

4-2019

# The Impact of Faith-Based Programs on Christian High School Students in a Rural Christian Independent School

Mike Cumiskey

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# The Impact of Faith-Based Programs on Christian High School Students in a Rural Christian Independent School

## **Abstract**

Christian schools have a long history of offering programs that contribute to the spiritual nurturing of adolescents. Many students participate in Bible classes, morning devotions, prayer groups, mission trips, service projects and chapels during their time in a Christian school. Yet, there is very little research on the effect that these faith-based programs have on a student's spiritual maturity. Despite this lack of research, Christian schools continue to work tirelessly to create, manage, maintain and sustain faith-based programs. To determine whether faith-based programs have a lasting impact on an individual's spiritual maturity, the researcher conducted a survey with youth and adults. A 25-question bipolar survey using a Likert scale was distributed to youth and adults ages 17-40 that participated in faith-based programs at a Christian high school. Results of the study showed that students that participate in faith-based program during high school show evidence of spiritual maturity post-graduation and have a positive perception of those programs that continues to contribute to their spiritual growth.

## **Document Type**

Thesis

## **Degree Name**

Master of Education (MEd)

## **Department**

Education

## **First Advisor**

Patricia C. Kornelis

## **Keywords**

Master of Education, thesis, religious institutions, spiritual formation, surveys, high school students

## **Subject Categories**

Curriculum and Instruction | Education

## **Comments**

Action Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Masters of Education

The Impact of Faith-Based Programs on Christian High School Students in a Rural Christian  
Independent School

by

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B.Sc. University of Lethbridge, 2006

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Action Research Project  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements of the  
Degree of Masters of Education

Department of Education  
Dordt College  
Sioux Center, Iowa  
April 2019

Faith-based Programs and Spiritual Growth

The Impact of Faith-Based Programs on Christian High School Students in a Rural Christian  
Independent School

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## Faith-based Programs and Spiritual Growth

### **Abstract**

Christian schools have a long history of offering programs that contribute to the spiritual nurturing of adolescents. Many students participate in Bible classes, morning devotions, prayer groups, mission trips, service projects and chapels during their time in a Christian school. Yet, there is very little research on the effect that these faith-based programs have on a student's spiritual maturity. Despite this lack of research, Christian schools continue to work tirelessly to create, manage, maintain and sustain faith-based programs. To determine whether faith-based programs have a lasting impact on an individual's spiritual maturity, the researcher conducted a survey with youth and adults. A 25-question bipolar survey using a Likert scale was distributed to youth and adults ages 17-40 that participated in faith-based programs at a Christian high school. Results of the study showed that students that participate in faith-based program during high school show evidence of spiritual maturity post-graduation and have a positive perception of those programs that continues to contribute to their spiritual growth.



The spiritual nurturing of students has long been the primary reason parents and guardians enroll their children in Christian education (Bushnell, 1861). “For many young Christians, there is a realization that they want to follow Christ in a way that does not separate them from the culture [in which they live]. They want to be culture makers, not culture avoiders” (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011). This being in the world, or at least, embracing mainstream cultural norms is a drastic divergence from how faith traditionally has been formed. The noticeable embrace of culture is not so much the issue as is the fear that what connects youth to the Christian faith becomes secondary to a desire to be in and part of the world. In other words, culture now predicts the tone and depth of Christian faith rather than tradition, foundational truths inherent in Christian liturgies (Schultz, 1998; Smith & Smith, 2011). Christian youth desire both the Christian label and the cultural acceptance that the world offers. “A healthy desire to influence culture can turn too easily into an unhealthy preoccupation with acceptance by mainstream culture. When this happens, youth consume what the world has to offer and end up with lives no different from anyone else’s” (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011). This becomes a contentious issue when looking at the purposes and effectiveness of faith-based liturgies in secondary Christian education.

The questions that remain underdeveloped in faith development include the evaluation of specific programs and liturgies and the impact of said programs and liturgies on student spiritual nurturing. Smith (2016) highlights that very little has changed in terms of how we implement faith-based programs in Christian schools (Smith, 2016; Smith & Snell, 2009). Much of Mitchell’s (2015) research speaks broadly about the impact of the “Christian environment” and the spiritual nurturing of students but more research is required to determine the specific attributes of this Christian environment are most effective both short and long term on the

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development of spiritual maturity high school-aged students. In an effort to revitalize our Christian schools and redirect our efforts to move closer to the mission of nurturing student hearts, more research is needed to determine the relationship between programs and liturgies in the Christian high school and the spiritual nurturing of students. Continued research in this area will help to lay the foundation of Christian character and discipline in the lives of students and prepare them to be contributing citizens of God's kingdom here and now.

Christian schools pride themselves with more than just rigorous academia but also work to design an educational model that educates the whole student. Abbotsford Christian School adopted a new vision and mission in 2011 with this goal in mind. Through much prayer, the mission statement was presented in seven words – Engage Minds, Nurture Hearts and Shape God's World. This mission was set with the intent that if, as a Christian community, Abbotsford Christian School took innovative strategies to engage student minds and provided programs to foster the spiritual nurturing of student hearts, then students would be equipped with the necessary skills and motivation to make an impact on God's world.

There have been strides made in every area of this mission over the last seven years. Traditional models and programs for spiritual nurturing continue to run as part of the regular schedule. These programs include Bible classes, chapels, morning devotionals and service trips. Little investigation has been put forth to determine the effectiveness of these programs on student spiritual nurturing. Mitchell's 2015 phenomenological study on the spiritual nurturing of Christian high school students provided much of the framework necessary for a site-specific analysis of the spiritual nurturing in Abbotsford Christian School high school students.

“Christian high schools should be known as communities of grace—places where visitors clearly see God at work in the way relationships are conducted” (Dexter, 2007, p. 5). The Pew

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Research Center (2010) defines this as an observable change in the desire of the youth heart. If the primary reasons parents send their children to Christian school are so that they can both grow the academic needs of their child and nurture a spirituality that is firmly rooted in biblical truth, then Christian Schools owe it to their community to evaluate the effectiveness of their spiritual nurturing programs so that they are intentional in the nurturing of the student heart.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine if faith-based programs in secondary Christian schools promote spiritual nurturing in high school-aged students. The study sought to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do faith-based programs (Bible classes, morning devotions, chapels, missions' trips, and service projects) affect a high school student's spiritual nurturing?
2. What are the lasting perceptions of bible-based programs?
3. What long-term effects do faith-based programs in high school have on its alumni students?

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are used to provide clarity and contextualize the terms used in this study.

*Adolescence:* Kessler (2000) defined adolescence as the impressionable years where youth are eager to learn about spiritual life. This is the period of time that significant transformation of the mind, the will, the body, social dimension and the soul take place (Willard, 2002).

*Christian education:* "Christian education is teaching students to know God and his world, and to glorify him through obedient service" (Christian Schools International, 2018). For the

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purposes of this study, Christian education will be used in the context of a brick-and-mortar secondary school.

*Christian Teacher:* A Christian teacher is one that “nurtures children’s intellectual, spiritual, social, emotional, physical, and technical development” in a way that “educates children for a Christian life of faith, offering freedom to explore the work of the Lord in creation and in human culture and history” (Society of Christian Schools of British Columbia, 2002).

*Spiritual Nurture:* “Spiritual nurture related to the encouragement and training of the whole human being” (Mitchell, 2015, p. 15). This definition is amplified by Bushnell’s (1861) explanation of student spiritual nurturing in the context of Christian education,

There is then some kind of nurture, which is of the Lord, deriving a quality and a power from Him, and communicating the same. Being instituted by Him, it will of necessity have a method and a character peculiar to itself, or rather to Him. It will be the Lord’s way of education, having aims appropriate to Him, and if realized in its full intent, terminating in results impossible to be reached by any kind of human methods. (p. 10)

## Literature Review

“Take [your children] by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master” (Ephesians 6:4, *The Message*). The Christian school is tasked with this goal. By enrolling a student in a Christian school environment, parents are presenting an opportunity to spiritually nurture their child. There is significant evidence that Christian parents desire support in the spiritual nurturing of their child (Bushnell, 1861; Miller, Miceli, Whitman, & Borkowski, 1996; Schultz, 1998) for there is no greater joy than to hear that children are in walking in the truth (3 John 2, *New International Version*).

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Fowler (1981) developed a system for adolescent spiritual development over several stages. The stages of Fowler's (1981) study are based on chronological age and suggest that students will progress based on their readiness to mature into later stages. The stages begin in childhood with infancy. Fowler's system of adolescent faith formation provided the framework for Mitchell's 2015 phenomenological study on adolescent faith formation in Christian high schools. Mitchell (2015) outlined Fowler's stages of faith development in the following way:

Stage one is intuitive-projective faith, stage two is mythical-literal faith, stage three is synthetic-conventional faith, stage four is individuative-reflective faith, stage five is conjunctive faith, and stage six is universalizing faith (Fowler, 1981). The first two stages deal with the child as they move through childhood. Adolescence is a time in life when stories are an important part of building faith; this concept has driven the development of Christian education curriculum in the life of the Christian school and Christian education in a broader sense in the church. (p. 18)

Stage three is arguably the most prominent stage for the Christian high school. Fowler (1981) described stage three as the exposure of the "adolescent's needs for God who accepts them and helps them for personal identity" (p. 173). Mitchell (2015) expounded on Fowler's research and suggested that an individual in stage three of faith development "begins to develop ideas and values of their own; however, are based primarily on the authorities in their lives" (p. 18).

"Cultural norms are shifting and among youth, this shift is even more prominent. Interesting enough, the consensus among youth is that they are desiring more and more to be 'countercultural' at least in terms of faith monogamy" (The Pew Research Center, 2010). suggested, Christian parents and families understand this shift and in a study on Christian

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education and spiritual nurturing, Rumer (1966) suggested that enrolling adolescents in Christian education supports faith formation through the regular integration of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, bible integration and peer/teacher relationships. Above all else, Christian parents desire that their children choose Christian faith and live this faith in a way that is authentic and transferrable (Erikson, 1968; Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012). The development of this desire is taught in part in the home but also in schools. Rumer (1966) stated that,

Faith formation occurs when encouragement, training and education in spiritual things occur at home and is reinforced in the heart and should be at the center of all education of youth...nurturing is an important part of the Christian school environment. Christian education cannot be separated from spiritual nurturing. (p. 32)

Spiritual nurturing is the process of supporting, encouraging, training, developing and educating towards things of a spiritual nature. The processes of nurturing and training are awakened in Christian schools. Bushnell (1861) suggested that the elements of Christian tradition are extended in Christian schools and gain fresh ground in the lives of adolescents.

The investment in Christian schools as a means for families to have their children taught from a Christian perspective has not changed in several decades. Considerable research has been put forth to support this claim (Schultz, 1998; Van Brummelen & Koole, 2012). Despite the limited programming that many Christian schools can provide students due to their size and access to public resources, faith formation that is part of the Christian school experience is critical to each student's faith identity and is the primary reason parents send their children to Christian school (Benton, 2008; Mitchell, 2015). Mitchell (2015) suggests that the formation that happens during the school day at a Christian school could possibly be deeper and more thoughtful than the spiritual training that happens in the life of the church and even the home.

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Mitchell (2015) highlights the impact of faith-based practices on spiritual nurturing in teenagers. She expounds on the developmental and identity-forming nuances during these formative years and offers insight into the impact of Christian education on high school students. Mitchell (2015) noted that among the 15 participants in the study, all agreed that the atmosphere is significantly different in a Christian school than in public schools. Study participants believed students were kinder, they looked out for each other, shared what they had, visited each other's youth groups and respected each other in the hallway. Dexter (2007) suggested that "Christian schools should be known as communities of grace – places where visitors clearly see God at work in the way relationships are conducted" (p. 5). Mitchell's study (2015) exemplified this definition. Parents, visitors, staff and students noticed a difference in the environment within the Christian high school.

In the evaluation of her research findings, Mitchell (2015) noted that the overwhelming response to spiritual nurturing in Christian schools from the participants was that student purpose was "wrapped up in their relationship with God. Nine of fifteen participants said one of the main goals and ambitions in life was to live out the will of God" (p. 182). Further, Mitchell (2015) noted that "the position of the heart to respond to the Holy Spirit was key in the amount of nurture the students soak up. Some students (non-participants) did not have their hearts focused on spiritual matters, and as a result they were not being nurtured" (p. 183). Mitchell's (2015) research speaks specifically to the significance of the posture of the student heart as a direct contributor to the spiritual nurturing of the student. This idea was later expounded by a 2012 Cardus Education Survey that showed students in Christian high schools exhibited a great appreciation for how their school prepared them for a vibrant spiritual life. Further research in the same study reported that students that are enrolled in Christian high schools admit to the

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impact school has on their day-to-day spiritual life and how is contributed to their spiritual nurturing (Cardus, 2012). More so, the study reported that,

Only Christian school graduates and religious home-educated graduates are more likely than any other group to share their faith with others. The school effect is strong for both sectors in terms of sharing their faith with friends or family, and is strong for Christian schools in terms of sharing their faith with acquaintances or strangers. It seems likely that Christian schools reinforce among their graduates the importance of communicating their faith to friends and strangers. (p. 48)

### **Methodology**

This study examined the impact of faith-based programs on the spiritual nurturing of Christian high school students and built on the research of Mitchell (2015). Participating in the study were grade 12 students and alumni that participated in the faith-based programs including class devotionals, weekly chapels, Bible classes and service projects from grade 9-12 at a medium size (331 students) Christian high school in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia.

### **Participants**

The research participants consisted of grade 12 and alumni that experienced the faith-based programs between grades 9-12 at a Christian high school. Alumni came from similar (middle class) socio-economic backgrounds and had an age range 18-40. There were 54 participants. Thirty-eight participants were 17 years old, eight participants were 18-20 years old, four were 26-27 years old, and eight were 37-40 years old. The mean age was 21.31 years of age. There were 38 females and 16 males that participated in the study.



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Participants were chosen by using Facebook alumni pages. Participants clicked on a survey link if they wanted to participate. Each Facebook group is a closed group and only registered alumni could access the alumni pages. These pages were established prior to the study.

### **Materials**

A combination of Mitchell's *Questions of Faith* Journal Analysis (See Appendix 1) and Fowler's stage four analysis indicators were compiled and distributed in survey form using a bipolar Likert Scale (see Appendix 1). The 25-question electronic survey was distributed using an anonymous survey tool (Survey Monkey) and posted on a newsfeed to closed Facebook alumni groups that had been previously established by the school. The survey allowed for systematic quantifiable data that canvassed a large anonymous sample population. The survey instrument was piloted prior to study to ensure its intent. Feedback from the pilot group suggested changing the polarized wording on the Likert scale to better reflect the questions being asked. Further, a suggestion was made to include gender as a qualifying question at the beginning of the study. This was not included in the original survey.

### **Design**

This quantifiable correlational study measured the perceived effectiveness of Bible-based programs on the spiritual nurturing of grade 12 and alumni students at a Christian high school. Survey statements were generated based on Fowler's faith-development model and are highlighted in Appendix 1. The survey statements reflect Fowler's stage four criteria and provided the quantitative data for the research using a 1-5 bipolar Likert Scale. The statements were a derivative of Mitchell's 2015 study and built on the responses of Christian high school students in previous studies (Fowler & Dell, 2006; Mitchell, 2015; Steele, 1995; Wighting &

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Jing, 2009; Winn 2010). The survey was piloted among six alumni that were outside of the age-category under study.

The 25-question survey was divided into two parts. Five questions addressed the impact of specific faith-programs the participants experienced in high school. Participants ranked their responses from (1) Not Meaningful to (5) Very Meaningful. In section two of the survey, 11 questions target the depth of the participant's current faith and nine questions target the recall of faith-based programs while attending Christian high-school.

### Results

The purpose of this study was to determine whether participation in faith-based program led significantly contributed to spiritual nurturing in Christian high school students. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do faith-based programs (bible classes, morning devotions, chapels, missions' trips, and service projects) affect a high school student's spiritual nurturing?
2. What are the lasting perceptions of bible-based programs?
3. What long-term effects do faith-based programs in high school have on its students?

In order to answer these questions, a one-way ordinal ANOVA method known as a Kruskal Wallis Test (K-W test) was performed to determine if there was any difference between participant responses and the three themes (Fowler's Stage-Four Growth, Bible-based engagement and Current Personal faith) under investigation. First, each participant's responses on the survey were ranked (located in Appendix D) and averaged according to each of the three themes identified as indicators of spiritual maturity. The sum of the ranked data is represented in Table 1 where n is equal to the number of participants for each themed question set and N is equal to the sum total of the participant responses.

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Table 1

*Sum of ranked data and participant responses*

	Fowler's Stage Four Development	Bible-Based Engagement	Current Personal Faith
Sum of Groups (T)	4365	4401	4437
n	54	54	54
<b>N</b>	<b>162</b>		

An alpha level of 0.05 with 2 degrees of freedom ( $df = k-1$ , where  $K$  is equal to the number of groups) were used to determine the critical value. Using a Chi-square value table, it was determined that the critical value was 5.00147. If the data is greater than the Chi-square value then the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected (there is no difference between groups).

The Kruskal Wallis equation was used to determine the Chi-value of the ranked data and is represented in Figure 1.

$$H = \left[ \frac{12}{n(n+1)} \sum_{j=1}^c \frac{T_j^2}{n_j} \right] - 3(n+1)$$

*Figure 1:* Kruskal Wallis test equation. Where  $N \sim$  Total sample size,  $T(j)^2$  is the total sum of a group squared, and  $n$  is the number of observations within the group.

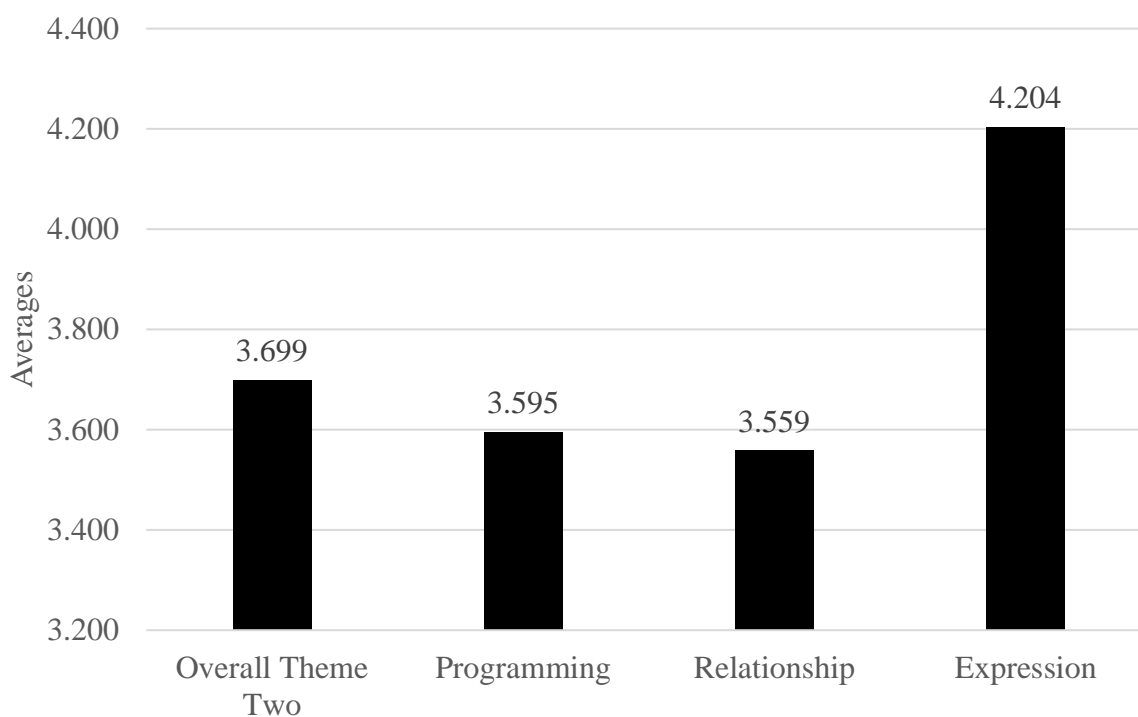
The H-value was calculated to be 0.0218. Because the H-value is significantly lower than the pre-determined Chi-square value, the null hypothesis is accepted and we can determine that there is no difference between the participant responses and themed questions ( $H=0.0218$  (2,  $N=162$ ),  $p>0.05$ ). Once it was determined that there were no differences between themes,

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measures of central tendency were used to analyze participant responses according to each of the research questions.

### Research Question One

The first research question asked the following: In what ways do faith-based programs (bible classes, morning devotions, chapels, missions' trips, and service projects) affect a high school student's spiritual nurturing? There was a mean score of 3.741 with a mode of 4 (Agree). The first research question was further divided into three sub-groups, Programming (survey questions 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2k), relationship (survey questions 2j, 2o, 2p, 2r, 2s) and expression (survey questions 2q and 2t). Programming had a mean score of 3.595 and mode of 4 (Agree), relationships had a mean score of 3.559 and a mode of 4 (Agree) and expression had a mean score of 4.204 and mode of 5 (Strongly Agree) which are reflected in Figure 2.

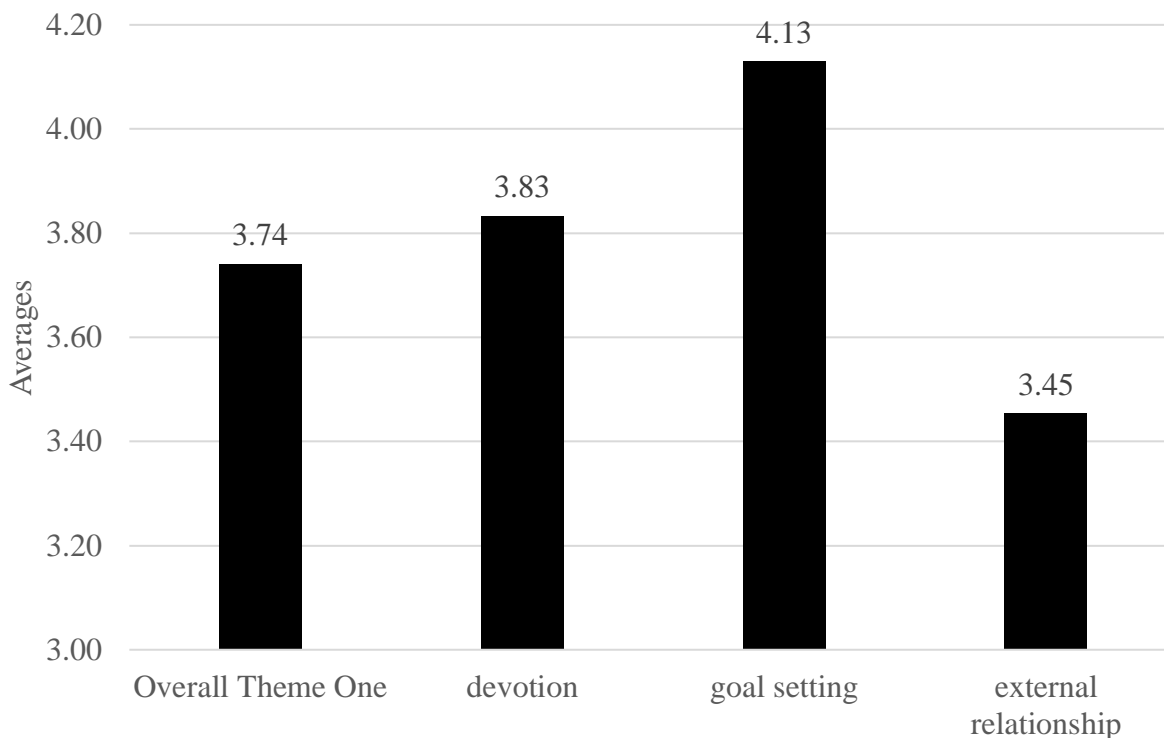


*Figure 2:* Bar graph showing average response scores to questions pertaining research question one (bible-based engagement).

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**Research Question Two**

The second research question asks the following: What are the lasting perceptions of bible-based programs? The mean score for this question group was 3.741 and a mode of 5 (Strongly Agree). The second research question had three subgroups; devotion (survey questions 2a and 2b), goal setting (survey question 2c) and external relationships (survey questions 2d and 2h). Devotion had a mean score of 3.833 with a mode of 4 (Agree), goal setting had a mean score of 4.130 and a mode of 4 (Agree) and external relationships had a mean score of 3.454 with a mode of 5 (Strongly Agree) which are reflected in Figure 3.

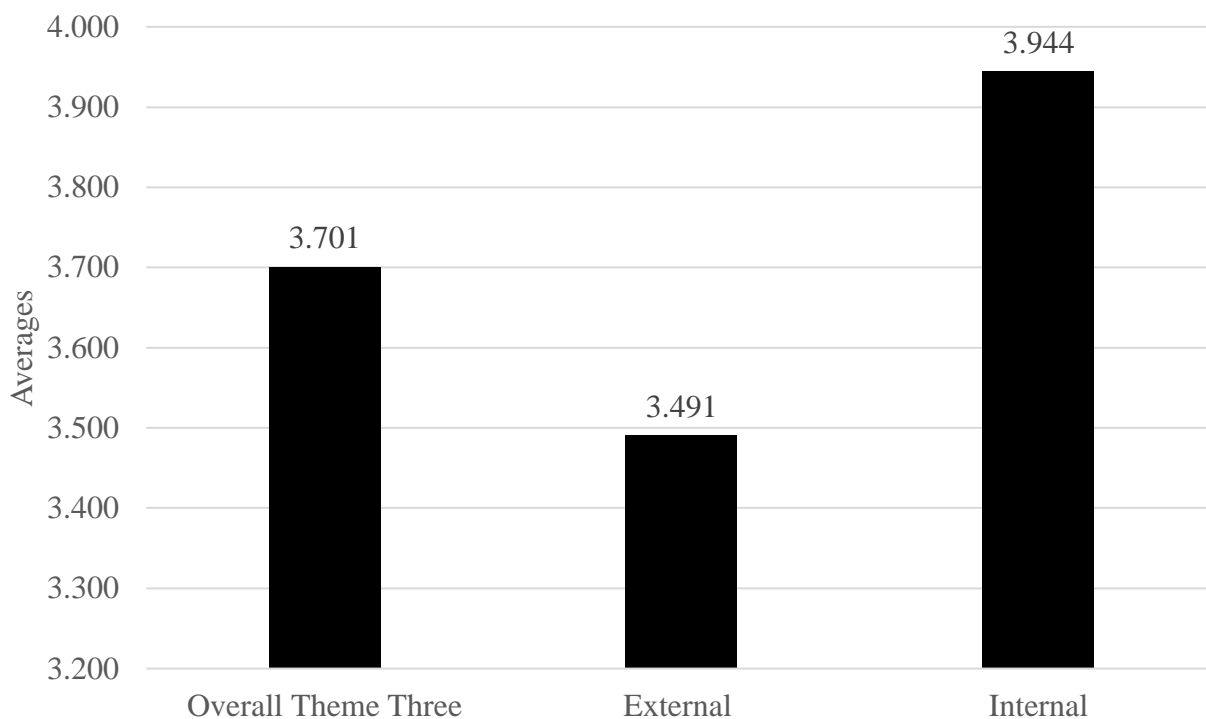


*Figure 3:* Bar graph showing average response score to questions pertaining to research question 2 (lasting perceptions of bible-based programs)

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### Research Question Three

The third research question asks the following: What long-term effects do faith-based programs in high-school have on its students? The mean score of these survey questions was 3.701 with a mode of 5 (Strongly Agree). This research question was broken down into two subgroups; External (survey questions 2e, 2l, 2m and 2n) and Internal (2f and 2g). The mean score for the external subgroup was 3.491 with a mode of 3 (Somewhat). The mean score for the internal subgroup was 3.944 with a mean score of 5 (Strongly Agree) and is illustrated in Figure 4.



*Figure 4:* Bar graph showing average response score to questions pertaining to research question 3 (Evidence of current personal faith).

### Discussion

Spiritual nurturing has been determined to be the primary reason parents enroll their children in Christian education (Bushnell, 1861). As educational models shift and curriculum is

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developed, the foundation of Christian education to teach the whole student and to develop students that are spiritually mature continues to be at the core of Christian education. Fowler's (1981) research on the stages of faith can be used as markers of spiritual maturity. Fowler determined that the stages of faith were marked by chronological years and most students that are in the high school years (ages 13-17) would be well-situated in stage three of faith development.

The purpose of this research study was to determine if faith-based programs in secondary Christian schools promote spiritual nurturing in high-school aged students. An indicator of this research study addressed whether current grade 12 students or alumni have indeed moved on from Fowler's Stage Three and, if so, would they show evidence of this maturity that is in line with Fowler's Stage Four in faith development.

Christian schools work to develop a model for education that educates the whole student. More specifically, at Abbotsford Christian School, the mission is to engage minds, nurture hearts and shape God's world. The anticipation with this missional foundation is that ACS would develop innovative strategies to engage student minds and provide programs to foster the spiritual nurturing of student hearts with the goal of equipping students with the skills to make an impact of God's world. This study addressed the following research questions: 1) What ways do faith-based programs affect a high schools' student's spiritual maturity, 2) What is the lasting impact of those faith-based programs and 3) What long-term effects do faith-based programs have on its students and their current faith?

In response to the first research question, the data reported that students who participated in faith-based programs during their Stage Three faith development (high school years) also responded positively to their experiences in those bible programs and were able to recall

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experiences from those programs even as far as ten years post-graduation (see Table 2, questions 1a-1e, 2k, 2o, 2r and 2s).

Table 2

*Number of participants scores for survey questions*

Survey Question		Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
<b>1a</b>	Morning class devotions	7	20	19	8	0	54
<b>1b</b>	Service projects	6	23	12	11	2	54
<b>1c</b>	International service trips	6	14	14	9	3	46
<b>1d</b>	Bible classes	21	25	5	2	1	54
<b>1e</b>	Weekly chapels	14	21	11	6	2	54
<b>2a</b>	I devote my life to walk with Christ	27	14	7	5	1	54
<b>2b</b>	Friends are the most important relationships to me	7	23	18	4	2	54
<b>2c</b>	I am committed to setting goals and achieving them	18	28	6	1	1	54
<b>2d</b>	I share my future plans with my family	32	12	8	1	1	54
<b>2e</b>	Faith-based practices in high-school have contributed to my faith today	14	23	13	2	2	54
<b>2f</b>	I have a deep faith in God	22	18	9	5	0	54
<b>2g</b>	I put my trust in God's plan for my life	29	12	8	4	1	54
<b>2h</b>	My life depends on others for its success	2	6	20	18	8	54
<b>2i</b>	Teachers in high-school have positively contributed to my faith walk	13	18	14	6	3	54
<b>2j</b>	My teachers showed a genuine care for my faith walk in high-school	18	22	9	3	2	54

(Table continued on page 17)



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Table 2  
*Number of participants scores for survey questions*

<b>2k</b>	Chapels were a great way to worship corporately in high-school	13	18	14	6	3	54
<b>2l</b>	I actively talk about my faith today	10	12	19	10	3	54
<b>2m</b>	I am actively serving in my church, home or community	20	8	12	9	5	54
<b>2n</b>	I can communicate my faith testimony with clarity	7	16	18	12	1	54
<b>2o</b>	My high-school teachers helped shape my faith	7	20	20	4	3	54
<b>2p</b>	The people at my high-school reflected the love and care of Christ	8	16	21	6	3	54
<b>2q</b>	I felt the freedom to pray in my high-school	30	12	9	2	1	54
<b>2r</b>	I remember scriptures that I was taught in high-school	13	13	17	8	3	54
<b>2s</b>	I learned tools to study scripture in high-school	11	21	12	9	1	54
<b>2t</b>	My school was a safe place to ask questions about faith	27	15	6	5	1	54

The most significant experiences were the opportunities to express faith during their high-school years. Expression of faith was defined as feeling comfortable to pray out loud, sharing prayer requests, missional experiences (including trip and service projects) and peer-to-peer relationship building (survey questions 2k, 2l, 2m, 2n, 2q, 2s and 2t). More curricular-driven courses such as Bible classes and chapels showed the highest scores among the participant (survey questions 1d and 1e). What is clear is that the faith-based experiences, whether curricular-driven Bible programs or opportunities to express faith both contribute positive to spiritual growth (see table 2 questions 1a-e, 2q and 2t).

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The data that reflects the second and third research question suggest that students who participated in faith-based program during high school exhibit evidence of spiritual maturity directly after school more so than those 5 years or more removed from high school (see table 3). Factors that could have contributed to these findings may include the following: students that are within 5 years of graduation are more likely to recall specific memories of their high school experiences (see table 2 questions 2i, 2j, 2o, 2r and 2s). Additionally, students are still more emotionally attached to their experiences in high school including friendships, teacher-student relationships and memories derived from in-class experiences.

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Table 3

*Average response for participant age groups*

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Average &gt;2014</b>	<b>Average &lt;2018</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>1a</b>	Morning class devotions	3.00	3.48	0.48
<b>1b</b>	Service projects	3.25	3.37	0.12
<b>1c</b>	International service trips	4.00	3.24	<b>-0.76</b>
<b>1d</b>	Bible classes	3.00	4.17	1.17
<b>1e</b>	Weekly chapels	3.00	3.72	0.72
<b>2a</b>	I devote my life to walk with Christ	4.75	4.13	<b>-0.62</b>
<b>2b</b>	Friends are the most important relationships to me	3.75	3.54	<b>-0.21</b>
<b>2c</b>	I am committed to setting goals and achieving them	3.75	4.13	0.38
<b>2d</b>	I share my future plans with my family	4.00	4.35	0.35
<b>2e</b>	Faith-based practices in high-school have contributed to my faith today	3.50	3.83	0.33
<b>2f</b>	I have a deep faith in God	4.25	4.06	<b>-0.19</b>
<b>2g</b>	I put my trust in God's plan for my life	4.50	4.19	<b>-0.31</b>
<b>2h</b>	My life depends on others for its success	2.75	2.56	<b>-0.19</b>
<b>2i</b>	Teachers in high-school have positively contributed to my faith walk	3.75	3.93	0.18
<b>2j</b>	My teachers showed a genuine care for my faith walk in high-school	3.50	3.94	0.44
<b>2k</b>	Chapels were a great way to worship corporately in high-school	2.75	3.59	0.84
<b>2l</b>	I actively talk about my faith today	3.25	3.30	0.05
<b>2m</b>	I am actively serving in my church, home or community	3.75	3.54	<b>-0.21</b>
<b>2n</b>	I can communicate my faith testimony with clarity	3.25	3.30	0.05
<b>2o</b>	My high-school teachers helped shape my faith	3.75	3.44	<b>-0.31</b>
<b>2p</b>	The people at my high-school reflected the love and care of Christ	3.00	3.37	0.37
<b>2q</b>	I felt the freedom to pray in my high-school	4.00	4.26	0.26
<b>2r</b>	I remember scriptures that I was taught in high-school	3.25	3.46	0.21
<b>2s</b>	I learned tools to study scripture in high-school	2.50	3.59	1.09
<b>2t</b>	My school was a safe place to ask questions about faith	4.00	4.15	0.15

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The study showed that there was no significant difference between the three research questions under study. The hypothesis under study was if bible-based programs encourage spiritual maturity than we should see evidence of spiritual maturity as indicators by Fowler's faith development model. Although there is some evidence that a positive correlation exists (mean score of programming was 3.699), there is more research that needs to be done to determine more specifically the type of program that has the greatest affect. But what is clear is that not all programs contribute equally to spiritual maturity and more specifically, programs that are more experiential or allow for more expression of faith have the greatest impact (see table 2 1a-1e, 2k, 2o, 2r and 2s).

Abbotsford Christian School has been long known as a school that educates through relationships. Relationships scored among the lowest as contributors to spiritual maturity. Both current external relationships and teacher relationships that were developed in high school scored among the lowest averages (see table 2 2b, 2d, 2i, 2j, 2o). More research needs to be done in this area but a suggestion could be made that the programs and relationships were contributors to expressions of faith and internalization of spiritual maturity – uniquely both of these areas scored among the highest averages. In other words, programming and external relationships could be the conduit for spiritual maturity but participants were more prone to respond directly about their current faith development rather than recall the root of that development in high school. The data suggests that high school teacher-student relationships are not significant to the lasting perception of bible-based programs nor was there evidence that these relationships contribute to students' current faith but rather personal devotions and goal setting ranked among the highest for lasting perceptions of bible-based programming (see table 2 2a, 2b, 2c). Interestingly, this would mean that programming that targets student personal faith, cultivates strong peer-to-peer

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relationships and offer opportunities for goal setting for faith are the most effective in moving students towards spiritual maturity. Personal programs such as mission trips, service projects, morning devotions and group prayer time were the programs suggested in this study (see Table 2).

### Limitations

This study like many others that use Likert scales can be subjective in nature. Despite a strong significance between each of the research questions, one limitation in the study was the large age gap that participated in the study (graduate years of 1993-2019). This large age gap may have contributed to responses that were less connected to the specific programs that the participant experienced in their high school years. Despite, knowing the graduation year of each participant, the limited number of responses from participants >2010 led to the data of graduates <2010 being favored (see Table 3). Therefore, older participants (>2010) may have less recollection of their experience and many of their responses could have been the result of other factors they have experienced since high school.

Table 4

*Age range of survey participants*

<b># of participants</b>	<b>17 years old</b>	<b>18-20 years old</b>	<b>26-27 years old</b>	<b>37-40 years old</b>
54	38	8	4	4

Another limitation in this study was in the survey. It was evident in the data collection that a question that asked about the participants' general high school experience would have been advantageous. This would have helped determine if participants were responding out of a general

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positive or negative experience overall or were specifically responding to the effectiveness of the programs, experiences and relationships as they remembered them.

Fowler's model for faith development was the sole indicator of faith growth but despite the chronological suggestion for the stages of faith, a limitation of this study could be that not all participants experienced this transition at the same time. The data would suggest that some participants lack some of the indicators of Stage Four faith. Using other indicators or measurements to evaluate student faith may yield more accurate results.

### **Conclusion**

Christian schools work tirelessly to find the balance between developing rigorous academia while still incorporating opportunities for students to develop spiritual maturity. Programs such as bible classes, chapels, morning devotions, mission trips and service projects are among the most common programs used to develop Christian mindedness and spiritual maturity within Christian education. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs is necessary to determine if these programs indeed contribute positively to student spiritual maturity. If the programs are effective in developing spiritual maturity within high school students, then we should see a growth from stage three to stage four of Fowler's faith development model.

The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between the bible-based programs used in high school and students' spiritual maturity. However, what is not clear is what specific programs are the main contributor to the maturity. Surprisingly, the study revealed that experiential programs like mission trips and service projects or programs that foster strong peer-to-peer relationships rank among the strongest contributors for spiritual maturity among participants that were enrolled in a Christian high school.

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Our efforts as Christian schools and educators to offer opportunities for spiritual growth are not in vain. Bible-based programs, at least those that are personal and experiential in intent, have a significant, lasting impact on the lives of high school students and promote a faith that is evidently lasting and firmly rooted. Our efforts should be to continue to personalize our education so that students can challenge, pursue and test their faith in the safety of trusted Christian educators.

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**Appendix A****Survey question categorization based on the three research questions under study**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Themes that arise from Fowler's stage-four Faith Development Theory	2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2h	Devotion (commitment) – 2a, 2b  Goal Setting – 2c  External relationships – 2d, 2h
Themes that arise from bible-based engagement (programs)	1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2j, 2k, 2o, 2p, 2q, 2r, 2s, 2t	Programming – 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2k  Relationship – 2j, 2o, 2p, 2r, 2s,  Expression – 2q, 2t
Themes that arise from current personal faith	2e, 2f, 2g, 2l, 2m, 2n	External – 2e, 2l, 2m, 2n  Internal – 2f, 2g

## Appendix B

### Survey question using a bi-polar Likert scale that was used to gather participant data

We are conducting this survey to seek input on how faith formation is developed through intentional faith practices at your Christian high school. The results are anonymous and will be destroyed upon completion of the research. Please take a few minutes to respond to the questions below.

- 1. Rate each of the following high-school practices on how meaningful they were to your faith formation.**

1 - Not Meaningful	2	3	4	5 – Very Meaningful
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**a. Morning Class devotions**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

**b. Service projects**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

**c. International service trips**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

**d. Bible class**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

**e. Weekly chapels**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

**f. Other faith practices not listed above. Please identify this practice: \_\_\_\_\_**

1 - Not Meaningful      2      3      4      5 – Very Meaningful

- 2. Please ranking each of the following as:**

1 – Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 – Strongly Agree
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**a. I devote my life to walk with Christ**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2      3      4      5 – Strongly Agree



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**p. The people at my high-school reflected the love and care of Christ**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2                      3                      4                      5 – Strongly Agree

**q. I felt the freedom to pray in my high-school**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2                      3                      4                      5 – Strongly Agree

**r. I remember scriptures that I was taught in high-school**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2                      3                      4                      5 – Strongly Agree

**s. I learned tools to study scripture in high-school**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2                      3                      4                      5 – Strongly Agree

**t. My school was a safe place to ask questions about faith**

1 – Strongly Disagree      2                      3                      4                      5 – Strongly Agree

## Appendix C

### Participants Letter used for voluntary participation in the study

Thank you for taking this opportunity to help with the research around Christian high school faith practices and faith formation. There are a series of twenty-five questions in this electronic survey that highlight your experience in bible-based program while attending Christian high school. There are three central questions guiding this study:

1. In ways do faith-based programs (bible classes, morning devotions, chapels, missions' trips, and service projects) effect a high school student's spiritual nurturing?
2. What are the lasting perceptions of bible-based programs?
3. What long-term effects do faith-based programs in high school have on its alumni students?

I am also interested in your current faith journey and spiritual maturity now that you have graduated from Christian high school. The commitment and participation of your part is extremely valuable to the success of this study and will remain anonymous and confidential. If you have any questions or comments about the study, please contact me at [mikecumiskey@gmail.com](mailto:mikecumiskey@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Mike Cumiskey  
Researcher

### Appendix D

#### Participant's response ranking for K.W. statistical analysis

Participant average per category			Ranked data		
Fowler's stage-four development	Bible-Based Engagement	Current Personal Faith	Fowler's stage-four development	Bible-Based Engagement	Current Personal Faith
3.60	3.64	4.33	101	94	26.5
4.20	4.64	5.00	32	11	1
4.20	4.43	4.83	32	20.5	3
3.20	1.64	2.33	132	162	156
3.20	2.77	2.00	132	152	160.5
4.00	3.64	4.17	53	94	36.5
3.40	4.29	4.17	118.5	29	36.5
4.00	3.71	4.67	53	87.5	8.5
4.40	3.50	3.83	22.5	111	69
3.80	3.77	2.83	76.5	86	149.5
3.80	3.93	4.50	76.5	61.5	16
4.00	3.86	4.17	53	65.5	36.5
4.20	4.07	3.00	32	45.5	144
4.00	3.36	3.67	53	123	91
3.40	2.79	3.17	118.5	151	137.5
3.60	3.79	3.33	101	84	126.5
4.00	4.14	3.50	53	43	111
3.80	3.93	3.33	76.5	61.5	126.5



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3.40	3.43	2.67	118.5	115	153
3.80	4.14	4.33	76.5	43	26.5
3.80	4.50	4.67	76.5	16	8.5
3.80	3.64	3.50	76.5	94	111
4.20	4.46	4.50	32	19	16
4.00	3.62	4.67	53	96	8.5
3.40	2.93	3.33	118.5	147.5	126.5
3.40	4.15	4.00	118.5	40	53
4.40	3.50	4.00	22.5	111	53
3.80	3.57	4.67	76.5	106.5	8.5
3.40	3.21	3.67	118.5	129	91
2.60	3.93	3.50	154	61.5	111
3.80	4.15	3.33	76.5	40	126.5
3.00	2.43	3.00	144	155	144
3.60	3.86	2.83	101	65.5	149.5
3.60	3.50	3.67	101	111	91
3.60	4.15	4.50	101	40	16
3.60	3.79	3.83	101	84	69
4.00	3.86	4.00	53	65.5	53
4.00	4.07	3.00	53	45.5	144
4.60	3.36	4.33	12.5	123	26.5
3.20	3.79	3.17	132	84	137.5

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3.80	3.71	3.17	76.5	87.5	137.5
3.60	3.57	4.33	101	106.5	26.5
2.20	3.36	2.00	157	123	160.5
3.20	2.07	3.00	132	159	144
3.80	4.36	3.17	76.5	24	137.5
3.60	3.93	3.83	101	61.5	69
4.80	4.43	4.50	5	20.5	16
4.00	3.86	3.50	53	65.5	111
3.60	3.69	2.17	101	89	158
4.20	4.79	4.83	32	6	3
3.80	4.00	4.83	76.5	53	3
4.60	4.14	4.17	12.5	43	36.5
3.20	3.07	3.17	132	141	137.5
3.80	2.93	3.17	76.5	147.5	137.5