law school] so what we decided to do is, I would, we
just go, we just move to this city, which was so stupid going in anyway. So we moved to
this inner city place and I didn’t have a job coming out of law school. . . . And we just
made a decision to just do it and then shortly thereafter got a job offer, got an interview,
and then a job offer.

Ian began to settle into a good life and a good job, started a family, and began wondering
if he had somehow settled. He described a time in his late 20s when he began to evaluate if the
passion he felt in his early 20s, through law school and his first few years working, had begun to
dwindle with children and a mortgage and the stuff of life. So I asked Ian what he thought it was
that actually got him to the point of leaving it all behind, to take the risk he did in relocating his
family to India. He shared how his action orientation was really a catalyst for him to take the
leap. He described it as desire to do something, coupled with the fear of missing out:
Um, well I think I always had a desire to go do something interesting. And so I figured, I looked at my life and was like, “You know we could be here forever.” I guess for me, honestly, fear of missing out. It was like, “You have this opportunity. You’re not going to have these opportunities forever. At some point they stop coming; don’t miss it.”

Heath described an action orientation as well, sharing a few different times when he couldn’t just sit back and allow nothing to happen (or allow something to happen slowly). On one occasion just after college, he shared about a 10-day hiking adventure with a number of other young leaders. He was the one who willingly carried the group’s supplies; he was the one who, when it was time to divvy up food (in frustration due to the leader trying to build consensus), jumped into action. He described that incident not as a positive time when he utilized this action orientation, but it has always been there. He reflected on this at one point in the interview when he shared how growing up in difficult circumstances (with an alcoholic, abusive father), he had a natural orientation toward taking action:

I think honestly it was the experience of growing up in that environment, kind of abusive environment, where there was no accountability and no one to protect me. And that left me highly motivated and highly empathetic with people who are in difficult situations. . . . It was just this deep sadness in my own heart that I grew up with, very deep sadness and discouragement. It’s not a large step from that to, you know, seeing someone in poverty who’s just trying to feed their children, right, I mean to think, well, let’s give it away.

An action orientation was seen in 9 of the 12 participants, but it was only pronounced in 3 or 4 of them. Only 2 participants described this orientation as having any causality to their sacrificial action. It would be very interesting to see if this action orientation is connected to a
particular personality type. Although I interviewed a number of participants that I would describe as having strong leadership qualities, I would not describe all participants in this way.

I did not perform any personality type tests or ask any of the participants to describe their personality specifically, but I could tell that the 12 participants certainly would not all fall into one personality profile. Still, it would be interesting to look more into this action orientation and see if there was a connection to personality types and the ability to do hard things.

**Finding Joy in the Work**

This theme came up a number of times, simply that they found great enjoyment in what they were doing, often citing that the sacrifice paled in comparison to the joy they experienced in the work.

Deborah mentioned the blessing she received from the sacrifice of adopting a number of children with special needs (how she found joy in the work). I asked her what she meant when she talked about this idea of blessing; this was her response:

I don’t think I meant blessing materially or even . . . I think what I consider a blessing is [that] pleasing God brings me joy. And that’s a blessing. That’s about as far as I thought about it. I didn’t think, “Well, if I do this or that, God’s going to do this for me or give me this.” Just the idea that I could please God is a blessing to me and knowing that that would . . . You know, helping special needs kids would please him. And then anything that he chose to do with it would just be kind of icing on the cake, or whatever they say.

Ken shared how his and his wife’s move to the inner city to care for their neighbors and bring a sense of pride and care back to their block actually had a profound impact on them. He shared how they experienced joy in the work by talking about the blessing they have received by the sacrifice:
[My wife] and I have had this conversation before, Toran. We really feel that we have been blessed more than any contribution than we may have made to our neighbors, to our neighborhood. It’s because I have never had this exciting feeling of being in the center of God’s will [before].

Greg talked about the sacrifice of leaving behind a thriving law practice to take a very large pay cut and move his family around the world to practice law on behalf of the poor and the vulnerable. It was actually in the midst of this, though, that he realized how grateful he was to be doing what he loved. The job was a blessing because, even though it was a sacrifice, there was nothing he would prefer to be doing.

The funny thing . . . this can sound falsely noble and alike, [but] I got out there and did that job [and] there wasn’t anything else that I wanted to do. I mean it wasn’t like . . . everything you do involves some kind of sacrifice; it involves some kind of trade off, right? I’ve always had everything I needed. I wish I had more money to pay for college, but you know I love my job; I love the people I get to work with. So I’m doing what I want . . . I think that is the bottom line of what I was trying to say.

Ian shared a similar experience of finding joy in the sacrificial work. He shared one story where his giddiness for the job he was doing to serve others simply leapt off the page. His eyes twinkled and his face was all smiles as he shared this:

I: We were quite happy, um, in Roanoke. I liked my job and I liked my firm. They had offered me a partnership before I left. And then I loved our church. But it was like when I got to India, living in India was hard, but the work was pretty entertaining. Like every single day I was doing something interesting and happy and thrilled to go to work.

T: Like what? What kinds of things were you doing that gave you that euphoria?
I: Well, I was meeting all of our clients all the time, I was often on trains going to places where we... the way we did investigations back then, we didn’t have an investigative professional on our staff, so we lead them ourselves. And so we’d get a tip and then that night we’d go hop on a train and go to that place and conduct our investigation and move forward to rescue everybody. It was always fast-paced and everything we did would result in something big happening.

There was an overwhelming response to this secondary theme in the follow-up interviews, more than any other single theme. One such example was Liam. He shared this during the follow-up interview, expressing how he and his wife have experienced deep-seated joy through their sacrifice:

The joy, one, you’ve got to start out with the word because if you take the Biblical use of the word, joy is deeper-rooted contentment of, you know, doing life right. [My wife] and I say... it’s amazing how many people say [to us], “It’s awesome what you do. I could never do that, the heartache would be too much.” Or “We could never do what you do, that’s amazing.” And our response varies a little bit, but, um, “Yes, you could and the fact that you think you would experience heartache would make you even better at it and would probably bring you even more joy.”... um, yeah the more, the more sacrifice you’re making the more filled you actually feel... those things, it just doesn’t compute, um... But it’s a reality. We have felt a lot of joy... we often feel more filled by this journey than we feel like we’re giving to others, definitely.

**Supportive Community**

Although this theme was not found across the board, there were a number of comments made regarding a community of friends and family that supported them on their journey toward
sacrifice or their initial decision and supported them in their efforts. This was never a catalyst for making the decision to sacrifice but was described as being helpful to those who wrestled with either follow-through or simply the difficulty of the sacrifice. Some of the supportive community that was described (by two of the male participants) actually happened before they ever made any sacrificial decisions, but it aided them in finding the emotional or spiritual health necessary to make these sacrificial decisions later in life.

Heath is one example of supportive community stepping in to help him find health before life-altering sacrifice was pursued. The story he shares illustrates how his community supported him by helping him see a counselor, which eventually allowed him to later sacrifice:

Working in a church environment was difficult for me. And a lot of this has to do with the wiring from the way I grew up . . . I mean you have this guy who’s a frickin’ volcano walking around. He’s also very bright and very talented, like one of those super endearing people who can also be super mean and curses a lot. And the church realized I was a mess and they were the first ones who grabbed hold of me and said like, “Hey . . . You’ve got stuff to deal with.” And they sent me to a counselor and that’s been a life-long journey doing all of that, but it’s all classic stuff. The wiring there right? It takes a long time to change it.

Greg actually described the support he received from his wife as they were processing the decision to sacrifice. It was the support of his wife as integral part of his community that gave him the courage to choose sacrifice (together):

This is sort of a funny story, the short of it is that the day or two after I called [my wife, she] was like, “You know I always thought at some point we might fold up our life and go to the mission field, but it never made sense to me that you would have stopped, you
would have gone to law school, practiced law for 10 years, developed competency and then not do that anymore.” But she said, “This really makes sense; let’s explore this.”

[She was] the wind at my back for that.

Ian also described his wife as a real encouragement in the decision to move to India and practice law on behalf of the poor and vulnerable:

Yeah, she was more all in for the move to India than I was. I think she always wanted to be a missionary. So for her it was like, “Oh, sweet, I thought we were giving up that idea when you were going to law school.” So she was thrilled the whole time.

Ian also described a time earlier in their marriage after law school when he and his wife moved into inner-city Roanoke and how it was the supportive community they found themselves in that aided in that move:

And so there were all these people, young professional Christian people our age who were moving into Roanoke, who were various friends with each other. And the idea was that we would move into the inner city, which is not a huge inner city, but the inner city of that city and just live life and I would get a job there just like everybody else, and we’d go to church and be great. So that’s what we did. . . . Jesus called us to do something and I just want to be around people that are serious about doing what Christ commanded. So I met this guy and he had a bunch of buddies and we had some buddies too that were interested in doing that, and, of course, we’re young so we can go anywhere we want . . . So . . . we just go, we just move to this city.

Amy described how supportive community has actually helped her with decisions and financial help, including building them the house they are living in now with all of the special needs children she has adopted. She shares how part of their supportive community is actually a
foundation board that has spearheaded some of the support, care, and financial help they have received.

We have this foundation [that was created for us], a wonderful board that oversees [it]; it’s called the Jones-Johnson Ministry Foundation, named after us because of all the kids, which they didn’t need to do. They help us a lot. The board meets every three months. . . . These are awesome people and [Mr.] DeGraf isn’t on the board but he always presides; he’s been a benefactor of ours since the ’80s. Awesome man, I love him, he’s a mentor, he’s given me wise council.

A supportive community did not seem to be causally connected to any of the participants’ decision to sacrifice. It did, however, seem to make a difference either in bringing participants to a place of health and wholeness that allowed them the ability to make a life-altering sacrifice, or in helping them to follow through with the decision to sacrifice. It would be very difficult to quantify how much a supportive community helps in the ongoing choice to sacrifice, but it certainly played an important role for some participants by offering encouragement and a pathway to greater health.

Opposition to Sacrifice

Some also shared some stories of opposition to their decisions to sacrifice. Some cited friends and other family members who (at least initially) thought they were making a mistake and, in some cases, even tried to talk them out of making the sacrifice. It may have been that the participant’s decision to sacrifice caused a lesser (but very real) sacrifice for others in their lives that gave opposition (e.g., grandparents not being able to see their grandchildren as much). Some participants indicated that the opposition may have come because some felt uncomfortable being
around someone who was potentially “upsetting the apple cart,” causing them to reflect on their own stated values, beliefs, and actions.

I asked Frank about the decision to sacrificially adopt a child with special needs (in this particular instance, it was a child born with no arms from Romania). He described the opposition he and his wife experienced from family and the same community that they expected to support them:

By the way, if you want to cause a disruption at church, talk about doing something radical for Jesus. It’s crazy, by the way. That people don’t like it in the church, mostly. Some do, but mostly at our church was like, “What? Whoa, no, steady!” And some people say you’re gonna ruin your lives. They told us we were going to ruin our lives with [G] alone. “You’ll have to take care of him his whole life.” “He’s gonna need this and that.” “You won’t have time to love your own kids.” “You’ll be distracted.” “You’ll be tired.” Whatever they say, you know. It starts to get into your head, so I had plenty of doubts.

Deborah (who is married to Frank) shared some similar reflections regarding opposition from friends and family in their initial responses to their decision to sacrifice:

I was just thinking that Frank and I have had a lot of opposition when we first started adopting, like when we first adopted [G]. Like our families kind of . . . They weren’t obviously against it, but they kind of hinted that we were crazy and that we were ruining our lives. Then Frank’s mom . . . she was kind of always saying, “Why do you do all this? Your life would be so much better if you spent a little money on yourself and took some vacations.” Frank said one time, “We do this for God, Mom.” And she said, “You do too much for God.” [Laughter]
It wasn’t just family though. Deborah said that she and Frank both experienced opposition from friends within their community as well. She shared a handful of experiences of this opposition from some fellow parishioners from their church in New England.

People at church were not necessarily all that supportive. To me it seemed obvious that when you’re a believer [Christian], you’d probably do something like this, but it didn’t seem obvious to them [laughter]. They just would go, “Why, why are you doing this?” And no support. And one person said to me, “You’ve got these three beautiful biological children and you know you’ve got this kid with no arms. He’ll have a horrible life, he’ll never be accepted.” And I’m thinking, “The kid was dying in an orphanage in Romania and they’re worried about whether he’ll be accepted in America?” You know? Just seemed backwards to me; it didn’t make sense [laughter].

Greg shared that when he and wife made the decision to leave his law practice and move overseas with their kids, the opposition began to roll in from some friends, but it was mostly made known by family members. He shared this:

There were all sorts of objections that come up. The biggest objection is you’ve got kids and what it’s gonna mean for them. Is it responsible and what’s it depriving them of? But immediately the objections from friends and family about kids and their safety and what are you depriving them of, “what about Little League” and all that. [Safety] was the principle objection that our families had.

After hearing a few different participants describe this kind of opposition, I asked Ian if he had experienced any opposition from friends or family or anyone once they made the decision to sacrifice. He shared how his parents’ initial reaction did turn around, but they felt opposition from both sets of parents:
My parents initially opposed and so I thought they were going to be completely opposed. Their initial reaction was very negative. Unexpectedly, then they quickly came around, kind of out of the blue. I kind of had accepted, “okay this is going to be bad” . . . but they quickly came around. I think they checked out IJM and thought “That’s not crazy.” [Laughter] So they were initially hostile. My wife’s parents, they were certainly not happy. They were not, I mean, they were not mean about it or anything, but they made it clear they didn’t want us to go.

It was interesting to hear some of these stories simply because it goes to show how difficult it can be to make the decision to sacrifice for the sake of serving others. Not everyone applauds. This often seemed to be related to the secondary sacrifices that are made by family or the internal conflict that arises in friends or acquaintances that have similar stated beliefs but are not ready (or willing) to take similar action.

**Ripple Effect of Sacrifice**

There were a number of stories of how they and others experienced really exciting effects of the sacrifice they made, in the lives of the participants’ children as well as in others. Some of the best stories I heard throughout the interviews were related to this theme. I was often left with my jaw on the ground as participants shared some of the ripple effects of their sacrifice, things they never could have orchestrated or imagined as a result of the sacrifice they made. This was often related to experience of the previous theme, Finding Joy in the Sacrifice.

Frank shared this story of how their sacrifice has led to a number of various ripple effects with their children:

All of them collectively had to share their whole lives. Their bedrooms, family vacations, meals, help the kids. We’d sometimes just delegate like [G] or [J] (two of their adopted
siblings who were both born with no arms) whatever they need. They’d poop their pants, 
[and I’d tell my kids] “take care of it.” [Laughter] . . . There were a lot of times their lives 
weren’t quite as lovely and as perfect as they could have been, but rather than become 
resentful, I think it affected all of them personality-wise in a good way.

Frank shared another story about the ripple effect (he was actually the one who used this 
phrase to describe this theme). It illustrates how Frank and Deborah’s decision to sacrifice by 
bringing kids with special needs into their home has led to some very interesting experiences. 
One of these was when their Romanian-born son with no arms showed an interest in music. He 
eventually learned to play the cello and guitar with his feet, which led to this cool ripple effect.

One of the moments I remember most was [G] walked in and he had his cell phone here 
like this [shows his son holding out his phone]. He said, “Dad there’s someone on the 
phone that wants to talk to you.” So I answered and it was the manager for the Goo Goo Dolls and he was like, “We saw a recording of your son playing one of our songs and we 
want to know if he’d want to do it with the band?” [Laughter] So next thing I know we’re 
in Pennsylvania in a stadium doing a sound check and on that night [G] is playing with 
the Goo Goo Dolls in front of like 7,000 people in the stadium. It was crazy, a crowd like 
that. That went viral and everything just went nuts.

After sharing a few more unbelievable stories, Frank ended this part of the interview by 
saying this: “I could tell you hundreds of these, I won’t torture you, but that’s what I mean by all 
these ripple effects. Everything leads to something else, which leads to something else.”

Christina shared a ripple effect of her sacrificial action with regard to her own children, 
what her children have grown to value, how they act, and what others notice about them.
People will ask me that now, “How can we get our kids to be like [yours]?” Like, they’ll look at our kids and see what they’ve done and what they’re doing and what matters to them and they want tips on how they can get their kids to care about others and whatever. And it’s not something you can just manufacture. It’s something you have to . . . you have to value it yourself. You can’t want your kids to value one thing when clearly your lifestyle values something else.

This theme had some of the most inspiring and amazing stories I’ve ever heard, way too many to share here, but it simply showed that the ramifications for those who had made sacrificial choices to serve others had far-reaching positive effects. From interactions with the Princess of Thailand, to hope and jobs being created in the inner city, to the overwhelmingly positive effects on the children of parents who had sacrificed to serve others. This theme would be very interesting and, I am sure, inspiring to study in more depth.

Validation

The themes were additionally validated in two ways: by using member checking from the participants in the follow-up interview (this was described briefly in Chapter III), as well as from the amount of data used to describe each theme. Figure 2 shows each participant and how many words they used when discussing each major theme. Figure 3 shows each major theme and how many total words were used to describe it throughout the data. Figures 4 and 5 do the same with each secondary theme. The percentages generally bear out the researcher’s interpretation of major and secondary themes, as well as their ranked importance with one minor note: Ripple Effect in the Secondary Themes had a disproportionate amount of data (words used) due to two participants who are married and shared similar stories for this theme. Those two account for 2,192 words of the 3,134 total words. They also show the relative importance that was given to
the top two major themes that emerged together as the grounded theory. Those top two major themes (Empathy and Spiritual Experience) constituted 17,113 words of data used to describe them, while all eight of the remaining major and secondary themes had only 17,158 combined (including the disproportionate amount of data derived in the secondary theme Ripple Effect).

![Figure 2. Major themes: Number of words by participant.](image-url)
Figure 3. Major themes: Word totals devoted to each theme.
Figure 4. Secondary themes: Number of words by participant.
Figure 5. Secondary themes: Word totals devoted to each theme.

Summary

There were five major and five secondary themes that arose from the data. The five major themes show a number of different influences that contribute to the sacrificial action. Two of the five major themes (Development of Empathy and Spiritual Experience with Ongoing Relational Interactions) were the most indicative of whether a person would choose sacrifice. These are developed further in Chapter V as the grounded theory that emerges from the research. The five major themes were The Development of Empathy (the ability to feel what others feel, often as a
result of suffering and/or difficulty), A Spiritual Experience with Ongoing Relational
Interactions, Pro-Sacrifice Messages (messages they heard or saw that were put sacrifice in a
positive light), Sacrificial Action Happening After Reflection (during the end of or after
emerging adulthood), and, finally, Practicing (actually practicing small sacrificial actions for the
sake of serving others as they grew up).

The five secondary themes were important to the study, but either didn’t explicitly
develop sacrificial action or were simply not shared by enough participants to move them into
the major theme category. The secondary themes were A Desire for Action (an action orientation
toward life); Finding Joy in the Work; Supportive Community; Opposition to Sacrifice (from
family, friends, or community); and Ripple Effect of Sacrifice (that their sacrifice positively
impacted others in ways that had not been anticipated). These themes did bring up some
interesting ideas that would be great to focus future research on (e.g., the role communities play
in supporting or discouraging sacrificial action and how sacrifice beneficially impacts others).
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Theory Emerging From Data Patterns

I did not find what I expected to. According to Glaser (one of the founders of grounded theory), “Grounded Theory is simply the discovery of emerging patterns in data. . . . Grounded Theory is the generation of theories from data” (Walsh et al., 2015, cited in “What Is Grounded Theory?” n.d.).

The purpose of a grounded theory design is to see if patterns emerge from the data that can be best explained as a theory. When I first began this dissertation, I expected to find easily explained practices that might help lead people to greater lives of sacrifice as they matured. I split my questioning into three developmental stages (childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood), expecting to find various messages, relationships, or experiences that I could point out might help develop sacrificial behavior.

The only other studies that I found that were asking similar questions had either focused on children or adolescents (and therefore one of those developmental stages) or didn’t use developmental theory specifically to address the question of why people sacrifice for others. I hoped to find certain messages that were given during childhood, adolescence, or emerging adulthood that would be a trigger or a common experience that all had in a particular developmental stage that made the difference.

What I found was not easily categorized into developmental stages at all and was more nuanced than the black-and-white concepts I hoped would manifest themselves. What I did find,
though, came across so often that it became impossible to deny, even though it didn’t always fit into the categories the way I had expected. There were many themes, both secondary and major, that, although were connected to participants’ experience of sacrificial action, did not come through strong enough to generate a theory, especially one that helps identify what seems to cause or grow the potential for sacrificial action. With further study there could be additions to this theory or entirely new theories, but with the data mined from the interviews, it was the top two major themes that I believe demand to be developed into a theory.

I was unsure if I had the latitude to allow many of the themes to lay fallow while only two were directly pursued for this theory. I could find very little in the literature on constructivist grounded theory to help make a case either way. In a personal communication with Dr. Kathy Charmaz (one of the foremost practitioners of constructivist grounded theory), she wrote and said,

Yes, of course, you can divide your analysis and pursue one direction rather than the other. Glaser and Strauss themselves did exactly that when they chose first to write about awareness of dying and then presented their temporal analysis in *Time for Dying*.

(K. Charmaz, personal communication, February 9, 2018)

The entirety of the communication can be found in Appendix H. With this answer from Dr. Charmaz, I felt comfortable moving forward with the top two major themes to create my grounded theory.

**Grounded Theory: Sacrificial Dynamite: The Convergence of Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God**

There were two themes that emerged that played the largest role in sacrificial action for my participants: the development of empathy and a spiritual experience that turned into an
ongoing relationship. My grounded theory is titled “Sacrificial Dynamite: The Convergence of Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God.” Sacrificial action in adulthood is likely to flow from the development of empathy throughout life (but often begun during childhood) and an experience with God that develops into an ongoing and growing relationship. This empathy is often developed through suffering and/or difficulty (regardless of whether the difficulty was of one’s own doing or the actions of others). The relationship with God is often developed through an experience (usually of both volition and emotion) that propels the person toward an ongoing and growing relationship.

It is the combination of these two themes that seemed to make the difference in why these individuals made the decision to sacrifice and was often cited by them as such. Just as dynamite contains both nitrate and glycerine, it is when the two are combined to form nitroglycerine that something explosive can happen. It is the combination of these two themes that created the “explosion” of sacrifice in their lives. I cannot determine which comes first, the development of empathy or the spiritual experience with God that continues as a relationship, but every participant described these two things. It is the combination of these two things that seems to be the greatest indicator of sacrifice. I’d like to look at these two pieces individually (Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God) and then try to discuss how they appear to work together. Each piece brings with it a layered explanation. Figure 6 (below) is a graphic illustrating how the theory developed from the data.
Figure 6. Grounded theory illustration.

Grounded Theory Illustration

Story Rich Data Collected Through In-Depth Interviews Through Original Four Research Questions.

Primary and Secondary themes emerged from the data.
Two main primary themes were described as having causal effects on the choice to sacrifice.

Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience with God

Developed Empathy
Often developed through suffering and/or difficulty, regardless of whether the difficulty was of one’s own doing or the actions of others.

Reflection in adulthood “lights the fuse” that allows the sacrificial explosion to take place.
The willful giving up of positions or possessions for the sake of serving others.

Ongoing Relational Experience with God
Often developed through an experience (usually of both volition and emotion) that propels the person toward an ongoing and growing relationship.

Grounded Theory:
Sacrificial Dynamite: The convergence of developed empathy and ongoing relational experience with God.
Developed Empathy

The ability to feel what others feel is a common way to define empathy, and every one of my participants either explicitly shared this theme or agreed that it was important to their decision to sacrifice. Although some people may be born with natural abilities to empathize with others (Deborah and Christina, as well as Bartolo seemed to), for most, the development of empathy usually came at a price. Most of the participants described painful moments that they attributed to the development of their empathy. It was through suffering that empathy grew. Take Heath, for example; he described the difficulty of growing up with an alcoholic father, where the threat of abuse always hung in the air, and a mother who refused to do anything about it. Amy described the pain of not fitting in and being teased regarding her acne or “homemade clothes.”

Others talked about being poor while growing up or being small or being bullied themselves. Frank described a car accident that nearly killed his parents and unborn sister when he was 15. He talked about his father’s inability to work after that and the resentment his dad had for his mother for years after the accident (she was driving). There is something about going through difficulty that you cannot control that develops empathy, and without empathy, there is very little motivation to sacrifice for others.

Heath explained that it was the empathy that he developed growing up with an abusive alcoholic father that gave him passion to stand up against bullying and injustice. He describes how this developed empathy was brought to a boiling point while working as a lawyer in a large, well-respected Washington, D.C., law firm. After feeling that his work in the firm was causing him to become emotionally numb and lifeless, he sat in church one Sunday and heard a story that broke his heart about a girl trafficked into sexual slavery. The empathy he acquired through suffering as a kid made a huge impact on his decision to leave his law firm and fight for the weak
and vulnerable. He described his thought process in this story of when he decided to leave his law firm. Within the story you will hear both elements of the theory: talking with God (spiritual experience that manifests itself in an ongoing relationship), empathy that has been built through previous experiences, and, ultimately, the mix of these two things, bringing him to the point of action.

And I’m basically talking to God saying, “Whatever you want me to do, I’m here.” And right as I’m doing that, Gary Haugen (Founder of International Justice Mission) gets up in our church and talks about these girls that are being raped and these brothels in India. And how it’s against the law and nobody will do anything about it. I was so moved by that. And I’m so moved, [but] I just finished a trial we’ve been in for six months [and] I’m so burned out at this time I can’t even sing in church. I don’t feel anything. I’m a super emotional guy, but I felt nothing. I was dead. But when he talked I was like, “Okay.” I immediately picture a scale in my head and on one side is the suffering of a girl who’s locked in a brothel somewhere in Southeast Asia being raped 10-15 times a day. And on the other side of the scale is everything it could potentially cost me to try to help that one girl. Even knowing that I didn’t think it would actually work. And the scale just went [makes hand gesture where the weight of the young girl far outweighs what he would have to give up].

One of the things that when I was in seminary that really impacted me was an exposition that one of our professors did from Philippians chapter 2 and he talked about that Paul quote, “Have this attitude in you that was also Christ Jesus.” And he walked us through what Paul was saying. “Who was in very nature God, did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped [used to his advantage], he emptied himself.” He
took us through the Greek word *Kenosis* and this idea of emptying yourself of all the rights and privileges, this security, comfort, all of it in order to go and serve, and save, and redeem, and then God raised him [Jesus]. Then our professor said, and this is another thing that just, when he said it in class I literally moaned out loud and everybody looked at me. He said, “Do you know that every time in the history of the world that great injustice and great wrongs have been overcome it’s because men and women have done this.” That’s it. I knew it was true. I thought of every example of every horrible injustice and worked through it. Someone, not always a Christian, you can talk about Gandhi, you can talk about whomever, but someone has done that and become weak.

I think honestly in that moment [as Gary Haugen talked about the trafficked girl] my life reoriented a little bit towards that. You know the scale showed up in my head. You know how your brain works. It takes me 5 minutes to describe that; it took .04 seconds for that image to go . . . and done. It was like the whole logic, the whole tree ran down, done . . . shit [now what?!].

Heath illustrates how the development of empathy through his own suffering allowed him to feel the suffering of another person. This was a person he had never met, who lived on the other side of the world that he didn’t even think he could honestly help, and yet it was that empathy that gave him the ability to choose to leave a lucrative career, move across the world, and give himself to helping others. Heath is the perfect example to illustrate the theory because he pulls together both pieces. I’ll use his story again to describe the second half of the theory: a spiritual experience that continues as an ongoing relationship.
Ongoing Relational Experience With God

This dissertation was anchored in the Christian faith as a way to narrow the focus for the definition of sacrifice. Due to this definition, the people and organizations that were contacted all directed me to participants that identify as Christian. It does not necessarily follow though that all would have had a spiritual experience with God that each indicated was significant and very real or that it also developed into an ongoing relationship with God. In fact, I would argue that many people who would identify as Christian would not describe the experience and ongoing relationship that these participants described. I’ll begin to illustrate this using portions of Heath’s interview. I shared these stories from Heath earlier, but they are worth repeating as they describe this phenomenon perfectly. Heath explained his initial experience with God in middle school on a retreat his youth pastor had taken the students on. It was this experience that became the catalyst to an ongoing relationship with God.

I remember when I was in 8th grade, I was going through confirmation in my church and I was just learning about Jesus. I didn’t know much about him . . . I went to the youth group and my parents didn’t go to church, but I loved youth group and I loved the youth pastor and I loved Jesus like period, straight out, flat out. Never had any other response but that to him.

We’re all on this H [shaped] dock and we’re farther out on the H dock kind of surrounding our buddy [who is getting baptized in the lake by his father]. And then something happened. I, (getting emotional, wet eyes and voice shaky) we all ended up jumping in the water. . . . It occurs to me now that we were all getting baptized but we all jumped in the water, he got baptized. I don’t think I was able to talk for a couple hours after that. I didn’t have a single box to put that in or anyone to explain what had
happened. But I would say it was an experience of God. And here’s the crazy thing about that; that experience for me was like the experience that a rocket ship has when it’s breaking out of the atmosphere, you know those thrusters just ignite for like 4 seconds but they propel the ship forever. So that experience happened; I’m still being propelled by that experience, it’s crazy, I’m 47. And it was just an experience and I was only 13. It was very emotional and my rational mind is, you know, [still] struggles with many things but that experience was real to me. . . . So I was just propelled by that.

Heath and most of the other participants described their experience with God as something that changed the trajectory of their lives, but it was not a one-time experience. Each of the participants described instances following the initial experience with God where there was a continual relational connection. They believed God guided them, gave them instruction (either through reflection on scripture as they read it or hearing someone teach on scripture), that they could speak directly to God and that he would speak to them (not necessarily an audible voice but a very real voice nonetheless). Heath described this relational connection to God in a time when he was frustrated by a choice he made: “I just say, ‘God, I don’t want to do this anymore.’ And I felt him say, ‘Okay.’” Another instance when Heath describes this relationship when he is about to make a major life decision:

And I go for a jog and I say the same thing whenever I’d go jogging in Thailand, I’d go up into the mountains and be like, “Lord if there’s anything you want to say, here I am.” And so I go running and I remember I stopped to take a breath and I look out over this valley and . . . God speaks to me or I perceive God speaking to me. [Laughter] Don’t ask me. I’ve only had this happen only one other time in my life where I felt like he actually was talking to me.
Although Heath has been used as a prototype of the theory, I could have easily used others to illustrate the same pattern (even if not in the exact same order). Others described their spiritual experiences in relational terms as well. John, Amy, Ken, Deborah, Frank, Bartolo, as well as most others all described the ongoing relational component very clearly. This relationship with God seemed to be a two-way street; they talked to God through prayer and then “heard” God speak to them, either through a sense they got during prayer or through spending time interacting with the Bible (either through personal study/reflection or through sermons they experienced). All described a relationship that required intentionality. This relationship with God was not merely happening to them, but rather something they actively pursued and participated in. I suppose that makes sense as all good relationships require intentionality and do not happen by accident. This does seem significant, though, to the development of a spiritual relationship that leads to sacrificial action; in fact, I believe it is one of the difference makers. It was the combination of an ongoing relationship that began with a spiritual experience and the development of empathy (often through suffering or difficulty) that was the catalyst of sacrificial action.

I would so like to say that I found a simple correlation or that there was a constant pattern of which came first, but this was not the case. Humans are complex; so too are our relationships. So the choice to sacrifice cannot be easily broken down into a few binary steps. What I can propose as a theory, though, is that the development of empathy through suffering/difficulty combined with a spiritual experience with God that leads to an ongoing relationship with God will likely lead to greater levels of sacrificing possessions or positions for the sake of serving others.
Implications for Practice

This theory has many implications for practice to develop the building blocks of sacrificial action. I’d like to break these implications down into the two building blocks of empathy development and relationship building with God.

Empathy Development

Empathy development often happens from suffering or difficulty experienced in life. Elmore (as cited in Caprino, 2014) describes parenting actions that actually hinder children from experiencing pain and discusses how these actions actually rob children from becoming the adults parents hope them to be. He describes a number of actions, but two in particular included rescuing too quickly and not allowing our children to experience risk. He cites a study done in Norway that found that children who are not allowed to play outside and get “skinned knees” were more likely to have phobias as adults.

Kids need to fall a few times to learn it’s normal; teens likely need to break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend to appreciate the emotional maturity that lasting relationships require. If parents remove risk from children’s lives, we will likely experience high arrogance and low self-esteem in our growing leaders. (Caprino, 2014)

This goes to parents’ deep-seated need to protect children from pain, and yet it is pain and suffering that actually allow us to learn resilience and grow empathy. Newer research indicates exactly what I have found in this study, that suffering or difficulty is a grower of empathy and can often lead to sacrificial action. This piece of research was found subsequent to the grounded theory and supports this half of the theory. Researchers Lim and DeSteno (2016) found that
increasing severity of past adversity predicts increased empathy, which, in turn, is linked to a stable tendency to feel compassion for others in need . . . [and] demonstrate that the resulting individual differences in compassion appear to engender behavioral responses meant to assist others (i.e., charitable giving, helping a stranger).

The development of empathy is not simply something that children and adolescents attain; adults can continue to increase their empathy as well. Riess conducted a randomized controlled trial to test the results of the empathy training she does with physicians and residents at Massachusetts General Hospital. The results showed “statistically significant improvements in satisfaction among patients treated by residents who had undergone the training,” showing that adults can indeed grow their empathy (Malloy, 2012). This is good news for us all, as empathy is not something you do or do not possess; it can be grown, even as an adult. There has been a lot of brain research over the past few years on what are called “mirror neurons,” parts of the brain that fire when we do something or when we see someone else doing it. These are connected with our limbic system, helping to identify emotions (our own) or what others are feeling (how we experience empathy) (Cort, 2005). I have not found any research on whether these “mirror neurons” develop more as a result of suffering, but it would not surprise me if they do and would seem to be in line with Lim and DeSteno’s (2016) research that earlier suffering produces empathy and the capacity to care for others in distress.

**Relationship Building With God**

There seem to be necessary assumptions that must be in place for a person to develop a growing relationship with God. Again, because this study is anchored in the Christian faith, a Christian understanding of how God has revealed Himself to humankind is necessary. In the Bible, God reveals Himself as being a person (really three persons in one, the Trinity). If God is
a person, as He claims to be in the Bible, then He must have a voice, a will, and thoughts and emotions (among other attributes). The Bible indicates that He does have these things, and because of this, we are able to interact with Him. The Bible also describes God as being “with us”; in fact, this is actually a significant Christian understanding of who God is. This is shown in that He sent His son Jesus (fully God, fully man) to be “with us” (Matthew 1:23, NIV). The name Emmanuel literally means “God with us.” After Jesus ascended into heaven (Luke 24:49-50; John 14:16), He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell those who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior (I Corinthians 3:16), which is the most “with us” God can be.

If it is believed that God is a person who desires to know us and be known by us, then we have the opportunity to interact with Him through reading and reflecting on His Word (the Bible), talking with (not merely to) Him in prayer, and interacting with others within the community of faith. This understanding of a relationship with God that can grow and deepen was a hallmark of those who chose to sacrifice positions or possessions for the sake of serving others. Throughout the interviews, there were stories of Bible verses, sermons (the Bible being taught), prayer times where God was both talked to and heard from, and various interactions with other Christians that developed a growing relationship with God.

The implications for practice are to have an expectation that God desires to know us and be known by us as we develop an ongoing interaction with Him. This happens through reading and reflecting on the Bible as well as speaking to him in prayer, as one would to a friend/mentor/parent, expecting Him to respond (not necessarily audibly but understandably, nonetheless).
Additions to the Literature

The data produced findings that drove me back to the literature, but it was not the literature that took up much of my literature review at the beginning of this project. Initially I expected that much of the findings would revolve around various aspects of developmental psychology, especially Fowler’s (1981) faith development theory. This was not the case. In fact, initially I was having a difficult time finding research (anywhere, but especially in development psychology) that dealt with sacrifice. It wasn’t until much later in the literature review and during some of the data collection that I stumbled into behavior psychology and the concept of prosocial psychology.

Much of the addition to the literature, either adding to or affirming various concepts, either was added a bit later in the literature review or was found after the data were analyzed. One book led to another, which led to another, as is often the case. While there are still limited amounts of literature that look at an overall picture of how adults that have sacrificed for the sake of serving others describe or attribute the reason they have done so, there is a lot of work on the concept of prosocial behavior. I will describe some of the more important findings and how they add to or affirm the literature.

There were two major themes that rose to the top of study and eventually became the basis for the grounded theory. The development of empathy was one of those and added a richness to the literature. There has been discussion within biological psychology as to whether people are born with certain genetic traits that make them more likely to act in a prosocial manner. Although not all talked about this, there were two of the female participants that described having a strong sense of empathy from a very early age. Dovidio et al. (2006) discuss some of the research that has been done in this area, and although my study was not attempting
to uncover any potential biological basis for sacrifice, it was interesting to note how at least two
of the participants described themselves as having early empathic tendencies.

The most common description for empathy development was through suffering. Sometimes the participants described situations where suffering was brought about through the
actions of others and sometimes by their own actions. Daloz et al. (1996) do not use the word
suffering but describe a similar concept in their “Common Fire” study. There was definitely an
affirmation of the concept of empathy being developed in childhood due to feeling what others feel, described by Berman (1997), Eisenberg and Mussen (1989), and Bierhoff (2002).

Interactions with people outside one’s primary “tribe” are helpful in developing empathy as described by Daloz et al. (1996). This affirmed what their “Common Fire” study described as a positive interaction with “otherness” (people unlike one’s self). Participants also described negative interactions with otherness, which was not addressed in the Common Fire study, but this is probably due to it not being described as having a direct positive effect on participants’ movement toward sacrifice (or as Daloz et al. describe, as working for the common good).

Spiritual experience that led to an ongoing relationship with God was the most discussed theme by participants. Unfortunately, I could not find much academic work that discusses this dynamic. There is some academic work described in the book How We Learn (Issler & Habermas, 1994) that describes the concepts of Communion (ongoing relationship with God) and Commission (service to others) as part of the four-part model of Christian maturity they describe. They discuss the “vertical” responsibility of Communion as the primary discipline of maturity, with Commission or service to others as a corollary of this primary discipline (along with the corollaries of Community and Character).
In Move, Hawkins and Parkinson (2011) studied over 1,000 churches and over 250,000 Christians from diverse theological backgrounds using the Spiritual Vitality Index (SVI). They found that Bible engagement and prayer were two of the most important indicators of spiritual growth, which was affirmed in my research by the way participants described how their relationship with God grew. Hawkins and Parkinson’s research “verified that serving those in need is one of the most catalytic things a church can do to move people closer to Christ” (p. 276). This too affirms the symbiotic nature of sacrificial action and relationship with God: not only does empathy development and a relational experience with God lead to sacrificial action, but the action itself may also, in turn, grow and strengthen the two catalysts.

There were also additions and affirmations to the fairly robust literature on prosocial (in my case, pro-sacrifice) messages happening throughout childhood and adolescence being a part of the participants’ experience (Berman, 1997; Daloz et al., 1996; Parks, 2000). It was interesting to note that although many participants shared pro-sacrifice messaging during these times (even into emerging adulthood and beyond), it was not one of the catalyzing features of their choice to sacrifice—potentially a necessary foundational piece, but not described as a catalyst, which interestingly enough was something I was hoping to understand better. Many people grow up with similar messaging from parents, mentors, and even religious and social organizations, but do not make the jump to sacrificial action. There wasn’t much that I found in academic works that engaged with this disconnect, so I can’t discern if the inability to link pro-sacrifice messaging to sacrificial action affirms or adds to the literature.

There was also a number of other ways that the study added to and affirmed various behavioral psychology works on pro-social psychology, some works within faith development
and some works within moral development. These can be seen in the Comparison of Research in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Summary Between Scott (2018) and Previous Research</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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</table>

**Development of Empathy (the Ability to Feel What Others Feel)**

- Empathy was developed through suffering.
- Empathy was often developed in childhood and grown in adolescence (although not exclusively) through feeling what others feel or understanding another perspective.
- A couple of participants indicated that they felt that they were born with strong empathy.
- Empathy (along with spiritual relationship) was the main motivator for sacrificial action.
- An experience with diversity (or “otherness,” someone outside of one’s own “tribe”).

**A Spiritual Experience with Ongoing Relational Interactions**

- Each participant described a spiritual experience that was a catalyst for relationship with God.
- The ongoing relationship was often described as the catalyst (along with empathy development) to sacrificial action.
- Relationship development came through various channels:
  - Learning more through Biblical or theological education (formal and informal)
  - Prayer, both speaking to God and listening to God
  - Reflection on both learning and prayer
  - Belief that God was personal and imminent (close).
- Relationship with God was strengthened through other themes of supportive community and pro-sacrifice messaging.

**Affirms:**

- Compassion and “a felt, empathic connection” described in the Common Fire study (Daloz et al., 1996).
- Empathy being developed in childhood due to feeling what others feel (Berman, 1997; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Bierhoff, 2002).
- Interactions with people outside one’s primary “tribe” are helpful in developing empathy (Daloz et al., 1996).
- The heritability of empathy and the complex answer to potential biological basis for prosocial action (Dovidio et al., 2006).

**Adds to:**

- Discussion of suffering as a means of empathy development (Daloz et al., 1996; Lim & DeStano, 2016).
- Two participants (both female) sensing they were “always” empathic (Bierhoff, 2002).

**Adds to:**

- There is some overlap in how institutions form us in the academic work *The Good Society* as well as spiritual disciplines in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 1991, 2007).
- The understanding that both spiritual experience and formal and informal Biblical and theological education grows relationship that leads to action. Fowler and Lovin (1980) describe this in *Trajectories of Faith* as they look at the life Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- The concepts of Communion (ongoing relationship with God) and Commission (service to others) as part of the four-part model of Christian maturity described in the book *How We Learn* (Issler & Habermas, 1994).
- Reflection on Bible reading and prayer is the number one indicator of spiritual maturity. That service plays a role in growing relationship with God (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2011).
Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Summary between Scott (2018) and Previous Research</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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### Pro-Sacrifice Messages

- Messages came from parents especially during childhood and adolescence both verbally and through modeling behaviors.
- Messages were also communicated through mentors and religious texts and stories.
- The bulk of the messages seemed to come from the Bible during mid-late adolescence and especially emerging adulthood.

Affirms:
- Mentoring and guidance (Parks, 2000).

Adds to:
- Messages and family modeling (Berman, 1997; Daloz et al., 1996), Mentoring and modeling (Shults & Sandage, 2006).

### Practicing (Opportunities to Practice Smaller Ways of Sacrificial Service for Others During Childhood and Adolescence)

- Opportunities to practice under the tutelage of parents.
- Short term service trips.
- Smaller, but significant opportunities to sacrifice something for others.

Adds to:
- Volunteerism (Bierhoff, 2002), On creating positive moral impressions (Weiner, 2006).

Affirms:
- Service opportunities without long term obligations (Daloz et al., 1996), Practicing in classroom communities of care and cooperation (Berman, 1997).

### Sacrificial Action Happening After Reflection During the End of (or After) Emerging Adulthood

- Action often came at the end of emerging adulthood (late 20s) or, more often, after emerging adulthood.
- Partially due to a period of reflection where participants began to ask themselves if the life they were living was actually on the trajectory of the life they wanted or expected to be living.
- All but one participant was unable to adequately reflect on their current trajectory until at least late emerging adulthood which lends more evidence to a new developmental stage preceding adulthood in the West.

Adds to:
- Movement through Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith) and into Stage 5 (Conjunctive Faith, i.e., the ability to see the inter-relatedness of things and that there are many sides to an issue) faith development (Fowler, 1981).
- Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007a).

### A Desire to for Action or an Action Orientation

- Many participants described a need to act or that they have always been a “do something” kind of person.

Adds to:
- Emotions and action (Weiner, 2006).
Table 3—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Summary between Scott (2018) and Previous Research</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finding Joy in the Work</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Many of the participants described the joy they received from the sacrificial action they took.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Participants usually described the joy as outweighing the high cost of the sacrifice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- This was generally revealed or learned after the choice to sacrifice, not before.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Joy was described as different from happiness, more in line with satisfaction in helping someone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adds to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Why do people help, the concept of equity, norms of social responsibility (Dovidio et al., 2006).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reward/punishment and moral emotions and impression management (Weiner, 2006).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirms:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The empathy-altruism hypothesis (Dovidio et al., 2006).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| **Supportive Community (Friends and Family That Supported Their Sacrificial Journey)** |
| - Help in follow of through once decision was made. |
| - Help in emotional, financial and other forms of support. |
| - Simple belief in and encouragement of the participant’s decision. |
| Affirms: |
| - Networks of belonging and the power of tribe (Parks, 2000). |
| Adds to: |
| - Why do people help (Dovidio et al., 2006). |
| - Social Context: Networks and social exchange (Fetchenhauer et al., 2006). |

| **Opposition to Sacrifice (Friends and Family That at Least Initially Opposed the Sacrificial Journey)** |
| - Some participants were discouraged from taking action due to the cost it would require from their family (i.e., sacrifice causing grandparents to lose easy access to grandkids due to required move). |
| - Some participants were told they were “upsetting the applecart” and discouraged by some members of their community. |
| Adds to: |
| - Cost/Reward model and the negative state relief model (Dovidio et al., 2006). |
| - Reciprocity and Solidarity as a social dilemma and organizational citizenship behavior (Bierhoff, 2002). |

| **Ripple Effect of Sacrifice** |
| - Although closely related to the theme of Finding Joy in the Work this theme showed up as unforeseen effects of the sacrifice. |
| - Often connected to the effect of the participants actions on their children. |
| - Also ways that their sacrifice introduced them to places, people and platforms that were unimaginable prior to the sacrifice. |
| Affirms: |
| - Models of development of social responsibility (Berman, 1997). |
| Adds to: |
| - Consequences for the helper and effects of volunteering and helping on adults (Dovidio et al., 2006). |
Recommendations for Future Research

A number of recommendations for future research would be beneficial or interesting to explore. This is an emergent study and is therefore delimited by the fact that I was unable to explore all of the axial codes.

One of the more interesting findings was that major life sacrifice rarely happened before the end of the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. It would be interesting to see why that may be the case and if there are necessary events or experiences that a person needs to go through before choosing such sacrifice.

I would also love to see more research done on the children of those who have made major life sacrifices. In the theme of the ripple effect, it was obvious that parental sacrifice had made a difference in the development of empathy in their children. Did this have a controlling influence on their children’s growth in empathy or growth in relationship with God? It makes sense that modeling from parents might make a large imprint on children, but many of the participants in this study didn’t describe major life sacrifice from their own parents as a causal factor in their choice to sacrifice. In fact, some even described pushback or opposition to sacrifice from their parents. It seems that parental support or modeling wasn’t a difference maker in whether these individuals with a growing empathy and a growing relationship with God would choose to sacrifice for others. It would be very interesting, however, to see if those who did model these two pieces of sacrifice (ongoing empathy and relationship with God) through actions (actually sacrificing positions or possessions for the sake of serving others) made a difference in the likelihood that their own children would sacrifice for the sake of serving others.

This study was grounded in the Christian faith and, as such, has limitations on how widely it may be applied. It would be very interesting to do another study on people who do not
claim to have faith in God or who claim to be adherents to another religion (say, Islam or Buddhism) that have sacrificed positions or possessions for the sake of serving others to see if similar themes arise, especially as it applies to the theory espoused here. Do people of no faith or a different faith who have sacrificed for others also describe empathy development through suffering or difficulty and an ongoing relationship with their deity or a state of mindfulness (or however a person of no faith might describe this idea) in a way that seems to link causality? It would be very interesting to see specifically if the ongoing relationship with God was instrumental for only self-identified Christians.

It would also be very interesting to see what types of spiritual practices those who sacrifice for others do on a regular basis. What do they do and how often do they do it? Are some of the practices used by all or most of the participants, or is there possibly one practice in particular that all participate in? The discussion on spiritual formation has a long and rich history within Christian circles since the earliest church. These would be a few interesting follow-up research questions.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Additional Proverbs Outlining Sacrifice in the Bible
Proverbs 11:16-17 “A kindhearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth. A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself” (NIV).

Proverbs 11:24-25 “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (NIV).

Proverbs 14:31 “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (NIV).

Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done” (NIV).

Proverbs 21:13 “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered” (NIV).

Proverbs 21:21 “He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor” (NIV).

Proverbs 22:9 “A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor” (NIV).

Proverbs 24:11-12 “Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?” (NIV)

Proverbs 28:27 “He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses” (NIV).

Proverbs 29:7 “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern” (NIV).

Proverbs 31:20 Here the author is speaking of the virtuous woman: “She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy” (NIV).
Appendix B

Initial Letter Sent to Organizations to Find Participants
To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Toran Scott and I am doing research in the area of sacrificial living with Western Michigan University. Sacrifice is something that is essential to our faith and yet seems to be so difficult to actually put into practice. There is very little research that has been done on what messages, relationships or experiences people who are living a sacrificial lifestyle might have in common. It is my hope that this research might help the Church and society in general, in knowing what experiences, messages or relationships we might want to expose our own kids, students and young adults to.

I am writing to see if you might be able to offer potential names of individuals who are at least 28 years of age and are living an easily identifiable lifestyle of self sacrifice. I have defined self sacrifice through a biblical lens as “the willful giving up of one’s possessions or positions for the sake of serving others”. I am hoping to find people who have maybe left good careers to serve others or maybe decided to adopt multiple children or use their resources in a sacrificial way for others. There are so many ways this might be shown, but I am hoping to interview people who would be easily identified as fitting the description of living a sacrificial life. I only expect to need about 3-5 hours of the participant’s time for two interviews over the course of a few months. All subjects will be anonymous in the research and all participants will be given access to the research and any findings.

I am sending this letter to you because I thought you might know some individuals who fit the description I need to interview. I have been identifying a small number of people and organizations that might be aware of individuals who might be willing to participate in this study and I thought you may be able to point me in some helpful directions. I would be happy to discuss this with you more if that would be helpful in any way. Thank you for considering this request.

In Christ,

Toran Scott

PhD. Candidate, Western Michigan University
Pastor at Ridge Point Community Church
Appendix C

Initial Letter Sent to Participants
Dear __________,

Hi, my name is Toran Scott. I’m a PhD candidate at Western Michigan University and according to some of what ___________ shared with me I think you would be a great candidate for this research. I am interviewing people who have been identified by others as having made choices that have resulted in a sacrificial lifestyle for the sake of serving others. My research is attempting to find out what potential relationships, messages, or experiences people who have chosen to live sacrificially for the sake of serving others have in common.

I’d love to be able to be able to spend about an hour and half asking you some simple questions about the relationships, messages and experiences you remember during your childhood (birth to 6th grade), adolescence (7th grade to early college years) and emerging adulthood (early to late 20’s). I will be interviewing around 12 or so other interesting individuals and after the first round of interviews will send out my initial findings for you all to read and reflect on a bit. I will then ask to do a follow up interview for another hour or so to see if the initial findings seem accurate or bring other thoughts and ideas to mind. Overall I’d expect the total time of both interviews/discussions and personal reflection to be around 2-4 hours of your time.

There are five initial interview questions that I’d love for you to reflect on some before our initial time together. Hopefully these questions will allow you to remember formative messages, relationships and experiences you had as you grew into the person you are today. Here are the questions:

1. As you reflect on your childhood are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think influenced you to make the choice to sacrifice?
2. As you reflect on your teenage to early 20’s are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think impacted you to make the choice to sacrifice?
3. As you reflect on your early to late 20’s are there any meaningful interactions or experiences that you think led you to make the choice to sacrifice?
4. As you reflect back on those meaningful interactions and experiences, how do you think they impacted your decision to live sacrificially?
5. Any other thoughts or reflections that you think are relevant?

All interviews will be coded so as to keep you anonymous in the research. The final findings will be made available to you if you wish to see them.

Thanks for considering being a part of this study; I believe your participation and time spent will be useful to the Church at large. I will follow up soon with an informed consent form that briefly explains the research and allows you to sign saying you wish to participate.

I look forward to connecting with you,

Toran Scott
Appendix D

Informed Consent
You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Self-Sacrifice: Experiences, Messages, and Relationships During Childhood, Adolescence, and Emerging Adulthood: A Grounded Theory.” This project will serve as Toran Scott’s dissertation, for the requirements of the PhD. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
We are trying to determine if there are any common messages, relationships or experiences among those who have sacrificed positions or possessions for the sake of serving others that might help understand what contributes to how individuals (like yourself) choose to live this way.

Who can participate in this study?
Any adult 29 years old or older who meets the definition of self sacrifice (the willful giving up of positions or possessions for the sake of serving others), speaks English, and has access to a computer and phone for the interviews and subsequent follow up connections may participate. According to the research of Jeffrey Jansen Arnett emerging adulthood ends around the late 20’s so someone 29 or older would have walked through this developmental stage and be able to discuss the relevant interview questions.

Where will this study take place?
The interviews will take place in an environment that is most comfortable for you, which could include a living room, an office, a coffeehouse, or something similar. Interviews will take place face to face when possible, via video call (Skype or something similar) as the next preferable option, or via phone if the other two are not feasible.
What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
The initial interview will take approximately 1 to 2 hours with the hope that some reflection of the initial interview questions takes place prior to that interview (approximately 15-30 minutes). We will send out the initial findings of the interviews within 4-6 months and the follow up interview after reading and reflecting on those initial findings will be approximately 15 to 45 minutes. Total time commitment should be between 2-4 hours.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You will be asked to reflect on the initial open-ended interview questions (five questions) for 15-30 minutes prior to the interview. Spend approximately 1-2 hours sharing your thoughts to those five questions and then read and reflect on the initial findings once all of the initial interviews are complete. These initial findings will be what ideas and themes have emerged from the interviews. We’d like you to take as much or little time as you see fit and then a follow up conversation to see if what we think we have discovered resonates with your thoughts and experiences. The follow up interview/discussion should be around 15-45 minutes. The total time commitment should be around 2-4 hours total depending on the individual.

What information is being measured during the study?
We will be looking for patterns of messages, relationships and or experiences that all of the interviewees have in common taking special interest in how the individuals reflect on how those events may or may not have contributed to your decision to live sacrificially.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
Although risks to you will be minimal, all interviews will be coded with a pseudonym so that you remain anonymous throughout the entire process from the beginning of the interview process through the writing of the dissertation. All data (interview transcripts, consent forms, pseudonym master list and recordings) will be kept locked file at Western Michigan University.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Although there may not be enormous benefit to you for participating we hope you gain an increased understanding of how various messages, relationships and experiences helped to influence the decisions you have made in life. We also hope you feel a sense of encouragement by being asked to participate and an acknowledgement of the positive influence you have had in this world.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
Other than the time you invest to participate there should be no cost to you.
Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Only the two professors on the dissertation committee along with the principle and student investigator will have access to the information collected.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the student investigator, Toran Scott at 616-485-1777 or toranscott@gmail.com You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

___________________________________________________________________
Participant’s signature  Date
Appendix E

Themes that Emerged from the Data
Major Themes that Emerged from the Data

1. The Development of Empathy (the ability to feel what others feel)

The development of empathy seemed to be the most significant finding that emerged from the data. Pretty much across the board all participants described the ability to feel what others felt and expressed a desire to act based on that empathy. Although the development of empathy happened in many different ways (from feeling like an outsider during childhood or adolescence to being bullied or being forced to confront their own bullying behavior) it was a consistent theme that emerged. Being able to feel what others were experiencing seemed to be the most significant indicator of future sacrifice for serving others. An experience with diversity (or “otherness”, someone outside of one’s own “tribe”) is a sub theme. It was often described and seems to be another significant way participants developed empathy.

2. A Spiritual Experience with Ongoing Relational Interactions

Nearly every participant in this study described some time in life (for most during adolescence or early emerging adulthood) when they had a spiritual experience that they still remember quite vividly. These experiences seemed to adjust the trajectories of each participant’s life and was a touchstone moment that the participants found themselves referring to as a (or even “the”) reason for sacrificing for others. God was often described in relational terms rather than religious terms indicating that participants felt a relational connection to God rather than merely a connection to dogma, theology, tradition or even the communal nature of their faith. The touchstone experience grew into a relationship that was ongoing where the participants seemed to have (or expect) back and forth interactions with God often in much the same way they would interact with a human friend.

3. Pro-Sacrifice Messages

Participants described many different ways that they received messages from others that sacrifice for the sake of serving others was a positive thing to do. Messages came from many sources: parents both verbally and through modeling behaviors, from religious texts such as the Bible, from mentors and guides who encouraged such action, from stories they heard of others who had sacrificed for others.

The bulk of the messages seemed to come from the Bible during mid-late adolescence and especially emerging adulthood. The main conveyor of messages during childhood was a parent. Even though the messages were delivered in a number of different ways there is no participant who didn’t share various messages they received during these developmental stages. In fact most participants described both specific prescribed messages (blatant, black and white, concrete) and non-specific described (abstract, nuanced) messages that played a role in how and why they sacrificed to serve others. Knowledge of people in need coupled with pro sacrificial messages seemed to be a catalyst for these participants to choose sacrifice. Modeling of
behaviors by parents, clergy and other mentors and the encouragement of other influential guides are two sub themes of Messages.

4. Practicing

Many of the individuals who participated in this study had opportunities to practice smaller ways of sacrificial service for others during childhood and adolescence. These opportunities to practice sacrificial behaviors under the safety net of parents or mentors where the sacrificial activity was not life altering may play a role in one’s ability to sacrifice later in life when the stakes are higher. I am interested in hearing from participants if they think these opportunities to practice were influential or not on their future choices to sacrifice.

5. Sacrificial Action Happens after Reflection during the end of (or after) Emerging Adulthood:

It was interesting to find that most of the individuals that participated in this study did not choose to sacrifice until they were either nearing the end of emerging adulthood (late 20’s) and ironically had more to lose. For all participants the sacrifice was not made without an understanding of what was being given up (even if the participant felt as though it was not a sacrifice) but for most it seemed that life had just snowballed through adolescence into emerging adulthood and it wasn’t until the end of that time that they began to reflect on where they were.

It was at this time that many (through reflection and for some through another spiritual experience) began to evaluate if they were living the way they thought they ought to. It was during this time of reflection and evaluation (coupled with messages and knowledge gained earlier and during this same time frame) that allowed them to move towards the trajectory that their spiritual experience had started them on years earlier.

Secondary Themes that Emerged from the Data

- A Desire to for Action or an Action Orientation:

Some participants seemed to indicate that something just needed to happen and they wouldn’t sit by while injustice, exploitation or suffering was happening. They had what I would call an “Action Orientation” to life often driven by empathy.

- Finding Joy in the Work:

This theme came up a number of times, simply that they found great enjoyment in what they were doing, often citing that the sacrifice paled in comparison to the joy they experienced in the work.
- **Supportive Community:**

  Although this was not across the board there were a number of comments made regarding a community of friends and family that supported their initial decision and supports them in their efforts.

- **Opposition to Sacrifice:**

  Some also shared some stories of opposition to their decisions to sacrifice. Some cited friends and others family who (at least initially) thought they were making a mistake and in some cases even tried to talk them out of making the sacrifice.

- **Ripple Effect of Sacrifice:**

  There were a number of stories of how they and others experienced really exciting effects of the sacrifice they made, both in the lives of the participants children as well in others. Things they never could have orchestrated or imagined as a result of the sacrifice they made.
Appendix F

Follow-Up Questions for Second Interview
How do the 5 major findings hit you?

Do they feel true to your own story of sacrifice?

Is there something fundamental or important that you think is missing as you read through them?

Anything else you would like to add (stories or thoughts as to what pushed you to sacrifice)?
Appendix G

Original Conceptual Categories
The original 19 conceptual categories that I created from the data as it was being analyzed were:

- Empathy in general
- Empathy developed through difficulty of not fitting in
- Empathy developed through hurting others
- Empathy developed through being hurt by others
- An experience with Diversity (or Otherness)
- A spiritual experience (either before the sacrifice or as a result of the sacrifice)
- A desire to for action or an action orientation
- Reflection in emerging adulthood
- An encouraging guide/mentor
- Finding joy in the work
- Messages
  - Choice to sacrifice comes after emerging adulthood… reflection induced
- Modeling
- Practicing
- Supportive community
- Invitation to sacrifice
- Sacrifice can be difficult
- Opposition to sacrifice
- Ripple effect of sacrifice
Appendix H

Personal Communication with Dr. Kathy Charmaz
Hello Dr. Charmaz,
I have a question that I’m hoping you may be able to answer for me. I’m finishing my PhD at Western Michigan University using grounded theory for my dissertation. The study produced 5 major themes and 5 secondary themes that seemed necessary to discuss in the findings section, but ultimately it was the combination of the top two major themes that led towards a cohesive theory. My supervisor and I are unsure if I can simply “drop” the other 3 major and 5 secondary themes from the grounded theory.

I have been looking around and can really find no instruction on the matter (especially something I can cite) to explain why the findings would continually be paired down towards the end product of producing/generating a theory. As I have read more and more over these past years on grounded theory I haven’t found easily citable information on this, but it seems to be the purpose of grounded theory design, to gather data, co-creating meaning with your participants and see if a theory bubbles up within the findings. I didn’t anticipate needing to somehow fit every finding (major or secondary) into the theory, but maybe that is an expectation? I’m hoping to defend a bit later this semester and this is one issue we’re trying to nail down as we move towards finalizing the dissertation.

Thanks for taking time, I look forward to connecting if at all possible.

Sincerely,

Toran Scott
Response from Dr. Charmaz:

Dear Toran,

Thank you for your interest in my work. Your message arrived while I was away and was juggling a very demanding schedule that precluded answering emails. Yes, of course, you can divide your analysis and pursue one direction rather than the other. Glaser and Strauss themselves did exactly that when they chose first to write about awareness of dying and then presented their temporal analysis in Time for Dying.

With best wishes with your dissertation,

Kathy

Kathy Charmaz, Professor Emerita
Sociology Department
Sonoma State University
1801 E. Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928
USA

Author of Constructing Grounded Theory 2nd ed., Sage Publications
Appendix I

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval
Date: December 15, 2014
To: Sue Poppink, Principal Investigator  
Toran Scott, Student Investigator for dissertation 

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-11-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Self Sacrifice: Experiences, Messages and Relationships during Childhood Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood, A Grounded Theory” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study.” Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: December 14, 2015
Appendix J

Data Analysis Step by Step
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1. I coded each interview, after reading them multiple times, as to what was a possible theme. This is what some researchers refer to as abductive reasoning.

2. Depending on when the transcriber got the interviews back to me, I sometimes analyzed them one by one, but sometimes two or three in a batch.

3. I marked the interviews for codes.

4. I added notes and insights that were found or wrote memos throughout the coding process.

5. Concepts began to emerge; I marked them as “categories”. These categories came from the codes and memos. I marked them in various colors and forms of underlining.

6. I took the first three interviews and wrote down potential categories. At this point I did not know whether these would turn out to be major themes or remain categories in the final analysis.

7. For the next six interviews, I looked to see if the initial categories were continuing to come up. I added any new categories that emerged with the interviews.

8. Then I went back to previous interviews, noting any congruent categories found in later interviews.

9. The final three interviews confirmed that no new categories emerged.

10. All twelve transcripts were marked up, using a different color for each category and theme.

11. I printed off color copies and cut out each category to see if the categories should be developed into a theme or could be seen in a new way.

12. I physically laid out the various piles to see if there could be different potential new themes. This did not substantially help to change the already developed categories and themes but I did, however, see that some of the categories made more sense when combined. Themes began to develop at this stage.

13. Next, I decided what were the major themes and what seemed to be secondary themes. This was decided based upon: (1) my judgment as to which themes were most significant, (2) to the amount of words and data used by participants to describe the themes, (3) how passionate participants described the theme (visible and audible emotion shown) and (4) if they actually said a particular theme was most important.

14. I sent the five major and five secondary themes out to the twelve participants along with a short explanation of the themes.

15. They were asked to read and reflect on the themes and then during the second interview let me know if they believed the themes did or did not reflect their experiences.

16. The feedback I got from participants did not live up to my expectations. I had hoped for some new ideas or corrections, but the participants consistently thought the themes
reflected their experience and were a good interpretation of what they had shared. Although nothing new came to light, it was good to confirm the analysis to that point.

17. From here, the themes were written out with supporting data.

18. The top two major themes were the difference makers in why participants decided to make the choice to sacrifice and it was out of these two themes that the grounded theory was developed.

19. The theory of “Sacrificial Dynamite: The Convergence of Developed Empathy and Ongoing Relational Experience With God” emerged from the data patterns.