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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH FORMATION
EXPERIENCES AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY:
A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
William Edgar Allen
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APPROVAL SHEET

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EXPERIENCES AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY:
A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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To Cheryl

My wife, helpmate, and friend

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGEA	Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SFI	Spiritual Formation Inventory
TDA	Transformational Discipleship Assessment

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PREFACE

In essence this topic had me before I had it. During years of worshipping the Lord among His people here and abroad, I was often grieved by the lack of a challenge and opportunity to respond to the preaching of the Word. One never knows who might be in the audience, whom the Spirit may be pressing, or what might have been accomplished that day in the life of one of God's own children had a challenge been given. This is not to say that an altar call is the best method or that it ought to be given.

My deepest gratitude is extended to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the unbelievable and awesome privilege of attending the leveling Master of Divinity courses and experiencing the definite work of the Spirit through the teaching of godly, dedicated fellow servants of the Lord. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the School of Church Ministries for accepting me into the Ph.D. program and to Dr. Michael Wilder for patiently enduring my tenacious grip on the topic. Dr. Timothy Jones invested in me and in many other students to be certain we understood the Christian worldview like never before through his Theological Anthropology and Human Development course. Dr. Timothy Beougher has been my sounding board and cheerleader on the topic from before the Ph.D. program, and Dr. Hal Pettegrew has become a friend and exemplar of what a university professor ought to be. Dr. Brian Richardson's gentle spirit, genuine interest, and professional guidance through the entire process left nothing to be desired. Scott McConnell at LifeWay Research was a joy to work with, and his expertise is the key reason the outcomes of this project can be considered valid and reliable.

Gabe Etzel and Jennifer Garrison as my fellow cohort members were and continue to be a source of encouragement and strength, and I am grateful to God's providence in grouping us together for the Ph.D. journey. Special thanks must also go to

Betsy Fredrick for her invaluable assistance in forging a better prospectus and dissertation.

Jamie Murphy as my pastor and friend expressed sincere interest in the project and came alongside me to provide perspective and encouragement. Not the least of these to be thanked is my wife, Cheryl. In more than three decades of marriage she has never even flinched when I proposed a new business idea, educational endeavor, or even overseas service. A truer helpmate, there never was.

God bless this effort and all who read it—for His glory and for the building of His Kingdom.

William Edgar Allen

Indianapolis, Indiana

May 2014

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The sometimes passionate and opinionated discussion on the efficacy of public evangelistic invitations supported only with anecdotal recollections or statistically unsupported research begs for a proper empirical study to elucidate what the relationship is, if any, between public evangelistic invitations and Christian formation. This research study therefore undertakes to provide the necessary outcomes on the question of the relationship, if any, between public evangelistic invitations and Christian formation. The particular focus of this study is on the altar call method of the public evangelistic invitation. It is acknowledged that many additional factors not considered in this study also affect Christian formation. This study further acknowledges the success or failure of public evangelistic invitations is directly related to the extent of follow-up efforts after the evangelistic service.

Christians are clearly commanded to share the gospel and to invite those that hear to commit their lives to Christ (Matt 11:28, 28:19). The issue is not whether unbelievers should be invited to come to Christ.¹ Rather, it is the method of that invitation, particularly with regard to the giving of an altar call, which has proponents for and against the practice voicing their position with equal certainty. Ehrhard warns the dangers of a public evangelistic invitation in the form of an altar call are serious because the eternal destiny of the souls of men is at stake.² In addition Murray holds the altar call

¹Jim Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System* (Parkville, MO: Christian Communicators, 2008), 5.

²Ibid., 27.

represents an outward response as connected with “receiving Christ” thereby instituting a condition of salvation which Christ never appointed.³ On the other hand Kendall notes proponents of the altar call consider it as a way of calling men to come out of hiding and stand up and be counted.⁴ Streett notes preachers who regularly issue an invitation with the necessary preparation and reliance on the Holy Spirit are those who become most adept in calling sinners to Christ.⁵

“Perhaps no contemporary practice among evangelical churches brings more emotional reaction than does the use or nonuse of an altar call or public invitation at the end of the preached word.”⁶ Though a great deal has been written by proponents and opponents of the altar call and some attempts have been made to quantify results following public evangelistic efforts, no definitive empirically supported conclusions have been propounded regarding the efficacy or lack thereof pertaining to public evangelistic invitations in the form of an altar call. This research study sought to fill this gap in the literature and replace emotionally-fueled discussions in the church on altar calls with a solid statistically unimpeachable outcome regarding the efficacy, if any, of altar calls.

Introduction to the Research Problem

Christian formation experiences and the relationship to spiritual maturity encompass a broad category under which the matter of altar call efficacy falls. Factors

³Iain H. Murray, *The Invitation System* (London: Hunt Barnard & Co., 1967), 26.

⁴R. T. Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted: Calling for Public Confession of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 10.

⁵R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 17.

⁶John H. Armstrong, “Review of *Stand Up and Be Counted*, by R.T. Kendall,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 3 (1986): 339.

such as pre-conversion beliefs, involvement at church, presence or absence of crisis events, upbringing, home environment, residential relocation, availability of discipleship support, and strength of pastoral godliness and leadership all impact faith formation and levels of spiritual maturity.⁷ Decision experiences such as a public evangelistic invitation response, a response to a tract, and a response from reading the Bible have an impact as well.⁸ The relationship between these factors and the level of spiritual maturity can be definitively measured to better understand the dynamics of the discipleship process and the Christian formation journey toward greater spiritual maturity.⁹

The subject of Christian formation intrigues believers and nonbelievers alike.¹⁰ Believers of every generation wrestle with the task of ensuring the Christian faith is passed on to the next generation.¹¹ Though Christian formation may be defined by some as a contemplative lifestyle, by others as embracing the disciplines of the Christian faith, and by still others as an effort to learn from Christians through the biographies of those who have lived and died in the faith, none will assert they have all the answers to questions on Christian formation.¹² Furthermore, there may be some benefit from developmental theories that shed light on the general patterns of human development¹³

⁷Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek, 2007), 94-106.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 11.

¹⁰Alan Andrews, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 7.

¹¹Jim Wilhoit and John Dettoni, *Nurture that Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 19.

¹²Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 13.

¹³Les L. Steele, *On the Way: A Practical Theology of Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 17.

such that a broader more informed Christian worldview emerges where the components of physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and Christian formation come more clearly into focus.¹⁴ These common aspects of development can be scientifically measured and evaluated¹⁵ to determine correlative—even predictive—relationships.¹⁶

Surprisingly little research or hard data is available on the matter of mass evangelism effectiveness.¹⁷ There have been attempts over the years to assess what the respondent or inquirer does in the months and years following a response to an evangelistic invitation, but the subject has not been well studied.¹⁸ In 1979, a sociology professor at Vanderbilt University contacted 189 people that made commitments at a Billy Graham crusade held in Seattle in 1976.¹⁹ Of those that responded, 83 percent indicated their experience had a positive or very positive effect on their lives, 15 percent said it had no effect, and 3 percent said it had a negative or very negative effect.²⁰ In the course of church growth seminars, over 10,000 people have been asked how they came to faith in Christ and membership in their churches.²¹ Friends and relatives are listed by 75

¹⁴Wilhoit and Dettoni, *Nurture That Is Christian*, 15.

¹⁵Ibid., 16.

¹⁶David M. Levine and David F. Stephan, *Even You Can Learn Statistics: A Guide for Everyone Who Has Ever Been Afraid of Statistics*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press, 2009), 207.

¹⁷Win Arn, “Mass Evangelism The Bottom Line,” *Church Growth: America*, January/February, 1978, 4.

¹⁸Andy Newman, “At Crusade, Spirit Meets Science in the Altar Call,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2005, A1.

¹⁹Glenn Firebaugh, “How Effective Are City-Wide Crusades?” *Christianity Today*, March 27, 1981, 24.

²⁰Ibid., 29.

²¹Win Arn, “‘Church Growth’ Leader Win Arn Responds to Firebaugh’s Conclusions,” *Christianity Today*, March 27, 1978, 26.

to 90 percent of those people whereas crusades account for only 0.01 percent.²²

In another study that examined the Greater Seattle Crusade of 1976, of the 434,100 people in attendance, 18,136 went forward with more than half for rededication.²³ Of particular note is that of the 1,285 who became new members in a local church, more than 80 percent already had a friend or relative in that congregation.²⁴

The outcome of the New England Billy Graham Crusade of 1982 in Greater Boston was the subject of a study in 1984.²⁵ A randomly selected group of 24 Protestant churches were contacted to assess the result of the 368 referral cards they received and it was found only 5 of the 368 referrals had become new members in these churches.²⁶

A study in 2002 surveyed pastors selected mostly at random for interviews by email or telephone.²⁷ Over 150 surveys were sent out with a response rate of more than 30 percent to assess if and how the public invitation is used by those pastors.²⁸ The study concluded that the future of the public invitation was bleak due to contemporary methodology and the increase of Calvinistic theology.

This research study may also yield a measure of understanding as to why 70 percent of young Protestant adults between the ages of 18 to 22 stop attending church

²²Ibid.

²³Arn, "Mass Evangelism The Bottom Line," 7.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Roger Kvam, "Evaluating Mass Evangelism: A Case Study of the 1982 Billy Graham Crusade in Boston, Massachusetts" (D.Min. project, Boston University School of Theology, 1984).

²⁶Ibid., 95.

²⁷Michael Lewis Mason, "An Analysis of the Evangelistic Invitations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

²⁸Ibid., 74.

regularly²⁹ or why—as some believe—the current church culture in North America is on life support.³⁰

The purpose of this research broadly is to examine the predictive relationship, if any, between faith formation experiences and spiritual maturity and more specifically to determine the spiritually efficacious impact, if any, of altar calls. This study is required considering the potentially contentious debate within the church, the current lack of useful data, the known ability to generate statistically predictive outcomes on the subject, and the documented loss of church membership in North America.

Theoretical Foundation

This study acknowledges that social and environmental influences affect the development and Christian formation of believers. For the secular theorist, questions of faith are endemic to the dynamic patterned process whereby men find meaning in life.³¹ Though James Fowler failed to understand biblical saving faith, he understood that one's worldview is a way for finding coherence and meaning in the multiple forces and relationships all people must encounter.³² From the adolescent who might experience upheavals in every area of life regarding a true identity and worldview to the octogenarian who finally faces long dormant issues and fundamental questions, each person moves through developmental stages.³³

²⁹Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 20.

³⁰Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 1.

³¹James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981), 3.

³²*Ibid.*, 4.

³³Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development* by Joan M. Erikson (New York: Norton, 1998), 73.

From a Christian perspective all truth is God's truth,³⁴ however, no foundation other than one built on biblical anthropology will yield a proper discussion on Christian formation.³⁵ Furthermore, only an understanding that includes creation, the fall, redemption, and the consummation of all things will correctly frame the discussion.³⁶ In this way an examination of Scripture and the experiences in the lives of people form a consistent worldview based on biblical anthropology³⁷ whereby the discussion on Christian formation from unsaved to saved becomes coherent.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative research was to examine the relationship between different Christian formation experiences and levels of spiritual maturity among adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant.

Research Questions

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of individuals who responded to an altar call versus those who did not?
2. To what degree are selected Christian formation experience variables predictive of spiritual maturity?
3. To what degree is an altar call experience related to spiritual maturity?
4. When considered together, are pre-conversion experiences, post-conversion experiences, and altar call experiences predictive of spiritual maturity?

³⁴Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47.

³⁵Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1994), 4.

³⁶James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 49.

³⁷J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology: Sources of Early Christian Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 1.

Research Delimitations

In order to discover a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between Christian formation experiences and spiritual maturity, the sample was delimited to adults eighteen years of age and older. This population is expected to be able to draw on years of life experience and to be able to recall pre-conversion incidents, events, and experiences that significantly impacted their faith decision(s). It is also expected they will be able to describe their approach to and participation in the spiritual disciplines associated with spiritual maturation.

The sample was further delimited to those members of a large national panel who are self-identified as Christians and who make themselves available for research purposes. These members are presumed to be interested in making their experiences and beliefs known in a reliable and structured environment that will accurately reflect their faith. Furthermore these individuals are presumed to be more interested in taking the time to recall their pre-Christian experiences in detail due to their participation in a national panel.³⁸

The sample was also delimited to ensure a broad range of denominations will be represented in the sample and it is presumed that many of the respondents—though perhaps self-identifying as evangelicals—will not meet the criteria to qualify as an evangelical as defined by The Barna Group.³⁹ The purpose of this delimitation is to bring

³⁸A national survey panel maintains a pool of millions of pre-qualified survey respondents. Research Now was the national panel selected for this research because it maintains 6.5 million members with thousands of panel segmentation variables and profile dimensions. Respondents are continually verified through a strict data integrity process including, but not limited to, digital fingerprinting, timestamps, real-time dynamic profiling, and software to identify “straight liners,” inattention, and fraud. Respondents want to give their opinion and are rewarded and motivated with incentives. Pre-selection criteria was utilized by LifeWay Research to increase external validity and to ensure bucket size was sufficient for characteristics such as denominational affiliation.

³⁹The Barna Group, “Survey Explores Who Qualifies as an Evangelical,” January 18, 2007, accessed August 4, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/111-survey-explores-who-qualifies-as-an-evangelical>. Those nine criteria are people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated that they believe when

greater understanding to the pre-conversion experiences and the actual specifics of decision events in both groups of people—those that have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and those who have merely had a spiritual experience of some kind and as a result are affiliated with a faith community.

The sample was delimited via demographic pre-selection to ensure a more homogeneous sample. Effort was made to screen the sample to reflect known population sizes of Protestants in the United States based on age group, gender, census region of the country, and income.

Because the data was collected through a national panel via the internet, the sample was delimited to those respondents who were computer literate and who had the requisite skills and educational level to take an on-line survey in a reasonably efficient manner.

Terminology

Altar call. This term, utilizing a broad definition, refers to any organized method in a public evangelistic invitation that requires people to make an outward response to a presentation of the gospel. It usually entails a “going forward” at a specified time, but often may be limited to a show of hands or the signing of a decision card.”⁴⁰

Altar call is used by some interchangeably with “public evangelistic invitation,” however the altar call is only one of many different ways people can be invited to respond to the gospel after a public presentation. For the purpose of this study, the venue for this presentation of the gospel followed by an invitation will include a church service, a

they die they will go to heaven because they had confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. In addition, these people say their faith is very important in their life today, believe they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians, believe that Satan exists, believe that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works, believe that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, assert the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches, and describe God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today.

⁴⁰Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, 28.

concert in a church, an evangelistic crusade, or some other venue where the gospel is publicly presented to more than one person and the presentation is followed by an invitation for the listeners to make an outward response. This outward response may include an audible repeating of the “sinner’s prayer.”⁴¹ Many consider a response to an altar call as evidence that the one responding has become a Christian and desires to commit their life publicly to Christ.⁴²

Biblical metanarrative. This term refers to the underlying connecting narrative at the center of biblical theology that is prevalent and pervasive in all parts of the Bible. *Biblical metanarrative* can be summarized in four words: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This sequence functions as an umbrella story encompassing the whole canonical narrative.⁴³

Christian formation. This term refers to the process of being formed more and

⁴¹Murray, *The Invitation System*, 6. See also, Roy J. Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 8: “Assuming that the conditions for receiving salvation have been clearly set forth, the invitation as here discussed, will be an appeal to people to meet these conditions and to openly demonstrate their willingness to do so by taking some specific action which will be prescribed by the preacher. Generally this action will be coming forward to the front of the auditorium as indication that one is receiving Christ.” See also, O. S. Hawkins, *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* (Dallas: Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2002), 16: “Drawing the net is what the preacher or layman does when he extends the gospel invitation. Drawing the net is what the Christian does when, after presenting the message of salvation, he calls for a decision.” See also, Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 13: “In camp meetings, and eventually in church buildings, a railing suitable for kneeling at was placed immediately in front of the pulpit. This railing, or bench, became known as the ‘altar.’ Thus the invitation for people to come to God’s mercy seat was brought home in terms of the opportunity for people to seek the Lord by kneeling at the altar. The call for people to come forward hence became known as the ‘altar call.’” See also, Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 17: “The public invitation is an important tool which can aid in leading people to Christ at the end of a gospel sermon.” See also, David Bennett, *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), xiii: The altar call is “the request to make ‘A public confession for Christ,’ by moving to the front of the scene of evangelism or by indicating in some other visible or audible way.”

⁴²Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 17.

⁴³Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*, 49.

more into the image and likeness of Christ which is a result of both God's initiative and man's responsibility.⁴⁴

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This term refers to a voluntary association of Baptist churches across the United States that was formed in 1845. Member churches generally affirm the tenets of the Baptist Faith and Message,⁴⁵ though SBC member churches may have a different Statement of Faith.

Spiritual maturity. This term is used to refer to the character of a Christian who is living out the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit resulting in observable attitudes and behaviors such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control identified as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.⁴⁶ *Spiritual maturity* is also descriptive of a Christian who is continually learning Truth from God's Word, is increasingly obedient to God in the denial of self, serves God and others, shares Christ with unbelievers, puts faith into practice, and seeks God and the building of that relationship as well as godly relationships with others.⁴⁷ It is a measure of how much Christians are other-centered, of how much they are a part of a Christian community where they can discover and use their gifts,⁴⁸ and it indicates these Christians see themselves involved in a process of sanctification where they are becoming more and more like Christ (Rom 8:29, 12:2).

Procedural Overview

The basic research design for this study followed a quantitative survey format.

⁴⁴Steele, *On the Way*, 10.

⁴⁵Charles S. Kelley, Richard D. Land, and R. Albert Mohler, *The Baptist Faith & Message* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2007).

⁴⁶Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 11.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁸Steele, *On the Way*, 114.

The research methodology used was a survey administered via the internet. The Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA) survey of LifeWay Research formed the foundation of the instrument and an Expert Panel formulated additional questions to gather data on pre-conversion and post-conversion variables. The TDA is an assessment tool used to measure spiritual maturity. The groups of questions in the TDA that form a factor in factor analysis for reliability are called “scales.” Those scales assessed by the TDA are Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, transparency in relationships, and doctrine. The TDA questions measure a person’s beliefs, desires, and actions in each of these attributes of discipleship. These are the substance of the TDA. It is an outgrowth of the work Brad Waggoner completed in 1991. He also worked with LifeWay Research in 2007 in a retrial sample, making some changes to the questions. Another assessment was completed in 2012 with new sampling and revision of questions and the results were again subjected to statistical analysis.⁴⁹

The survey instrument was first approved by the Dissertation Committee and the Research Ethics Committee. The TDA utilizes survey questions developed by LifeWay Research that have been validated and are statistically reliable through the application of Wilks’ Lambda Discriminant Analysis and Cronbach’s Item Analysis. Additional questions were created for the purpose of meeting the specific objectives of this research study and those questions were validated through the use of an Expert Panel in conjunction with professionals in market research at LifeWay Research.

The research sample was drawn from a large national panel used only for research. This panel had in excess of six one-half million members and demographic information on panel members was available. Pre-selection criteria was used to increase

⁴⁹Scott McConnell, V. P. LifeWay Research, telephone interview by author, August 16, 2013.

external validity and to ensure bucket size was sufficient for characteristics such as denominational affiliation. The population for this study was adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant and who were members of a large national panel.

Demographics were balanced to reflect known population sizes of Protestants in the US, based on age group, gender, census region of the country, income, and denominational affiliation. The number of completed surveys was one thousand. LifeWay Research was retained to assist with statistical computations and to maximize internal and external validity and reliability.

Research Assumptions

Due to the combination of social science theory considerations and the application of scriptural analysis to the issues addressed by this research, a number of assumptions were made.

1. Respondents accurately recalled the events and particulars surrounding their conversion experience.
2. Respondents answered the survey questions to accurately reflect their own experiences.
3. The faith formation process is multi-faceted and the particulars of that process could be measured and quantified through scientific data collection and statistical analysis of that data.
4. The specific action and timing of the work of the Holy Spirit is unknown to man.
5. Some Christians do come to salvation in a setting concomitant with an altar call.
6. Not all those responding to an altar call are saved.
7. The genuineness of the salvation experience may be understood and measured by the perseverance and spiritual fruit of the individual.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

This research study was an effort to definitively answer the question on the efficacy of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. This chapter reviews precedent literature relevant to the primary issue under study but it first reviews the literature for a holistic perspective in an attempt to establish an understanding as to why reaching a conclusion on the efficacy of altar calls even matters.

After reviewing the biblical-theological foundation of human anthropology, social science theories pertaining to human development are discussed as they relate to the subject matter of this research. Biblically consistent aspects of those theories are identified and incorporated into an understanding of human spiritual need and development followed by a brief consideration of the tension between human freedom and divine sovereignty. Then a review and discussion of election, conversion, and sanctification are presented followed by a consideration of the history and development of the altar call as a form of a public evangelistic invitation.

A review of the main arguments for and against altar calls is presented followed by a consideration of Scripture relating to the subject of altar calls as derived from precedent literature. A survey of prior studies that have attempted to quantify the results and efficacy, if any, of altar calls is discussed followed by a consideration of the development and application of a tool for the assessment of spiritual maturity.

This research study is one whose time has come. Capable writers have provided the historical background on altar calls and for more than two centuries the altar call has been utilized as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. Efforts over the last thirty years to justify or discredit the use of the altar call have failed and the art and science of

data gathering and analysis regarding spiritual maturity has progressed in the form of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). The possibility of establishing a definitive conclusion on the matter of altar calls is theoretically within reach.

Biblical-Theological Foundations of Anthropology

A proper understanding of humanity is imperative to this discussion and only a review of *imago Dei* properly initiates and directs the discussion as it is a basis for all further understanding.

Creation and *Imago Dei*

Imago Dei refers to the image and likeness of God in which man was created in the Genesis 1:26-28 creation account.¹ Gerhard von Rad believes this terminology refers to the purpose for which man was created.² Likewise, Christians understand being transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18) is the divinely decreed trajectory for the life of every believer. Furthermore man is the representative of God on earth to maintain and enforce God's dominion over the earth and his role here is similar to God's in the non-human world.³

Collins takes the view that there is a narrower and wider sense of man being created in the image of God.⁴ In the narrower sense, man's abilities were completely in harmony with God's own purity and wisdom and this was lost in the fall as recorded in

¹James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 11.

²Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 60.

³Ibid., 59.

⁴C. Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 62.

Genesis 3.⁵ In the wider sense, man has reason, will, and relationships as God does and these were badly damaged but not entirely lost as a result of the fall.⁶ Believers are justified at regeneration, progressively sanctified, and finally glorified with Christ at the consummation and second coming of Jesus in a relationship with God as it was meant to be.⁷ Believers experience the “now and not yet” on this side of heaven in that they are restored to a right relationship with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross however, sin remains in the world and impacts the life of the believer.⁸

From the creation account, Ware notes it is clear God actively chose to enter into relationship with the creation he made.⁹ Man being created in the image of God is a stable foundation that begins here and now but will also continue beyond this life.¹⁰ According to Smith, humans are moral animals as a result of being made in the image of God.¹¹ Psalm 8 echoes Genesis 1 in noting to be human is to carry the image of God.¹² Men and women together are the image of God and, according to Hoekema, this image in its totality can only be appreciated by looking at humankind as a whole.¹³ This image

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 316.

⁸Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 197; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 172.

⁹Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 139.

¹⁰Verna E. F. Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 6.

¹¹Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33.

¹²Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 18.

¹³Ibid., 99.

pervades all of humanity; even Einstein recognized mankind's pursuit of truth as a longing for God.¹⁴

Functional view. Shults believes the primary meaning of the image and likeness language in Genesis refers to the function given to humanity for dominion over the earth.¹⁵ Scripture clearly indicates God gave man a cultural mandate to rule the earth for God.¹⁶ This functional view of the image is borne out in the specific task that Adam was given in taking care of the Garden of Eden.¹⁷ Williams notes that to enable this work man was given the superior gift of knowledge and reason, which makes dominion over the animals possible.¹⁸ Green, however, notes any attempt to strip the meaning of the image of God in man as solely related to the functional task would indicate this is the only difference between man and other animals.¹⁹

Relational view. The image of God in a broader or structural sense refers to the relational aspect of the image wherein man enjoys gifts and capacities that enable him to function in relationship with God and with other men.²⁰ Green understands the concept of the image of God in view of these relationships as being fundamentally relational and covenantal.²¹ This image of God man bears in the narrower sense was lost

¹⁴Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image*, 30.

¹⁵F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 232.

¹⁶Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 14.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 79, citing Gen 2:15.

¹⁸Donald T. Williams, *Mere Humanity: G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 97.

¹⁹Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 61.

²⁰Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 71.

²¹Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 63.

in man's fall into sin but in the broader sense it was not completely lost; only corrupted or perverted according to Hoekema.²² Shults notes that an understanding of the image and its application to human nature is perhaps best comprehended with an eschatological view toward spiritual union with God in Christ.²³

The Fall

Thomas Aquinas explained the difference between human beings before and after the fall as noting the image survived but the likeness was lost.²⁴ Martin Luther understood the image and likeness to relate to original righteousness and believed that man's intellect and will remained after the fall but that they are impaired and only able to be restored through faith in Christ.²⁵ Calvin understood the image of God as being perfect before the fall and after the fall this image in man—though not totally annihilated—was frightfully deformed.²⁶ Calvin also believed man's ability to reason and his will were perverted and distorted as a result of the fall.²⁷

According to Shults, modern scientific and philosophical considerations have undermined the Western understanding of inherited sin as a result of the fall.²⁸ The doctrine of pervasive depravity, according to Hoekema, maintains men are born with a

²²Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 69.

²³Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 242.

²⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. 93.9, cited in *ibid.*, 226.

²⁵Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, trans. George V. Schick, *Luther's Works*, 1:64, cited in *ibid.*

²⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.15.3, cited in Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 43.

²⁷John Calvin, *Commentary on John*, 11:25, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1979), cited in Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 46.

²⁸Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 201.

spiritual inability as a result of Adam's sin.²⁹ Smith notes even in those living in rebellion to God the residual of *imago Dei* is seen when human self-centeredness is overridden by motivations springing from moral commitments that are irreducible to self-interest.³⁰

Redemption and Consummation

The restoration of the image of God in man through faith in Christ enables him to function properly in his relationship with God, other men, and nature.³¹ This is all for the purpose of bringing glory to God.³² All of mankind is looking for restoration: it is the ultimate definition of true humanity, according to Williams.³³ This restoration of the image of God in man is a progressive renewal by the work of the Holy Spirit and it will not reach its completion until believers are united with Christ.³⁴ Hoekema notes when believers are finally reunited with Christ at the second coming, the image of God in man will become complete and man's relationship with God will be fully and eternally restored.³⁵

Relationship to God

Ware says any discussion of human relationship with God must consider the supremacy, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency of God.³⁶ God is always the giver and man

²⁹Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 152.

³⁰Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 31.

³¹Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 86.

³²*Ibid.*, 92.

³³Williams, *Mere Humanity*, 51.

³⁴Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 30.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 107.

³⁶Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 67, 155.

is always the receiver and therefore, the God-human relationship is asymmetrical.³⁷ God does not need the world he has made and he is completely self-sufficient and independent of creation.³⁸

Covenantal relationship. According to Gentry, in the Old Testament the expression “to cut a covenant” is the language that was used when a covenant was established.³⁹ The Hebrew word for “image” used in the creation account is derived from a root word that is used as a verb in reference to carving or cutting.⁴⁰ A covenant, therefore, always involves the deepest and most extreme relationship.⁴¹ Gentry notes that man’s purpose as a created being is to have right relationships with God and one another and this is the metanarrative—the overriding all-inclusive story—of the Bible.⁴²

God’s nature is unchangeable but there is a relational mutability present when a sinner is converted and repents and trusts the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and death.⁴³ God’s disposition toward that person changes from one of condemnation to one of peace and acceptance.⁴⁴ Man’s relationship with God is not the same as it is with humans but it is no less a real relationship and the glory of God is the ultimate purpose for the God-human relationship.⁴⁵

³⁷Ibid., 157.

³⁸Ibid., 49.

³⁹Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 17.

⁴⁰Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 13.

⁴¹Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant,” 16.

⁴²Ibid., 19.

⁴³Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 28.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 30.

Social Science Theories

A number of theorists have proposed different paradigms that may assist those within the Christian community to better understand Christian conversion. Wilhoit and Dettoni assert the Christian community has grown to accept the psychological premise of developmentalism as a theoretical base.⁴⁶ According to Steele, a proper approach to understanding Christian faith formation must at least be open to exploring psychological insights that are in line with the Christian faith.⁴⁷ This section explores the development of secular theories as they impact and pertain to understanding Christian faith formation. The discussion will progress from earlier theories to the more recent and directly applicable theories of Fowler and Loder. Notwithstanding insights that might be gained from the following discussion, Scripture is clear the event of conversion in the life of a Christian is solely the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:17; 1 Cor 3:6; Eph 2:8-9).

History

In the 1930s Sigmund Freud proposed a psychoanalytic theory of understanding human thinking and development.⁴⁸ It is in the sequential component of that theoretical framework where the understanding of a developmental sequence for human personality begins to take shape.⁴⁹ Freud's understanding of development as a result of internal conflict and as a progression of movement as one develops are contributory according to Steele, notwithstanding Freud's premise that all religion is false.⁵⁰ In the 1940s, B.F.

⁴⁶Jim Wilhoit and John Dettoni, eds., *Nurture that Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 7.

⁴⁷Les L. Steele, *On the Way: A Practical Theology of Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 1, 67.

⁴⁸Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1965).

⁴⁹Steele, *On the Way*, 59.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 60.

Skinner began his work on the theory of behaviorism.⁵¹ This theory posits humans are a product of their environment whereby operant conditioning via negative and positive stimuli in an environment shape the behavior of an individual.⁵² According to Steele, Christians readily acknowledge elements of behavioral theory are evident in discipleship programs.⁵³

In the 1950s Erik Erikson produced a theoretical framework for understanding the development of children⁵⁴ and later expanded that work to ultimately address late stages of life.⁵⁵ Steele notes these theories afforded an understanding and description of the general stages and phases of development across the life span with a focus on what individuals actually think or experience.⁵⁶ Erikson identifies eight stages of psychosocial development related to chronological development that entail movement from basic to more complex thinking and behavior where each stage builds on the next and the psychosocial crisis experiences in each stage appear as either strengths or weaknesses in later stages.⁵⁷ Equally important is the premise an individual life cycle cannot be adequately understood apart from the social context in which it exists.⁵⁸ According to Wilhoit and Dettoni, Erikson's contributions to a Christian understanding of faith formation are many in that the positive role of religion, the integrity of persons, and the

⁵¹B. F. Skinner, *About Behaviorism* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

⁵²Neil J. Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

⁵³Steele, *On the Way*, 62.

⁵⁴Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1993).

⁵⁵Erik H. Erikson, *Adulthood* (New York: Norton, 1978).

⁵⁶Steele, *On the Way*, 69.

⁵⁷Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: Norton, 1998), 32.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 114.

reality of the need for and the presence of spiritual growth across the life span are recognized.⁵⁹

Another aspect of developmental psychology that adds insight to this discussion is the work of Jean Piaget in his description of the four stages of cognitive development related to, but not closely connected with, chronological age.⁶⁰ Piaget emphasizes humans have a natural tendency to organize their surroundings and experiences in a way that makes sense to them and enables them to adapt to their environment.⁶¹ Piaget recognized problems encountered in social settings create tensions that force people to confront their own understanding of the world and to grow, develop, and adapt as a result of the disequilibrium.⁶²

Building on Piaget's work, Lawrence Kohlberg formed a theory of moral development and reasoning with a focus on the structures of social perspective-taking and justice operations.⁶³ He explored the human ability to put oneself in the shoes of another and the ways one understands equality and the give-and-take in a situation of moral conflict.⁶⁴ David Elkind also built on the earlier work of Piaget by examining how children think about religious issues, including their understanding and perception of prayer, God, and religion.⁶⁵ These theories indicate people grow as a result of interacting

⁵⁹Wilhoit and Dettoni, *Nurture that Is Christian*, 100.

⁶⁰Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development* (Boston: Pearson/A and B, 2004).

⁶¹Steele, *On the Way*, 70.

⁶²James E. Plueddemann, "The Power of Piaget," in *Nurture that Is Christian*, 51.

⁶³Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁶⁴Catherine Stonehouse, "The Power of Kohlberg," in *Nurture that Is Christian*, 63.

⁶⁵David Elkind, *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1994).

with people, their environment, and knowledge⁶⁶ and that Christian formation is a continual process related to moral development according to Steele.⁶⁷

James Fowler

In 1981, two critical works were published on the subject of faith formation. James Fowler followed a timeline from the view of human development over six stages in an effort to describe how one's faith develops and matures.⁶⁸ James Loder proposed an understanding of faith described as a knowing event consisting of five steps.⁶⁹ Both of these works contributed to the discussion attempting to articulate how faith is formed and how one's worldview is transformed.

Jones and Wilder note that Fowler generally follows theories of human development in his description of the stages of faith.⁷⁰ This theory represents a linear process consisting of a total of six stages beginning at stage 1 faith where the young child simply embraces the emotional aspects of faith or a sense of trust in the primary caregivers.⁷¹ Stage 2 is faith experienced during the elementary school years when the child explains the world through what they have seen or heard in their home, school, and other associations and environments. During adolescence, stage 3 faith develops as young adolescents become loyal to a particular group which might also include a church group.

⁶⁶Pleuddemann, "The Power of Piaget," in Wilhoit and Dettoni, *Nurture that Is Christian*, 58.

⁶⁷Steele, *On the Way*, 73.

⁶⁸James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981).

⁶⁹James Edwin Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

⁷⁰Timothy P. Jones and Michael S. Wilder, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," in Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation*, 166.

⁷¹Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 122.

In this stage adolescents experience profound changes physically and emotionally and they search and struggle to identify a social group, outside the family, where they are accepted and able to engage with others on a deeper level. In later adolescence, stage 4 faith often leads the young person to become critical or even cynical after observing problems or inconsistencies in stage 3 faith. Fowler notes it is not a given that young adults will automatically move into this faith stage in their late teens or early twenties. Some will simply continue to apply stage 3 faith to explain reality and may never progress to stage 4 faith if they have failed to do so by midlife. Those that do progress to stage 4 take on the responsibility for their own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes.

Stage 5 faith is more commonly seen in midlife or later years. Individuals find new beliefs or perhaps they return to the faith of their youth. In stage 6 faith people are able to see the value of all belief systems and agree that humans are all involved in the same project of making the world a better place.⁷² Christians reject Fowler's paradigm principally because it purports to be a prescriptive model. Nevertheless there are some helpful descriptions on the subject of human development.⁷³

James Loder

Loder proposed five steps in the process of conversion (which he described as a "convictional experience") beginning with a conflict when a person realizes their current understanding of how the world works fails to adequately explain a new situation, feeling, or experience.⁷⁴ In step 1 a conflict arises and the person consciously and/or subconsciously works to regain a position of equilibrium—a point at which the world once again makes sense.

⁷²The forgoing summary of Fowler's six stages of faith is taken from Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 122-200.

⁷³Jones and Wilder, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," 177.

⁷⁴James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 31.

In step 2, the individual evaluates all known or available resources in an attempt to find a solution to the conflict. This step involves following hunches, intuition, and an exhaustive exploration of all possibilities, as well as periods of waiting where the conscious and unconscious mind continue to labor toward a resolution. This step may be as brief as a mere moment or may persist for several years.

In step 3, a resolution to the conflict appears within reach and one's perspective or worldview is transformed in an accommodation of that new understanding. This is considered to be the turning point in the entire process which Loder describes as the "knowing event" and it occurs with enough force to propel the individual into the next step.⁷⁵

In step 4, the "aha" moment and the release of tension that had been maintained by the conflict takes place and the expanded consciousness of the individual is now open to new patterns of thinking and understanding according to the context of the situation.⁷⁶ Step 5 involves interpreting the conflict as it was originally experienced in light of the new understanding and it is a time for interpreting the world in a coherent manner under the modified or new worldview.⁷⁷ This interpretation extends both backward and forward in time to the extent the individual will in some way communicate this new understanding publicly.⁷⁸ As with Fowler, Christians reject Loder's paradigm though some helpful insights are provided that might increase an understanding of the process of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers.⁷⁹

⁷⁵The foregoing summary of Loder's Steps 1, 2 and 3 is taken from Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 30-32.

⁷⁶Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed., 36

⁷⁷Ibid., 40.

⁷⁸Ibid., 4.

⁷⁹Patrick M. Barker, "The Relevance of James Loder's Grammar of Transformation for Pastoral Care and Counseling," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 49 (Summer 1995): 165.

The Models with Regard to the Christian Born-Again Experience

In addition to being academic contemporaries and friends, and having developed theoretical models related to faith development around the same time, Fowler and Loder complement each other with their models in an overall understanding of how faith is developed.⁸⁰ With the foregoing overview and comparison of each model, this discussion narrows the examination to what is generally understood as the evangelical Christian born-again experience. In this discussion the tenants of the Christian faith are fully accepted.

From an evangelical Christian perspective it is possible for a born-again believer to acknowledge and appreciate good and worthy characteristics of other belief systems, however, the evangelical Christian faith necessitates an unwavering worldview and faith system that proclaims Jesus Christ as the author and embodiment of absolute truth to the extent that all other faith and belief systems fall short (John 14:6). For this reason Fowler's model prohibits the insertion of the Christian born-again experience into any of the six stages of faith unless the model was to be equipped with a seventh stage identified as a true relationship with Christ.⁸¹

Although Loder acknowledges that the Holy Spirit may initiate the breaking in on people to lead them to a conversion experience in the middle of their searching or scanning, this breaking in is not present in every case study examined by Loder.⁸² In

⁸⁰C. R. Dykstra, "Theological Table-Talk: Transformation in Faith and Morals," *Theology Today* 39 (1982): 57.

⁸¹Rhodes, "Conversion as Crisis and Process: A Comparison of Two Models," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 5, no. 3 (1986): 20-27; see also Timothy P. Jones, "James W. Fowler's Stages of Faith and Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* as Spiritual Transcendence: An Evangelical Rethinking of Fowler's Model of Faith Development," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (2005): 59-71.

⁸²James E. Loder, Dana R. Wright, and John D. Kuentzel, *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 19.

addition, Loder's work gives evidence that people have been searching at the time of the breaking in of the Holy Spirit, but the searching or scanning is not a prerequisite for the genuine Christian conversion experience.⁸³ The transforming moment of the born-again Christian is solely at the initiation, mediation, and completion of the Holy Spirit (John 6:44). James Loder's five-step description of conversion falls far short of the Christian born-again conversion experience and the subsequent process of sanctification in the life of the believer.

Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty

When considering the topic of Christian conversion and the role of the Holy Spirit in that event or process, it is necessary to come to an understanding of the interplay between human freedom and divine sovereignty, particularly with regard to altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. According to Ware, this question of human freedom and its relationship to God's sovereignty requires first a consideration of God's nature rather than that of man.⁸⁴

Scripture is clear in Psalm 135:5-7, God does whatever pleases him and he has all power over life and death (Deut 32:39). There is no God besides him according to Isaiah 45:5-7 and God unequivocally communicated his sovereignty over all creation through the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:34-35). The apostle Paul reminds believers that God's promises and purposes are accomplished through the march of history by recalling what was decreed for Jacob and Esau even before they were born, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and the metaphor of the potter (Rom 9:6-26).

In addition, Paul in Ephesians 1:11 reminds believers their inheritance in Christ was predestined in accord with the plan and purpose of God who works all things

⁸³Barker, "The Relevance of James Loder's Grammar," 159.

⁸⁴Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 67; Martin Luther, *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 25.

according to his will. Ware notes, “Not one atom or despot or demon acts in any respect to hinder the fulfillment of what God has eternally ordained.”⁸⁵ If this is not true, God is not sovereign—not in control.⁸⁶

Sociocultural Context

Martin notes it is inescapable that human nature is developed by and affected by sociocultural factors.⁸⁷ It is, however, impossible for society and the effects of culture to precisely predict and define human motivation and action.⁸⁸ There will always be the possibility of decision and action that does not coincide precisely with environmental, social, and cultural parameters that impact development.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, there is a moral order woven into the fabric of every society that provides the standards for human relations.⁹⁰ If people did not have a guiding moral order that was embedded from society they would never feel the need to rationalize.⁹¹ With this as a foundation, human beings choose and act in relation to the goals they have set for themselves based on their own life experience.⁹²

⁸⁵Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 15.

⁸⁶Jonathan Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1754), 4999.

⁸⁷Jack Martin, *Psychology and the Question of Agency*, SUNY Series, Alternatives in Psychology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 60.

⁸⁸Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 145.

⁸⁹Martin, *Psychology and the Question of Agency*, 72.

⁹⁰Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 149.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 13.

⁹²Martin, *Psychology and the Question of Agency*, 79.

The Metanarrative

A metanarrative is a master overriding story that enables the people in a specific sociocultural group to explain and contemplate the world they live in and to find purpose and meaning for their lives.⁹³ The metanarrative may be a set of religious beliefs that organizes and guides human life in its definition of unseen reality.⁹⁴

According to Martin, secular writers understand biology and cultural aspects are not completely sufficient for the psychologist to be able to understand human behavior.⁹⁵ These writers attribute human agency to the more complex evolution found in humans.⁹⁶ They believe synaptic activity and neural pathways in the human brain produce the person in his or her totality based on the environment, social experiences, and relationships.⁹⁷ Conversion is ultimately seen by secular writers as an ongoing process of socialization and synaptic adaptation.⁹⁸ Conversely, the Christian metanarrative embraces the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation storyline of the Bible as discussed earlier.⁹⁹

Human Freedom

Human agency or freedom to choose is understood as the independent ability of a person to make choices and act on those choices in ways that make a difference in their lives.¹⁰⁰ This human agency cannot be reduced to purely biological, social, or

⁹³Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 64.

⁹⁴Ibid., 98.

⁹⁵Martin, *Psychology and the Question of Agency*, 79.

⁹⁶Ibid., 106.

⁹⁷Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life*, 85.

⁹⁸Ibid., 129.

⁹⁹James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 49.

¹⁰⁰Martin, *Psychology and the Question of Agency*, 44.

cultural factors.¹⁰¹ Man has reason and understanding as the ultimate creation¹⁰² and he makes choices in agreement with his greatest desires.¹⁰³

The Christian understanding is that true freedom was lost when the first parents fell into sin.¹⁰⁴ Romans 8:7-8 confirms the unbeliever is completely unable to do what is commanded in Scripture—he is inclined to act only in the interest of sin.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless unbelievers are still responsible and accountable for their rejection of scriptural commands.¹⁰⁶ The true freedom that man lost in the fall is restored in the process of redemption for the Christian.¹⁰⁷ True freedom then is the ability to do what is pleasing to God, and it is only possible for the believer.¹⁰⁸

God's Sovereignty

God continually oversees and directs everything as it pertains to the created order, and nothing happens outside his plans and purpose.¹⁰⁹ This activity of God in the world is completely compatible with the choices and actions that humans take according to the way they are inclined.¹¹⁰ This compatibilist view of the relationship between divine

¹⁰¹Ibid., 2.

¹⁰²Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 229.

¹⁰³Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 26; Edwards, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry*, 5002; Luther, *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*, 288-89.

¹⁰⁴Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 232.

¹⁰⁵Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 92.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 93.

¹⁰⁷Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 234.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 231.

¹⁰⁹Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 17.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 24.

sovereignty and human freedom encompasses God's control of everything that happens on the earth.¹¹¹

Election—Biblical and Literature Support

No discussion of public evangelistic invitations, including altar calls, is complete without some consideration of the doctrine of election. This doctrine refers to God's decision to choose those who would be saved before the foundation of the world.¹¹² Christ taught that it is God's decision as to whom the gospel would be revealed (Matt 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22). In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus told Peter that it was the Father in heaven who had revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt 16:16-17). Jesus' confidence in the success of his mission is frankly predestination and no matter how many people do not believe, God's saving purposes cannot be thought to be frustrated.¹¹³

The fact that those who are not Jesus' sheep do not hear his voice, are not known by him, and do not follow him does not reduce their moral responsibility in the slightest.¹¹⁴ That they are not Jesus' sheep does not excuse them—it indicts them.¹¹⁵ Moreover, unqualified statements of absolute predestination as found in the New Testament refer only to positive predestination—not negative as well.¹¹⁶ If men are not saved, it is because they have thrust aside the Word of God.¹¹⁷ All people should have the

¹¹¹Ibid., 71.

¹¹²Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 669.

¹¹³D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 290, on John 6:37.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 293, on John 10:27.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 658, on Acts 13:47-48.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

opportunity to hear the gospel and to decide either for or against the Lord.¹¹⁸

The sovereign guidance of God is presumed to be the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life,¹¹⁹ including one's response to a public evangelistic invitation. God takes the initiative in the process of redemption, not humans.¹²⁰ This process of calling by God indicates Christians are the objects of God's effectual summoning to become the recipients of his grace.¹²¹ In this relationship from eternity past, God knew man—he did not simply know “about” man.¹²² Paul was noting from God's standpoint he had already decreed the glorification of believers should take place.¹²³ Therefore, while glorification is not yet experienced, the divine decision to justify those who would be glorified has already been made—the issue has been settled.¹²⁴ The public evangelistic invitation that follows a proclamation of the gospel, therefore, may be viewed as merely one mechanism to identify those for whom the issue has already been settled.¹²⁵

Paul reminds the reader that it is “grace rather than race” that is operative and that human tradition or performance had nothing to do with God's choice of Jacob.¹²⁶ Believers are chosen in Christ—it is outside of them and therein, the name of Christ

¹¹⁸R. Alan Streett, *The Effective Invitation: A Practical Guide for the Pastor*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 140

¹¹⁹Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 527, on Rom 8:28-30.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 231, on Rom 3:25.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 530, on Rom 8:28.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 532, on Rom 8:29.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 536, on Rom 8:30.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

¹²⁵Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 55.

¹²⁶Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 578, on Rom 9:10-11.

excludes all merit.¹²⁷ This faith “in Christ” denotes not so much that Jesus Christ is the object of their faith as that he is the living environment within which faith is exercised.¹²⁸

Paul knew the Thessalonians had been chosen by God because of the unmistakable signs of new life that became apparent in them and their ready response to the gospel which was vital as well as verbal.¹²⁹ As with any effective presentation of the gospel, Paul notes his preaching was not marked by the persuasive techniques of rhetoric but by the power and demonstration of the Spirit.¹³⁰ Further sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the Truth are the means by which salvation is secured for the elect rather than any attendant circumstances,¹³¹ including the presence of absence of a public evangelistic invitation response.

Conversion

Thanks in part to the work of Fowler and Loder, many understand faith as emerging through both crisis and process.¹³² Dunn notes that according to Erikson, a transitional crisis is a crucial period in which a decisive turn one way or another is unavoidable.¹³³ The path to this decisive turn often involves instability, typically with regard to career, relations, and identity, as well as the instability of what was perceived as

¹²⁷F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 255.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 13, on 1 Thess 1:4.

¹³⁰Ibid., 14, on 1 Thess 1:5.

¹³¹Ibid., 290, on 2 Thess 2:13.

¹³²Rhodes, “Conversion as Crisis and Process,” 21.

¹³³Erik H. Erikson, quoted in Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2012), 27.

truth.¹³⁴ A proper understanding of conversion applies the designation “miraculous” only to the saving truth to which one is converted and not to the process—or method—of conversion itself.¹³⁵

Crisis and Process

Crisis and process conversion may be understood to consist of a successful negotiation of a crisis or change where conversion is a form of passage or transition a person passes through.¹³⁶ This surrender may not be a sudden and dramatic event and a person may not be able to pinpoint the moment of its coming or to say where, when, or how it happened, however, one is aware that something new has been born.¹³⁷ The transformation from unbelief to belief involves an instantaneous alteration in the person at the deepest level, such that it is a change in what the person *is*.¹³⁸ The moment at which the transformation occurs becomes for that person decisive for eternity.¹³⁹ The process is typically marked by a period of deep awareness of personal sin, followed by a sense of joyous liberation, dawning with the realization of personal forgiveness in Christ.¹⁴⁰

Epstein notes the teen years extending into college age may be understood as a time of storm and stress due to conflict with parents, high-risk behaviors, and more

¹³⁴Ibid., 34.

¹³⁵Robert M. Price, “The Centrality and Scope of Conversion,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9 (Spring 1981): 35.

¹³⁶Mark Searle, “The Journey of Conversion,” *Worship* 54 (January 1980): 36.

¹³⁷Ibid., 42.

¹³⁸William C. Davis, “Kierkegaard on the Transformation of the Individual in Conversion,” *Religious Studies* 28 (June 1992): 145.

¹³⁹Ibid., 146.

¹⁴⁰Andrew F. Walls, “Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28 (January 2004): 2.

simply the process of growing up.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, people of all ages today are no less deeply trusting in unverifiable objects of belief and faith than those in any other period of time.¹⁴² Young adulthood for many is a time of intense change often marked by milestones such as moving away from home and entering college or the military or the full-time workforce.¹⁴³ This is identified as a time of exploration and confusion where young people are carefree but often floundering and idealistic.¹⁴⁴ It is a natural drive to establish one's identity with regard to relationships, work, and ideology or worldview, including religious beliefs, because these enable one to make sense of the world.¹⁴⁵ Christian conversion involves a new theocentric vision of the relationship between God and humanity that extends to all spheres of life.¹⁴⁶

Studies

Stress, personal crises, and contact with diverse beliefs are often related to spiritual maturation.¹⁴⁷ Sudden religious conversions do provide some context for understanding belief change in college students but a more gradual change in content and degree of belief may be more common.¹⁴⁸ Those working in college ministries

¹⁴¹Robert Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen* (Sanger, CA: Quill Driver, 2007), 117.

¹⁴²Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, 50.

¹⁴³Donald Edmondson and Crystal Park, "Shifting Foundations: Religious Belief Change and Adjustment in College Students," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12 (April 2009): 289.

¹⁴⁴Dunn and Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 24.

¹⁴⁵Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004), 165.

¹⁴⁶Jon Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America: 1930 to the Present* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 99.

¹⁴⁷Edmondson and Park, "Shifting Foundations," 290.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 291.

understand that in terms of building bridges through friendship they must eventually cross the bridge and bring the non-Christian into a direct confrontation with the Lord Jesus so they realize their personal responsibility to decide for or against Christ.¹⁴⁹

In the late 1800s, Edwin Starbuck conducted research on conversion to Christianity and observed the average age of a person experiencing a religious conversion was 15.6 years.¹⁵⁰ According to Charles Arn, self-reported age of conversion in one study noted 17 percent from the age of 11 to 20, 35 percent from 21 to 30, 26 percent from 31 to 40, 8 percent between 41 and 50, 4 percent between 51 and 60, 1 percent between 61 to 70 and less than 1 percent beyond 70.¹⁵¹

Furthermore according to Arn, those who attended church while growing up are more likely to make a commitment or recommitment of faith than those who did not attend church as a child.¹⁵² In 1952, 6 percent of those surveyed claimed they had not received any religious instruction as a child, but in 1993, of those born between 1965 and 1981, 52 percent reported they had no religious training as a child.¹⁵³

Spencer maintained where conversions are sudden and sustained they cannot be discounted if they occurred at a revival even where abuses had crept in because none can dictate the mode in which the Holy Spirit chooses to do his work.¹⁵⁴ In addition, one

¹⁴⁹Paul E. Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 73.

¹⁵⁰Charles Arn, "Factors Affecting Late-Life Conversion," *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (2008): 330.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 331. See also Daniel Brewster, "The 4-14 Window: Child Ministries and Evangelism Strategies," in *Children in Crisis: A New Commitment*, ed. Phyllis Kilbourn (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996), 126, noting that 85 percent of Christians commit their life to Christ between the ages of 4-14 years old.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 332.

¹⁵⁴Ichabod Spencer, *A Pastor's Sketches: Conversations with Anxious Souls Concerning the Way of Salvation* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2006), viii.

might distrust sick-bed conversions because some have witnessed the unexpected return of health to bring back the former unregenerate behavior or that which is worse.¹⁵⁵

Analogy to Marriage in Conversion

The theology of marriage must begin with the metanarrative of Scripture and in particular the two great poles of creation and redemption.¹⁵⁶ In Ephesians 5, Paul gives an interpretation of Genesis 2:24 that God's purpose in marriage is analogous to the New Testament revelation of Christ and the church.¹⁵⁷ Paul taught that when God designed the original marriage he already had Christ and the church in mind, and the marriage relationship is a picture of the relationship between Christ and his redeemed people.¹⁵⁸ The serpent's success at disrupting the vertical relationship between man and God as well as the horizontal relationship between the man and the woman is the basis for God's plan of redemption.¹⁵⁹ Redemption and the sanctification process restore proper order to both of these relationships.¹⁶⁰ Marriage involves a deep and uniquely theological significance because it mirrors the covenant love of God for his people.¹⁶¹ The New Testament connects the man-woman relationship in marriage to the spiritual relationship Christians have with Jesus Christ.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 102.

¹⁵⁶Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2005), 77.

¹⁵⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, John Piper, and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 175.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁹David Lee Talley, "Gender and Sanctification: From Creation to Transformation," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8 (Spring 2003): 9.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ash, *Marriage*, 109.

¹⁶²Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards*

The marriage ceremony includes a public pledge before witnesses of lifelong faithfulness between one man and one woman.¹⁶³ Before the public pledge is given, there is a public reminder of the nature and purposes of marriage.¹⁶⁴ This is not unlike the public response often associated with a public evangelistic invitation.

In a marriage ceremony the presence of the bride, groom, God, and the assembled witnesses of the vows increase the weight of condemnation upon any who break those vows.¹⁶⁵ The presence of witnesses mandates the making of the marriage covenant is public in nature and involves the whole believing community.¹⁶⁶ In a sense, the public vow helps to create the couple and they become accountable to an ideal of marriage that is outside of them and far bigger than they are.¹⁶⁷ At the consummation of all things, the church as the bride and wife is pure and lovely as she enjoys intimate fellowship with the Lamb in accord with the redemptive plan.¹⁶⁸ Conversion, therefore, can be understood in the context of the marriage covenant.¹⁶⁹

Sanctification—Biblical and Literature Support

The doctrine of sanctification addresses the understanding of how Christians

for a Culture in Crisis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 145.

¹⁶³Ash, *Marriage*, 212.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁶⁵Wayne Grudem and Dennis Rainey, *Pastoral Leadership for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 140.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷David Blankenhorn, *The Future of Marriage* (reprt., New York: Encounter, 2009), 18.

¹⁶⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 337.

¹⁶⁹Ash, *Marriage*, 109.

grow toward spiritual maturity in Christ following justification at conversion.¹⁷⁰

Sanctification is a progressive work of God in man that makes believers more free from sin and more like Christ in their actual lives.¹⁷¹ The difficulty in articulating the doctrine of sanctification arises in trying to establish when sanctification occurs and to what degree and extent it is the work of God versus the effort or responsibility of man.¹⁷²

Different perspectives on the doctrine of sanctification center on the interpretation of Romans 7 where Paul describes the relationship between the law and sin and the impact on humanity.¹⁷³ There has never been, nor will there ever be, a consensus on whether Paul is speaking in an autobiographical sense or whether he is speaking of humanity in general or both.¹⁷⁴ For the purposes of this discussion, Romans 7:1-13 is understood to describe Paul's description of how the unregenerate misunderstand the relationship between the law, sin, and salvation.¹⁷⁵ Romans 7:14-25 is understood to describe the ongoing struggle with sin that believers experience and the apostle Paul is included in this group.¹⁷⁶

John 17 is also vital to a proper understanding of the view of sanctification.¹⁷⁷ In this chapter Jesus notes he sanctifies himself so his disciples and all other believers

¹⁷⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 8; Melvin E. Dieter et al., *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 8.

¹⁷³Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 8.

¹⁷⁴Terry L. Wilder, ed., *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: Three Views of Romans 7* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 6.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 46.

¹⁷⁷David G. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 28.

may also be sanctified (John 17:19-20). In this life the Christian is caught in the tension between the reality of Christ's kingdom in the spirit of the believer and the fact the believer must continue to live in this world that has not yet been completely eradicated of sin.¹⁷⁸ In other words, Christians are required to live in an overlapping of the ages.¹⁷⁹

The difficulty with a proper understanding of Romans 7:14-25 is how the Christian can be struggling with sin if he is already sanctified.¹⁸⁰ The Christian has been freed from enslavement to sin and is now a slave of Christ dominated by the Lord and no longer dominated by sin.¹⁸¹ This union with Christ places the Christian in conflict with the world, and though the war against sin and death has been won by Christ, Christians remain in conflict with sin until death or until the return of Christ.¹⁸² Therefore, sanctification is a lifelong process as well as something that has occurred at the point of conversion.¹⁸³ This ongoing process is a divine gift and not purely the result of human effort though it does involve the responsible participation of the believer.¹⁸⁴

History of Development and Use of the Altar Call

Some Calvinists oppose the use of a public invitation or altar call at the end of sermons thinking it confusing, possibly spiritually dangerous, and a hindrance to true salvation because of its incompatibility with their understanding of total depravity,

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 96.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 56.

¹⁸¹Dieter et al., *Five Views on Sanctification*, 56; Acts 26:18, Rom 6:14.

¹⁸²Alexander, *Christian Spirituality*, 61; Eph 6:12.

¹⁸³Dieter et al., *Five Views on Sanctification*, 72.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 70.

unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace.¹⁸⁵ The apparent decline of the use of the altar call in churches today may be attributed in part to the resurgence in Calvinistic theology.¹⁸⁶ The use is also on the decline as modern churches hold back for fear of pushing away seekers who are more interested in substituting personal growth for conversion as religious consumers.¹⁸⁷ This section examines the genesis and development of the altar call. Though some hold the understanding that altar call methodology extends far back into the Old Testament,¹⁸⁸ others claim the use of the system is a fairly recent development that sprang up as a result of the rapid growth and movement of people in America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸⁹

A rising emphasis on conversions centered in the pietistic movement in Germany during the 1680s.¹⁹⁰ The conversions experienced under the preaching of August Hermann Franke grew into the thousands and the struggle of those convicted during pietistic preaching was always culminated in private and never before an audience in a public assembly.¹⁹¹ John Wesley was influenced by Puritanism, however, his concept of conversion resulted from his contacts with the Moravians in Georgia who were directly

¹⁸⁵R. Allen Streett, "The Public Invitation and Calvinism," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 233.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸⁷David Briggs, "Glimpses of Graham," *Reading, Pennsylvania Eagle/Reading Times*, May 3, 1997, sec. A, p. 9.

¹⁸⁸Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 55; see also R. T. Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted: Calling for Public Confession of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 36, regarding the "public pledge."

¹⁸⁹David Bennett, *The Altar Call* (Lanham, MD: University Press Of America, 2000), 62.

¹⁹⁰Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Invitation: A Historical Survey," *Restoration Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1961): 6.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*

related to the Pietists.¹⁹²

While John Wesley was living and working among the Moravians he realized he had not experienced conversion and this culminated in his well-known conversion experience in 1738 while attending a Moravian prayer meeting in Aldersgate Street, London.¹⁹³ Though John Wesley preached to more than 30,000 at times there appears to be no direct evidence that Wesley ever used an altar call despite his forceful exhortation of the Scriptures and his emphasis on conversion.¹⁹⁴ There is evidence however that those who followed in the Methodist footsteps of Wesley did utilize what came to be known as the “mourners bench” as early as the late 1700s.¹⁹⁵ George Whitefield who was a contemporary and peer of Wesley is noted by Benjamin Franklin to also have preached to crowds of over 30,000 souls.¹⁹⁶ Whitefield, as well as Wesley, is not known to have used the altar call.¹⁹⁷ Jonathan Edwards led the revival sweeping Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734, and with the addition of George Whitefield in 1740 led to what is known as the Great Awakening in the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁹⁸ Preaching during this period

¹⁹²Ibid., 7.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 5. See also Roy J. Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1974), 7-8.

¹⁹⁵John H. Armstrong, “Review of *Stand Up and Be Counted* by R. T. Kendall,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 3 (1986): 52. Those sources that do claim Wesley utilized the altar call or mourners bench stem from references to a 1957 book by C. B. Templeton, *Evangelism for Tomorrow*, cited in Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 4.

¹⁹⁶Arnold Dallimore, “*Peddler in Divinity*” *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 113.

¹⁹⁷John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, PA: Daniel Miller, 1843), 23, cited in Olbricht, “The Invitation,” 8. See also Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 13.

¹⁹⁸Olbricht, “The Invitation,” 8.

was principally aimed at initiating in the individual a private struggle toward the need for a Savior and conversion.¹⁹⁹

The strong democratic spirit of the frontiersman²⁰⁰ and the freedom from colonial rule and the burgeoning individualism of the Americans gave them a sense of their right to make decisions for themselves.²⁰¹ This led to a resurgence toward the end of the eighteenth century of the American evangelical movement, which became designated as the Second Great Awakening.²⁰² During this time, great gatherings of people in camp meetings spontaneously formed where one or many different preachers²⁰³ would address the crowds.²⁰⁴ These camp meetings occurred across a broad range of the American frontier but appeared to center in the western frontier territories of Kentucky and Tennessee.²⁰⁵

The camp meetings were initially in large sprawling areas that attracted people from two-hundred miles or further²⁰⁶ and with crowds easily exceeding 20,000 the meetings often continued for six days or more.²⁰⁷ The precise reasoning for initiating the invitation is unclear but the sprawling, disorganized, and disruptive setting of the camp meetings was not conducive to the private considerations of the status of one's soul in response to the preaching.²⁰⁸ The Cane Ridge camp meeting in Kentucky in May 1801,

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 9.

²⁰¹Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 57.

²⁰²Olbricht, "The Invitation," 9.

²⁰³John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 65.

²⁰⁴Olbricht, "The Invitation," 10.

²⁰⁵Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 66.

²⁰⁶Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 49.

²⁰⁷Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805*, 64-65.

²⁰⁸Olbricht, "The Invitation," 9.

had an attendance in excess of 25,000 people.²⁰⁹ A young man by the name of Peter Cartwright attended this meeting and in his autobiography wrote, “On Saturday evening of said meeting, I went, with weeping multitudes, and bowed before the stand, and earnestly prayed for mercy.”²¹⁰

Because there were a number of different preaching points around the campground, those under conviction were scattered throughout the fields and woods and the disorganization led to charges of immorality against the camp meetings which were not completely unfounded.²¹¹ Measures to guard against opportunities for immorality and to collect mourners near the front of the crowd for more efficient counseling were instituted first at Cane Ridge, Kentucky.²¹² This new procedure of having the sinners come forward when the invitation was given spread rapidly on the frontier and beyond.²¹³ Benches were set aside for them at the front of the area which became known as the “mourner’s bench.”²¹⁴ Preaching points were organized and fenced or roped off enclosures from six to ten square yards with seats were provided for mourners for the purpose of effective counseling without the noise and activity of camp life.²¹⁵ By the 1820s, the mourner’s bench was also referred to as the “anxious seat” and it was widely in use.²¹⁶

²⁰⁹Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805*, 64-65.

²¹⁰Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 38.

²¹¹Olbricht, “The Invitation,” 10.

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Ibid., 11.

²¹⁵John B. McFerrin, *History of Methodism in Tennessee* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten, 1901), 337.

²¹⁶Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 132.

Charles Finney first employed the invitation at Evans Mills, New York, in 1825, and as a result suffered bitter criticism from his Presbyterian colleagues.²¹⁷ The invitation directed people to stand up and go to an inquiry room when the services were completed because the aisles were too narrow for everyone to reach the anxious seat.²¹⁸ Theologically, the use of the invitation was a significant innovation because it was the product of movement away from strict Calvinism to Arminianism in the camp meeting settings and in area churches.²¹⁹ This might also be referred to as an era of moderate Calvinism in opposition to the rigid Calvinism of Timothy Dwight and Lyman Beecher.²²⁰ The use of the mourner's bench is well documented by Reverend Barton Warren Stone who, in June 1804, rejected the use of the mourner's bench but saw a great decline in mourners as well.²²¹ What is unique is that Stone and others who had departed from the Presbyterian faith during the Second Great Awakening came to insist that salvation was possible for all men and not only for the elect few.²²²

In the New England states during the 1840s, the anxious bench was in use, however, due to resistance from Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and the German Reformed, particularly in New York, its use declined.²²³ Use continued in the West and the South as did the regular employment of the altar call.²²⁴ Dwight L. Moody utilized the

²¹⁷William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism, Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1959), 31.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*, 404.

²¹⁹Olbricht, "The Invitation," 9.

²²⁰Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 52.

²²¹Colby D. Hall, *The New Light Christians* (Fort Worth: Stafford-Lowdon, 1959), 103.

²²²Olbricht, "The Invitation," 13.

²²³Nevin, *The Anxious Bench*, 11.

²²⁴Olbricht, "The Invitation," 16.

invitation in Chicago in the 1860s as it had already been popularized among the people by Charles Finney.²²⁵

Others followed Moody with his use of the altar call during evangelistic services such as Sam Jones (1847-1906), Reuben Torrey (1856-1928), Rodney Gypsy Smith (1860-1947), and Billy Sunday (1862-1935).²²⁶ By 1973, more than 125,000 people had responded to the gospel invitation to receive Christ as Savior in Jack Van Impe crusades.²²⁷ Billy Graham was himself saved at an altar call during a crusade in November 1934, given by Mordecai Ham in Charlotte, North Carolina.²²⁸ In the Billy Graham crusades, held from 1947 to 1983, almost 2,000,000 people publicly responded to Billy Graham's invitation to receive Christ.²²⁹ By 1969, more than 94 percent of Southern Baptist churches always gave a public invitation at the close of a service.²³⁰ Today altar call usage is on the decline in America.²³¹

Arguments in Favor of the Altar Call

A 1972 survey indicated that over 40 percent of Southern Baptist church members made a public profession of faith in a revival.²³² Due in part to the use of the altar call form of the public evangelistic invitation, Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

²²⁵Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 141.

²²⁶Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 100-03.

²²⁷Ibid., 105.

²²⁸Ibid., 109.

²²⁹Ibid., 130.

²³⁰Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 163.

²³¹Briggs, "Glimpses of Graham," A9.

²³²John P. Newport, "The Theology and Experience of Salvation," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22 (Winter 1977): 393.

membership more than doubled between 1942 and 1972.²³³ Proponents argue an invitation of some form should follow a presentation of the gospel because truth by its nature demands a verdict.²³⁴ Their goal is to have the listeners know that God expects some sort of response and the preacher's task is to make the invitation clear.²³⁵ John M. Buchanan writes, "If we wrap up the Sunday morning service without posing a question to be answered, a challenge or an invitation, we have left critical work undone."²³⁶ According to Graham, it must be remembered that "simply responding to an invitation at a gospel meeting is meaningless unless God is at work."²³⁷

Keathley notes God calls men to salvation but he uses the gospel preacher to issue the summons.²³⁸ According to Greg Laurie, "Except for preaching a watered down gospel the worst sin in giving an invitation is making it confusing or overly inclusive."²³⁹ Billy Graham notes, "The particular method of invitation we use is of comparatively recent origin, but the spirit and the principle of the evangelistic invitation is as old as the Bible itself."²⁴⁰

Kendall believes a presentation of an opportunity to make a public pledge

²³³Ibid., 396.

²³⁴Robert L. Hamblin, "The Gospel Invitation in Today's World," *Theological Educator* 57 (Spring 1998): 22.

²³⁵Dennis R. Edwards, "'Not Hearers Only' Preaching Invitationally," *Vision* 10 (Spring 2009): 78.

²³⁶John M. Buchanan, "Preaching for a Decision," *Christian Century*, 128, no. 20 (2011): 3.

²³⁷Billy Graham, "Insights to the Invitation," *Proclaim*, October 1977, 4.

²³⁸Ken Keathley, "Rescuing the Perishing," *Heartland*, Summer 1999, 1, 3.

²³⁹Greg Laurie, "Whatever Happened to the Clear Invitation?" *Leadership Magazine* (Spring 1995): 54.

²⁴⁰Billy Graham, "Why Do We Ask for Decisions?" *Decision Magazine*, March 1961, 9.

reinforces the need for a person to consider the state of his own soul.²⁴¹ He notes that even where there might be an offense because the call for a public pledge has been made, it may be that very confrontation which brings home one's need to be saved in a manner the preaching failed to do.²⁴² In addition, he notes the point when an individual is actually regenerated is impossible to know because regeneration took place before the conscious awareness of it.²⁴³

Roy Fish noted the nature of the gospel represents an offer and such an offer commands a decision.²⁴⁴ O.S. Hawkins believed the main intent of the public evangelistic invitation was to give an opportunity to those in attendance who recently received the free gift of eternal life to make a public pledge of such by confessing Christ before men.²⁴⁵ Streett notes the public invitation affords those who have heard the gospel in the past an opportunity to receive Christ.²⁴⁶ In this way the pastor or evangelist can reap a harvest of souls that was planted weeks, months, and even years earlier.²⁴⁷ Furthermore Streett claims that having responded to an invitation affords the new convert, when he begins to doubt his salvation, a mental reminder of his surrender to the Lord.²⁴⁸ It must be acknowledged however that some who "walked the aisle" have no evidence of a relationship with the Lord and they may be relying on a similar assurance of salvation when it does not exist.

²⁴¹Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 22.

²⁴²*Ibid.*, 70.

²⁴³*Ibid.*, 75.

²⁴⁴Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 10.

²⁴⁵O. S. Hawkins, *Drawing the Net: 30 Practical Principles for Leading Others to Christ Publicly and Personally* (Dallas: Annuity Board of the SBC, 2002), 141.

²⁴⁶Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 140.

²⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 141.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 147.

Kendall establishes there is no clear mandate in the New Testament to call for an immediate decision to come forward to confess Christ publicly.²⁴⁹ However, Hamblin notes that in the Bible there is no example of the invitation as it is used but neither is there an example for Sunday school, church buildings, or hymn books.²⁵⁰ This also applies to regular tithing.²⁵¹

Kendall notes there is no scriptural verse that explicitly refers to the public pledge but there are numerous biblical equivalents.²⁵² One of the best examples of verses in the Bible supporting the call for people to pledge themselves publicly to Christ is Matthew 10:32-33 where Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who confesses me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.” Kendall notes when Christ called people to himself he did so publicly and when the woman touched the hem of Jesus’ garment to be healed in Mark 5:25-33, the healing had already taken place when Jesus called her out of hiding to make a public confession.²⁵³

Fish reminds readers that Peter called on the audience at Pentecost to repent and be baptized,²⁵⁴ that preaching and invitation are virtually inseparable,²⁵⁵ and by nature man is spiritually lethargic and needs encouragement to respond to the gospel even as Paul had a reputation as one who persuaded men to believe.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Abraham

²⁴⁹Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 61.

²⁵⁰Hamblin, “The Gospel Invitation in Today’s World,” 26.

²⁵¹Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 60.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, 73.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵⁴Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 9, recalling Acts 2:38.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 11, noting 2 Cor 5:38.

publicly called people in the camp to come to him if they were on the Lord's side (Exod 32:26) and Joshua publicly challenged the people to choose whom they would serve (Josh 24:25).

Hawkins notes that when a preacher extends the gospel invitation after presenting the message of salvation and calls for a public decision he is emulating what Peter did at Pentecost.²⁵⁷ Streett claims that, while not specifically recorded, it is safe to assume Jesus gave a public invitation to all his followers.²⁵⁸

Kendall recalls Moody is noted to have said where he found one person converted under the sermon, one hundred had been converted in the inquiry room following the sermon.²⁵⁹ Roy Fish mentions Dwight L. Moody always gave an invitation after failing to do so on Sunday night October 8, 1871, when after the service the great Chicago fire began and many people lost their lives.²⁶⁰

Kendall maintains the invitation provides people an opportunity to do what they want to do; not an effort to make them do what they do not want to do.²⁶¹ Fish notes extending the invitation is nothing more than drawing the net as a fisherman might do.²⁶² Shivers notes it is a pity to let anyone leave uncommitted who would have made a decision if the proper invitation had been given.²⁶³ Streett sees the preacher as the man of God pointing the way to heaven and as such, he ought to preach for a verdict.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁷Hawkins, *Drawing the Net*, 16.

²⁵⁸Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 59.

²⁵⁹Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 55.

²⁶⁰Fish, *Giving a Good Invitation*, 30.

²⁶¹Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 26.

²⁶²Hawkins, *Drawing the Net*, 9.

²⁶³Frank R. Shivers, *The Evangelistic Invitation: 101-150 Helps In Giving The Evangelistic Invitation* (Sumpter, SC: Hill, 2004), ix.

²⁶⁴Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 13.

The foregoing points are repeatedly cited in literature in favor of the altar call as a form of a public evangelistic invitation and the fact that the use of the altar call has been effective in motivating listeners to move forward to the front of the venue is not contested.

Arguments against the Altar Call

According to Ehrhard, statistics compiled using the invitation system show that only a very small percentage of those going forward show any signs of conversion even a few weeks after the decision.²⁶⁵ In addition he notes false conversions were the exception rather than the rule where the altar call was not used and that when Finney reflected on the many who claimed conversion but had since fallen away, he had mixed thoughts about the genuineness of his work.²⁶⁶ Murray notes there is reason to believe the number of people who go forward in response to an altar call and then fall away entirely is considerable and some have admitted that 90 percent or more will ultimately fall away.²⁶⁷ In Bennett's scholarly and balanced work on altar calls, he notes the method Finney employed, according to R.E. Davies, was basically persuasion calculated to convince people against their will to accept Christ resulting in frequent falling away.²⁶⁸

In the mid-1800s, Horace Bushnell strongly rejected what he referred to as "the machinery system of revivals," where Christian piety was reduced to a "kind of campaigning or stage-effect exercise."²⁶⁹ He believed parents ought to properly nurture

²⁶⁵Jim Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System* (Parkville, MO: Christian Communicators, 1999), 12.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶⁷Iain H. Murray, *The Invitation System* (London: Hunt Barnard & Company, 1967), 27.

²⁶⁸Davies, *My Spirit*, 247, cited in Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 202.

²⁶⁹Horace Bushnell, *Twentieth Anniversary: A Commemorative Discourse in the North Church, of Hartford, May 22, 1853*, 19-20.

their children in the Christian faith such that they would grow up Christian, never knowing themselves as being otherwise, and therefore eliminating the potential slide into depravity requiring a later supposed revival experience.²⁷⁰

Ehrhard notes it is only since the 1800s this system been employed to bring men to Christ.²⁷¹ Bennett cites exaggerations of estimates of conversions from mass evangelism using public evangelistic invitations and recalls a 1978 study of Campus Crusade for Christ with hundreds of thousands of decisions registered but only 3 percent of persons responding were incorporated into local congregations.²⁷² He further recalls that at the Billy Graham Crusade in Wembley, England, in 1955, Erroll Hulse noted he and his wife worked as counselors every night but of the twenty-six inquirers they counseled not one came to anything.²⁷³

Bennett correctly notes many evangelists, as well as inquirers, apparently confuse going forward with conversion.²⁷⁴ He also notes that many who go forward at an altar call are not genuinely converted, yet some find themselves attached to a church, and these false conversions weaken the church because the altar call tends to promote reliance on human means rather than on God.²⁷⁵ It should be noted, however, that false conversions will be the result in any environment where the Spirit is not at work (Matt 7:22-23).

Ehrhard points out the altar call form of a public evangelistic invitation leads many to trust their eternal destination to confidence in a confession, though they openly

²⁷⁰Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (reprt., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 10.

²⁷¹Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, 5.

²⁷²Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 219.

²⁷³*Ibid.*, 223.

²⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 220.

²⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 232.

live in rebellion to God throughout their lives.²⁷⁶ In addition, he notes there is danger in eliciting an emotional response based on the personality of the speaker or the persuasion of the appeal and because of the blindness of unregenerate man people are prone to attempt to work out their own standing before God.²⁷⁷ Ehrhard believes preachers must be convinced of the power God's Word has in converting man without the help of man-made methods in the form of an altar call.²⁷⁸

Murray notes even though baptism was a public confession in the early church, it is not right to conclude that the altar call merely changes the mode in which the confession is made, because baptism never had the place in evangelism the altar call has now.²⁷⁹ According to Murray, baptism is an act that confirms the promises of salvation to believers, but altar calls are a device intended to convince men to become believers.²⁸⁰

Murray reminds his readers that the false principle of works is what natural man has always assumed to be true and the altar call leads inevitably to the danger of hastening unregenerate men to confess faith in Christ when it does not exist.²⁸¹ He notes those who respond are given reason to believe they are doing something commendable before God and those who do not are falsely led to believe they are disobeying God.²⁸² Bennett indicates the altar call is responsible for the current belief of many evangelicals who see Christian conversion primarily as a human decision of the human will.²⁸³

²⁷⁶Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, 6.

²⁷⁷Ibid., 8.

²⁷⁸Ibid., 16.

²⁷⁹Murray, *The Invitation System*, 9.

²⁸⁰Ibid., 10.

²⁸¹Ibid., 22.

²⁸²Ibid., 26.

²⁸³Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 201.

Bennett further notes there is no guarantee that because a person found themselves in church and moved forward in an altar call that the Holy Spirit is actually working in their lives, because even when the Spirit does begin to work on a human soul the process leading up to conversion often still takes weeks, months, or even years.²⁸⁴ Ehrhard notes people mistake the coming forward with salvation and this confuses the practice of coming forward with a genuine conversion experience.²⁸⁵ Murray notes the willingness to come to the front on the part of the young converted may be due to various reasons including natural self-love, seeking happiness, a disturbed conscience, etc.²⁸⁶

Bennett agrees with Ehrhard the impression often given by evangelists, pastors, reporters, and writers about going forward is that it is equivalent to conversion.²⁸⁷ Recalling altar calls given by others, Murray notes there is pressure on people to come forward and the idea is conveyed by the preacher that this step forward is of great spiritual importance and that a failure to do so is a deliberate refusal to obey God.²⁸⁸ Furthermore Bennett notes that invitations are often associated with prolonged and excessively emotional appeals, dishonest appeals, or confusing appeals with aggressive and manipulative counseling.²⁸⁹ Even those who oppose the use of the altar call allow that, considering Scripture, the use of the altar call in exceptional circumstances can be justified, however, it does not support the systematic use of the practice.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴Ibid., 213.

²⁸⁵Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, 12.

²⁸⁶Murray, *The Invitation System*, 26.

²⁸⁷Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 229.

²⁸⁸Murray, *The Invitation System*, 14.

²⁸⁹Bennett, *The Altar Call*, 236.

²⁹⁰Ibid., 185.

Scriptural Considerations on Calls for a Decision

Since there is no clear command or example in Scripture regarding the practice of altar calls, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ must form their own opinion based on Scripture. Similar to other issues within evangelical Christianity, opinions range from very agreeable to very disagreeable concerning the validity of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. A Christian call for a decision in the spiritual realm is an implied invitation to decide for or against the Lord. The difficulty is presented when the call for a decision is associated with a presumed mandatory physical response. This section examines Scripture for the purpose of further understanding the thinking, practice, and approach of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation.

The Responsibility to Evangelize

From the very start, Jesus taught his disciples they would ultimately be fishers of men (Matt 4:19). In addition, Jesus' final words of instruction to his disciples were to take the good news into the whole world for the purpose of sharing it with all creation (Mark 16:15). Furthermore, the verse that has been responsible for sending out more missionaries into the world than perhaps any other quotes Jesus telling believers to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). Jesus clearly left no doubt among his followers that it was their job to share the good news of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection with the rest of the world.

Old Testament Examples of Calls for a Decision

The Old Testament presents numerous accounts of people being confronted with the Truth followed by an implicit or explicit call for a decision. When Moses came down from the mountain and found the people under Aaron's leadership were out of control, Moses took his stand in the gate of the camp and announced to all the people that whoever was for Yahweh should come to him (Exod 32:26). This was an invitation given

by Moses to those who belonged to Yahweh to come on Yahweh's terms.²⁹¹

Near the end of Joshua's leadership of the nation of Israel, Joshua called the people together to remember what the Lord had done for them and to present them with the need to make a decision either for or against the Lord (Josh 24). The choice that Joshua presented to the people was between serving the Lord and serving other gods.²⁹² Joshua made it clear they could choose to their hearts' content however he wanted it to be known that he and his household had chosen the Lord.²⁹³ The entire service of rededication and decision by the people was recorded by Joshua in a book and he erected a large stone to commemorate the event to motivate the people to show true covenant loyalty.²⁹⁴

This episode from the book of Joshua forced a decision on Israel and in the hour of choice, Israel's freedom remained totally protected.²⁹⁵ She was simply asked to view God's history and determine if it proved his superiority over other claims to deity.²⁹⁶ Butler notes this public presentation of the truth followed by a demand for a decision is atemporal—it belongs to no specific time and thus to all times.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, this timeless presentation beckons man to choose whom he will serve and reminds him the choice he makes has serious consequences.²⁹⁸

²⁹¹John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 431.

²⁹²Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 352.

²⁹³*Ibid.*

²⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 358.

²⁹⁵Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7 (Dallas: Word, 1983), 274.

²⁹⁶*Ibid.*

²⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 278.

²⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 280.

Israel was confronted with a similar moment of decision under the leadership of the prophet Elijah and later under King Josiah. Elijah presented the nation of Israel on Mount Carmel with a choice between serving the Lord or the idol Baal (1 Kgs 18:21). When the people were publicly confronted with the word of truth and the power of God they humbled themselves, believed, and confessed the Lord is God (1 Kgs 18:39). Approximately three hundred years later the Israelites had forgotten the events on Mount Carmel when the Book of the Law was found during the repair of the house of the Lord under King Josiah (2 Kgs 22:8). The King gathered the people of Judah and publicly read the book of the Lord in their hearing resulting in all present to make a covenant to follow the Lord (2 Kgs 23:1-3).

Even after the exile the Israelites required periodic times of confrontation with the truth followed by an opportunity for decision. When the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem took foreign wives, Ezra and the people gathered before the house of the Lord to repent and make a covenant before the Lord (Ezra 10:1-11). Ezra publicly presented them with the fact of their unfaithfulness and exhorted them to confess their sins before the Lord and to take action in keeping with obedience. A large crowd gathered with the expectation that Ezra would speak to them indicating their understanding that a decision would be required.²⁹⁹ Williamson notes that by making the people swear to follow the suggested course of action, Ezra ensured there would be no turning back at a later stage.³⁰⁰ In addition, Williamson comments it was precisely because Ezra felt so deeply about the situation that he was prepared to use even his emotions to help stimulate what he regarded as the necessary response.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 149.

³⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 151.

³⁰¹*Ibid.*

Nehemiah notes the people gathered and stood for a quarter of the day while the book of the law was read (Neh 9:1-3). The people came to the occasion with outward signs of confession, mourning, and repentance.³⁰² This public reading and call for repentance culminated with a written covenant by the people before God (Neh 9:38). The written pledge was a public record of the agreement of the people and their leaders to acknowledge the Lord and the last verse referring to the names was added within the pledge itself for accountability and clarification of the event according to Williamson.³⁰³

Through the prophet Joel, the Lord himself spoke publicly to his people.³⁰⁴ The message was to return and repent and to make peace with their God.³⁰⁵ According to Allen, this account described as a war in the valley of decision for the Lord gave an opportunity to the people to make a decision to return to the Lord and rend their hearts.³⁰⁶

Perhaps one of the best known public proclamations of the Word of God followed by a demand for a response is from the prophet Jonah in the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:3-5). The people did respond to the message and donned the traditional symbol of mourning and repentance.³⁰⁷ The King of Nineveh himself was perhaps the most profoundly affected person that day. He was not satisfied with a cultic show of pretense but rather demanded a change of moral behavior noting that a personal reformation was required.³⁰⁸

³⁰²Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 310.

³⁰³*Ibid.*, 339.

³⁰⁴Ronald Barclay Allen, *Joel: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 49, on Joel 2.

³⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 62.

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 63.

³⁰⁷Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 225.

³⁰⁸*Ibid.*

This format then—the circumstances of people coming in repentance, of publicly acknowledging the Lord, and pledging themselves to God in a way that may or may not be associated with a physical action after a reading or proclamation of Scripture—does have some parallels to the public evangelistic invitation of the modern era.

New Testament Examples of Calls for a Decision

From the earliest passages in the gospel accounts proclamations of the gospel are followed by an implicit or explicit call for a decision. John the Baptist issued a public summons to repent and to believe (Mark 1:4-5). This summons was not new but it was a fresh reiteration of the Word addressed to men through the prophets.³⁰⁹ In response to his preaching, however, John the Baptist did call for an action which was wholly novel—baptism in the Jordan River.³¹⁰ This was a public call for people to come out to him in the wilderness akin to calling Israel once more to come to the wilderness for the purpose of hearing the truth and for repentance in a second Exodus.³¹¹ Accordingly, Jesus calls men to a radical decision and his proclamation of the kingdom of God was not to give content but to convey a summons requiring a decision.³¹²

Jesus called for a decision when he called to the crowds to come to him and take his yoke upon them thereby finding rest for their souls (Matt 11:28-30). He also told the rich young ruler directly to come and follow him therein requiring a decision and response which the rich young ruler declined (Matt 19:21).

The Day of Pentecost is one of the clearest examples of a New Testament

³⁰⁹William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 65.

³¹⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

³¹¹*Ibid.*, 50.

³¹²*Ibid.*, 66.

public evangelistic invitation.³¹³ Peter publicly preached the first sermon and the crowds—moved by the power of the Spirit—were compelled to ask Peter what they should do (Acts 2:37). That the crowd interposed a question is indicative that the consciences of all present were touched.³¹⁴ This setting allowed for conversational interaction between the speaker and the crowd. Such interaction is culturally aberrant today inside the modern Western church. Nevertheless, sermons are preached, people are compelled by the Spirit, and the unspoken question is the same as presented by the crowd in front of Peter on that day.³¹⁵ Peter responded that they should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The idea of baptism was directed to the crowd to individualize the response in a turning to God—a conversion of the mind and heart.³¹⁶ In response to their question, Peter was truly issuing a command or at least an instruction as to what they should do.³¹⁷ Likewise, today the unasked question as to what should be done must be answered by the speaker in the example of Peter.³¹⁸

In his letter to the Romans, Paul emphasizes the gospel demands only a simple response and that, when responded to, it mediates God’s salvation.³¹⁹ It is important to note that belief is required and oral confession is not a second requirement for salvation.³²⁰ This

³¹³Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 63.

³¹⁴C. K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: T & T Clark, 2002), 153.

³¹⁵Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 82.

³¹⁶Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 154.

³¹⁷*Ibid.*, 155.

³¹⁸Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 82.

³¹⁹Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 657, on Rom 10:9.

³²⁰*Ibid.*

oral confession is simply the outward manifestation of the critical inner response of faith.³²¹

Paul understood he and all others who share the good news of Jesus Christ are ambassadors for Christ and as such they appeal to those who hear and beg them to be reconciled to Christ (2 Cor 5:20). Paul appeals to the Corinthians both to embrace the fruits of divine reconciliation—due to their movement away from the gospel—and to heed and accept God’s proffered gesture of friendship.³²² It is here the human preacher is charged to deliver the word of reconciliation—not as a human voice—but in the very call and invitation of God that resonates in the proclamation of the message.³²³

The book of Acts recounts a number of examples of a proclamation of the gospel followed by an opportunity for decision. Paul publicly preached in the synagogue in Thessalonica and reasoned with the Jews such that some were persuaded by the presentation of the gospel (Acts 17:1-4). After his presentation of the gospel on Mars Hill it is noted that some joined Paul and believed (Acts 17:34). In Corinth, Paul publicly reasoned in the synagogue and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks and he did the same in Ephesus (Acts 18:4, 19). Paul also reasoned with King Agrippa and endeavored to persuade him to become a Christian (Acts 26:27-28). In each of these instances Paul reasoned with the people and persuaded them from Scripture to believe the gospel. The express or implied call for a response is evidenced in the fact that a number of people believed. Paul clearly was not ashamed of the gospel and he appealed to people—even begged them—on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). This common approach by Paul may be seen as indicative of modern day public evangelistic invitations.

³²¹Ibid.

³²²Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40 (Dallas: Word, 1985), 155.

³²³Ibid., 156.

Patterns of Belief and Action

Though an altar call as a form of a public evangelistic invitation is not clearly prescribed in Scripture, there is a pattern of proclamation, exhortation, persuasion, and a call for a decision for or against the Lord throughout Scripture.³²⁴ With regard to this pattern, Paul in 1 Corinthians 3 attacks a view that is too high or too low of ministers noting it is always God who manifests the eternal transformation in a believer's heart at conversion while ministers will come and go.³²⁵ In that chapter, Paul's "but now" in Romans 3:21 changes the focus from the old era of dominion by sin to the new era of salvation and this is the essence of the gospel.³²⁶

The verdict of "justified" is rendered the moment a person believes.³²⁷ This moment may be understood as the result of calm reflection birthed as a product of divine revelation akin to Peter's confession.³²⁸ Divine revelation had been at work bringing Peter and the other disciples to the conclusion of the truth about Jesus.³²⁹ This same divine revelation and work of the Spirit is ongoing in all who are chosen but are yet to be made known to the world. None can say or know exactly what the Lord has been doing in the life of anyone who responds to a public evangelistic invitation. Yet Paul exhorted and persuaded men to accept the gospel without exclusivity.³³⁰

³²⁴Kendall, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, 37; see also Street, *The Effective Invitation*, 55.

³²⁵Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 62, on 1 Cor 3:6-7.

³²⁶Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 221.

³²⁷*Ibid.*, 228.

³²⁸Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 468, on Matt 16:16-17.

³²⁹*Ibid.*, 469.

³³⁰Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, as noted in the discussion of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and in front of King Agrippa, 675, 811, 864, 1171.

The physical act of response is not required but a response of faith is often triggered by or linked to an action.³³¹ Jesus commanded the man with the shriveled hand to stretch out his hand and the hand was restored to normal (Matt 12:13). The paralytic who was lowered through the roof of the home in which Jesus was teaching was told by Jesus to get up, pick up his mat, and go home (Mark 2:11-12). Lane writes, “When Jesus caused the paralytic to walk before the eyes of his critics, they were forced to recognize that this declaration of forgiveness had been effective.”³³² The physical act of the lame man walking was evidence of the divine work that had already been wrought in the life and soul of the man.³³³ The command by Jesus to walk followed the Lord’s acknowledgment of the man’s faith wherein healing and forgiveness are interchangeable terms because sickness, disease, and death are all consequences of the sinful condition of man.³³⁴

The woman who was bleeding for twelve years endeavored to touch the fringe of Jesus’ cloak and in doing so was healed through this act of faith (Luke 8:44). The man who had been ill for thirty-eight years by the pool in Jerusalem was commanded by Jesus to get up, pick up his mat, and walk, which the man promptly did (John 5:8). This man was picked from among the many invalids present and it was the sovereign initiative of Christ for which no reason was given.³³⁵ In healing the man born blind Jesus spat on the ground, made some clay, and applied it to the eyes of the man and told him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam upon which he regained his sight (John 9:6-7). The initiation of the healing—restoration—is with Jesus, however, the man followed in obedience and washed

³³¹Streett, *The Effective Invitation*, 146.

³³²Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 98.

³³³*Ibid.*

³³⁴*Ibid.*, 94, on Mark 2:5.

³³⁵D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 243, on John 5:8.

in the pool as instructed.³³⁶ The power which effected the healing came not from the man's act of obedience nor from the pool called "Sent" but from the Sent One himself.³³⁷

In the same way, Peter told the lame man next to the temple entrance to walk in the name of Jesus Christ and as the man clung to Peter and was raised to his feet he was immediately able to walk (Acts 3:6-8). The miracle followed immediately upon the command supplemented by the usual action of standing and walking.³³⁸ This hardly proves the man to have become a Christian, though in view of verse 6, "in the name of Jesus," Luke no doubt would think it probable that he would do so.³³⁹ Paul, in seeing that the lame man in Lystra had faith to be healed, commanded him to stand upright on his feet and the man did so and began to walk (Acts 14:9-10).

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus taught that many would hear the good news and respond but only a few were chosen and would mature to bear fruit for the kingdom (Mark 4:1-20). In this parable it is the sowing of the seed that is central to the story, not the diversity of the responses.³⁴⁰ The parable is framed at the beginning and again at the end with a solemn call to attentive hearing as the hearers are ultimately led to formulate a judgment or decision.³⁴¹ The emphasis of the parable is not on the enormity of the waste but on the enormity and splendor of the harvest—a common figure for the consummation of the kingdom of God.³⁴²

³³⁶Ibid., 363.

³³⁷Ibid.

³³⁸Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 183.

³³⁹Ibid., 185.

³⁴⁰Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 154, 161, on Mark 4:1-20.

³⁴¹Ibid., 153.

³⁴²Ibid., 154.

The Lord Knows His Own

Responses to a public evangelistic invitation—or any other form of gospel presentation—might therefore be in the form of seed on the path, the rocky soil, among the thorns, or seed on good soil (Matt 13:1-23). At first glance, all responses may indeed look the same, however, on the Day of the Lord, only those from the good soil of grace and election will come bearing fruit.³⁴³ On that Day the criterion for man’s acceptance or rejection before the Son of Man is his loyalty or disloyalty to Jesus today.³⁴⁴ All too often people respond as Israel did under Joshua, by pledging their whole heart to the Lord and thereafter halting between two opinions at the first temptation wherein they eventually choose the path of death, which they had never departed from.³⁴⁵ Just as with the rich young ruler, it was his wealth—thorns paradoxically considered evidence of God’s blessing—that kept him from total uninhibited commitment.³⁴⁶

With or without a public evangelistic invitation Scripture is clear that God knows who belongs to him (John 10:14). Scripture states that only God knows the hearts of men (1 Kgs 8:39; John 10:14, 27). No one is therefore able to determine the eternal result of a response to any form of a public evangelistic invitation. Paul tells the Romans they are not in a position to judge the servant of another and the Lord is able to make his servants stand (Rom 14:4). Here Paul is referring to the strong and the weak in the faith and he is making the point that God has received them both and that it is God to whom each believer must answer.³⁴⁷ No one has the right to judge a fellow believer’s salvation because each believer is a “household slave” and as such, one who belongs to another.³⁴⁸

³⁴³Ibid.

³⁴⁴Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 311, on Mark 8:38.

³⁴⁵Butler, *Joshua*, 279, on Josh 24.

³⁴⁶Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 558, on Matt 19:21-23.

³⁴⁷Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 839.

³⁴⁸Ibid.

In addition, it is relatively certain the weak believer was the one who was judging one day to be more important than the other.³⁴⁹

Prior Studies Related to Altar Call Efficacy

Surprisingly little research or hard data is available on the matter of mass evangelism effectiveness.³⁵⁰ There have been attempts over the years to assess what the respondent or inquirer does in the months and years following a response to an evangelistic invitation, but the subject has not been well studied.³⁵¹ In 1979, a sociology professor at Vanderbilt University contacted 189 people that made commitments at a Billy Graham crusade held in Seattle in 1976.³⁵² Of those that responded, 83 percent indicated their experience had a positive or very positive effect on their lives, 15 percent said it had no effect, and 3 percent said it had a negative or very negative effect.³⁵³ The survey was paid for by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA)³⁵⁴ and the letter sent to the respondents was on BGEA letterhead.³⁵⁵ Others note at least half the respondents at the 1976 crusade listed themselves as Christians coming forward for rededication.³⁵⁶ In the course of church growth seminars, over 10,000 people have been

³⁴⁹Ibid., 842, on Rom 14:5.

³⁵⁰Win Arn, "Mass Evangelism The Bottom Line," *Church Growth: America*, January/February, 1978, 4.

³⁵¹Andy Newman, "At Crusade, Spirit Meets Science in the Altar Call," *New York Times*, June 25, 2005, sec. A, p. 1.

³⁵²Glenn Firebaugh, "How Effective Are City-Wide Crusades?" *Christianity Today*, March 27, 1981, 24.

³⁵³Ibid., 29.

³⁵⁴Ibid., 24.

³⁵⁵Newman, "At Crusade, Spirit Meets Science in the Altar Call," A1.

³⁵⁶Win Arn, "'Church Growth' Leader Win Arn Responds to Firebaugh's Conclusions," *Christianity Today*, March 27, 1981, 26.

asked how they came to faith in Christ and membership in their churches and friends and relatives are listed by 75 to 90% of those people whereas crusades account for a very small percentage.³⁵⁷ However, the “friends and relatives” noted by many as being instrumental in their conversion no doubt brought at least some of them to an evangelistic service where they came to faith and responded to an altar call.

In another study that examined the Greater Seattle Crusade of 1976, of the 434,100 people in attendance, 18,136 went forward with more than half for rededication.³⁵⁸ Those who responded for salvation numbered 5,550 and of that number after one year 1,285 or 7 percent of the total number going forward were incorporated into a local church as new members.³⁵⁹ Of the follow-up cards received by churches, 30.6 percent were for conversion and of that number, 15.3 percent were new members in a follow-up church.³⁶⁰ Of particular note is that of those new members, more than 80 percent already had a friend or relative in that congregation.³⁶¹

The outcome of the New England Billy Graham Crusade of 1982 in Greater Boston was the subject of a study in 1984.³⁶² From May 30 to June 6, 136,000 people attended with a total response rate of 6.3 percent³⁶³ for a total number of 8,622 inquirers and of that response 3,661 were for salvation.³⁶⁴ A randomly selected group of 24

³⁵⁷Ibid.

³⁵⁸Arn, “Mass Evangelism The Bottom Line,” 7.

³⁵⁹Ibid., 6.

³⁶⁰Ibid.

³⁶¹Ibid., 7.

³⁶²Roger Kvam, “Evaluating Mass Evangelism: A Case Study of the 1982 Billy Graham Crusade in Boston, Massachusetts” (D.Min. project, Boston University School of Theology, 1984).

³⁶³Ibid., 13.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 71.

Protestant churches were contacted to assess the result of 368 referral cards they had received as a result of the crusade. Of those 368 referrals, one-half to two-thirds were already church members before the crusade, and only five respondents became new members in these churches as a result of the crusade.³⁶⁵ As noted previously, the follow-up effort by participating churches is always a critical part of the success of public evangelistic invitations and the specifics of church follow-up efforts were not identified in this study.

A study in 2002 surveyed pastors selected mostly at random for interviews by email or telephone.³⁶⁶ Over 150 surveys were sent out with a response rate of more than 30 percent to assess if and how the public evangelistic invitation is used by those pastors.³⁶⁷ The study concluded the future of the public invitation was bleak due to contemporary methodology and the increase of Calvinistic theology.

In 2008, an isolated study was performed at The First Baptist Church in Summit, Mississippi.³⁶⁸ Questionnaires were distributed to a seven-person focus group to evaluate the effectiveness of the public invitation over a twelve-week period with the first six weeks as a control period where the usual format of the invitation was not altered.³⁶⁹ During the last six weeks, the public evangelistic invitation was altered using elements, recommendations, and tips from precedent literature to increase effectiveness.³⁷⁰ The

³⁶⁵Ibid., 95.

³⁶⁶Michael Lewis Mason, “An Analysis of the Evangelistic Invitations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” (D.Min. project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

³⁶⁷Ibid., 74.

³⁶⁸Larry Wayne LeBlanc, “Establishing an Effective Public Invitation for First Baptist Church, Summit, Mississippi” (D.Min. project, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

³⁶⁹Ibid., 61.

³⁷⁰Ibid.

planned control period and the later alterations to the invitation were unknown to the focus group.³⁷¹ The results of the study revealed a slight statistical decline in the perceived effectiveness of the invitation indicating a negligible impact if any due to a change in the form or format of the invitation.³⁷²

Relevance of Spiritual Maturity Scales

One need not look far to understand America has drifted from its Judeo-Christian heritage.³⁷³ Even in SBC churches there appears to be a crisis in Bible literacy.³⁷⁴ With regard to a functional view, Brad Waggoner began his dissertation work in the late 1980s to develop an instrument for measuring and evaluating the discipleship base of SBC churches.³⁷⁵ That work was finished in 1991 with the finding that the instrument developed in the research provided a statistically reliable measurement of the degree to which a given church member manifests the functional characteristics of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁷⁶ The purpose of the study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument for assessing spiritual maturity based on a scriptural review of the biblical parameters of what a disciple is and does.³⁷⁷ The intention of the study was to

³⁷¹Ibid., 64.

³⁷²Ibid., 71.

³⁷³R. Kent Hughes and John H. Armstrong, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody, 1996).

³⁷⁴Kenneth H. Gourlay, "An Assessment of Bible Knowledge among Adult Southern Baptist Sunday School Participants," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 22.

³⁷⁵Brad J. Waggoner, "The Development of an Instrument for Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base of Southern Baptist Churches" (Ed.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991).

³⁷⁶Ibid., 118.

³⁷⁷Ibid., 11.

develop an instrument that could be used to gather information for accurately judging strategies for church growth and church planting in various mission fields. The characteristics of a disciple were divided into five basic categories of attitudinal, conduct/behavior, relational, ministry, and doctrinal.³⁷⁸

Waggoner's dissertation work has been the basis for a great deal of research within the SBC as well as research outside the boundaries of the SBC in other denominations on the subject of spiritual maturity assessments.³⁷⁹ Waggoner's own additional research published in 2008 utilized the Spiritual Formation Inventory (SFI) for the purpose of assessing spiritual formation and the future of discipleship in the American church.³⁸⁰ Waggoner concluded this more recent study with a call to the church to do whatever is necessary to increase the health and strength of the body of Christ.³⁸¹ The final chapter of his book, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship*, discusses a number of recommendations and applications for church leaders in that regard.³⁸²

LifeWay Research in 2007, in association with Brad Waggoner, completed additional research to revise and strengthen the research tools used to assess spiritual maturity.³⁸³ Samples were taken and additional statistical tests were applied to increase the validity and reliability of the survey questions.³⁸⁴ That entire process was repeated

³⁷⁸Ibid., 143.

³⁷⁹Scott McConnell, V.P. of LifeWay Research, telephone interview by author, August 16, 2013.

³⁸⁰Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008).

³⁸¹Ibid., 288.

³⁸²Ibid., 289.

³⁸³McConnell, telephone interview.

³⁸⁴Ibid.

again in 2012 to the extent that statistically solid survey questions divided into eight categories or scales are now utilized for research in an instrument known as the TDA.³⁸⁵

The availability of the TDA provides a valid and reliable tool to assess spiritual maturity in the areas of seeking God, Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, sharing Christ, building relationships, unashamed (transparency), exercising faith, serving God and others, and doctrine.³⁸⁶ These scales served as the foundation for this research study assessing the efficacy, if any, of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. The new factors being explored were coupled with known predictors and then subjected to regression analysis.

Research Purpose

The foregoing review of the literature dictated the composition of this research study in a number of ways. First and foremost, the available literature on altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation reveals strong opinions both for and against the practice, however, there is a glaring gap in the literature with the absence of any robust and statistically valid and reliable research on the subject. This research study attempts to progress the discussion to the extent that interested parties may ponder the results of this study as they consider their own position with regard to altar calls. Pastors and seminary professors may have an interest in this topic but there are many others including, but not limited to, those whose lives have been changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in connection with or related to an altar call experience.

This study has also been affected by the precedent literature by way of a review of the theological and doctrinal issues related to the subject of altar calls. Whether one is of the Calvinist or Wesleyan tradition, the need to faithfully respond to the Great

³⁸⁵Ibid. See also LifeWay Research, "Transformational Discipleship Assessment," accessed August 25, 2013, <http://tda.lifeway.com>.

³⁸⁶Ibid.

Commission is a responsibility believers must take seriously. In that regard, the range of arguments surrounding the discussion on the efficacy of altar calls commands an objective and empirical contribution for the sake of moving forward in the work of evangelizing the unsaved.

Additionally this study sought to build upon the work of those that have gone before. The presence of valid and reliable scales for the assessment of discipleship characteristics is of great value. This study accepts the enviable position of being able to zero in on a finite aspect of Christian formation under the large umbrella of tested discipleship characteristics to pursue a definitive understanding of the efficacy, if any, of altar calls. Without having to reinvent the wheel this research was able to add to the vast body of literature on Christian formation in an empirically reliable manner to provide some clarity on a potentially emotional subject.

Finally, the review of precedent literature in looking at social science as well as the evangelical understanding of Christian formation directed this research in a way that hopefully provides a bridge of understanding between those two schools of thought.

In summary, the purpose of this research was to assess the efficacy, if any, of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation in an empirically responsible manner such that further discussion and research may continue to build upon the contemporary understanding of Christian formation until the Day of the Lord.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

A review of the literature reveals strong opinions on the issue of public evangelistic invitations with the use of altar calls. Groups on both sides of the discussion agree there is an absence of any direct command in Scripture pertaining to altar calls. Attempts to quantify the early or later results of public evangelistic efforts utilizing some form of an evangelistic invitation have failed to add to the discussion in a valid, reliable, and empirically sound manner.

This chapter describes the methodologies and procedures that were used in this research study. This study was designed to investigate in a systematic and comprehensive way the efficacy of altar calls in order contribute to the discussion on altar calls such that opinion and anecdotal reasoning will give way to the scientifically valid and reliable outcomes of research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative research was to examine the relationship between different Christian formation experiences and levels of spiritual maturity among adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant.

Research Question Synopsis

The following questions directed the collection and analysis of the data for this research study:

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of individuals who responded to an altar call versus those who did not?
2. To what degree are selected Christian formation experience variables predictive of spiritual maturity?

3. To what degree is an altar call experience related to spiritual maturity?
4. When considered together are pre-conversion experiences, post-conversion experiences, and altar call experiences predictive of spiritual maturity?

Research Design Overview

Research is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data for the purpose of increasing understanding of a phenomenon of interest or concern.¹ In the information age, there is no shortage of research that is smoothly and confidently presented, however, only a bit of it is sound—most of it is not.² One of the goals of research is to discover something that can improve readers' lives by changing what or how they think with sound data that helps to free a discussion from traces of ignorance, prejudice, or half-baked ideas.³ That goal is achieved only with the use of a valid instrument that measures precisely what it was intended to measure.⁴ In addition, the instrument must be reliable to the extent it yields a certain result every time when the entity being measured has not changed.⁵

A quantitative survey research design was chosen for this study for the purpose of providing a numeric description of the trends of a population by studying a sample of that population.⁶ A quantitative approach was required because the research problem called for an understanding of the best predictors of outcomes by identifying variables

¹Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2010), 2.

²Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3.

³Ibid., 8,11.

⁴Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 28.

⁵Ibid., 29.

⁶John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 12.

and the relationships between them.⁷ The statistical analysis describes, organizes, and interprets data in a meaningful way.⁸ Regression analyses was applied to the data in simple and multiple forms to assess whether the results of the data collected offer any predictive value.⁹ At no point was there an attempt to make any inference about causation because the analyses can offer an assessment of predictability only.¹⁰ A survey was the chosen strategy of inquiry because it would yield numeric data amenable to statistical procedures ensuring standards of validity and reliability.¹¹ It is acknowledged this survey research captured only a fleeting moment in time much the same as a camera taking a single photograph of an ongoing activity.¹²

The groups of questions that form a factor in factor analysis for reliability are called “scales.” These are the substance of the TDA. It is an outgrowth of the work Brad Waggoner completed in 1991 and later in work with LifeWay Research in 2007 as a consultant during a retriial sample followed by changes to some of the questions. This was repeated more recently in 2012 with new testing and revision of questions and the results were again subjected to statistical analysis.¹³

The TDA is valid internally because of the experts that have looked at the questions for over twenty years. It has external validity because when populations are sampled the patterns of relationship are consistent. The TDA questions form factors for

⁷Ibid., 18.

⁸Neil J Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2011), 7.

⁹Ibid., 279.

¹⁰Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 185.

¹¹Creswell, *Research Design*, 17.

¹²Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 187.

¹³Scott McConnell, V.P. LifeWay Research, telephone interview by author, August 16, 2013.

factoral analysis and the Cronbach statistical test has been applied with the positive outcome that the scales are reliable and the results are the same every time the instrument is used.¹⁴

The new questions generated by the Expert Panel did not require Cronbach statistical analysis nor test sampling. If the outcomes tested were used to give leaders the ability to test the presence of outcome factors, for example, before salvation or in the salvation process, then reliability would have to be proved through repeated sampling and the application of Cronbach statistical analysis so that others could use the tool for the same reasons. However, the new questions determined only if these new criteria matter in any positive or negative way. It is akin to an on-off switch and the practice or the presence of an experience was not being measured, rather its relationship to the TDA scales was being measured.¹⁵

The results were tested to see if there was a dependent relationship to the scales with the new questions. This research looked to see if these new attributes were predictive of these elements of spiritual maturity or in the alternative if they had a negative effect. The new questions related to church practices or events in the believer's life and they were yes-no type questions. This research assessed whether they were predictive of higher spiritual maturity. There was no proposal for the new questions to be used as a new scale for repeated use. Rather, this study was only checking for a predictive relationship with the known valid and reliable TDA scales.

The data set subjected to statistical analysis consisted of one thousand completed surveys. Those surveys included the additional questions compiled by the Expert Panel in addition to the questions on the TDA. The independent variables were the many different criteria listed in the additional survey questions. The dependent

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

variables were the two response variables of whether the respondent responded to an altar call and the score on the TDA. Since the dependent variable of altar call had only two possible responses, it was binary in nature. The other dependent variable, comprised of the TDA score, was continuous in nature as there were many different possible outcomes. For each of the dependent variables, descriptive analysis was the first approach taken to analyze the data. The next step in analysis was to subject the data to several different regression analyses in an effort to reveal any relevant relationships among the variables.

If there was a relationship, then multiple regression tests were run. This placed other criteria with a known predictive relationship in with the new items. For example, how long someone has been a believer is generally predictive of higher spiritual maturity. These known factors were not exhaustive in coupling the new questions with known predictive factors. Multiple regression enabled the determination of whether the new questions added to the predictive value or whether their presence was just spurious.

The utilization of crosstab analysis revealed the frequency distributions of variables. In addition, Chi Square tests evaluated the association between row and column variables in a two-way table. The null hypothesis in this study was that there was no relationship between the variables. The alternative hypothesis was that there was an association between the variables, however, the type of association was not assumed. The cutoff level of significance was 0.05. Therefore, any significance of 0.05 or lower was assumed to be significant evidence to deny the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis finding an association between the variables. In this way, crosstabs along with Chi Square tests were used to evaluate the relationship between each independent variable to the dependent variable. Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyses were performed on each independent variable with the dependent variable of altar call response to detect any relevant relationship significance by comparing the difference in group means.

A LifeWay statistician was retained to run the statistical tests and SAS

software was used throughout the analyses as the statistical tool. The goal was to identify relationships with the TDA scales that were valid and reliable. The overarching question was, “Is it predictive?” This research only sought relationships if it mattered in a statistically significant and predictive manner, either positively or negatively or not at all.

Population

The population surveyed was adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant and who trust in Jesus Christ as savior as their means of eternal life.

Sample and Delimitations

Once approval from the requisite committees was received, LifeWay Research drew the sample from a large national panel used only for research purposes. This panel has 6.5 million members and demographic information on members was available. Pre-selection criteria was used to increase external validity and to ensure bucket size was sufficient for characteristics such as denominational affiliation.

A national survey panel maintains a pool of pre-qualified survey respondents. Respondents are continually verified through a strict data integrity process including, but not limited to, digital fingerprinting, timestamps, real-time dynamic profiling, and software to identify “straight liners,” inattention, and fraud. Respondents want to give their opinion and are rewarded and motivated with incentives.¹⁶

Demographics were balanced to reflect known population sizes of Protestants in America based on age group, gender, census region of the country, income, and denomination. The number of completed surveys was one thousand to reach the goals of data collection required for this research study.

¹⁶Taken from the Research Now website, accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.researchnow.com>.

Limitations of Generalization

In order to discover a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between Christian formation experiences and spiritual maturity, the survey sample was delimited to adults eighteen years of age and older. This population is expected to be able to draw on years of life experience and to be able to recall pre-conversion incidents, events, and experiences that significantly impacted their faith decision(s). It is also expected they will be able to describe their approach to and participation in the spiritual disciplines associated with spiritual maturation.

The sample was further delimited to those members of a large national panel who are self-identified as Christians and who make themselves available for research purposes. These members are presumed to be interested in making their experiences and beliefs known in a reliable and structured environment that will accurately reflect their faith. Furthermore these individuals are presumed to be more interested in taking the time to recall their pre-Christian experiences in detail due to their participation in the national panel.

The sample was also delimited to ensure a broad range of denominations were represented in the sample and it was presumed many of the respondents—though perhaps self-identifying as evangelicals—did not meet the criteria to qualify as an evangelical as defined by The Barna Group. The purpose of this delimitation was to bring greater understanding to the pre-conversion experiences and the actual specifics of decision events in both groups of people—those that have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and those who have merely had a spiritual experience of some kind and as a result are affiliated with a faith community.

The sample was also be delimited via demographic pre-selecting to ensure a more homogeneous sample. In other words, effort was made to screen the sample to reflect known population sizes of Protestants in the United States based on age group, gender, census region of the country, income, and denomination.

By nature of the research methodology, the survey sample was delimited to those respondents who were computer literate and had the requisite skills and educational level to take the on-line survey in a reasonably efficient manner.

Research Instrumentation

The intent of the research was to determine whether the presence or absence of an altar call experience in the Christian formation of adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant had any predictive value in relation to spiritual maturity. The TDA utilized by LifeWay Research was the foundation for the instrument used in this study. The TDA consists of questions related to scales used in the measurement of spiritual maturity that have been refined and subjected to repeated sampling and statistical analyses for more than twenty years.

Additional questions related to pre-conversion and post-conversion experiences including, but not limited to, altar calls were composed and inserted into the TDA.¹⁷ An Expert Panel was selected to assist with the construction of the new questions and to insure internal and external validity.¹⁸ Correspondence, as needed, was undertaken with the Expert Panel until the new questions were completed.¹⁹ The results of the work of the Expert Panel were combined²⁰ so the new survey questions²¹ could be determined and then properly inserted into the TDA.

Ethics Committee Process

The final instrument was approved by the Dissertation Committee and the

¹⁷See Appendix 1 for a copy of the preliminary additional questions.

¹⁸See Appendix 2 for a description of the Expert Panel.

¹⁹See Appendix 3 for a copy of the instructions to the Expert Panel members.

²⁰See Appendix 4 for a copy of the results of the Expert Panel work.

²¹See Appendix 5 for a copy of the final new survey questions.

Research Ethics Committee before it was used in data collection. The validity and reliability of the instrument was established for the purpose of seeking approval.

Research Procedures

The actual procedures and gathering of data in this research study are straightforward. Following months of communication an agreement was entered into between the researcher and LifeWay Research.²² Once the instrument had been completed and approved by the requisite committees, LifeWay Research accessed randomized national survey panel members under an agreement with the national panel for the purpose of collecting completed surveys. Specific instructions were given to the participants.²³ Estimated time for completion of the survey was twenty minutes. Prior to delivery of the survey to the respondents, the sample was pre-screened to balance the demographics as described above.

An initial goal of 500 surveys was collected with real-time assessment of whether a statistically significant number of surveys had been received to achieve the goal of the study. It became apparent additional data was required to achieve a sufficient number of positive altar call respondents who had not been raised in a church environment and the the data collection was extended until the requisite number of one thousand completed surveys had been received by LifeWay Research. At that time data collection ceased and statistical analyses commenced as described previously.

²²See Appendix 6 for a copy of the LifeWay Research Agreement.

²³See Appendix 7 for a copy of the instructions to the research participants.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to assess the relationship, if any, between the presence or absence of altar call experiences in the lives of Christians and spiritual maturity. The design of this study was quantitative with the utilization of a survey instrument administered via the internet to a national survey panel under the supervision of LifeWay Research. This chapter presents an analysis of the findings of the research study. The compilation of the data is presented in addition to an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design.

Compilation Method Analysis and Protocol

Initially the absence of an empirical study on the efficacy of altar calls from a review of the literature was confirmed. Consideration was given to the use of a questionnaire on the research topic to be administered to SBC churches of 500 or more members for a target data collection of 400 or more completed surveys from a minimum of three churches. The researcher was discouraged in this approach by faculty advisors due to a historically low rate of involvement and return in prior similar research efforts on other topics. Furthermore, the method of collection via Survey Monkey or a similar web-based application placed unreasonable limits on data collection in terms of time, logistics, and data control. The goal of the research was to obtain a result that would add to the discussion on the question of the efficacy of altar calls in a capacity that has weight rather than add to a collection of statistically invalid and unreliable studies.

The BGEA was later approached in the hope they might be interested in working on the research topic. The request for such a working relationship was understandably and courteously declined due to the official position of the BGEA that

they “do not participate in research studies.”¹

Scott McConnell at LifeWay Research was contacted by email on August 23, 2012, to determine whether LifeWay Research had any capacity to assist in this research endeavor. That discussion resulted in a proposal from LifeWay Research on September 7, 2012. In the months that followed, emails, telephone conferences, and a face-to-face meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, further clarified the goals and approach of the research study. The accepted proposal was executed on October 17, 2013, and it is the basis for the research approach being presented in this dissertation.

The instrument consisted of a merging of the TDA and additional questions developed with the assistance and at the direction of the Expert Panel. The members of that panel were approved by the dissertation supervisor.

Once the instrument was ready and the dissertation committee and the research ethics committee approved its use, a randomized sample from a national survey panel was selected and approached for the collection of data. The sample was pre-screened on the basis of demographic information to reflect known population sizes of Protestants in America based on age group, gender, census region of the country, income, and denomination. The entire sample consisted of adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant and who trust Jesus Christ as savior as their means of eternal life. Real-time monitoring was employed regarding data collection to ensure an actionable and statistically significant number of completed surveys were collected. It should be noted LifeWay added an open-ended question related to the altar call response experience (see Question 13a in Appendix 5), a question regarding a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (see Question 22), and a “don’t know” option for that question as well as the “born again” question (see Question 21).

When data collection was completed, a LifeWay Research statistician

¹BGEA statistician, telephone conference with author, July 20, 2012.

performed regression analysis computations to determine if any of the variables raised in the new questions had a predictive relationship regarding any of the spiritual maturity scales of the TDA. Based on the outcomes of those analyses, additional testing was completed to further explore the predictive value of the data.

Demographic and Sample Data

In this section the age of the respondents is explained with respect to the actual characteristics of the sample as derived from the survey results.

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age: Basic Statistical Measures			
Location		Variability	
Mean	47.10900	Std Deviation	15.50928
Median	46.50000	Variance	240.53766
Mode	43.00000	Range	71.00000
		Interquartile Range	26.00000

Table 2. Age distribution

Age: Spread	
Quantile	Estimate
100% Max	89.0
99%	79.0
95%	72.0
90%	67.0
75% Q3	60.0
50% Median	46.5
25% Q1	34.0
10%	26.0
5%	23.0
1%	19.0
0% Min	18.0

The average or mean age was 47.1 years old. The oldest occurring age was 89 while the youngest was 18. The middle occurring or median age was 46.5 years old which was very close to the average. This indicates a normal distribution for the sample. Normally distributed data behave well in most statistical models.

Findings and Displays by Research Question

The research questions for this research study assessed the predictive relationship, if any, between the independent variables of the added questions and the dependent variables of the altar call response and the TDA scores indicative of spiritual maturity. This section includes an objective description and analysis of data with appropriate tables to organize the data clearly and logically by research question (RQ).

Research Question 1

RQ 1 asked, “What are the descriptive characteristics of individuals who responded to an altar call versus those who did not?” In this section the demographic and other descriptive results of the survey are presented with tables describing the outcomes related to the independent variables of the additional questions and the dependent variable of altar call response. A discussion of the results is provided for each table.

Table 3. Education by altar call response

Education	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency			
Percent			
1. Less than high school	9 0.90	7 0.70	16 1.60
2. High school	102 10.20	66 6.60	168 16.80
3. Some college	168 16.80	137 13.70	305 30.50
4. College degree	173 17.30	166 16.60	339 33.90
5. Graduate degree	81 8.10	91 9.10	172 17.20
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

Table 3 indicates most of the respondents, almost 82 percent, have at least some college and that in all categories except the graduate degree, a greater number of respondents did respond to an altar call. The high school group showed the largest difference with 61 percent “Yes” and 39 percent “No.” With regard to the totals, the dependent variable of altar call response is fairly evenly spread between both options. The respondents represent a wide range of denominations and it is noteworthy that at the average age of 47.1 years old, a majority of the 1,000 respondents—533—did respond to an altar call.

Table 4. Education—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	4	7.5178	0.1109
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	4	7.5485	0.1096
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	7.0474	0.0079
Phi Coefficient		0.0867	
Contingency Coefficient		0.0864	
Cramer's V		0.0867	

The probability value for the Chi Square test is 0.1109, which is greater than the threshold of 0.05 established earlier regarding significance. The Chi Square test therefore reveals no significant relationship exists between education levels and altar call options at this point in the statistical analyses.

Table 5 indicates there are more respondents in the age group 40-49 than in any other category. The age groups from 30 to 69 all have noticeably higher percentages of “yes” responses whereas the age groups on each end—18 to 29 and 70+—have a slightly greater percentage of “no” responses. In addition, the largest difference within an age group was found in the 50-59 age group where 111 of the 187 in that category or greater than 59 percent have responded to an altar call.

Table 5. Age with regard to altar call response

Age	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency			
Percent			
18 - 29	84	92	176
	8.40	9.20	17.60
30 - 39	80	74	154
	8.00	7.40	15.40
40 - 49	127	104	231
	12.70	10.40	23.10
50 - 59	111	76	187
	11.10	7.60	18.70
60 - 69	96	83	179
	9.60	8.30	17.90
70+	35	38	73
	3.50	3.80	7.30
Total	533	467	1000
	53.30	46.70	100.00

Table 6. Age—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	5	6.1766	0.2894
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	5	6.1901	0.2882
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	0.9533	0.3289
Phi Coefficient		0.0786	
Contingency Coefficient		0.0783	
Cramer's V		0.0786	

The Chi Square test from table 6 has a probability of 0.2894, greater than the cut off alpha level of 0.05. Therefore age—at least in the categories presented in table 6—did not show a significant relationship to the dependent variable of altar call response. Nevertheless, the disparity between the 50 to 59 group and the other age categories may reflect the diminishing prevalence of altar call usage in churches over the last few decades or an increase in the variety of methodologies utilized.

Table 7. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency			
Percent			
American Indian	10	12	22
	1.00	1.20	2.20
Asian	11	12	23
	1.10	1.20	2.30
African American	103	36	139
	10.30	3.60	13.90
Hispanic	17	9	26
	1.70	0.90	2.60
Caucasian	383	393	776
	38.30	39.30	77.60
Other	9	5	14
	0.90	0.50	1.40
Total	533	467	1000
	53.30	46.70	100.00

The majority of total respondents (77.6 percent) were Caucasian and for that group the percentage of “yes” and “no” responses were fairly equal with 49.3 percent responding they had an altar call experience. Most African American respondents (103 out of 139 or more than 73 percent) had responded to an altar call and as a group were easily the highest response percentage category.

Table 8. Ethnicity—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	5	32.0371	<.0001
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	5	33.3348	<.0001
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	9.9853	0.0016
Phi Coefficient		0.1790	
Contingency Coefficient		0.1762	
Cramer's V		0.1790	

The Chi Square probability of <.0001 indicates a relationship between ethnicity and altar call response, however, upon further examination, the variable of ethnicity did

not explain the variance in altar call responses because the R-Square value was 3 percent as noted next. The R-Square value is a model assessment tool that indicates the percentage of explainable variance within the dependent variable. The higher the R-Square value, the more variance is explained. An R-Square value of 80 percent or more is considered as a high mark for a model.

Table 9. Ethnicity—analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	5	7.9743805	1.5948761	6.58	<.0001
Error	994	240.9366195	0.2423910		
Corrected Total	999	248.9110000			

Table 10. Ethnicity—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Altar call mean
0.032037	33.56048	0.492332	1.467000

Table 11. Income

Income	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
Frequency Percent below \$30,000	141 14.10	126 12.60	267 26.70
30,000-\$49,999	128 12.80	115 11.50	243 24.30
\$50,000-\$74,999	100 10.00	94 9.40	194 19.40
\$75,000-\$99,999	73 7.30	57 5.70	130 13.00
over \$100,000	91 9.10	75 7.50	166 16.60
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

The greatest percentage (26.7 percent) of respondents came from the “below \$30,000” category. Each of the categories were very similar in terms of “yes” and “no” responses with an average of 53.8 percent and 46.2 percent.

Table 12. Income—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	4	0.8830	0.9270
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	4	0.8842	0.9268
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	0.3327	0.5641
Phi Coefficient		0.0297	
Contingency Coefficient		0.0297	
Cramer's V		0.0297	

The prior established testing alpha level was 0.05. Therefore, any probability value greater than the alpha level indicated the null hypothesis was not rejected finding no association between the variables exists. The Chi Square statistic, 0.8830 was very low with a high probability value of 0.9270 indicating no relationship between current income level and altar call response is found as of this point in the statistical analyses.

Table 13. Region of the country

Region	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
Midwest	110 11.01	149 14.91	259 25.93
Northeast	71 7.11	76 7.61	147 14.71
South	258 25.83	161 16.12	419 41.94
West	93 9.31	81 8.11	174 17.42
Total	532 53.25	467 46.75	999 100.00

Table 13 shows most respondents (41.94 percent) live in the South and that this category had the highest percentage (258 of 419 or 61.57 percent) of “yes” responses regarding an altar call experience. Surprisingly in this sample the Midwest had the highest “no” percentage of 57.5 percent with the Northeast second at 51.7 percent.

Table 14. Region—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	3	25.2036	<.0001
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	3	25.3220	<.0001
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	14.4915	0.0001
Phi Coefficient		0.1588	
Contingency Coefficient		0.1569	
Cramer's V		0.1588	

The Chi Square value was high with a corresponding probability value below 0.05. Therefore this indicated there was significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis in favor of a relationship among the variables. On closer examination, the F value was high therein driving a low probability value which may indicate significance. However, very little of the variance within the dependent variable of altar call was explained by the independent variable of region as demonstrated in the next tables.

Table 15. Region—analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	3	6.2742148	2.0914049	8.58	<.0001
Error	995	242.4184779	0.2436367		
Corrected Total	998	248.6926927			

Table 16. Region—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Altarcall mean
0.025229	33.63588	0.493596	1.467467

Table 17. Type of church as a youth

Youth church	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
1. Adventist	2 0.20	1 0.10	3 0.30
2. AME	3 0.30	3 0.30	6 0.60
3. Baptist	215 21.50	116 11.60	331 33.10
4. Catholic	40 4.00	34 3.40	74 7.40
5. Church of Christ	12 1.20	16 1.60	28 2.80
6. Church of God	14 1.40	6 0.60	20 2.00
7. Episcopal	6 0.60	11 1.10	17 1.70
8. Lutheran	27 2.70	88 8.80	115 11.50
9. Methodist	45 4.50	58 5.80	103 10.30
10. Nazarene	8 0.80	0 0.00	8 0.80
11. Presbyterian	16 1.60	34 3.40	50 5.00
12. Pentecostal	36 3.60	8 0.80	44 4.40
13. Wesleyan	5 0.50	0 0.00	5 0.50
14. Non-denominational	33 3.30	35 3.50	68 6.80
15. Other	45 4.50	33 3.30	78 7.80
16. Not applicable – no church	26 2.60	24 2.40	50 5.00
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

Table 17 indicates Baptists by far had the highest percentage of respondents in the sample in addition to having a high percentage of “yes” responses (215 out of 331 or almost 65 percent) related to an altar call experience. The highest percentage of “yes”

responses was the Pentecostal category with (36 out of 44) almost 82 percent. Those who grew up without going to church as a youth were about evenly split between “yes” and “no” responses and as a category they accounted for only 5 percent of respondents. Catholics as a current religious preference were delimited from the study, however, of those that were raised Catholic and met the screener criteria for trusting Christ as savior, 54 percent had responded to an altar call.

Table 18. Youth church—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	15	105.0542	<.0001
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	15	113.5290	<.0001
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	22.3013	<.0001
Phi Coefficient		0.3241	
Contingency Coefficient		0.3083	
Cramer's V		0.3241	

Table 18 indicates a low probability and therefore the presence of significance regarding a relationship between the variables, however, further analysis, as shown next, indicates there was no relationship between the dependent variable of altar call response and the independent variable of the type of church the respondent attended as a youth.

Table 19. Youth Church—analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	15	26.1491415	1.7432761	7.70	<.0001
Error	984	222.7618585	0.2263840		
Corrected Total	999	248.9110000			

Table 20. Youth church—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Altar call mean
0.105054	32.43342	0.475798	1.467000

Table 21. Self-described as born again?

Born again Frequency Percent	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
1. yes	450 45.00	218 21.80	668 66.80
2. no	52 5.20	189 18.90	241 24.10
3. don't know	31 3.10	60 6.00	91 9.10
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

Table 21 indicates over 66 percent of the respondents described themselves as born again Christians. Only 9 percent did not know. The question was a simple “yes” or “no” or “don’t know” and read as follows: “Would you describe yourself as a born-again Christian?” All respondents passed the screener questions to establish they were trusting only in Christ for salvation, however the vast majority (75 percent or $189 + 60 = 249$ out of $241 + 91 = 332$) who answered “no” or “don’t know” to this question had no altar call experience.

Table 22. Born again?—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	2	164.0549	<.0001
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	2	170.0586	<.0001
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	117.0226	<.0001
Phi Coefficient		0.4050	
Contingency Coefficient		0.3754	
Cramer's V		0.4050	

The Chi square probability is low therefore indicating significance and thus a relationship between the variables. Further statistical analysis follows next.

Table 23. Born again?—analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	2	40.8350691	20.4175346	97.83	<.0001
Error	997	208.0759309	0.2087020		
Corrected Total	999	248.9110000			

Table 24. Born again?—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	Altar call mean
0.164055	31.14105	0.456839	1.467000

The F value and the corresponding probability value indicate the means are significantly different. The R-Square value, although not good enough to fully explain all variance within table 21, is higher at 16.41 percent. In other words, there was at least some relationship between those who described themselves as born again and those who have had an altar call experience.

Table 25. Personal relationship?

Relationship Frequency Percent	Altar call		
	Yes	No	Total
1. yes	500 50.00	398 39.80	898 89.80
2. no	12 1.20	25 2.50	37 3.70
3. don't know	21 2.10	44 4.40	65 6.50
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

Table 25 indicates a large majority (93.8 percent) of those that responded to an altar call answered in the affirmative that they had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Those that had not responded to an altar call were twice as likely to answer this question as “no” or “don’t know” versus those who had responded to an altar call. Subsequent analysis revealed only a slight percentage of the variance within the binary dependent variable of Altar Call was explained by the independent variable presented by this question.

Table 26. Gender

Gender	Altar call response		
	yes	no	Total
1. male	231 45.00	219 21.90	450 45.00
2. female	302 30.20	248 24.80	550 55.00
Total	533 53.30	467 46.70	1000 100.00

Table 26 indicates a relatively even distribution of males and females with a slightly higher percentage of women who had an altar call experience at roughly 55 percent, versus males at 51.3 percent.

Table 27. Gender—question of significant relationship

Statistic	DF	Value	Probability
Chi-Square	1	1.2714	0.2595
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	1	1.2712	0.2595
Continuity Adj. Chi-Square	1	1.1318	0.2874
Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square	1	1.2701	0.2598
Phi Coefficient		0.0357	
Contingency Coefficient		0.0356	
Cramer's V		0.0357	

The Chi Square test and corresponding probability value indicate the null hypothesis was not rejected. In other words, there was no statistical support to say there was a relationship between the independent variable of gender and the dependent variable of an altar call response.

Question 10 in the additional questions compiled by the Expert Panel read as follows: “Please check any of the following significant life situations or change events that occurred in the 6 months prior to your conversion.” Following this question were twenty-four possible answers. Only those life situations or change events that were deemed to be significant by the respondents are displayed next, for a total of five (5) situations or events. A “1” indicates the life situation or change event was marked.

Table 28. Adult invested in my life

Adult Invested	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
0	429 43.91	402 41.15	831 85.06
1	89 9.11	57 5.83	146 14.94
Total	518 53.02	459 46.98	977 100.00

Only 15 percent of respondents noted the significance of an adult investing in their life in the six months prior to conversion and 61 percent of that group also responded to an altar call.

Table 29. Change of residence

Residence change Frequency Percent	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
0	484 49.54	442 45.24	926 94.78
1	34 3.48	17 1.74	51 5.22
Total	518 53.02	459 46.98	977 100.00

Only 5 percent of respondents noted they had moved in the six months prior to conversion and 67 percent of that group responded to an altar call.

Table 30. Personal illness or injury

Illness or injury Frequency Percent	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
0	494 50.56	451 46.16	945 96.72
1	24 2.46	8 0.82	32 3.28
Total	518 53.02	459 46.98	977 100.00

Of those that experienced personal illness or injury in the six months prior to conversion, 75 percent had responded to an altar call.

Table 31. Retreat or mission trip

Retreat/Mission trip Frequency Percent	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
0	481 49.23	440 45.04	921 94.27
1	37 3.79	19 1.94	56 5.73
Total	518 53.02	459 46.98	977 100.00

Only about 6 percent of respondents noted the significance of a retreat or mission trip in the six months prior to conversion and 66 percent of that group responded to an altar call.

Table 32. None of the above

None of the above Frequency Percent	Altar call response		
	Yes	No	Total
0	309 31.63	221 22.62	530 54.25
1	209 21.39	238 24.36	447 45.75
Total	518 53.02	459 46.98	977 100.00

The result of these most frequent responses by participants indicates there was a possibility—though not a direct relationship—that significant life situations or change events occurring in the six months prior to conversion may have the effect of moving an unbeliever to the place of being more open to the gospel. Each of the above variables—with the exception of “none of the above”—involves marked interpersonal relating accompanied by a degree of stress which under the power and work of the Spirit can make the person open to the gospel.

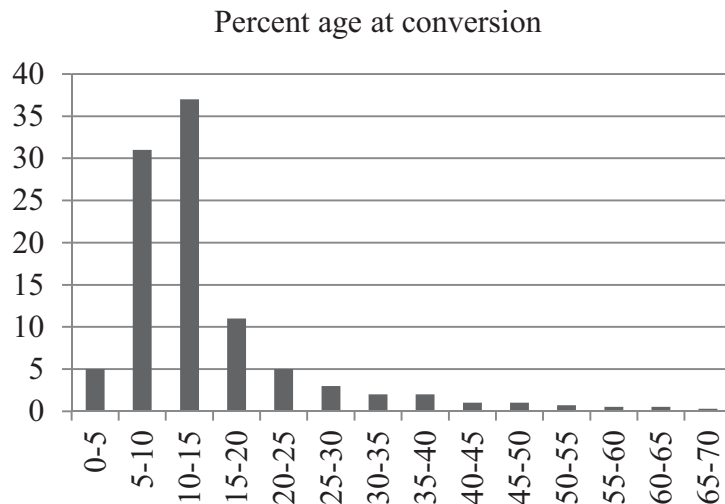


Figure 1. Age at conversion

The reported age of conversion of respondents between 5 and 15 years old accounted for 68 percent of all respondents. An additional 11 percent were converted between the ages of 15 and 20 years old. After 20 years old there is a steady decline in age of conversion from about 5 percent to 0.03 percent. There was no significant relationship between the age of conversion and the dependent variable of altar call response. The outcomes for this sample do, however, support the substantial literature and common understanding that ministry to children is extremely important. During those formative years, many are open to the gospel and will make decisions for Christ that will initiate their walk with the Lord toward spiritual maturity for the remainder of their lives.

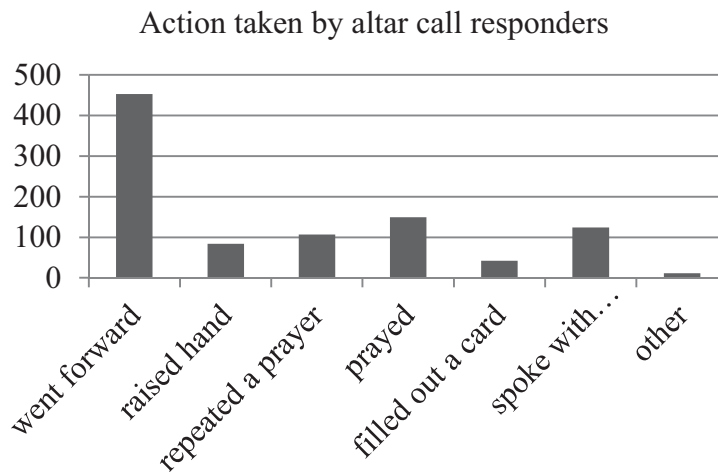


Figure 2. Action taken by altar call respondent

Question 14 in the survey was directed only to those who indicated they had responded to an altar call. The respondents were asked to mark all actions taken by them at the time of their altar call response. The total number of responses therefore is greater than the 533 that responded “yes” to the altar call question. The majority of those who responded to an altar call did go forward. Only 124 of that group indicated they spoke with someone one-on-one.

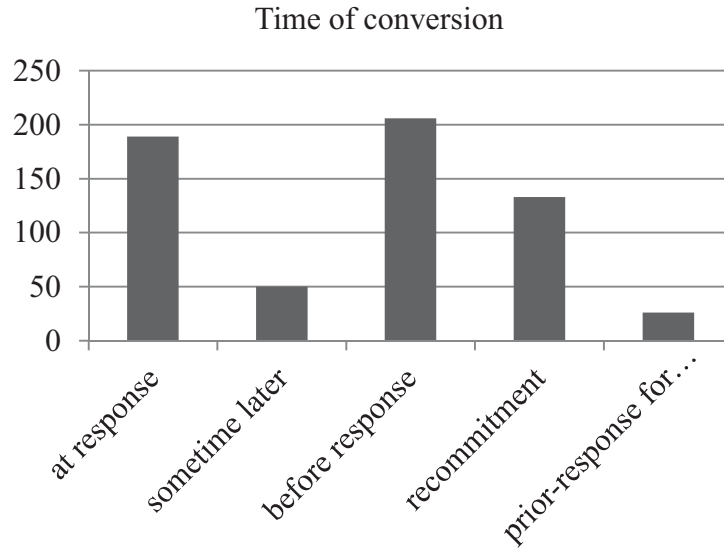


Figure 3. Time of conversion

Question 15 in the survey also was directed only to those who responded to an altar call. This question attempted to determine the timing of the respondent's conversion. Since some of the respondents had responded to more than one altar call, the total number of responses to this question is greater than the 533 who answered "yes" to the altar call question. Most understood their conversion to have occurred before the response or at the time of the response. The next largest category were those who responded to recommit their life to the Lord.

Table 33. Variable interplay

Pearson Correlation Coefficients, N = 1000 Prob > r under H0: Rho=0									
	gender	age	education	ethnicity	income	Youth church	Born again	Relationship	Altar call
gender	1.00000 0.1029	-0.05160 0.1029	-0.08663 0.0061	0.00380 0.9043	-0.18415 <.0001	-0.04051 0.2005	-0.01124 0.7226	-0.03817 0.2279	-0.03566 0.2600
age	-0.05160 0.1029	1.00000	-0.06151 0.0518	-0.03949 0.2121	0.08314 0.0085	-0.03330 0.2928	-0.03203 0.3116	-0.05387 0.0886	-0.02352 0.4575
education	-0.08663 0.0061	-0.06151 0.0518	1.00000	0.00798 0.8010	0.29152 <.0001	0.04379 0.1665	0.05399 0.0879	-0.04884 0.1227	0.08399 0.0079
ethnicity	0.00380 0.9043	-0.03949 0.2121	0.00798 0.8010	1.00000	0.07889 0.0126	0.10322 0.0011	0.03461 0.2742	-0.01844 0.5602	0.09998 0.0015
income	-0.18415 <.0001	0.08314 0.0085	0.29152 <.0001	0.07889 0.0126	1.00000	0.02648 0.4030	0.03704 0.2419	-0.02232 0.4809	-0.01825 0.5643
Youth church	-0.04051 0.2005	-0.03330 0.2928	0.04379 0.1665	0.10322 0.0011	0.02648 0.4030	1.00000	0.03698 0.2427	0.05908 0.0618	0.07216 0.0225
Born again	-0.01124 0.7226	-0.03203 0.3116	0.05399 0.0879	0.03461 0.2742	0.03704 0.2419	0.03698 0.2427	1.00000	0.32296 <.0001	0.34226 <.0001
relationship	-0.03817 0.2279	-0.05387 0.0886	-0.04884 0.1227	-0.01844 0.5602	-0.02232 0.4809	0.05908 0.0618	0.32296 <.0001	1.00000	0.13527 <.0001
Altar call	-0.03566 0.2600	-0.02352 0.4575	0.08399 0.0079	0.09998 0.0015	-0.01825 0.5643	0.07216 0.0225	0.34226 <.0001	0.13527 <.0001	1.00000

Up to this point, all analysis was univariate, meaning that only a single variable was examined. A higher order, more rigorous statistical test assesses variable interplay known as multivariate analysis. All variables above are included in the multivariate analysis regardless of the Chi Square test for relationship significance. Independent variables were eliminated or added back into the model based on the Stepwise Selection Method. This statistical approach is the most rigorous and ensures only those variables having relationships remain in the model. This method tests for significance and the variables were considered significant at a probability value of 0.05 or less. These numbers measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two variables. The correlation coefficient can range from -1 to +1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation, +1 indicating a perfect positive correlation, and 0.70 or more indicating highly

correlated variables. A variable correlated with itself will always have a correlation coefficient of 1. The variables most likely to be correlated do show some likelihood but not enough to single out. This refers to the possible relationship between education and income (0.29) and the possible relationship between being self-described as a born again Christian and claiming to have a personal relationship with Christ (0.32).

Further analysis in tables 34 and 35 indicate being self-described as born again, ethnicity, education, and income show a significant influence to having responded to an altar call. In other words, if one of the respondents in this research sample was Caucasian or African American, makes at least \$75,000 per year, has at least some college and describes himself/herself as born again, it is more likely than not that he/she responded in some way to an evangelistic invitation.

Table 34. Summary of stepwise selection

Step	Effect		DF	Number In	Score Chi-Square	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq
	Entered	Removed					
1	Born again		1	1	116.7592		<.0001
2	ethnicity		1	2	8.3704		0.0038
3	education		1	3	4.6663		0.0308
4	income		1	4	4.3648		0.0367

The Chi-Square test for this entire model of the above four variables resulted in a high value of 42.82 with a significant probability of <.0001 indicating a goodness-of-fit for the model. Therefore, with 95 percent confidence, for this sample, ethnic background, education, income level, and being self-described as born again are predictive of having had an altar call response experience. This model works 72 percent of the time to explain the variance in the dependent variable of altar call response. In other words, since the altar call response variable is a “yes” or “no” possibility, it is akin to the flip of a coin. This model, however, predicts correctly 72 percent of the time whether the response would be a “yes” or a “no.”

Table 35. Analysis of maximum likelihood estimates

Analysis of Maximum Likelihood Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	Wald Chi-Square	Pr > ChiSq
Intercept	1	3.1515	0.4423	50.7597	<.0001
income	1	0.1060	0.0508	4.3496	0.0370
ethnicity	1	-0.2182	0.0727	9.0117	0.0027
education	1	-0.1877	0.0704	7.1010	0.0077
Born again	1	-1.1784	0.1179	99.8692	<.0001

Question 17 in the survey questions compiled by the Expert Panel was limited to those respondents that did NOT have an altar call experience. This question gave respondents eight choices, as noted next, to describe what significant action was associated with their conversion.

Table 36. Actions related to conversion (NO altar call response)

Significant action	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
1. read a tract	3	0.65	3	0.65
2. led to Lord by pastor	34	7.31	37	7.96
3. led to Lord by a friend	24	5.16	61	13.12
4. led to Lord by family	75	16.13	136	29.25
5. no memory-young age	160	34.41	296	63.66
6. read Bible and prayed	23	4.95	319	68.60
7. no specific-over time	105	22.58	424	91.18
8. some other way	41	8.82	465	100.00
Frequency Missing = 535				

The highest percentage in this group (34 percent) were those respondents that could not remember because they had been a believer from a very young age. An additional 23 percent noted they recalled no specific action related to their conversion

because it happened over a period of time. A further 29 percent were led to the Lord by a pastor, family member, or friend. These groups account for 86 percent of the respondents in this sample who are believers but had not responded to an altar call.

Question 11 in the survey questions compiled by the Expert Panel asked all respondents, “How long was it after your conversion before you started to regularly attend church?” The choices for all respondents and the frequency of the responses are indicated in the next table.

Table 37. Time-conversion to regular church attendance

Time to regular attendance	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
1. regular attendance before conversion	722	72.20	722	72.20
2. 0-6 months	126	12.60	848	84.80
3. 6 months to 1 year	21	2.10	869	86.90
4. 1-5 years	20	2.00	889	88.90
5. 6-10 years	15	1.50	904	90.40
6. more than 10 years	22	2.20	926	92.60
7. have never regularly attended church	74	7.40	1000	100.00

Table 37 indicates that a clear majority of 72 percent of sample respondents regularly attended church before their conversion. An additional 13 percent began to regularly attend church within 6 months after their conversion and a further 8 percent took anywhere from 6 months to more than 10 years before they began to regularly attend church. It is interesting to note 7.4 percent answered they “have never regularly attended church.”

Question 20 in the survey questions compiled by the Expert Panel asked all respondents, “What factor/experience/thing most influenced your conversion?” Respondents were given a list of fourteen things to pick only one from. The results of the survey are indicated in the next table.

Table 38. Factor most influencing conversion

Factors	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
1. Christian radio	10	1.00	10	1.00
2. Christian TV	7	0.70	17	1.70
3. reading the Bible	62	6.20	79	7.90
4. Christian literature	18	1.80	97	9.70
5. talking to God, hearing from God	93	9.30	190	19.00
6. a friend explaining the gospel to me	61	6.10	251	25.10
7. a family member explaining gospel	221	22.10	472	47.20
8. a pastor explaining the gospel to me	156	15.60	628	62.80
9. a life crisis or situation	57	5.70	685	68.50
10. a vision	4	0.40	689	68.90
11. sermons/preaching	200	20.00	889	88.90
12. a bargain with God	5	0.50	894	89.40
13. a dream	5	0.50	899	89.90
14. other	101	10.10	1000	100.00

The most frequent factors that influenced respondents toward conversion were a family member, pastor, or friend (44 percent combined total) explaining the gospel to them, listening to sermons or preaching (20 percent), and talking to God or hearing from God (9 percent).

Question 13b of those compiled by the Expert Panel asked those that had responded to a public evangelistic invitation to indicate in what setting they responded. The choices and the results are displayed next.

Table 39. Setting of response

Setting	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
1. church service	411	77.11	411	77.11
2. concert	5	0.94	416	78.05
3. children's ministry event	16	3.00	432	81.05
4. youth ministry event	57	10.69	489	91.74
5. public evangelistic crusade	24	4.50	513	96.25
6. other	20	3.75	533	100.00

Clearly the most common setting for a response to a public evangelistic invitation was in a church service (77 percent) as determined by the sample in this research. When combined with a youth ministry event, these groups account for 88 percent of respondents in this sample.

Question 16 of those compiled by the Expert Panel asked, "If your conversion occurred at some later time after your response to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation, how many years after your response to the altar call/public evangelistic invitation was your conversion?" The relevant choices and the results of that question are displayed next.

Table 40. Time between response and conversion

Time after response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
1. 0-1 year	29	53.70	29	53.70
2. 2-5 years	10	18.52	39	72.22
3. 6-10 years	9	16.67	48	88.89
4. 16-20 years	1	1.85	49	90.74
5. 21-25 years	2	3.70	51	94.44
6. 26-30 years	2	3.70	53	98.15
7. 41-50 years	1	1.85	54	100.00

Among respondents whose conversion occurred after their response (54 out of 533) to an altar call, 54 percent indicated their conversion was a year or less after their altar call response. However, 19 respondents did not convert until two (2) to ten (10) years later after their response to an altar call.

Research Question 2

RQ 2 read as follows: “To what degree are selected Christian formation experience variables predictive of spiritual maturity?” This question was approached first with a summary of the TDA scores and the statistical analysis related to the outcomes. A score of 100 is the maximum possible that respondents could have achieved on the TDA score.

Table 41. Dependent variable TDA score characteristics

Moments			
N	977	Sum Weights	977
Mean	75.419652	Sum Observations	73685
Std Deviation	11.3298144	Variance	128.364695
Skewness	-0.0455739	Kurtosis	-0.7495511
Uncorrected SS	5682581	Corrected SS	125283.943
Coeff Variation	15.0223637	Std Error Mean	0.36247288

Very little skewness with a standard error mean of 0.362 and a mean of 75.41 indicates a normal shape to the data collected from respondents on the TDA as a measure of spiritual maturity.

Table 42. TDA mean and median

Basic Statistical Measures			
Location		Variability	
Mean	75.41965	Std Deviation	11.32981
Median	75.00000	Variance	128.36470
Mode	74.00000	Range	57.00000
		Interquartile Range	17.00000

The mean and median for the TDA outcomes were very close also indicating a normal shape to the data.

The next series of tables examines the relationship between demographic data and the TDA scores with regard to the level of spiritual maturity of the respondents.

Table 43. ANOVA analysis for gender versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	1	603.0237	603.0237	4.71	0.0302
Error	975	124766.6951	127.9658		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

This statistic shows a link between the gender of the respondent and their spiritual maturity, however, on further analysis, as shown in table 44 the R-Square value was only 0.48 percent (80 percent or better is considered strong) indicating gender was certainly not the top influencer.

Table 44. Gender/TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.004810	14.99978	11.31220	75.41579

Table 45. ANOVA analysis for age versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	1	1646.5930	1646.5930	12.98	0.0003
Error	975	123723.1259	126.8955		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 46. Age/TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.013134	14.93691	11.26479	75.41579

Table 45 shows a significant probability value for age influencing the TDA score, however, the R-Square value in Table 46 suggests that age *alone* does not fully explain the change or variations in the TDA scores.

Table 47. ANOVA analysis for education versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	4	187.0634	46.7659	0.36	0.8350
Error	972	125182.6554	128.7887		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 47 shows a probability value above the alpha value of 0.05 and therefore indicates education did not influence spiritual maturity.

Table 48. ANOVA analysis for ethnicity versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	5	1624.7924	324.9585	2.55	0.0265
Error	971	123744.9265	127.4407		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 48 indicates ethnicity was a significant influencer for spiritual maturity, however, the low R-Square value in table 49 indicated the ethnicity variable *alone* does not fully explain the differences in spiritual maturity.

Table 49. Ethnicity / TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.012960	14.96897	11.28896	75.41579

Table 50. ANOVA analysis for income versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	4	1260.6228	315.1557	2.47	0.0433
Error	972	124109.0960	127.6843		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 51. Income / TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.010055	14.98326	11.29975	75.41579

Table 50 shows a high probability value for income, indicating income affects spiritual maturity, however, the R-Square value in table 51 indicates the income variable *alone* does not fully explain the differences in spiritual maturity.

Table 52. ANOVA analysis for region versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	3	801.6691	267.2230	2.09	0.1001
Error	972	124365.9599	127.9485		
Corrected Total	975	125167.6290			

According to the probability value of 0.1001 being greater than the alpha value of 0.05 the conclusion was that region does not influence spiritual maturity TDA scores.

Table 53. ANOVA analysis for youth church versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	15	4765.3046	317.6870	2.53	0.0011
Error	961	120604.4142	125.4989		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 54. R-Square value for youth church

R-Square	CoeffVar	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.038010	14.85449	11.20263	75.41579

The probability value indicated significance to the extent that the type of church attended from youth did influence spiritual maturity as measured by the TDA scales, however, the impact was low at 3.8 percent.

Table 55. ANOVA analysis for born again versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	2	23767.6009	11883.8004	113.92	<.0001
Error	974	101602.1180	104.3143		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 55 shows the probability value was less than the cutoff value of 0.05 indicating whether someone was a self-described born again Christian affects spiritual maturity.

Further analysis demonstrated in table 56 shows almost 19% of the differences in TDA scores can be attributed to whether someone described themselves as born again under this research study.

Table 56. Born again / TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.189580	13.54284	10.21344	75.41579

Table 57. ANOVA analysis for personal relationship versus TDA score

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	2	19906.0571	9953.0285	91.92	<.0001
Error	974	105463.6618	108.2789		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 58. Personal relationship/TDA score—R-Square value

R-Square	Coeff Var	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.158779	13.79779	10.40572	75.41579

Tables 57 and 58 indicate that having a personal relationship with Christ was significantly related to a TDA spiritual maturity score. In fact, almost 16 percent of the variation in score can be attributed to whether a respondent had a personal relationship with the Lord.

Table 59. Altar call action at conversion/TDA score

Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t
Intercept	1	76.162077	1.502451	50.69	<.0001
1. got up and went forward	1	1.030977	1.478347	0.70	0.4859
2. raised my hand in response	1	0.048095	1.369169	0.04	0.9720
3. repeated a prayer out loud	1	1.732470	1.287626	1.35	0.1791
4. prayed out loud or silently on my own	1	1.616952	1.087555	1.49	0.1377
5. filled out a card	1	1.561979	1.909907	0.82	0.4138
6. spoke with someone one-on-one	1	2.590672	1.217905	2.13	0.0339
7. other	1	6.427821	3.363439	1.91	0.0566

Table 59 indicates the only action at conversion that affected spiritual maturity was speaking with someone one-on-one. In other words, there is a 95 percent confidence that a response to an altar call where the respondent spoke with someone one-on-one does have some effect on the TDA score.

Table 60. Prior actions / TDA score

Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t
Intercept	1	74.898328	1.011467	74.05	<.0001
1. school change	1	-0.257666	1.645018	-0.16	0.8756
2. adult investing in my life	1	3.538609	1.175867	3.01	0.0027
3. marital status change	1	-1.469968	1.985549	-0.74	0.4593
4. financial problems	1	-2.413830	2.305704	-1.05	0.2954
5. child entering/leaving home	1	-1.653259	2.725820	-0.61	0.5443
6. residence change	1	-2.086474	1.747571	-1.19	0.2328
7. depression, anger	1	0.069135	1.715523	0.04	0.9679
8. loss of home	1	-2.602021	3.803938	-0.68	0.4941
9. new church or pastor	1	-1.730851	1.429829	-1.21	0.2264
10. education milestone	1	0.154348	2.022934	0.08	0.9392
11. a need to find purpose in life	1	2.291848	1.146220	2.00	0.0458
12. job status change	1	0.360461	2.693246	0.13	0.8936
13. verbal and/or physical abuse	1	-4.294164	2.062606	-2.08	0.0376
14. death of loved one	1	1.106227	1.623040	0.68	0.4957
15. emotional/physical affair	1	1.086146	2.738334	0.40	0.6917
16. illness or injury	1	2.404051	2.161139	1.11	0.2662
17. addiction to alcohol	1	6.331908	3.482601	1.82	0.0694
18. addiction to drugs	1	6.206805	4.415296	1.41	0.1601
19. addiction to pornography	1	0.140863	3.259782	0.04	0.9655
20. addiction to gambling	1	4.809734	6.797576	0.71	0.4794
21. arrest or jail time	1	-6.371268	5.058522	-1.26	0.2082
22. mission trip/retreat	1	0.546390	1.642903	0.33	0.7395
23. none of above	1	-0.653983	1.141888	-0.57	0.5670
24. other	1	2.953472	1.622551	1.82	0.0690

Table 60 indicates that of the 24 possible significant life situations or change events respondents could choose from related to the six months prior to conversion, only the presence of an adult that invested in them and feeling a strong need to find a purpose in life had an impact on spiritual maturity scores.

Table 61. Time of conversion and altar call response

Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t
Intercept	1	77.040317	1.570774	49.05	<.0001
1. at the time of the response	1	0.976728	1.624563	0.60	0.5480
2. at some later time	1	-1.608801	2.089812	-0.77	0.4418
3. before the altar call response	1	1.692941	1.524908	1.11	0.2674
4. recommitment	1	2.525195	1.461987	1.73	0.0847
5. prior but response for another reason	1	5.067299	2.268331	2.23	0.0259

In table 61 only with category 5 where the respondent noted their conversion had occurred previously and they responded to the altar call for a different reason, was there an indication of some effect on the TDA spiritual maturity score.

Table 62. ANOVA for most significant variables and TDA

Source	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Youth church	13	1788.076677	137.544360	2.05	0.0163
Born again	2	8685.654655	4342.827328	64.75	<.0001
Relationship with Christ	2	6934.993239	3467.496620	51.70	<.0001
Significant life or change event	7	3490.582073	498.654582	7.43	<.0001
Time began to attend	6	4895.756477	815.959413	12.17	<.0001
Youth church + born again	23	1164.673664	50.637985	0.75	0.7869
Youth church + relationship	18	867.407872	48.189326	0.72	0.7925
Youth ch +born ag +relation	9	0.000000	0.000000	0.00	1.0000

Table 62 indicates all of the single variables by themselves were significant for a positive impact on the TDA scores and that a self-description of being born again and having a personal relationship with Christ were the most indicative of a positive impact on the TDA score. The combinations of variables were not significant.

Table 63. Parameter estimates for influence on SCORE

Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t
Intercept	1	60.516672	3.049871	19.84	<.0001
Born again - yes	1	6.174708	1.404372	4.40	<.0001
Relationship - yes	1	5.118895	1.539095	3.33	0.0010
Time attend - regular	1	7.770919	1.416666	5.49	<.0001
Time attend – 0-6 months	1	6.124195	1.822083	3.36	0.0008

Table 63 indicates those variables predictive of spiritual maturity were self-identified as born again (add 6.17 points to TDA score), indicating a personal relationship with Christ (add 5.12 points), being in regular church attendance at the time of conversion (add 7.77 points), and starting to regularly attend church in zero to six months following conversion (add 6.12 points).

Research Question 3

RQ 3 asked, “To what degree is an altar call experience related to spiritual maturity?” As noted in the following tables, the presence of an altar call experience had, on average, a 10 percent positive influence on TDA scores but the dependent variable by itself is not predictive of spiritual maturity.

Table 64. ANOVA results for ALTAR CALL versus SCORE

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	1	12462.3848	12462.3848	107.62	<.0001
Error	975	112907.3340	115.8024		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 65. R-Square value ALTAR CALL and SCORE

R-Square	CoeffVar	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.099405	14.26910	10.76115	75.41579

In other words, in table 64 the F value is high with a correspondingly significant p-value (probability) and in table 65 the R-Square value is close to 10 percent.

Research Question 4

RQ 4 asked, “When considered together are pre-conversion experiences, post-conversion experiences, and altar call experiences predictive of spiritual maturity?” According to tables 66 through 69 the presence of an adult investing in the life of the respondent prior to conversion, a pre-conversion need to find a purpose in life, speaking with someone one-on-one at the time of an altar call response, being in regular church attendance prior to conversion, starting to regularly attend church within six (6) months following conversion, responding to an altar call at some point after conversion, and the type of church a respondent was involved in as a youth were all found to positively affect spiritual maturity.

Table 66. Experiences predictive of spiritual maturity

Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	DF	Estimate	Standard Error	t Value	Pr > t
Investment of an adult prior to conversion	1	3.538609	1.175867	3.01	0.0027
A felt need to find a purpose in life prior to conversion	1	2.291848	1.146220	2.00	0.0458
Speaking with someone one-on-one	1	2.590672	1.217905	2.13	0.0339
Time attend - regular	1	7.770919	1.416666	5.49	<.0001
Time attend – 0-6 months	1	6.124195	1.822083	3.36	0.0008
Alter call response after conversion	1	5.067299	2.268331	2.23	0.0259

Table 67. Church as a youth

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model	15	4765.3046	317.6870	2.53	0.0011
Error	961	120604.4142	125.4989		
Corrected Total	976	125369.7188			

Table 68. R-Square for church as a youth

R-Square	CoeffVar	Root MSE	SCORE Mean
0.038010	14.85449	11.20263	75.41579

Table 69. ANOVA for church as a youth

Source	DF	Anova SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Youth church	15	4765.304626	317.686975	2.53	0.0011

Evaluation of the Research Design

An overall evaluation of the research design indicates the study yielded some useful data and unique insights into many of the variables possibly affecting spiritual maturity in Christians.

Strengths of the Research Design

The strength of the research design was that a tightly controlled sample was accessed and the methodology of using a national panel allowed for a sample that more closely resembled American cultural demographics. In addition, the collection of data was timely via the internet and the data was collected in a format easily subjected to statistical analyses. Furthermore, a high degree of specificity was afforded in the questions of the Expert Panel and the screener questions in the survey auto-limited respondents to those who were trusting Jesus as savior.

The definition of an altar call or a public evangelistic invitation was broad enough to include virtually all methods utilized in past and present preaching and evangelistic ministries in order to capture all respondents that had any sort of responsive experience. Additionally, the research design was robust in that it approached the research problem in a two-pronged approach gathering data relating to public evangelistic invitation responses as well as regarding levels of spiritual maturity against reliable and valid scales.

The research design also allowed for the study of a very broad range of independent variables as they related to the dependent variables of an altar call response and a TDA score. Finally, the research design benefitted from the high level of expertise invested in running the statistical models against the data to ensure a high quality of outcomes. The cross tabulation and multivariate analyses provided a broad and thorough perspective on the sample and in essence mined all there was to be mined from this research effort.

Weaknesses of the Research Design

There were some general weaknesses in the research design. For example, Expert Panel question 11 did not prove particularly useful in that more than 72 percent regularly attended church before their conversion and an additional 12.6 percent were regularly attending within 0 to 6 months after conversion. Questions 10 and 20 offered perhaps too many choices or independent variables and therein may have confused or at least slowed down some of the respondents.

Additional cross tabulations might have been useful to determine relationships, if any, between the various scales of the TDA. The research design gathered a great deal of data indicating one-on-one mentoring or counseling is important, however, that data was not amenable to cross tabulation with the age at response, length of time to regular church attendance, or the amount of time between a response to an altar call and conversion. It can also be argued that the research design was too ambitious with a multitude of variables to the extent that this chapter struggled to maintain clarity and a logical flow with regard to the results.

Finally, the proposed search for a relationship between public evangelistic invitation responses and the level of spiritual maturity was likely too tenuous notwithstanding the statistical ability to parse the data into an answer.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research study offers empirically solid research that finds altar call responses are not predictive of spiritual maturity. The presence of an altar call response experience, however, does have a 9.9 percent influence on a TDA score but that variable alone does not fully explain the variance in the score. In other words, those that responded to an altar call tended to score about 10 percent better on the TDA versus those who had not responded to an altar call however, only an influence was established as compared to a predictive relationship. The additional conclusions that emerged as a result of the statistical analysis of the findings are presented in this chapter and followed by the research implications, application, limitations, and a discussion of the need for further research. This study was a serious effort to extend the discussion on the use of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. As such, there is a great deal in this research that supports the argument for using public evangelistic invitations.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative research was to examine the relationship between different Christian formation experiences and levels of spiritual maturity among adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant.

Research Questions

The following questions were answered by this research study:

1. What are the descriptive characteristics of individuals who responded to an altar call versus those who did not?
2. To what degree are selected Christian formation experience variables predictive of spiritual maturity?

3. To what degree is an altar call experience related to spiritual maturity?
4. When considered together, are pre-conversion experiences, post-conversion experiences, and altar call experiences predictive of spiritual maturity?

Research Conclusions

In addition to the finding noted regarding an altar call response influence on the TDA score, a number of unique findings and conclusions emerged from this study.

The average age of respondents was 47 years old with the youngest respondent being 18 years old and the oldest at 89 years old. Of the 1,000 completed surveys collected, 533 respondents reported having responded to a public evangelistic invitation versus the remaining 467 that had not had that experience. In other words, 53.3 percent of respondents in this research study had responded to some form of an altar call.

Of those that responded to an altar call, more than 79 percent had a college degree or at least some college versus the no-response group where respondents in the same categories totaled more than 84 percent. Respondents with a college degree were the largest group at 34 percent of the total sample. Those with an education level of less than high school or high school were a small portion of respondents at 1.6 percent and 16.8 percent respectively. Univariate regression analysis indicated there was no significant relationship between educational levels and altar call response or lack thereof.

The age group of 40 to 49 was most prevalent in terms of survey response frequency at 23.1 percent with all other age groups represented at 15 percent to 18 percent except for those 70 or older at 7.3 percent. Those respondents in the 50 to 59 age group had the highest rate of altar call experiences at 59 percent. Univariate regression analysis indicated the age of the respondent did not show a significant relationship to the dependent variable of an altar call response.

With regard to the age at conversion, 5 to 15 years old accounted for 68 percent of respondents and if that window is expanded to 5 to 20 years old, 79 percent converted to Christianity and faith in Jesus Christ as a child or as a young adult. This outcome clearly supports the 4 to 14 window referenced earlier and highlights the

continuing importance and need for ministry to children and young adults.

With regard to ethnicity, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, and other respondents were negligible at 1.4 percent to 2.6 percent. Caucasians were the largest survey response group at 77.6 percent, followed by African Americans at 13.9 percent. Caucasians were very close to being evenly split on the matter of an altar call response experience, however, African American respondents that had responded to an altar call heavily outweighed the no-response group by almost 3 to 1. Univariate regression analyses indicated no clear relationship between ethnicity and altar call response characteristics.

The greatest percentage of respondents came from the “below \$30,000” category at almost 27 percent. All income categories showed approximately the same split between “yes” and “no” responses to an altar call with an average of 53.8 percent “yes” versus 46.2 percent “no.” Again, there was no statistically significant relationship between income and altar call response experiences.

Respondents were split into regions of the country as Midwest, Northeast, South, and West. Most of the respondents lived in the South at almost 42 percent with a 61.57 percent “yes” altar call experience rate whereas the Midwest had the highest “no” response rate of 57.5 percent, followed by the Northeast at 51.7 percent. No definitive statistical significance was found between the independent variable of region and the dependent variable of altar call response.

Each respondent was asked to identify the church—if any—that they attended as a youth. Baptists were by far the highest percentage at 33 percent with the next closest being Lutheran at 11.5 percent. With regard to altar call response experiences, Baptists answered “yes” at about 65 percent with Pentecostals having the highest percentage at 82 percent. It is interesting to note those currently attending the Catholic Church were delimited from the study because of the focus on Protestants, however, a total of 74 respondents reported being raised as a Catholic, and of that number 54 percent had responded to an altar call. Univariate regression analyses failed to show a significant

relationship between the independent variable of type of church as a youth and altar call response. Those who grew up without attending church amounted to only 5 percent of respondents and that number was essentially evenly split between “yes” and “no” on the matter of an altar call response experience.

One question designed by the Expert Panel was a simple, “Would you describe yourself as a born-again Christian?” A total of 66 percent of respondents said “yes” and 9 percent did not know. Of those who answered “no” or “don’t know,” 75 percent had no altar call experience. If someone had responded to an altar call, they were twice as likely to describe themselves as “born again” versus those who had not had an altar call experience. Statistical analysis indicated there is a positive relationship between those who describe themselves as “born-again” and those who have responded to an altar call.

Another question asked respondents whether they had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Those that had responded to an altar call and answered “yes” to this question accounted for 56 percent of the “yes” responses. In other words, almost 94 percent of those that responded to an altar call identified themselves as having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. With regard to those who had not responded to an altar call, those that said “no” or “don’t know” to this question were twice as likely to respond in the negative versus those that had an altar call experience. The fact that 15.6 percent of those that responded to an altar call answered this question as “no” or “don’t know” does lend some support to the position that altar calls can encourage false conversions.

Respondents were split at 55 percent female and 45 percent male with the females at a higher altar call response rate of 55 percent versus males at 51.3 percent. Statistical analyses did not indicate any relationship between gender and altar call response.

Respondents were asked to identify, from a list of 24 choices including “none of the above,” significant life situations or change events that occurred within 6 months prior to conversion. None of the response variables were statistically significant, however, the presence of an adult that invested in their life, a change of residence, a

retreat or mission trip, and “none of the above” were the most frequently selected.

As might be expected, multivariate analysis revealed a significant relationship between self-description as being born-again and a personal relationship with Christ, and between income and education.

Those that had responded to an altar call were asked to indicate what action they had taken. There were seven choices and respondents were asked to note all actions they had taken. Therefore the responses to this question outnumbered the 533 total in the sample who had responded to an altar call. A total of 453 or almost 85 percent went forward. This same group (533) was asked to indicate when they were converted. Those who answered they were converted before the response to the altar call numbered 206 whereas those who were converted at the time of the response to the altar call numbered 189.

Those sample respondents that responded “no” to the altar call question were asked to identify what significant action was associated with their conversion. The highest response (34.41 percent) was having no specific memory due to having been a Christian from a young age. The next most frequent response was no specific memory because the conversion occurred over a period of time (22.58 percent). Slightly more than 16 percent indicated they were led to the Lord by a family member. Therefore, 73 percent of those who had never responded to an altar call were believers from a young age, converted over a period of time, or were directly impacted toward conversion by a family member.

All respondents were asked to indicate how much time passed from their conversion to regular attendance at church. The most frequent rate of response indicated more than 72 percent of respondents regularly attended church prior to their conversion. An additional 12 percent were in regular attendance within six months of their conversion.

All respondents were provided a list of 14 things to choose from to indicate

what factor/experience/thing most influenced their conversion. The most frequent responses were a family member explaining the gospel to them, sermons or preaching, and a pastor explaining the gospel to them for 22 percent, 20 percent, and 15.6 percent respectively.

Those respondents that did respond to a public evangelistic invitation were asked to choose from a list of six venues in which their response may have occurred. By far the most common setting was a church service (77 percent) with a youth ministry event (11 percent) the next most common. Fully 44 percent of respondents indicated they were influenced toward conversion by one-on-one sharing and by relationships with believers.

Respondents that responded to an altar call but that had come to a point of conversion at some later time were asked to indicate how much later that conversion had occurred. The most frequent response was 0 to 1 year, then 2 to 5 years, then 6 to 10 years for 54 percent, 19 percent and 17 percent respectively. Most of those who responded to an altar call (approximately 90 percent) associate the time of their conversion with some sort of an evangelistic invitation response. It does not necessarily follow that these individuals understand their response to the invitation as being a condition of their conversion or that they even felt responding was necessary.

There was some indication that a relationship existed between a response to an altar call and TDA scores, however, on further more rigorous statistical analysis, it was found that a response to an altar call *alone* does not fully explain variances in TDA scores. Gender, age, ethnicity, and income independent variables revealed similar results. The variable of whether someone describes themselves as a born-again Christian and whether the respondent had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ did positively relate to the TDA scores accounting for 19 percent differences and 16 percent differences respectively.

Other conclusions indicated speaking with someone one-on-one at the time of

conversion directly affected spiritual maturity. In addition, events in respondent's lives prior to conversion that moved them toward conversion were found to be the presence of an adult investing in their lives and the felt need to find a purpose in life. Most who come to faith in Christ are not dealing with any particular trauma in their lives, however, the moving of a residence, a personal illness or injury, or participation in a mission trip or retreat did have a significant impact in the pre-conversion lives of 13.9 percent of respondents.

For those participants that responded to an altar call where their conversion had occurred at an earlier time and they were responding for another reason, there was an indication of a positive influence on the TDA score. The independent variables that most significantly predicted spiritual maturity scores were self-description as a born-again Christian (add 6.17 points to the TDA score), having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (add 5.12 points), regularly attending church before conversion (add 7.77 points), and regular church attendance zero to six (6) months after conversion (add 6.12 points).

Research Implications

The implications of the research are addressed here and applied to the current debate on the use of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. Historically at least the use of public evangelistic invitations has had a decisive role in the lives of more than 53 percent of the respondents in this study and the majority of those responses occurred in a church they regularly attended. The South as a region of the United States maintains the strongest heritage with regard to the use of an altar call, and Baptists and Pentecostals are most likely to continue the practice. The African American church also maintains a strong emphasis on invitation methodology encouraging a public commitment as almost 75 percent of respondents in that group had responded to an altar call.

Being invited to church by a relative had the highest probability of attracting someone to church and of getting the individual involved at that church. One-on-one

sharing of the gospel is still the most effective way to lead someone to Christ and familial relationships are the most effective in this outreach.

Not everyone who responds to an altar call has a personal relationship with the Lord and conversion may still be as much as ten years away following a response.

Those who describe themselves as born-again are much more likely to score higher on a spiritual maturity inventory as are those who indicate they have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Those that grow up apart from any church involvement are much less likely to end up in a church and youth ministries still play a vital role in the transformative years of young people. Sermons are the most critical part of a worship service from an evangelistic standpoint and the need to clearly and fully declare the gospel in every message is of paramount importance. There is a good chance that an unsaved person hearing the gospel through the preaching of the Word is being moved by the Spirit of the Lord to come to a faith decision and if no invitation is given, someone close to that person ought to seize the opportunity to discuss the matter in a one-on-one conversation.

The presence of a response to some form of a public evangelistic invitation encourages believers in their commitment to the Lord and those that do not have a history of responding publicly are more likely to be unsure as to whether they are born-again. Traumatic events in the lives of the unsaved are an opportunity for the Spirit of the Lord to get the attention of an individual and the potential for a salvation experience in the midst of personal trials is a possibility. Not everyone who is Christian will be able to specifically identify a place and time when they came to faith and many Christians have learned to walk with the Lord from a very young age.

Research Applications

The applications of the research extend to church-based public evangelistic outreach efforts, large cross-denominational crusade efforts such as those of the BGEA, and personal sharing of the Good News to family, friends, and complete strangers.

That fully 53 percent of the respondents in this study associated at least some part of their Christian walk with a response to a public evangelistic invitation indicates this methodology is worthwhile. Only the Lord knows the heart of the one responding and the breaking in of the Spirit for conversion of the soul may be as much as ten years into the future. There was some indication from this research that a public evangelistic invitation may lead unbelievers to a false sense of hope. That number is likely larger because those individuals experiencing a false conversion associated with an altar call response would almost certainly not be included in this survey. The job of the proclaimer is to simply, clearly, and completely share the gospel so that the seeds of Truth can take root by the power of the Spirit. Seminaries that do not guide and train young preachers in invitation methodology may want to revisit that aspect of training and equipping seminarians as reflected in course syllabi content and learning objectives.

Those that do respond to a challenge following a presentation of the gospel may be more likely to be sure of their standing before the Lord and therein more spiritually mature. As the American culture drifts further from a Judeo-Christian heritage, the difference between the walk of believers and the world will grow thereby affording unbelievers an opportunity to consider the sharper contrast of what a life surrendered to Jesus Christ looks like and the evidence of changed lives. Inside and outside of churches a renewed emphasis on simply presenting the gospel and following the presentation with an opportunity for the hearer(s) to accept Christ is in order. Furthermore, this study reveals the importance of speaking with someone one-on-one at or near the time of a response to an altar call and the associated importance of follow-up counseling, discipleship training, and mentoring for the new believer.

Nothing continues to be more powerful and effective than the relational reaching out to an unbeliever and more likely than not, that person will take the time to listen to what a believer has to say—with a markedly increased probability when that person is a relative. The old invitation to church of “come and see” is still appropriate

and the church is still the most likely place for an unbeliever to hear and accept the Good News. Neighbors need to invite and preachers need to preach.

Those who offer a public evangelistic invitation with integrity and under the guidance of the Spirit do not dishonor the Lord nor do those who, according to conscience, decline the giving of an invitation at the end of a message. Personal evangelism strategies that have been taught through the years did have definite beneficial effect for the kingdom and future efforts attuned to contemporary culture will also be effective. The simple truth of the gospel is still the most important news and it is never out of season nor out of step with the fundamental need of man.

Research Limitations

In addition to the limits of generalization articulated in chapter 3, the findings and conclusions of this research study must be tempered with additional limitations as outlined herein. The TDA is an excellent, reliable, and valid instrument, however, no instrument can be all-inclusive. Some evidence of relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables were identified, but those relationships failed to maintain clear singular significance under close statistical scrutiny.

Respondents of national panels are incentivized to complete surveys such as the one utilized by this study and the technical sophistication of the national panel helps to guard against respondents lacking integrity. No system is foolproof, but the findings and outcomes in this research study should be valid and reliable to the extent that another study utilizing the same tools and parameters would obtain the same outcomes.

As indicated in the review of the literature, fewer ministers are giving a public evangelistic invitation. Quite possibly an even greater number of seminarians are never exposed to the methodology of the public evangelistic invitation. Nevertheless the Lord will accomplish His plan despite and in spite of the plans of man.

Although universal approaches to obedience to the Word, such as sharing the gospel one-on-one, easily translate to other cultures, times, and places, much of the

findings and conclusions in this study are tied too closely to American culture to be of use beyond North America. For example, most of the 24 choices respondents considered as significant life situations or change events occurring in the 6 months prior to conversion have no relevance to many other people in the world. In addition, the sheer volume and variety of opportunities to be exposed to the gospel in America is unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

Finally, this research study and the findings and conclusions may be of limited value because, despite this effort to address the question of the efficacy of altar calls in a definitive manner, the discussion will continue to be ruled and guided by emotions and opinions in addition to personal biases and convictions.

For the purpose of clarity, a sample “altar call invitation” is included with this study (see Appendix 8.¹ In addition a sample of the so-called “sinner’s prayer” often associated with a public evangelistic invitation is included (see Appendix 9).²

Further Research

Based on the lessons learned in this research study and the questions that arise or remain as a result of this work, further research is still needed. There may be a more appropriate instrument available for this type of study even though the TDA remains an extremely solid instrument. A connection between altar call responses and spiritual maturity has been established, however, further research ought to strive for a more definitive connection, if it exists.

Additional research is always needed to gauge the usefulness and effectiveness of evangelistic crusades. Those efforts outlined in the review of the literature fell short, but technology has taken many quantum leaps in the last several years. Real time data

¹Frank R. Shivers, *The Evangelistic Invitation 101-150 Helps in Giving The Evangelistic Invitation* (Sumpter, SC: Hill, 2004), 85.

²The Billy Graham Library, “How to Know Jesus,” accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.billygrahamlibrary.org/PGView.aspx?pid=13>.

collection through social media offers avenues for research in this area that have not been explored. In addition, smart phone technology that allows for the texting of prayer requests and praises during worship could also be harnessed in future research attempts on this topic.

The definition of an altar call/public evangelistic invitation used in this study was broad and covered a number of venues and actions on the part of the respondent. An effort to establish a taxonomy for this methodology would assist further research efforts by narrowing the scope of survey questions and increasing the specificity of the outcomes.

Further research might utilize the Expert Panel questions to improve the applicability and usefulness of the data collected without tying it to the TDA or some other instrument. This would involve validating the instrument as an expanded and stand alone document that might be better equipped to answer the same research questions.

Additional research might also focus on a subset of the sample population where outcomes might generate a much greater interest—for example—within the African American community or the Pentecostal denomination.

A separate study might be designed to take a deeper look at the methodology of public crusades to ascertain why, historically, the beneficial outcomes for the kingdom appear to be so small. Furthermore, that study might do a comparative analysis of the methodology used in North America with that of public crusades by nationals in Asia and Africa. A study of this sort might also research and assess the use of “prayer triplets” where three believers agree to pray together for the conversion of three of each others’ friends such that they are praying simultaneously for nine individuals or couples. A similar study might assess the enormous amount of pre-crusade work and training and the ecumenical teamwork that develops as a result of the effort for the purpose of determining a real lasting benefit of the crusade.

A longitudinal study following 100 respondents at a public crusade would be

most useful. The difficulty would be in simply observing and measuring as opposed to nurturing and building up for maturing in the faith.

A study of this sort would also be interesting and useful in a refugee camp setting where a people group normally closed to the gospel is now open and the cultural barriers to Christian conversion have been removed to some degree. The findings and conclusions in this study would indicate that environment is ideal for proclamation of the Word followed by an invitation.

Perhaps a study might be designed to explore the relationship between those who have come from the Catholic Church into the evangelical Protestant community and the ways in which they came to Christ. In addition, there is a need for a study that focuses exclusively on those who come to faith but had no prior exposure to the North American church culture.

Using a similar method and design as demonstrated in this research, another study might be performed with much closer scrutiny of the individual TDA scales in an effort to uncover predictive relationships this study failed to appreciate.

A study could also be designed to modulate the methodology of the public evangelistic invitation to determine the effect on response rate with cross tabulation analysis to determine the longevity and deepening of commitments over time.

Since it has been established that instruments, the collection of data, and the statistical analysis of findings on this topic can be designed to be valid and reliable, a future study might undertake to redesign the TDA work Waggoner initiated in the 1990s. American culture, particularly for millennials, has changed a great deal and an instrument tailored to an increasingly church-averse subset of the population would be useful.

Another study that would extend the discussion on the topic would be to approach seminarians and/or seminaries to determine the subject matter of preaching practicums to better ascertain the state of contemporary seminary education with regard to public evangelistic invitations.

APPENDIX 1

EXPERT PANEL PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. Would you describe yourself as a born-again Christian? ___Yes ___No

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

2. How old were you when you became a Christian? I was _____ years old.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

3. Please check any of the following significant life situations or change events that occurred in the preceding days, weeks or months before your decision to become a Christian?

- Marital status change – got married, got divorced, got separated
- spending/financial/credit problems
- child entering the home/moving out of the home
- place of residence change (includes moving to college)
- personal depression, anger or other emotional issues
- loss of home
- moved to a new church and/or got a new pastor
- education level milestone achieved
- felt a strong need to find a purpose for my life
- job change or loss or discharge from or entry into the military
- being the recipient of verbal and/or physical abuse
- death of a loved one/friend
- participated in an emotional and/or physical affair
- personal illness or injury or a medical/health concern
- personal addiction to alcohol
- personal addiction to drugs
- personal addiction to pornography
- personal addiction to gambling
- personal arrest and/or time in prison/jail

mission trip, spiritual retreat, conference, etc.

none of the above

other

Please describe "other": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

4. How many years was it after you became a Christian before you started to regularly attend church?

0-1 2-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30

31-40 41-50 >51 I have never regularly attended church

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

5. *Altar call/evangelistic invitation—means that after a public gospel presentation an invitation/opportunity was given for people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. For the purpose of this survey, this takes place in an environment where a speaker presents the gospel to a group of people. It could be in a church, at a concert, or some other venue.*

Did you become a Christian in a setting where there was an altar call/evangelistic invitation? Yes No

(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).

If you marked "yes", in what setting did you respond to the altar call/evangelistic invitation?

Church service

Concert

Other

Please describe "other": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments

6. **(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).**

If you responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation at any time in your Christian journey, what did you do? Please mark all that apply.

- got up and went forward
- raised my hand
- repeated a prayer out loud as led by someone else
- prayed out loud or silently on my own
- filled out a card
- other
- Please describe "other": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

7. **(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).**

If you responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation, which of the following is true for you? Please mark only one.

If you have responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation more than once, please mark all that apply.

- I became a Christian at the time of the response to the altar call/evangelistic invitation.
- I became a Christian at some later time.
- I became a Christian before the altar call and my response to the altar call was a public profession of my faith in Jesus Christ.
- I was already a Christian and I responded to the altar call to recommit my life to Jesus.
- I was already a Christian and I responded to the altar call for the following reason:
Please describe the "reason" _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

8. **(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).**

If you responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation but became a Christian at some later time, how many years later did you become a Christian?

- 0-1 2-5 6-10 11-15 15-20 21-25 26-30 31-40
- 41-50 >51

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

9. **(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).**
 If you did not respond to an altar call/evangelistic invitation, how did you become a Christian?

- Read a tract, prayed to receive Christ.
- Was led to the Lord by a pastor, friend, or other person.
- Cannot remember, grew up in a Christian home and have known the Lord from a young age.
- Read the Bible and prayed to accept the Lord.
- Some other way
- Please describe "Some other way": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

10. Please answer the following questions pertaining to your life before you became a Christian:

- A. I was raised in a home where we went to church regularly. Yes No
- B. The church I was raised in was Catholic
- Baptist
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Episcopal
- Pentecostal
- Wesleyan
- Nazarene
- AME
- other _____
- not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments:

11. What factor/experience/thing most influenced you to become a Christian?
Please check only one.

- Christian radio a life crisis situation or event
- Christian TV a vision
- reading the Bible sermons/preaching
- Christian literature a bargain with God
- a person(s) witnessing to me talking to God, hearing from God
- a dream other – please describe _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments and general comments:

APPENDIX 2

DESCRIPTION OF EXPERT PANEL

Timothy K. Beougher, Ph.D., is the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth, Associate Dean of Evangelism and Church Growth, and the Director of Research Doctoral Studies at the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He earned a B.S. from Kansas State University, a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Th.M. and Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He has written and edited numerous materials related to evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual awakening, including *Overcoming Walls to Witnessing and Training Leaders to Make Disciples*, and *Evangelism for a Changing World*. He has ministry experience as an evangelist, church planter, pastor, and interim pastor.

Scott McConnell is the Vice President of LifeWay Research in Nashville, Tennessee. He earned a bachelors degree in Marketing and Strategic Management from the University of Pennsylvania. At LifeWay, his research has addressed the beliefs, behaviors, needs and preferences of church leaders, laity, and the unchurched. Those research topics have included a variety of issues including parenting, young adult church dropouts, the formerly churched, standout churches who are effective in evangelism, and multi-site churches. He is the author of *Multi-Site Churches: Guidance for the Movement's Next Generation* and co-author of *The Parent Adventure: Preparing Your Children For a Lifetime With God*.

Alvin L. Reid serves as Professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where he has been since 1995. He is also the founding Bailey Smith Chair of Evangelism. He has a B.A. from Samford University and holds a M.Div. and the Ph.D. with a major in evangelism from Southwestern Seminary. He has written extensively on evangelism, missional Christianity, spiritual awakening, and student ministry including *AS YOU GO: Creating a Missional Culture of Gospel-Centered Students*, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional*, and *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History through Revival, and Evangelism for a Changing World*. He is a prolific blogger on his website and for betweenthehours.com, and is a regular contributor to MORF magazine produced by StudentLife and NavPress.

R. Alan Streett, Ph.D., is the Senior Research Professor of Biblical Exegesis at Criswell College in Dallas, Texas, where he previously served as the W. A. Criswell Endowed Professor of Expository Preaching. He is a Ph.D. candidate in New Testament from the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David (UK) and he earned a B.A. from the University of Baltimore, a M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary, and Ph.D. from the California Graduate School of Theology. He has lectured in a wide variety of forums, taught on a number of topics including evangelism and church planting, and he has authored numerous articles, book reviews, and books including *The Effective Invitation*.

Hershael W. York, Ph.D., is the Victor and Louise Lester Professor of Christian Preaching, and the Associate Dean of Ministry and Proclamation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He earned a B.A. and M.A. from the University of Kentucky, and a M.Div. and Ph.D. from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Since coming to Southern, he has authored two books on speaking and preaching, has been featured in *Preaching Today* as one of the best preachers in North America, and has served as the President of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. He is currently the pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky, and frequently ministers in Brazil and Romania.

APPENDIX 3

INSTRUCTIONS TO EXPERT PANEL

Letter to Expert Panel 9-25-2013

Gentlemen,

Thank you for agreeing to serve on this expert panel. The goal of this brief endeavor is to design survey questions to elicit information from respondents regarding altar call experiences and aspects of their lives before and after that event. Those respondents that have not responded to an altar call will skip the questions as noted. All respondents will complete the Transformational Discipleship Assessment and the scoring on eight spiritual maturity scales will be computed. Regression analyses will be applied to the data to assess the predictive relationship, if any, between altar call experiences and spiritual maturity.

Your task is to determine whether the proposed questions are clear in their presentation, whether they are specific enough in content, and whether each question will effectively and accurately yield data that is measurable. You are therefore asked to score the validity of each question on a scale of 1-9. For example, if you believe the question will clearly and accurately elicit the desired information, you would give it a high score (7-9). If you believe a certain question is unclear, incomplete, worded improperly, or will not elicit the desired information, then you would give it a low score (1-3).

Space is provided following each question for your comments, questions, and/or suggestions or any other point or concern you may have regarding that particular question. A second round of question evaluation and scoring is not anticipated at this time. The results of your collective efforts will be sent to each of you in the form of "Final Questions." Please simply note your responses and comments on the attached form and return to me as soon as is reasonably possible; preferably within one to two weeks. Thank you in advance for your time and effort on this project.

APPENDIX 4

EXPERT PANEL RESULTS

Consolidation of comments as of 10-19-13

Screener

S1. What is your religious preference? (select one)

- Christian – Catholic
- Christian – Orthodox (Russian, Armenian, Greek)
- Christian – Protestant (including Adventist, Baptist, Church of God, Church of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodists, etc.)
- Christian – Non-denominational
- Jewish
- Mormon/Latter Day Saints
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Christian Scientist
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Unity/Unitarian
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- No preference
- Other

(Terminate if S1 is not 3 or 4)

S2. Which of the following best describes your beliefs about life after death?

1. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have tried your best to be a good person and live a good life
2. When you die, you will go to Heaven because God loves everyone and we will all be in Heaven with Him
3. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior
4. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have read the Bible, been involved in church, and tried to live as God wants you to live
5. When you die, you will return in another life form
6. You have no way of knowing what will happen when you die
7. There is no life after death

(Terminate if S2 is not 3)

1. Would you describe yourself as a born-again Christian? ___ Yes ___ No

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q1: scoring = 8, 9, 7, 3, 9

- I think older believers will be very familiar with this terminology; I'm not sure the phrase is used much today and therefore might not be as clear to younger believers.
- decent – but the question assumes a person has a level of biblical knowledge, ie. “born again” jargon. I work with a lot of unchurched people who would not necessarily get this.
- Christian is such a nebulous term, but maybe you want it that way. In the Northeast most people believe they are Christian if they are not Jewish.
- It is not my favorite question, but it is valid. I recommend basing the next few questions on the acceptance of Jesus as Savior question (S2). This question could be moved later so it doesn't confuse things.

2. How old were you when you first held this belief? I was _____ years old.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q2: scoring = 9, 9, 9, 3, 6-9

- clear enough
- This only works for those who are evangelicals. Most people in the world, including RC and Orthodox believe they were born Christians.
- 6 but 9 if anchored on the definite S2.

For the purposes of this survey, this point in time will be referred to as “your conversion.”

3. Please check any of the following significant life situations or change events that occurred in the 6 months prior to your conversion.

- Marital status change – got married, got divorced, got separated
- financial problems
- child entering the home/moving out of the home
- place of residence change (includes moving to college)
- personal depression, anger or other emotional issues
- loss of home
- moved to a new church and/or got a new pastor
- education level milestone achieved
- felt a strong need to find a purpose for my life
- job change (including loss of job or entry into or discharge from the military)
- being the recipient of verbal and/or physical abuse
- death of a loved one/friend
- participated in an emotional and/or physical affair
- personal illness or injury or a medical/health concern
- personal addiction to alcohol

- personal addiction to drugs
- personal addiction to pornography
- personal addiction to gambling
- personal arrest and/or time in prison/jail
- mission trip, spiritual retreat, conference, etc.
- none of the above
- other

Please describe "other": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q3: scoring = 8, 6, 7, 3, 8

- would it be clearer just to say "the preceding year?"
- the time frame is too vague. How far back-how many months, etc?
- days, weeks or months is a bit nebulous. Perhaps add next to each one the time duration from then to conversion?
- Again, this works only if you change "Christian" to "follower of Jesus" or some other similar designation.
- Need a specific timeframe. The less often "or" appears in questions the better. Keep in mind that most will report becoming a Christian at a young age. Many options assume teen or adult situations. May want to replace a few with things kids would experience like a school change, or an adult investing in their life.

4. How many years was it after your conversion before you started to regularly attend church?

0-1 2-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30
 31-40 41-50 >51 I have never regularly attended church

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q4: scoring = 8, 7, 5, 3, 6-8

- Would a person who attended church regularly before his/her conversion check 0-1? You might consider adding, "I regularly attended church before my conversion." Yes
- This may not take into account the on-again, off-again nature of attendance of some Christians. What if the person attended regularly for two months, but then stopped, and then started again a year later, etc. A person's self-definition may be misleading.
- Years? Seems like you are assuming it takes years as the default. I would just say how long, and include 0-6 months, 6 months to a year, then the rest. Yes Perhaps I do not understand the point.
- Same as above. If you began by asking them when they were converted these questions would have much more value.
- 6 but with the suggestions by the other Experts an 8. Their points about changing through the years is a good one, but not something you can capture in this question.

5. *Altar call/evangelistic invitation – means that after a public gospel presentation an opportunity was given for people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. For the purpose of this survey, this takes place in an environment where a speaker presents the gospel to a group of people. It could be in a church, at a concert, event, or some other venue.*

5a. Have you ever responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation?

Yes No

Ask 5b if 5a is yes.

5b. If you marked “yes”, in what setting did you respond to the altar call/evangelistic invitation?

- Church service
 Concert
 Children’s ministry event
 Youth/student ministry event
 Public evangelistic crusade such as a Billy Graham Crusade
 Other, Please describe : _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q5: scoring = 9, 7, 9, 3, 8

- You don’t need to say “Please skip this question, etc.” since the follow-up says “If you marked ‘yes’”.
- I think this is helpful. I personally do not like or ever use the terminology “altar call,” as that is an old term that does not really denote the point. Public response, public invitation, evangelistic invitation are all better and more current nomenclature.
- same as above. Very valid if you are speaking about conversion, minimally so if “Christian” is used.
- I think you will get the information you wanted in Q7, so this can begin to unpack the altar call rather than get it all in one question.

6. (Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).

If you responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation at any time in your Christian journey, what did you do? Please mark all that apply.

- got up and went forward
 raised my hand
 repeated a prayer out loud as led by someone else
 prayed out loud or silently on my own
 filled out a card
 other
Please describe “other”: _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q6: scoring = 9, 7, 8, 3-9, 8

- The answers presuppose some understanding of the invitation system. “Raise your hand” for instance, should perhaps be “raised your hand in response to a request by the speaker” or something like that. Yes
- useful
- same as above 3 or 9 depending on definitions.
- I am not positive this is everything. I am thinking through situations that are “stay where you are” and respond or “come talk one-on-one with someone.” What you do in both are here, so I don’t have a specific edit yet. Also wondering if the “Christian journey” phrase will relate to everyone. Again, don’t have a better suggestion at this point.

7. **(Please skip this question if it does not apply to you).**

If you responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation, which of the following is true for you? Please mark only one.

If you have responded to an altar call/evangelistic invitation more than once, please mark all that apply.

- My conversion occurred at the time of the response to the altar call/evangelistic invitation.
- My conversion occurred at some later time.
- My conversion occurred before the altar call and my response to the altar call was a public profession of my faith in Jesus Christ.
- My conversion had occurred previously and I responded to the altar call to recommit my life to Jesus.
- My conversion had occurred previously and I responded to the altar call for the following reason: (Please describe) _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q7: scoring = 9, 2, 9, 3-9, 9

- how can the respondent mark only one and all that apply?
- I like this one a lot.
- same as above, 3-9

8. **(Ask if Q7=2).**

How many years after your response to the altar call/evangelistic invitation was your conversion?

- 0-1 2-5 6-10 11-15 15-20 21-25 26-30 31-40
- 41-50 >51

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q8: scoring = 9, 3, 8, 3-9, 9

- This asks for only one narrow type of respondent. What about someone who became a Christian but didn’t respond to an altar call for a long time?
- Fine.
- Same as above, 3-9.
- I agree the use for this question will be limited.

9. (Ask if Q5=6).

If What significant action (if any) marked your conversion ?

- Read a tract, prayed to receive Christ.
 Was led to the Lord by a pastor, friend, or other person.
 Cannot remember, have known the Lord from a young age.
 Read the Bible and prayed to accept the Lord.
 Some other way
Please describe "Some other way": _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q9: scoring = 9, 1, 7, 3, 5-9

- This question equates becoming a Christian with responding to an altar call. Shouldn't it instead ask how the respondent responded publicly or made a profession of faith known to someone? Agree see edit to question
- I would add, "Watched Christian TV programming" and "internet witnessing site" or something like that.
- Too much undefined religious jargon. "tract" should be "religious pamphlet about Jesus and how to become a follower of his." Same with "led to the Lord", "Christian home", and "accept the Lord." agree
- 5 but if the list is tighter 9: I want to split pastor, friend, or other person into separate items with the third being family member, but this may be better captured in Q11. Also, add an option for those that don't have a specific point in time but their conversion happened over a period of time.

10. Please answer the following questions pertaining to your life before you became a Christian:

A. I was raised in a home where we went to church regularly. Yes No

- B. The church I attended growing up was Catholic
 Baptist
 Methodist
 Presbyterian
 Episcopal
 Pentecostal
 Wesleyan
 Nazarene
 AME
 other _____
 not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not valid		minimally valid		undecided		moderately valid		very valid

Comments on Q10: scoring = 8, 9, 8, 3, 9

- add Lutheran? Yes. See S1 Protestant and Non-Denom for a few others you may want to include.
- Fine.

- Change “Christian” to “follower....” Change “raised” to “reared” – You raise pigs, you rear humans.

11. What factor/experience/thing most influenced your conversion?

Please check only one.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christian radio | <input type="checkbox"/> | a life crisis situation or event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christian TV | <input type="checkbox"/> | a vision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | reading the Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> | sermons/preaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Christian literature | <input type="checkbox"/> | a bargain with God |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a person(s) explaining the Gospel to me | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | talking to God, hearing from God | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | a dream | <input type="checkbox"/> | other – please describe _____ |

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
not		minimally		undecided		moderately		very
valid		valid				valid		valid

Comments on Q11: scoring = 8, 7, 8, 3-9, 9

- Though for some it will be hard to give only one answer.
- Fine.
- Same as above 3 or 9 – “Christian”
- I too would like them to check all that apply. I would also like to break out the person to see who this is as I expect this one to be big: friend explaining the Gospel to me, family member explaining the Gospel to me, pastor/minister explaining the Gospel to me.

General comments:

- hope this is helpful.
- Sorry it took so long.
- Here you go! I think this will be a helpful study!
- I like the questionnaire and the questions you ask, but strongly suggest you either change your vocabulary and define your terms. In most questions you used the word “Christian,” which in my opinion has little meaning. Only once you use the phrase “born again,” which at first sounds more specific. However, Catholics and Orthodox believe you are born again when you are baptized. Fifty percent of Protestants in America speak of being born again without any conception of what it means. That is why definitions must be supplied to make the survey valid and useful for your purposes. I believe you need to tweak your survey. Hope this helps.
- I think this will be helpful. It will put numbers on things we think about and discuss.

APPENDIX 5
FINAL QUESTIONS

**ALLEN Quantitative Instrument for Inclusion with the
Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA)**

1. What is your gender? Male Female
2. What is your age? _____
3. Which of the following best describes the highest level of education you have completed? (Select one)
 - Less than high school graduate
 - High school graduate
 - Some college
 - College graduate (Bachelor's degree)
 - Graduate degree (Ph.D., Masters, etc.)
4. What is your racial or ethnic background?
 - American Indian
 - Asian-American/Pacific Islander
 - Black/African-American
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - White/Caucasian
 - Other _____
5. Which of the following best represents your household income last year before taxes?
 - Less than \$30,000
 - \$30,000 - \$49,999
 - \$50,000 - \$74,999
 - \$75,000 - \$99,999
 - \$100,000 or more
6. What state do you live in? _____

Screener Question 1.

7. What is your religious preference? (select one)
- Christian – Catholic
 - Christian – Orthodox (Russian, Armenian, Greek)
 - Christian – Protestant (including Adventist, Baptist, Church of God, Church of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodists, etc.)
 - Christian – Non-denominational
 - Jewish
 - Mormon/Latter Day Saints
 - Muslim
 - Hindu
 - Buddhist
 - Christian Scientist
 - Jehovah’s Witnesses
 - Unity/Unitarian
 - Atheist
 - Agnostic
 - No preference
 - Other

(Terminate if S1 is not 3 or 4)

Screener Question 2.

8. Which of the following best describes your beliefs about life after death?
1. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have tried your best to be a good person and live a good life
 2. When you die, you will go to Heaven because God loves everyone and we will all be in Heaven with Him
 3. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior
 4. When you die, you will go to Heaven because you have read the Bible, been involved in church, and tried to live as God wants you to live
 5. When you die, you will return in another life form
 6. You have no way of knowing what will happen when you die
 7. There is no life after death

(Terminate if S2 is not 3)

9. How old were you when you first held this belief? I was _____ years old.

For the purposes of this survey, this point in time will be referred to as “your conversion.”

10. Please check any of the following significant life situations or change events that occurred in the 6 months prior to your conversion.

- school change as a child
- an adult investing in my life
- marital status change – got married, got divorced, got separated
- financial problems
- child entering the home/moving out of the home
- place of residence change (includes moving to college)
- personal depression, anger or other emotional issues
- loss of home
- moved to a new church and/or got a new pastor
- education level milestone achieved
- felt a strong need to find a purpose for my life
- job change (including loss of job or entry into or discharge from the military)
- being the recipient of verbal and/or physical abuse
- death of a loved one/friend
- participated in an emotional and/or physical affair
- personal illness or injury or a medical/health concern
- personal addiction to alcohol
- personal addiction to drugs
- personal addiction to pornography
- personal addiction to gambling
- personal arrest and/or time in prison/jail
- mission trip, spiritual retreat, conference, etc.
- none of the above
- other

Please describe “other”:

11. How long was it after your conversion before you started to regularly attend church?

- I regularly attended church before my conversion.
- 0-6 months
- 6 months – 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- more than 10 years
- I have never regularly attended church

Altar call/public evangelistic invitation – means that after a public gospel presentation an opportunity was given for people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. For the purpose of this survey, this takes place in an environment where a speaker presents the gospel to a group of people. It could be in a church, at a concert, event, or some other venue.

12. Have you ever responded to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation?

- Yes
- No

13. a. In your own words, what occurred when you responded to the altar call (both what did you do and what significance did it have to you)?

- b. In what setting did you respond to the altar call/public evangelistic invitation?

Church service
 Concert
 Children's ministry event
 Youth/student ministry event
 Public evangelistic crusade such as a Billy Graham Crusade
 Other, please describe _____

14. If you responded to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation, what did you do?

Please mark all that apply.

Got up and went forward
 Raised my hand in response to a request by the speaker
 Repeated a prayer out loud as led by someone else
 Prayed out loud or silently on my own
 Filled out a card
 Spoke with someone one-on-one
 Other, please describe _____

15. If you responded to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation, which of the following is true for you? Please mark only one.

If you have responded to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation more than once, please mark all that apply.

My conversion occurred at the time of the response to the altar call/public evangelistic invitation.
 My conversion occurred at some later time.
 My conversion occurred before the altar call and my response to the altar call was a public profession of my faith in Jesus Christ.
 My conversion had occurred previously and I responded to the altar call to recommit my life to Jesus.
 My conversion had occurred previously and I responded to the altar call for the following reason: (Please describe) _____

16. If your conversion occurred at some later time after your response to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation, how many years after your response to the altar call/public evangelistic invitation was your conversion?

0-1 2-5 6-10 11-15 15-20 21-25 26-30 31-40
 41-50 >51

17. If you never responded to an altar call/public evangelistic invitation, what significant action (if any) marked your conversion?
- Read a tract, prayed to receive Christ.
 - Was led to the Lord by a pastor.
 - Was led to the Lord by a friend.
 - Was led to the Lord by a family member.
 - Cannot remember, have known the Lord from a young age.
 - Read the Bible and prayed to accept the Lord.
 - No specific action, my conversion happened over a period of time.
 - Some other way
 - Please describe "Some other way": _____

Please answer the following questions pertaining to your life before you became a Christian:

18. I grew up in a home where we went to church regularly. Yes No
19. The church I attended growing up was
- Catholic
 - Lutheran
 - Baptist
 - Adventist
 - Church of God
 - Church of Christ
 - Methodist
 - Presbyterian
 - Episcopal
 - Pentecostal
 - Wesleyan
 - Nazarene
 - AME
 - Non-denominational
 - other _____
 - not applicable
20. What factor/experience/thing most influenced your conversion?
Please check only one.
- Christian radio
 - Christian TV
 - reading the Bible
 - Christian literature
 - talking to God, hearing from God
 - a friend explaining the Gospel to me
 - a family member explaining the Gospel to me
 - a pastor/minister explaining the Gospel to me
 - other, please describe _____
 - a life crisis situation or event
 - a vision
 - sermons/preaching
 - a bargain with God
 - a dream
21. Would you describe yourself as a born-again Christian?
 Yes No Don't know
22. Would you describe yourself as having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
 Yes No Don't know

APPENDIX 6

LIFEWAY RESEARCH AGREEMENT



RESEARCH PROJECT FORM AGREEMENT

Client Name	Bill Allen		
Client Address	8540 Bishops Lane		
City, State and ZIP	Indianapolis, IN 46217		
SSN or FEIN	N/A	Phone	317-508-6963
Description/Scope of Work to be Performed	See Attached Proposal Exhibit A		

This Research Project Form Agreement (“Agreement”) is made and entered into by and between LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, a nonprofit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Tennessee (“LifeWay”), and the above named “Client.”

For good and adequate consideration, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, the parties agree to terms as set forth below.

1. **Scope of Work.** LifeWay agrees to conduct the research project as further described below.
2. **Term and Termination.** This Agreement shall end upon a thirty (30) day written notice being given by either party to the other party. All obligations up to and including the date of termination shall be met by both parties. Any costs incurred by LifeWay before termination of this Agreement shall be the responsibility of the Client.
3. **Payment.** LifeWay will be paid a fee as indicated on the research proposal that commissions the creation of the research project. Payment in full is due at the time the work is commissioned, unless indicated otherwise on the attached Proposal Exhibit A.
4. **Confidentiality.** Please know all of our clients are assured the highest degree of confidentiality. The information obtained as a result of this work remains confidential between you and LifeWay. LifeWay will not release the results of the survey unless or until they are made public by the client.

5. **Intellectual Property Rights.** All copyrights or other intellectual property rights in the research data LifeWay is providing (database, reports, etc.) will be owned by the Client (as a work made for hire) but not any of the methods, questionnaires, analysis or any other “work-product” created by LifeWay in order to perform the research and create the data. Client shall control the release of the data to the public if at all, however, in such Client release of any data, reports, analysis, etc. Client shall give attribution to LifeWay Research as the provider of the research. Once initially released to the public by Client, LifeWay may publish the data. In any event, LifeWay is hereby granted a license to utilize the data, reports and any other end product created hereunder for its own use consistent with Client’s reserved rights described above.

6. **No Partnership.** The parties are independent contractors in relation to each other. None of the terms set forth in this Agreement create, or shall be construed as creating, any partnership, joint venture, agency, master-servant, employment, trust, or any other relationship between the parties. Neither party shall have the right or the power to serve as an agent of any other party, or to act in any other way on behalf of or in any way that might create a binding obligation on the other party.

7. **Dispute Resolution.** Any dispute, controversy or claim arising under, out of, in connection with or in relation to this Agreement, or the breach, termination, validity or enforceability of any provision of this Agreement, will be resolved by through mediation conducted in accordance with and subject to the mediation rules of the Christian Mediation and Conciliation Services. If mediation fails to resolve the conflict then the matter will be resolved through final and binding arbitration conducted in accordance with and subject to the Arbitration Rules of the Christian Mediation and Conciliation Services or other mutually agreeable arbitration method. Unless otherwise mutually agreed upon by the parties, the mediation sessions or arbitration hearings will be held in Nashville, Tennessee. Judgment upon any award rendered in arbitration may be entered in any court located in Davidson County having jurisdiction thereof, or application may be made to such court for a judicial acceptance of the award and an enforcement, as the law may allow. In addition to any other relief, the prevailing party shall be entitled to costs including reasonable attorney fees.

8. **Entire Agreement.** This document, which includes any Schedules selected, bids, quotes, a Request for Proposal, or other terms, which are attached hereto and made a part hereof, contains the entire agreement of the parties. Inconsistencies between the terms of this Agreement and the terms of attachments shall be resolved according to the following order of priority: first, this Agreement, including the Schedules as selected above; second, the RFP, if any; third, all other attachments. All change orders or modifications must be in writing and signed by both LifeWay and Client. This Agreement may be executed in counterparts, which collectively constitute the one and the same agreement. Copies of this Agreement, including signatures, shall be as valid as the original hereof.

LifeWay Christian Resources
of the Southern Baptist Convention d/b/a
LifeWay Research

Client: Bill Allen

By: _____

By: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

EXHIBIT A



Evangelistic Invitations and Altar Calls

– Proposal for Research –

October 17, 2013

Background

Bill Allen is seeking to study the effect of evangelistic invitations/altar calls on people's lives to establish whether there is efficacy in the use of the method. A collateral purpose is to motivate the reader to consider/reconsider the use of this method (for or against) of calling people to a decision after a Gospel presentation.

Research Focus

Is there empirical evidence that the uses of evangelistic invitations/altar calls affect the lives of those that respond toward spiritual maturity?

Methodology

LifeWay Research will assist in the development of a quantitative survey to determine the relationship (if any) between people who trusted Christ as savior in response to an altar call and maturity in specific areas of spiritual formation.

The population to be surveyed will be Adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant and who are trusting Jesus Christ as savior as their means of eternal life. The sample will be drawn from a large national panel that is only used for research. The panel has several million members and available demographic information on panel members includes religious preference.

The sample will be balanced to reflect known U.S. population sizes of key demographic groups: age, gender, census region of the country, and income. This sample will then be screened to ask their religious preference and their views of afterlife/heaven. Only those that are trusting Jesus Christ as savior to get to heaven will qualify for the survey. 500 to 1,200 completed surveys would be obtained.

The survey will be designed to meet the specific requirements of Bill Allen's research work by Mr. Allen with consultation with LifeWay Research as needed. The survey will be up to 20 minutes in length. Key topics will include measurement of whether the respondent personally responded to an altar call or evangelistic invitation. Respondents will also complete all of the questions in the Transformational Discipleship Assessment that measure spiritual maturity.

LifeWay Research Deliverables

- LifeWay Research will review the new questions Bill Allen designs. Upon approval the new questions and TDA questions will be programmed. The questions will be closed-ended questions. One open-ended question may be included to capture more detail on their conversion.
- LifeWay Research will field the online, invitation-only survey among a representative sample of Protestants who have trusted Christ as savior.
- LifeWay Research will run cross-tabulations of the quantitative data with breakouts of the data by those who did/did not respond to an altar call as well as key demographic information.
- LWR will conduct regression analysis to determine if responding to an evangelistic invitation/altar call predicts higher spiritual maturity in any of the TDA scales.

Cost

Consideration as agreed depending on number of surveys.

Confidentiality

All of our clients are assured the highest degree of confidentiality. The information obtained as a result of this work remains confidential between Bill Allen and LifeWay Research. LifeWay Research will not release the results of the survey but are permitted to quote the results once they are made public by the Client.

Terms

- The first payment of 33% of the project cost is due upon acceptance of this proposal.
- The second payment of 33% of the project cost is due upon approval of the survey.
- The final payment of 34% of the project cost is due upon completion of the deliverables.
- The portions of the research conducted by LifeWay Research will be identified as such in the doctoral dissertation.
- The questions that form the Transformational Discipleship Assessment remain the property of LifeWay Research. They may be presented to the official dissertation readers, but may not be published in the final dissertation.

Thank you for your interest in LifeWay Research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Scott McConnell
VP LifeWay Research
Scott.mcconnell@lifeway.com.

APPENDIX 7

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Agreement to Participate

In this research you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your own spiritual journey including your past and present experiences and practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name be identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

APPENDIX 8

SAMPLE ALTAR CALL

How do you go to heaven? Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) The Bible says, “There is no other name ... given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) You can’t get there except through Christ. The Bible says it’s a narrow road—very narrow, Jesus said. “Except you repent, you shall ... likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3) Has there ever been a moment in your life when you really turned from sin to God? Has there ever been a moment when you really received Christ into your heart? “For as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12)

You must receive him. When you stand at the entrance of eternity, you’re going to be asked for a passport. Everywhere I go in the world I have to carry a little green American passport. I have to pull it out, and I can’t get into any country unless I’ve got that passport. You can’t get into heaven unless your passport is in order, unless it has been stamped by Christ. Is your passport in order? Has it been stamped?

I want to tell you, if I didn’t know tonight that my sins were forgiven, if I didn’t know I was in Christ, you couldn’t drag me out of this coliseum until I had settled it. And if you have a doubt about it, don’t you leave here until you have settled it.

You may be from Winston-Salem. You may be from out of town. You may be in a delegation; you may be with friends. You may be a member of a church; you may not be a member of any church. You may be a Sunday school teacher, and you might be the worst heathen in town. I don’t care who you are or what you are. Don’t leave here with a doubt about this business tonight.

You come, because the Bible said, “My Spirit will not always strive with man.” (Genesis 6:3) The Bible says, “He that hardeneth his heart, being often reproved, shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy.” (Proverbs 29:1) Come and give your life to Christ while there is time.¹

¹This sample altar call is an excerpt from Billy Graham’s invitation to his sermon “Heaven or Hell” given during his 1958 evangelistic meetings in Charlotte, NC. Frank R. Shivers, *The Evangelistic Invitation 101-150 Helps in Giving The Evangelistic Invitation* (Sumpter, SC: Hill, 2004),

APPENDIX 9

SAMPLE “SINNER’S PRAYER”

Here is how you can receive Christ:¹

Admit your need (I am a sinner).

Be willing to turn from your sins (repent).

Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.

Through prayer, invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit.

(Receive Him as Lord and Savior.)

PRAYER

How to pray:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Your Name. Amen.

¹This appendix is excerpted from The Billy Graham Library, “How to Know Jesus,” accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.billygrahamlibrary.org/PGView.aspx?pid=13>.

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH FORMATION EXPERIENCES AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
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The purpose of this quantitative research study was to determine the efficacy, if any, of altar calls as a form of a public evangelistic invitation. Since there is no scriptural command with regard to the practice, the literature prior to this study relied solely on opinion, conjecture, anecdotal stories, and the occasional attempt to quantify results from evangelistic crusades.

The quantitative research design consisted of utilizing the consistently valid and reliable Transformational Discipleship Assessment used for measuring spiritual maturity, supplemented with additional questions to respondents pertaining to pre-conversion experiences and the presence or absence of an altar call response. A sample from a national panel of over six million members was randomly selected and the results of the survey were subjected to rigorous regression statistical analyses. Efforts were taken to ensure demographics of the sample were representative of adult Americans whose religious preference is Protestant. The results and conclusions of the research have moved the debate on the efficacy of altar calls to the next level.

KEYWORDS: Altar Call, Evangelistic Invitation, Faith Formation, Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Maturity, Going Forward, Conversion.

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