“I KNEW IT, BUT I DIDN’T KNOW IT”: BLACK CHURCH LAY LEADERS AND PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

by

MAUREEN ANN MILLER

(Under the Direction of Karen E. Watkins)

ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of empirical studies on the impact of Black spirituality on adult learning, and a gap in the literature on church leaders’ growth and epistemological development (Harrison, 2010; McKenna et al., 2007). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted their transformative learning experiences in a leadership development program and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. The study sought to understand how Black church leaders can grow and develop capacity for more effective leadership. Two questions guided the study: (1) How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation? (2) What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation? Using the Critical Incident Technique, this qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with nine graduates of the program.

The findings showed five major themes. First, participants’ incidents of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978) were triggered by two types of events: namely, epochal disorienting dilemmas and slow awakenings. Second, the process of perspective transformation occurred through integrated steps of critical examination of assumptions, critical self-reflection, and liberatory actions. Third, the participants viewed perspective transformation as the beginning of a continuous journey,

not a destination. Fourth, four core symbols of Black spirituality played a role in the framing of perspective transformation: namely, the sacred text, worship, piety, and authority of the pulpit voice. Fifth, participants experienced four progressive stages of faithing through new perspectives of God's love, self, others, and the faith community (Fowler,1981). There were two major conclusions from the study: (1) Black church lay leaders' experiences of perspective transformation were a combination of conscious and unconscious occurrences, and (2) the Black church lay leaders' consciousness of Black spirituality framed every aspect of their perspective transformation and created new understandings of freedom.

The outcomes of this study present Black spirituality as a significant influence on adult learning. The study highlights spirituality is not a homogenous construct and requires further delineation in future scholarship on adult education. This empirical study contributes to the scholarship on adult education, transformative learning, and religious education.

INDEX WORDS: Transformative learning, Black spirituality, critical incident technique, Black church, Black church leadership, perspective transformation, faith development theory, adult education, religious education

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DEDICATION

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to:

My parents, the late Canute Miller and Dulcie Louise Miller.

The heights by great men [women] reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight; but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upwards through the night.

(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow).

Daddy, your ingemination of this poem still rings in my ears. I wish you were here to see its fruit, but I know you are celebrating with me from the balconies of heaven.

Mom, your stance for my academic future changed the trajectory of my entire life. This accomplishment would not have been possible without your fight, your prayers, and your sacrifices. I am forever indebted to you. Thank you for being such an extraordinary rock in our family, an exemplary educator, and a dedicated community advocate. Most of all, I thank God you are here to celebrate the fruit of your labor with me.

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INTRODUCTION

> *Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.*
>
> —George Bernard Shaw

> *Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*
>
> —Romans 12:2 (New Living Translation)

The realities of life in the twenty-first century have changed the religious milieu in North America and church leadership is facing pressure to develop increased epistemological capacity to engage the growing complexity (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Byrd, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2008, 2015; Wong, 2011). The result is a growing chasm between traditional church leadership and twenty-first century congregations. Transformation is an inherent tenet of Christianity. Adherents of the faith are admonished in Romans 12:2 to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Mezirow (1978) defined this type of change as perspective transformation, describing a "structural change in the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (p.100). Ironically, church tradition and hegemonic structures have in some instances resisted the evolutionary movement of transformation, particularly among leaders. Thus, there is an opportunity for scholars and practitioners to explore how church leaders learn and experience perspective transformation. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship in adult education by providing insight on how Black church lay leaders make meaning and grow epistemologically during their transformative learning experiences.

The Religious Milieu in North America

This section discusses three major trends generating increased pressure for new approaches to church leadership and church leader development: (1) the decline in church attendance in mainline churches; (2) the rise of non-denominational churches; and (3) the declining interest in seminarian theological education. These changes not only place new demands for theological training outside of the walls of the seminary but require educative spaces that can generate church leaders' capacity to engage the complexities of society.

One formidable challenge of church leadership is the declining interest in church attendance and involvement (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Barna Group, 2008, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2008, 2014, 2015). Barna and Kinnaman (2014) reported 49% of Christians were actively churched (attended church regularly), 8% were minimally churched (attended church infrequently), 33% were dechurched (attended in the past but were on a hiatus), and 10% were purely unchurched (never attended church). A subsequent study conducted in 2017showed a further decline in church attendance (Barna Group, 2017). Based on that study, only 38% of Americans were active churchgoers (regular churchgoers and had attended church in the last 7 days), approximately 34% were dechurched (previously very, somewhat or minimally active churchgoers, but have not attended a church service in the past six months), and 43% were unchurched (never attended and have not attended a church service in 6 months).

Further, the declining attendance is mostly evident in mainline churches.[1] The number of Protestant Christians belonging to mainline churches dropped from 18.1% in 2007 to 14.7% in 2014, and U.S. Catholics declined from 23.9% to 20.8% during the same period (Pew Research

[1] Mainline churches are defined as historic Protestant denominational churches, typically including the American Baptist Churches in the USA; the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Church (Barna Group, 2009)

Center, 2015). Although the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) reported a slight increase in the number of churches in 2016, the same report showed a decline in memberships, baptisms, and average worship attendance (Baptist Press, 2017). Church membership declined by 0.51 percent and average weekly worship attendance declined by 6.75 percent (Baptist Press, 2017).

Despite the dismal prognosis of declining church membership in mainline churches, further research showed the dechurched Christians are not necessarily leaving the faith (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Barna Group, 2008,2009; Pew Research Center, 2008). They are exploring alternative ways of worship. Many adults now believe there are various biblically legitimate alternatives to participation in a conventional church (Barna Group, 2008). Adults are attending alternative places of worship, including house churches, ministry in the marketplace, and cyber worship spaces on social media. Some Christians are incorporating other spiritual approaches into their worship practices, claiming new understandings of God, self, and the world (Byrd, 2011).

In addition to exploring alternative ways of worship, Christians are deviating from traditionally held values and beliefs. With the growing diverse and pluralistic religious landscape, societal norms are changing. Certain traditional values of the church, such as family, married couples, and church services have been redefined. Further, with the influx of Asian immigrants since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Eastern religious practices have become more prevalent, some of which have been adapted into Christian practices (Premawardhana, 2006). Such adaptations challenge traditional doctrine and praxis. Rather than engaging the complexity, traditional church leaders categorize these trends as “worldly” and vehemently strive to keep them out of the church (Byrd, 2011).

Further, some traditional churches have made institutional changes, by bridging traditional worship practices with contemporary trends. The most common change is the addition of a "contemporary service" on Sunday mornings. The definition of "contemporary service" is vague, but typically refers to a freer and more expressive worship style, replacing hymns with present-day gospel songs, with accompanying musical instruments such as drums and guitars. Other innovations include casual attire, mid-week home Bible studies, and small group activities. Worship is no longer confined to Sunday morning and worship gatherings occur at many different times between Friday and Sunday evening. The churches have made institutional changes to avert the decline without inquiring or understanding the interests of those they seek to attract (Byrd, 2011). The changes seem geared toward preserving the existing institutional structure and therefore, have been unsuccessful in averting the decline in attendance (Byrd, 2011).

Successful change arose outside of the walls of the mainline church. The upsurge of the nondenominational church in the last two decades is the most prolific alternative to the traditional or mainline church. The Hartford Institute of Religious Research (2010) reported nondenominational churches were the fastest-growing Protestant churches in America and the second largest Protestant group, following the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). There are several descriptors for these types of churches: inter-denominational, nondenominational, charismatic, unaffiliated, or independent. These terms are self-identifiers with no clear distinctions between them (Thumma, 1999). The term nondenominational is a misnomer since every faith community has its roots in a major denomination's doctrine and praxis. The nondenominational church typically integrates alternative worship styles and faith tenets across denominations, often at the preference of the founding leader. Interdenominational is a more

befitting descriptor. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will use the term interdenominational to describe this type of church.

Despite the nebulous descriptors and often fluid theological doctrines, the interdenominational church is growing rapidly and attracting Christians from mainline churches. The Pew Research Center (2015) reported a dramatic decline in the number of Protestant Christians who identified with a mainline denomination, showing a decline from 18% in 2007 to 15% in 2015. The interdenominational category showed the most significant increase with 6.2% of all adults (and 13% of Protestants) identifying with interdenominational churches, up from 4.5% of all adults (and 9% of all Protestants) in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2015). The statistics show a continuous move toward a more fluid theology and worship style.

In conjunction with the growth of the interdenominational churches, there is a decline in seminary attendance. While there are several contributing factors to the decline, the growth of the interdenominational church has played a role. Although some major seminaries are adapting a more ecumenical approach, most seminaries are still affiliated with a mainline church. The education is geared toward the praxis and doctrine of the sponsoring denomination and therefore, would be, in part, unsuited to the interdenominational context. Further, the nondenominational churches are frowned upon as inferior and non grata.

Besides the curriculum, seminary training is cost-prohibitive for the average interdenominational church leader, and even more so for the support staff. The study conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2014), reported that only 21% of independent churches had a congregation of 150 to 349 members, 38% had 100 to 149, and 12% over 350 members. The 2015 Faith Communities Today (FACT) national survey of congregations showed more than half of American congregations have less than 100 people in attendance for their

Sunday service (Roozen, 2016). The survey indicated only a limited number of interdenominational churches are mega-churches. Most churches have a small membership. In a smaller church, there will be a smaller budget and paying for the theological training of leaders will not be a viable option. Therefore, theological training in interdenominational churches is mostly internal.

The emerging training gap does not only pertain to systematic theology and biblical doctrine. Religious trends indicate there is a growing need for church leaders' growth and development. The changing religious milieu places pressure on church leaders to make adaptive changes. Church leaders need more than a revision of seminary curricula or more instrumental learning to engage the complexities of congregational leadership (Gibbs, 2000; Premawardhana, 2006; Schaller, 1994; Wong, 2011). Progress in church leadership can only evolve from the changed mindsets of church leaders. However, church leaders are entrenched in religious convictions and commitments. Is there a context in which church leaders can grow and develop the capacity to question embedded and previously unquestioned assumptions and develop a broader perspective for twenty-first-century leadership? The transformative learning experiences of church leaders is an understudied phenomenon in adult education scholarship. This qualitative study explored the transformative learning experiences of a group of Black church lay leaders in a leadership development program, to understand how they constructed meaning during the transformation process and the possible role of Black spirituality and faith in their meaning-making.

Context of Study: The Pedagogical Setting

The context of this study was a one-year church leadership development program that began in 2013 in response to the growing need for formal theological education in the

interdenominational sector. A critical pedagogical approach was implemented to foster transformational learning. The goal was to create an educative space that provided theological knowledge and simultaneously challenged and fostered examination of underlying epistemology.

Some adult education scholars (Hoggan, 2015; Parker, 1993) advocate merging instrumental and transformational learning is doomed to fail. Hoggan (2015) contended training cannot foster transformation. Parker (1993) claimed similar experiments failed because those spearheading the change attempted to change the form of teaching while leaving the content intact. A theological context is even more prone to this malady because the educator is inclined to have strong commitments to a particular truth claim. To invite students into actively knowing through critical inspection would be to risk distortion of the professed truth claim. Hence, theological education can become instrumental learning. Renowned educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire (1970/2000) referred to this type of education as the "banking" system; one in which students are receptacles for information dictated by teachers. On the other hand, in a transformational learning space, the teacher not only provides information but opens the door for new insight; not only speaks but listens, not only supplies answers but asks questions, not only teaches but learns (Parker, 1993). To study in such an environment is "to experience the power of a learning space" (Parker, 1993, p. 71). Students have the freedom to become active knowers as their assumptions are challenged and they fearlessly question the previously unquestioned perspectives. It is in this atmosphere that developmental growth can occur. "Development means successively asking broader and deeper questions of the relationship between oneself and the world" (Daloz, 1986, p. 236).

In a quest toward this type of progressive development, the curriculum in the leadership program was intentionally designed to provide a sufficiently robust environment that challenged

students' embedded assumptions and home theology. Using a critical theological approach, students were introduced to various methods of historical criticism (such as source criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, and form criticism). The Old Testament was presented as a theological witness of Israel's relationship with God, and the aim was to create an awareness that any reading of the Old Testament texts must consider the social contexts of both the community that produced the texts and the community reading them (Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, & Petersen, 2011). Similarly, the New Testament writings were introduced as Hellenistic literature, documents of a faith community written to address the needs of that community (Efird, 1980). Such renderings challenge denominational dogma and simple regurgitations of what was previously thought and taught; thereby evoking tension between religion studied and religion practiced (Medine, Penner, & Lehman, 2015). The overall pedagogical structure was based on Mezirow's (1978, 2000) transformative learning theory and guided by Cranton's (2002) seven steps to set up a learning environment for transformation. Since perspective transformation was the goal, every strategy employed was designed to provide "an ever-changing balance of challenge, support, and learner empowerment" (Cranton, 2002, p. 71).

The Pedagogical Structure

The curriculum included five courses, eight to nine weeks in length. The courses were: An Interpretation of the Old Testament; An Interpretation of the New Testament; Introduction to Sermon Preparation and Delivery; Church History; and Biblical Leadership. The first two courses invited students to step away from their sacred text, and to examine the Bible as a collection of stories by multiple authors, describing God's relationship with humans, beginning with Adam and Eve. The table below gives a summation of how the program structure aligned with Cranton's (2002) guide for transformative pedagogy.

Table 1.1

Pedagogical Structures

Pedagogical Guide*	**Related Course**	**Transformative Activity**
Activate Dilemma	· Interpretation of Old Testament · Interpretation of New Testament · Church History	· Challenge embedded home theology. · Liberty to question sacred text. · Challenge current spirituality · Challenge by the patriarchs' journey
Articulate Assumptions Critically Self-Reflect	· Interpretation of the Old Testament · Interpretation of the New Testament · Church History · Biblical Leadership	· Weekly journals · Group Dialogue · Critical Friend
Open to Alternatives	· Interpretation of Old Testament · Interpretation of New Testament · Biblical Leadership · Introduction to Preaching	· Introduction of "different" to replace right or wrong. · Consider alternative interpretations/ beliefs/ worship styles. · Foster self-authorship of values & beliefs.
Engage in Discourse Revise Assumptions Act on Revisions	· All courses · Intensified in Biblical Leadership	· Group dialogue in and outside of the classroom · Student-led discussions · Journaling · Self-reflection in and on action · Action plans for accountability and sustainability

Note. *Adapted from Cranton (2002)

The pedagogical structure was intentionally designed to create a disorienting dilemma between the person's previously held assumptions or home theology and the current emerging understanding of the literature (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1978). Each successive course was a gradual progression of Cranton's (2002) steps for transformation. The first two courses (Interpretation of the Old Testament and Interpretation of the New Testament) were a hybrid of

instrumental learning and critical reflection. The classroom format included lectures, individual presentations, group discussions. and journaling. Students were encouraged to challenge and question previously unquestioned assumptions (Cranton, 2002). The third course, Sermon Preparation and Delivery, presented students with the opportunity to apply their new paradigms and critical thinking skills to the scriptures and to bolster confidence in developing their own theological voice. The fourth course, Church History, gave an introductory knowledge of the development of western Christian history in the early centuries of the Christian tradition. With visual aids and documentaries, students gained exposure to the martyrs and early church fathers of the faith. The learning was enhanced through reflections, journaling and group dialogue.

The final course was Biblical Leadership. This course adapted a dialogical rather than a didactic approach and aimed to focus on the person of the student/ leader. Exercises included assessment from a critical friend, self-examination and reflection, and weekly journaling. Class meetings had a more fluid structure, with opportunities for students to reflect on the assigned reading, share from their experiences, and learn from each other. The classroom layout was changed weekly and students were assigned different seats each week. Typically, students found the rearrangement disconcerting, particularly those who sat in the same seats for most of the year. However, the exercise was useful to help students become comfortable with change and differentness.

Gestalt art was utilized to introduce the concept of differences in perspectives. The concept of Gestalt art has its roots in Gestalt psychology or Gestaltism (from the German word meaning shape or form). This theory is about perception and proposes that when the human mind forms percepts (gestalts), it makes associations and groups smaller parts to create a reality of its own. Therefore the whole takes on a reality independent of and greater than its parts. Exercises

in Gestalt art helped increase students' awareness of their cognitive embeddedness and to become more open to differences in perceptions and worldviews.

One of the main practices introduced to students was reflection in action and reflection on action (Schon, 1984). Students purposefully examined and reflected on their actions, assumptions, and leadership practices (Cranton, 2002; Drago-Severson, 2009). Students were encouraged to practice noticing their feelings and actions during specific interactions. Each week students journaled on key experiences during the week. They used journaling to self- reflect, self- evaluate, and reframe. This critical reflective practice encouraged students to examine taken-for-granted values and paradigms and challenge their assumptions.

In addition to weekly journaling, students had to complete a critical friend assignment which required feedback on their leadership presence from three individuals: Someone to whom they reported in the past or present; a direct report to them; and a peer. Students had to share their feedback with the class, discuss the congruences, and what action they would take, if any. A critical friend is a trusted voice, who is supportive, but provides candid and honest feedback on the learner's performance or area of focus and speaks constructively about strengths and weaknesses (Costa & Kallick, 1993). The critical friend exercise expands the learner's capacity for self-examination and openness to constructive criticism from others (Costa & Kallick, 1993).

The overall format of Biblical Leadership was designed to foster students' introspection and freedom of expression. The locus of authority in the learning space was progressively shifted to the students, challenging and supporting critical thinking and self- expression. In this course, the final four stages of Cranton's (2002) stages are executed. Students were challenged to be open to the viewpoints of others, engage in authentic discourse, revise their assumptions and perspectives, and act on the revised perspectives (Cranton, 2002).

The core principle of the pedagogical design of the program was to create and maintain a safe holding environment (Kegan, 1994) that provided support for participants to share openly. It was an educative space that invited collective "constructive discourse" (Mezirow, 2000), dialogue without judgment, a circle of trust in which truth could be told (Palmer, 2009), and "a fertile, nurturing soil" for adult growth and capacity building (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 276). The space had to be a well-anchored bridge, with an ever-present awareness of where learners were in navigating the bridge and providing support for them to walk safely across (Kegan, 2009).

The above section provided key information on the leadership program. The goal of the section was to provide background information on the curriculum and the pedagogical structure that was intentionally designed to foster perspective transformation. The section provided a detailed description of the courses and exercises to which the interviewees will refer.

The Cultural Context

"The who, what, when, where, why, and how of learning may be only understood as situated in a specific cultural context" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). As such, the cultural context of students entering this pedagogical space is an important consideration in the study. The ethnicity of the students is predominantly African American and Afro Caribbean. The school is in partnership with certain feeder churches that incorporate the program in their leadership training. Consequently, the demographic of the students represents the feeder churches. This section will give a synopsis of the Black church culture in which the students have their spiritual roots.

Overall, Black spirituality is a way of life from birth to death (Appiah, 2005). Therefore, church attendance is an accepted way of life for those steeped in Black church culture and is disproportionately higher among African Americans than White Protestant Americans (Wiggins,

2005). A comparative table prepared by the Pew Research Center (2015) reported only a slight decline in membership in historically Black churches between 2007 and 2014. Black Methodist churches showed a decline from 0.6 percent to 0.5 percent, Black Baptist churches showed a slight decrease from 4.4 in 2007 to 4.0 in 2014, and Pentecostal historical Black protestant churches increased from 0.9 to1.0. The high regard for church attendance and involvement is rooted in the socio-cultural traditions of Black spirituality (Wiggins, 2005).

This section identified relevant components of Black church culture. The deep historical values and practice of spirituality are significant considerations in an examination of the epistemology and ontology of Black lay leaders. The cultural and spiritual context of students affects not only what they know, but how they make meaning. This study examined the role of the Black church socio-cultural dynamics as participants interpreted their learning experience in a critically engaging program.

The Religious Context

In this section, I discuss the religious institutionalization of the participants of this study, which they term "Black Pentecostalism" throughout their narratives. All the participants in this study were affiliated with interdenominational churches with roots in the historically Black Pentecostal movement. Below, I give a brief history of Black Pentecostalism and the relevant spin-off movements.

There are still debates about who began the Pentecostal movement, the white Charles Fox Parham, who centered his doctrine on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues (glossolalia), or the black William Seymour, the leader of the 1906 Azusa Street revival, to which most Pentecostal movements trace their roots (Alexander & Yong, 2011). Nonetheless, African Americans have been at the helm of the Pentecostal movement,

forging the worship, music, and shaping the theological landscape. The Holiness movement of the nineteenth century, emphasizing piety and stoical living, eventually became intertwined with the Pentecostal movement. Hence churches called the Pentecostal Holiness church emerged and most Holiness churches joined the Pentecostal movement (Alexander & Yong, 2011). There is no one type of modern-day Black Pentecostal church, but there are numerous churches with links to the Azusa Street revival. Such denominations include Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), and Charismatic churches (1960s).

Participants in this study identified having their roots in either Black Pentecostal Holiness churches or the Church of God, headquartered in Tennessee. The latter denomination is a large organization spanning the Caribbean and across the world. The most recent update on the website claims 7 million members in 178 nations (ChurchofGod.org., 2019). This denomination began in 1886, when a former Baptist, Richard Greene, broke away from the Baptist movement to form the Christian Union. After twenty-one years, they adopted the name Church of God. Ten years later, revival broke out and people were baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Church of God then began to follow the doctrine of sanctification, and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, following the Holiness movement.

There has been some relaxation of the standards of piety in the neo-Pentecostal churches, but very little has changed in worship styles or theology (Alexander & Yong, 2011). Although the interdenominational churches to which the participants are affiliated have broken ties with their denominational associations, Pentecostal spiritualism still prevails. All participants had their theological upbringing in churches with roots in Black Pentecostal and Holiness doctrines and, although their current churches are interdenominational, their theology and praxis are modern versions of Pentecostalism.

In this section, I provided a brief synopsis of the religious context of the participants, described as Black Pentecostalism or Black church. Their current churches have their roots in Pentecostal spirituality, which includes an emphasis on baptism in the Holy Spirit, the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, demonstrative worship, and a strong adherence to denominational rules for pious living.

Statement of the Problem

Church leadership in the twenty-first century is facing increasing pressure for higher levels of training and epistemological capacities. Seminaries have proven inadequate to prepare pastoral leaders for the real world of pastoral demands (Wong, 2011). In addition to unprepared seminary-trained leaders, there are church leaders, particularly in the growing interdenominational churches, who have no formal theological training. The problem is more pronounced among church lay leaders, who are subordinates to a senior pastor, have responsibilities of pastoral leadership, and have little or no theological training. Further, the rapidly changing religious landscape demands critical theological engagement rather than merely parroting traditional denominational dogma. Church leaders need an educative space that challenges and nurtures their epistemological growth.

Adult education and religious education communities are challenged to explore new ways to enhance the capacity of church leaders within and outside of seminaries. There is much more to learn about how church leaders learn and develop capacity. What and where is the "nurturing context in and out of which [a church leader] grows?" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57). How do church leaders construct meaning when assumptions are challenged? How do they differentiate perspectives and reintegrate changed perspectives into their lives and faith? How do they construct meaning while facing adaptive challenges? These are some of the questions that, if

explored, could provide vital information in adult learning. My study aimed to explore and better understand the transformative learning experiences of a group of Black church lay leaders and to advance our understanding of the role of Black spirituality in adult learning.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

Significance of the Study

There is a pressing need for robust educative spaces that can develop pastoral leaders for leadership in the twenty-first century. Equally concerning is the paucity of literature on pastoral leader development (McKenna, Yost, & Boyd, 2007; Wong, 2011). A search conducted by McKenna, Yost, and Boyd (2007) found no empirical studies on pastoral leadership development. However, the search yielded a significant amount of literature on pastoral effectiveness and leadership and congregational learning (Campbell, 2000; Fleischer 2006; Hawkins, 1997; Price, 2004).

Similarly, there was a strong representation in the literature on educative spaces in higher education, and a deficit of studies in non-formal education settings (Taylor, 2007). Dirkx (1998) confirmed studying the educative spaces for transformation is not an exhausted subject matter: "The conscious presence in learning space for transformation is a gift … how we consciously and willfully attend to its presence is perhaps the greatest challenge we face as educators and

learners" (p. 11). The implications on the student experience in the learning space have not been sufficiently researched (Taylor, 2007).

Further, pastoral leader development and learning experiences have not received attention in the scholarship (McKenna et al., 2007; Wong, 2011). Scholars such as Sweet (2003) and Schweitzer (2000) acknowledge that church leadership is facing challenges of a new religious landscape. Wong (2011) and Premawardhana (2006) confirm seminaries have not prepared church leaders for the realities of twenty-first-century congregations. Practitioners and scholars criticized seminaries for failing to prepare graduates for the challenges and complexities of twenty-first-century pastoral practices (McKenna et al., 2007; Wong, 2011).

The adult learning literature has not given attention to the preparation of pastoral leaders for transformation or how their spirituality may or may not affect their transformative learning experience. I was unable to find any empirical studies on pastoral or church leader transformation. The existing literature focuses on spirituality or leadership. To facilitate the development process of church leaders, it is important to explore how they learn and grow, and how they construct meaning during their transformative learning experiences. There are no empirical studies in the adult education literature seeking to enact transformation in church leaders or church lay leaders or to explore participants' experiences of transformation.
The problem is exacerbated by the absence of literature on Black church leaders' growth and development.

This study is significant to the scholarship in Learning, Leadership and Organization Development and its interconnectedness with spirituality. The role of the cultural, social, and historical contexts in shaping transformative learning has not been sufficiently researched in the adult education scholarship (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). Besides, research studies on the

intersection of Black spirituality and adult development are sparse. Therefore, my study explored how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction to the study, an overview of the religious milieu in North America relevant to the study, background information about the cultural, pedagogical and religious setting of the study, a description of the problem statement, the purpose and research questions, and the significance of the problem. In chapter two, I discuss the body of literature relevant to the study, including spirituality and adult education, Black Spirituality, the theoretical framework, and related empirical studies. Chapter three presents an in-depth description of the qualitative research methodology and methods used in the study, including design of the study, philosophical constructs, research design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and trustworthiness, and the researcher subjectivity statement. In chapter four, I give a biographical description of the participants followed by a narration of their critical incidents of perspective transformation. In chapter five, I discuss the research findings from the critical incidents relative to the two research questions, using themes and subthemes. Finally, chapter six brings the findings in conversation with current literature and discusses implications for future scholarship and the practice of transformative learning.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> *Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end.* (hooks, 1994, p. 61)

Scholars (Schweitzer, 2004; Smith, 2006; Sweet, 2000, 2003) have extensively addressed the phenomenon of the changing religious milieu and its implications for the postmodern church. Similarly, there is a wide range of studies on congregational learning and pastoral leadership outcomes in the religious education literature (Everist, 2002; Fleischer, 2006; Herrington, Bonem, & Furr, 2000; Mercer, 2006). However, there are few studies on church leaders' development (Harrison, 2010; McKenna et al., 2007). "While much work has been done in understanding the developmental journey of leaders in secular organizations, there is limited empirical research investigating the key experiences in the pastoral leader's journey" (McKenna et al., 2007, p. 179).

Further, while there is a growing interest in spirituality in the practice of adult education and adult development scholarship (Astin, 2004; Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Davis, 2003; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Fenwick & English, 2004; Fleming & Courtenay, 2006; Tisdell, 1999, 2007, 2008; Tisdale & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2001, 2002, 2006; Zinn, 1997), there is a paucity of empirical studies on Black spirituality in adult education (Harrison, 2010; Taylor, 1998). The most relevant studies are in African American womanist scholarship (Cannon, 1995; Dillard, 2006; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, D. I., & Tyson, 2000; Mattis, 2002), The poor representation of Black spirituality in the adult education literature is a critical gap in the adult learning literature.

To identify literature on the subject, I conducted searches for related theoretical and empirical studies utilizing Google Scholar and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). I searched for the following key terms: spirituality and adult education; Black spirituality; Black spirituality and adult education; spirituality and higher education; Black church and adult education; African American spirituality and adult education; and African American education and spirituality. I searched ProQuest Dissertations and Theses for dissertations on spirituality and adult education, African American spirituality, and Black spirituality and adult education. Sometimes searching the shelves of the library and working with a senior librarian can lead to otherwise hidden resources. Therefore, I visited the library at the University of Georgia and Pitts Library, Emory University, consulted with the senior research librarians, and searched the shelves for books on the Black church and adult education and Black church leadership development. The results confirmed the sparsity of conceptual and empirical literature on Black spirituality in adult learning. Further, there were no empirical studies on Black church leader development.

This study contributes to the empirical and theoretical scholarship in adult education. It provides an empirical study on Black church leader development and engages the spiritual dimension of transformative learning, bringing the mythos and culture of Black spirituality in conversation with adult development theories. Adult development scholarship acknowledges adult growth involves a process of personal meaning-making and occurs through an ongoing process of reflection and reconstruction of the meaning of experiences (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Taylor, 1998, 2008). However, such approaches understand transformation as a rational and conceptual process, privileging the cognitive-development and neglecting the critical elements of the emotional and spiritual

dimensions of transformation (Dirkx, 1997; Taylor, 1998). The integration of Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory strengthens the theoretical framework and illumines the granularity of the distinction between the cognitive and spiritual dimensions of meaning-making.

The purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. The following questions guided the study:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

Since the study focused on the transformative learning experiences of Black church leaders of African American and African Caribbean descent, this chapter begins with an exposition of the historical and cultural context of Black spirituality. Following, is a review of major themes on spirituality in adult education literature, spirituality and culture in the literature, and related empirical studies on spirituality. Finally, using the theoretical framework as a guide, the chapter details the adult learning theories that comprise the theoretical framework of the study and related empirical studies informing the framework.

Black Church Historical Context

In this section, I lean heavily on the seminal works of Albert J. Raboteau (1980) *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*; and E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln (1974), *The Negro Church in America. The Black church since Frazier;* C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya (1990), *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* and the recent work of Noel Leo Erskine (2014), *Plantation Church* to discuss the historical context of Black spirituality.

The Black church has its roots in the Atlantic slave trade in which millions of Africans were packed like human cargo and brought to the Caribbean and American colonies to work in mines, plantations, and households. The enslavement of Africans shattered the African system of kinship and organized social life (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). Families were torn apart and family members were always at risk of being sold to other plantation owners. However, African folklore, music, language, and religion remained, transplanted into the new environment. African religion proved to be one of the most resilient elements of the slave's culture. African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief have been retained and reinterpreted in the diaspora (Raboteau, 1980). Slaves brought to the Americas were seized from many different nations, languages and tribal groups. Records from slave ships show a large percentage of slaves came from West Africa and the Congo-Angola region to the Americas. This wide geographical expanse included societies and cultures such as the Mandinke, Yoruba, Ibo and Bakongo (Raboteau, 1980). Despite the differences in religious practices among the groups, there was enough similarity to be blended and assimilated to form a common religious heritage in the new world. The African slaves' respect for spiritual power resulted in openness to syncretism with other religious traditions.

Many African religions believed in a Supreme Creator of the world or a High God. This God was not involved in human affairs, but such activities were left to the ancestor spirits and the lesser gods. These gods were numerous and received the most attention. Since the gods could do good or evil, people were careful to attend to their relations with them through praise, sacrifice, and obedience. The religions included priests to preside over worship and rituals. Priests were expected to be skilled diviners and herbalists. Devotees were initiated into the cult after lengthy training. Worshippers experienced ecstatic trances, described as "spirit

possession," during which they danced in the spirit of the god and became the god's mouthpiece (Erskine, 2014; Raboteau, 1980). Drumming, dancing, and singing played an integral role in worship rituals. The rhythms of the drums invoked the gods to manifest themselves.

African religious practices have permeated Afro-Americans' religion not only in worship practices, but in ancestor worship, magical practices, and the cult of the gods. Hence, there is the veneration of ghosts of ancestors in the Convince cult in Jamaica and in Brazil the Macumba cult devotees become possessed by *prestos velhos*, the spirit of the black ancestors (Raboteau, 1980). There are special rites performed during funerals, for a proper complete burial of the loved one. In death, one returned to be received by the ancestors. If properly honored, the dead would appear to the leader of the family, sometimes in a dream, to give instructions. In Jamaica, burial included nine nights of rituals. If the burial rites were not handled properly, the "duppy" or ghost of the dead person, may return and cause misfortune (Erskine,2014).

Although such worship practices existed among the slaves, plantation owners did not allow them to practice their religion (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Raboteau, 1980; Woodson, 1921). The Plantation owners were fearful of slave revolts and therefore outlawed such practices. Similarly, there was opposition to teaching slaves the Bible, or to read and write. Nonetheless, slave masters became convinced Christianity made the slaves more passive (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). Missionaries convinced slave owners the slaves would learn to serve out of Christian love and duty (Raboteau, 1980). The Bible was taught selectively, avoiding certain texts suggesting freedom (Raboteau, 1980).

Despite these limitations, slaves brought their cultural past to their interpretation of Christianity and their new faith represented hope and liberation. They mixed Christianity with the worship of ancestors and the spirit they encountered in their world (Erskine, 2014). They

adapted Christianity to their social and psychological needs (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974). Hence, the slaves placed more faith in their interpretation of Christianity than the teaching of the missionaries (Erskine, 2014).

The Great Awakening marked the “dawning of the new day” in the conversion of slaves to Christianity (Erskine, 2014; Raboteau, 1980; Woodson, 1921). As the revival swept the nation, Blacks were among those in the crowds. Blacks joined the Presbyterian, the Separate Baptist, and Methodist groups. In 1786, Methodists recorded 1,890 black members out of 18,791 total members. By 1797, the numbers had increased to 12,215, almost a quarter of the membership (Raboteau, 1980, p. 131). In 1793, the Baptists reported the black Baptists' membership was about a quarter of the total membership, with 18,000 to19,000 Black members (Raboteau, 1980, p. 131). Although these figures are believed to be exaggerated, they indicate the rapid growth of black membership.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) identify seven major historic Black denominations that comprised the Black church: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church; the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). In addition, Blacks were members of predominantly white churches, such as the United Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Congregational churches. Independent African Baptist churches began to emerge in the late 1700s. In 1783, an African American, George Liele, arrived in Kingston, Jamaica, from Savannah, Georgia, and founded the first Baptist church, named the Ethiopia Baptist Church.

Whether slave or free, Blacks brought their African worship to Christianity. Slaves continued to dance in the emotionally charged worship. “Of dancing and music, the negroes are passionately fond,” wrote Sir. Charles Lyell in 1845 (Raboteau, 1980, p. 66). They sang their own songs of hope known as “Negro Spirituals.” There were different types of spirituals, ranging from anthems, jubilees, and shouts. Clapping hands, dancing, and crying aloud were customary. The religious dance called “ring shout” or “running sperichils” was widespread (Frazier & Lincoln, 1974; Raboteau, 1980). The worshippers formed a ring and danced and clapped their hands. In the “shout,” the song is danced with the entire body. It is believed to be West African in origin and symbolizes “spirit possession.” Although they danced under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they danced in ways their African heritage knew and understood.

Black Church Community

There are two trends in the modern study of African American religions regarding African cultural continuity in African American cultures. These are the Africanist and Creolist schools, rooted in the debate between anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits and sociologist E. Franklin Frazer. Herskovits (1943,1990) defended the continuum of African cultural heritage in African American culture, called Africanism. Conversely, Frazier (1942) contended the experiences of slavery deprived Africans of their culture, advocating social constructionist approaches, called Creolism. Historical writers Erskine (2014) and Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) echo the sentiment that threads of African culture are still present in the Black church today. Black church or African American church is synonymous with Black spirituality. It is not a building. “It is a culture and a community with a language and personality of its own” (Appiah, 2005, p. v). Black church hinges on two important pillars: the leader and the worship (Wimbush, 2000). The church leader had, and still has, a significant role in the church community. In

African religions, the spiritual leader helped to mediate and channel God's direction to the community and to connect to the ancestors. The king of the tribe was central to solving community problems. In the formative years of the Black church, the pastor assumed a similar practice – leading worship and being the person to provide leadership and direction (Wimbush, 2000).

Similarly, today the Black church leader has a strong authoritative role in the faith community. The pastor plays a dominant role as the locus of authority for biblical knowledge and the sage who hears from God on behalf of the people. This is even more pronounced in the interdenominational context in which the pastor is the founder and progenitor of the church doctrine and praxis. Like the African priest, the lives of the community are tied to the leader and there is a sense of connection to God through the community. In a study conducted by Cohall and Cooper (2010), Black Baptist pastors perceived themselves as playing more of a social and political role in their communities than White pastors. "The role of the Baptist pastor has evolved well beyond preaching and counseling the flock- to becoming a key leader as a political strategist, social activist, economic advisor, and educator" (p. 27). Further, followers are expected to submit to the dictates of the church leaders because they hear from God. In the traditional "Black church" ethic, many lay people take little agency over their spiritual lives (Appiah, 2005). There is a tacit understanding of authoritarianism and loss of voice as worshippers may not critically question interpretations, methodologies, ideologies, and/or doctrine. Appiah (2005) described the existing contexts as the "devoicing" and "internalized devoicing" in the hegemonic relationships in the Black church.

One of those socio-religious constructs is the role of women in the Black church. Although women form the core of the Black church, men dominate the senior leadership roles

(Wiggins, 2005). There is a perpetuation of oppression, discrimination, and inequality in the Black church leadership. African American males dominate leadership roles in the Black church, and they enforce their dominance in disciplines and actions to control their status and determine women's roles (Wiggins, 2005).

Besides the leadership roles, worship is still a distinguishing characteristic of the Black church in both North America and the Caribbean (Erskine, 2014; Herskovits, 1941/1990). In traditional Black churches, variations of the "shout" are still actively practiced in the Black church. Ecstatic worship symbolizes the presence and power of the Holy Spirit among the worshippers. Wiggins (2005) identified five key dimensions of congregational life in the Black church as prayer, praise, personal associations, preaching, and pastoral leadership.

In this section, I discussed the historical background of the Black church and the main tenets of the Black church spirituality, relevant to the study. Expressive worship, a keen awareness of the spiritual environment, coupled with a strong sense of community with hegemonic leadership structures are signature characteristics of the Black church. Besides, Appiah (2005) described the "devoicing" and "internalized devoicing" in the hegemonic relationships in the Black church. African American males dominate leadership positions in the Black church, and they enforce their dominance to control their status and to define women's roles (Wiggins, 2005). Black church spirituality is more than an edifice; it is a way of thinking, being, and acting. It is a culture and a community with a language and tradition of its own (Appiah, 2005; Erskine, 2014). The Black church culture shapes identity, from birth to death (Appiah, 2005).

Black Spirituality in Adult Education Literature

A review of the literature on Black spirituality in adult education indicates an evolution of epistemological and cultural understandings is occurring in research and education (Dillard et al., 2000). Spirituality is a core element of Black culture and disenfranchised demographics (Hodge & Williams, 2002). Black spirituality and the Black church are interwoven and an integral part of the African diaspora community. Black spirituality had its beginnings on the continent of Africa and "forged in the fiery furnace of slavery" (Hayes, 2012) and engrained in the core of Black people (Dillard et al., 2000). The African church tradition "embraced the spirit in all things and taught that one could meet spirit under a tree, in the fields, at the market as well in a church under a cross" (Erskine, 2014, p.1). It allows them in the face of oppression and brutality to "keep on keeping on" because the "wonderworking God" is in their midst (Hayes, 2012). Daphne C. Wiggins (2005), in her work on *Righteous Content: Black women's perspectives of church and faith*, explained spirituality and church attendance were instilled in children. "We always went to church" (p.15).

One Black academician penned her experience of spirituality in her work. Cynthia Dillard (2006; Dillard et al., 2000), an African American professor and researcher in academia, presented spirituality as a qualitative research paradigm that arises from a framework of Black feminist epistemology. She concurred that defining spirituality is "fraught with difficulty" (Dillard, 2006, p. 67) because "it defies definition: it is all that is" (p. 68). For Dillard (2006) spirituality involves consciousness; that is, choosing to be "in relationship with the divine power of all things." As a spiritual practice, it is engaging as a researcher or teacher in continuous reflection and examining the heart to determine the true purpose for one's work. Research and teaching are not just something you do, but a way of engaging with others and being in the

world. In her co-authored work, Dillard addressed the question on what spirituality in education is:

> Spirituality in education is education with purpose, education that is liberatory work, education that is emancipation…spirituality in education is education that connects, education that is about building relationships between and across teachers and students, males and females, others and ourselves. (Dillard et al., 2000, p. 447)

Dillard et al. (2000) emphasized the recurring theme in the literature regarding spirituality in adult education: Spirituality in adult education connects and builds relationships with self and others. Dillard et al. (2000) observed, although spirituality can connect and build relationships in the learning environment, the voice of spirituality has been muted within academia. Spiritually oriented academicians perceive an implicit message to leave their spirituality outside of the classroom doors.

Dillard et al. (2000) probably explained the paucity of literature on Black spirituality in adult education. The problem may be rooted in the silencing of the spiritual voice by privileging the academic voice (Dillard, 2006; Dillard et al., 2000). Dillard et al., (2000) posed three poignant questions relative to spirituality and adult education: (1) What does "being a spiritual people" mean for the way African American educators "educate?" (2) What does "being a spiritual people" mean relative to how African American researchers research? (3) How does a spiritually centered paradigm influence the learning of both students and teachers in the context of the classroom? Dillard (2006; Dillard et al., 2000) argued for a spiritual pedagogy that intersects with education and epistemology that draws on spiritual tradition and liberates African American researchers from the traditions of educational research. Then educators could embrace

what it means to be spiritual Black women, academicians, and researchers, without leaving any part of themselves invisible to be accepted in the academy (Dillard et al., 2000).

Section Summary

In this section, I discussed the historical and social context of Black spirituality. Also observed, was the deficit in the literature regarding Black spirituality in adult education. There were studies in the literature on race and adult education from the perspective of Black female faculty in higher education (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Dillard et al., 2000; Ray, 2007). However, there were few studies on the Black cultural context in transformative learning (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008) or in non-formal educational settings (Taylor, 2008). In the world of adult education, "many variables drive the teaching and learning transaction" (Johnson-Bailey, 2002). The cultural context of Black spirituality is an important variable for consideration in the exploration of the transformative learning incidents of Black church lay leaders.

Perspectives on Spirituality in Adult Education Literature

In this section, I discuss perspectives on spirituality in the adult education literature relevant to my research. The discussion focuses on emergent literature on spirituality in adult education, perspectives on spirituality and culture in adult learning, and empirical studies on spirituality in adult learning that inform the research.

Spirituality is an important facet of human experience (Tisdell &Tolliver, 2003); yet, up to recently, spirituality had been given limited attention in adult learning literature, outside of religious education studies (Merriam, 2008; Tisdell, 2000). Merriam (2008) explained, for most of the twentieth-century adult learning was understood primarily as a cognitive process, focusing on information processing. In the twenty-first-century adult learning is regarded as multi-

dimensional, involving the body, emotions, spirit, and mind. Consequently, spirituality is gaining attention as an integral part of adult learning. Recent scholarship has emerged dealing with the role of spirituality in education broadly (Buzzanell, 2009; Dirkx, 1997; English, 2001; English & Gillen, 2000; Palmer, 1993, 1998; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2000, 2001, 2008; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Empirical studies have focused on spirituality and students in higher education (Astin, 2004; Parks, 2000; Richards, 2019; Roberts, 2009; Salinas, Allen, McEwan, King, & Bolden, 2018; Weinsky, 2006), and spirituality and educators in higher education (Bennet, 2003; Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Tolliver &Tisdell, 2006).

With the growing body of literature on spirituality and education, scholars acknowledge spirituality is an integral part of adult education (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Dillard, 2006; Dillard et al., 2000; Dirkx, 1997; English & Gillen, 2000; Fenwick & English, 2004; Tisdell, 1999, 2007, 2008; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2001, 2002, 2006). However, the definition of spirituality covers a broad spectrum in the adult education literature (Fenwick & English, 2004). Tisdell (2000), a prolific voice on spirituality and adult education, succinctly distinguished the terms religion and spirituality:

> For many of us our adult spirituality is clearly informed by how we were socialized both religiously and culturally. Yet spirituality is not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose. (p. 309)

There is a general trend in the adult education literature of distancing spirituality from any religious commitment and toward more holistic learning (Fenwick & English, 2004). Tisdell (1999) described the essence of spirituality as "discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary

business of life" (p. 88). Spirituality is viewed as an integral part of life and cannot be torn from other aspects of adult development. "It informs our knowing in ways that are beyond our conscious awareness" (Tisdell, 1999, p. 94). Spirituality is not only a personal endeavor; it includes an orientation toward community and relationships. Tisdell (1999) suggested three manifestations of spirituality: a sense of dwelling; one of seeking connectedness through relationships with loved ones; and acting in moral responsibility to carry out the work of justice for a better world. "Spirituality is about constructing knowledge through image and symbol. It is also about attempting to live or act in the world in accordance with one's spiritual path, which for many has an orientation to community" (Tisdell, 1999, p. 91).

Tolliver and Tisdell (2003) proposed seven assumptions about spirituality in the context of education that are relevant to this study: (1) it is a conscious honoring of and connection to the Life-force that is occurring through everything; (2) since the Life-force is always present, people's spirituality is always present in the learning environment; (3) Spirituality is about how people make meaning, and about experiences that contribute to their wholeness of life; (4) it is how people construct knowledge through unconscious images, symbols, and music; (5) moving toward a more authentic self; (6) spirituality and religion are interrelated, though not synonymous; and (7) spiritual experiences often occur by surprise (p. 391). These assumptions present spirituality as interwoven in every fabric of our lives, including relationships with self, others, and our development. Tisdell (1999) emphasized spirituality as a mutually binding force that brings congruency in the purposes and practices of learners and educators in the learning space.

Spirituality and Culture in Adult Education Literature

There has been very little attention given to the connection between spirituality and culture in the literature on adult learning (Taylor, 1998, 2007). Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) observed the existing literature on adult education and spirituality focused on the role of spirituality in constructing meaning and restructuring one's identity but had not made a direct connection to spirituality and culture or to culturally relevant education. Tisdell (1999, 2000, 2008; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003), discussed the role of spirituality in engaging the notion of "the cultural imagination." Tisdell (2008) observed that the existing body of literature on spirituality in higher education did not include culture, and most discourses focusing on culture or equity issues did not include spirituality (p. 533). However, spirituality and cultural identity are interwoven. "There is a cultural dimension to spirituality and a spiritual dimension to culture" (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003, p. 13).

Tolliver and Tisdell discussed extensively the relationship between spirituality and cultural identity development in their work (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Culture includes the values, language, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors shared by a social group (Guy, 1999; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Individuals give expression to their experiences, including spiritual experiences, and construct meaning through the lens of culture - symbols, values, rituals, and images (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). These ways of knowing are culturally constructed and are at the core of how spiritual knowing is interpreted and expressed. Therefore, spirituality can have an important role to play in culturally relevant education (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003).

Tolliver and Tisdell's (2002, 2006) assertions, regarding the interconnectedness of spirituality and culture, and culture and transformative learning, validate the importance of the

inclusion of Black spirituality in the study on Black church leaders' meaning construction in their transformative learning incidents. Based on the literature, there are three factors for consideration: (1) A church community has a group-based identity and culture which impacts meaning construction; (2) there are socio-cultural aspects unique to the learner that impact the experience; and (3) for the experience to be transformative, it must have relevance to the culture. This type of transformative learning experience stands in contrast to the concept of education for assimilation or education for cultural survival, previously associated with African American adult education (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

This study grounded its understanding of spirituality in two paradigms in the adult education literature. The first approach presents spirituality as a progressive growth toward development within the Judeo-Christian tradition (Fowler, 1981; Palmer, 1993,1998). Fowler (1981) advocates six stages of faith that relate to a person's meaning-making structures. Faithing is dynamic and each stage of faith represents a way of constructing meaning. According to Tisdell (1999), Fowler's (1981) definition of faith refers to spirituality.

The second concept of spirituality informing this study is the interconnectedness between spirituality and cultural identity (Charaniya, 2012; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006). Culture includes the values, language, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors shared by a social group (Guy, 1999; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). Individuals give expression to their experiences, including spirituality, and construct meaning through the lens of culture - symbols, values, rituals, and images (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). These ways of knowing are culturally constructed and are at the core of how spiritual knowing is interpreted and expressed. Spirituality "can have an important role to play in culturally relevant education that draws on learner's cultural and group-based identities in the learning environment" (Tisdell &Tolliver,

2003, p. 13). And this is where Black spirituality plays a critical role in this study since the participants are primarily African American and Afro Caribbean and influenced by Black spiritual traditions as previously discussed.

Hence, the interconnectedness between spirituality and culture, and culture and transformative learning (Charaniya, 2012; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver &Tisdell, 2002, 2006) supports the need for further studies on spirituality and transformative learning in diverse contexts. Mezirow (2000) acknowledged social, cultural, and historical contexts play a role in transformational learning. However, he did not elaborate on how this occurs.

Empirical Research on Spirituality in Adult Education

In my search for empirical studies on spirituality and adult education, I encountered studies relating primarily to spirituality in the practice of educators in higher education (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Dillard, 2006; Dillard et al., 2000; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003) and students in higher education (Byrd, 2011; Mayhew, 2004; Parks, 2000; Salinas et al., 2018). I was unable to find empirical studies on church leaders' or pastoral transformation. I will discuss five empirical studies that relate to spirituality and adult education. The selected studies are: (1) Courtenay and Milton (2004) *From the Voices of Educators and Learner*s; (2) Fleming and Courtenay (2006), *The Role of Spirituality in the Practice of Adult Education Leaders*; (3) Mattis (2002), *Religion and spirituality in the meaning-making and coping experiences of African American Women*; (4) Merriam and Ntseane (2008), *Transformational Learning in Botswana: How culture shapes the Process*; and (5) Salinas et al. (2018), *Role of Spirituality for Black Male Community College Students*.

Table 2.1

Empirical Studies on Spirituality in Adult Education

Author/Title	Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Findings	Major Themes
Courtenay & Milton, (2004) *From the Voices of Educators and Learners*	To understand the role of spirituality in adult education from the perspective of adult instructors and learners	10 instructors 10 students	In-depth semi-structured interviews	· Sense of connectedness with Transcendent, people, nature. · Search for meaning and purpose in life · Awareness of a Transcendent force acting in their lives	- Connectedness Identity and purpose - Transcendent force
Fleming & Courtenay (2006) *The Role of Spirituality in the Practice of Adult Education Leaders*	To investigate the role of spirituality in the practice of adult education leaders	15 leaders in Adult Education	Phenomenological inquiry. Semi-structured interviews	· Sense of connection to others · 12 of 15 participants distinguished religion from spirituality · Reflects individual identity · Spirituality evolves over time and requires reflection and choice. · Resource in times of challenge. · Shapes perception and use of power. · Leadership style reflected the perception of spirituality	Connectedness Identity - Power - Moral & Ethical guide - Transcendent as source

Author/Title	Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Findings	Major Themes
Mattis (2002) *Religion and spirituality in the meaning-making and coping experiences of African American Women:*	To explore the ways in which African American women use religion/spirituality to cope and construct meaning in times of adversity	23 African American women	Initial survey. Random selection from surveyed responses. Semi-structured interview protocol	· Interrogating & accepting reality. · Gaining insight & courage · Confronting limitations · Identify & grapple with life · Defining character& moral principles · Achieving growth · Trusting Transcendent for knowledge	Strong cultural values, beliefs - Identity and purpose - Transcendent as the source – guidance, knowledge
Merriam & Ntseane (2008) *Transformational Learning in Botswana: How culture shapes the Process*	To understand how culture shapes the nature of transformative learning in Botswana	12 adults 8 women 4 men	In-depth interviews	Three culturally specific factors were embedded in how constructed meaning of their experience: · A spiritual system used to interpret events · Processed learning in the context of responsibilities & relationships · Processed learning in terms of traditional gender roles	Strong adherence to cultural values - Spiritual belief system to interpret life events - Community relationship - Gender

Author/Title	Purpose	Sample	Methodology	Findings	Major Themes
Salinas et al. (2018) *Role of Spirituality for Black Male Community College Students*	To explore how spirituality influences Black male community college students' success	12 Black and Latino male community college students	Focus groups. Semi-structured protocol	· All Black participants reported spirituality and God played a significant role in their lives, academic accomplishment and behavior. Look to the Bible as a model for manhood and masculinity. · Jesus as a role model for leadership, · The church as a source of leadership development · Success as a function of divine purpose · Support through kinship with church members and spiritual family	Strong adherence to cultural values, beliefs - high spirituality - Strong church community support. - Core spiritual values, beliefs dominant since childhood - Identity

The table above presents a synopsis of the five empirical studies. Four common themes emerged in the studies: (1) Culture and spirituality were intertwined and played a dominant role in adult learning experiences in Black contexts; (2) Spirituality was a source of identity development; (3) Transcendent was a source of guidance and knowledge; (4) spirituality was a source of connectedness to the Transcendent and others.

Courtenay and Milton (2004) conducted a study to understand the role of spirituality in adult education. Ten instructors and ten adult students participated in the study. The study focused on instructors who viewed spirituality as important in their teaching and learners who believed spirituality had a place in the adult classroom. The findings showed participants defined spirituality as a sense of connectedness with the Transcendent and others, a search for identity and meaning, and awareness of the Transcendent.

In a similar study, Fleming and Courtenay (2006) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the role of spirituality in the practice of adult education leaders. Researchers selected recommended reputable adult education leaders in various subfields of adult education, representing diversity in race gender, ethnicity, and spiritual traditions. The findings showed participants viewed spirituality as a sense of connection to a higher power. Spirituality was a resource in troubled times and shaped their perception of their use of power in a leadership relationship. One implication of this study is the strong connection between spirituality and identity development.

The next three studies – Mattis (2002), Merriam and Ntseane (2008), and Salinas et al. (2018) – share a Black cultural context. The findings showed culture and spirituality were interwoven. Mattis (2002) interviewed ten African American women to determine how they used spirituality to cope and construct meaning in times of adversity. The findings showed the

women relied heavily on their religious /spiritual ideologies to face reality and deal with crises. Participants reported a strong reliance on the Transcendent in times of adversity as the source of knowledge and guidance, the source for identity, and source of guidance to define their character and moral principles.

Merriam and Ntseane (2008) conducted a qualitative study in Botswana, examining how the culture shaped the transformative learning process. Using Mezirow's Transformative learning theory to guide the study, the researchers interviewed twelve participants who acknowledged having an experience that significantly changed their view of themselves or their perspectives. The methodology was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The findings showed participants constructed meaning of their experiences within their cultural contexts of spirituality, gender roles, and community responsibilities and relationships. Participants viewed some of the events triggering their disorienting dilemma as originating from God or the ancestors. The researchers noted participants' interpretation was guided by a "spiritual system" operating parallel to their faith tradition (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008, p. 89). Further, contrary to the western individual focus of transformation, participants processed their disorienting dilemma in relation to family and/or community. Similarly, many of the women interpreted their transformational learning in terms of their traditional women's roles.

A study by Salinas et al. (2018), on *The Role of Spirituality for Black Male Community College Students*, showed a similar affinity toward cultural understandings of spirituality. The study included twelve Black and Latino college males using semi-structured and group interviews. Like the African American women in Mattis' (2002) study, the Black male students had a high awareness of their spirituality as a source of self-identity. They relied on their spirituality as a source of courage in times of challenge. They had a strong reliance on their

spirituality for guidance and a sense of purpose. As with the Botswanan participants (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008), the Black men's learning experiences were intertwined with strong ties to their spirituality, community, and family.

The empirical studies highlighted the interconnectedness of spirituality and culture and the significance in adult meaning-making. The major findings indicated participants looked to spirituality for connectedness to others, spirituality was a source of identity development, a source of guidance and knowledge, Spirituality and culture were intertwined. Further, the implication of the three studies suggested Black spirituality has a "spiritual system" beyond a faith tradition, that shapes one's meaning-making (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008).

Section Summary

In the above section, I discussed the existing scholarship on spirituality and adult education, establishing spirituality and culture play an important role in adult education, from the lived experience of both the educator and the student. This study is grounding its understanding of spirituality on two paradigms in the adult education literature: spirituality is a progressive growth toward development within the Judeo-Christian tradition (Fowler, 1981; Palmer, 1993, 1998), and there is an existing interconnectedness between spirituality and cultural identity (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006). The findings in the five empirical studies informing this study showed spirituality played a significant role in adult learning experiences as a source of identity development, for guidance and knowledge, and connectedness to the Transcendent and others.

The Conceptual Framework

The research purpose, to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted their incidents of perspective transformation, inherently assumes an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist epistemology. It assumes the church leaders can construct meaning, and how they

make meaning of the event is an individualized experience. Therefore, a theory providing a lens to capture meaning construction was essential to explore how participants interpret their transformative learning experiences. In this study, I sought to understand not only the outcome of their transformative experiences but to explore how, if at all, their spirituality shaped their meaning-making process. To identify and understand the leaders' meaning construction from both the cognitive and spiritual dimensions, the study combined Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning Theory and Fowler's (1982) Faith Development Theory (Stages of Faith) as a theoretical lens. Figure 2.1 depicts the conceptual framework guiding this study.

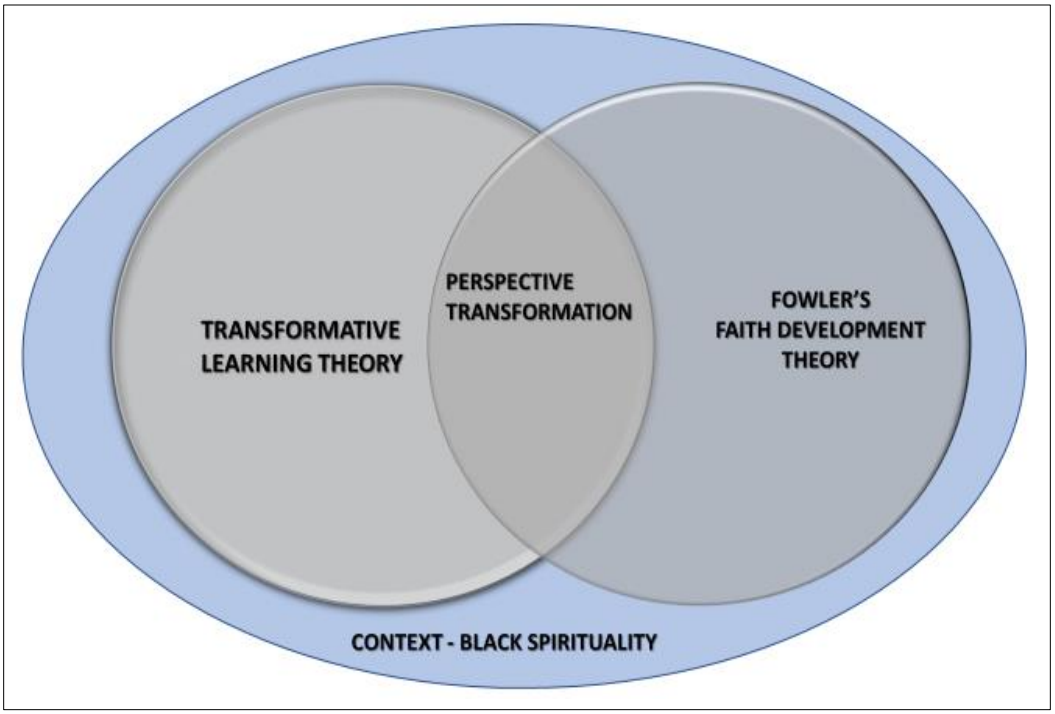

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework.

Transformative Learning Theory

The most significant theory in adult education addressing adult meaning-making is the work of Mezirow (1978, 1991, 1997,1998, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). This seminal architect of transformative learning theory focused on how adults come to know and learn by critically reflecting on assumptions and changing their behaviors and meaning perspectives. Mezirow's (1978) theory evolved from a national field study of women returning to community colleges in the United States and included 12 re-entry programs, descriptions of an additional 24 programs, and 314 mail responses from women. Based on the findings of the study, Mezirow (1978) identified ten phases of meaning-making experienced by the women: (1) A disorienting dilemma; (2) self- examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame; (3) a critical assessment of assumptions; (4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; (5) exploration of options for new roles; (6) planning a course of action; (7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing plans; (8) trying new roles; (9) building new competence in the new role; and (10) reintegrating back into life, based on the new perspective.

Mezirow (1978) described the process of perspective transformation as "involving a structural change in the way in which we see ourselves and our relationships" (p. 100). According to Mezirow (1978), a primary dimension of adult development and learning is the awareness "one is caught in one's own history and is reliving it" (p. 100). This awareness propels us into becoming critically aware of cultural and psychological assumptions by which we have patterned our lives and relationships and through a transformational process develop a new perspective (p. 101).

Roots of Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow (1978,2000,) identified the influence of some major thinkers on the development of transformative learning theory, including Kuhn (1962), Freire (1970/2000), and Gould (1978). Mezirow's (1978, 1991) frame of reference is similar to Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigms and perspective transformation is synonymous with Kuhn's (1962) paradigm shifts. Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire's (1970/2000) conscientization or the raising of consciousness denounced the "banking concept of education" in which learners merely regurgitate information and advocated a problem-posing approach in which learners become critically conscious of their psychosocial and political reality and reconstruct their reality, beginning with a dialogic education. Psychiatrist Roger Gould (1978), offered the notion of creating a new reality through transformations beginning in the adolescent years and continuing to midlife. The release from internal constraints such as fears, preoccupations, and assumptions acquired during childhood and in relationship with parents, occurs progressively through new adaptive behaviors. Mezirow's (1978) transforming meaning perspective through critical reflection has its roots in Gould's (1978) work and the Frankfurt School of German philosophers' notion of reflection.

Mezirow (1981, 2000, 2009) identified the work of Habermas (1971, 1984) as most influential on the development of transformative learning. In particular, Mezirow (1985) drew on Habermas' (1984) instrumental and communicative domains of learning. Instrumental learning focuses on task-oriented problem solving to improve performance, while communicative learning is "learning what others mean when they communicate with you" (p. 9). To determine what someone meant necessitated becoming critically reflective of the assumptions of the person communicating. Mezirow (1997) explained Habermas (1981) "helped us to understand that problem-solving and learning may be instrumental - learning to manipulate and

control the environment or other people to enhance efficacy in improving performance" and "the truth of an assertion can be established through empirical testing," while communicative learning involves "understanding *purposes, values, beliefs, and feelings"* (p. 6). Therefore, it is essential for learners to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions of their values, beliefs, and feelings.

Mezirow (1991, 2000) discussed a third domain by Habermas (1981), emancipatory learning. This type of learning involved self-knowledge through reflection on one's history and biography and how both have shaped one's view of self and role in the world. "Emancipation is from libidinal, institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted as beyond human control (Mezirow, 1981, p.6). Insights gained from reflection are emancipatory because at least one knows the reason for the problem (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow (1981, 1991, 2000) viewed Habermas' (1984) emancipatory learning as the transformation process in Transformative Learning theory and the concept of emancipatory action as synonymous with perspective transformation.

Core principles of perspective transformation. Mezirow (1981) defined perspective transformation as:

> The emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (p. 6)

Perspective transformation occurs when one recognizes the dependency on cultural roles and viewpoints and takes action to overcome them. Mezirow (1978, 2000) elaborated further in his description of transformative learning:

> The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of references (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 7-8)

There are key terminologies in transformative learning theory (some used in the above-quoted definition) that inform this study and are therefore important to explicate. As such, in this section I will define the following terms, using Mezirow's definitions as closely as possible: 1) Meaning schemes; 2) frames of reference and meaning perspectives; 3) habits of mind; 4) points of view; 5) critical reflection, and 6) disorienting dilemma. Human beings have an intrinsic desire to understand the meaning of experiences. We are human meaning makers. Mezirow distinguished two dimensions of meaning-making: Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning Schemes are "a set of related and habitual expectations governing 'if-then', 'cause-effect' and category relationships as well as event sequences" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2). Meaning schemes are the expectations one has about roles and values. They are habitual and implicit rules one uses to interpret (Mezirow, 1990).

Meaning perspectives or frames of reference are synonymous. A meaning perspective is multiple meaning schemes and represents the personal and cultural paradigms by which we understand ourselves and our relationships (Mezirow, 2000). Often, a meaning perspective is the result of cultural assimilation, learned stereotypes, or uncritically acquired perspectives since childhood. Mezirow (1990) described meaning perspectives as "higher order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations" or "networks of argument" (p. 2). Further, a meaning perspective is "the structure of cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to – and transformed by – one's past experience" (Mezirow, 1978, p.

101). A meaning perspective is not only cognitive. It is "an integrated psychological structure with dimensions of thought, feeling, and will" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 108). Interestingly, Mezirow (1990) equated changes in meaning perspectives with what developmental psychologists describe as stages of moral, ethical and ego-development. Meaning perspectives can expand over time and involve acting on the new perspective (Mezirow, 1978).

Frames of reference or meaning perspectives have two dimensions: habits of mind and resulting points of view. Habits of mind are "broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting," influenced by one's predisposition based on educational, political, social, economic, cultural, or psychological idiosyncrasies (Mezirow, 1990). Examples of habits of mind are ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Habits of mind are more enduring than points of view. Mezirow (2000) listed six varieties of habits of mind: 1) Sociolinguistic (ideologies, social norms, customs); 2) moral-ethical 3) conscience, moral norms), 4) epistemic (learning styles), philosophical (religious doctrine, philosophy, transcendental worldview), 5) psychological (self-concept, personality traits, and 6) aesthetic (values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgment. Relevant to this study, religious doctrine is categorized as a meaning perspective and a habit of mind.

Points of view. Points of view are the articulation of the habit of mind, reflected in beliefs, values, judgments attitude or feelings we have regarding other individuals or groups. While points of view can be changed by awareness and feedback from others, habits of mind are more enduring. According to Mezirow (1997), points of view change as we reflect and identify the need to modify our assumptions.

Critical reflection. Mezirow (1990) distinguishes between reflection and critical reflection. Reflection assesses the assumptions implicit in beliefs; critical reflection refers to

"challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning" (p. 12). This process involves becoming critically aware of our presuppositions and challenging the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense of our encounters with ourselves, others, and the world (Mezirow, 1990). Therefore, transforming an uncritically embedded meaning perspective can be changed through critical reflection on the interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind. Meaning perspectives are transformed through critical reflection on the "epistemic, sociocultural and psychic distortions" acquired through the uncritical acceptance of the values of others (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14). Mezirow (1990) lauded critical self-reflection as the most significant learning experience in adulthood.

Disorienting dilemma. A core constituent of Transformative learning theory is that perspective transformation is triggered by a disorienting dilemma. A life crisis or anomaly that cannot be resolved by acquiring more information, or in a typical way, acts as a catalyst for a critical assessment of assumptions and self- development. The event categorized as a disorienting dilemma. Examples of such events are the loss of a job or a loved one, a divorce, or graduation from college. The resulting transformation in habit of mind can be epochal, "a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight" or can occur through changes in points of view which eventually culminate into a transformation in habit of mind (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21).

When an experience occurs that is congruent with the current meaning perspective, it is assimilated into the meaning structure. If the current experience is not congruent, creating an anomaly, the meaning structure can reject the experience. If the experience is too significant to reject, then the experience becomes what Mezirow calls a "disorienting dilemma," triggering the development of a new meaning structure through critical analysis and self-development (Mezirow, 1978).

Perspectives and critiques of transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory has mushroomed since Mezirow' s (1978) initial proposal. As other understandings of transformative learning emerged, scholars no longer considered Mezirow's (1978) ten steps of transformation as progressive movements. A plethora of understandings of transformative learning has emerged over the years, often nuanced by disciplinary approaches. Taylor (1998) identified four main approaches in the literature: the psychoanalytic, psychocritical, psychodevelopmental, and social emancipatory. Each approach had different outcomes and ways of knowing. Several additional paradigms have emerged since Taylor's (1998) review of the literature. Relevant to my study, is the cultural-spiritual perspective (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

One of the common critiques of Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 2000) transformative learning Theory is its western bias, privileging rational and cognitive learning, and neglecting the sociocultural contexts (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Dirkx, 1998; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Taylor, 1997; Tennant, 2006). Clark and Wilson (1991) argued Mezirow's theory neglected the influence of class, and gender and presented western notions of human agency, self-direction, and independence as a universal factor. Mezirow refined the terminologies in his later works (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) and acknowledged the importance of the emotional and sociocultural contexts and added people could learn by transforming their points of view. However, he did not elaborate on the connection between context and transformative learning.

Although Mezirow's (1978) theory began with a study of women's re-entry to college, neither women nor gender received attention in his work. English and Irving (2012) noted although some attention had been given to race, class, and gender in the adult education literature, there was still more to learn about their intersections with women and transformative

learning. Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) highlighted their experiences as Black women educators and their unique encounters of race and transformative learning that were dissimilar to Mezirow's model. Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) presented a socio-cultural, race-centric approach identifying transformative learning experiences that were "culturally bound" and not confined to adult years, an individualistic experience, or framed in critical reflection (p. 50).

Dirkx (1997) offers a psychoanalytical approach to transformative learning in his work on nurturing the soul. He examined spirituality within the context of transformative adult learning and urged adult educators to recognize the soul or spiritual dimension in learning. He critiqued the transformative learning process as reflected in the works of Mezirow (1991) and Cranton (1994) as an "ego-based" view that provided only a partial understanding of the process of change in transformative learning. According to Dirkx (1997), the soul dimension of transformation has received little attention in the adult learning scholarship. The more traditional methods of instruction miss a part of the richness of the world captured by stories, narratives, myths, tales, and rituals. Transformative learning includes nurturing the soul by recognizing what is present within our relationships and experiences, to acknowledge its presence in the learning space, and to give it a voice through which it can be heard (Dirkx, 1997). Humans inherently need to make sense of the changes both within and around us (Dirkx, 1997). "The transformative process can be depicted in stories of the ego and its attempts guide the human spirit through the labyrinth of self, society, language, and culture" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 79). A rational view of the process, Dirkx (1997) argued, is only a partial understanding of it.

Clark (1991,1993) challenged Mezirow's first step of transformation by positing another type of trigger, named integrating circumstance, initiated perspective transformation in a different way than a disorienting dilemma. "First it appears not as a life-threatening rupture, but

rather as an opportunity for exploration and development. It invites rather than threatens" (Clark, 1993, p. 82). Second, it clarifies rather than stirs reevaluation. Third, integrating circumstances draw the person into deeper understanding and growth. Clark (1993) noted the disorienting dilemma originates outside of the person, "throwing them off track and reordering their world." The integrating circumstance begins within the person's conscious or unconscious desire to find something that is missing from their lives and opens them to change. Therefore, Clark (1993) argued perspective transformation can be orienting as well as disorienting.

A well-known critic of Mezirow's theory was Bruce Pietrykowski. A lively debate on transformative learning theory ensued between Pietrykowski and Mezirow. In his article, "*Knowledge and Power in Adult education: Beyond Friere and Habermas,* Pietrykowski (1996) challenged Mezirow's application of Freire's and Habermas' theories in assessing the adult learning process and described Mezirow's framework of transformation as "teleological" (p.91). Pietrykowski's (1996) main critiques centered on what he described as Mezirow's "artificial separation" between instrumental learning, self-reflection, and dialogic learning and the assertion that the goal of adult education is to create emancipated learners free of communication with distortions. Pietrykowski (1996) argued Mezirow's notion of self-reflection bore a humanistic and modernistic view in which learners sought true knowledge and emancipation from systems of power and domination. He argued self-reflection is not necessarily emancipatory and Mezirow failed to consider the multiple sources of power and dominance at work. Pietrykowski (1996) explained his criticisms were rooted in the larger methodological concern of his postmodern modem versus Mezirow's modern approach to adult education and argued theorists themselves should be "more engaged in understanding the multiple realities that constitute the lived worlds of adult learners and educators" (p.91).

In the exchange of communication, Mezirow contended Pietrykowsky's critiques were not based on a thorough reading of his most recent works in which he clarified critical reflection and transformative learning were generic processes in both instrumental and communicative learning. In particular, Mezirow noted transformative learning theory acknowledged instrumental learning was contextual and critical self-reflective learning was not necessarily emancipatory. In response to Pietrykowski's critique regarding power, Mezirow contended transformative learning theory presupposes structures of power and influence and provide a clear set of standards that could help the learner and understand what Pietrykowski (1996) described as "the deep structures of power that govern their lives" (p.94).

Noting Mezirow's original transformative learning theory had been diffused to include "almost any kind of learning outcome" and had "strayed away" from its foundation (p.58), Hoggan (2016) postulated transformative learning theory was an analytic metatheory. As such, the theory was an umbrella paradigm encompassing "the processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p.71). With this understanding, Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation would be distinct from and included in the overarching umbrella of transformative learning theory.

Despite the critiques and debates, Mezirow's perspective transformation is still considered a seminal contribution to adult education and hailed as "the most robust theoretical elucidation of learning in the whole corpus of literature concerned with transformative learning" (Hoggan, Malkki, Finnegan, 2017, p. 49). Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation was the best-suited theory with which to examine the transformative learning experiences of the Black church lay leaders. The next section discusses how Faith Development Theory complemented Mezirow's (1978) theory to create a robust theoretical framework for this research.

Faith Development Theory

This study proposed the experiences of perspective transformation by the church leaders would be best understood with the integration of transformative learning and faith development theories. Combined, these two theoretical approaches provide insight into the cognitive as well as the spiritual dynamics of the church leaders' meaning construction during their transformative learning incidents. Fowler's Faith Development theory, despite its criticisms, is still highly respected and attracts research studies in theology, psychology, religious education, and pastoral care (Streib, 2003).

Fowler 's (1981) Faith Development Theory fits within the paradigm of developmental theory to recognize the spiritual dimension of one's relation to the ultimate reality (Kegan, 1980). Although the roots lie in the cognitive-developmental work of Piaget (1969), Fowler (1981) drew heavily on the work of Erikson (1963). Fowler's (1981) Faith Development theory intersects theology, human development, and psychology (Love, 2002). Fowler (1981) did not view faith solely in a religious context. Faith is congruous with the way others may use the term spirituality (Tisdell, 1999). Fowler (1981) coined the word *faithing,* meaning "the act of setting one's heart on" (p. 11). Faithing is an experience for all humans, although the object of one's faith may differ. Faithing is a way of construing or interpreting experience. Fowler (2001) explained, "Faith involves ties of mutual trust and loyalty between persons, and groups, who commit themselves, explicitly and tacitly, to loyalty to, and trust in, shared centers of value and power" (p. 169). Fowler (1981) took a triadic approach to faithing. He examined the construction of meaning within the context of (1) self, (2) relationship with others, and (3) relationship with the Transcendent.

Fowler's (1981) theory includes seven stages of faith development that cover the span of life. The first stage, Intuitive -Projective refers to infants and involves sensorimotor knowing. The other six stages: Mythical- Literal, Synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive and universaling, can be applied to adulthood. Fowler's stages of faith are progressive, and development is predicated on movement in ways of constructing meaning with self, other, and Transcendent. Movement between stages is not linear, but a rising spiral movement. It is a process of "transition, regression, and conversion" (Fowler, 1981, p. 274). Each stage carries an expansion in perspective-taking and capacities. Movement to another stage means a reworking of the contents of the previous stage has occurred. Transitions between spiral stage levels are often painful and dislocating. One cannot rush to the next stage since each stage has its "proper time of ascendency" based on an integration of graces and strengths for the stage (Fowler, 1981, p. 274). The following table outlines the Fowler's (1981) stages of faith related to adults and the corresponding ways of knowing.

Table 2.2

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

Stage	Stages of Faith	Ways of Knowing
Stage 2	Mythical Literal	- One-dimensional and literal interpretation of narratives, symbols. - Begins to take on stories, beliefs, and observances of the community.
Stage 3	Synthetic—Conventional	- Capable of using and appreciating abstract concepts. - Begins to experience clashes with valued authority sources, officially sanctioned leaders, and practices previously deemed sacred.
Stage 4	Individuative—Reflective	- The self, previously sustained in identity and faith by an interpersonal circle, is now differentiated. - Identity not defined by others. - Take on authority for defining values, goals, and meanings that they had previously abdicated. - Constructs meaning being conscious of its own boundaries.
Stage 5	Conjunctive faith	- Sees both or many sides of an issue simultaneously. - Attends to interrelatedness in things, avoiding fitting things in its own prior mindset. - Alive to paradox and contradictions. - Can appreciate myths of others
Stage 6	Universalizing	- Overcomes paradox of stage 4 - Overcoming the self - Focuses on transformation from present reality. - Moving toward a transcendent reality, and often become martyrs for the vision they carry.

Note. Extrapolated from Fowler (1981,1984, 2000)

Two areas of relevance to this study are the theory's attention to shifts in the locus of authority and ways of knowing at each developmental stage. Fowler (1981) asserted the "images of power" we hold are shaped by our master stories. These stories pattern how we construe and give meaning to "power -in-action" in our lives (p. 277). At stage 2, The mythical-literal

knower has a literal and one- dimensional way of knowing. This knower interprets myths, symbols, and narratives literally. Ultimate authority is external and lies in the mythical transcendent. The stage three Synthetic-conventional knower begins to experience life in the world extending beyond themselves and family. Faith synthesizes values and seeks identity by conforming to expectations, and judgments of significant others. Authority is external and lies in other sanctioned leaders, church, or institution. The Stage 4, Individuative- Reflective knower, differentiates from the values to which he/she was once conformed. The transition from stage 3 to stage 4 requires an interruption from external sources of authority. There is a relocation of authority to the self in ways of seeing, knowing, and committing, this knower chooses either/or. In stage 5, the Conjunctive -Faith knower can see multiple perspectives and lives with paradoxes and contradictions in life. In terms of faith, this knower accepts that the traditions, symbols, and stories are partial and limited to a few people's experiences with God. They can handle multiple truths and are open to new depths in spirituality. According to Fowler (1981), there are very few individuals who ascend to stage 6. The universalizing knower has a deep commitment to emptying the self. Fowler (1981) explains that these individuals become "incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community" (p. 200).

Faithing is much more than stages. At the core of Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory is the notion that faith has two aspects: structure, or "forms" and "content." Fowler (1981) described structure as "the formally describable operations" of knowing and the "content" as the realities, symbols, narratives, practices and communities on and in which persons "rest their hearts" (p. 273). In faithing, both the "forms" and the "contents" exert power in shaping a person's life-sustaining, life-guiding meanings (Fowler, 1981, p.273). Changes in either the form or the content can have transforming or deforming effects on the knower's meaning-making.

Fowler's (1981) theoretical focus on the "dance" between the self, other, and Transcendent, added a rich component to my research. Although the scope of this study did not include examining the stages of faith, the theory provided a lens to examine the role of the leaders' faithing or spirituality on their experience in the learning space. One of the conditions of the learning environment was a critically engaging theological pedagogy that invited students to engage in critical discourse on meta-narratives and sacred symbols. The curriculum intentionally challenged the "content" on which the leaders had "rested" their faith. Faith Development theory provided the instrument to examine the knower's meaning-making process when navigating polarities and contradictions with their faith commitments.

Perspectives and critiques of faith development theory. Despite its renown, Fowler's theory is not without criticisms. Theologian Moseley (1994), once an advocate of Faith Development Theory, had two main critiques of the theory. First, it did not consider the paradoxes of faith. The "closed systems of moral and religious development fail to appreciate the hard paradoxes of faith" (p. 12). Moseley (1994) argued Fowler (1981) did not pay sufficient attention to "the logic of paradox" (p. 13) and the paradox of struggle was "lost in the idealism of moral progress." Second, the theory needed an "open-ended relationship with God in which new experiences of the ambiguity and plurality of divine revelation" could be understood (p. 13).

According to Moseley (1994), Fowler (1981) mixed metaphysical claims of the relationship between self and Transcendent into a Piagetian empiricist framework. Further, Moseley (1994) argued he was suspicious of developmental models that relegated people from the Third World to the lowest level of human development. Linking faith with progress was loathsome to those who had suffered personal or social oppression (Moseley, 1994).

Like Moseley (1994), Loder (1982) and Parks (1991, 2000) cautioned that humanistic models of faith development like Fowler's did not allow for the influence of "The Divine" to impact an individual's growth. Loder (1982) argued developmental models were ill-equipped to assess religious people and were theologically deficient. Loder (1982) described Fowler's work as "a sensitive, insightful study of the ego's competence in structuring meaning, and it is only potentially but not necessarily related to faith in a biblical or theological sense" (p.135). Parks (1991) identified five areas of concern in the criticisms of Fowler's theory: 1) the generic definition of faith; 2) the unattainable description of stage 6, universalizing faith; 3) the inadequacy to specific religious beliefs; 4) the neglect of the emotional and unconscious; and 6) its inadequacy in terms of the socio-political, particularly gender analysis. Oikarinen (1993) echoed the sentiment of theologians such as Loder (1982), Parks (1991) and Moseley (1991), that Fowler's theory did not offer a consistent and universal criterion for ideological and religious education.

Despite the criticisms, Fowler's (1981) Faith Development theory is a suitable addition to the theoretical framework of this study. Most of the criticisms of the theory were theological rather than paradigmatic (Loder, 1981; Moseley, 1994; Oikarinen, 1993). Fowler's Faith Development theory provides a structure for evaluating faith development and thereby strengthens the theoretical framework for this study on how church leaders make meaning during their transformative learning experiences.

Cognitive Developmental Theories

Cognitive Development theory offers a different lens with which to examine how adults construct meaning. In this section, I will present the developmental theories of Piaget (1969), Kohlberg (1969), Perry (1970, 1981), Kegan (1982), and Fowler (1981). I selected these theories

because of their common developmental underpinnings. Although Piaget's work focused on children, his work is relevant to my research because he influenced the developmental stage theories of Fowler, Kegan, and Kohlberg. Fowler, like Kegan, was also influenced by Kohlberg and Perry. Piaget (1969) proposed five levels of cognitive development thought which represent ways of making sense and constructing meaning. Perry's (1970, 1981) work centered on undergraduate college students. Perry noted changes in how the students processed and understood their world. Perry's work demonstrated how people think about their world relates to the meanings they attribute to their experience.

Although Mezirow (1978, 2000) did not subscribe to developmental paradigms, developmental psychologist Robert Kegan's (1982) work provides a lens through which to define growth and can illuminate the process of meaning-making described in perspective transformation. Further, Kegan's (1982, 1994) orders of consciousness share congruency with Fowler's (1982) stages of faith. The origins of the theory lie in the work of John Dewey (1938), James Baldwin (1906), and George Herbert Mead (1934). However, the most compelling influence is Jean Piaget's (1936) theory of children's cognition. Kegan (1982, 1994) adapted two major conceptualizations about human beings: (1) constructivism (humans construct reality, not stumble upon it), and (2) developmentalism (systems evolve organically over time). Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory offers an interpretation of how adults construct meaning. The theory focuses on a person as "an active meaning maker of experience" and incorporates various aspects of human development, expanding the concept of mental organization to include cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal realms (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 33).

Kegan (1994) asserted the evolution of consciousness is "the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow old but subsumed into more

complex systems of mind" (p. 9). The adult mind is "not an end state but a vast evolutionary expanse encompassing a variety of capacities of mind" (p. 5). Consciousness is epistemological. It is how we know and make meaning based on our life experiences. Consciousness is also ontological. It is how we create our reality based on our meaning-making capacities. The human capacity to engage the complexities of life is inextricably linked to levels of consciousness.

Kegan (1982, 1994) postulated six progressive orders of consciousness, spanning from childhood to adulthood: (0) incorporative, (1) impulsive, (2), imperial, (3) interpersonal, (4) institutional (5) and (6) inter-individual. The last three stages are mostly associated with adult development (Kegan, 1982, 1994). The movement between orders of consciousness occurs through increasing meaning-making constructions. The movement between stages is an evolution, "a lifetime activity of differentiating and integrating what is taken as self and what is taken as other" (p. 76). The theory adopted the neo-Piagetian concept of motion of evolution. Evolution is a "meaning-constitutive activity" (Kegan, 1982, p. 77). Each movement is precipitated by an evolutionary truce, as a balancing of subject and object occurs, which results in expanded developmental capacity. The table below offers a snapshot of the developmental theories, and how each theorist described the process of development.

Table 2.3

Cognitive Development Theory Comparative Table

	Piaget (1969) ***Cognitive Development***	**Kohlberg (1969)** ***Moral Development***	**Perry (1970, 1981)** ***Intellectual & Ethical Development***	**Kegan (1982, 1994)** ***Constructive-Developmental***	**Fowler (1981)** ***Faith Development***
Description	Development is the result of biological changes that enable higher cognitive functions Majority of identity work complete before adulthood	Neo-Piagetian How people learn and practice morality. Evolution of moral reasoning is the basis of ethical behavior and develops through constructive stages	Intellectual & ethical development of male college students. Move from dualistic to relativist thought	Neo-Piagetian interpretation of how adults construct meaning through stages of development. Each stage subsumed by the previous.	Neo-Piagetian Intersects theology, human development, and psychology. Faith is a way of meaning-making of events in our lives. Faith develops through one's lifespan
Structure	5 main stages of physical cognitive development 1. Sensorimotor 2. Preoperational 3. Concrete Operational 4. Early Formal Operational 5. Full Formal Operational	6 developmental stages grouped into 3 levels: 1.Preconventional 2.Conventional morality 3.Post-conventional	4 stages of development 1. Dualism 2. Multiplicity 3. Relativity 4. Commitment	6 stages/ orders of consciousness/ orders of mind, based on subject-object orientation. 0. Incorporative. 1. Impulsive 2. Imperial/ Self-Sovereign Mind 3. interpersonal Socialized Mind 4.Institutional Self -authored Mind 5.Inter-individual Transforming	7 stages of faith development Stage1: Intuitive-Projective Stage2: Mythical Literal Stage3: Synthetic -Conventional. Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective faith. Stage 5: Conjunctive faith. Stage 6: Universalizing

	Piaget (1969) ***Cognitive Development***	**Kohlberg (1969)** ***Moral Development***	**Perry (1970, 1981)** ***Intellectual & Ethical Development***	**Kegan (1982, 1994)** ***Constructive-Developmental***	**Fowler (1981)** ***Faith Development***
Context		Humans are capable of reason and have a desire to understand others.	Progress to more complex perspectives as move through school.	The consciousness bridge, with supports and challenges.	The content of faith upon which persons "rest their hearts."
Evolution		Progress comes through increasing competence. Cannot skip stages	Development spurred by learning. Not always a higher level. New commitments viewed as growth.	Differentiation and reintegration in self/other relationship	Rising spiral movements. Movements in dependency between self, other, and Transcendent.

Kegan (1982, 1994) gave a lucid explanation of how one becomes aware of embedded assumptions and values and begins the process of perspective change. Constructive-Developmental theory looks at development as the gradual process through which what was "subject" in our way of knowing becomes “object.” According to Kegan (1982, 1994), the subject-object relationships lie at the root of any mental organizing principle. These principles guide how one constructs meaning. "Object" refers to those areas in our knowing that are separate from ourselves. When something is object, we can talk about it, reflect on it, and make choices about it. "Subject" refers to those components in our knowing that we are fused with and embedded in. "We have object; we are subject" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32). Kegan (1994) explained that what is subject is absolute and what we have as object is relative. Developmental growth occurs when there is a renegotiation of the subject-object balance. "Simply put, we cannot take a perspective on what we are subject to, because we are embedded n it; it is not separate from our selves" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 37).

Another contribution of Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory is the hypothesis of the different ways of knowing. As the above table depicts, knowers with the second order of consciousness (imperial or instrumental) are self-oriented. They are subject to their own perspectives, needs, and wishes, and cannot accept another person’s perspective. The third order, interpersonal knower, is socialized into the perspectives of others. They are embedded with the opinions and perspectives of significant others. The “other” could be a church community, work, family, or other associations. The interpersonal knower is differentiated from his/her own needs and interests. Other people are experienced as their sources of internal validation, orientation, or authority. The fourth order of consciousness is the institutional independent knower. Unlike the second and third order, these knowers can consider other perspectives; however, since they are

subject to their autonomous self, they will always remain with their own perspective. They have differentiated themselves from, and made object, the interpersonal relationship of the third order. That individual can detach from embedded or dependent values to which he/she was attached and self-author new meaning. Individuals at this level can reflect on the perspectives of others and no longer see conflict as a threat. The fifth order of consciousness is the self-transforming mind or the inter-individual self. These knowers see beyond themselves and recognize their "commonalities and interdependence with others" (Kegan, 1982, p. 239). Their thinking becomes dialectical with an increasing orientation toward paradox and contradiction. They are open to the perspectives of others and use those perspectives to transform themselves and others.

There are striking congruences between the orders of consciousness in the Constructive-Developmental theory and the stages of faith described in Faith Development theory. Kegan's (1982, 1994) imperial knowers and Fowler's (1981) mythical-literal knowers are concrete knowers with a linear and literal perspective. The interpersonal knower (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and the synthetic-conventional knower (Fowler, 1981) conform to and are dependent on, the perspectives, values, and beliefs of significant others or groups. The institutional knower (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and the individuative-reflective knower (Fowler, 1981) are independent thinkers, consider the perspectives of others, but take up agency in their beliefs, values, and authority. At this stage, the knower differentiates from conventional sources of authority and critically examines previously unquestioned myths and symbols. Both theories offer a final stage of development in which the knower has a universal worldview and lives for the good of humanity. The major point of departure between both theories is that Fowler (1981) centers his structure around the self in relation to the other and Transcendent and Kegan (1982, 1984) privileges the self from a psychological lens (Fowler, 2000).

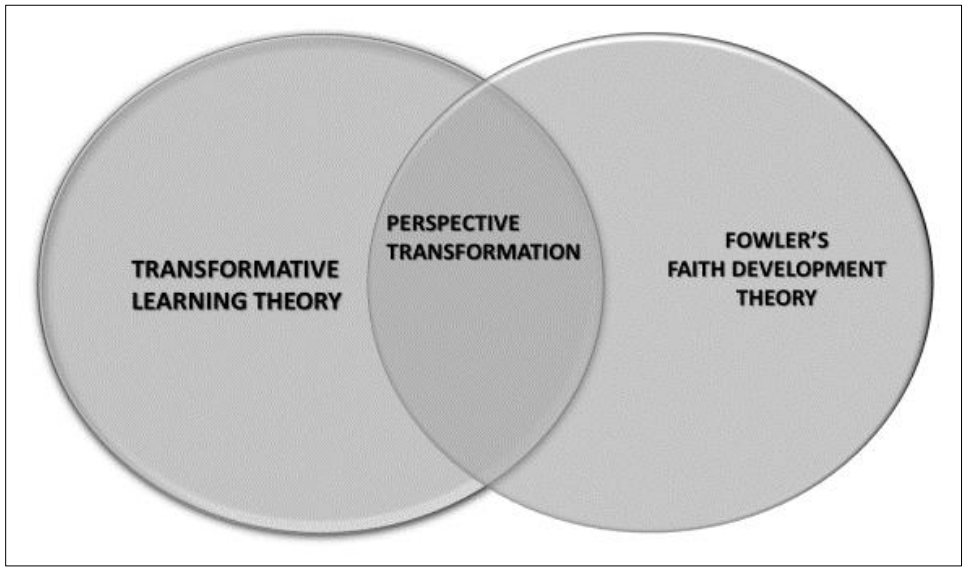

Figure 2.2. Bridging transformative learning and faith development theory.

Combining Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 1998, 2000) transformative learning theory and Fowler's (1981) Faith development theory provided a robust theoretical framework with which to explore how a group of church leaders interpreted their perspective transformation. Despite the different viewpoints on the validity of developmental stages, the theories are mutually informing. Fowler's stages of faith provide a rationale for the differences in meaning perspectives of the learners described by Mezirow (1978, 1991, 1998, 2000). As Kegan and Lahey (2009) succinctly explained, Mezirow's frame of reference is a way of knowing. Epistemology refers to how we know and directs us to the core of transformational learning. The "meaning perspectives" as defined by Mezirow (1978) are at the core of what this study aimed to examine in the church leaders' transformative learning experiences. Informational learning pertains to changes in what we know, and transformational learning refers to changes in how we know (Kegan, 2009). The "meaning perspective" is the structure of the knowers' cultural

assumptions within which the new experience is rejected or assimilated, and this study explored if, how, and what assumptions were rejected or assimilated. Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation, a component of transformative learning theory, takes a rational approach and examines what the learner does to produce the outcome of a changed perspective. The psychological developmental approach, such as Fowler (1981) and Kegan (1982) hypothesizes on the internal movements that produce the outcome.

The table below provides a synopsis of a juxtaposition of Fowler's (1981) stages of faith (stages 3, 4, 5) and Mezirow's (1978) Perspective Transformation. These stages were selected because of their relevance to the study. Stage 6 was omitted because Fowler (1981) indicated very few people achieve that stage. The table highlights the knower's perspective taking, locus of authority and symbolic function.

Table 2.4

Theoretical Comparative Table

	Fowler (1981) FDT	**Mezirow (1978) TLT**
	<u>Stage 2: Mythical-Literal Faith</u>	
Perspective-Taking	Can… · Rely on own logic · Apply literal appropriation of community's beliefs Cannot… · Formulate own story.	
Locus of Authority	Found in rules. · Rewards for doing good. · Punishment for doing bad	
Symbolic Function	Reliance on stories, rules, and values, practices, beliefs of tradition	
	<u>Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith</u>	
Perspective- Taking	Can… · Integrate emotion, personality patterns, ideas, thoughts, stories, values, beliefs from significant others Cannot… · Compose own story, meaning of life, or critically reflect on belief's values and stories of faith outlook	
Locus of Authority	External Generalized other – ex. school or church	
Symbolic Function	Reliance on faith tradition	
	<u>Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective</u>	

	Fowler (1981) FDT	Mezirow (1978) TLT
Perspective-Taking	Emergence of executive ego Can… Objectify, examine, and critically choose elements of own identity and faith	**Perspective Transformation** · Process of effecting change "frames of reference" Transformation begins through critical reflection on the assumptions, beliefs, habits of mind and points of view. · The capacity to critically reflect is only present in transition from Fowler's stage 3 to 4 and beyond. · Becoming aware of embeddedness usually marks a transition from stage 3 (Fowler).
Locus of Authority	Internal. Autonomous Self. Distancing from conventional sources of authority.	· Consciously choosing a new perspective as being of more value than old. · Autonomous self does not rise until stage 3-4
Symbolic Function	Critically examine and interpret myths, symbols, liturgy	
	Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith	
Perspective Taking	Can … · Integrate polarities and contradiction within selves, society, and experiences · Acknowledge paradox as intrinsic to truth · Hold truth as multiform and complex · Have openness to truth of other faith traditions	
Locus of Authority	Multiple perspectives. Acts out of conflicting loyalties to self, untransformed world, and transforming desires	
Symbolic Function	Longs for transforming newness. Yet remains committed to institutions and persons in the present. Will not have an uncritical devotion to a cause or ideology	

Note. Adapted from Fowler (1981, 2000); Mezirow (1978, 2000).

Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory highlights the spiritual dimension in the transformative process. Fowler reminds the framework of the "moving ground which roots and regenerates our self-other relating" (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 410). Fowler (1981) brilliantly synthesizes the epistemological and ontological dance between the self- other- relationships with the religious dimension of our self- other- Transcendent relationship. As such, faithing at the Mythical-literal stage relies on literal interpretations of sacred stories and the relationship with God is framed by rules, values, and practices. The synthetic-conventional faithing is reliant on the faith tradition to frame understanding and one's relationship with God. The Individuative-reflective knower, consistent with the autonomous self, differentiates and examines previously unquestioned traditions, values, and myths and integrates own perception. The process of differentiation and integration continues in the Conjunctive Faith and Universalizing stages. In Conjunctive Faithing, the knower lives in the dialectic of loyalty to the old faith community and the emerging reality of multiple and divergent faith communities. Universalizing faithing reflects the values, beliefs, and ideologies and seeks to transform his/her own system. Therefore, in faithing, this knower empties the self and becomes deeply committed to the solidarity of faith communities and the radical love of God.

Mezirow (1978), rather than designating stages, described transformation as a change in perspective. It is being "able to understand the issues…make rational choices as a socially responsible, autonomous agent, and … [be] free to act on them" (Mezirow, 1978, p.25). At the core of the transformation is a subject-object movement. The hidden assumptions in our ways of knowing (Kegan, 1982, 1994) are in Mezirow's terms "frames of reference." However, according to Kegan (1982) and Fowler's (1981) theories, the knowers at stages two and three do not have the developmental capacity to differentiate from embedded assumptions and therefore

cannot critically reflect on their frames of reference. The transition of knowers from stage three to stage 4 (Kegan and Fowler) is the spiraling cycle of differentiation from embedded ways of knowing and integration of meaning-making structures. Hence, Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation presupposes all knowers have the developmental capacity to take those cognitive changes once a dilemma occurs.

Overall, the intersection of Faith Development Theory and Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning Theory provided a robust roadmap to explore the cognitive and spiritual development of church leaders during their transformative learning incidents. The two theories worked cohesively to address the research questions. The integration of the theories provided insight not only on the learners' current ways of knowing but the possible trajectory of their meaning-making experience. The theories worked together to examine the meaning construction and the interplay between self, others, and Transcendent. Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory provided a barometer to examine the second question related to the role of Black spirituality in the Black church lay leaders' experiences of perspective transformation. Although Fowler (1981) did not address Black spirituality, the theory provided a lens to examine the underlying patterns of knowing and relating to the Transcendent, self, and other.

In terms of understandings of transformation, the theories provided a robust triangulation of theoretical approaches. Fowler's (1981) depicted transformation as a spiraling movement of processes of transition, regression, and conversion, with old capacities subsumed by new ones. For Fowler (1981), transformative movement occurs when there is a change in the way one "holds, understands, and takes responsibility for living one's faith" (p. 68). Each stage is characterized by an expansion in ways of knowing, judging, valuing and a change in how faith navigates power and relationship between self and others. Interestingly, in addition to defining

underlying frames of reference, Mezirow (1978) privileged "a decision to take action" as quintessential to transformation (Mezirow, 1978, p.105). Further, the ability to move to a new perspective and sustain such action is dependent on association with others who share the new perspective (Mezirow, 1978). The determination to persevere may be difficult without the support and assistance from others who share the new perspective, such as a learning group, or therapist. Amid diverse understandings, Mezirow's (1978, 2000) transformative learning theory gave definition and parameters around this study. Both Fowler's (1981) Faith Developmental theory and Mezirow's (1978, 2000) transformative learning theory were mutually informing.

Empirical Studies with Transformative Learning and Faith Development Theories

In this section, I will discuss four empirical studies that inform this study on the viability of Mezirow's (1978, Transformative Learning Theory and Fowler's (1981) Faith Developmental Theory as a theoretical framework for a spiritually based context. The empirical studies to be discussed are: 1) Kiely (2005), *A Transformative Learning Model for service -Learning: A longitudinal Case Study*; 2) Mikaelian (2016), *The transformative learning experiences of Southern California church-based small group members;* 3) Mountjoy (2003), *Faith and Learning: An investigation into faith as a factor in perspective transformation in adult learners in higher education;* and 4) Wollert (2003), *Transformative learning and faith development in graduate seminary.* The discussion will include an overview of each study, the forms of data collected, and the conclusions guiding the theoretical framework of the study.

Kiely (2005) conducted a longitudinal research study on students in an in-service training program in Nicaragua. Kiely (2005) utilized Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning theory as a theoretical framework because it focused on how people make meaning of their experiences and how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the way people make sense

of “ill-structured problems, critical incidents, and/or ambiguous life events “(p. 6). The study was conducted with 57 students who were enrolled in a two to four-year college program and who participated in an in-service program.

Kiely’s (2005) methodology included a case study design. Data collection included document analysis, on-site observation, focus groups, and semi-structured and unstructured interviews. He employed triangulation by emerging ideas and interpretations from observation, document analysis, and interviews. Kiely (2005) organized the findings in five categories: Contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing, and connecting.

Although Kiely’s (2005) research related to in-service learning, the study is well within the context of adult learning. The methodology and findings were helpful, primarily in the utilization of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory to inform the research purpose. One of Kiely’s (2005) primary findings is that context impacted the students’ transformational learning experience, before, during, and after participating in the program. Within the category of contextual border crossing, Kiely (2005) discussed four categories impacting the participants’ epistemologies: personal, structural, historical, and programmatic. The personal category included the individual life experiences and “biographical baggage” unique to each person, and which is foundational to understanding the participants’ “frames of reference.” The structural category included the participant’s race, class, gender, religion; the historical category related to the country-specific factors that influenced the current issues, history, and culture; and programmatic elements referred to the pedagogical structure of the program. All participants reported facing dissonance.

The findings showed the participants’ transformative learning process correlated to the type and intensity of the dissonance experienced relative to the context. The findings of the study

(2005) illuminated the significance of the meaning-making structures of participants on their learning experience. Kiely's (2005) study showed issues of race, religion, and nationality as contributing factors to ways of knowing. Hence, the study (2005) supported the significance of the Black church context in the exploration of the transformative learning process of church lay leaders. Kiely (2005) explained the suitability of Mezirow's model of transformative learning to inform this type of study: "It focuses on how people make meaning of their experiences and, in particular, how significant learning and behavioral change often result from the way people make sense of ill-structured problems, critical incidents, and/or ambiguous life events" (p. 6).

Mikaelian's (2016) qualitative study explored the ways a church-based small group experienced transformation, and the factors contributing to their experience. Mikaelin (2016) used Transformative Learning theory as a theoretical lens because she wished to explore how transformative learning would work in a church context. Mikaelian (2016) conducted 22 semi-structured interviews, using purposeful sampling to identify participants who could provide information-rich data, and convenience sampling to select the participating churches. Before the interview, participants received the interview questions and a brief email on "Understanding of Transformative Learning" including a story or example to help the interviewees understand the subject. The study used a grounded theory approach with thematic analysis.

The findings showed some participants reported their transformative experiences began before the small group involvement and were either supported or enhanced by the small group. In response to the question regarding the most significant contributing factors, ten themes emerged. The most prominent theme was the role of relationships (both individual and group) in forging transformation, followed by group discussion, accountability, transparency, and a safe environment. Participants reported experiencing transformation in their view of relationships,

God, theological perspectives, self, Christian life, ministry, and Christian beliefs. A transformed view of relationships was most prominent.

Mikaelian's (2016) study is particularly significant to my research because of the context. While most empirical studies on transformative learning theory are based on higher education (Taylor, 1998, 2007), this study has an informal context and explores transformative learning within a church-based small group.

The third empirical study is Mountjoy's (2003) qualitative study to explore faith as a factor in perspective transformation in adult learners in higher education. Mountjoy (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 graduates of a Christian University. Participants were purposefully selected. First, participants had to acknowledge via a survey, verbally, or in writing that a perspective transformation had occurred during their program. Second, they had to indicate by a similar method they had a personal faith in God. Using a case study design, the study focused on the participants' stories of perspective transformation. The study used a grounded study approach and the constant comparative method for data analysis.

The findings showed all participants regarded faith as an integral element in their transformative experience. Five factors were identified as contributing to their experience, including a critical incident of hearing from God, modeling others, the learning culture of the program, and the intersection of faith and learning. There was a clear relationship between students' faith and the learning they received, which ultimately led to perspective transformation. Participants acknowledged experiencing a change in their perspectives of God and self. This empirical study showed the versatility of transformative learning theory and its suitability as a theoretical lens for a study within a spiritual context. Further, while the study showed self-

reflection played an important role in shaping perspective transformation, the conventional understanding of self-reflection was expanded to include conversations with God or prayer.

Wollert's (2003) study sought to understand the transformative learning experiences and faith development of students at a graduate theological seminary. Like this study, Wollert (2003) used a combined theoretical framework of Mezirow (1978) and Fowler (1982). Wollert (2003) conducted a mixed-methods study, a sequential QUAN-QUAL study. The study (2003) used the Barnes Fowler-Scale, an instrument designed to assess individuals' stages of faith development. Fourteen participants were interviewed who were assessed at stages 2 to 5 on the Barnes Fowler -scale. Data analysis initially consisted of a statistical investigation of the data and the constant comparative method was used for thematic analysis.

Although the Barnes Fowler-scale proved to be an unreliable instrument to determine stages, it is interesting to note the largest number of participants were assessed at stage 3 (synthetic-conventional). Wollert (2003) delineated three categories with which to discuss the findings: seminary roles, professional roles, and personal roles. I will limit my discussion to the key findings relevant to my study. Wollert (2003) reported faith development and transformative learning domains permeated all roles. The findings showed individuals' perceptions of beliefs, values, and commitments influenced their psychological and cognitive operations. Wollert (2003) noted some participants experienced a transformation of meaning schemes while others experienced a change in meaning perspectives.

Wollert's (2003) juxtaposition of Fowler's (1981) and Mezirow's (1978) theories make a significant contribution and support my selected theoretical framework. Wollert (2003) observed the spiritual could not be extricated from the professional, ministerial, or academic roles of participants, but was intricately interwoven. Wollert (2003) concurs with this study's assertion that the inclusion of faith development theory helps to capture the spiritual dynamic of the transformational process.

Section summary. In this section, I discussed four empirical studies anchoring the theoretical approach I am using in my research. Kiely's (2005) longitudinal study highlighted context as a significant driver in learners' transformative learning experiences. Mikaelian (2016), Mountjoy (2003) and Wollert (2003) strongly indicate the interconnectedness of learning and faith. Wollert (2003) illustrated the integration of Mezirow's (1978) Transformative learning and Fowler's (1981) theories as a robust lens with which to explore meaning-making in a religious context. The discussion included an overview of each study, the forms of data collected, and how the conclusions support how I am using the theories to explore the research.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the significant literature informing my study on the transformative learning experiences of Black church lay leaders. I began with a description of the historical and social context of Black spirituality in which the study is situated. The literature identified Black Spirituality as a way of being and seeing the world and embedded with deep historical and cultural roots and an invisible yet significant player in the learning transaction. The next section of the chapter examined relevant literature on spirituality, spirituality and culture, and Black spirituality in the adult education literature. A significant portion of the review discussed the increasing recognition of spirituality as an important contributor to the educative experience for both educators and students. In particular, the empirical studies highlighted the significance of Black Spirituality in the meaning-making and learning experiences of learners of African descent. The third section discussed the conceptual framework, including the relevant theories and empirical studies supporting the selected theoretical framework for the study. The literature showed the integration of Fowler's (1981) Faith Developmental Theory, and Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning Theory present a

robust framework to explore the research purpose, how Black church lay leaders interpret their transformative learning experiences. Finally, the review discussed relevant empirical studies integrating Transformative Learning Theory and spirituality. Apparent in the review is the sparsity of empirical studies on Black spirituality in the literature.

Scholars of adult transformation acknowledge adult growth involves much more than cognitive factors (Cranton, 1994; Kegan, 1982; Mezirow,1978). There is still much more to explore in the literature on culture, spirituality, and transformative learning. This study aimed to contribute to the body of literature on learning, leadership and organizational development by examining transformative learning theory within the context of Black spirituality.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> *There are other ways of looking at data…not as a body of information to be coded but rather a STORY [sic] to understand.* (Galman, 2016, p. 56)

The purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders experienced perspective transformation, describing and examining how they constructed meaning and how, if at all, Black spirituality and faithing played a role in their meaning-making. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the study. I discuss the research design, methodology, participant selection and criteria, data collection methods, data analysis, validity and reliability, my researcher subjectivities, and researcher stance.

Research Design

Research methodology can be classified into three approaches: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell, 2007). This study used a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002), framed from an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist epistemology. Qualitative inquiry "aims at understanding the *meaning* of human *action"* (Schwandt, 2007, p.248). It offers a descriptive and inductive approach that focuses on discovering meaning from the perspective of participants (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research emphasizes the description rather than the

quantity (Maxwell, 2012). Measurements can provide data on "how often" or "how many people," but they cannot answer the question of "why" or explain human behavior (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative inquiry aims "to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives and to describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 98). Qualitative research has its roots in the philosophy of phenomenology and its emphasis on experience and interpretation. There is an underlying assumption that "there is an essence or essences to shared experience [sic]" (Patton, 1990, p.70). Further, Patton (1990) explained, "the experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example … the essence of being a participant in a particular program" (p.70). Patton's (1990) assertion supports a qualitative approach as well suited for my study on the transformative learning experiences of church lay leaders in a leadership development program. The research purpose necessitated an approach that could, not only give understanding on "how" and "why" participants act but uncover the influence that the context had on their actions (Maxwell, 2012).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term representing various research methods, designs, and approaches adopted by scholars from diverse disciplines to explain the meaning of a social phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Preissle, 2006). Interpretive research, naturalistic inquiry, inductive research, field study, and ethnography are a few of the terms used interchangeably for this approach (Merriam,1998). Preissle (2006) captures its flexibility in her description:

> Qualitative research is a loosely defined category of conceptually informed research designs or models, all of which elicit verbal, visual, tactile, olfactory and gustatory information in the form of descriptive narratives like field notes, recordings or other transcriptions from audio and videotapes, and other written records and pictures or films

(p. 686). Although qualitative inquiry is flexible and has many approaches, there are certain common characteristics across practices. First, the main philosophical assumption is that individuals construct reality as they interact with their social worlds and the qualitative researcher is interested in learning about the meaning people have constructed (Merriam,1998). The goal is to understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, often termed the emic, or the insider's view, not the etic, or the researcher's view (Merriam, 1998). A second common characteristic is that the researcher is the primary instrument of the research, for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). In this endeavor, the researcher is researching the self as well as the participant, having direct contact with participants and experiencing the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the research is subjective and necessitates transparency regarding the researcher's biases and epistemological assumptions (Crotty, 1998, 2003; Kramp, 2004; van Manen, 1990). Third, a qualitative approach captures rich descriptions and offers a lens with which to explore the players and the influence of the learning context (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Fourth, this type of research typically takes an inductive approach, allowing the researcher to build toward a theory from the observation. While deductive researchers "hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 4). Since the study was exploratory, aiming to understand how church lay leaders construct meaning in their transformative learning incidents, a deductive approach was most befitting.

Constructivist Ontology

Researchers' paradigm assumptions or worldview shape their selection of methods and procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify three fundamental questions guiding the researcher's approach to the study: the ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions. The ontological question addresses the form or nature of reality. Questions such as, "how things really are" and how things really work" are relevant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). One of the paradigms guiding inquiry in qualitative research is constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Taking a constructivist approach, the ontological assumption is that reality is socially constructed through acts of interpretation (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 2002). We create our realities in "multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). An individual's constructs are alterable as are their associated realities.

These constructivist assumptions undergird the research purpose of my study, which aimed to explore how church lay leaders uniquely interpreted their transformative learning experiences. Constructivist inquiry aims to understand the constructions that people hold. As such, the constructivist lens allowed me to understand how the participants constructed meaning during their learning incidents. Further, the paradigmatic assumption that reality is individually constructed undergirded an inherent supposition in my research purpose; that is, each church lay leader could have a unique experience in a shared context. (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Constructivists "believe in pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended and contextualized (e.g., sensitive to place and situation) perspectives" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125). Humans engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty (1998). "We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world." (Crotty, 1998, p.44).

Constructivist Epistemology

The second question the researcher asks is epistemological. "What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Constructivism views knowledge as something that is constructed by the knower and not revealed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Therefore, the qualitative researcher's epistemological beliefs shape how the researcher "sees the world and acts in it" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19). The "knower and respondent co-create understandings" and use "a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Constructivism is one of the underlying assumptions in the conceptual framework of this study. Each participant is acknowledged as having their own socially and individually constructed reality. The conceptual framework, based on Mezirow's (1978, 2000) perspective transformation and Fowler's (1981) Stages of Faith theories, focus on how humans progressively make meaning and construct reality over time. The theories have their roots in the constructivist epistemology of Piaget (1970). The premise of these theories is that persons construct their reality and do not stumble upon it. Therefore, my epistemological beliefs align with constructivist principles on the emanation of knowledge and meaning. These constructions are subject to continuous change as new constructions evolve.

Interpretivist Perspective

While constructivism provided a framework with which to examine the experiences, an interpretivist paradigm strengthened the research design by providing a lens to delve into the meaning-making of the participants. One of the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research is the interpretivist perspective. The interpretive traditions emerged from the position that human interpretation is the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world (Prasad,

2015). The interpretivist perspective subscribes to the belief that an individual's reality is socially constructed and these constructions are only possible because of the human ability to attach meanings to objects, events, or relations (Prasad, 2015). Therefore, certain objects are interpreted with particular meanings or symbolism. Another feature of the interpretive tradition is its emphasis that although we individually engage in meaning-making, these actions are "significantly mediated by the cognitive schema and language that we obtain from our wider societies" (Prasad, 2015, p. 14). The interpretivist paradigm examines not only the action of meaning-making but the underlying meaning structures that create the meaning the knower attributes to the incidents of perspective transformation. The contribution of the interpretivist lens is significant to the context of my study. Church leaders' paradigms are not only shaped by their personal social constructs, but the schema of their religious institutionalization, dogma, images, symbols, and rituals. Interpretivism looks at how meaning is constructed, the underlying associations, and provides a way to interpret one's actions and language. "To find meaning in an action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interprets in a particular way what the actors are doing" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191).

Methodology and Methods

The third question the researcher must address is what methodology can be used to find out whatever needs to be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The response to this question is rooted in the selected ontological and epistemological perspectives. The congruity of qualitative inquiry, constructivist epistemology, and interpretivist philosophical stances offered a robust methodology to ascertain an in-depth understanding of how participants constructed meaning during their transformative learning experiences. The interpretivist lens examines the social constructs and helps to uncover and interpret the associations underlying their meaning

construction. Consequently, the qualitative approach assists the researcher to "get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 5).

In summary, a qualitative approach was the best-suited research methodology for my study, exploring how a group of participants experienced and responded to their perspective transformation. The constructivist/interpretivist paradigm provided a robust philosophical anchor for the first question on how the participants constructed meaning during their learning incidents. The interpretivist perspective provided a lens to explore the second question on how, if at all, did Black spirituality and faithing shaped their meaning-making in their incidents of transformation. The constructivist underpinning allows the researcher to "approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning. It is an invitation to reinterpretation" (Crotty, 1998, p.51). The qualitative/constructivist/ interpretivist collaboration provided a robust theoretical framework in which to explore a rich and in-depth understanding of the meaning-making of church leaders during their perspective transformation.

Similar to the methodology, the method was strategically selected. The goal of the research study was to discover "the essence" of the lived experience of participants, by obtaining "rich, textual data" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 57). Toward that end, I selected the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954) as the primary method of data collection, conducting semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996), and using the Critical Incident Technique's interview protocol.

Participant Selection

Since the purpose of the study was to understand how learners in the program interpreted their experiences of perspective transformation, a purposeful selection strategy was used to secure participants for this study (Maxwell, 2005). "Purposeful sampling is based on the

assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p.61). The participants for this study were church lay leaders who were graduates of a particular leadership training program and had completed the program within the last three years.

While Patton (1990) and Merriam (1998) referred to a process of purposeful sampling, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) preferred the term 'criterion-based' rather than 'purposeful' and distinguished between 'sample' and 'selection.' Based on LeCompte and Preissle's (1993) definition, a 'sample' is a sub-set of a population identified and selected for a study, and a 'selection' refers to the researcher intentionally selecting who or what is the focus of the study. In this study, I selected participants based on a specific set of criteria discussed below and use the terms 'selection' and 'sampling' interchangeably. Patton (1990) and Merriam (1998) discussed several strategies for purposeful sampling of participants. Three selection strategies were employed to increase the pool of volunteers and enhance the quality of the data collection; namely, criterion sampling, snowball or chain sampling, and critical case sampling (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Qualitative researchers construct a list of characteristics the participants in the study must have (deMarrais, 2004). Criterion sampling selects participants based upon a predetermined list of criteria that are important to the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Based on the phenomenon being researched, criterion sampling served as a logical first step in my participant selection process. Patton (2002) includes critical incidents as a source of criterion sampling. In my research, the experience of a critical transformative learning incident was a criterion. Therefore, the first step in the participant selection process was to invite graduates to participate

in a research study if they had experienced a significant change of perspective during the program (Appendix B).

Four graduates responded promptly to the initial email. At this point, I resorted to the strategy of snowball or chain sampling, also known as network selection (deMarrais, 2004). I asked participants for recommendations on which graduates to contact (Merriam,1998; Patton, 1990). Further, I asked the first four participants to contact other graduates who fit the criteria and had shared stories of transformative incidents (deMarrais, 2004). This was an effective strategy since students developed camaraderie during the program, leading to long-standing relationships after the program. Chain sampling proved to be a resourceful strategy to recruit participants (Merriam, 1998).

Since the study focused on understanding the lived experiences of others, the ability to obtain rich, in-depth descriptions was a priority (Patton, 1990). "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in-depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). An intense sampling strategy was necessary to obtain *information-rich* cases that illustrated the phenomenon of interest. This strategy looks for critical cases that can make a point dramatically or is deemed important to the knowledge of the overall topic (Patton, 1990). In this data gathering, the focus was to understand what was happening in that critical incident. Therefore, information on what was happening in the space of transformation, such as what triggered disorientation, or a description of emotional or mental processes were important data. Patton (1990) recommended choosing the sample that would have the greatest impact on knowledge development if the research site was small. I selected nine participants who, based on my assessment, could provide detailed descriptions of their experiences.

As shown above, purposeful sampling was the ideal strategy to provide information-rich data for the study (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). A purposeful sampling strategy is ideal when the researcher seeks to discover or understand a phenomenon or dilemma (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of my study was to better understand the phenomenon of church lay leaders' transformational learning incidents. The study focused on meaning in context and therefore necessitated "a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

Sample Selection

The qualitative researcher typically purposefully selects smaller samples for their information-rich data on the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990). Further, the Critical Incidents Technique focuses on the number of incidents, rather than numbers of participants, to establish a pattern of critical behavior. While admitting there was no simple answer to the question of sample size, Flanagan (1954) suggested fifty or one hundred critical incidents may be sufficient for a simple activity and several thousands of incidents for more complex activities. The focus of my study was to examine how participants interpreted and responded to their learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. Therefore, I aimed to capture detailed descriptions of as many critical incidents as possible, to determine patterns of triggers or types of disorienting dilemmas, meaning construction during the dilemma, and how faith and spirituality intersected with meaning-making.

My initial goal was to interview eight participants who had experienced, and could sufficiently detail, significant critical incidents and who collectively represented both African American and Afro Caribbean nationalities. My goal was to have equal representation of both African American and African Caribbean nationalities. Since the phenomenon being studied

was Black Spirituality, which applies to all African diasporic groups, and the student population of the program had equal representation of both ethnicities, I hoped to seize the opportunity to deepen the study by capturing the experiences of both ethnic groups. Therefore, my goal was to have four participants from each ethnicity. When saturation was reached, I had interviewed nine participants. Five were of Afro-Caribbean descent and four were African Americans. I completed ten interviews (one participant had two interviews) for a total of 763 minutes. The ten interviews yielded 6,922 lines and 197 pages of transcripts. The average length of the interviews was 20 pages. There were sixty-one reported incidents from the recorded transcripts. After screening the critical incidents for relevance to the research topic and completeness, and review by my major professor, 48 critical incidents were selected for use as samples. Although I asked each participant to describe four incidents, some participants provided more than the requested number. The critical incidents are detailed in chapter 4.

Below is a taxonomy of the demographic profiles of the participants. As the table indicates, the participants were comprised of six females and three males. Four participants identified as African American (1 male and 3 females) and 5 identified as Afro Caribbean (2 males and 3 females). The data is drawn from a demographic data form completed by each participant. A copy of the sample data form is shown in Appendix D. Concerning their ages, there was representation across ages 21 to over 51. Three participants identified between ages 21-30 (2 males and 1 female); two participants were between ages 31-40 (2 females); one female identified in ranges 41-50, and 2 participants were 51 and over (1 male and 1 female).

In terms of education, two females identified as having some college; one male and no females had an associate degree; four participants had a bachelor's degree (1 male and 3 females) and two participants had a master's degree (1 male and 1 female). In a comparison of

education and ethnicities, one African American and one Afro Caribbean had some college (females). One Afro Caribbean had an associate degree (male); three African Americans had a bachelor's degree (2 males and one female); and one Afro Caribbean female. Two Afro Caribbean participants had a master's degree (1 male and 1 female).

A review of the participants' reported years in the faith, in leadership, and as members in their respective churches show a broad range of experience. The number of years committed to their Christian faith ranged from seven to forty years, with an average of 21.44 years. The length of time in church leadership ranged from one to twenty years, with an average of 8.66 years. The number of years of membership in their current churches ranged from four to twenty-five years, with an average of 10.88 years.

Table 3.1

Demographic Profiles of Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Ethnicity	Gender	Education	Years in Faith	Years in Leadership	Years in current church
Leah	51 +	African American	F	Some College	40	20	25
Ruth	20 - 29	African American	F	Bachelors	16	6	10
Mary	30 - 40	African American	F	Bachelors	7	1	4
Paul	51+	Afro Caribbean	M	Associates	25	15	12
Timothy	21-30	Afro Caribbean	M	Masters	21	8	10
Deborah	41 -50	Afro Caribbean	F	Masters	25	6	9
Milcah	30-40	Afro Caribbean	F	Bachelors	10	5	10
Joshua	20-29	African American	M	Bachelors	14	5	6
Anna	51+	Afro Caribbean	F	Some College	35	12	12

Note. F: Female: M: Male

Data Collection

"Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Qualitative interviews are ideal when a researcher's goal is to gain an in-depth description from participants on a particular event or phenomenon (deMarrais, 2004). Using probes and follow-up questions, the researcher can gain a rich description of the event in the

words of the participant. Since obtaining rich descriptions from participants was essential to this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions to enable participants to engage in the process freely (deMarrais, 2004). A qualitative interview is a "conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996, p. 125). Therefore, every effort was made to foster a conversational atmosphere, both in the interview process and the site. In my data collection method, I conducted interviews using the Critical Incident Technique interview protocol, with follow-up probes. The interview protocol is displayed in Appendix C.

The Critical Incident Technique

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT), first developed by John C. Flanagan (1954), is now recognized across disciplines as an effective qualitative research method for capturing participant stories (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Chell, 1998; Ellinger & Watkins, 1998; Gremler, 2004; Kain, 2004; Sharoff, 2008; Watkins, Suh, Brenes-Dawsey, & Oliver, 2018; Woolsey, 1986) The technique has its roots in industrial and organizational psychology (Butterfield et al., 2005; Kain, 2004). However, it was in Flanagan's (1954) seminal work that the technique became recognized as a research method. The technique offers a "flexible set of procedures" that has proved useful in both quantitative studies of behavior and qualitative narrative interviews (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998). Research studies in Medicine, Psychology, Nursing, Human Resource Development, and Education are among the many disciplines using CIT (Brookfield, 1990; Ellinger & Watkins, 1998; Sharoff, 2008; Watkins, et al., 2018).

Flanagan (1954) described an incident as "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act" (p. 1). Flanagan proposed five phases in a CIT study: (1) Establish the

general aims of the activity studied; (2) Make plans and setting specifications for collecting incidents regarding the activity; (3) collect data (either by interviews or written by the observer); (4) analyze the data; and (5) interpret and report the results (Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan (1954) did not regard these phases as a rigid rule. They were a "flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 335). As such, there have been various adaptations to Flanagan's stages due to its wide utilization across disciplines (Brookfield, 1983, 1986, 2000; Buckner, 2012; Chell, 1998; Ellinger & Watkins, 1998; Sharoff, 2008; Watkins, et al., 2018).

The first phase requires that the researcher crafts a precise statement of the purpose of the research. Having a specific aim for the observed activity determines the parameters of the observation (Flanagan, 1954). In this study, the purpose was to understand how participants interpreted their transformative experiences and to examine how they constructed meaning during such incidents. Therefore, every activity during the interview process was intentionally designed to invite the participant to tell their story in as much detail as possible (Kain, 2004).

In the second step, setting plans, the researcher decides who will make observations, who will be observed and what activities will be observed. Since the technique is exploratory and descriptive, the focus is to obtain complete and extensive coverage of the phenomenon being observed. The strength of the CIT study is not determined by the number of participants, but by the number of critical incidents reported or observed. "The crucial thing here is to ensure the entire content domain of the activity in question has been captured and described" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 479). One of the determining factors in the study was who and what would be observed. Participants had to have completed all the courses and graduated successfully from the program. The observed activity centered on the participants' stories of perspective

transformation aiming to learn why those incidents were significant to the participants (Kain, 2004).

The third phase is collecting the data. In my research, participants were asked to recall from memory their incidents of transformative learning. Flanagan (1954) preferred direct observations but acquiesced that recollections are acceptable if "full and precise" details are given (p. 340). There are four methods of collecting recalled data in the critical incident method: (1) Individual interviews; (2) group interviews; (3) questionnaires; and (4) record forms, that is, recording details of incidents in narrative form. My study employed individual interviews using the critical incident protocol as a guide. Woolsey (1986) strongly recommended a detailed interview guide and a pilot study to refine the wording of the questions. One of the significant aspects of the Critical Incident Technique as a qualitative research tool is the questions asked of the participants. The questions should refer to the general aim of the study and the observer should specify the possible timeframe or focus of the study (Kain, 2004).

Phase four is analyzing the data. Some researchers caution that this phase is the most difficult and frustrating part of the method (Butterfield et al., 2005; Woolsey, 1986). It requires analyzing several critical incidents. The purpose of the analysis is to create themes that summarize the data, and concurrently sacrifice "as little as possible of their comprehensiveness, specificity, and validity" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 334). There are three steps in the process: selecting a frame of reference, which arises from how the data will be used; (2) formulating the categories and, (3) establishing the level of specificity or generality to be used in reporting the findings. The fifth phase is interpreting and reporting the findings. In this step, the categories should be given self-explanatory titles. Woolsey (1986), emphasized that simplicity, brevity, and clarity are essential in the titles. Using the respondent's own words strengthens the reporting.

A significant enhancement for qualitative researchers was the development of the constructivist approach to CIT by Ellinger and Watkins (1998). It allows the researcher "to develop rich narratives of critical incidents that capture both context and meaning from the perspective of the respondent" (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998, p. 288). The objective is to understand a situation from the respondent's point of view. The researcher's goal is to grasp the meaning and sufficiently articulate it. In this study, capturing the participants' values, symbols, and spiritual contexts was an integral part of the outcome. Among the advantages of the Critical Incident Technique is, it allows for focus on a particular event or incident, enabling the researcher to probe further as the interviewee's attention is drawn to the event (Chell, 1998). Although the accounts are retrospective, since the incident is 'critical' the interviewees can recall the details of their stories.

The Semi-Structured Interview

Ellinger and Watkins (1998) defined the CIT as "a systematic and sequential method for collecting observed incidents, or observations previously made which are reported from memory" (p. 286). Guided by the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), I devised an interview protocol, inviting the interviewees to recall from memory significant incidents of perspective transformation (Kain, 2004). I crafted four interview questions after several revisions and gleaning from the experiences from an exploratory pilot study I conducted in 2017 as part of an Institutional Review Board approved class project. The purpose of the study was to understand how students in the program experienced transformative learning and what were the supports and challenges that fostered transformation. There were three participants in the study (2017). Participants reported experiencing a change in perspective in their relationships with God, self, and others. The findings from the pilot study (2017) guided the research focus and interview

protocol for the current study. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board on September 10, 2018, for the study on the transformative learning experiences of Black church lay leaders.

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, I sent a letter of invitation to all graduates of the program within the last two years (Appendix B). Participating interviewees received an interview packet comprised of a demographic form (Appendix D) and the interview protocol (Appendix C). The first question was introductory, intended to obtain personal background information. Since the critical incident technique invites participants to tell their story and explain why the incident is significant (Kain, 2004), the CIT interview questions begin with, "Think about a time when… [the phenomenon of interest] happened" or "Tell me about a time when…[phenomenon] happened." Respondents are asked to provide multiple incidents related to the phenomenon and describe what happened and why this incident was significant to them. Since the researcher aims to understand the meanings behind the incidents, emphasis is placed on discovering why the incident was significant. As such, the next question was, "Think about a time when your perspective of God, yourself, or others changed as a result of the program; tell me what happened, who was involved, and what was the outcome." There was no limit to the number of incidents a participant could describe.

During the interview, I followed up with probing questions to obtain "rich thick descriptions" of each incident (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Special attention was given to asking open-ended questions to invite more detailed descriptions from participants (deMarrais, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Probes such as "tell me more about that" helped to solicit more detailed descriptions.

My earlier interviews using the critical incident technique proved challenging. After reviewing the first two transcripts with my major professor and methodologist, we concluded I was missing opportunities to probe participant responses for more detail (deMarrais, 2004). Participants sometimes veered away from their stories and narrated multiple vignettes, each interrupting the other. With each successive interview, I became more adept at asking probing questions to guide respondents to focus on one incident or event at a time and to give specific, detailed encounters. I learned, "guiding questions that request a retelling of a particular event or experience yield wonderfully detailed stories" (deMarrais, 2004, p. 62).

To explore the research questions, I conducted interviews with nine graduates of the program who acknowledged experiencing some type of perspective change and who volunteered to participate in the study. Ten interviews were conducted with nine participants, six females and three males. I requested a second interview with the first interviewee after becoming more adept at conducting interviews with the Critical Incident Technique.

The Interview

I meticulously prepared for each interview, arriving early and ensuring the temperature in the room was comfortable, and furniture properly arranged. I ensured there was a bottle of water readily available for the interviewee. Nine of the ten interviews were held in a private conference room at a neighborhood clubhouse, and the other in a reserved conference room at a public library. I ensured two copies of the consent form were ready to be reviewed, and the recording devices (laptop and standalone recorder) were ready and working properly. Each interview began with light conversation followed by the consent form process and brief information about the study (deMarrais, 2004).

"The participant observer uses two primary means of data collection: looking and asking" (Erickson, 2012, p. 1455). Therefore, the task was one of listening and observing keenly. I gave heed to Seidman's (2013) compelling caution about the listening of the researcher on three levels: Listen to what the participant is saying; listen for the participant's inner voice (participants sometimes give a guarded response, that is the outer voice, and the researcher must probe further for the depth of meaning from the inner voice); and listen hard to assess the progress of the interview and be sensitive to the participant's energy level. Most interviews lasted for an hour and I was attentive to participant cues for when they were ready to conclude (Seidman, 2013). I jotted down notes regarding participant facial expressions, body language, and vocal intonations. In some of the interviews, participants became emotional. I had to allow space for pregnant pauses as participants wrestled or relived their critical incidents (Seidman, 2013). Immediately following each interview, I made additional observation notes. Sometimes participants continued to reflect on their experiences while walking to their cars after the interviews. I immediately added salient comments to my field notes when I got home.

Data Configuration

Initial data configuration occurred in three phases: Cleaning the data, familiarization with the data, and coding the data (Ruona, 2005). I uploaded all recorded interviews to a transcription service to be transcribed. Using the transcriptions as a base document, I conducted a second tier of transcribing. I listened to each recorded interview and compared it with the transcription received to ensure accuracy of the transcribed data. Depending on participants' accents and word pronunciations, editing the transcriptions was both intensive and critical to ensure the transcriptions were verbatim the words of the interviewees. My first task was to have a clean data set (Ruona, 2005). After arriving at a good quality transcript, I removed filler words

such as, “ahm” and “you know,” names of individuals, and any personal references that may disclose the identity of the interviewees or their church affiliation. Initially, I applied generic pseudonyms to each participant temporarily, such as Participant A or B, because I wanted to assign a pseudonym that reflected the essence of their story at a later phase of the analysis. I emailed a copy of the edited transcript to each participant for member checking. None of the interviewees made changes to the transcripts. However, I sent clarifying questions to three participants who responded promptly.

The next phase was becoming familiar with the data (Ruona, 2005). I read through the entire corpus of data to get a sense of the participants’ stories and to immerse myself in their collective lived experience. Listening to the recorded interviews helped me to situate myself in the participants’ experience and to hear at a deeper level what they were communicating in response to the questions (Ruona, 2005). Initially, I uploaded the first two interviews into NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QDA) for analysis. However, I quickly abandoned the idea, choosing to use Microsoft Word, since I was proficient with the software. Further, researchers have acknowledged Microsoft Word is a viable tool for organizing, coding, and sorting data for analysis (Ruona, 2005; Stephenson, 2015). I created a folder in Microsoft Word, titled ‘Analysis’ and copied and saved each transcript in a new file (Example, “Ruth_analysis1”). I began working through each transcript one at a time. I read through a participant’s transcript in its entirety to get to know the person behind the transcript and the essence of what they were communicating about their experience. Since I was not a part of the phenomenon being studied, I removed any comments I made, leaving only protocol or clarifying questions in the data.

I began initial coding by perusing the transcript again and highlighting what appeared to be critical incidents. I placed a comment assigning a number and a one-word label of the main

subject of the excerpt (Example: Incident #2_ martyrs), making additional notes of hunches or other ideas in the comments section (La Pelle, 2004; Merriam, 2002; Ruona, 2005). My next step was to save the coded transcript data into a new file ("Participant name _ analysis2). First I removed participant responses not relevant to the research purpose. After completing this process, I examined the highlighted items for congruences. One observation early in the process was participants tell their stories in layers, and sometimes interrupted one story with another or switched to another story in response to a question. Therefore, the next step was to place all related fragments of a story together to create a complete critical incident. For example, all highlighted fragments labeled "Incident#2_martyrs" would be placed together. At this juncture, I turned to narrative analysis to augment the process of developing critical incidents from the fragments.

Data Analysis

"To conduct inquiry one must have both an idea of what one is attempting to accomplish and an idea of how to proceed" (Wolcott, 1992, p. 41). At this stage of the research, I needed the most effective method to interpret the participants' underlying experiences and accomplish the research purpose. The analytical approach I selected for this study was narrative analysis. Using narrative analysis to develop critical incidents had been used successfully in similar research studies (Brenes-Dawsey, 2018; Buckner, 2012; Stephenson, 2015).

Narrative Analysis

"The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world… Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 30). In narrative inquiry, the inquirer privileges learning from the participant in a particular setting and the learning occurs through the stories of individuals (Ollerenshaw & Creswell,

2002). Most beneficial to this study was Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) method of analyzing stories through the retelling or restorying of the story, using the problem-solution approach. "Restorying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story, (example, time, place, plot, and scene). And then rewriting the story to place it within a chronological sequence" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). As evidenced in the data set, the participant's stories sometimes do not follow a logical sequence. Hence, the researcher provides a "causal link" among the fragments, including rich detail about the context or setting of the incident (p. 332). In this type of narrative inquiry, the researcher analyzes the raw data for elements of plot structure (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Organizing the plot elements into the problem-solution narrative structure includes six components: rough transcription, characters, setting, problem, action, resolution.

Supplemental to the restorying approach of (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), I found Labov and Waletsky's (1997) narrative structure most suited for delineating key components of the incidents and addressing the research questions in my study. Labov and Waletsky's narrative structure is comprised of six elements: 1) Abstract-the beginning of the story, *what is the story about;* 2) Orientation - *the time, place, situation;* 3) Complicating Actions or sequence of event - *what happened then?;* 4) Evaluation -the significance of the meaning to the narrator – *narrator clarifies and comments on the meaning of the story*, 5) Resolution-outcome, *what finally happened?* 6) Coda-end of the story - *a return to the present*. This analytical structure worked cohesively with Ellinger and Watkins' (1998) CIT constructivist approach to better capture the meaning-making elements of the participants' critical incident narratives. Based on Mezirow's transformative learning theory, the study deductively assumed all critical incidents involved a disorienting dilemma. Therefore, the abstract (identifying what the story was about) had to be

established early in the analytical process. The table below illustrates how Labov and Waletsky's (1997) narrative structure served to delineate the essential elements of the critical incidents and enhance the cohesive flow of the narratives.

Table 3.2

Development of Critical Incident Narratives

Abstract *What is this about?*	**Orientation** *Who, what, where, when?*	**Complicating Action** *Then what happened?*	**Evaluation** *Meaning to narrator?*	**Resolution** *What finally happened?*	**Coda** *What is the current state?*
Identification of the trigger of the disorienting dilemma	Description of the dilemma; what happened, and who, or what was involved	Sequence of events following initial awareness of the anomaly	Significance of the anomaly to the individual	Individual's response. How they resolved the anomaly.	Current action as a result of the resolution

Note. Adaptation from Labov & Waletsky's (1997) narrative structure

I scrupulously read through all the transcripts and followed this model as I re-storyed the critical incidents (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Initially, I identified 60 incidents and began an assessment process using Labov and Waletsky's (1997) model as a guide. Some critical incidents mentioned by the participants did not have all the necessary elements. The first criterion was the incidents had to have occurred during the tenure in the program. Any incident outside of this parameter was removed from the data set. Second, the five elements (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, and resolution) had to be evident for an occurrence to be identified as a critical incident. Therefore, parenthetical descriptions of perspective changes without the related elements were not considered stories and were not categorized as critical incidents. Some critical incidents did not have a clear resulting action and participants indicated

they were still working on the new actions. However, these incidents were included as critical incidents because of the rich information they provided about meaning-making and the individualized process of perspective transformation. The total number of incidents was then reduced to 54.

Following the above process, I created a data subset of critical incidents and submitted the document to my major professor for review. During our review process, duplicated references to the same phenomenon were removed or merged with similar incidents. After final reviews, 48 critical incidents were selected for their completeness and relevance to the research purpose and questions. I assigned a title to each incident to convey the essence of the story, illustrated in Table 3.3.

Deductive and Inductive Data Analysis

My research necessitated both an inductive and deductive approach to address the research purpose and questions. Both inductive and deductive approaches are paradigmatic, describing ways of reasoning when analyzing data. Galman (2016) refers to both approaches as organizing metaphors for data analysis. Inductive and deductive approaches are ways of thinking about the theory-data relationship in data analysis (Bendassolli, 2013), whether the theory drives the data (deductive) or the data generates the theory (inductive).

In this study, I used Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning and Fowler's (1981) Faith Development theories as organizing principles for the second stage of the data analysis. As table 3.3 indicates, I created two sets of assertions for each critical incident, one related to Transformative Learning Theory and the other for Faith Development Theory (faithing). Assertions were generated for each theory or for both theories as applicable, adding substantiating vignettes or quotes from the data (Erickson, 2012). Assertions bring the data in

relationship with the theory (Erickson, 2012). “In qualitative research, analysis is a boot-strapping operation in which, reflexively, assertions and questions are generated on the basis of evidence, and evidence is defined in relation to assertions and questions.” (Erickson, 2012, p. 1458). The underlying question the assertions answered was, what might this incident contribute to the understanding of Transformative Learning and Faith Development theories, as it relates to the research questions.

Further, crafting assertions employs an inductive lens. The inductive approach takes a bottom-up analysis of the data, observing the how and what of the experiences described by participants, and exploring what new hypotheses may arise from the data. The aim is knowledge creation, rather than to confirm or refute the existing theories. Integrating the deductive and inductive approaches helped me to view the data from different perspectives, probing what is there that I should expect to see, what is not there that I expected to see, and what is there that I did not expect to see (Galman, 2016).

Table 3.3

Critical Incident Titles and Assertions

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
1.	**Mary**	*I don't know this the way I think I do; I only know what I heard*	When new information contradicts previous knowledge, it creates awareness of unquestioned assumptions and the new urge to question triggers transformation.	When new knowledge contradicts a previously held truth claim, it creates uncertainty and a search for a new truth claim.
2.		*The rug was pulled from under my beliefs*	When previous meaning structures begin to crumble, it creates a disorienting dilemma that leads to the creation of a new structure based on the new experience.	Transition is preceded by serious clashes with what was previously held as sacred. One confronts literalism and shifts focus to the meanings of the stories.
3.		*Is this my faith or my family's*	Movement toward differentiation from institutional or family embeddedness begins with the examination of self in relation to previously held commitments.	Transition is precipitated by leaving home spiritually to examine one's relationship with faith and Transcendent and charting one's own course.
4.		*If the one who sees all loves me unconditionally, then I can love myself*	Transformation includes new perspectives of self and new values placed on self.	Self -identity is rooted in a new perspective of Transcendent' s love and directly impacts value placed on self.
5.		*Now I respect others with different beliefs and values*	Transformation involves openness to different viewpoints. Growth includes capacity to coexist with differentness.	Greater awareness of God's love leads to extension of love and acceptance of those with different value systems.
6.		*I was pulled to go where I never thought I would go*	Seeing oneself in a new way allows for new possibilities and provokes action to chart new paths.	Coming into a new sense of identity, based on faith, requires new action consistent with and based on the new level of faith.
7.		*I saw my past in a different way, and it showed a clear path that I couldn't see before.*	Revision /reframing of old experience becomes a guide to future meaning-making and action.	A change in perspective includes seeing past experiences in a new light. There is an act of choosing to see them in a new light.

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
8.		*I took God out of my box*	Questioning assumptions and values leads to awareness of embedded feelings and emotions that have shaped reality or perception, even of Transcendent and leads to creating a new reality.	Faithing leads to change in socially constructed perspective of Transcendent. shaped by faith communities, experiences, relationships, or family background.
9.	**Deborah**	*I learned my way is not the only right way*.	Transformation involves openness to different viewpoints. Growth includes the capacity to coexist with differentness.	Becomes less committed to own truth claim, demonstrates movement from linearity to emergent ability to hold more than one truth claim in tension with each other
10.		Now I question what I never questioned and examine what I hear.	Learner becomes critically aware of own assumptions and expectations of others and exercises autonomy to reassess and reformulate own interpretations	Make belief system object by stepping away to examine the self in relation to the system.
11.		I no longer compare myself with others or live to please others	A new identity emerges attributing value and worth to oneself, increased confidence, and movement from people-pleasing toward autonomous self	A new sense of identity emerges with experience of new perspective of Transcendent
12.		I must take responsibility for what has been passed on to me	A new identity leads to examination and enlargement about identities and roles in life and the world and becoming more socially responsible.	New perspective of God, self, other leads to a sense of belonging and subsequent commitment to the larger faith community, past and present.
13.	**Ruth**	I am now free to ask questions	Learner exercises autonomy to assess and formulate own interpretations	New freedom to question institutional traditions and assumptions, fosters independence from the perspective of religious authorities and ability to craft own path for learning
14.		I am free from bondage to rules	Learner exercises autonomy to assess and formulate own interpretation and application of previously unquestioned.	Faithing leads to freedom to contextualize sacred text and move from literal institutional interpretations

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
15.		I am free to be a constant presence of God's love for others		New perspective of God's love and self leads to a changed perspective of relationships with others.
16.		I am free to embrace differentness in others	Examination of previously unexamined cultural or social assumptions leads to increased capacity to coexist with those who are different from ourselves.	
17.		I am free to search myself and make changes	New openness to critical self- reflection fosters transformation	
18.		I am free to be imperfect	Autonomy to negotiate own standards for living and letting go of external standards	Letting go includes abandoning community's standard for perfection and renegotiating in relationship with God
19.		I am free to live within the tension of faith and trials	New autonomy to question institutional traditions and assumptions and disengage dependence on the perspective of authority figures.	Faithing seeks understanding and transitions from embeddedness to spiritual authorities and fairytale interpretations of Bible stories to living out faith.
20.		I am free to search the scriptures on my own		New freedom to question institutional traditions and assumptions, fosters independence from the perspective of religious authorities and ability to craft own path for learning
21.		I am free to love people and make a difference in someone's life		New perspective of God's love and self leads to a change of perspective of relationships with others.
22.	**Paul**	I let go of the harsh God and grabbed hold of the new	When the new experience challenges the old knowledge, it is necessary to purposefully let go of old and create a new reality	Faithing leads to change in socially constructed perspective of Transcendent. shaped by faith communities, experiences, relationships, or family background
23.		I shifted from judgmental to empathetic	Critical self- reflection leads to awareness of assumptions and ways of being and acting.	A new way of seeing God leads to new way of seeing self and others

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
24.		Now I look beyond the surface when I read	When new information contradicts previous knowledge, it creates awareness of unquestioned assumptions and the new urge to question.	When new knowledge contradicts the old, it creates a loss of confidence in narratives on which one's faith was built and leads them to search for a new truth claim
25.		I lost confidence in what I knew and began to question everything	When new information contradicts previous knowledge, it creates awareness of unquestioned assumptions and the new urge to question.	When new knowledge contradicts the old, it creates a loss of confidence in narratives on which one's faith was built and leads them to search for a new truth claim
26.		I couldn't see my flaws, but now I am a reflective leader	Critical self- reflection leads to a new awareness of ways of being and acting.	
27.	**Leah**	I discovered the relentless pursuit of God's love	Transformation includes a new perspective of self and new values placed on self.	New perspective of God's love leads to a new self -identity.
28.		I began to see myself differently, me and my story	Transformation includes a new perspective of self and new values placed on self.	New perspective of God's love leads to a new self -identity self -value.
29.		I freely question without fear of punishment	Exercises autonomy to assess and formulate own interpretations	New freedom to question institutional traditions and assumptions, and exercise independence from the perspective of religious authorities
30.	**Timothy**	I learned to look deeply within and deal with what's there, rather than living to save face	Critical self- reflection fosters awareness of embedded assumptions and ways of being and acting	
31.		I'm making my own decisions from the inside out	Shift from embeddedness to opinions of others includes increased autonomy.	

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
32.		A twelve-year-old's feedback changed my mindset	Critical feedback can trigger transformation if willing to take corresponding action through reflection.	
33.	**Milcah**	I can no longer associate with someone who is stuck in the old traditions	Transformation necessitates a change in associations with those of a new mindset.	
34.		Now I read with my brain turned on and then I shout		Moving from embeddedness to institutional traditions includes renegotiation- let go/hold on.
35.		I saw what the matter with me that I couldn't see before	Critical self- reflection fosters awareness of embedded assumptions and ways of being and acting.	
36.		Now I lead from a place of love adding value to people's lives		New perspective of God's love and self leads to a changed perspective of relationships with others.
37.		I am responsible to a larger community beyond my church	Transformation triggers an increase in sense of social responsibility.	New perspective of God, self, and other leads to a sense of belonging and subsequent commitment to the larger faith community, past and present.
38.	**Joshua**	I stepped out of the box of church tradition	New autonomy to question previously embedded assumptions and beliefs.	New freedom to question institutional traditions and assumptions, and exercise independence from the perspective of religious authorities.
39.		There is a love story between God and me and there I find significance		Self -identity is rooted in a new perspective of Transcendent' s love and directly impacts value placed on self.

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
40..		Now I read the Bible as a collection of stories, not a divine dictation		When new knowledge contradicts a previously held truth claim, it creates uncertainty and a search for a new truth claim. One confronts literalism and shifts focus to the meanings of the stories
41.		I realized I was judgmental and impatient,	Critical self- reflection fosters awareness of assumptions and ways of being and acting	
42.		I gained confidence to speak up for myself		Self -identity is rooted in new perspective of the Transcendent' s love and directly impacts value placed on self.
43.	**Anna**	I am more connected to Christians around the world.		New perspective of God, self, other leads to a sense of belonging and subsequent commitment to the larger faith community, past and present
44.		Now I am open to different cultures and ways of worshipping God.	Examination of previously unexamined cultural or social assumptions leads to increased capacity to be open to other beliefs, cultures, customs.	
45.		I became aware of God's loves for me and it changed how I see myself		New perspective of God's love leads to new self-identity and self-value.
46.		Now I am receptive to the opinion of others	Self-examination leads to the ability to see what one could not see and a changed perspective of self and other	

No.	Participant	Critical Incident Title	Assertions on Perspective Transformation	Assertions on Faithing
47.		I will dance when I wish, not under pressure	Change in embeddedness leads to an increased level of autonomy.	New autonomy leads to renegotiation of nonnegotiable traditions
48.		I no longer judge myself and others	Self-examination leads to the ability to see what one could not see and a changed perspective of self and other	New perspective of God's love leads to new perspective of self and others.

Constant Comparative Method

One of the methods used to conduct inductive qualitative analysis is the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) It involves constantly comparing certain cases, categories and incidents in the data (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004). Each unit of meaning in the data is compared with all other units for similarity. If there is no other similar unit, a new category is created. Eventually, all units are placed in buckets of categories and coded. The process is repeated as categories are changed and refined (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have developed procedures for rigorous data analysis using the constant comparative method. The steps are sequential and begin with identifying units of meaning and coding categories, refining the selected categories, exploring possible relationships and patterns across the categories, and the outcome is the integration and emergence of new understandings of the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using the constant comparative method, I conducted a cross-case analysis to progress from assertions to themes.

Before moving to develop themes, I meticulously perused the entire data corpus, copying quotations to support assertions and "testing the evidentiary warrant" for each assertion in the data (Erickson, 2012, p. 1459. In response to the first question, how do Black church lay leaders interpret and respond to their transformative learning experiences, I used the abstracts in Labov and Waletsky's (1997) structural elements to identify the a priori construct of a disorienting dilemma for each incident and compared how each was triggered, noting the similarities and differences. Then, I organized the types of dilemmas into categories. Second, I compared all the assertions related to transformative learning and placed them in categories of similarity and assigned themes. I compared all the themes, explored relationships and patterns and consolidated and refined them. Similarly, I followed a similar pattern for the second question, what role, if

any, did Black spirituality and Faithing play in their meaning-making. I compared all assertions related to Faithing and sorted them by order of similarity. I extracted all references to Black church or Black Pentecostalism, or church traditions and placed them in a separate category for further analysis. The table below illustrates the process of moving from assertions to themes.

Table 3.4

Moving from Assertions to Themes

Participant	Title	Assertion Perspective Transformation	Assertion - Faithing	Themes Perspective Transformation	Theme Faithing
A	*I don't know this the way I think I do; I only know what I heard*	When new information contradicts previous knowledge, it creates awareness of unquestioned assumptions and the new urge to question triggers transformation	When new knowledge contradicts previously held truth claim, it creates uncertainty and search for new truth claim.	Disorienting dilemma triggered by new knowledge contradiction *I felt the foundation I thought I had was shaken from under me*	Autonomy from authoritative voices *I told myself, I need to study this for myself to see what it's saying. I can't trust what I've been taught.*

Trustworthiness

The literature on qualitative research concurs that establishing credibility and trustworthiness is an important responsibility of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Since the researcher is the primary research instrument validity and reliability are key components (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). This study established rigor through triangulation across the data, member checking, thick, rich descriptions, and inter-rater measures. In this section, I discuss the methodology employed to ensure rigor in this study. I begin with a discussion of validity, internal validity and external validity, and reliability (Merriam, 1998).

Validity

Validity and reliability can be established from the onset of the study, the data collection, analysis, and how the findings are presented (Merriam, 1998). Creswell and Miller (2000) define validity as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the special phenomenon and is credible to them" (pp.124-125). Creswell and Miller (2000) argue the qualitative researcher brings a lens to the research and its validity. The data is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. The researcher is making decisions and deciding on validity throughout the process from design to findings. Therefore, there are two lenses to consider when safeguarding credibility: the researcher and the participant. Researcher's paradigms also shape the choices in validity procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Further, since qualitative research assumes the participants' reality is socially constructed, it is important to check how accurately their realities are represented. Below, I discuss the significance of internal validity, external validity, and reliability in establishing trustworthiness and follow with a description of the measures taken to ensure rigor and validity in this study.

Internal validity. In establishing internal validity, the researcher must ensure the research findings are congruent with the reality of the participants. With the constructivist paradigm, reality has multiple forms constructed by humans. As such, Merriam (1998) offered six strategies to enhance internal validity (triangulation, member checks, long term observation, peer examination, participant collaboration, and clarifying researcher assumptions and worldview). This study used triangulation, member checks, and clarifying researcher assumptions to ensure internal validity. These, along with other strategies, are discussed below.

External validity. External validity addresses the generalizability of the research study. The concern centers on the feasibility to generalize the findings from one study. The researcher should ensure the findings are generalizable and transferrable (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2014). Multi-case or cross-case analysis along with specific procedures for coding, augment the generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2002). The generalizability of the findings in this study is enhanced by the cross-case analysis of 48 critical incidents, along with their interrelatedness to the theories used (Miles et al., 2014).

Reliability. In qualitative research, reliability is understood to mean "the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Since qualitative research is contextual and people's experiences and interpretations are fluid, there is no guarantee a similar study would yield the same results. Hence, the expectation of reliability has been nuanced to refer to the dependability or consistency of the results with the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). There are methods the researcher can use to ensure dependable results. Some of these are triangulation, researcher disclosure on assumptions and theories used in the study, and details on the investigator's process of data collection and analysis (Merriam,1998).

Triangulation

Four main strategies of triangulation were applied to this study: 1) data collection triangulation, 2) investigator triangulation, 3) cross-case triangulation, and 4) theoretical triangulation. In the data collection, a combination of interviews and copious fieldnotes helped to ensure the data was being examined and understood from various perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interview protocol using the Critical Incident Technique, along with follow-up probing questions, served to deepen the understanding of the participants' experiences. Second,

investigator triangulation was used effectively to establish internal validity and to foster different interpretations of the data (Denzin, 2012). My doctoral committee chair, and methodologist, was actively involved as an inter-rater evaluator throughout the study from the data collection to the findings, critically reviewing the initial transcripts to ensure rigor in the interview process, examining the critical incidents culled from the data, and ensuring the preliminary findings flowed logically from the data presented. Third, using cross-case analysis to examine the 48 critical incidents served as a form of triangulation to confirm the validity and reliability of the findings across the data set (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Fourth, theoretical triangulation of two separate yet complementary theories (Mezirow's (1978) Transformative Learning theory and Fowler's (1981) Faith Development theory) served to guide the analysis and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon being examined.

Member Checks

The second method applied to establish trustworthiness was member checking. In qualitative research, member checking occurs when the researcher sends the interview transcriptions and interpretations back to the participants for review to ensure the data accurately represent what they wished to communicate (Merriam, 1998; Roulston, 2010). This is crucially important for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Butterfield et al. (2005) stated member checking or participant cross-checking is one of the methods utilized to ensure trustworthiness in CIT studies. I provided participants with copies of the transcripts of their interviews and invited them to confirm or edit the data. I sent clarifying questions to three participants who responded promptly, and the updates were included in the final narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I received confirmation from five participants. No changes were requested.

Deep Thick Data

Another procedure for establishing trustworthiness was to utilize thick data, describing the setting, the participants, and the themes in detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thick data includes "deep, dense, detailed" accounts that present the experience in detail, and capture the feelings, emotions, and actions of the participant (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Credibility is established when the narrative takes the reader into the world of the participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Through detailed fieldnotes during and after the interviews, I provided thick descriptions, as evidenced in chapter 4, giving the reader a sense of being there. Through the selection of participants, probing questions, and fieldnotes, I established a protocol for obtaining thick descriptions of participants' actions, expressions, and experiences.

Memos

"Memoing enables the researcher to engage with the data to a depth that would otherwise be difficult to achieve" (Birks, Chapman, Francis, 2008, p. 69). Memos, field notes, and maintaining a researcher's journal from the data collection process through the analysis helped me to maintain an audit trail of the research progress (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Memoing tracked and kept a record of my train of thought when I made changes in the coding or categories. Birks et al. (2008) used the acronym MEMO to reinforce the value of memoing in qualitative research: Mapping research activities; Extracting meaning from the data; Maintaining momentum; Opening communication. Mapping research activities is helpful because I can have an audit trail of my activities. I used memos to stay in conversation with the data, asking myself questions such as, "What is it doing?" or "what is it really saying?" Sometimes my memo was in the form of diagrams in PowerPoint to convey my thoughts. The figures below illustrate my use of PowerPoint diagrams to memo and converse with the data.

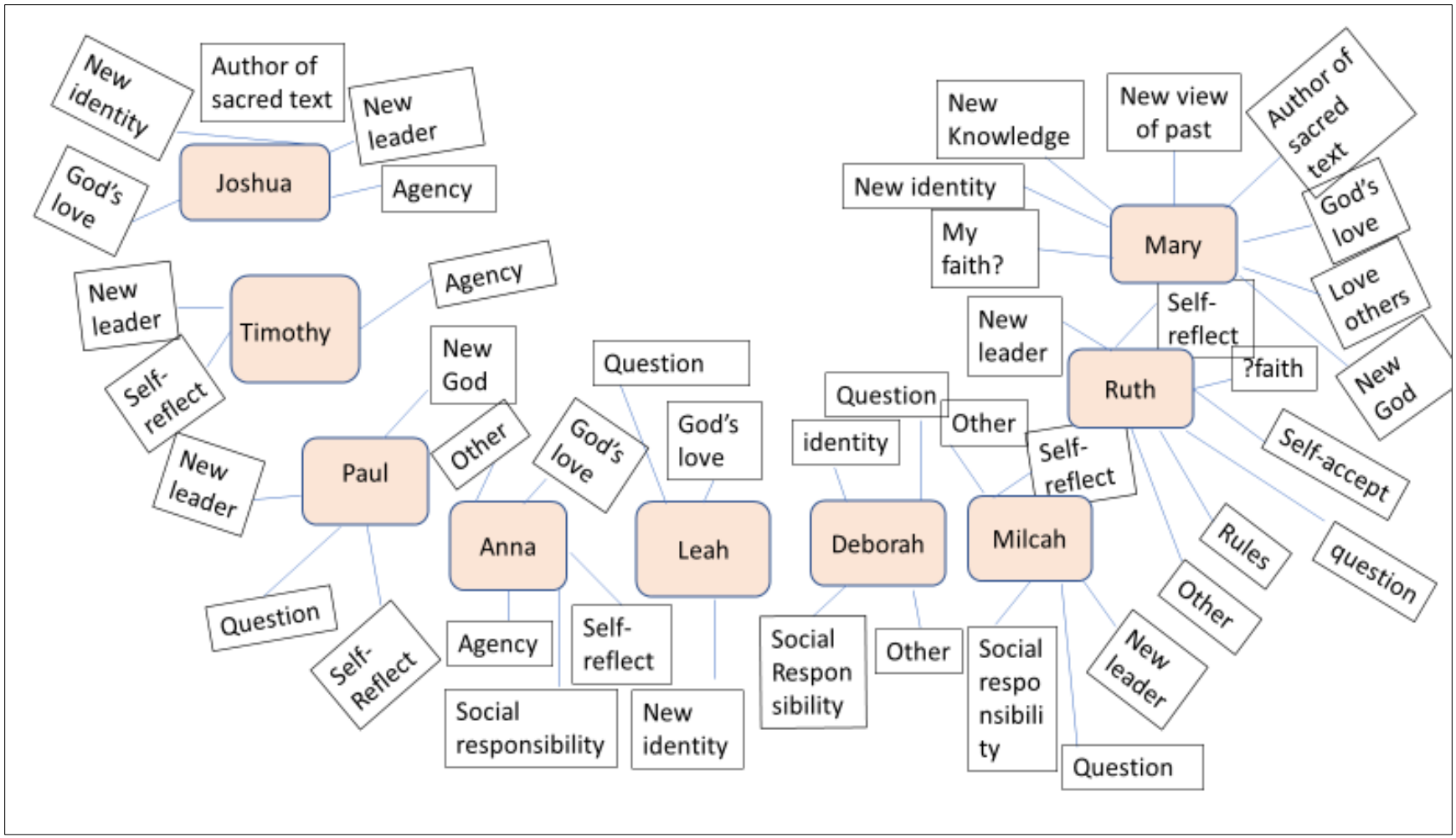

Figure 3.1. Brainstorming sample 1.

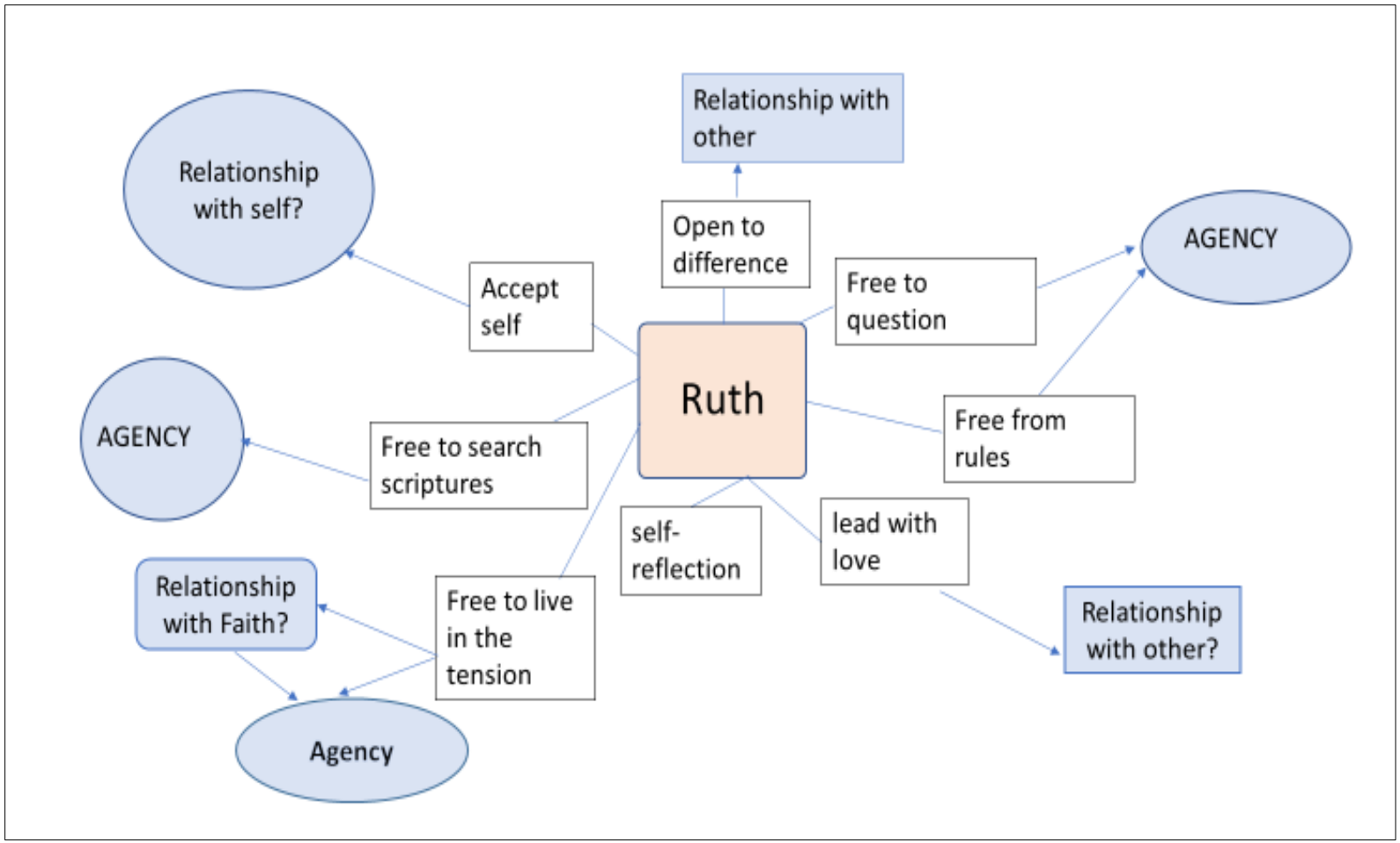

Figure 3.2. Brainstorming sample 2.

Researcher Subjectivities

"Research is an interactive process shaped by one's own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5). One way to lend validity and credibility to the research is to identify my "biases, motivations, interests or perspectives" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Reflexivity is the process of reflecting on the self as researcher, "the human as instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I approached this study as a Black Jamaican female, educator, pastor, and a naturalized American citizen who has spent most of her life residing in the United States. The church lay leaders are either Caribbean born, first-generation African Americans born of Caribbean parents or African Americans. There are noted challenges when researching within one's culture, especially among women of color who are participants and researchers (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhammad, 2001). Merriam et al. (2001) noted the closer the researcher is to the participants in culture, gender, race, or socio-economic class, the more it is assumed that the access will be granted. However, Johnson-Bailey (1999) in her study with Black re-entry women, found that while there were cultural understandings, issues of class and color arose from two of her participants. Further, as an insider, I could be too biased and too close to the culture and phenomenon being studied to ask necessary probing questions, making assumptions on interpretations (Merriam et al., 2001).

There were issues of positionality and power to be considered. Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the other (Johnson- Bailey, 1999). My position as a pastor (although not a pastor of the participants) and one of the instructors in the program created a power dynamic that did not disappear when I assumed the role of researcher. As

Medine et al. (2015) asserted, "As teachers, we hold a great deal of power, no matter how student-centered we make our classrooms: we set the epistemological frameworks, choose the readings, organize the space and how it is used, and give the final grade" (p. 372). Further, I designed the curriculum to explore how transformative learning would evolve among a traditional church demographic. Being aware of the power dynamic, I conducted the interviews at a neutral location, away from the school or church, dressed in sweatpants, and ensured we were seated at a round table. I took extra precautions to create a warm and conversational setting and avoided any comments that may be construed as "grading" the interview.

Throughout the research, I wrote memos and journals. Journals helped me to put my emotions in the moment on paper and to examine my personal assumptions and goals (Ortlipp, 2008). Similarly, "Production of memos with a reflective element has the advantage of explicating the position of the researcher" (Birks et al., 2008, p. 73). When I read memos or journals written after interviews or interaction with the data, I learned about my position or frame of mind at that time. There were moments I had a teacher's hat on, mentally grading their capacity to accurately recall facts.

As I conducted the research, going from the interviews to the analysis, the dynamics of the relationship shifted. I was an insider who had become an outsider (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). One of the surprises of the study was the discovery all the participants had their roots in Black Pentecostalism. Before conducting the interviews, the only knowledge I had regarding their faith was their current churches were interdenominational. I do not have a background in Black Pentecostalism. My father was a nonpracticing Catholic, who always reminded us he was Catholic. My mother's family was staunch Baptist for several generations. Therefore, my siblings and I grew up in a Baptist faith community. I spent a few years as a teenager attending a

Methodist church. However, I have spent all of my adult years in interdenominational faith communities. Therefore, as the interviews progressed, I realized I had very little awareness of the participants' lived experiences. As a researcher, I was the one who thought she "knew but didn't know."

Researcher Stance

As a pastor and educator, I am committed to the ongoing development of church leaders. However, beyond my ecclesial role, I brought my passion for transformative learning to the research. This passion was fueled by my own experience as a seminarian and pastoral leader in search of transformation beyond instrumental learning. Although the expansion of my transformative shifts began during my seminary education, surprisingly, the quantum leap in my development occurred in a doctoral course entitled, *Adult Development: Understanding the Shape and Features of Adult Growth*. Learners were given the time, space, and opportunity to intentionally and introspectively "occupy themselves with themselves" as Foucault suggested (Papadimos, Manos, & Murray, 2013, p.2).

When I walked into the class on the first day, I was certain about where I was headed. In fact, by its title, I knew this course would be instrumental in equipping me to accomplish my goal - helping others to grow. However, when I walked out of class that day, I felt like I had been thrown into the ocean without a life vest. After the introductory lecture on constructive – developmental theory, and the picture from the Gestalt perception of the old woman/young woman with the caption "what do you see," I sensed a dramatic shift: My scholastic journey would not begin with a study of the other - 'out there'; it would begin with me- the self. Foucault's *Technologies of the Self* reminds us that teachers and mentors must first know themselves and they must convert their looking from the outside, from others and the world,

toward ‘oneself’ (Papadimos et al., 2013). The first class marked the beginning of several sobering moments in my quest for scholarship.

Paulo Freire (1998), a Brazilian philosopher and educator, succinctly stated, “Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (p.51). My experience in this course indelibly re-formed my epistemological capacities. My experience was marked by a cycle of disorientation, differentiation and integration, deconstruction and reconstruction. Each convening and assignment had a unique impact on my transition from leader to emerging scholar. In the next few weeks, I would become increasingly aware that I was unfinished. The practice of reflection was a key instrument in my journey. I engaged in this practice extensively through journaling, contemplation, and dialogues with classmates, family, and co-workers. I learned reflection is an investigative and collaborative practice by which we can, “by our own means or with help of others, act upon ourselves to change our thoughts, conducts, and way of being” (Papadimos et al., 2013, p .2).

It was my own metamorphosis that sparked my curious interest in transformative learning and Black spirituality. I brought my experience in that graduate course to the program, integrating some of the exercises from the curriculum and learning vicariously from the professor how to become a facilitator of transformation. The professor combined her psychological support for students with a curriculum that was both challenging and flexible. She knew when and how to “hold well,” and “let go” providing support and stability during our growth process (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kegan, 2000). She allowed the classroom experiences to evolve organically so that the students were always directing their own learning. Malcolm Knowles, often referred to as the father of adult education, promoted this andragogic principle of learner-focus as essential for effective adult learning (Knowles, 1980).

In designing the program, I wanted to explore what would emerge when transformative learning and Black spirituality collided. I did not know what form Black Spirituality would take. Therefore, this research was truly an exploration of the phenomenon. I recognize transformation is an individual choice. However, I am committed to the work of transformative learning, creating spaces in which people can become whatever or whoever they choose to become, within and outside of the ecclesial context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and methods used in the study. To explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their experiences of perspective transformation, I adopted a qualitative approach and framed the study in an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist epistemology. Further, I used the Critical Incident Technique and semi-structured interviews for data collection. Adopting a deductive and inductive approach, I used both narrative inquiry and constant comparative inquiry to analyze the data. I outlined all measures taken to ensure quality and rigor in the research process, through a combination of triangulation, member checks, deep thick data, and memoing. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of my subjectivities as a researcher, my role as an insider/outsider, and my stance as a researcher.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Neo: *Why do my eyes hurt?*
Morpheus*: You've never used them before.*
—*The Matrix*, 1999

The purpose of this study is to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. The following questions guided the study:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

The Critical Incidents

Below, I present each participant and the narratives of their critical incidents in their own words. I begin with a biographical vignette of each participant, describing the context of the interview, to give a sense of "*being there* in the scene" (Erickson, 1986, 2012). To more vividly portray each participant to the reader, I selected pseudonyms from biblical characters and highlight the similarities in their stories. The words of the participants are identified in italics. The demographic profile of each participant was provided in chapter 3 (Table 3.1). The taxonomy below provides a sequential list of the nine participants and the titles of each critical incident narrated in the chapter.

Table 4.1

Critical Incidents by Participant

No.	Pseudonym	Critical Incident Title
1.	Mary	I don't know this the way I think I do; I only know what I heard
2.	Mary	The rug was pulled from under my beliefs
3.	Mary	Is this my faith or my family's
4.	Mary	If the one who sees all loves me unconditionally, then I can love myself
5.	Mary	Now I respect others with different beliefs and values
6.	Mary	I was pulled to go where I never thought I would go
7.	Mary	I saw my past in a different way, and it showed a clear path that I couldn't see before.
8.	Mary	I took God out of my box
9.	Deborah	I learned my way is not the only right way.
10.	Deborah	Now I question what I never questioned and examine what I hear.
11.	Deborah	I no longer compare myself with others or live to please others
12.	Deborah	I must take responsibility for what has been passed on to me
13.	Ruth	I am now free to ask questions
14.	Ruth	I am free from bondage to rules
15.	Ruth	I am free to be a constant presence of God's love for others
16.	Ruth	I am free to embrace differentness in others
17.	Ruth	I am free to search myself and make changes
18.	Ruth	I am free to be imperfect
19.	Ruth	I am free to live within the tension of faith and trials
20.	Ruth	I am free to search the scriptures on my own
21.	Ruth	I am free to love people and make a difference in someone's life
22.	Paul	I let go of the harsh God and grabbed hold of the new
23.	Paul	I shifted from judgmental to empathetic
24.	Paul	Now I look beyond the surface when I read
25.	Paul	I lost confidence in what I knew and began to question everything
26.	Paul	I couldn't see my flaws, but now I am a reflective leader
27.	Leah	I discovered the relentless pursuit of God's love
28.	Leah	I began to see myself differently, me and my story
29.	Leah	I freely question without fear of punishment

No.	Pseudonym	Critical Incident Title
30.	Timothy	I learned to look deeply within and deal with what's there, rather than living to save face
31.	Timothy	I'm making my own decisions from the inside out
32.	Timothy	A twelve-year-old's feedback changed my mindset
33.	Milcah	I can no longer associate with someone who is stuck in the old traditions
34.	Milcah	Now I read with my brain turned on and then I shout
35.	Milcah	I saw what the matter with me that I couldn't see before
36.	Milcah	Now I lead from a place of love adding value to people's lives
37.	Milcah	I am responsible to a larger community beyond my church
38.	Joshua	I stepped out of the box of church tradition
39.	Joshua	There is a love story between God and me and there I find significance
40..	Joshua	Now I read the Bible as a collection of stories, not a divine dictation
41.	Joshua	I realized I was judgmental and impatient,
42.	Joshua	I gained confidence to speak up for myself
43.	Anna	I am more connected to Christians around the world.
44.	Anna	Now I am open to different cultures and ways of worshipping God.
45.	Anna	I became aware of God's loves for me and it changed how I see myself
46.	Anna	Now I am receptive to the opinion of others
47.	Anna	I will dance when I wish, not under pressure
48.	Anna	I no longer judge myself and others

Mary

Mary met me in the conference room for our interview. She arrived at exactly 1:30 PM. She had to leave promptly at 3:00 PM to pick up her children from school. I always wondered how she was able to juggle the demands of being a wife, mother, graduate student, and church leadership. She walked in hurriedly and took her seat. She reached for her tote bag and pulled out a notepad and a copy of the protocol questions. The paper had handwritten notes next to each question. She perused her notes while I got the recording devices ready.

Mary is a thirty-five-year-old African American mother of three. She gained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and is completing a master's degree in Business Administration. Mary found out about the program while surfing the web. She was looking for some level of theological training while waiting to apply to graduate school. She relocated from another state and had been attending her local church for four years. She had been a part of the leadership team at her current church for a year and was encouraged by her leaders to attend the program. She was eager to attend the class because she had never been a part of church leadership before. She felt assured of God's leading when her leaders recommended the same program, she found on the web a year prior. Since coming into the faith, seven years ago, Mary had attended two interdenominational churches, both with a Pentecostal background. Both congregations were comprised of predominantly African Americans and Caribbean migrants.

I named her after the biblical character Mary Magdalene, because of a few similarities in their stories. Mary Magdalene is believed to have been a woman of ill repute before her encounter with Jesus. Mention of her name in the scriptures is often followed by the qualifier, "from whom seven demons had gone out" (Luke 8:2). The story of her past seemed to be indelibly etched on her present. Following her conversion, she fervently followed Jesus. In fact, she was such a devoted follower that she was the first to arrive at the tomb on resurrection day, and the first to see the resurrected Jesus. Similarly, participant Mary had a troubled past from her childhood. After years of sexual and physical abuse, she ventured out on her own during her teen years and made many poor decisions along the way. Like Mary Magdalene, she had marks from the past that followed her. After her conversion, she tried desperately to hide her tattoos and any other visible signs of her past. Nonetheless, since her conversion, she has fervently followed Christ, voraciously studies the Bible, and seeks to draw closer to God.

As we began the interview, she quickly became immersed in her stories. Sometimes she gazed into the distance as she relived her story, seeming to forget I was in the room. I allowed her space to tell her story as I listened intently. She passionately reiterated her hunger to learn and to grow. I watched her countenance light up intermittently as she expressed gratitude that God had heard and answered her heart's cries. After each narrative, she reviewed her notes and placed a checkmark on her list.

Incident 1: I don't know this the way I think I do; I only know what I heard.

One day we came across a scripture in the Old Testament, "One can chase a thousand and two can put ten thousand to flight." That was something that I had heard and repeated many times, not realizing that I didn't know the entire verse of scripture and had no idea that we were using it out of context. I felt the foundation I thought I had was shaken from under me. I said, "I don't know this thing the way I think I do, I only know what I've heard." I need to make sure that I understand this word, so that I'm not repeating what I've heard, but I'm repeating what I know. And so that was the first aha moment for me of realizing I don't know this thing the way I thought I did. So that started my journey into really digging into the scriptures. I told myself, I need to study this for myself to see what it's saying. I can't trust what I've been taught.

Incident 2: The rug was pulled from under my belief about the Bible.

We were reading two parallel stories that said the exact opposite of each other. I remember so clearly, it was David taking the census in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. To my amazement, one story said the Lord incited David and the other said Satan incited David to take the census. I said, Wait, was it the Lord or was it Satan? For the first time, I began to see human perspectives behind the text. I came from a Black Pentecostal

church. It was nondenominational, but we had a Pentecostal background. It was a Caribbean church. So, we were taught the Bible is written by God. If I questioned anything in it, the response was basically, 'Because God said it" and "This is just what the book says. So, we're just going to do what the book says." But something happened to me that day when I read these parallel stories. It was challenging to move from the idea that this is a book written by God, to accept it's a book written by human beings with opinions. It just had me questioning. Is everything in here real? Should I believe all of that? … And where does that leave me? That definitely shook everything in me because, with the Christian faith, the Bible is our everything. We were taught everything we need is in that book. And so now I was put into a situation where I didn't know if I should believe everything in the book. What should I do with this new information? So, everything I thought I knew was ripped apart. I started looking at the people who were writing it and seeing them as I saw us. And so, they're people just like we are, doing life and facing situations. I don't know how, but somehow it brought me back into understanding that although this book is written by humans, it is sanctioned by God. I think God wanted us to see ourselves in it. And if it was just this magical book, and it was just all divine, we would never achieve what it says, or be able to relate or grasp it. That definitely was one of those times where I felt the rug was pulled from underneath me. I don't really know how I got back around to saying that this is a sacred book. I can't say I have a specific moment when I got from being torn apart, to being put back together. It made me step back and then I started seeing scripture on many different levels. I just embraced the Bible as literature. I had never looked at it that way before. I was seeing different genres of literature, some not to be taken literally. And I think when I was going

through that process, it just opened up something in me, showing me that there's more to this. When I'm reading scripture now it's different because I'm asking questions: Who wrote this? When did they write it? What was happening at the time they wrote it? Who were they writing it to? And how does this relate to what is happening now? I had never done that before. Now I have a different understanding of the scriptures and how I process what it says.

Incident 3: Is this my faith or my family's?

We were learning about the history of the church from the first to early sixteenth century. I went through another awakening because I realized that I did not know the history of my faith at all. I thought about what they had to go through, even their persecution. There was one story where they thrust the young woman in the lion's den and waited for the lion to rip her to pieces. And even in that moment, she was at peace. I began to ask myself, how would I have felt? What would I do? I'd be completely gripped with fear. I couldn't see myself in that situation. They held tight to their faith. Why were they able to hold on? How were they able to stand strong, and say, "I'm dying for this no matter what you say or what you do, … but I'm going to die believing that Jesus is Lord? What was it? And that was also a part of my process of why do you believe, what do you believe in? What makes you believe in it? That was a part of my process and then asking myself, "Are you willing to lay your life down for it? And if it's not worth laying your life down for, then maybe this is not the thing for you. It was really that process that made me really dissect my relationship with God and what God meant to me. It got me to the place where I began to question myself. "You proclaim to be a Christian, where did that come from? Was it something that you just decided to take up because most of your

family said this is what we do? Do you own this? Why did you choose this? What does God mean to you? What is the relationship between you and God and what does that mean? Why Christianity and not anything else?" … I realized I had not owned my faith. I think I had to go through that journey for some reason, to grasp it, hold it and own it. Even though it's been a year since I've completed the program, I am still asking questions. I'm still digging. It's like a continual journey, just finding more and searching more.

Incident 4: If the one who sees all loves me unconditionally, then I can love myself.

It was a revelatory moment for me one night where I was explaining something to someone on the phone. And it brought up an old incident in my life, dealing with abuse. And after I got off the call, I realized that I had gone through so much and even in my messy past, God loved me regardless. God loves me, regardless. And there was nothing in me that he didn't accept 100%. And it made me realize that … if he who sees all loves me unconditionally, then I can love myself with flaws and all. And so, this new awareness took me on a journey of loving me, and then made me realize that in loving myself now I can freely love others. When I rededicated my life to God, I came with life experiences and they showed on me. One of those was tattoos and although no one said anything, I just felt uncomfortable. I would try to cover my tattoos with a bracelet or something like that because I felt like there was something wrong with it. But doing a lot of self-reflection and journaling on what happened and how it played out in my life helped me to process what was going on inside of me. It was just a journey and I can't pinpoint when it happened. I just know I am now free to be me. And it may be small to others, but it's big to me. I took a trip to my hometown not too long after I finished the course. And usually,

I'm on edge and cautious. And on that trip, certain individuals didn't have the same effect on me. I had a new perspective. I am who I am. Either you love me, or you don't. And that's just who I am now, which is quite different. I even cut my hair. I've had long hair for my entire life. And so, when I cut my hair, the people around me were surprised. That's something I wouldn't have done, for fear of what others would think or say. And then put color in my hair on top of it! So, I've been loving me, loving life. And I am who I am, flaws and all. And so, you either take it the way that I am, or you don't, but I am me. I guess you'd say I'm unapologetically me. And so, I'm still going through, the process of just finding who I am and who I am in God and just loving every part in every season. And it made me realize who God is to me, and that everything about me is my story. And so, there was no reason for me to hide anything about my life any longer.

Incident 5: Now I respect others with different beliefs and values.

We were having a group discussion about how we see our culture and how we as Christians relate to what is happening in our culture today. I began to examine how I look at the culture I currently live in and how I react to people who have different traditions or values. I've always considered myself to be an open, nonjudgmental person. I was surprised to discover I had preconceived ideas about what and how people should be. I began to think, what made me see others a particular way and can I see myself in that person? I realized I saw other people based on how I was raised and from my circle. I thought about people around me who were different from me in the way they looked, the way they saw life, what they believed about God. I began to ask myself, what got them there and could that have been me. The response was, yes, that could have been me. It just took *me on this journey to realize that I am no different than anybody else and I am*

no better than, and they are no worse than because they have different beliefs or values. We are just living in different spaces in life. This was a major area of change for me. Now I don't have expectations of others based on my standards, I just bring myself to the relationship. I respect others in their different spaces.

Incident 6: I was pulled to go where I never thought I would go.

The most challenging experience for me was the preaching class. We had to preach three sermons. I liked the background work for the sermon preparation because I like research. But I was not ready to stand in front of a crowd. Although it wasn't a crowd, it felt like a crowd. Being forcefully placed in that situation, made me step on a different platform that I've never been on before and never saw myself on and never really wanted to be on. Sermon preparation and delivery opened a new world to me. I never really considered this is what a preacher does, and this is what happens when a preacher goes in front of people. And I never looked at the responsibility of preaching and how that affects the people who are hearing the word. During the first sermon, I began to feel a new pull and a new responsibility. I began to feel the weight of the responsibility to teach and preach. It made me realize you really have to be mindful of what you say. I saw that and it shook me. It just took me into a different direction than I ever expected to go in, because I had never seen myself doing any of that, neither had I considered it. With each sermon, it became clearer this is where I am going. I was pulled to see something I didn't know was in me…. I was pulled to a place I never thought I would go.

Incident 7: I saw my past in a new way, and it showed a clear path I couldn't see before.

We were discussing the feedback we got from our three critical friends. They were asked to tell us what they saw as our strengths, what were our growth opportunities, and what possibilities they saw for us in the future. We had to reflect on the feedback and deduce what are our strengths, how we show up to others, how does that play out in different areas of life, and what it might tell us about our purpose in life. I had been asking God, who am I and what am I here for. I had been wrestling with these questions for an entire year. I was frustrated because I couldn't figure out what was missing. So, I did not complete the assignment. I laid on my bed and I just started crying. I couldn't figure it out. And there was just so much going on in my head and I couldn't properly express it to anyone. When we began the class discussion, I didn't want to participate. I said I'm not *doing this. I didn't want anything to do with that process. But because we did it as a group, I was called on to participate. When I finally walked through the exercise, it was an aha moment. First, it made me realize God knew exactly what I needed and was answering my prayer. Second, I began to connect the dots between my strengths and some of the major turns in my life. Somehow those experiences began to make sense and showed a clear path that I couldn't see before. I can't say I have it all figured out. But now I have a clear sense of my strengths and how they have been playing out in my life. So, I have a new sense of identity about who I am and how God uses my strengths, and that's a green light to discovering my purpose.*

Incident 8: I took God out of my box.

We were discussing how we see and relate to leaders in our lives. We were sharing about our past experiences with leaders and the impact. I realized during the discussion I had a

blocker that affected my relationship with leaders in my life. I was wrestling with it, trying to figure out what it was and why. Later that week I went to a Bible study and had an aha moment. There was a discussion about how people view God. The associate pastor said, people look at God differently and it is connected to how you deal with relationships around you. And some people see God as God the father and some people see God as non-gender. It's who you are and how you are conditioned to see God. And I thought, I had never thought of that before. It made me realize that God is, and God is just God. And because of situations and because we're human and because of the life that we live and circumstances, we tend to put God in a box based on our own thoughts and lives. Then I realized I had God in a box based on my relationship with my father. I was battling with issues from my own father. So, my issues from my earthly father had spilled over into how I saw God and anyone in authority in my life. I struggled with trusting and allowing myself to be vulnerable. This incident opened my eyes to realize that not only did I have to deal with whatever was lingering from the relationship with my father, but I also had to take God out of this box that I made. Once I saw God beyond being a father, it opened a new door for a deeper relationship of trust. Now I'm working through my relationship with leaders.

Deborah

Deborah strolled into the waiting room ten minutes before the scheduled interview, casually scouting the room and viewing the pictures hanging on the wall. I wrapped up my prior meeting as she beckoned that she was not rushed. We took our seats around the small conference table, expressing our gratitude for the beautiful spring weather, and began to sip water from the ice-cold bottles on the table.

Deborah is a forty-five-year-old mother of three teen boys. Her youthful demeanor bore no witness to her three six-foot-tall sons. She seemed to fit right in with the thirty-year-old millennials. She was born in the Caribbean and migrated to the United States when she was thirteen years old. She has a master's degree and a ten -year career in her field of study. Deborah has been a Christian for twenty-five years. At fifteen years old, she accompanied a friend to a church service and committed her life to God. Since that time, although she has experienced some low moments, she has remained in her faith. She has been a leader in her church for the past six years and a member for nine years.

I named her after the biblical character Deborah in the Old Testament because of their shared propensity toward defying societal expectations for women. In biblical times a woman's place was one of subservience to her husband. Her role was to give her husband a son and attend to the affairs of the household. Deborah was quite different. She rose to become the leader of the nation. She was Israel's Judge and Prophetess for forty years. She was the only woman to acquire such a status. Deborah led the chief commander of the army into battle, defeating the nation's arch-nemesis.

While this participant has not reached the hierarchical status of her biblical counterpart, she bears some of Deborah's most notable traits. She chose a career typically reserved for men. She resisted efforts to be pigeonholed into roles designated for women. After completing high school, Deborah specifically selected a field of study that defied the stereotype of male and female roles and resisted her superiors' efforts to steer her away. Deborah's relationship with her mother has been stormy since childhood, because of Deborah's recalcitrance. Her mother wanted her only daughter to walk in her footsteps, but Deborah vehemently resisted any effort to force her into conformity. Deborah would not conform to her mother's bidding to wear hats to church services,

even though her mother told her the pastor required it. She refused to wear dresses to church and chose to wear jeans and tennis shoes instead. She struggled to forge her own path for her Christian walk while dealing with the reprimand from the church mothers and her mother. It's in this context of living in the tension, between who people say she should be and who she wants to be, that Deborah came to the leadership program.

Incident 9: I learned my way is not the only right way.

When we were going through the course, I realized all these different Christian religious beliefs originated from one faith. After Jesus' death there was one church, later called the catholic or universal church. Then different groups branched off as people had different interpretations and beliefs. How did this happen? How is it that we have all these various beliefs and yet started at one place? How did we all get here? Somebody had a different understanding and decided, mine is right and yours is not. And then this is where we are today. We are taught only our way is correct and spend our lives thinking what we do in our church is the only right way. But I learned to be receptive of other people's beliefs because, at the end, the ultimate judge is God. And so, some people will think they got it right and then they realize they don't have it right, and some of us who think we don't have it right may have it right. Once I worked it out within me, I began to see people differently, not only in the church but at work and in general. I learned to be able to see people's perspective, knowing that every time I come into somebody's space, they have their own opinions and way of seeing things. They have their own culture, beliefs, values, and problems. And when they interact with me, it doesn't mean that I am less important to them or they have issues with me. It's just that they came with who they are, and I have to meet them where they are. And so, when I meet people now, what's

resonating is realizing I am meeting with whatever they are going through, their culture and beliefs. I no longer see people as right or wrong. And so, it's making leeway for relationships to grow. My way is not the only way. I didn't see things that way before.

Incident 10: Now I question what I never questioned, and I'm not just being led.

I remember this particular day because I had read the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis many times but had never noticed before that Adam was there with Eve when she was persuaded to eat the forbidden fruit. People always say Eve made Adam sin. I had to read it over and over. I had never noticed that before. I thought, there's a lot of things in this book that people just don't tell you. We go to church on Sunday mornings and we expect the preacher to tell us everything. And I was one of those people. Prior to this, I had never gone back to see, is this really true or is there some truth to this? I've spent the majority of my Christian life just being churched and being a listener. I never really had the urge to check things for myself. I go to church, sit there and say, Amen. And I can say for me, there are a lot of things I learned in my Christian walk from someone else that I just accepted as being true. And so, this awakened me to realize there are things we've been taught but we never really went back to inquire. What was it like then? What did they do? And how did this belief begin? What does it really mean? This awakened me to examine things I had just accepted. We've been taught just to do things as part of the tradition, but it doesn't mean it's for today or that we are following the original meaning or intention for it. I forever loved church history because it opened my eyes. It explained a lot of those unanswered questions that I had when it came to the faith itself and why we do the things we do. So that's kind of where I am, just kind of still searching, thinking as I go through. But I recognize now that I do have to do my due

diligence in searching scripture for myself and not just accept everything that someone says from the pulpit. I recognize the intentions are good, but they are giving their interpretation. I can read it and get something totally different. So now, I listen differently. I listen more intently to what is being preached. Now, I don't just take everything at face value. I am now more attentive to what's being taught, and I research what I hear to see if it's correct or makes sense to me. So, I think now it's no longer where I take it in and act on it. Now it's more of stepping back and saying, let me see how that resonates with me. How am I feeling about this? How is it speaking to me? I'm not just being led, so to speak, I'm also forging my own path.

Incident 11: I no longer compare myself with others or live my life to please others.

We had an assignment to ask a critical friend to describe our notable strengths. The classmates also chimed in. I was surprised at the positive feedback. For a long time, I didn't think I was worthy enough. Even with a graduate degree, I didn't feel like I was at the level where I should be. I always thought others were more capable. Now I realize it is okay for someone else to understand it better or first or get it different, or maybe what they got was what they needed and that may not be where I need to be. I may need something else. So, it's kind of letting myself a little off the hook; No longer saying, you have to be this way or another or things have to be a particular way. Sometimes it's not. So, I'm trying to be more lenient with myself because I can be really hard on myself. And so, this journey is teaching me how to figure out me and the things I like and how I learn. I'm not going to be like someone else or fit those roles people try to pigeonhole me into. I guess that's my struggle; like my mother telling me what kind of wife or Christian I should be. And so, I realized that people force these roles on you, and you spend your life

trying to live up to those things. And sometimes that's not the way it's supposed to be. I've learned that for me I must be authentic to myself. I will no longer live my life trying to please others. The first 40 years of my life I tried to be what other people wanted me to be and I was not really happy. Now, I am no longer comparing myself to others. I think I'm in that cocoon stage so to speak. I'm still in there trying to be that butterfly. So, total transformation I wouldn't say. I would say I'm still in there trying to figure it out, but for me, transformation is you begin as one thing and then come out to be a totally different thing. I don't think I'm there. I'm trying to get my sure foot of which direction I wanted to take. This experience pointed me in the direction and started a process. I know being a Christian is great, but that's just not all there is. There's a lot more I need to do and more to grow and I am here on earth for a reason.

Incident 12: I must take responsibility for what has been passed on to me.

One thing that struck me was the martyrs in the second and third centuries who never met Jesus personally, and had only heard about him from someone else; but they were willing to give their lives for the cause. That really stuck with me. I go to church and go about my daily life, but I never really understood I stand on the shoulders of many who gave their lives for the faith I benefit from. One thing I walked away with is I do have a responsibility with the gospel that we have. What I saw in the videos was how these people stood on their faith when the lions were released to kill them. Some were beheaded and burned alive. What made them stand? I began to look at my own life. I was sad. I can honestly say that I was sad because it made me realize that I wasn't doing anything with my faith. I looked back at my Christian walk and realized it had been a roller coaster, all focused on me. Something happens and then I get upset for the entire

day or am ready to give up. And I realized I get derailed by small things and miss the bigger picture. I have a lot of work to do. There's a level that I haven't got to yet. So, I began a journey of examining my faith walk, asking myself what is really important and how do I take responsibility for the gospel handed down to me. I am still working on that, taking small steps.

Ruth

At 6:05 pm, Ruth pulled her car swiftly into the parking lot. She got out of the car with a big warm smile and her long, lanky body, apologizing for being a few minutes late. As she walked toward me, I reminisced on her first day of class. She had recently been given the responsibility of co-leader of a department at her church. She was concerned about how that would work because she was not willing to give up her freedom to worship God in her way and was not yet confident in how to relate to the Transcendent. We hugged each other and walked toward the conference room where I held most of the interviews. It was a neutral location, a midsize room with small round tables, ideal for a conversational setting.

Ruth is a twenty-eight-year-old female, who committed her life to her faith sixteen years ago. She has been a member of her church for twelve years and has been on the leadership team for the past five years. She was born in the United States to Jamaican parents. I named her Ruth, after a young woman in the Bible, who boldly left her family's religious roots to adopt the Jewish faith. Participant Ruth was raised by Christian parents but sought her own path for her faith. As a first-generation American, living and belonging to a Jamaican household, she has had to pave her own path into assimilation. It is probably this dichotomous cultural existence- an African American with Jamaican parents and all the cultural ramifications, that has given Ruth the tenacity to take ownership of her faith at a young age. She seeks her own relationship with

God and refuses to do anything simply because of pressure from her parents or her church. Therefore, it was surprising to both Ruth and her mother when Ruth showed up on the second week of class, at the nudging of her mother. Her mother attended the first class and thought the program would be helpful to Ruth who was searching for answers in her walk of faith. For some reason unknown to Ruth, she decided to come to class on the second week of class.

Ruth is a recent college graduate and lives at home with her parents. Both mother and daughter acknowledge the frequent battles of the minds that occur because of Ruth's intransigence. Ruth is vibrant and carefree, except when she feels her freedom to choose is threatened. She is an excellent communicator who exercises her freedom of expression without restraint. Ruth expressed appreciation for the liberty to ask questions that may be deemed heretical in her church context. She proved to be a deep thinker and a conscientious student. She came to class fully prepared each week engaging in dialogue and self- reflection.

As we entered the room, she looked around nervously. I offered her a bottle of water. I set up the recording devices as we chatted about the traffic. She tapped her fingers on the table nervously as she waited for me to get started. Once we began, she quickly overcame her nervous energy and delved into the interview. She told her story with high energy and eyes sparkling intermittently with excitement. Her vibrant energy seemed to fill the room for the next hour.

Ruth's interpretations of her transformative learning experience centered around what she describes as freedom. Freedom to examine what she believed and to live out her faith in her own way was quintessential to Ruth. Although Ruth described several examples of her changed mindset, I selected the incidents that directly addressed the research questions.

Incident: 13: I am now free to ask questions that others said could put me in hell.

In the first class, we were invited to step away from seeing the text as a sacred text and ask questions. It was easy for me to step away because I was always curious about what certain things meant. Not that I expected to get the answers for everything but knowing it's okay to ask questions. Before this, I was told you just have to have faith, and you don't, have to understand everything, and even when I would ask questions, I felt like the answers didn't answer my questions. I just needed something deeper. I wanted to be able to see what the text really meant instead of just listening to what somebody else said about it. As the teacher explained how we would use literary devices, I remembered when I was younger, I don't remember the question that I asked, but I was told, "You can't think like that, that type of question puts you in hell" and that stayed with me. So, I wouldn't ask questions because I didn't want people to think that I was going to hell. So, from the first class, I delved right in, with my questions. Realizing I could ask felt like a load fell off me. Now I have a willingness to ask more questions, and a willingness to dig deeper. I enjoy the freedom to ask why it was written, why did God respond in a certain way, who wrote it, and can it be applied to today's culture. My transformation is that I feel free to ask those questions without guilt or feeling less than others or fear of being far from God.

Incident 14: I am free from bondage to rules.

I remember the chapter title: "Structures of Covenant Life." I learned about why God gave the ten commandments and realized it wasn't meant to be a restriction, rather it was to give structure. God wasn't just saying, here are these laws that you have to follow, obey me. But it was really out of love because they had come out of four hundred years of

slavery and had never been in a free environment where they had to live in a community and make their own decisions. So, God gave the laws based on love and protection, saying, these are the guidelines for living a free life in a community. And it had always been for me, when I read about the ten commandments, that I think its. rules, rules, rules This is what you have to do to be a good Christian. This what you have to do because this is what God says and you're going to hell if you don't follow them. But to see that's not what it was intended for. And so, for me, it changed my view of what I saw as mere rules. They are guidelines to help me navigate life. And that really was just like, Wow! I never saw it like that before. Now I am open to look at the guidelines and apply them to my life, if they apply, and not feel I am in bondage.

Incident 15: I am free to be a constant presence of God's love for others.

We were reading in Exodus how the children of Israel were in slavery to the Egyptians for four hundred years and God heard their groaning and sent Moses to deliver them. They were not crying out to God specifically but were just crying out from the anguish and God showed up. And that's how I want to show up to other people just to be present because that's the type of God that I serve. And that's the kind of God that I want to serve. That's not just the God of rules, but it's really about love. It was more about the character of God. As I saw in everything that I read, it was really a story of love. And so to grow closer to him, you become more like him. And I wanted that. I wanted to extend that to other people. So when they see me, they also can see love and just not see me doing things. And I don't think I was necessarily doing that. I can do things well and I could get things done. But that love wasn't showing. I began to really extend myself more to the people I lead and that's not something I did with anyone in any of my relationships.

I give the relationships the bare minimum, just enough that you feel a little bit cared for, but now I find myself getting out of that comfortable space because I want the people to trust me. I want to be more effective as a leader. I wanted them to open up to me and I wanted them to know I was there for them. I was really extending myself and that was hard at first. We all hear God is love. But I just think the way I saw it in that story was different. It just made me think, Wow! I wanted to understand that more and I wanted to walk in that love. I could clearly see this is a God who really loves us. And regardless of what happened, God was still constant in that love regardless of how the circumstances changed or who was even a part of the story, what they did or what they didn't do. This is the God that we serve and that's how I want to be for others.

Incident 16: I am free to embrace differentness in others.

We were discussing how some Jewish believers wouldn't fellowship with Gentile believers in the early church and how the leaders had to make special exceptions for the Gentiles who came from a different culture. For example, the Gentiles weren't forced to be circumcised and they could eat meat. I began to think about how divided we are because of different beliefs. I realized that growing up in church if you're listening to one preacher or one style or one belief system all your life when you hear something else, you reject it. But it's not necessarily wrong, it's just because you grew up with just this one mindset. I had been judging based on my experience and I only experienced it one way. This is what we believe and everyone else is wrong. But I began to see it doesn't necessarily have to be only a right or wrong way. Having a different belief or way of worship doesn't make one wrong or that doesn't make us enemies. We can still love God. So with that, I can look at other people who don't believe what I believe, and we can still

come together. That was a big difference for me. Now if I don't agree with someone, I try to see it from their angle. I don't think I was able to do that before. I didn't have the mental capacity to do it before.

Incident 17: I am free to search myself and make changes.

We were practicing self-reflection while reading about the heart qualification of a leader. I really was able to see my heart on certain things. I was just able to look at myself to say, okay, why are you really doing this? Is it about God at the end of the day? I began to reflect on why I do what I do in the church. We are told you're supposed to be in church, you're supposed to work in the church, you're supposed to give your services, you're supposed to do this thing or the other. And for me I asked myself, why am I really doing certain things? Because I want to do it, I want to have a closer walk with God or because I feel obligated? It helped me to really dissect the things I learned about myself. It helped me to see myself because now I have this better way to examine my actions. I wasn't able to do that before. Just the self-reflection, just that mental process for me, that I think is what I gained the most. Now I can search myself and make changes.

Incident 18: I am free to be imperfect.

I was reading about some of the apologists and patriarchs of the faith who had personal failures and struggles, but their names are still in the history books. So, I realized God uses people who are not perfect, seeing that God loves us despite our imperfections. God doesn't love me because I do things perfectly or not love me because I didn't do something, I didn't pray, or I didn't do this or that. It's not about those end goals, but it's about the journey. And at the end, you become someone different because of what it took you to get there and what you learned along the way. I don't have to be a perfect person.

So, I don't have to bring myself to a place of anxiety because I'm not hitting the marks that I think I'm supposed to hit. I don't think that's how I saw it before I felt like you had to just be a perfect Christian and dot all your I's crossed all your T''s. I think it gave me room to not be so hard on myself. And, knowing now I don't have to be perfect for God to love me or to even be a Christian is freeing to me. Now I see myself as someone who is growing, and growth doesn't have a timetable. I'm constantly changing. Even just my mind, the thoughts that I'm thinking, and I'm able to see that now.

Incident 19: I am free to live within the tension of faith and trials.

I was reading about the life of the Christians in the early church and how people died without seeing the promise they were believing for. We always hear the successful Bible stories, like Daniel survives in the lion's den or the three Hebrew boys live after being thrown in the fiery furnace. They overcame, but the truth is throughout church history a lot of people didn't. Even these apostles who did great miracles recorded in the Bible who we think were famous, really were not. I was surprised to learn Christianity was a small thing going on in the bigger context and a bigger world and they weren't culturally or politically the people in power. That doesn't mean that they didn't have a promise or that they didn't have faith. Their lives weren't all sunshine and rainbows. So, it became clear that something is not wrong with me or my faith because everything is not perfect in my life. Before then, I just had the overwhelming sense that everything was going to be great if I had faith. What I was hearing preached over and over is if I press and touch the hem of his garment all will be fine. But I was able to see other people's lives and stories that didn't line up with what I was hearing preached. So, my faith was strengthened to live with trials and gave me a different view of faith.

Incident 20: I am free to search the scriptures on my own.

I remember the first time we looked at one of the popular texts we love to quote and realized it was taken out of context. It didn't mean what we thought. I felt like, what?! Was I taught wrong? I don't want to go that far, but is it ignorance? Why don't they know this? Why is it being taught like this to us? Why are we not being taught how to interpret the scriptures so that we can get a deeper understanding of our faith and not just someone telling us this is what it means? Why don't we learn it like this so everyone can have a sturdy foundation? It was shaky because I realized I didn't have a full grasp of this thing that I believe. I came to a point where I realized I don't have to make those definite judgments like they were wrong because it could be a number of things and it's okay. I just think it's culture, education, class, it's just a whole bunch of factors, but they're still doing the best they can. So I realized that, and I try not to think they're right or wrong. When something is preached that I now know is taken out of context, I just take what I can and try to get something out of it. I'm not going to discredit how somebody else brings it. I realized I can't rely on a preacher. So now I read the Bible and search for meaning on my own.

Incident 21: I am free to love people and make a difference in someone's life.

I just can't forget that day. The assistant professor said, "You know, these people are willing to die for their faith and we won't even live for ours." Dang, that's so true! That just always stayed in my mind. We don't have to do anything extraordinary although you may want to, you don't have to be somebody super significant. We can live and love God and love people. I asked myself, what am I doing right here? Am I a horrible person? No. But I just felt like. I'm not really living out my faith, because I want to do so many other

things and I have such grand ideas that I'm prohibiting myself from doing stuff because I feel like, oh, I'm not doing this or I'm not doing that. I'm not living my life to the fullest. People are dying for their faith and we can't even just live to just love people. That's enough to walk out what you're doing, to walk in purpose, whatever that may be, even if it's something super small to walk that out, we're not doing that. But we are still focused on praying about car notes and getting more money. And for me to see those people die, those horrible deaths and to really stand up in the face of persecution, I realized we aren't doing much with what we have. Those words changed my mindset to live each day purposefully to make a difference in someone's life, and not just focus on me. Sometimes it's just kind words and other times it's action. But I do what I can.

Paul

Paul met me at the conference room where I conducted most of my interviews. He pulled up in the parking lot ten minutes before the scheduled interview time. I watched as he walked toward the door, dressed in his crisply ironed button-down white shirt, black pants, and pristinely polished black shoes. He greeted me with his usual warm and inviting smile. It had been two years since he had completed the program. I remembered Paul standing out from the rest as the model student who was always prepared for class. He completed every reading assignment, turned in every assignment on time, and actively participated in group discussions.

Paul is in his early fifties and has served as a lay leader for fifteen years. He has been a member of his current church for eight years. He was born in the Caribbean and migrated to the United States twenty-five years ago. I named him Paul, after the Apostle Paul, because of their zeal and subsequent changed perspective of God. The Apostle Paul, previously named Saul, was so zealous in his commitment to Judaism, that he dedicated his time to arresting and persecuting

Christians. On one such mission, Paul had a divine encounter that left him blind for a few days. Something like scales fell from his eyes, he received his sight and immediately converted to Christianity. Paul went full throttle with his new faith, to become one of the most prominent proponents of Christianity in the early church.

This participant, Paul, had a similar fervor for his faith. He was brought up in a Black Pentecostal Holiness church. There were rigid rules about how to live as a Christian and strong theology about God as a hard-nosed judge. Paul is passionate about teaching and preaching the gospel and winning new converts to his faith. Believing that it was his responsibility as head of his home, Paul was unwavering in his standards for his family. His wife and children had to be in church every Sunday, even on vacations, rising early for Bible study and prayer at home. He brought that zeal everywhere he went – in church, work, and home.

I smiled as he opened his manila folder with a copy of the interview questions and handwritten notes. We talked for a few minutes about his current ministry activities before beginning the interview. I began the interview with the consent form process and a few questions about his background. His face lit up as he described his transformative experiences in his distinct Caribbean accent. Sometimes when he spoke about his old rigid demeanor, he dropped his head, looking down at the table. Those moments would be short-lived as he quickly beamed with excitement about his new perspectives on God, himself, and his relationship with others. After the interview, Paul stayed and talked while I packed up. He expressed how much the interview process was therapeutic for him. Although he thoughtfully prepared for the interview, he got further illumination about his transformative experience during the interview.

Incident 22: I let go of the harsh God and grabbed hold of the new God.

Reading about God 's pursuit of the children of Israel, although they continually turned to other gods, was mind-blowing for me. I was stuck on the cycle in the book of Judges: The Israelites would turn away from God, then be oppressed by other nations, then they cried out to God for help, God would send a strong leader to deliver them, then they would serve God for a short time, only to start the cycle again. I marveled at God's mercy and patience. It gave me an entirely different perspective on God. I realized there is so much about God's character I didn't know. I used to see God as a judgmental God, a harsh God, a hard God, and if I don't pray, if I don't read the Bible, God's going to cut me off. So I used to put pressure on myself, always trying to appease and keep God from being angry with me. It was so bad that even when I went on vacation, I would search for a church to attend on Sunday. I felt God would be upset with me if I missed church. I began to see this did not match what I was seeing in the stories. So I grabbed hold of this new God I never knew; I began to see God as gracious and merciful. Now I live my life knowing God forgives me of whatever I've done wrong. I can relax and serve God. I can rest knowing that God's love is unconditional.

Incident 23: I shifted from judgmental to empathetic.

My daughter did something she shouldn't have done, and I was very rough on her and I said, "you are a Christian and you're not supposed to do that and God doesn't like that," and she said to me, "But Dad, God is a forgiving God." And that really hit home. I realized that although I began to see God as forgiving, I wasn't extending it to others. I was still operating in the old perspective. I was stuck on punishment for her sin. From that moment I was a changed person. I realized my perspective of God as a harsh judge

had affected my relationships with others. I was very judgmental. I would pressure my wife and family to do what I thought was the only way to serve God. Once I became aware of how and why I acted this way to others, I became more empathetic and merciful. It helped me to have a better relationship with my daughter and my wife. Even in my ministry, I find myself wanting them to feel the love and forgiveness I now enjoy.

Incident 24: Now I look beyond the surface when I read.

I always knew the story of God making a covenant with Abraham in the book of Genesis. What I didn't know was God used an ancient near east custom to cut the covenant. I was shocked. God used a custom from a pagan culture?! I kept asking myself, if the pagans were doing this before, why would God choose this method? That opened my eyes to so much, because I used to think that everything originated with God and the children of Israel. Also, we've been taught to stay away from the ways of the culture because it is sinful. But God used the way of the culture to speak to Abraham. It was really a shocker for me. I realized God related to them based on the culture they lived in. God doesn't discard or disregard our culture but speaks to us through it. Therefore we have to look at the context of the scripture and apply it to see what God is saying to us today. Now when I read the scripture, I no longer take it at face value. I research how it relates to the culture. It changed my perspective of God, culture, and the Bible. Now I am making my teaching more relevant to the culture of our time.

Incident 25: I lost confidence in what I knew and began to question everything.

I was taught the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses and had read the books many times. While in class, I noticed Deuteronomy narrated the death of Moses. Did Moses write about his own death? It was a shocker. I teach the Bible; how did I not

notice this before? I was thinking "how could I have missed this?" This happened several times. Either I failed to notice something in a text, or our church tradition had added something that was not there, like three wise men coming to see baby Jesus. The text never said three wise men! Where did I get these things? So I lost confidence in what I knew. I didn't want to give wrong information to others. I asked myself, how much of what I know is wrong? I realized I never questioned what I heard or checked it for myself. I just assumed it was correct and repeated it. I came from a Black Pentecostal church. In our tradition, you just pray and fast and read the Bible and that's how you prepare yourself to be a preacher. Nobody went to Bible school. It wasn't necessary. I just fell into that category. So when those discrepancies took place, I realized training and research are important. I stepped back from what I thought I knew and began to question everything. I'm researching to see if what I learned is correct. I've learned not to bypass double checking things and not to assume I know. I no longer rely on what was handed down to me.

Incident 26: I couldn't see my flaws, but now I am a reflective leader.

I got quite a surprise when we started doing self-reflection on our leadership practice. I had never even heard of self-reflection before this time. We had to reflect on certain incidents and share them with classmates. That's when I realized I always saw myself as right in every situation. I couldn't see my faults. I would talk about other people's flaws, judging others for the same thing I was guilty of doing. I'm right and you are wrong was how things always went. When the folks on my team didn't do what I asked, I would become aggressive because they were supposed to do what I said. It was hard to see myself. From that day until today, I do reflection on a regular basis and I always learn

new things about myself. And because of that, it changed my perspective and gave me a different attitude as a leader. In a situation, I look at things from different angles. I look at things from the other's person's lens. So reflection is now a natural part of my life. It causes me to play out the scenarios in my head, "if I do this, what's going to happen?" Or, "this is how this looks right now to the other person, I need another approach." Before this time, I would just act and whatever happened, happened. So I'm taking a more reflective approach during the situation and afterwards. This is where I have seen the biggest change in myself.

Leah

When I pulled up in the parking lot twenty minutes before the scheduled time for the interview, Leah was already waiting in her car. She was always the first to arrive for class each week, waiting in her car for the other students to arrive. We met at the school because that location was more convenient for her. Leah had a radiant smile and hugged me warmly when she entered the room. Her flamboyant fashion sense juxtaposed her quiet and reserved disposition. She wore a beautiful hot pink shirt over her white linen crop pants. The matching gold and turquoise necklace accentuated the outfit perfectly. Her silver and black hair framed her face nicely, highlighting her high cheekbones and extended lashes.

Leah is a fifty-six-year-old African American woman who has lived in the same state for her entire life. She dropped out of college after her freshman year and lost confidence in her academic abilities. She comes from a large family of eight siblings and countless nieces and nephews. Her parents were fervent Christians and all the children were very actively involved in the Pentecostal church. Therefore, Leah committed to her faith as a child and has been a

Christian for most of her life. Leah has been a member of her current church for the past twenty-five years and has served in several leadership roles for twenty years.

I named her Leah, after one of the wives of the patriarch Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob loved Leah's younger sister, Rachel, and asked her father for her hand in marriage. Much to Jacob's chagrin, on the morning after the wedding he realized he was given Leah. Jacob worked for her father for seven years to get Rachel as a wife. Not only was Leah an unloved wife, she was not as beautiful as her younger sister. But, according to the narrator, God saw that Leah was "unloved "and opened her womb to conceive. While Rachel struggled with infertility, Leah birthed six boys and one girl and had another two sons through her maid, who she gave to Jacob as a surrogate. Therefore, Leah is the matriarch of eight of the twelve tribes of Israel. After several years of yearning for her husband's love, indicated by the names she gave her sons, (Reuben, "see, a son"; Simeon, "God heard that I am unloved;" Levi, "now my husband will be with me;"), it appears Leah found love in God and named her fourth son, Judah, meaning "praise."

Similarly, participant Leah felt unloved. During her childhood, she was sexually abused by a family member and spent many years looking for love in all the wrong places. After suffering pain and rejection in failed relationships and ultimately a divorce, she eventually found a loving and caring husband. Nonetheless, feeling unloved left its scars on Leah. She had to work through healing from past hurts and gaining self-confidence. Leah said she came to the program for an in-depth study of the scriptures and to overcome fear. Since completing the program three years ago, Leah launched her own ministry and has authored her first book.

During the interview, Leah's eyes were filled with tears as she told her story of transformation. She eventually reached for the box of tissue on the table and pulled it closer to

her for quick retrieval. At the end of the interview, she expressed her love for God and gratitude God had met her in this experience of transformation.

Incident 27: I discovered the relentless pursuit of God's love.

The first major shift occurred when we were discussing in class about God's relentless pursuit of the children of Israel, even when they kept turning away to serve other gods. Tears rolled down my face and when I think about it now, it still brings me to tears. That day I saw God's pursuit of the children of Israel in a way I had not noticed before, even though I had read the stories many times. It was one of those moments when the class just zoned in on a particular moment. We all said, "God, why are you still helping them out of trouble?!" But, suddenly we stopped talking. It was no longer the children of Israel's story; it was ours. In that time of reflection, I became aware that I was no different. I knew God loved me, but that relentless pursuit, even when I am disobedient or say I am going to do something and do the opposite, shifted my perspective. Somehow I became aware of God's endless capacity to love me even when I don't love him like I should and can't stay committed to what I promised to do. And so it just helped me to see that even in my frailties and limitations God doesn't change his mind about me. I asked myself, "why did you not know this before?" But I did not, I did not. No, I did not feel or experience that until I really saw the pursuit. I knew it, but I didn't know it. I think it just penetrated another level in my heart and another place in me where it just began to have a new meaning You know, when you say you have a firm foundation? Everything in my perspective of God shifted and my life had a new foundation of relentless love.

Incident 28: I began to see myself differently—me and my story.

I came through the doors on the first day of class, purposely sitting at the front of the class because I had so much fear. It had been several years since I had been in school. What am I doing in school at this stage of life? I quit college after the first year because I was afraid I wouldn't succeed. And here I am. I looked around the room nervously. As everyone introduced themselves, my heart was beating against my chest. Thoughts were racing through my mind: "these folks are way ahead of me; this is my last class. I can't do this. What am I doing here?" I forced myself to sit at the front of the class for fear I might miss something if I sat too far back. Every week I told myself it was my last class. In every course, I said, "this is my last course". But, somehow I kept coming back. Now that it's all over, I look back and realize after a while, I began to sit at the front of the class, not because of fear, but because I could. So it was just incredible. I can't pinpoint a specific day or time, but somehow along the way, I began to see myself differently. I was my worst critic. So every time I failed to do something, I would just continue to beat myself up. But I began to look at myself differently, giving myself a little slack. That voice saying, "You need to," "Look at what you did or didn't do," just left me. I began to have more confidence in who I am. I said, "God didn't make any mistakes about the call on my life". I began to reason with myself, "God's not beating me up. He's loved me through this process so I can choose to stay defeated or I can move on". And I chose to move on. The first decision was to accept myself for who I am. I had to accept myself and my story. My story is that I was abused as a child and that brought a cloud of fear. In the times of reflection, I became more and more aware of how that was playing out behind the fear. I began to open myself to embrace God's love in a new way and allowed God to

come into places that I didn't know were vacant. And now, when I stand before audiences to speak, they don't believe when I tell them there was a time when I wouldn't speak publicly because of fear. So it's accepting what I had to walk through in my past, knowing God was with me in those rough times when I didn't even know, and the assurance that who I am is enough. My past story no longer defines how I see myself. I came in the doors with fear and left with a new perspective of who I am.

Incident 29: I freely question without fear of punishment.

We were learning about genres in the New Testament and came across one of the scriptures we quote so often, "I wish above all things that you would prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers." I was so surprised to learn it was a customary greeting in letters of the time and we had built a whole doctrine about prosperity out of it. It was taken totally out of context. I was so taken aback. It shook me for a while. I said, What?! I've just been taking what someone else said and never thought to check it for myself. I just assumed if it came from the pulpit or television, it was correct. I left class that night just feeling cheated. After that, I sat in a judgmental seat judging everything I heard in a sermon. It was hard because class was a free space; we could ask any question, have open discussions about what we didn't agree with. But in church, you knew not to disagree or question anything. We were always taught that you cannot question God. To question the Bible was to question God. But the new freedom opened me up to a whole new world. I would listen to the sermon at church and then when I get home, I said let me see what it's saying for myself. I gained such confidence, knowing I can ask, Why? How? Where? And who was the author speaking to? I can ask and not fear that it's being dishonoring to God or the scriptures. I still do that. I don't always get

an answer to my question immediately, but I can ask that question and that's what's important to me. That was freeing because it just brought me to another level of seeing God, the Bible, and myself. Yeah, the freedom feels good.

Timothy

I waited at the door for Timothy's arrival. He notified me by text he was running late. We were scheduled to meet at 5:00 pm, but due to unusually heavy traffic, he arrived at 5:20 pm. He hurried into the room, apologizing for being late. He reached for his laptop in his briefcase and opened it on the table. This was my second interview with Timothy. After reviewing the transcript from the first interview, we both decided a second interview would allow for richer descriptions of his transformative experiences. Timothy seemed to be reviewing his notes on the computer. He looked quite relaxed in his blue and white plaid shirt and khaki pants. He explained he was supposed to work from home, but had to travel to work unexpectedly, due to computer problems. Timothy was excited about his new job. He waited almost a year to receive this job offer and was quite pleased.

Timothy is twenty- eight years old. He was born in the Caribbean and migrated with his mother to the United States at age thirteen. He recently completed a master's degree and plans to further his studies to the doctoral level. He has always excelled academically. Striving for excellence was one of the core values his mother instilled in him.

Timothy's commitment to his faith occurred at a young age. He vividly remembers walking down the aisle of the church at the tender age of six, in response to a stirring sermon from his pastor. So, although he is in his late twenties, he has been a Christian for over twenty years. He was raised by his mother who had a strong commitment to her faith. Frequent church

attendance was a normal part of Timothy's life since childhood, sometimes three to four times per week. Timothy recalls missing only three Sunday services in his adult life, due to illness.

I named him after a young man named Timothy, who was a mentee and companion of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. This participant has the similitude of Timothy, who committed to the Christian faith at a young age, following after his mother who was a devout Christian. He had a good reputation in the community and made a notable impression on Apostle Paul. From the correspondence, it appears the community had lofty expectations of this young man, but Timothy seemed to be retreating as the problems in the church community weighed heavily on him. In a letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul admonished Timothy to remember the deposit that was made in him through his mother and grandmother. Similarly, when participant Timothy began the program he was in a conundrum; struggling to navigate the tension between demanding expectations from those around him and the weariness he felt from his overcommitment in life and ministry.

As we began the interview, it was clear Timothy was focused on telling his story and ensuring he answered the questions, not veering off course as he did in the last interview. His mannerism was different this time. His responses were thoughtfully prepared and reverberated the heart of someone who was wrestling with his responsibility as a leader and the decisions he felt he needed to make to secure his own well-being. After the interview, he continued to share more personally, expressing gratitude for a listening ear.

Incident 30: I learned to look deeply within and deal with what's there.

I had a major shift after watching two videos. The first was an interview with a pastor's wife describing how her husband was addicted to drugs, committed several acts of adultery over the years and was found dead from a drug overdose. The second was with a

pastor who had committed adultery but was able to move forward because he took time away from ministry to recover and seek counsel. What was so compelling to me was that the first pastor had notoriety and charisma and seemed to have everything going for him. His wife said after each episode of failure, he rushed back into ministry and didn't take sufficient time to deal with the problem. He didn't want anyone to know he was struggling. His actions had a damaging effect on his marriage, children, and the church, and eventually cost him his life. Listening to his story and his ultimate demise sent shock waves through me. I said, I don't want that to happen to me. There were many similarities between us. There are people who look up to me and I'm a man too. My own vulnerabilities stared me in the face. Falling is not far from me and it's not uncommon. I have friends who've gone through similar situations. At first, my concern was how other people were affected. I may be able to walk through my own struggles and get over it. But the people are not going to easily get through things. I began to see the faces of the people I connect with, those I lead, who respect me or who look to me for guidance. I don't want to be in a situation where they're disappointed or they are let down or their lives are ruined because of me. After a lot of introspection and looking deep within I asked myself: Where am I? I realized my real concern was about not disappointing people. But now I can say that it's not really about disappointing people. It's about my relationship with God and knowing that I'm walking in integrity with my own standards for my life and looking after my wellbeing. That was when I began to understand that a leader must introspect and know when to step down or when to vacate the position. It was really an eye-opener. In the past, I would've said, if you messed up, forgive yourself and move on. Now my perspective shift is to look much deeper within. Look at my inner

demons, look at the challenges, look at the struggles and then chart a new path. And so it taught me then, just looking at both stories that growth comes when we allow ourselves to introspect deeply and deal with what's within, rather than living to save face. That was a big lens switch for me.

Incident 31: I'm making decisions from the inside out.

We were discussing finding balance between church and self- care. The comment was made that leaders must realize they are not indispensable and whether they are there or not, the church will still go on. And it was such a turning point for me. I asked myself, why do I feel obligated to always be at church? Why did I accept all these leadership positions? I always feel I have to be at church to do something or participate because if I'm not there, it won't get done or it won't get done properly. I would feel guilty if I went away for a weekend or wanted to get away to work on my marriage. At that time, there was so much going on in my life, I was a newlywed, a fulltime student, and had a job. I began to see and feel like things were caving in. I needed to step back because I was not taking care of myself and not taking care of my family. It was too much pressure. Why am I doing this? I realized this undue pressure from other people went back to my childhood. Adults would say I want my son to be like Timothy or I want my daughter to marry Timothy. And so, it was a lot of outside pressure to be a role model. And I lost myself in that banter, allowing people's opinions and thoughts to shape who I was and how I tried to live my life. And so I came to the realization people's expectations dictated how I lived my life. And so that was really eye-opening for me. Holes were being poked into my values and concepts about how I live, how I critically think, and how I view myself. Journaling allowed me to open up and to talk through these habits. I was living life from

the outside in rather than from the inside out. That realization transitioned me into taking ownership and carrying out my decisions regardless of people's opinions. I know I am ruffling feathers with my decisions. But I'm coming into my own and I'm my own leader. So, for me, transformation was shifting from allowing other people's opinions and expectations to dictate my decisions and how I live my life and moving toward making my own decisions based on what I want and being okay with what people think.

Incident 32: A twelve-year-old's feedback changed my mindset.

We did a critical friend assessment in which we had to reach out to three people for feedback, but I eventually got feedback from six people. Most of the people I spoke with had glowing comments about my strengths and that was welcoming. But I had feedback from a twelve-year-old girl who said I needed to be more serious in my leadership role. That kind of blew me away because, I said, why would she say I need to be more serious? And then I began to reflect on some of the ways in which I handled situations and the things I would permit in terms of questions or goofing off in our gatherings. I could definitely see where she was coming from. And so that was really, really good for me to take a step back and reflect on my leadership approach and why I showed up that way. Since that time I've had a lot more conversations with those I lead and those who lead me about how I show up. And so from the twelve- year old girl's feedback, I had a change of mindset. Now I make sure I maintain a presence as a leader, and not just be a buddy to those I lead. Another big lesson for me was allowing myself to wrestle with and process feedback. Now I welcome feedback. It has become a welcomed addition to my life. I no longer see it as a criticism, but a powerful way to grow.

Milcah

Milcah is a forty-year-old Caribbean born woman, who migrated to the United States with her parents at age eight. She completed her high school education and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts. Although Milcah was raised by her parents, it was her grandmother who took her to church. Her parents were not practicing Christians, and so she spent most of the early years outside of the church. Ten years ago, at age thirty, Milcah was invited to a church service where she committed her life to Christ. Since that day, she has been a member of the same church. So, she has only attended one church and had only one pastor since committing to her faith. She has been a part of the leadership team in her church for the past five years.

I met Milcah at the public library for our interview. The media center was unavailable, and I wanted a quiet location, in proximity to both of us. This library worked well because it had available conference rooms and was only ten minutes away from where Milcah worked. I hurriedly walked into the building, clutching tightly to my coat and happy to escape the blistering cold winds. To my surprise Milcah was already there, seated in the waiting area. She said she arrived thirty minutes early to allow time to center her thoughts for the interview. The librarian escorted us to the reserved conference room while we chatted about the unseasonably cold weather. Milcah had the finesse of a corporate executive, donning her well-tailored dark gray pantsuit and ruffled white shirt. Her dark red pumps complemented her attire nicely and seemed to add another couple of inches to her 5'9" torso. Her hair and make-up were flawless as if she had just started her day.

I named her Milcah after one of five sisters, referenced in the Hebrew Bible as the Daughters of Zelophehad. Their father died before the Israelites possessed the Promised Land and he had no male heir. According to the community law in this patrilineal system, women

could not own or inherit property and the family inheritance would have been lost. These five sisters made the annals of biblical history because, in a culture in which women had no voice, they boldly challenged the community to make an exception and demanded they receive their father's inheritance. Interestingly, not only did God sanction the daughters' request by ordering Moses to give them the land, God instructed Moses to issue a new judicial ruling, allowing daughters to inherit property in the absence of a male heir.

Participant Milcah reflects the forthrightness and tenacity of the Daughters of Zelophehad. She is not afraid to challenge or push past roadblocks at any level to accomplish her goals. In her corporate career, she began with an entry-level position and has broken through corporate glass ceilings to become an executive manager. Her self -confidence is very apparent upon meeting her. She came from a family of women who took pride in being strong and assertive. Her grandmother and aunts were known in the family for being resolute and opinionated. After a painful divorce, her mother intentionally instilled in her the desire to be financially and mentally independent, relying on no one, particularly men. So, these values were deeply engrained in Milcah as she faced adulthood.

I chose to name her after one of the daughters, Milcah, whose name is from the root word *malkâh* in Hebrew, which means "queen," and "counsel" in the Hebrew- Chaldee Lexicon. Both nouns aptly describe Milcah's personality. She speaks with an authoritative tone that commands respect even in a crowd. She seems to naturally emerge as the leader in group settings. She is sought after for her wise counsel by her peers and even those she considers as authority figures in her life. It is not surprising that she presides over an auxiliary organization at her son's school, oversees two departments in her church and serves on the Board of Trustees.

She placed her Louis Vuitton bag on the chair next to her and her iPad on the table in front of her. After opening the file of choice on the iPad, she remained pensive, twiddling with her well-manicured nails while she waited on me to start. After testing the two recording devices, I began the interview with the consent form process and moved into the interview protocol.

Milcah shared many interesting stories about her transformative experiences. She spoke extensively about relationships and circumstances that were positively impacted by her changed perspectives, declaring "*my whole life has changed."* However, I had to limit my selections to incidents that directly answered the research questions. Below I have shared some stories from Milcah, describing specific incidents of changed perspectives during the leadership program.

Incident 33: I can no longer associate with someone who is stuck in the old traditions.

> *After the first class, one of my classmates called to tell me she was very upset because the class was not reflecting what she had learned about God. By the second class, she said it was blasphemy and that's not who God is. She said she grew up in the church, had been prayed over, had hands laid on her and travailed at the altar. She had invested too many years to have her God snatched away. I said, "But this is only the second class, give it a chance." She never came back. I was shocked, honestly, because I respected her as a leader and looked up to her as someone I could learn from. She would pray all day long! I couldn't believe what I was hearing. That experience changed my whole perspective on learning. We can't be so tied to what we already know that we can't even listen to something new, even when it doesn't agree with what we think we know. She had so much potential and could have learned so much. I pulled away from her because I decided I can no longer be around someone who doesn't want to learn and grow with me. So it*

changed my perspective about what it takes to be a church leader. You have to want to grow. The scripture says to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, but some people are Christians for a long time and never have a renewed mind because they don't want to change anything. Yes, I came to the course to learn, but something else happened from this incident. I don't know why it had such an effect on me. But this incident made me examine myself because I can be very opinionated. I don't want to be someone who is so closed to new or different ideas that I can't learn and grow, and this incident opened my eyes to see what I didn't want to become; blinded and stuck in the old. I got a new determination to push forward to learn with an open mind.

Incident 34: Now I read with my brain turned on and then I shout.

I think one of the major turning points for me was when I learned the words eisegesis and exegesis. Eisegesis is what we bring to the text and exegesis is what we draw out of the text. I remember we were looking at a few texts and discussing how we understood them. We were looking at how we bring our cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, and religious beliefs to our interpretation. That was so powerful to me. One of the texts we looked at was in Exodus when God promised to take the children of Israel out of Egypt and bring them into the promised land. I was very familiar with this one. We always read this text assuming it is a promise to us that God is bringing us out of something. I never thought it could mean anything else or that someone could interpret it in a different way, or that it was not written specifically to us. That was very eye-opening. I realized I was doing a lot of bringing into the text but not a lot of drawing out. This discovery had a major impact on my life, even today. I've never read scripture the same. Prior to this time, I did not have any theological training. Whatever I'd learned over the years came from being

in church services. Growing up we were taught, and it may be Black culture, that wisdom, knowledge, and understanding come from God. It's not something that's taught. You didn't have to go to school to learn about God because the Bible is there to teach you. So, prior to the class, I would just read the scriptures and depend on the Holy Spirit to reveal what the scripture was saying. There was a lot I didn't understand. But once I learned about how these two words work in understanding scripture, I had a different lens to read or apply scripture. Now I examine what I bring to a text and how someone else might read it. From the Black church standpoint, it's a lot of whooping and hollering that we're used to. And I come from a Pentecostal background. So it's like once you hear, "God is good all the time" and "you were called for a purpose for such a time as this," you start shouting. But what is the text about? Who was the intended audience? What can the text tell me? So, now I read with my brain turned on and listen to the Holy Spirit. Then I can shout because I have understanding.

Incident 35: I saw what was the matter with me that I couldn't see before.

I wasn't shocked when I saw what my critical friends wrote about me, at least not entirely. I knew I was a strong person and very outspoken. But hearing it from someone else's viewpoint, especially other Christians, really shook me in a way I didn't expect. I had responses from three critical friends, from work, church, and family, and their comments were very similar. To an extent, I knew I was that way, but I didn't do anything about it. I didn't care because I didn't see anything wrong with it. I told myself, I'm just confident and I know who I am. I grew up in a family of strong women, being independent, and outspoken. I was always taught by my mom not to be dependent on anyone. I think that became the norm for me. I say what I mean, and I'm going to do what

I decide if I feel it's right, I don't care what anybody else says. So the feedback said I am very smart and outspoken; but could take over the room when it's not necessary, not giving others an opportunity to speak. In a class, I blurt out the answers, just because I know it, not giving others the opportunity to learn. And so the things that were said stayed with me, and it made me think about my relationships, even my marriage. For many years, my husband would say, "You don't see yourself, you're smart and you know a lot, but you don't see yourself," but I couldn't see it for myself. I was the dominant one in relationships, even at work. But from the Christian standpoint, you don't want to be that person who thinks you are so filled with the Spirit that you become a monster. I had to pull away from what I'd seen and learned from my childhood. I prayed and I said, "God, teach me how to pull it back." We learned about reflecting in and on action. So I began to look at how I handled some past situations and sometimes in the middle of a situation, I would catch myself taking over and pull back. I've seen the growth in my husband like a thousand times over just from me pulling back. It's like a whole 180-degree change. I'm talking about I learned to control my smart mouth…. I had to allow him just to be the man. That one assignment opened my eyes to see what I couldn't see before and changed my whole life.

Incident 36: Now I lead from a place of love adding value to people's lives.

I've been in leadership at work and church for many years. So, the video on the five levels of leadership caught my attention. We looked at the different leadership levels and discussed where we fit based on how we lead. The first and lowest was positional leading, where people follow you because of your position and title. The higher levels focused on relationships and people's development. I was definitely a level one leader. I

was leading from a place where I'm the big boss and you're going to do what I say. I used to say, "This is corporate America." And so if a person had family issues or an emergency, I would get upset, thinking, you're supposed to be at work, and we are already short-staffed. We are a production center and we have goals to meet. But the speaker on the video said a good leader empowers people and adds value to their lives. You can't lead people without loving them. A manager only focuses on the tasks. Those statements rang in my ear and contradicted everything in my leadership style. I realized I was a manager, not a leader. What helped me was examining myself as a leader. That self-reflection was a serious gamechanger. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror. First, you see your attributes -You look at your face, your hair, your eyes, and everything looks great; but then you look closer. You stare in your eyes, and if you stare long enough you see your dark side staring back at you. I had to journal and work through what I was seeing in myself. Now I have a new outlook on leadership. I'm leading from the place of "what if I were in your shoe?" I constantly commend, affirm, and encourage those I lead. It is interesting that I was recently promoted and recognized by upper management for running a highly productive office. I learned I don't have to beat people down to produce. Now I lead from a place of compassion, adding value to people's lives. My new boss recently commented that he admires that I lead from a place of humility. I laughed to myself. I thought, "Jesus, won't you do it!"

Incident 37: I am responsible to a larger community beyond my church.

When I read the stories of the men and women who gave up their lives for the faith, it shifted my whole mindset about my faith. I had never heard or read anything about martyrs of the faith before. We read many stories about church fathers who were

martyred, but the story of Felicitas had the greatest impact on me. Felicitas was one of five new converts who were arrested in the third century. When she was arrested her father tried to persuade her to recant her faith and spare her life. She told him she would never give up the name Christian. So, when it was time for her execution, she gave her baby to a woman for adoption and willingly gave her life to die by the sword. This story had me thinking for a long time. She was a new Christian, yet she was willing to die. She was a young mother, but she gave up her life for her faith; she could have recanted but she refused; the beast wouldn't kill her, but she still gave her life. What a price this young convert was willing to pay! I suddenly felt like I had been given a precious treasure. I asked myself, what am I doing with what others sacrificed for? I got a new appreciation for what was sacrificed for me to live as a Christian. The fact is I took my faith for granted and although we are taught to spread the gospel, I never felt a responsibility to those who came before me or those who come after me. Now I feel connected to a community beyond my church and time and feel responsible to stand for my faith and be a shoulder for others to stand on. Growing up as a Christian, I've heard many Bible stories and I could regurgitate them, but to see it lived outside of the Bible times and to experience it from a different standpoint, it's like I'm in the story. I'm part of the story. I am part of that history. I never saw my faith that way before. I feel so privileged and thankful, and now I look for opportunities to make a difference because what I have is precious and I am a part of something much bigger than I ever knew.

Joshua

I was pleasantly surprised when Joshua pulled up in the parking lot five minutes before our interview time. I arrived thirty minutes early at the media conference center to ensure the

temperature was comfortable in the room and my recording devices were all ready for the interview. I watched Joshua sprinting lightly toward me with the big warm smile that was his custom. His sweat suit and tennis shoes reflected his laid-back demeanor. Watching him approach the door emptyhanded, I asked if he had brought anything with him for the interview. Then he turned around and sprinted back to the car to get his briefcase.

Joshua is in his late twenties, an African American of Caribbean parents. He has been a Christian for fourteen years. At age thirteen, his mother invited him to a water baptism service. During the service, the candidates for baptism told their conversion stories and Joshua was deeply moved. The Pastor asked if anyone in the audience wished to be baptized, and Joshua walked to the altar, committed his life to Christ and got baptized. Since that time he has faithfully attended church with his mother and has been in a leadership role for the past five years.

Joshua placed his briefcase on the chair next to him and sat at the table across from me. I offered him a bottle of water and he held it in his hand. Joshua seemed eager to begin. We went through the consent process and he signed the form. Joshua began to describe his incidents of change with high energy and fervor. He never opened his briefcase and never took anything out of it. About halfway through the interview, he took a few sips of water and then fidgeted with the water bottle while he described his experiences. There were interludes of deep emotion and sorrow as he recounted the absence of his father in his life, the recent deaths of two loved ones, and his struggle to cope. He rebounded as he expounded on God's unfathomable love for him and his growing love and appreciation for God.

At the end of the interview, I asked Joshua which biblical character he thought best depicted his character. He chose Joshua and gave reasons that I will highlight since they provide

deeper insight on this participant. The biblical character Joshua was an assistant to the Prophet Moses, serving as a brilliant military commander of Israel's army. He was Moses' successor and led the children of Israel into the conquest of the Promised Land. However, the participant did not highlight Joshua's leadership or military prowess, neither are those the qualities that reflect his character. Instead, he focused on Joshua's dedication to God and Moses. Joshua always accompanied Moses whenever he went to the Tent of Meeting to commune with God. He had a devoted heart to Moses and "never moved from the tent" when Moses left him there for forty days and nights to got to the top of Mount Sinai to communicate with God. He faithfully learned the Torah from Moses and passed it on to the elders. When the children of Israel were unfaithful to God, Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Like the biblical counterpart, participant Joshua passionately expresses his love for God and has devoted his life to serving God since he was fourteen years old. He expressed his love to worship God and sometimes wishes he could remain in the atmosphere of worship after church services. He is known as a hard worker in his church. He is very devoted to his pastors and serving faithfully is very important to him. In the interview, he expressed his deep commitment to teach others about God. When Joshua came to the program, he had recently been given increased responsibilities at his church. His pastors recommended the program as part of his preparation for the new role.

Incident 38: I stepped out of the box of church tradition.

We were having a class discussion about how the church practices changed during and after Emperor Constantine's reign and how even the portraits of Jesus changed from humble servant to look like an emperor seated on his throne. I've learned so much about how the traditions of the church changed over the years based on people's perspectives

and preferences. It opened my eyes to see even some of the traditions that I was so adamant about like women must wear a hat…. And to be honest, I've been so strict on what we shouldn't be wearing to church. I remember there was a time I was so adamant that we shouldn't have piercings or tattoos, just based on the culture I was raised in. Every church we attended was a Pentecostal church. We weren't allowed to wear jewelry. I remember Mom saying we shouldn't wear jewelry or get piercings. At one time when I was a little kid, I wanted to get my ears pierced and she said no. My sister wanted to get a tattoo. I said, no, you cannot get a tattoo. She ended up getting the tattoo and I was so mad at her and I stopped talking to her for a long time. I realized I was looking at life through a religious lens, man-made traditions based on someone's opinion. I'm at a place where I don't see things based on what man would think is okay. So I'm not religious or tied to church traditions any longer. I realized God is so much bigger than our religious box.

Incident 39: There is a love story between God and me and there I find significance.

I think one of the first things to hit me in class was when we were invited to step out of the Bible as our sacred book and read it as a love story between God and Israel. That really shifted me. We saw how God loved Israel so much that whenever they turned away, God allowed other nations to oppress them, but as soon as Israel turned back, God embraced them and punished the nations that oppressed them. So that opened my eyes to see the grace and mercy of God and his unconditional love in a new way. That encouraged me so much, to know that no matter what I do, God is always there, speaking love to me and not judgment. And that right there changed me. I grew up in a broken family. My father was never there. He would promise to show up and never kept his

word. Only my mom was there, and she didn't have time to spend with me because she was always working. That's the reason why I fought so much for acceptance because I felt so inferior and insignificant. My dad didn't see me as important, so maybe nobody else did. It really damaged me growing up and I think it was through all of that why I came to God. Because he was the only one that could fill that void that was in my heart. He was the only one that could make me feel significant and wanted. So seeing our relationship as a love story between God and me, like the children of Israel, really changed how I see myself. I've seen how much more God loves me and there's so much more that I don't even know. I saw this true acceptance in his love and what he's capable of doing. Yes, there is a love story between God and Israel, but there is a love story between God and me, and that's how I see my life now.

Incident 40: Now I read the Bible with the context in mind.

When we were invited to step away from the Bible as our sacred book and see it as literature, I didn't know what to expect. I came to this course to gain more knowledge of the Bible, not to step away from it. But when I stepped outside of it, I was able to see the Bible in a new way. Before the class, I saw every scripture as God speaking to me, so there was a lot I couldn't see. On the second class, we were introduced to the two creation stories in Genesis by two different sources. We were learning how to identify their voices in the texts and how they tell the same story differently. I had never heard there were two creation stories or different sources! It really messed up my mind. I struggled with it. I thought everything that's in the Bible is not 100% true or from God? How do I know the stories are accurate? How could redactors just add or arrange it? Can I believe what's in here? And even how the Bible was compiled, how can somebody

decide what should and shouldn't be in it? I think what brought it all back together for me was when we got to the New Testament and there were stories that were similar in the synoptic gospels but yet focused on different aspects of the event. I realized these writings were recordings of ordinary people's testament of what happened and how they saw it. Before the class, I thought the sayings of Jesus were written verbatim straight from the mouth of Jesus. I didn't think logically that no one was recording while Jesus spoke, and what we read is someone's recollection of what was said. But I found confidence in seeing the stories were very similar although handed down from different sources. So the fact that they were so closely similar, gave me confidence that these things really happened. Looking at the writings from the outside, helped me to focus on the big picture of what God was really trying to say and do. Now I don't read the Bible the same way, looking for a word for me. I do a lot more research and now I want to see what more is in the text.

Incident 41: I realized I was judgmental and impatient.

In our leadership class, we had to write our autobiography and discuss with the group what we learned about ourselves from the exercise. It was a very emotional time. The box of tissue was passed around the table from one storyteller to the other. Just listening to everyone's story really opened my eyes. I was surprised so many of us had similar stories of past hurt and rejection. I realized you can never tell what someone has gone through by looking at them. I would never have imagined the people sitting with me in the class had gone through so much. Then, to see the connection between our past experiences and our current views and attitudes was even more amazing. Suddenly, I realized I brought with me being judgmental. I didn't think I was, but I was. Instead of love and grace,

because that's what God is all about, a lot of times I've been so quick to judge others and to say something rather than to listen or to understand where they're coming from. Before the class, I was very impatient and frustrated when my team didn't do what I thought they should do or didn't show up for planned events. I was focused on getting things done. But I began to look at it differently. I don't know what they're going through. I don't know what's really going on with them. I never thought to ask. So instead of passing judgment or getting frustrated, I should've been there to give support. Instead of reaching out only when I needed something done, I began to reach out to them individually and ask them how they were doing. I was shocked to hear some of the things they were going through. I had no idea. Now I've made it a regular practice to check on my team during the week. So instead of being judgmental, I am a more understanding and compassionate person and leader.

Incident 42: I gained confidence to speak up for myself.

We had to get feedback about our leadership from three critical friends. My boss at work was one of mine. I spoke with my boss for probably an hour. She told me things that I knew and some things that I didn't know. She told me that I love people and show that I love my job. But a lot of times I don't stand up for myself. When there's a problem either I don't say anything or I'm not firm. She told me, "This is corporate America, you can't be so soft because they'll run all over you. You have to be a lot firmer. You can't be afraid to speak up." She was telling the truth because a lot of times, I didn't want to be firm because I was trying to build relationships with people, and I felt if I was firm, they wouldn't want to build a relationship with me. She told me people don't have any respect for those who cannot be firm, because you're just a pushover or a yes man all the time. I

know that if God wants to use me to be a pastor one day, I'm going to need to learn this because if not, I will be pleasing the people rather than pleasing God. I don't ever want to do that. So, for me, what I'm trying to do to get that balance, daily reflecting and knowing that if I need to step up and say something, just say it no matter what, don't be afraid of the repercussions, even if that negatively affects the relationship. I have to be more authoritative. I had a situation at work recently, in which I was accused by someone in upper management of causing an error…. but after hearing the feedback that I got from the class and my boss, I understood I had to be firm. So, I typed up a very nice but firm email response and sent it back to everyone copied on the original email and explained why it was not my fault. My boss and her boss, emailed back, affirming my response. So, this assignment really helped me to see myself differently and to have more confidence to stand up for myself.

Anna

Anna and I finally met for the interview at the media conference room. This was our fourth attempt to meet. We had to reschedule three times due to scheduling conflicts. She arrived on time for her interview and brought her notebook in the event she had forgotten any details, she commented. She sat erect in her chair as I got the audio recording devices ready. She seemed quite nervous as I reviewed the consent form with her. When we began the interview, she was very focused on her choice of words. She seemed conscious that she was being recorded. However, that was short-lived. When she began to describe her experience on the day the class watched the video clips of Christians being martyred, she gazed out the window showing deep anguish in her tone and countenance. She seemed to have forgotten about the recording device and was reliving every moment of that experience.

Anna is a fifty-five-year-old Caribbean born female who serves in various capacities in her church. I named her after the biblical character Anna who was noted in the Bible for her dedicated life of serving God. She never left the temple but worshipped day and night with fasting and prayer, waiting for the arrival of the Messiah.

Like the biblical character, Anna speaks of her passionate pursuit of an intimate relationship with God and her love for spending alone time with God. She has served as a leader in her church for the past twelve years. She committed to her faith thirty- five years ago and has been a part of a Protestant denomination that is a spinoff of Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and has roots in the Black Holiness movement.

She enrolled in the program at the encouragement of family members who had completed the program. She was required by senior leadership to complete the course, but she elected not to enroll until she was ready. She speaks openly of being strong-willed and guards her autonomy in decision making. After ending the hour and a half interview, Anna walked with me to the car. She spoke for another ten minutes about her experience. I tried to capture the essence of her comments in my field notes. One statement that stood out for me is, "*I realize we knew the stories in the Bible. But we never understood the journey."* This statement succinctly encapsulates Anna's experience.

Incident 43: Now I am more connected to Christians around the world.

I remember when we watched the video of persecutions in the second century. It was a moment when the entire class was in shock. We just sat there in awe to see the kind of brutality that Christians had to go through. Some of us were crying. I think I was in shock because I never knew these things actually happened. It was emotional because for the first time I truly understood what it meant for Christians to go through persecutions.

Here we are now as Christians, I don't want to say taking things lightly, but we do. Just to know that there are so many people who came before us and they went through so many things, losing their lives and being tortured. That opened my eyes to see Christianity didn't just start here and now. There were ordinary people like you and me who fought and gave their lives for what I have freely today. I became aware of the persecuted church in other parts of the world who are still being martyred because of their faith. So that for me was one of the biggest things I walked away with. I asked myself, if I were in that predicament where would I stand and what would be my response? One of the things that I loved is that the majority of them stood for the faith even if it meant that they were going to be put to death. It was not just men, but women and children who died. It was an emotional time, but it really got me to stop and think. I had to grapple with my own commitment and just to be grateful for where we are today. I said if they did it I can do it. It allowed me to know that Christ said he would not leave or forsake me. And it's not just in word, it's actually something that he did then, and he will continue to do. God was with them even in the persecution. So, my faith rose, because that got me to a place to say you know if persecution came today, I could say for Christ I live and for Christ, I die. Now before this class, I couldn't say that. So, my faith was strengthened. So, my eyes are more open. I pay attention now to things going on with Christians around the world. Before I was just going to church and going home. And I thought nothing else of it again. But now I am so much more connected to what is going on with Christians around the world. My whole awareness of the church and my responsibility to the persecuted church has changed.

Incident 44: Now I am open to different cultures and ways of worshipping God.

Recently we were around some Christians from another culture and they were wearing their cultural attire. I remember someone made a negative comment saying how could they be Christians and still dress in that way. My response was what makes them different from we are? That's when I realized I had changed. Before I started the program I probably would've been the first to agree with the negative comments. I would've said, 'How could they serve God like that? How can they say they love God when they're walking around with paintings on their skins?' That's the perception we have because that's how we were taught. But my eyes were opened to look around the world and see how people of other cultures are professing Christ in their own way. I think I was so closeminded about other cultures and how they worship God because I was so engulfed in our own culture. One of the things I learned was that because it's done differently, doesn't make it wrong. So, now I look at them [people of different cultures] as brothers and sisters rather than as outsiders.

Incident 45: I became aware of God's love for me and it changed how I see myself.

I think another aha moment for me was when I saw the Old Testament as a story of the journey of the children of Israel and their relationship with God. I thought I knew some of the stories but when I just dug deeper I got to realize that God is a loving God and meets you where you are. I knew the stories, but I didn't understand the journey. Now I know I no longer have to look at myself and say I want to be like that person, or I want to be able to speak eloquently like that person. I got to understand God meets us where we are. So that really changed things for me. Just going through the stories gave me an awareness that I am truly loved by God, not just because God said he loves the world, but

God truly loves me as a person. And somehow my eyes were opened to see this. Somehow the light bulb went on for me to see that God loves me where I am now. *That's what he did for the children of Israel. And it helped me to realize that even when I am not at my best, God is there. And he never leaves me regardless of how badly I think I messed up. That awareness became so alive to me that God loves me, it changed everything- how I see God's love and how I see myself. Just knowing if we're not at the place where we ought to be, God's still there with us, made all the difference for me.*

Incident 46: Now I am receptive to the opinion of others.

We were having a class discussion about social media. I am not on social media and feel strongly about not using it. I was voicing my opinion very strongly against its use. But in the midst of the group discussion I got to see how opinionated I was and as others shared their views I realized not all social media use is bad. That was just my opinion. It is neither right nor wrong. That was one of my struggles, being opinionated. I was the type of person if I thought a certain way about something I would hold on to my opinion. Your perception of it was wrong because mine is right. Now I think my awareness is keener than before. I listen to others now, rather than spouting out my opinions. I can actually listen to others' opinions without rebutting and will actually consider their opinions. I definitely did not do that before.

Incident 47: Now I dance to my own tune and not under pressure.

I was sitting in my seat and everyone around me was dancing and shouting and someone asked me, "What trouble did you get into?" She asked because I wasn't shouting or jumping. I was just sitting down enjoying the presence of God. I realized something had changed for me and I am not sure when it happened. I think it was through self-

reflection. But I came to another level of respect for myself. Sometimes I would have something to say and I wouldn't say it because I doubted that my thought was correct. One thing that changed is how I worship at church. That's something I struggled with for a long time because I've always felt it should not be about my emotions, but we're taught that if you don't jump and shout then something is wrong. Now I can look at myself and say, 'Anna, it's about your relationship with God.' So, I think that I have changed in a way that's more beneficial to me because sometimes I would do things just to please everybody else. Now I stop, and ask myself, 'Is this for God or is this for man?' Sometimes it's a hard decision to make. But this is one of the things now that I can truly say that I walk in now. I'm no longer looking around and saying, 'Everybody is jumping so I need to jump.' No. I sit and listen to what is being preached. I write. I question. Yes, there's a place to dance and shout. But I'm at a place now where I don't allow myself to get that way unless I feel the Holy Spirit leading me. I will dance and shout when I want to, but not because other people think I should.

Incident 48: I no longer judge myself and others.

The critical friend assignment really opened my eyes. I think it was my sister who said that I was judgmental, and I had no compassion for people, especially those with drug addiction. It really, really baffled me. I thought I was very compassionate. It really hit me. I said, "Me? Really? No compassion?!" But when she said that I just played it over and over and over and over again in my mind. She said other things, but this one hit home. It took that incident for me to examine myself. I would even judge myself. Often I would tell myself, "This is what you did wrong," or "This is what you did." So I had to learn not to listen to that judgmental voice construing thoughts and saying, "Look at

what you did." And now I no longer look at others as being bad people, but that they have a problem God can solve. People are always coming to me for advice and now there is a difference in how I respond. I'm listening to what they are saying now. Even the advice that I give them is different. I'm no longer judging, which I always did, but never knew I was doing and was always accusing someone else of doing. It was through self-reflection that I was able to see what I was doing and change how I see myself and others.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the critical incidents of perspective transformation narrated by the nine participants. Each participant was introduced with a vivid description of the context of each interview, followed by a brief biography. To further illuminate their expose, each participant was given a pseudonym from a biblical character that best amplified their stories. Following an evaluation process described in chapter three, forty- eight critical incidents were selected for analysis and recorded in the words of each participant.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

> *Nothing is different, yet all is transformed. It is seen differently. In that change of perspective, in the transformation of meaning lies the meaning of transformation…. Our old life is still there, but its meaning has profoundly changed because we have left home, seen it from afar, and had been transformed by that vision.* (Daloz, 1986, p. 26)

The purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

In this chapter, I present the findings derived from a cross-analysis of themes and subthemes emerging from the participants' critical incident narratives. Overall, the themes emerged from a deductive and inductive analysis of the entire corpus of data including, but not limited to, the critical incidents presented in chapter four. The guiding theoretical perspective used in the analysis of the first question was Mezirow's (1978, 1991, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 1990) Perspective Transformation theory, and the second question's analysis was guided by Fowler's (1981, 1996, 2000) Faith Development Theory (Stages of Faith).

First, I provided a data display of the five themes as an overview of each thematic section and its accompanying sub-sections. Next, I arranged the findings in two sections. The first set of findings correlating to the first research question is that the church lay leaders' perspective transformation was initiated by two types of events, namely disorienting dilemmas and

awakenings; there was a convergence of critical examination of beliefs and values, critical reflection, and liberatory actions during the transformation process; and participants viewed their perspective transformational experiences as the beginning of a continuous journey. The second set of findings, corresponding to question two, is that Black spirituality and faithing were interwoven in the meaning-making process, touching the untouchables and renegotiating the non-negotiables of Black Pentecostal church tradition, and there was a tetradic movement of faithing, initiated by a new perspective of God's love. The data are displayed by research question (RQ), findings, and themes and subthemes below. Participants' direct quotes are italicized throughout the chapter.

Research Questions and Findings

Table 5.1

Research Questions and Themes

Research Question	Themes
1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?	1. Perspective Transformation was triggered by two types of events. a. Epochal disorienting dilemmas b. Slow Awakenings 2. Perspective transformation occurred through the convergence of critical examination of beliefs, critical self-reflection, and liberatory actions. 3. Perspective transformation was the beginning of a continuous journey
2. How, if at all, did Black spirituality and faithing influence their meaning-making in their perspective transformation?	4. Four symbols of Black spirituality played a role in shaping perspective transformation 5. A process of faithing occurred in four progressive stages

Epochal Disorienting Dilemmas

The first set of findings in the study addresses how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences in a one-year leadership program with a critical theological curriculum. The a priori theoretical framework of Mezirow's perspective transformation theory (1978, 1991, 2000) confirmed all participants experienced some type of "trigger event" creating a disorienting dilemma. However, although participants experienced the same events, albeit some at different times, their triggers and interpretations were an individualized experience. The diagram below encapsulates the findings in response to the first research question.

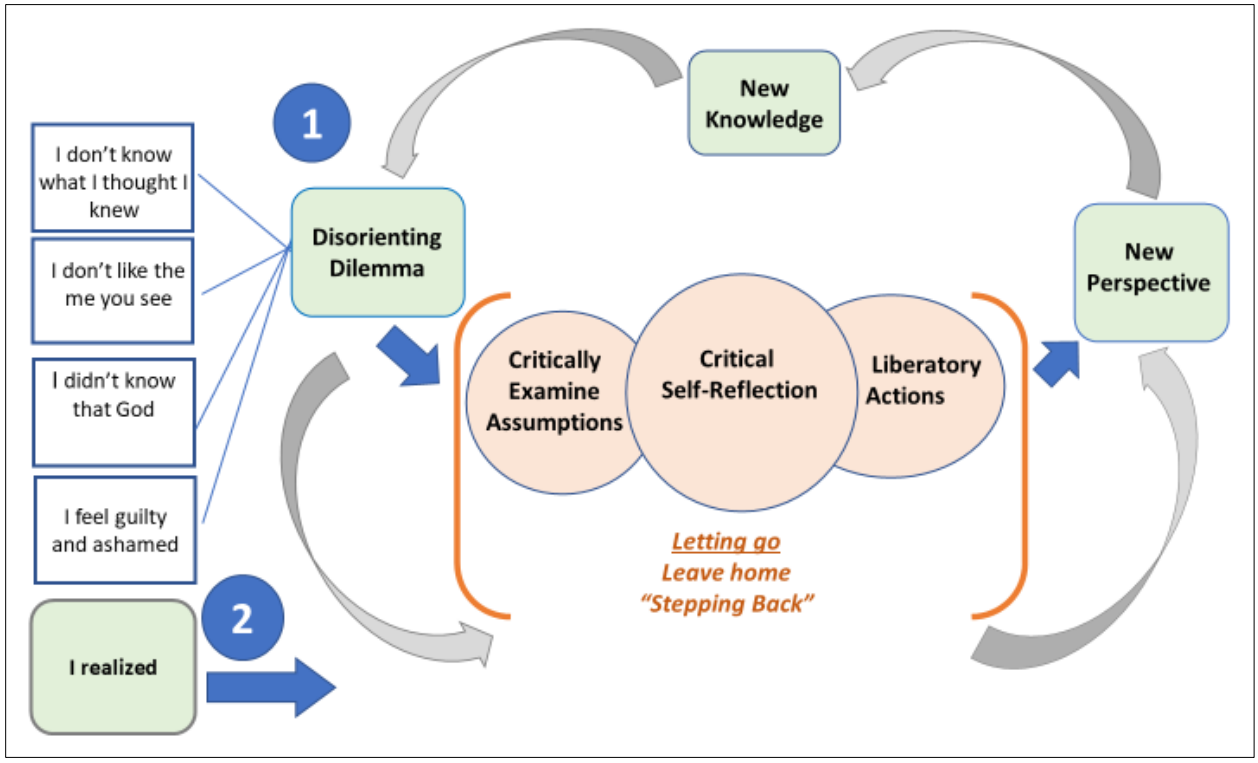

Figure 5.1. Movements of perspective transformation.

The findings of the study showed the participants experienced a disorienting dilemma from four types of trigger events: (1) when new knowledge contradicted their previously unquestioned knowledge and beliefs; (2) after receiving critical feedback from valued voices (3) following awareness of new perspectives of God; and (4) while reviewing stories of martyrdom in the early church. Mezirow and Associates (1990) defined making 'meaning' as making sense of an experience and making an interpretation of it (p. 1). In the next section, I discuss the four disorienting events and assign a "meaning-making" legend to each, to capture how participants made sense of their experiences. The taxonomy below summarizes the findings by trigger events and participants based on their reported critical incidents.

Table 5.2

Disorienting Dilemmas by Participant

Participants	New Knowledge Contradiction		Critical Feedback	New Perspective of God	Stories of Martyrs
	Human Authorship of Sacred Text	Texts Used out of Context			
Mary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paul	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Timothy	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Joshua	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Anna	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Deborah	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Milcah	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓

Note.
✓ = Reported a related critical incident
✗ = Did not report a related critical incident

New Knowledge Contradicted Previously Unquestioned Beliefs: *"I don't know what I thought I knew."*

There were two distinct events which participants described as triggering a disorienting dilemma related to contradictions between new and old knowledge: learning the sacred text was authored by humans and the awareness that understandings of popularly quoted scriptures were misinterpreted and taken out of context. The concept that the Old Testament was authored by humans and not a dictation from God was new and disconcerting to most participants. Seven of the nine participants reported a related critical incident. Joshua's bewilderment echoed the sentiment of some participants:

> *It really messed me up…. Everything that's in the Bible is not 100% true or from God? How do I know the stories are accurate? How could redactors just add or arrange it? Can I believe what's in here?*

Similarly, when the realization dawned on Paul that the patriarch Moses could not have written about his own death in the book of Deuteronomy and some form of redaction had occurred, he was both shocked and disappointed with himself. He marveled at how he had failed to notice although he was a diligent student of scripture and had read the text numerous times. For Paul, the discovery *was a shocker.* So Paul lost confidence in what he thought he knew. He became acutely aware of his previously unquestioned assumptions. He remarked, *I asked myself, how much of what I know is wrong? I realized I never questioned what I heard or checked it for myself. I just assumed it was correct.*

Mary admitted it *shook everything* in her when she discovered there were two conflicting versions of the same story of David conducting a census. Even more unnerving, one narrative said God tempted David and the other stated Satan incited David.

> *For the first time I began to see human perspectives behind the text. It was challenging to move from the idea that this is a book written by God, to accept it's a book written by human beings with opinions. It just had me questioning. Is everything in here real?*

Although Anna described this event as a disorienting dilemma, she admitted not being as distraught as some of her classmates. She said after her initial *shock*, some things began to *make sense* and answered some of her unvoiced questions. She got a *clearer and better understanding* of some of the conflicting stories she had read. She said it was a *wake -up call* to her to *search the scriptures* more diligently.

The second area of disorientation regarding contradiction with new knowledge was in the area of popularly quoted texts used out of context in and outside of the pulpit. All nine participants referenced this phenomenon in a critical incident. When Leah became aware that one such scripture in the New Testament was a standard greeting in epistolary writings and not related to the context in which it was used, she was shaken.

> *It shook me for a while. I said, What?! I've just been taking what someone else said and never thought to check it for myself. I just assumed if it came from the pulpit or television, it was correct. I left class that night just feeling cheated*.

Ruth and Mary had similar disorienting experiences. Ruth was shaken and felt she did not have a *sturdy foundation* of the Bible. She remarked, "*I didn't have a full grasp on this thing that I believe*." Like Ruth, Mary felt the *foundation* she thought she had *was shaken* from underneath her when she realized one of her frequently used scriptures meant the opposite of what she had learned. Regarding the same scripture, Timothy admitted it was an *aha moment* for him, but concluded he couldn't place the blame on anyone other than himself because he needed to

inquire into the scriptures more closely. Deborah sardonically remarked, "*there's a lot of things in this book that people just don't tell you."*

Critical Feedback from Valued Voices: *"I don't like the me you see"*

All nine participants reported feedback from a critical friend as a significant trigger in their perspective transformation. Feedback from a trusted voice provided a lens through which they could see what was hidden from their view and triggered movement toward critical self-examination. For Milcah, the critical feedback propelled her to change her opinionated persona. Milcah knew she had a strong and overpowering personality and she was proud of it. She had received critiques about it in the past but *didn't care* because she *"didn't see anything wrong with it".* She proudly guarded what she perceived as *confidence* like a family heirloom. However, when she received critical feedback from all three trusted voices, Milcah no longer viewed this as an asset and became troubled that she was becoming a *spiritual monster* and needed to *learn to control* [her] *smart mouth.*

Similarly, Timothy got quite an awakening when a twelve -year old girl's response stated he "*needed to be more serious"* in his leadership role. The comment was quite unexpected and disturbing to Timothy. Although he received favorable comments from adults, this critique was most disorienting. Timothy explained, *"that kind of blew me away because I said, why would she say I need to be more serious?"* The feedback triggered a change of perspective on Timothy's leadership style and responsibility.

Surprisingly, Deborah had a different encounter with her critical friend experience. She focused on words of affirmation and acceptance. She recalled, "*I was surprised at the positive feedback. For a long time, I didn't think I was worthy enough."* Consequently, she began a

journey of changing her perspective of herself, *not being so hard* on herself because she said, "[the feedback] *helped me to be comfortable with me."*

New Perception of God: *"I didn't know that God"*

Seven of the nine participants described critical incidents of perspective transformation emanating from a changed perspective of God. Reading the sacred texts from a different lens provided new information that conflicted with their prior perceptions shaped by personal experience or by their religious assimilation. Ruth succinctly explained her new awareness of God that triggered the disorienting dilemma: "*I realized you are taught church first and then God. Then both are merged and are no longer distinguishable."*

Paul described his disorientation when he learned God used an Ancient Near East culture of suzerainty treaties to make a covenant with Abraham: "*I was shocked. God used a custom from a pagan culture?! I kept asking myself, if the pagans were doing this before, why would God choose this method? It was really a shocker for me."* When Paul had an awareness of God's unwavering mercy toward the children of Israel, it contradicted his earlier perceptions of God. This anomaly led Paul to *get rid of the harsh God.* Paul explained:

> *I realized there is so much about God's character I didn't know. I used to see God as a judgmental God, a harsh God, a hard God, and if I don't pray, if I don't read the Bible, God's going to cut me off. So I used to put pressure on myself, always trying to appease and keep God from being angry with me.*

Similarly, Joshua reexamined his assumptions about God and his dealings with infractions of piety when he realized, *that's what God is all about, showing love and grace and understanding.* That new awareness challenged his previous assumptions, triggering a change of perspective.

Whereas Ruth, Paul, and Joshua alluded to perspectives of God shaped by religious institutionalization, Mary became aware she had formulated her own perspective of God based on her painful relationship with her father, because "*we tend to put God in a box based on our own thoughts and lives."* Mary's disorienting dilemma was triggered by her new awareness she had "*put God in a box,"* keeping a safe distance to protect herself. She needed to see God *beyond being a father* to accommodate the new knowledge of the trustworthy God she was encountering in her learning.

Stories of Martyrdom in the Early Church: "*I feel guilty and ashamed"*

Participants reported having no prior knowledge of the brutal persecutions of Christians in the early church and found the information disorienting. All nine participants narrated critical incidents of perspective transformation related to the early martyrs' experiences. Participants described their new awareness as traumatic and evoking *shock, guilt, and shame*. Anna described being *really shocked* when she watched the videos and felt *anguish* and *empathy.* For the first time, *she truly understood* Christian persecutions and began to *grapple* with her own commitments to the faith and God.

Deborah, Timothy, and Ruth's disorientation included feelings of guilt and shame for not doing enough for their faith. Deborah lamented, "*I was sad. I can honestly say that I was sad because it made me realize that I wasn't doing anything for my faith."* Timothy suddenly saw his lived Christianity as lacking commitment and *a joke.* He explicated, "*that was really jarring for me because I thought, what would I need to change to have more meaning in my faith?"* Ruth shared a similar sentiment when she said, *"for me to see those people die, those horrible deaths and to really stand up in the face of persecution, I realized we aren't doing much with what we*

have." Milcah admitted she had never heard about the martyrs previously and so it seemed "*surreal … like, did this really happen? … It shifted my whole mindset."*

Slow Awakenings

According to the findings, not all incidents of perspective transformation began with an epochal disorienting dilemma. In a review of the critical incidents, 24 of the 48 incidents occurred through one of four ways: 1) A spontaneous or "aha" awakening; 2) an awakening during group discourse; 3) a resolution to an existing concern, and 4) an unconscious progressive transformation over time. The taxonomy below provides a summary of contributing occurrences by each participant.

Table 5.3

Moments of Awakening by Participant

Participant	Awakening "Aha" Moment	Addressed Existing Concern	Group Discourse	Progressive Over Time
Mary	2	1	1	2
Ruth	1	3	1	
Leah				1
Paul	1			
Timothy	1	1	1	
Joshua			2	
Anna		1	1	2
Deborah				2
Milcah			1	
Total	**5**	**6**	**7**	**7**

An "Aha" Moment

Four participants described five incidents in which they experienced an "aha" moment or an *awakening.* It is a sudden awareness of an unquestioned assumption or way of being. Mary described how her perspective transformation concerning her relationship with her faith began: "*We were learning about the history of the church from the first to early sixteenth century. I went through another awakening because I realized I did not know the history of my faith at all."* Similarly, Timothy was watching a video about pastoral moral failures when he became aware of his own vulnerability that set-in motion a perspective change. He explained, "*Listening to his story and his ultimate demise sent shock waves through me."*

Resolution to an Existing Anomaly

Six incidents of perspective transformation began with enlightenment on an existing anomaly. When Ruth learned about the moral failures of some of the church fathers, she was able to let go of her struggle with striving for perfectionism. She began a journey of shaping a new perspective of herself when she *was able to see other people's lives and stories didn't line up with what [she] was hearing preached.* Similarly, Ruth had struggled with concepts of faith she had learned. However, *"It became clear something is not wrong with me or my faith."* She began a journey to rethink what faith was for her. Mary was struggling to discover her life purpose and self- identity. Her perspective change began with a serendipitous class exercise. She explained, "*When I finally walked through the exercise it was an "aha moment.*"

Group Discourse

Seven incidents of perspective transformation began during group discourse. Anna, Mary, and Joshua were surprised at what they learned about themselves during group discussion and triggered them into self-examination and perspective changes. *It was in the midst of a*

group discussion on social media usage that Anna becoming acutely aware she was extremely biased and opinionated. Similarly, Mary had no idea she was biased and exclusivist. *"We were having a group discussion about how we see our culture and how we as Christians relate to what is happening in our culture today… I was surprised to discover I had preconceived ideas about what and how people should be.* While the class shared autobiographical stories, Joshua realized he was *judgmental. He stated, "Suddenly, I realized I brought with me being judgmental."*

Progressive Movements

The findings showed 5 participants experienced progressive movements toward perspective change in which they recalled either not knowing when it happened, or the process occurred over progressive stages. Mary became aware of her inherent *blockage* with dealing with leaders; however, it was during a Bible study that illumination came to move her toward perspective change. *We were discussing how we see and relate to leaders in our lives…I realized during the discussion I had a blocker that affected my relationship with leaders in my life…later that week I went to a Bible study and had an aha moment."*

When Deborah described her perspective change regarding accepting herself, she could not identify when it all started. *I really can't say there was one specific aha moment. I think I began to notice how many of the people who impacted the faith in church history did not conform to the norms…but over time I came to realize being different is not a bad thing."*

Like Deborah, Leah could not identify how her transformative change regarding her self-identity began. *"I can't pinpoint a specific day or time, but somehow along the way, I began to see myself differently.* Anna did not realize she had a changed perspective on people who practiced a different faith or worship style until faced with the situation. *I remember someone made a negative comment saying how could they be Christians and still dress in that way.* Anna was

surprised at her response: *Before I started the program I probably would've been the first to agree with the negative comment.* Anna was not aware of the ongoing perspective change until the incident occurred.

Summary

The data strongly supports the first theme that the nine participants experienced two types of triggers of perspective transformation: An epochal disorienting dilemma from four distinct events and four types of awakenings. When participants were exposed to new knowledge of the sacred text that contradicted previously unquestioned understanding, their confidence in their faith or knowledge level was shaken; after receiving critical feedback from individuals whose opinions they valued, they noticed in themselves what they could not see or ignored previously, and were prompted to move toward a changed perspective; when new knowledge about the character of God contradicted their previously held meaning perspectives, participants were activated to resolve the anomaly; and when participants gained knowledge about the martyrs in the early church, they experienced feelings of shock, guilt, shame, and critical introspection, which became catalysts for perspective transformation. Additionally, participants described "aha moments" or "awakenings" which either resolved existing anomalies, triggered changed perspectives, or denoted slow and progressive perspective transformation.

Stepping Back: Integrated Critical Reflection

Mezirow 's (2000) ten-step meaning-making process of transformative learning included self-examination and critical assessment of assumptions as two separate stages in perspective transformation. The findings from the critical incident narratives indicate the integration of both steps as participants simultaneously critically assessed their values and beliefs, critically self-examined, and took liberatory actions in their decision-making. The movement between the three

steps was fluid, with no specific order. Participants described this process as "stepping back" and lauded critical self- reflection for making the most contribution to their new meaning perspectives. The diagram below depicts this triadic convergence as described in the critical incidents.

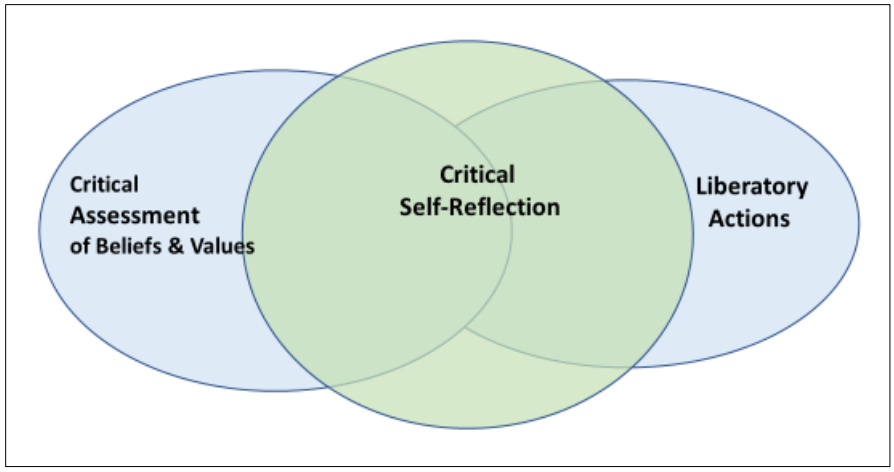

Figure 5.2. Stepping back: Critical assessment, critical reflection, and liberatory action.

Stepping Back

When confronted with anomalies with previously unquestioned beliefs or values, the participants entered an integrated phase of *stepping back:* questioning assumptions, engaging in critical self-reflection and moving toward more liberatory action. Paul demonstrated the interplay between the three movements when he described what happened after he became aware of his previously unquestioned assumption about Moses' authorship:

> *How could Moses write about his own death?... I was thinking "how could I have missed this?" ... Where did I get these things? ... I stepped back from what I thought I knew and began to question everything ... I no longer rely on what was handed down to me ... I make sure I do my own research.*

The interweaving of the three steps is highlighted in this excerpt:

> Question assumption*: How could Moses write about his own death?*
>
> Critical reflection*: I was thinking "how could I have missed this? … Where did I get these things?"*
>
> Question assumption*: I stepped back from what I thought I knew and began to question everything.*
>
> Liberatory action: *I no longer rely on what was handed down to me…. I make sure I do my own research.*

Mary's description of a similar experience illustrates the dance of stepping back and taking liberatory steps to examine her current knowledge and its source, while simultaneously taking introspection.

> *It made me step back … I had to kind of remove myself … it was kind of taking a look at what I think I did know and find out where did that information come from. It started my journey into really digging … and ask what is this, and what does it mean and what does it mean to me? How does it relate to me? … there's kind of dissecting of the information I knew.*

When Timothy confronted his struggle with overcommitment, he became critically reflective, questioned his own assumptions and values, and took a more liberatory stance:

> *I turned the lens on myself and the light on myself…. Why am I doing this? I realized this undue pressure from other people went back to my childhood…. I came to the realization people's expectations dictated how I lived my life. And so that was really eye-opening for me. Holes were being poked into my values and concepts about how I live, how I critically think, and how I view myself. Journaling allowed me to open up and to talk*

through these habits. I was living life from the outside in rather than from the inside out. That realization transitioned me into taking ownership and carrying out my decisions regardless of people's opinions…. I'm coming into my own.

Similarly, Milcah realized she had to step away from some values and assumptions from her childhood. She described how she was able to let go of embedded cultural and familial values regarding her overly opinionated demeanor. She reexamined her values and assumptions of strong women from her family and through self-reflection, she was able to "leave home" and move forward to a new meaning perspective.

I had to pull away from what I'd seen and learned from my childhood. I prayed and I said, "God, teach me how to pull it back." We learned about reflecting in and on action. So I began to look at how I handled some past situations and sometimes in the middle of a situation, I would catch myself taking over and pull back.

Timothy recalled how he arrived at a changed perspective about his leadership style after receiving feedback from his twelve-year-old critical friend. Timothy saw no problems with his leadership style, but her feedback caused him to question his assumptions about his leadership.

And so that was really, really good for me to take a step back and reflect on my leadership approach and why I showed up that way. And then I looked back at the activities and some of the things I would permit and the goofing off. I could definitely begin to see where she was coming from. I began to see from her lens.

Liberatory Actions

In their "*stepping back*," participants' reported having a new sense of freedom as they engaged the process of transformation. Leah explained, "*I was free to ask. We ought to be able to ask. And that was freeing, because it just brings you to another level."* Ruth described the

liberatory steps in her transformational process, *"the more I think about things, the more my understanding is changing and growing and the more I question…. And for me, it's just that space and that freedom to ask the questions and to just dig a little deeper."*

Participants showed a new awareness of freedom through their examination of assumptions and critical reflection and took steps to exercise their freedom in a new way. Joshua described coming *out of the religious box* because he realized his value judgments were *based on someone's opinion* and "*tied to church traditions."* In the same vein, Deborah described how her listening had changed:

> *Now it's no longer where I take it in and act on it. Now it's more of stepping back and saying, let me see how that resonates with me…. I'm not just being led, so to speak, I'm also forging my own path."*

While self-reflecting, Paul realized he had unwittingly adopted the attitude of the leader in handling a situation with an ex-member of the church. Therefore, he decided to take ownership of his relationships*:*

> *When you come into a church, you learn from your surroundings and that's what I was seeing. Whatever I saw, that's what I did. So because that's how the leader reacted, I was doing the same. I thought, that's definitely where that came from. So I changed my perspective…*

Timothy became aware of the need to take charge of his personal life. He had allowed, "*other people's opinions and expectations to dictate* [his] *decisions."* Therefore, a significant part of his perspective transformation was, "*making my own decisions based on what I want and being okay with what people think."*

Critical Self-Reflection

Critical self-reflection was the third leg of the "*stepping back*" triad. Such reflection reassesses our orientation to "perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 13). Participants credited critical self-reflection as the most effective instrument in their perspective transformation. Milcah's metaphorical description succinctly summarizes her experience of critical self-reflection:

> *That self-reflection was a serious gamechanger. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror. First, you see your attributes -You look at your face, your hair, your eyes, and everything looks great; but then you look closer. You stare in your eyes, and if you stare long enough you see your dark side staring back at you. I had to journal and work through what I was seeing in myself.*

Ruth likened critical reflection to mental talk that keeps her aware of her meaning-making.

> *For me, it was mental talk. I didn't do that before…. But now in that space, I look at myself, dissect myself, even dissect my walk and my views of God and look at how I've been living out my whole Christian life and make changes. I just keep asking. I keep bombarding myself with these questions. For me, it's not always about really getting an answer immediately, but it's really to help me see how I am thinking.*

Anna, Paul, and Milcah credit self - reflection with helping them to see what was in their blind spots. Anna described her experience:

> *I'm no longer judging, which I always did, but never knew I was doing and was always accusing someone else of doing. It was through self- reflection that I was able to see what I was doing and change how I see myself and others. One of the most important things that I walked away with is self-reflection.*

Paul had a very similar encounter during self- reflection:

> *That's when I realized I always saw myself as right in every situation. I couldn't see my faults. I would talk about other people's flaws, judging others for the same thing I was guilty of doing…. From that day until today, I do reflection on a regular basis and I always learn new things about myself.*

Milcah described how self- reflection sparked by feedback from her critical friends helped her to see what she could not see before. She declared: *"That one assignment opened my eyes to see what I couldn't see before and changed my whole life."*

Section Summary

This section discussed the second theme in response to the first research question. The findings showed perspective transformation occurred through an integrated movement of critical examination of beliefs, critical self-reflection, and liberatory actions. Participants described this triadic process as "*stepping back*." There was a fluid integration of critical self-examination and critical reflection, and an increased sense of freedom that precipitated the emergence of new meaning perspectives among participants.

A Continuous Journey

While participants acknowledged experiencing a shift in perspective, they admitted they were still working through their transformation. They referred to their experience as a *journey,* a continuous cycle of perspective transformation, that is set in motion when new knowledge is encountered, followed by a disorienting dilemma, a process of critical reflection (*stepping back*), the emergence of a new perspective, and new action based on the changed perspective. The diagram below depicts the cycle described in participants' critical incidents.

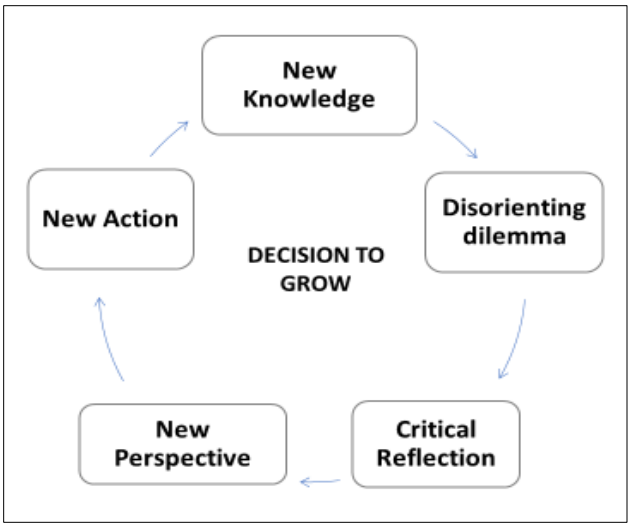

Figure 5.3. Cycle of perspective transformation.

Participants viewed their critical incidents of perspective transformation as a *new door* to growth that gave them *new tools* with which to navigate the timeless cycle of growth. As Ruth asserted, "*Now I see myself as someone who is growing, and growth doesn't have a timetable*." The findings showed three ways in which participants described their experiences of perspective transformation as a journey, rather than a destination: (1) Their perspective transformation was an ongoing cycle; (2) their experiences incited an insatiable hunger for more growth; and (3) their decision to grow was the epicenter of the cycle.

A Continuous Cycle

Ruth described her experience of perspective transformation as a cycle of continuous movements:

> *I'm constantly changing. Even just my mind, the thoughts that I'm thinking…. we have new information. we can drop them or keep them… but we have to keep it going…. Keep being renewed, keep being changed, and not just be stuck in this place. It's like this is the*

old me and now I see it differently but next year we probably could be in a different place where we see it differently again.

Deborah assessed her experience of perspective transformation during the program:

But for me, transformation is you begin as one thing and then come out to be a totally different thing. I don't think I'm there. I think I'm in that cocoon stage so to speak. I'm still in there trying to be that butterfly. So, total transformation I wouldn't say … this experience pointed me in the direction and started a process.

Further, while some participants described their experience as *a journey*, they acknowledged being at different stages in the cycle. Mary admitted she was still working on her new perspective of herself: "*I'm still going through, the process of just finding who I am and who I am in God*." Similarly, Deborah was *still taking small steps* in some areas. "*This journey is teaching me how to figure out me and the things I like and how I do things*." Joshua described experiencing a perspective change regarding being assertive at work and finding balance, however in terms of the corresponding new actions, he admitted he *"was still working on it*."

New Appetite for Further Growth

Some participants experienced an *awakening* with a new appetite for further growth and development. Mary described her new appetite for growth:

I just want more … it opened something in me…. It opened up more doors. It's been a year since I completed the program, and I am still asking questions. I'm still digging. I'm still finding brand new information. It's like a continual journey.

Anna felt a new urgency "*to keep learning and growing"* because she realized "*it's not what you hear from the pulpit, but to learn for yourself is to see differently."*

The Decision to Grow

Both Timothy and Ruth saw transformation as a continuous process of growth that, at its core, necessitated the learner's decision to choose change. Timothy explained, "*It starts with me though. I have to be willing to change. Transformation can only take place if I open myself to it. So it is an ongoing thing for me."* Ruth concurred, "*I think every day it's a decision you make to be transformed. You don't just wake up transformed."* She further explicated*:*

> *It's a decision to be reshaped or reformed in whatever capacity or aspect is important to you. It's a decision to grow in capacity…. You have to decide to change. Just because you hear something doesn't mean you are changed by it. So for me, it's a decision to be reshaped. I have to keep deciding to be transformed and that needs new knowledge. And I think once I get the knowledge … I have to keep acting on them. That's where I am.*

Section Summary

In this section of the chapter, the findings deductively and inductively offered insights on the first research question, how did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation as a result of a leadership training program. The data revealed patterns of a disorienting dilemma as a catalyst for perspective transformation. Although participants encountered the same events, the experiences were individualized in scope and meaning-making. Participants described an integrated process of "stepping back" in which they engaged in a critical examination of beliefs, values, and customs, critical self-reflection and liberatory action to detach themselves from embeddedness and reframe meaning perspectives. Critical self-reflection was most effective in exposing unexamined assumptions and forging the path to new perspectives. Finally, participants identified their experience as the inception of a journey toward transformation, and not a destination. Their experience left them at various stages of the

transformation cycle, some still self -reflecting, wrestling with letting go, deciding on the new perspective, or determining what the ensuing new action should be. The experience awakened an appetite for more growth and development, and taught them growth is a choice, and perspective transformation demands an unwavering decision to grow.

Black Spirituality and Faithing

Mezirow (1991) defined perspective transformation as involving a "structural change in the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (p. 100), and faithing is a person's way of seeing oneself in relation to others and God in a context of shared meaning (Fowler, 1981). As such, the second research question juxtaposes these two concepts of meaning-making and explores emergent themes from the convergence of both lenses. This section discusses the findings corresponding to question two, what role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their experiences of perspective transformation. The findings showed participants' perspective transformation was shaped by a dynamic interaction between Black spirituality and faithing as participants made sense of their experience. Participants engaged in a process of faithing in which they renegotiated four symbols of Black spirituality and their perspective transformation occurred in four successive stages of faithing.

Touching the Untouchable and Negotiating the Non-Negotiables of Black Spirituality

In the process of perspective transformation, participants reported reinterpreting four major meaning perspectives rooted in their institutionalization in Black Pentecostalism. This section discusses how participants made meaning within the structure of these institutional assumptions and reframed their new knowledge to create new perspectives. The findings showed participants reinterpreted their perspectives on four symbols of Black Spirituality: (1) the sacred text; (3) authority of the pulpit voice; (3) rules of piety; and (4) spiritual worship.

The Ultimate Reality

The unquestioned assumption in the participants' context of shared meaning was God as the "Ultimate Reality" (Fowler, 1981). God was the life force and architect of their transformative experiences. Leah captured this conviction as she reminisced on her experience, "*You have moments in your life when you know God met you and I know this was one of mine."* Further, she described her experience with intimate anthropomorphism: "*And he just opened up my heart to say, okay, this is what I'm giving you and if you can accept yourself and that I accept you, then we can do great things."*

Mary had a similar sense of Providence when she realized she wound up in the same certificate program she had found online a year prior. She was excited because then she "*knew for sure*" that was where she needed to be. There were other such moments when Mary was persuaded God was orchestrating her learning experience. When she began to research the scriptures more deeply, *something opened,* and her understanding was increasing. "*And that's really what it was. I wanted more … and so it's like God was saying, 'you want more?' Here you go."* When she began to experience a changed perspective of God's love for her, God again was at work: *"And he just took me on this journey where I realized that everything about me is exactly the way he wanted it to be."* The third pivotal confirming moment for Mary was when the class was working on an exercise on finding your strength. The exercise addressed some questions she had been wrestling with about her life purpose. Mary elaborated:

> *That was definitely, the time for me that made me realize that, yeah, God sees; because no one had any idea that I was battling with that, even at that very moment. But God was the only one who knew, and he knew exactly what I needed, and he presented it.*

In that learning context, there was a shared meaning-identity with God at its center.

Although each participant brought their individual stories that gave their lives meaning (their varied levels of faithing, predilections, and church communities), there was a "master identity" (Fowler, 1981, p.19) and one center of value and power that was unquestioned and nonnegotiable and that was the active presence and work of the Transcendent.

The Sacred Text and Black Spirituality

Participants reported the sacred text as one of the untouchable pillars of Black Pentecostalism. The two main assumptions under question were the divine authorship of the sacred text and the unquestionable status of God's word. When Mary noticed the literary voices in the narratives, she struggled to reconcile the paradox of the sacred text being *human yet divine* and *holy yet flawed.* Mary did not recall when or how she came back around to accepting the sacred text as holy after her disorienting dilemma, but she reframed her perspective to make sense of the dichotomy. Mary elucidated the meaning-making process that brought her back to hold on to this important pillar of her faith.

> *I don't know how, but somehow it brought me back into understanding that although this book is written by humans, it is sanctioned by God. I think God wanted us to see ourselves in it. And if it was just this magical book, and it was just all divine, we would never achieve what it says, or be able to relate or grasp it*. [Like] *in the person of Jesus, how he could be fully divine, but yet fully human.*

Likewise, Joshua recalled struggling with placing confidence in a text with human authorship. He reframed his meaning-making in a later course to accept the sacredness of the writings again. Below he explicated how he resolved the anomaly and reframed his perspective.

> *I think what brought it all back together for me was when we got to the New Testament and there were stories that were similar in the synoptic gospels but yet focused on*

different aspects of the event…. I found confidence in seeing the stories were very similar although handed down from different sources. So the fact that they were so closely similar, gave me confidence that these things really happened…. It helped me to focus on the big picture of what God was really trying to say and do.

The idea of probing the text was certainly daunting. Joshua even cited a verse of scripture that he said cautioned against adding or subtracting from God's word. Therefore, it was not surprising this was an area of trepidation for some participants As Mary explained, *I came from a Black Pentecostal church…. So, we were taught the Bible is written by God. If I questioned anything in it, the response was basically, 'Because God said it."* Ruth vividly recalled asking a question when she was younger and was told, *"You can't think like that. That type of question puts you in hell … you just have to have faith, and you don't, have to understand everything."* Leah confirmed, "*We were always taught that you cannot question God. To question the Bible was to question God.."* Ruth welcomed the new liberty to ask questions without fear *of being far from God* or for fear others may think she *was going to hell.*

The sacredness of the scriptures as a non-negotiable is not peculiar to Black Pentecostalism but is certainly a pillar of the faith. As Mary remarked, "*The Bible is our guide. It is everything. Everything that we need is in that book."* The reverential fear of God and God's punishment are at the core of Black Pentecostalism. Therefore, in their faithing and perspective transformation, participants sought to make sense of their new knowledge while preserving or "holding on" to this pillar of their faith.

Authority of the Pulpit Voice and Black Spirituality

The authority of the preacher is a hallmark of Black spirituality (Wimbush, 2000) and in the Black church context, the preacher and the denomination are the authoritative voices.

Therefore participants had to reinterpret this symbol of the faith in light of their new knowledge and autonomy. Deborah described the dynamic of the pulpit – congregant relationship:

> *We go to church on Sunday mornings and we expect the preacher to tell us everything. And I was one of those people…. I've spent the majority of my Christian life just being churched and being a listener.*

Participants reported becoming aware of their embeddedness to unquestioned assumptions and information obtained from the pulpit. They began to search the scriptures for themselves, listen more objectively to sermons and became selective in their application of what they were learning. All nine participants reported a critical incident related to an awareness of previously unquestioned assumptions and the need to study the scriptures on their own. As Deborah voiced, "*I recognize now that I do have to do my due diligence in searching scripture for myself and not just accept everything that someone says from the pulpit."*

Anna and Leah noted their listening of sermons had changed. Anna explained, "*So our minds are now challenged to not just take in everything we hear because we have to examine it, and sometimes when I get home I research the text for myself."* Leah takes notes *to research further* when she gets home. Rather than blindly following the traditions, Deborah began to reevaluate some of the practices she had not questioned previously. "*It awakened me to examine things I had just accepted. We've been taught just to do things as part of the tradition, but it doesn't mean it's for today or that we are following the original meaning or intention for it."* Ruth began to exercise agency she had previously relinquished and committed to studying the scriptures on her own and delineated between *church tradition* and God.

Milcah and Paul recalled being told in their faith tradition, *wisdom, knowledge, and understanding come from God* and there was no need to receive formal training. They both

attributed this perspective to their Black Pentecostal roots. Paul explained the custom in his faith tradition:

> *I came from a Black Pentecostal church. In our tradition, you just pray and fast and read the Bible and that's how you prepared yourself to be a preacher. Nobody went to Bible school. It wasn't necessary.*

So Paul and Milcah's experience caused them to become critically aware of their own need for training and ultimately a new perspective of their preparation for ministry.

Ruth and Leah described how they reintegrated their new knowledge, Ruth explained,

> *So now I read the Bible and search for meaning on my own…. I realized I don't have to make those definite judgments like they* [the preachers*] were wrong because it could be a number of things. I just think it's culture, education, class, it's just a whole bunch of factors, but they're still doing the best they can [and I] take what I can and try to get something out of it.*

Leah had a similar response, "*I try not to think they're right or wrong. When something is preached that I now know is taken out of context, I tell myself, 'just focus on the main point'."*

The findings showed when participants received new knowledge that contradicted prior knowledge of scripture, they became aware of their embeddedness to pulpit authoritative voices and unquestioned beliefs and interpretations. In a process of "letting go" and "holding on," participants detached from embedded meaning perspectives from these authoritative voices and exercised increased autonomy in their knowledge construction and praxis of their faith.

Piety and Black Spirituality

The third pillar of Black Pentecostalism mentioned by participants in their critical incidents was symbols of piety. Ruth summarized her assumptions, "Y*ou have to be a perfect*

Christian and you have to dot all your I's, cross all your T's and everything is supposed to go perfect." Mary narrated how she felt pressured to hide her tattoos when she went to church and coloring her hair was a major step toward redefining piety. When Joshua declared, "*I stepped out of the religious box*," he was referring to letting go of embeddedness to institutional standards of piety from his upbringing in the Black Pentecostal Holiness church. He admitted, "*And to be honest, I've been so adamant on that, I've been so strict on what we shouldn't be wearing."*

Milcah had to deal with harsh criticism from her family members who had strict standards about attire and dietary requirements based on the Old Testament scriptures. "*They tell me I shouldn't be doing all these things … you shouldn't cut your hair. But I look at the scriptures …and I get a clear understanding of who the audience was, and it was not relevant to me.*

Similarly, Ruth was liberated from the burden of Old Testament laws as standards of piety for her life. Instead of "*rules, rules, rules,"* She saw the commandments as *guidelines for life* which she could selectively choose to apply. Anna described the lived reality of institutionalized piety:

> *You were always told you have to be holy; you have to come to church; you have to do this and the other. You are always <u>doing</u> something. You're always working towards something. So obviously if there's something wrong, then it means you're doing something wrong and not doing something right.*

Six participants (Mary, Ruth, Timothy, Joshua, Milcah, and Anna) described critical incidents related to institutionalized forms of piety rooted in Black Pentecostalism. Through the examination of the beliefs and exercising agency, participants determined new perspectives on what constituted piety.

Worship and Black Spirituality

High spirited worship is a hallmark of Black Spirituality. Throughout their narratives, participants referenced the primacy placed on spiritual worship and exuberant preaching styles in the Black Pentecostal church. Timothy observed, "*Coming from a church and culture that is predominantly Caribbean I think we have the influences in how we worship and how we teach or preach, and expectation of how we should interact and how that's all connected*. "Anna concurred, "*We're taught that if you don't jump and shout then something is wrong."* Milcah jokingly commented:

> *From the Black church standpoint, it's a lot of whooping and hollering that we're used to. And I come from a Pentecostal background. So it's like once you hear, "God is good all the time" and "you were called for a purpose for such a time as this," you start shouting.*

Milcah questioned the substance of some of the current sermons. "*But what is the text about? Who was the intended audience? What can the text tell me?*" Timothy also expressed concern about the tendency to prioritize the "shout" over the "*weightier matters of the word.*" He explained further, "*I feel as if we have peaks and troughs and oftentimes … we don't dive into the word of God so we can grow and so in the peaks and troughs it is more troughs because we are actually at the same place."* For Anna, she wanted to sit and listen to the sermon and take notes, but she felt pressured to "shout" because it was an expectation. With the examination of assumptions, self-reflection, and liberatory actions, Anna decided she would only shout if she chose to do so.

Interestingly, neither Milcah nor Anna chose to let go of the exuberant worship. Milcah did not abandon this hallmark of her faith but integrated the more substantive preaching with the dance: "So, *now I read with my brain turned on…. Then I can shout because I have*

understanding." Similarly, Anna integrated her new perspective with the dance. *Yes, there's a place to dance and shout…. I will dance and shout when I want to, but not because other people think I should."* The question for Anna was not the validity of demonstrative worship; the issue was exercising her autonomy.

Section Summary

The findings showed the complexity of transformative learning within the context of spirituality and related faith commitments. Participants navigated four symbols of their context of Black Spirituality in their perspective transformation. The participants' transformative learning experiences included reexamining meaning perspectives rooted in Black Pentecostal regarding the sacred text, the authority of pulpit voices, forms of piety, and demonstrative worship. While participants reported incidents of new perspectives concerning these pillars of the faith, their meaning-making centered on "holding on" to these symbols and reintegrating the new perspectives into their current contexts.

Four Stages of Faithing

Fowler (1981) identified three patterns of faith-identity relationships of self, other, and God and faithing as making sense of the experiences of life in light of one's beliefs and context. Participants' narratives highlighted four successive stages of faithing in which they experienced a new perspective, ultimately changing their relationships with God, self, others, and the broader community. The diagram below depicts these progressive stages of faithing toward perspective transformation and the participants with corresponding critical incidents.

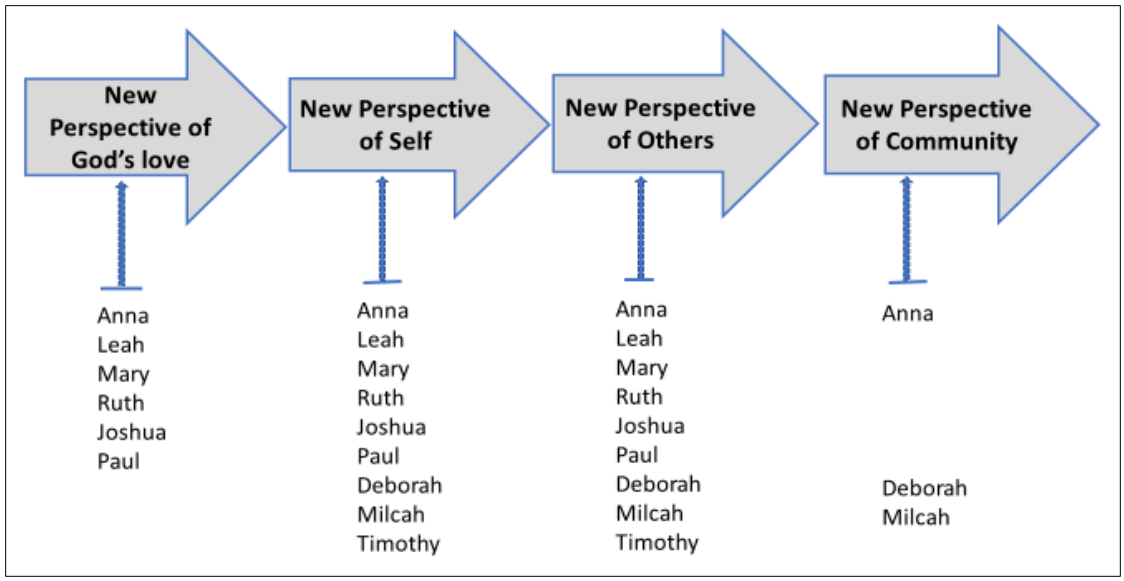

Figure 5.4. Stages of faithing.

New Perspective of God's Love

Six participants described encountering a new perspective of God's love. Participants described a new understanding of God's love for them personally as a separate experience from acquiring new knowledge about God's character, as described earlier in the chapter. Knowing God loves the world had a different meaning from knowing God loved them personally. Leah nicely captures the essence of her encounter:

> *I knew God loved me, but that relentless pursuit … shifted my perspective. I knew it, but I didn't know it. I think it just penetrated another level in my heart and another place in me where it just began to have a new meaning … Somehow I became aware of God's endless capacity to love me.*

Anna and Joshua cognitively knew God loved them, but their experience was significant because they had a new awareness that God loved them personally. Anna expounded:

> *So it gave me a clearer understanding of who God is. It also gave me an awareness that I am truly loved by God and not just because God said he loves us, but he truly loves me as a person.*

Joshua added, "*It gave me an awareness that I am truly loved by God, not just because God said he loves the world, but God truly loves me as a person."*

Not only was God's love personal to Joshua and Mary, but it was unconditional and gave them the acceptance they sought. The new awareness of God's acceptance and unconditional love had special significance to Joshua because of the absence of his biological father in his life:

> *So that opened my eyes to see the grace and mercy of God and his unconditional love in a new way. That encouraged me so much, to know that no matter what I do, God is always there, speaking love to me and not judgment … somehow the light bulb went on for me to see that God loves me where I am now. That right there changed me.*

Similarly, Mary had a new awareness of God's unconditional love and acceptance, despite her *messy* past: "*It made me realize … that God loves me, regardless. And there was nothing in me that he didn't accept 100%. He loves me regardless."*

Ruth's experience of God's love conflicted with her prior understanding of God and the dynamics of a relationship with God. Previously, she saw God as *the God of rules* and obeying the ten commandments was "*what you had to do to be a good Christian …* or *you're going to hell."* However, Ruth's new experience of God's love offered a counternarrative:

> *God seems different to me now. We're doing stuff to make God love us. Then, we are the sinful ones and we are always trying to make God love us. But what transformed in my mind is God is already here with us and already loves us.*

New Perspective of Self

Participant stories indicated an outgrowth from the new perspective of God's love was a changed perspective of the self. "*God loves us as we are and it's for us to really own that and to really look at ourselves and reflect on ourselves and change ourselves,"* Ruth explained. As such, when Mary and Leah became aware of God's love and acceptance, they began to reevaluate how they saw themselves. Mary shared, "*And it made me realize that … If he who sees all loves me unconditionally, then I can love myself with flaws and all. And so, this new awareness took me on a journey of loving me."* Leah could not recall a specific moment when it occurred, but she recalled, "*somehow along the way, I began to see myself differently. The first decision was to accept myself for who I am. I had to accept myself and my story*."

Anna and Joshua had a change of self- acceptance when they perceived God would meet them lovingly despite their inadequacies. Anna no longer felt inadequate or needed to compare herself with others:

> *I got to realize that God is a loving God and meets you where you are…. Now I know I no longer have to look at myself and say I want to be like that person…. Wherever I am, even in my weaknesses I am complete because I understand now God meets me where I am. That really changed things for me.*

Joshua began to see his relationship with God as a love story and that changed how he saw himself. *"So seeing our relationship as a love story between God and me, like the children of Israel, really changed how I see myself."*

Milcah and Timothy's change of perspective of themselves pertained to their leadership roles. Milcah gained a new perspective of her "*confidence"* and her insensitive leadership at work.

I'm very confident. But I … asked myself, 'Wow, is this really what I think it is? … Am I really reflecting Christ?' And at some point, it didn't make me feel good … when I was at home and during my regular job it hit home really hard. I had to change.

Timothy realized he was living an inauthentic life of trying to please others. He prided himself as a leader with many responsibilities, although he carried them out *willy nilly*; but he had a perspective change, to become "*accountable, responsible, and have integrity."* And so whatever he did, "*It can't be willy nilly anymore. It has to be thoughtful and it has to be genuine."*

New Perspective of Others

All participants who experienced a change of perspective of themselves also identified a corresponding change in their perspectives of others. The change was reflected in openness toward others who had different beliefs or worship styles, an awareness of leading others with love and being compassionate and forgiving in relationships. Mary explained the snowball effect of a change in perspective of God's love: "*It changed not only the way I see God and my relation to him and him to me, but how I see people," b*ecause "*in loving myself now I can freely love others."*

To that end, Ruth, Milcah, Paul, and Joshua began to *lead others from a place of compassion*. When Ruth encountered her new perspective of God's love, not only did it change her perspective of herself but how she related to others. "*That's how I want to show up to other people just to be present because that's the type of God that I serve."* During her self- reflection, she realized, "*that love wasn't showing,* [so] *I began to really extend myself more to the people I lead and that's not something I did with anyone in any of my relationships."* Milcah had a similar experience of reevaluating her leadership and changing her perspective. "*Now I have a new*

outlook on leadership. I'm leading from the place of "what if I were in your shoe? I constantly commend, affirm, and encourage those I lead." Like Milcah, Paul was a "do as I say" leader at work and home. *"I realized my perspective of God as a harsh judge had affected my relationships with others. I was very judgmental."* However, Paul had a change of perspective after experiencing God's love: *"I find myself wanting them to feel the love and forgiveness I now enjoy…. In a situation, … I look at things from the other's person's lens … I became more empathetic and merciful."* Similarly, Joshua was *very impatient and frustrated* with his team and was only *focused on getting things done.* He recognized, "*I never thought to ask."* So Joshua became "*a more understanding and compassionate person and leader."*

All nine participants reported becoming more open to people who were different culturally, socially, or in religious beliefs and practices. Ruth discussed her prior insular perspective on religious practices and the subsequent change:

> *I had been judging based on my experience and I only experienced it one way. But I began to see it doesn't necessarily have to be only a right or wrong way. Having a different belief or way of worship doesn't make one wrong or that doesn't make us enemies. We can still love God. So with that, I can look at other people who don't* believe *what I believe, and we can still come together. That was a big difference for me.*

Like Ruth, Milcah reexamined her assumptions about God, and subsequently had a changed perspective about God in relationship with others, particularly non-Christians:

> *We limit God to certain things….* But *God is a big God. God is not just the God of Christians. God is God of the universe. I'm still learning every day as I go on. And because God is so big, the love of God covers a lot. And so if we truly learn to love, is that not God? Not just saying it, but just seeing people differently.*

Anna's perspective expanded beyond her cultural and religious borders and was able to appreciate cultural differences in worship:

> *It opened my eyes to look around the world and see how people of other cultures are professing Christ in their own way. I think I was so closeminded about other cultures and how they worship God because I was so engulfed in our own culture.*

Not only were there perspective changes in leadership and cultural predilections, but changes also occurred in personal relationships. Anna and Ruth recounted a changed perspective in valuing the opinion of others. Anna marveled, *"I listen to others now, rather than spouting out my opinions. I can actually listen to others' opinions without rebutting and will actually consider their opinions. I definitely did not do that before."* Ruth described being open to engage people's opinions. "*That was a big difference for me…. I try to see it from their angle. I don't think I was able to do that before. I didn't have the mental capacity to do it before."* Similarly, Ruth did not apologize to others. She didn't think she was wrong, and an apology was not necessary. She described an incident in which she apologized to her sister for the first time after her changed perspective:

> *She asked me, 'Why is your apology so awkward?' Because it never happened for me to think about someone else besides me. Even in my relationship, I'm just thinking about how I feel and what I want." … Now I apologize even though I still probably think I am right but I'm going to apologize to you. You were upset by it and I hurt you…. I definitely find myself apologizing more…. I didn't have mercy in my relationships with other people.*

Interestingly, although Milcah, Deborah, and Timothy did not mention a critical incident about God's love for them, they experienced a new perspective of themselves and relationships with others. Deborah explicated:

> *And so when it comes to God, I know he loves me, just me the way I am. So I have to learn to do the same for me and with others. I know I'm not at my best all the time and he still loves me anyway. So what I'm learning now is how to love people differently.*

New Perspective of Responsibility to Faith Community

Three participants went beyond their changed perspectives in relationships with others to experience a new awareness regarding their responsibility to a wider community. When Anna learned about the extensive martyrdom in the early church, she felt a new connection to a broader faith community beyond her church.

> *Before I was just going to church and going home. And I thought nothing else of it again. But now I am so much more connected to what is going on with Christians around the world. My whole awareness of the church and my responsibility to the persecuted church has changed.*

Milcah had a similar change of perspective when she suddenly felt she had received a *special treasure* and was a part of a community *much bigger* than she imagined.

> *I never felt a responsibility to those who came before me or those who come after me. Now I feel connected to a community beyond my church and feel responsible to stand for my faith and be a shoulder for others to stand on.*

Deborah realized she had *missed the bigger picture* and *had a lot of work to do*. So she determined to take steps toward a greater reach because she had a *responsibility to do something* with what she had received.

Section Summary

This section responded to the second research question addressing the role of faithing in the transformative learning experiences of the church leaders. The findings show participants experienced four progressive stages of faithing: new perspectives of God's love, new perspectives of self, new perspectives of others, and new perspectives of the faith community. The movements toward increasing capacity began with a new perspective of God's love for six of the nine participants. All nine participants experienced a change of perspective of themselves, which catapulted a change in perspective and relationship with others. Changes in the perspective of others included being more open to different cultures and beliefs, changes to becoming a more compassionate leader and becoming more pliable in interactions with others. Three participants described incidents of expanded responsibility to their faith and faith community. Each stage fostered a widening of the perspective of self in relation to others centered on God's love.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study, organized into two sections, according to the two research questions guiding this inquiry. In the first section, the findings highlighted three major aspects of the experiences of perspective transformation by the Black church lay leaders: Perspective transformation began in two ways: A disorienting dilemma triggered by four epochal events (new knowledge of the sacred text, critical feedback from trusted voices, new perspectives of God, and stories of martyrdom), and four distinct types of awakenings (an "aha" moment, a resolve to an existing anomaly, an awakening during group discourse, and previously unnoticed awakenings from progressive transformation); an integrated process ensued which combined three steps of transformation (critical examination of beliefs and

assumptions, critical self- reflection, and expanded freedom); and the outcome was not finite, but the inception of a continuous journey of change.

In the second section, the findings illuminated four major symbols of Black Pentecostalism played a role in the participants' perspective transformation (The veneration of the sacred text, the authority of the pulpit voice, strict forms of piety, and high-spirited worship). Participants navigated these four meaning schemes through a critical examination of the beliefs, self- reflection and asserted autonomy to arrive at new meaning perspectives. Further, four progressive stages of faithing were evident in the meaning-making process. Participants experienced new perspectives of God's love, new perspectives of themselves, new perspectives in their relationship with others, and a new sense of responsibility to the faith and community. Each of these themes worked together to present how meaning-making occurred leading to perspective transformation in a shared context of Black Spirituality and faithing.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

> *For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other*. (Freire, 1970/2000)

The purpose of this study was to explore how a group of Black church lay leaders interpreted and responded to their transformative learning experiences and the possible role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making. My goal was to gain a better understanding of how Black church leaders can grow and develop capacity for effective leadership in the twenty-first century. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation?
2. What role, if any, did Black spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation?

In this concluding chapter, I begin with a summary of the research study, discuss the conclusions relating to the research questions, the implication of the findings on the theory and practice of transformative learning, and opportunities for future research.

Summary of the Study

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology, conducting semi-structured interviews using the Critical Incident Technique for data collection. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to identify program graduates who reported experiencing perspective transformation and who could provide information-rich descriptions of their experiences. I conducted ten in-depth interviews with nine participants to capture a thick description of the

incidents. The interviews were transcribed and uploaded into Microsoft Word for analysis. Taking both inductive and deductive approaches, I analyzed the data using three analytical methods. First, I used Mezirow's (1997, 2000) transformative learning theory to identify a priori disorienting dilemmas in the narratives. Second, I used narrative analysis to arrange the stories from the data into critical incidents (Labov & Waletsky, 1997). Third, I used the constant comparative method to conduct thematic analysis across the entire corpus of data to identify the main themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The critical incidents were presented in chapter four and the details of the findings discussed in chapter five.

Conclusions and Discussion of Findings

Overall, two conclusions were drawn from the study: 1) Black Church Lay Leaders' experiences of perspective transformation were a combination of conscious and unconscious occurrences, and 2) The Black church lay leaders' consciousness of Black spirituality and faithing framed every aspect of their perspective transformation and created new understandings of freedom**.** The previous chapter presented the findings by theme and category in response to each research question. In this chapter, I will discuss the conclusions relative to the research questions, making connections to the relevant literature. Figure 6.1 encapsulates the research findings, displaying the related phases of Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory most evident in the data, and the interrelatedness of Black spirituality in the process of perspective transformation.

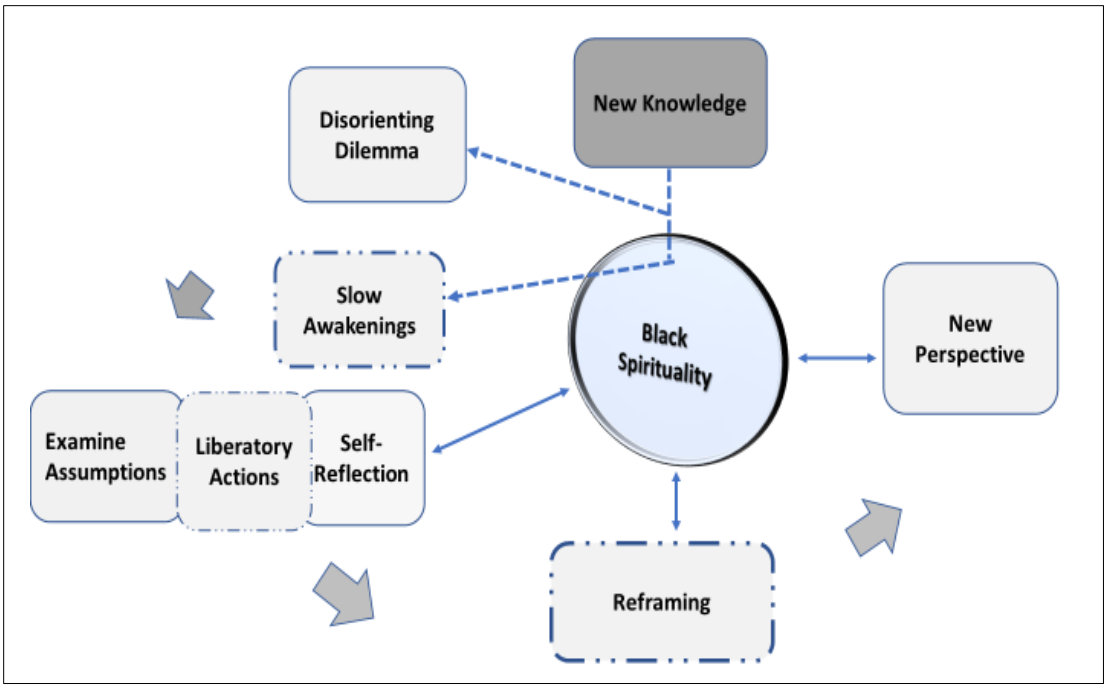

Figure 6.1. Perspective transformation of Black church lay leaders.

Conclusion 1: Black Church Lay Leaders' Experiences of Perspective Transformation Were a Combination of Conscious and Unconscious Occurrences.

The first conclusion responds to question one: How did Black church lay leaders experience perspective transformation? The question aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the Black church lay leaders' incidents of perspective transformation, including what happened and how they constructed meaning during their experiences. In this sample, Black church leaders had a nuanced experience of three of Mezirow's ten phases of perspective transformation in an interweaving of conscious and unconscious occurrences. This study concurs with the depth psychology perspective that psychological wholeness involves the conscious and unconscious aspects of the human psyche (Dirkx, 1997, 2012; Sonik, 2008). The transformative learning experiences of the Black church lay leaders was "an interplay of conscious and unconscious, of outer and inner worlds (Sonik, 2008, p.97). The "conscious" in this context represents what the participants

knowingly experienced and the "unconscious" are those inner workings unbeknown to the knower (Dirkx, 2012).

In this section, I discuss the three phases of Mezirow's ten phases of perspective transformation experienced by the Black church lay leaders, namely, disorienting dilemmas, self-examination, and critical assessment of assumptions and highlight the congruences and deviations from the theory. The discussion is framed within the context of conscious and unconscious experiences of transformation.

Epochal disorienting dilemmas. Consistent with Mezirow's (1978) theory, the study showed incidents of perspective transformation that were triggered by an epochal disorienting dilemma. Participants experienced a disorienting dilemma when new knowledge was paradoxical and disruptive to their current understandings and assumptions of themselves, God, and relationship with others. For example, participants experienced a disorienting dilemma when the feedback from their critical friends contradicted their understandings of themselves. Similarly, when the participants learned about the brutal persecutions of Christians in the early church, they were shocked and dismayed. They experienced an array of emotions, including remorse, anger, guilt, and shame concerning their commitment to their faith. They could not reconcile the new knowledge with their current frames of reference and were abruptly thrust into critical examination of assumptions and self-reflection. Mezirow (1990) expanded the definition of a disorienting dilemma to include "anomalies and dilemmas of which old ways of knowing cannot make sense become catalysts or 'trigger events' that precipitate critical reflection and transformations" (p. 14). Most studies on the process of transformative learning concur perspective transformation is typically precipitated by a disorienting dilemma (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Roberts, 2009; Taylor, 2000).

Slow awakenings. The Black church lay leaders experienced another type of trigger during their incidents of perspective transformation, which they described as "aha" moments or awakenings. These "aha" moments occurred when learners seemed to stumble upon an awakening triggered by an unrelated event. In these incidents, perspective transformation was triggered when the learner had a spur-of-the-moment awareness. Nohl (2009) acknowledged the potential for spontaneity in transformative learning, noting the element of serendipity is missing in Mezirow's (1978, 2000) rational and cognitive approach.

The second type of awakening occurred when incidents of pre-existing anomalies were resolved by new knowledge, resulting in a change of perspective. Four participants described significant perspective transformation precipitated by an unexpected resolution to a pre-existing anomaly. The findings are congruent with Clark's (1991) study in which participants experienced perspective transformation after searching consciously or unconsciously and finding the missing piece. These "integrative circumstances" are not life-threatening, but present opportunities for further exploration or clarify an existing anomaly (Clark, 1993). Similar to the current study, two types of triggers were identified in Clark's (1991) study: a disorienting dilemma posing a serious threat to life as the person knew it, and an event providing a missing piece of information.

This study partially concurs with Mezirow's (2000) acknowledgment of "incremental transformations, involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformed habit of mind" (p. 21). Hoggan et al. (2017) further elucidated this concept, cautioning against expectations of definitive beginnings and endings in the process of transformation and described the "overlapping trajectories of transformation" (p.52). "Small instances of disorientation may begin a slow, cumulative yet strong process of change" (Hoggan,

2017, p.52).

This study highlights the role of unconscious activity in transformative learning. The data corpus indicates there was an unconscious inner working of transformation that eventually became an outward expression. The serendipitous "aha moments" in the data cannot be fully explained as a rational process. Meaning-making includes "unconscious, imaginative, and extrarational processes" (Dirkx, 2012, p. 116). Fowler's (1981) definition of spirituality includes the way people construct meaning through symbols, images, and unconscious processes. Therefore, this study suggests the soul learns through "a focus on the interface where the socioemotional and the intellectual world meet, where the inner and outer worlds converge" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 85). Spiritual practice is one way to engage the inner world. Practices such as meditation, yoga, prayer, and contemplation can play a significant role in fostering discernment and insight (Barrick, 2003; Mikaelian, 2016; Mountjoy, 2003; Palmer, 2009; Sawyer, 2004). My study confirms "gentle promptings of our higher self" can occur through prayer and quiet moments of meditation (Barrick, 2003, p.18).

Critical reflection. The second most notable phase of perspective transformation among the Black church leaders was a period of self-reflection and examination of assumptions. However, rather than Mezirow's (1978) two separate phases, participants described a triadic process of critical examination of previously unquestioned assumptions, critical self-reflection and liberatory actions in a process they termed "stepping back." This process always followed a disorienting dilemma or awakening. Participants emphatically attributed their perspective transformation to self-reflection. One participant described it as "a serious game-changer." By self-reflection, they refer to a process of interrogating the self and reflecting on and in-action (Schon, 1983). They described a process of asking soul-searching questions of themselves and

digging deep within for inner truths.

The active role of critical self-examination and assessment of assumptions in perspective transformation, found in this study, is partially congruent with Mezirow's (2000) theory. The study corroborates with adult education scholars who advocate the significance of critical reflection on adult learning (Brookfield, 1992, 2000; Habermas, 1984; Mezirow,1991, 1998, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Schon,1984). However, there are different understandings of the theory and practice of self-reflection in the literature (Kreber, 2012). Mezirow and Associates (1990) asserted "the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection" (p. 13) and Taylor (2000) argued transformation can occur without critical reflection. Some scholars question Mezirow's emphasis on critical reflection (Merriam et al., 2001; Taylor, 2000). Brookfield (2000) supported critical reflection as necessary, but not necessarily sufficient to bring about transformation, and Dirkx (1997) proposed the alternative of seeing through the heart of the imagination rather than through the cognitive or rational. Dirkx (1997) argued the overemphasis on critical self-reflection understates the affective, emotional, spiritual, and transpersonal elements.

Although Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Associates, 1990) wrote extensively about critical reflection, the term is not included in the ten steps (Mezirow, 1985, 1998, 2000). Mezirow and Associates (1990) defined critical reflection as "challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning" and acknowledged it would be more accurate to speak of "premise reflection" (p. 12). However, he decided to continue using the term critical reflection, since it was widely used. The ten steps included self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame and a critical assessment of assumptions. Mezirow and Associates' (1990) description of the process of

critical reflection appeared to include both critical assessment of assumptions and some form of self-examination. Mezirow and Associates (1990) wrote:

> Becoming critically aware of our own presuppositions involves challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense of our encounters with the world, others, and ourselves. (p. 12)

To "challenge our established and habitual patterns of expectation" involves self-examination.

Nonetheless, what is significant to this study is Mezirow's (1998) expansion of critical reflection beyond the cognitive to include other ways of knowing, such as spiritual, contextual, and relational. In this study, critical reflection included unconscious, introspective probing and challenging previously unquestioned assumptions, values, and spiritual beliefs. Dirkx (2012) captured the essence of the participants' reflective process when he asserted transformative learning required an "ongoing dialogue of the ego with these deeper, unconscious, and extrarational aspects of the human psyche…it is about attending to and nurturing the souls" (p. 127).

Liberatory actions. Exercising freedom to question and decide on matters of the faith was a significant factor in the perspective transformation of the Black church lay leaders. Adult development theorists associate growth with greater autonomy and ability to act independently from the demands of one's environment (Daloz, 1999; Fowler, 1981; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Mezirow, 1978,1991,2000). Fowler (1981) and Mezirow (2000) portrayed autonomy as universally equitable and accessible (Moseley, 1994; Clark & Wilson, 1991). However, in the cultural context of the Black church lay leaders, and the inherent hegemonic structure, the freedom to question and decide independently on doctrinal matters is not easily acquired (Appiah, 2005; Wiggins, 2005). The participants' perspective transformation was characterized

by a new understanding of themselves, accompanied by the emergence of a more liberated and empowered self. (Roberts, 2009; Tennant, 2006).

In summary, the Black church lay leaders' experiences of perspective transformation included a mixture of conscious and unconscious progressive movements. Such conscious engagement included nuanced experiences with three of Mezirow's ten steps of transformation (disorienting dilemma, critical self-reflection, and critical examination of assumptions), and unexpected awakenings originating from unconscious inner movements of transformation.

Conclusion 2: The Black Church Lay Leaders' Consciousness of Black Spirituality Framed Every Aspect of Their Perspective Transformation and Created New Understandings of Freedom.

This section responds to the second research question: What role if any, did Black Spirituality and faithing play in their perspective transformation? From the disorienting dilemma to the formulation of the new perspective, every aspect of the Black church leaders' perspective transformation was fashioned and shaped from their context of Black spirituality. The participants gave numerous examples of their perspective transformation developing around and defined by, their understandings of their faith. Before beginning this discussion, it is important to recall the definitions of faithing, spirituality, and Black spirituality that inform this study. Faithing is understood as the way one makes sense of experiences based on the faith upon which "they rest their hearts" (Fowler, 1981, p. 11). Spirituality is a conscious honoring of and connection to the Life-force (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006). Therefore, participants' faithing, (how they made sense of their experiences) was predicated on their spirituality (a conscious honoring and connection to the Life -Force) and their spirituality was steeped in Black Pentecostalism. As such, Black Spirituality not only referred to the culture, praxis, and doctrine of Black Pentecostalism, as understood by the Black church lay leaders but represented the frames of

reference through which new experience and knowledge were filtered. On this premise, this study understood spirituality for the Black church lay leaders as synonymous with Black spirituality. Following is a discussion of four ways in which spirituality framed the Black church leaders' experiences: 1) God was the Life-force; 2) God was at the core of identity development; 3) God was at the center of relationships and connectedness with others, and 4) Perspectives were reframed in light of major symbols of Black Spirituality.

God as life-force. God was seen as the ultimate architect from the beginning; a life-force that was present and involved (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, 2006). In each phase, God was acknowledged and recognized for being at work. Participants saw their lives as grounded in relatedness to God (Fowler, 1996). Three of the four events creating a disorienting dilemma pertained to God (God's character as a gracious God, God's authorship of the scriptures, the trepidation from not knowing the correct meaning of scriptures). When the church lay leaders developed a new perspective, it was God who had brought the change. These findings are congruent with prior empirical studies on Black Spirituality (Mattis, 2002; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Salinas et al., 2018) in which participants relied heavily on their spirituality as a source of guidance, strength, and support. Further, in Merriam and Ntseane's (2008) study, participants viewed some of their life-crises generating disorienting dilemmas as originating from God.

Identity development. Another dominant theme in the findings was new identity development initiated by a new awareness of God's love. Participants developed a new sense of worth and identity when they became aware of God's love for them. An increased sense of identity and a clearer understanding of one's role in the world are consistent with the scholarship

on spirituality and transformative learning (Charaniya, 2012; Courtenay & Milton, 2004; English, 2000; Fleming & Courtenay, 2006; Mattis, 2002; Mountjoy, 2003; Roberts, 2009).

Further, the participants' experiences of expanded self-identity as an outgrowth of a new perspective of God's love are congruent with Fowler's (1981) theory. According to Fowler (1996), the self is the "evolving subjective experience of becoming and being a person in relation" (p. 20) and faith involves a triadic relationship between the Transcendent, self, and other. The Transcendent is the center of value and power. In this triadic structure, when our ways of symbolizing the center change, the relationship with self and other changes. Fowler's (1981) stages of faith depict the development of faith and selfhood and the subsequent emergent ways of knowing. The data showed participants' perspective transformation involved differentiating from some conforming identities, beliefs, and values, critically weighing and interpreting them, and ultimately deciding on their own. As participants expanded in their selfhood, they gained the confidence to question previously unquestioned beliefs and to search the scriptures for meaning independent of spiritual authority. These activities are congruent with Fowler's (1981) transition from the synthetic- Conventional faith (stage three) to the Individuative-Reflective faith (Stage four) in which the knower begins to separate from external authority.

Growth in self-identity includes a shift in the locus of authority (Fowler, 1981). Each increasing stage of faith portrays progressive movements away from external sources of authority and to internal authority, "residing in one's own soul judgment" (Fowler, 1996, p. 68). Congruent with Fowler's (1981) theory, participants' experiences of perspective transformation began with a changed perspective of God's love, a subsequent change in self- identity, and a corresponding shift in the locus of authority.

Relationships and connectedness with others. Sequential to the new relationship with the self, participants developed new perspectives on their relationships with others. Tisdell (1999) suggested one of the manifestations of spirituality is seeking connectedness through relationships with loved ones and acting with moral responsibility for a better world. As participants developed a new perspective of God's love and self, they began to expand in their love for others. Some participants felt a greater moral responsibility to their communities and humanity. All participants experienced a changed perspective in some level of relationship, including work, church, and loved ones. Overall, as participants became more aware of God's love, they became increasingly open to people of different cultures, lifestyles or beliefs.

The significance of a new perspective on relationships and connectedness with others in perspective transformation is strongly supported in empirical studies on spirituality and transformative learning (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Fleming & Courtenay, 2006; Mikaelian, 2016; Mountjoy, 2003; Taylor & Elias, 2012). Also, the finding supports Fowler's (1981) theory that our relationship with the Transcendent as a spiritual center affects all other relationships in our lives. The relationship with others is the third leg in Fowler's (1981) systemic triad of Transcendent, self, and other.

Reframing perspectives. When participants encountered an anomaly with a core pillar of Black spirituality, they engaged in a process of reframing of their perspective to preserve the sanctity of the pillar. There was a conscious or unconscious understanding that certain symbols of their faith would not be altered. Certain pillars, such as the sacredness of scriptures and exuberant worship, were indelibly etched. A part of the participants' process of meaning-making included reframing their perspective to accommodate the new knowledge while re-establishing the validity of the symbol. Mezirow (1990), explained the phenomenon. When an experience is

too threatening or strange, the learner makes a new interpretation that reinforces the frame of reference. Mezirow (1990) included this process in the reflection phase. However, there is robust data in the study to support the process of reframing as a separate and significant step in perspective transformation. Mezirow (2000) discusses two types of reframing, objective (critical reflection on the assumption of others) and subjective (critical reflection of one's assumptions). Neither description correlated with the participants' experiences in this study.

The finding is supported in Fowler's (1981) explanation of the contents of faith. Contents are the realities, values, symbols, powers, communities on and in which persons "rest their hearts" (p. 273). These contents are the centers of value, images of power, and the master stories that shape our characters and faith orientations. A transition from one stage to another does not necessitate a change in the content of one's faith. The change may have occurred in the way one understands and takes responsibility for living the faith (Fowler, 1996). A conversion to a particular faith is considered a change in the contents of faith. The participants' perspective transformation involved a change in how they understood the symbols of their faith. Therefore, in a spiritual context reframing plays an important role in the act of faithing. The knowers negotiate and reformulate the integral frames of reference upon which they have "rested their hearts."

The space for freedom. Participants in this study identified new found freedom as one of the hallmarks of their experience of perspective transformation. Being free to ask questions about biblical texts or to independently choose how to carry out their faith were some of the liberatory actions described by participants. The extent to which they can or will exercise the new freedom is uncertain, particularly as they return to their faith communities where the old paradigms were shaped. Moving to and sustaining the actions of a new perspective is dependent on continued

association with others who share the new perspective (Mezirow,1978). Further, some participants reported expanded worldviews and a new sense of social responsibility. The finding supports current studies indicating perspective transformation progressively includes a new sense of social responsibility and social action (Lange, 2004; Mezirow, 1978). Perspective transformation includes epistemological and ontological processes in which knowers experience enlargement in their identities and in how they are being in the world (Charaniya, 2012; Lange, 2004). Nonetheless, while the data showed participants had a deep desire to be liberated from restraining structures and to make an impact in a wider world, the end goal is unknown to the researcher.

In summary, Black spirituality shaped every aspect of the perspective transformation of the Black church lay leaders, both consciously and unconsciously. The disorienting dilemmas were triggered by dissonances with the key symbols and understandings of their faith. Participants' process of meaning-making involved a critical examination of their previously unquestioned assumptions and beliefs, critical self-reflection concerning their relationship with God, commitment to their faith, and relationships with self and others. Ultimately, their perspective transformation was evidenced in a sequence beginning with a changed perspective of God and God's love, a changed self-identity, an expanded perspective of others, and an increased sense of social and moral responsibility to their faith and humankind.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

The implications for this study are drawn from a combination of the study findings, interpretations, and existing literature based on perspective transformation and spirituality. Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1978,1990,1991,2000) has made a significant contribution to the field of adult education in illuminating how adults make meaning and

transform their perspectives. Transformative learning focuses on how we know and how we understand ourselves and our world (Dirkx, 2012). In this section, I discuss this study's implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study have three main implications on the theory of perspective transformation: a) support the scholarship on the important influence of Black spirituality on adult learning; b) support the integration of Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory and Mezirow's (1978) perspective transformation as a robust theoretical framework for research on spiritual contexts; and c) challenge current understandings of a disorienting dilemma.

This study expands the scholarship by engaging Black spirituality as a culture and context of influence in transformative learning. The study demonstrates Black spirituality has a nuanced cultural context, affecting how individuals view themselves, the Transcendent, and the world. The mythos, symbols, and values play a significant role in how the Black lay leaders constructed meaning during their experiences of perspective transformation.

Although recent scholarship has focused on the role and impact of spirituality in adult education, (Charaniya, 2012; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Tisdell, 2008; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003; Tolliver and Tisdell, 2002, 2006), there is still much more to learn about spirituality and transformative learning. The study supports transformative learning cannot be isolated as a cognitive phenomenon, since it affects the whole person, including one's spirituality which transcends religion (Dirkx, 2012; Sawyer, 2004; Tisdell, 2000). The notion of spirituality as culture, and not a mere religion, and its impact on the ways of being of educators and learners, is still an understudied phenomenon (Courtenay & Milton, 2004; Fleming & Courtenay, 2006; Robert, 2009; Tolliver and Tisdell, 2002, 2006). Further, the study posits Black spirituality is

much more than a style of worship; it is a culture of its own; a way of being, acting, and seeing the world (Appiah, 2005). Black Spirituality is a very present, formidable player in the transactions of adult learning and transformation. The study's findings highlight the need for further attention in the literature on Black spirituality and transformative learning.

The second implication for theory is identified in the study's juxtaposition of Mezirow's (1978, 1990,1991,2000) Transformative Learning Theory and Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory as a theoretical framework to explore perspective transformation in a spiritual context. The theories proved to be mutually informing and together presented a robust story of how a group of Black church leaders learned and understood themselves. Overall, Fowler's (1981) theory helped to increase understanding of how people construct meaning through symbols and images and unconscious processes. The theory provided a complementary lens to understand the underlying spiritual structures and presented a guide for assessing spiritual transformation (Tisdell, 2000; Wollert, 2003).

The third implication is the need to rethink current understandings of a disorienting dilemma. Mezirow defined the phenomenon as "life's dilemmas which cannot be resolved by simply acquiring more information" (Mezirow, 1978, p.108), "anomalies and dilemmas" (Mezirow,1990, p. 14), and "epochal, a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, or incremental, involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind" (Mezirow, 2000, p.21). Chad Hoggan (2017) referenced a "slow, cumulative yet strong process of change" (p.52). This study challenges current understandings of a disorienting dilemma by presenting unconscious inner work through spiritual practices, such as prayerful discernment and sudden awakenings, as catalysts of perspective transformation.

Implications for Practice

In conjunction with the theoretical implications, there are clear implications for practice. In this section, I will discuss implications for practice in adult education and religious education. The rapidly changing societal milieu has placed demands on both secular and ecclesial educators to move away from traditional pedagogy and seek ways to facilitate epistemological growth. "Recasting the territory of adult education as spaces where individuals, groups, and society cultivate capacities to act in a constructive transforming manner demands an evolution of the way we teach, learn, and act" (Nicolaides & Marsick, 2016, p. 18). One of the implications of practice of this study is the need for practitioners to recognize, and act upon, the presence and transforming power of spirituality in adult education (Mattis, 2002; Mountjoy, 2003; Roberts, 2009; Salinas et.al., 2018).

Probably the most pressing interest of this study is the urgent need to expand the epistemological capacity of ecclesial leaders for relevant and effective leadership in the twenty-first century (Byrd, 2011; Harrison, 2010; McKenna, et al., 2007; Premawardhana, 2006; Wong, 2011). This study has shown there is a context in which church leaders can grow and develop the capacity to question embedded and previously unquestioned assumptions and develop a broader perspective for twenty-first-century leadership. This study showed one can expand epistemologically by transforming a frame of reference (Mezirow, 1978) and preserve the major symbols and master stories of the faith (Fowler, 1981). Therefore, a major implication for practice involves developing learning spaces that challenge and expand the developmental growth of church leaders.

Implications for Future Study

From a cultural-spiritual standpoint, adult transformative learning is certainly not an exhausted area of research (Dirkx, 2012; Taylor, 2007). There is still much more to learn about how adults make meaning within their varied contexts. "Transformation is an extrarational process that involves the integration of various aspects of the Self" (Baumgartner, 2001, p.18). This study highlights spirituality is not a homogenous context and requires further delineation in future scholarship on the cultural-spiritual dimensions in adult education. Although this study focused on a Judeo-Christian context, there are implications for future research on Black spirituality in other religious and non-religious contexts. Further, based on the limitations of my sample, I was unable to determine if gender, age, or years in the faith impacted the transformative learning experiences of the church leaders. There is a deficit in the number of studies within the cultural context on the impact of differences in gender, age, and transformative learning (Taylor, 2007). Therefore, there are implications for further research in the area of demographics.

Another implication for future study is a constructive-developmental approach. A developmental theoretical lens would be useful to assess the stages of faith (Fowler, 1981) or order of consciousness (Kegan, 1982) of the participants. Such a study would explore whether developmental stages played a role in their meaning-making and the extent to which they rely on internal or external sources of authority. Finally, a follow-up study to explore how the participants are integrating their new perspectives would be an enriching sequel to this study.

Limitations of the Study

All studies have limitations. One of the limitations of this qualitative exploratory study is the findings are specific to the experiences of a group of nine church lay leaders, primarily with

Black Pentecostal roots, and from a specific geographical location. Although I attempted to get participants from different churches, only five churches were represented. Further, there are many other blends of denominations and interdenominational churches that fall within the category of Black spirituality. The study represented the perceptions and idiosyncrasies of the nine participants and the subjectivities of the researcher. Finally, although a qualitative design is noted for its ability to engender rich data and capture the lived experiences of respondents, the method has been critiqued for having limited generalizability (Wolcott, 2001). However, an important philosophical assumption of qualitative research is that the goal is to understand a phenomenon, not to generalize (Ruona, 2005).

Chapter Summary

Research on perspective transformation within the context of Black spirituality is limited. Even more pronounced is the sparsity of studies on Black church leaders' growth and development. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the adult education scholarship by exploring how a group of Black church lay leaders experienced perspective transformation and how they constructed meaning during their experiences. The research questions driving the study were: (1) How did a group of Black church leaders experience perspective transformation? And, (2) what role, if any, did Black Spirituality and faithing play in their meaning-making. This chapter provided two conclusions in response to the questions. Black church lay leaders' experiences of perspective transformation were a combination of conscious and unconscious occurrences, and second, the Black church lay leaders' consciousness of Black spirituality framed every aspect of their perspective transformation and created new understandings of freedom. Each conclusion was discussed and supported with references to the findings and relevant literature. Implications for theory, practice, and future research were discussed.

This study gave a voice to the once muted and constrained through their stories of perspective transformation. Whether a meaning scheme or a meaning perspective was transformed or there was a shift from one developmental stage to another, is not the overarching lesson from this study. The stories of emancipation from institutionalization to self-autonomy and liberatory action recorded in chapter four, remind us as practitioners and scholars that transformative learning cannot be studied or accomplished devoid of understanding of the soul and spirit of the ones we seek to help transform.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Office of Research
Institutional Review Board

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

September 10, 2018

Dear Karen Watkins:

On 9/10/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Transformative learning experiences of Black lay church leaders
Investigator:	Karen Watkins
Co-Investigator:	Maureen Miller
IRB ID:	STUDY00006175
Funding:	None
Review Category:	Exempt, HHS (2)

The IRB approved the protocol from 9/10/2018 to 9/9/2023.

This is an exempt study, so it's not necessary to submit a modification for minor changes to study procedure. You can keep us informed of changes that don't affect the study scope by using "Add Comment".

Please close this study when it is complete.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

William Westbrook, IRB Analyst
University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

EMAIL LETTER OF INVITATION

Exploring how Black church lay leaders interpret their transformative learning experiences

Dear Graduates,

I am a doctoral student in the Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development program in the College of Education at the University of Georgia.
I am conducting a research study that explores how Black church leaders interpreted their transformational learning incidents in the leadership development program you attended. If you experienced a change in perspective of God, self, or others during the program I invite you to share your experience by participating in the study.
If you choose to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60 -90-minute interview. Each interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy and to make any changes you deem necessary. You will be asked to return the amended transcript to the researcher via email. You may also be asked clarifying questions after the interview.

Prior to the interview, you will receive an information package which includes the questions you may be asked during the interview.

Before beginning the interview, you will be asked to review and sign a consent form, acknowledging your voluntary participation in the study.

There are no direct benefits for your participation. However, participants may benefit from a deeper reflection of their experience.

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the researcher.

All information collected will be held confidential unless otherwise required by law. The transcription will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants. The researcher will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. Your identity will be screened, and all data and identifying information will be kept in a secured location for five years and then destroyed.

The researcher will answer any questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 678-895-6631.

You may also contact the professor supervising the research, Dr. Karen E. Watkins, Professor, Learning, leadership, and Organization Development, College of Education, The University of Georgia, at 706-542-2214.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please complete the attached participant interest form and return it to the researcher via email.

Sincerely,

Maureen Miller

Doctoral Candidate
Learning, Leadership, and Organization Development
Department of Lifelong Learning, Administration and Policy
University of Georgia
Researcher Phone: (678) 895-6631
Researcher Email: maureen.miller25@uga.edu

Participant Interest

I am interested in participating in the research on the transformative learning experiences of

Black church lay leaders, and the role of Black spirituality in their meaning-making.

- ☐ I completed all required courses and I am a graduate of the Diploma in Practical Theology program.
- ☐ I can identify at least two to four incidents where I recognized and responded to some type of perspective change during the program.
- ☐ I am willing to share and describe those incidents with the researcher during 60- 90-minute interviews.
- ☐ I am willing to have the interview audio- recorded.
- ☐ I am willing to provide biographical information and give my consent for the information gained through the interview to be used in the research and published dissertation or other publication.

Signed: _____

Print Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following guide will be used for the study on the perspective transformation of Black church lay leaders:

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself.
    a. What is your leadership role at your church?
    b. How long have you been a leader?
    c. What brought you to this course?
    d. What is your age?
    e. Where did you grow up?
    f. Where have you lived, etc.]
2. Think about a time when you feel your perspective on God, yourself, or your relationships changed because of something that happened in the course. Describe a specific incident.
    a. What happened?
    b. Who or what was involved?
    c. What made it significant to you?
    d. What made this different from your previous perspective?
    e. How did that previous experience play out in your life?
3. Think about a time when something happened that challenged or confirmed your faith?
    a. What happened?
    b. Who or what was involved?
    c. What made it significant to you?
    d. What made this different from your previous perspective?
    e. How did that previous experience play out in your life?
4. What other experiences of change during the course would you like to share with me?

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Please complete the following:

Name:	
Telephone:	
Email Address:	

Ethnicity:	**Highest Level of Education**
How would you describe yourself? _____ African American _____ Caribbean _____ Other_____	_____ Doctorate _____ Masters _____ Bachelors _____ Associates _____ Some college _____ High School _____ Diploma in _____
Age Range: ___ 21-30 years ___ 31-40 years ___ 41- 50 years __ 51 and older	

Years as Christian	**Years in Church Leadership**	**Years in Current Church**
_____ 1 – 5 Years _____ 6 – 10 Years	_____ 1 – 5 Years _____ 6 – 10 Years	____ 1 – 5 Years ____ 6 – 10 Years

_____ 11 – 15 Years _____ 16 – 20 Years _____ 21 Years and over	_____ 11-15 Years _____ 16 – 20 years ____ 21 years and over	____ 11-15 Years ____ 16 – 20 years ____ 21 years and over

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

Researcher's Statement
I am asking you to take part in the research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study, so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Karen Watkins
Learning, Leadership, & Organization Development
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration & Policy
The University of Georgia
Kwatkins@uga.edu

Interviewer: Maureen Miller
Learning, Leadership, & Organization Development
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
Maureen.miller25@uga.edu;

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to understand the transformative learning experiences of Black church lay leaders in a critical theological leadership development program.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 60 - 90-minute interview and respond to follow-up clarifying questions via email.

Risks and discomforts
- We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts from participating in this research.

Benefits
- There are no direct benefits to the participant, although participants may gain benefit from reflecting on their experiences. This study will contribute to the body of literature on adult transformative learning and development.

Privacy/Confidentiality
The transcription of interviews will use pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality. Audio-files and transcriptions will be stored in password protected files on the researcher's computer.

Audio/Video Recording
I request your permission to audio record this interview, so I may accurately document your responses. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please let me know. All your responses are confidential. Upon completion of the research, I will keep all copies of the interview and its transcription in a safe and secured location for one (1) year. After two (2) years all copies of the recording will be destroyed. I will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone.

Voluntary Participation
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop the interview at any time without penalty or loss. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions:
The main researcher conducting this study is Maureen A. Miller, doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at *maureenmiller25@uga.edu* or via phone at *678-895-6631*. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at *706.542.3199* or *irb@uga.edu*.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.