

Christianity and national parks: Seeing God in nature-based experiences

by

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B.S., North Carolina State University, 2015

M.S., Western Illinois University, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources
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Abstract

To unveil the multilayered experiences which Christians undergo when engaging in nature-based experiences, this research utilized a multidimensional approach to address and further comprehend the characteristics of these moments. Specifically, this research aimed to understand how Christians experience God within nature-based experiences and further how tenets within the structure and expressions associated with their religious belief system address the overarching phenomena and associated lenses. Through the content of the primary phenomena, the lenses which were of focus include investigations concerning the extrinsic composition of these experiences (i.e., presence or absence of individuals, natural contexts and involved surroundings, and engaged religious expressions (i.e., prayer, worship, and using biblical- or religious-based resources)) and how this brought forth intrinsic outcomes as a result (i.e., descriptions regarding experiencing God and influence in solidifying or transforming the environmental mindset of Christians). As a result, this research was completed in a cumulative manner which involves three ventures which act as independent studies while collectively contributing to an overall, enhanced understanding of the complexity of the experienced phenomena primarily in situ (i.e., in nature as defined by NPS units) and ex situ as well (i.e., potential completion of pro-environmental behaviors). Further, this research involved three distinct research questions to inform the progression of this compound endeavor and they include: 1) “How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during communal or group-based ventures?”, 2) “How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during moments of solitude?”, and 3) “How do Christians experiencing God in national parks describe their environmental mindset?”.

Regarding the first question, semi-structured interviews in alignment with a phenomenological framework and qualitative foundation were completed in the research settings of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Indiana Dunes National Park in summer 2020 to approach this inquiry focused on the influence of experiencing God during social interaction through group-based or communal activities in nature (i.e., defined as an accessible NPS unit). Three sources including 1) individuals partaking in a worship service within an NPS unit (N=15), 2) individuals who voluntarily engaged in an extended, overnight stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit (N=5), and 3) individuals who voluntarily chose to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit (N=16). With 36 total participants, shared expressions amongst sources provided notable and collective highlights of the focus phenomena within this specific unit of the overall research process (i.e., experiencing God during social interaction within nature-based experiences). Specifically, participants portrayed an overall amplification of experiencing the focus phenomena through a “triangle effect” (Mike). This effect involved the components of social interaction, nature, and God which represented the overall amplification of their experiences within nature (i.e., NPS units) which brought forth both individual and collective moments. When engaging in group-based or communal activities, participants relayed the impact of the present “triangle effect” (Mike) and further the foundational role of experiencing God that formed an enhanced level of authenticity in their ventures, such as through in-depth and raw connections with both present individuals, their natural surroundings, and God as well. Overall, participants reflected an increased probability to spend time in nature with others as a result of these formative moments to not only foster meaningful relationships

with others and nature, but observe God in varied, renewed exposures as a result of the infiltrating “triangle effect” (Mike).

Concerning the second question, the implementation of an additional lens in informing the overarching phenomena of focus in consideration of employing an alternate approach to understand the specifics of experiencing God in nature-based experiences by Christians was used. The involved research settings and implemented interviews involving three sources were maintained as the used methods in reference to all three research questions. In further recognition of the second inquiry including the role of solitude within the ventures of those who identified as Christians, participants conveyed the ability to engage in solitude through both the presence and absence of individuals. While solitude was associated with executing aloneness, participants shared that solitude could occur when in a collective context due to the provision of opportunities to retreat from the group-based moments. Further, participants highlighted the notable role of solitude to provide pause in their nature-based experiences. It is through the pause of solitude and electing to engage in this brief or momentary halt of occurrences which compose a world-based context where participants were able to experience God through opportunities to acquire a renewed or revived perspective concerning their surroundings (i.e., natural and present individuals in a group-based venture), their position within life, their purpose in life, and further their relationship with God. It is through solitude and the involved pause where participants portrayed the progression of transcendental, influential, and pivotal experiences with God in His creation that could serve as filters through which to shift their overall state and reinforce their perceived self-reliance and self-efficacy and through their identification in God to further apply the gathered rejuvenation in all life-based situations (i.e., difficult inhibiting occurrences ranging to climatic or peak experiences).

In consideration of the third question, this inquiry provides an all-encompassing investigation regarding the environmental mindset Christians maintain in consideration of their experiencing of God and specifically within nature-based moments. This question aimed to unveil varying influences and roles within the overarching, identified environmental mindset of Christians by describing how natural (i.e., surrounding natural context involving an NPS unit), religious (i.e., expressions including worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources), and environmental focuses (i.e., viewpoint of the environment and associated in situ and ex situ behaviors) informed the environmental mindset of participants. Based on this compound approach involving a range of varied focuses to address the complex nature of the applicable phenomena, participants shared a unified reflection of an overarching environmental mindset which is undergirded by their relationship with God. Further, this relationship progressed the formation of an ingrained desire to act in a manner which is reflective of stewardship as directed by the character of God and His biblical-based mandates (i.e., Holy Bible). With this overall baseline, the conveyed environmental mindset of participants was also conveyed by highlighting a varied set of focuses including social, environmental, and religious. Participants expressed their overall environmental mindset as one that places significance on the existence of environmental justice issues and the need for amplifying humanitarian efforts, enhancing pro-environmental and environmentally conscious behaviors and continuously evolving perspectives, and applying this overarching mindset in a manner which ultimately conveys respect for God's creation and His primary role as the Creator of existence. As a result, participants displayed their environmental mindset as one that is diverse in its composition, but mainly desires to express gratitude to God through conscious behaviors which recognize Him

through the furthering of an in-depth relationship and applying this meaningful intrinsic “fabric” within the interactions they have with both nature and individuals as well.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Ryan L. Sharp

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Abstract

To unveil the multifaceted and multilayered experiences which Christians undergo when engaging in nature-based experiences, this research utilized a multidimensional approach to address and further comprehend the characteristics of these moments. Specifically, this research aimed to understand how Christians experience God within nature-based experiences and further how tenets within the structure and expressions associated with their religious belief system address the overarching phenomena and associated lenses. Through the content of the primary phenomena, the lenses which were of focus include investigations concerning the extrinsic composition of these experiences (i.e., presence or absence of individuals, natural contexts and involved surroundings, and engaged religious expressions (i.e., prayer, worship, and using biblical- or religious-based resources)) and how this brought forth intrinsic outcomes as a result (i.e., descriptions regarding experiencing God and influence in solidifying or transforming the environmental mindset of Christians). As a result, this research was completed in a cumulative manner which involves three ventures which act as independent studies while collectively contributing to an overall, enhanced understanding of the complexity of the experienced phenomena primarily in situ (i.e., in nature as defined by NPS units) and ex situ as well (i.e., potential completion of pro-environmental behaviors). Further, this research involved three distinct research questions to inform the progression of this compound endeavor and they include: 1) “How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during communal or group-based ventures?”, 2) “How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during moments of solitude?”, and 3) “How do Christians experiencing God in national parks describe their environmental mindset?”.

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Dedication

To my heavenly father and reason for all things which compose existence, may everything praise You, God, in all things and all ways, my life is Yours wholly and may You be reflected as the primary sovereign author of existence, loving God, and divine designer of all that we are blessed to encounter in this unfathomable creation You formed from the beginning of time, You reign forever more and are the sole answer for all, may Your words transcend time and breathe life into all that exists for You are all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-encompassing, You are everything and may You be the only name which is experienced and remembered from this venture.

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Chapter 1 - An Introduction to the Interaction of Religion and Nature: Seeing God in Nature-based Experiences

Introduction

When time is spent in the natural world, the connection between an individual and their surroundings could generate a series of dynamic responses that produce corresponding intrinsic and/or extrinsic reactions. The natural world in which these outcomes come to fruition can serve as an inspirational element for these results based on the multitude of meanings that could be used to define the setting or context in which these human responses take place (Craig et al., 2018; Krebs, 1999; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; Van den Berg & Koole, 2006). Examples of how the natural world could potentially be described involve land that is uninhabited or developed by humans and relates to the aspect of wilderness, urban locations which contain green spaces within increased infrastructure or developed landscapes, densely forested locations in rural areas, or established public lands (e.g., parks and protected areas) that contain a diverse source of natural characteristics based on the surrounding area(s) (Craig et al., 2018; Krebs, 1999; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; Van den Berg & Koole, 2006). Dependent upon the definition an individual aligns with the concept of the natural world and what composes this factor, their resulting reactions could include a vast range of experiences (Craig et al., 2018; Frumkin et al., 2017; Krebs, 1999; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; Van den Berg & Koole, 2006). Specifically, examples include an overwhelming sense of awe which produces a level of encompassing contentment, striking inspiration that creates an indescribable sense of heightened passion, or a notable desire to immerse oneself in a nature-based venture which magnifies their connection to nature (Anderson et al., 2018). These experiences of impalpable sensations and the existence of this ethereal connection could be

described in varying forms based on the dynamic characteristics which compose a multilayered nature-based experience.

The aspect of time spent in nature and the notable impact these experiences can have within the lives of individuals through the involvement of undefinable influences was primarily introduced through the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Emerson and Thoreau were prominent in the movement of transcendentalism which involves an approach to life or composed mindset that provides an individual with insight into varying dimensions not only within themselves, but with the surrounding contexts in which an individual interacts during the circumstances that compose life-based occurrences (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). In particular, the natural world is noted as an immense source of self-enrichment that provides individuals with an opportunity to engage with nature to offer a sense of enlightenment and revival for those that immerse themselves in these nature-based experiences (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Through these impactful moments, Emerson and Thoreau highlighted the enhanced intrinsic revelations that can take place within the lives of individuals and produce an approach to world-based contexts that is magnified in its level of overall self-reliance and self-awareness (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017).

Based on this viewpoint through transcendentalism, individuals are able to access portions of themselves from interactions with nature and experience a transformative revival which comes to fruition from engaging with the intrinsic guiding beliefs or forces that allow them to develop as an independent being (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). This line of thought can produce an outcome that is fostered in transcendentalism by providing an individual with a non-adhering view of life which is not solely governed by the ideals of current

society and instead engages the substantial views they may hold that do not conform to established guidelines (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). The contrasting beliefs an individual maintains which may not rely on societal guidelines and instead peer inward to the internal components of themselves were focused on by Emerson and Thoreau and associated with completing continuous immersions within nature (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Consistent engagement with nature-based settings and experiences, the frequency and form of visitations (e.g., solitude- or group-based), will foster relationships an individual develops with their surroundings and produce the mystifying outcomes which Emerson and Thoreau highlighted when referring to the capacity of nature (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Additionally, this line of thought or viewpoint concerning time in nature may have been highlighted through the works of Emerson and Thoreau, but their notable realizations which were conveyed through transcendentalism have been found to withstand the bounds of time and space (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Specifically, the notable elements which were focused on by Emerson and Thoreau have continued through time and are immensely applicable not only in previous contexts, but current and future contexts as well due to the continuous impact nature can provide within individuals' lives (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017).

Determining the foundational elements that formulate and come to fruition within an individual's time in nature is one that is subjective and results in a multitude of significant factors (Boyes & Mackenzie, 2015). Similar to the defining concepts which compose an individual's view of the natural contexts, the experiences they encounter could be diverse as well due to the individualistic characteristics which compose an individual's experiences (Boyes & Mackenzie, 2015). For example, individuals within a similar natural setting could experience

varying emotions based on one undergoing a sense of wonder or fascination and an alternate individual experiencing emotions of fear or anxiety (Boyes & Mackenzie, 2015). Understanding common themes amongst the individualistic descriptions that compose how an individual views nature and defines themselves regarding their natural surroundings could provide immense insight into how these experienced characteristics influence the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of an individual. This information is applicable not only in determining the mindset and intrinsic pillars that compose an individual's viewpoint concerning nature, but also describes how these individual viewpoints can relate to a large-scale influence within nature through the combination of these perspectives (Hargreaves, 2011; Maniates, 2001).

An aspect of an individual's life that could describe their mindset regarding nature, is the factor of religion. Religion can be related to the overarching beliefs that one may maintain regarding the establishment and existence of nature (Koenig, 2012). This specific element within the lives of those that identify with a religious belief system can serve as a primary or notably prominent reasoning for how an individual chooses to enact their decisions or behaviors within a world-based context (Fam et al., 2004). The beliefs or foundational pillars and observed practices or religious expressions (e.g., prayer, worship, and using biblical- or religious-based resources) within religion are often integral within the lives of those that implement these tenets through structured and/or unstructured capacities and can translate into how they approach situations, such as engaging in nature-based experiences for a specific time period or engaging in environmental-based efforts (e.g., pro-environmental behaviors; Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; Koenig, 2012). This particular factor could serve as the central source from which the environmental-based perceptions and overarching mindset that forms within an individual and align with their chosen religious beliefs.

The aspect of religion in nature was also a prominent inclusion in the established endeavors of Emerson and Thoreau who notated the amplification characteristic that can occur when the elements of religion and nature are conjoined or interact (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Within nature, restorative experiences can be gained by those that elect to engage in these contexts and result in an individual transcendence which fosters connections to a divine experience an individual may regard as their revelation of personal realizations (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). It is within these moments, that restorative or healing aspects nature provides can be magnified and result in heightened connections with an ethereal being which can further intensify or enliven the overall experience for an individual (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). For example, Emerson noted the relationship and time of reflection that could come to fruition from partaking in nature-based experiences as a result of the ultimate connection that can be established between an individual and a higher deity (i.e., God) during these moments of solitude (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). The overall intensification between an individual and their nature-based surroundings can come to fulfillment from time spent in nature due to the physical experience of engaging in a context that an individual views as being established by the higher deity with which they communicate, connect, and form a relationship with as well (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017).

An example of a religion whose perceived tenants may facilitate the religious connection that practicing individuals have during nature-based experiences is Christianity (Luhrmann, 2004). Christianity is a religion that believes in the existence of a higher deity or being (i.e., God) which has established the progression and facets of creation and further serves as the authority of existence which individuals aim to connect (Luhrmann, 2004). When experiencing an immersion in nature that an identified deity has created, Christians may encounter a bond or

attachment to their surroundings based on their ingrained beliefs which could infiltrate into their behaviors (Goldberg et al., 2019). Through this, Christians may describe their nature-based moments as a method to become engaged in an experience of God and His works (Goldberg et al., 2019). For example, Christians may express their nature-based experiences as moments of worship or prayer that serve as pivotal characteristics in how they execute their time in nature and acquire a more in-depth, evolving connection with God (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). These moments can take place through moments of solitude, whether individually or through retreating from a group context, or collectively in group-based or communal activities. While alternate perspectives which contrast the presence of this specific viewpoint within Christianity that highlight the presence of dominion-based influences exist, this aspect of an identified Christian's beliefs could play a momentous influence in how they perceive their relationship with nature (Fam et al., 2004; White, 1967). For example, influences include the manner in which they should behave, whether it be environmental-based or not focused on environmental aspects, their level of religious engagement as a result of spending time with additional individuals, and further reflect support which opposes previous formulated perceptions of Christianity (e.g., support opposing previous dominion-based perceptions; Fam et al., 2004; White, 1967).

The role of God or a higher being is a noteworthy element and overarching phenomena in understanding the core components that compose how a Christian views nature through their environmental mindset, but the literature-based guidance individuals receive also serves as a pronounced factor (Davies, 2018). Within the religion of Christianity, there is a presence of numerous denominations which collectively and individually express or implement their held religious beliefs in multifaceted forms. Although differences may exist amongst the denominations under the categorization of Christianity, a thread which serves as a commonality

amongst collectives includes the use of biblical- or religious-based resources (Davies, 2018). This often-consistent source within the religious practices of Christian denominations can serve as an outlined approach to life or guiding resources and all they may entail (Davies, 2018). Within biblical- or religious-based resources, such as the Holy Bible, statements regarding the creation of nature and how behaviors should be enacted within these contexts or spaces are specific aspects which could motivate associated behaviors (Davies, 2018). These references could be significant principals in how an individual perceives the natural world, behaves in nature, connects with a higher deity, and forms their attitudes concerning their nature-based experiences (Davies, 2018).

Further, the role of religious expressions involving biblical- or religious-based resources, worship, and prayer in conjunction with the factor of experiencing God represent an intricate, complex collective that could provide an in-depth understanding of a specific aspect that is often indescribable by those that identify with the Christian religion (Davies, 2018; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Whether completed individually or collectively, these aspects can serve as communication methods to speak with and hear from God within a nature-based context and produce components within their experiences that result in infiltrating elements within their lives (Davies, 2018; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Currently, the present level of knowledge regarding a phenomena (i.e., experiencing God in nature and further through facets of solitude, group-based or communal activities, and how these compound experiences inform the environmental mindset of Christians) that pervades the life of individuals and informs many of their behaviors in nature- and world-based contexts is not robust in its quantity. To address the minor level of data and knowledge concerning possible connections regarding the dynamic interaction of religion and nature, this research employed a qualitative foundation and procedures to acquire an

in-depth comprehension of the factors referenced above (i.e., influence of solitude, group-based or communal activities, religious expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources), natural characteristics, and beliefs to accommodate the environmental mindset of Christians). As a result, this research specifically completed semi-structured interviews within the nature-based settings of Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU) to gain a rich, thick and informed level of detail to better understand the role of religion in nature. For the purpose of this research, nature is defined as public land, such as U.S. National Park Service (NPS) units (e.g., parks and protected areas), that serve as sources for individuals to connect with the abiotic and biotic elements that compose these sites and engage in landscapes that offer accessible outlets for individuals (Fisichelli et al., 2015).

Through the execution of this research, three sources were used to address the overall objective and gain an in-depth comprehension regarding the connection between an individual, their religious beliefs, and nature. The sources that served as primary considerations in this research and formed the foundation for the overarching research questions include 1) individuals engaging in a worship service within an NPS unit, 2) individuals who voluntarily selected to engage in an overnight, extended stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit, and 3) individuals who selected to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit. Based on these sources, this research aimed to acquire support and formulated meanings to inform three research questions that focus on detailing the nature-based experience of each involved source and collective of participants. Regarding the multilayered facets which could inform the amplified interaction of religion and nature, three research questions of focus were developed and assessed based on the

overall phenomena of focus (i.e., experiencing God within nature, such as NPS units). The three research questions include:

1. How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during communal or group-based ventures?
2. How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during moments of solitude?
3. How do Christians experiencing God in national parks describe their environmental mindset?

Purpose Statement and Qualitative Foundation

Overall, this research aims to detail and unveil meaning from an element or phenomena and associated experiences of life which are often immensely subjective, indescribable, and pivotal in their composition. Specifically, this research aims to describe the dynamic interaction of religion and nature in the context of understanding how these experiences come forth in the lives of participants and further into the existence of other beings and processes through infiltrating outcomes. Through distinctions between how these nature-based moments progress in situ (i.e., the role of present or absent individuals, existence of religious expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources, experiencing God, etc.) and how the experiences foster the progression of ex situ outcomes as well (i.e., environmental mindset of Christians, associated behaviors and perceptions, implementation of nature-based ventures, etc.), the overarching objective is to offer clarity regarding the progression of these experiences and further how they transform and inform the lives of those who identify with the belief system of focus, Christianity. As a result, the purpose is to acquire knowledge pertaining to how the interaction of religion and nature comes to fruition and further how they converge or

diverge in their form within the lives of each involved participant. As a result, the occurrence of the moments will be further described and could highlight the role of an aspect which has transcended time (i.e., religion and specifically Christianity) and could serve as the initiation and continuation of experiences within and outside of natural contexts. Additionally, they could also serve in de-mystifying a potential catalyst by not only understanding how religion exists in relation to nature but offer insight into an “untapped” resource in authentically observing the “roots” of nature-based experiences and the perceived life purpose or composition of individuals.

A qualitative foundation was employed to investigate the multifaceted lenses through which the overall phenomena of experiencing God in nature-based experiences comes to fruition (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 2010). Through this foundation, the aim to discover or make meaning of the progression of the focus phenomena becomes elevated in its opportunity capacity through the focus on rich, thick descriptions which qualitative research provides through its core paradigms, guiding frameworks, used methodological procedures, and enriching analysis processes (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 2010). Further, this foundation provides the existence of paradigms or ways in which the occurrences of existence progress (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Specifically, these forms of making meaning and observing the world are defined as paradigms and serve as the guiding forces within the implementation of qualitative research and the applicable frameworks and procedures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For this research and the focus phenomena, the main objective involves the completion of phases and processes which desire to provide and contribute an in-depth level of understanding in consideration of current knowledge pertaining to the interaction of religion and nature. Based on this desire to offer meaning and distinction concerning the progression of these multifaceted experiences, the

involved paradigm and world view for this qualitative research includes constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Within the paradigm of constructivism, this specific mindset and filter through which the world is observed is informed through a baseline that holds the existence of diverse and varied forms of understanding (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 2010). Specifically, the constructivism paradigm is one that reflects the presence of multiple forms of explanation through an ontological perspective of existence in reality and a breadth of meaning as a result of the progression of a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through this world view, it is observed that the ranging forms of meaning can be shared or distinguished amongst individuals based on the facets which compose their existence, such as experiential conditions and the progression of social interaction and can shift and become altered based on the furthering of both time and space (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Regarding an epistemological perspective in relation to understanding the progression of a phenomenon within the life of an individual, this characteristic of the constructivism paradigm as it occurs here within this research is one that highlights the direct presence and continuation of the focus phenomena and acts as an evolving element which produces enriched meaning as additional detail is unveiled (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Further, the involvement of a constructivism paradigm within this research is further represented through a concluding characteristic which involves a methodological based approach and viewpoint considering the focus phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In particular, the use of procedures which are hermeneutical in their composition and involve a compounding form of interpretation as the phenomena is being investigated and informed is the consistent pillar within the progression of the selected and employed methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through these

intentional, purposeful, and qualitative-based methods, this characteristic of the constructivism paradigm is one that desires to iteratively continue the process of unveiling detail of the focus phenomena through interactions involved within this research (i.e., interview(s)) which serve as a productive, impactful mode by which meaning and reality can be brought forth from existing mental constructions of those involved (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 2010).

As a result of the presence of a constructivism paradigm and the specific reference of methods which include a developing sense of meaning within this applicable world view, this research addressed this element of the paradigm through the use of a phenomenological framework specifically (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2010). This framework involves the use of a viewpoint regarding the research process which considers the unique, subjective experiencing of a phenomena and implements measures which aim to detail the occurrence of the associated meanings (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014). It is through this specific framework where the baseline or core tenets of a phenomena are acquired and informed through the completed research in contrast to other frameworks which may focus on the data collection methods in a similar manner and yet involve the formation of theory (i.e., grounded theory) from the resulting collected information through a revealing process or are bounded by the elements of space, time, or involve the focus on a specific collective or group (i.e., case study; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014). Due to the unique form of evolution and knowledge base which a phenomenological framework provides in relation to the constructivism paradigm and further qualitative foundation, this served as an optimal guiding mindset and associated research design to employ within the current venture based on the otherworldly and unrefined experiences which exist in relation to understanding the interaction

of religion and nature and how this comes forth in a subjective, influential, and potentially life-altering manner for individuals as a result of their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

Dissertation Structure

Regarding the progression of the information within this dissertation, the continuation of each unit of content is intentional in its provided insight and structure. Specifically, each unit or chapter contained within serve as independent works which are coordinated through their relation as associated ventures. Similar to the multifaceted progression of the focus phenomena (i.e., experiencing God within nature-based experiences), the placement of each chapter is intentional to provide full exposure to the phenomena as it is explored through varying lenses and further how it brings forth impactful elements within the life of individuals (i.e., research participants). As the chapters arise, the established structure progressively builds to a compound climax in providing insight into the ultimate facet of the phenomena of focus. Each chapter serves to reflect the existence of a divine narrative which is often elusive in its composure and yet formulates “building blocks” within the life of an individual and represents the presence of an aspect of life that evolves and transforms into a “solid structure” of internal pillars and a foundation which ultimately guides the existence of an individual within a world-based context.

Concerning the intentional structure of the involved chapters, each work provides an accumulating observation or “window” into the existence of the focus phenomena through the viewpoint of each participant. Specifically, the facets of 1) experience composition (i.e., solitude and group-based or communal gatherings) and 2) the environmental mindset of participants through varying influences (i.e., location, religious expressions, and environmental perceptions and behaviors) serve as the guiding lines of thought through the continuation of each chapter.

Despite the independent manner of each chapter, they collectively build on each other to provide a descriptive and purposeful reflection of the phenomena and offer a cohesive amplification of the present meanings and essence descriptions of these experiences as well (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2010).

With the present content serving as an establishing atmosphere and introductory method to formulate a mindset with which to assimilate the involved works, Chapter Two titled “Religion, Social Interaction, and National Parks: Experiencing God in Group-based or Communal Activities in Nature”, acts as the initiating outlet of meaning making through a focus on a pivotal aspect which composes nature-based experiences and further reflects the impact of these moments as well (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019). Specifically, this chapter aims to detail the role of social interaction in relation to nature-based experiences and it not only shapes the ventures which participants undergo but seeks insight into how this component influences their experiencing of God through the presence of others (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019). In relation to Christianity, the role of social interaction is a primary component due to the notable potential engaging in conversations or spending time within collective contexts can bring forth for those who do or do not share a similar belief system (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019). While social interaction can take place amongst any group setting due to the formation of individuals as social beings, this specific element transcends into the interactions which take place between those who identify with parallel religious belief systems and their viewpoint concerning a life-based existence (Goldberg et al., 2019). It is within social interaction amongst Christians where spiritual guidance and advice, in-depth reflection or meditation on foundational religious tenets (i.e., biblical- or religious-based resources, such as the Holy Bible), and a potential, enriching affinity for all of God’s observed creation can be

fostered (i.e., humanity and nature). This chapter sought to detail the influence of this facet in how Christians experience God through potentially formative experiences based on the revived or “fresh” perspectives which other individuals can provide through their individualistic paradigm and how this brought forth reflections in the lives of participants not only in their relation to nature and others, but to God overall.

Through a foundation established in observing the role of social interaction, Chapter Three titled “The Interaction of Religion, Solitude, and Nature: Experiencing God and Taking a Pause for Solitude”, aims to observe an alternate experience within the spectrum in relation to group-based or communal gatherings through a focus involving solitude. Within these specific moments, solitude is an aspect which can be completed through time which is spent in aloneness or is engaged through a retreat from a group setting (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). It is within these moments of disengaging from a setting, whether it involves a present collective context or an individual-based context, where solitude can be engaged and facilitate the posture of an individual to gain a renewed perspective or provide an outlet for higher level thought processes to occur based on the diminished and reduced distractions (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). Through solitude, individuals are able to engage in the fostered sense of pause and further perceive an atmosphere which motivates the progression of meditative experiences within a natural space and inherently provides these moments of refuge (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). Further, the experiencing of solitude within nature-based experiences also positions an individual’s mental state to become aware of nuances within their surroundings and their present state as well (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). The omnipresence of God as believed through Christianity is observed as a constant

aspect in existence, but through solitude the attention and viewpoint of individuals is further refined in an uninhibited manner and also enhances the recognition and reception of the presence of God. Additionally, the progression of this enlightening experience is one that could not only influence how an individual observes themselves within the context of a natural space, but overall in the presence and experiencing of God. As a result, this specific research aimed to unveil this multilayered and intrinsically compound experience to provide insight into potentially meaningful, raw, and authentic experiences which enhances the perceived connection an individual maintains with nature and the Creator (i.e., God).

With a foundational establishment of understanding concerning the composition of extrinsic (i.e., solitude and group-based or communal activities) and resulting intrinsic (i.e., internal outcomes or attributes from experiencing God, observing God through other individuals being present, mental clarity to increase a recognition of God, etc.) components of experiencing God within nature, the specific relation and overarching mindset regarding nature was highlighted through the climatic Chapter Four titled “The Dynamic of Religion and the Environment: Understanding the Environmental Mindset of Christians”. Specifically, a baseline knowledge in consideration of notable facets which compose the nature-based experience of Christians serves as observations of potential influences in their perspective or mindset which is formed in consideration of nature. Specifically, the completed experiences and the primary role of their religious belief system forms a compound series of experiences which not only initiates but evolves and develops the mindset which individuals grow in consideration of the environment. In particular, the role of religion is a significant mainstay in consideration of the environmental mindset an individual maintains and this specific chapter serves as the climax in this intentional narrative progression to serve as the cohesive reflection of the varied, diverse

components which collectively influence the sum (i.e., environmental mindset; Davies, 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). This chapter aimed to evaluate previous (i.e., viewing Christianity as a dominion-based religious belief system which forms environmentally degrading actions) and present (i.e., biblical-based and God-inspired mandates to act as stewards in consideration of nature) perspectives considering the role of religion (i.e., Christianity) and evaluate how participants expressed their environmental mindset and considered the presence of pieces which formed this composed view (i.e., elements forming their experiences such as worship, prayer, biblical- or religious-based resources, natural surroundings, and their engagement or presence of thoughts and actions pertaining to environmental behaviors; Kals et al., 1999; Hargreaves, 2011; McDonald et al., 2014; Steg & Vlek, 2009; White, 1967). As a result, this chapter offers an in-depth understanding behind the actions which individuals complete ex situ and in situ in consideration of nature and further how an ingrained, indescribable aspect of their life contributes to portions or the overall sum of this environmental mindset (Davies, 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000)

With a cohesive reflection of discovering and unveiling rich, thick detail regarding the relationship and resulting outcomes (i.e., perceptions and behaviors) which come from human-human, human-nature, and human-God connections, an alternate and reflective perspective is provided in Chapter Five titled “A Creator and a Vessel: The Unmatched Sovereignty of God and a Letter from His Saved Creation” through a final, alternate lens. Specifically, this chapter aims to offer an additional “branch” from the collective “vine” of this research. Throughout the intentional and structured narratives which each chapter provides, they reflect “branches” of a complex and potentially life-changing “vine”. This “vine” in particular is the forming pulse which brings forth and sustains the “branches” of this research. As a result, this “vine” is the

foundation for the contained efforts and resulting revelations or essence descriptions for the existence of a notably composite phenomenon (i.e., experiencing God in nature-based experiences). Regarding this item, the “vine” is even further described in this concluding work. Specifically, this alternate lens as provided by the researcher is one of a personal reflection of this overarching process and aims to offer a raw, authentic, and genuine view of the “vine” and “branches” which form this collective research.

Throughout this entire research process, an integral item and pillar which has progressed through the completed ventures involves the presence of researcher bias. Specifically, the researcher is an individual who identifies as a Christian and desires to act in a manner which not only reflects the tenets involved within this belief system but serves as a vessel for God within their daily existence and all they engage in to ultimately highlight His sovereignty, divine power, infinite grace, and unmatched compassion for His creation. While qualitative-based measures were employed in an iterative manner throughout this entire research venture to ensure the introduction of bias or additional outside, inhibiting influences were not present within any completed phase, this chapter serves as a “heart reflection” of the researcher behind this work. Specifically, this chapter aims to offer insight into the indescribable driving forces which not only direct their research aspirations, but their life-based contexts as well. It is through this chapter where this lens provides an opportunity to peer into their heart and ultimately to show themselves as a saved, loved, and redeemed child of God who is underserving of His compassion and yet it is infinitely and freely given. As a result, this chapter aims to reflect and praise God in an unrestricted manner and give Him the glory which He is and will always be deserving of. He is the “vine” and the ultimate growing source which not only produces the “branches” of this research, but the progression of a beautiful, divine, existence through His unfailing character and

creation. Through an individual-based lens, this chapter aims to serve as an influential factor through a personal reflection of an evolving, infiltrating element within the existence of one individual that could result in resounding implications. Through displaying an authentic reflection of religion within this chapter and how this pillar can not only produce developing environmental-based outcomes but existence-based revelations which spur associated forms of results (e.g., affinity for nature, place attachment, stewardship-based ethics, environmentally conscious mindset, desire to increase public awareness of the positive forces within the scheme of nature, detection of life-based purpose within a world-based context, etc.), the potential for current or future changes could be probable and not only impact the existence of nature in an advantageous manner, but potentially bring forth life-altering attributes within the lives of individuals as well.

Chapter 2 - Religion, Social Interaction, and National Parks: Experiencing God in Group-based or Communal Activities in Nature

Abstract

To evaluate the phenomena of experiencing God through social interactions within nature-based experiences, participants who identified as Christians were interviewed to obtain in-depth and rich information. Semi-structured interviews through a phenomenological framework were completed in-person to comprehend lived experiences of participants through verbal and non-verbal expressions. Specifically, interviews were completed in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU) during summer 2020 to provide a context which would evoke meaning for the involved participants in relation to the phenomena. In total, 36 participants across three sources were interviewed and include: 1) worship service attendees within GRSM (N=15), 2) employed personnel implementing worship services within GRSM (N=16), and 3) religious-retreat attendees within INDU (N=5). Amongst the three sources, various experiences within the natural settings were present and provided a direct form of detail acquisition to unveil representative and descriptive information concerning the focus phenomena. Findings for this research revealed that participants related the phenomena to a “triangle effect” (Mike) where the facets of nature, social interaction through group-based or communal activities, and experiencing God were elevated individually and collectively when spending time within a natural setting. Overall, participants shared a common expression of an increased ability to experience an elevated level of rawness and authentically connect with individuals, nature, and God through nature-based experiences within a group. As a result,

participants conveyed an intentional selection to engage in these activities and further utilize natural settings as a medium to primarily connect with God and transfer this formative relationship as enhancing factors within their social interactions.

Introduction

The aspect of community or gathering can serve as a connection and initiate channels of communication that foster a sense of belonging within a collective of individuals that may share similar interests or thoughts (Coley et al., 1997). Despite the communal composition of a group, the interconnected aspect of sharing experiences and moments within life with others can be significant in altering or developing the characteristics that compose a person and the resulting sense of fulfillment they receive from these bonds (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019; Lehto et al., 2012). Whether a gathering of family, friends, acquaintances, or individuals who are unknown to one another, these collective moments can be enriching due to the level of connectedness that can be perceived and acquired by each involved person (Coley et al., 1997). It is within these moments where infiltrating attributes can arise through positive social interactions and result in the progression of lasting bonds that can potentially endure the fleeting presence of time and space (Coley et al., 1997).

Similar to the development of impactful connections between individuals, these relationships can occur within varying contexts that introduce transcending bonds as well (Coley et al., 1997). For example, nature is a source that can foster the gathering of individuals and introduce or deepen potential connections to the present natural settings for those that are involved within the collective (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019). Nature has been found to be a significant influence in the lives of individuals through providing a source of physical activity, emotional reflection and fulfillment, or mental clarity and anxiety reduction

(Ramkissoon et al., 2012). When the notable role of nature is conjoined with the positive impact that social interaction can produce, enriching and progressive moments can potentially take place due to the combined benefits that come to fruition from these elements (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2012). As a result, individuals can not only engage in socially enlivening experiences, but execute these moments in a setting which motivates authentic engagements between individuals and the present natural characteristics as well (Coley et al., 1997; Goldberg et al., 2019; Ramkissoon et al., 2012).

Further, the occurrence of the conjoined impacts of human- and nature-based connections can produce additional aspects within these experiences that relate to multifaceted nuances, such as transcendence or spirituality (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Coley et al., 1997; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2019; Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Koenig, 2012; Ronda, 2013). Based on the ethereal and intangible factors that can result from individuals partaking in social interactions within a natural setting, a heightened level of connections could occur based on the dynamic setting and facets of verbal and/or non-verbal engagement (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Coley et al., 1997; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2019; Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Ronda, 2013). During these experiences, the completed connections or interactions amongst individuals and the present natural settings can produce heightened acquisitions by individuals that produce mystifying outcomes and potentially impact the emotional, mental, and physical state of those that are engaging in a complex situation (Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). For example, individuals engaging in a shared, nature-based experience may undergo an overwhelming sense of fulfillment or an intrinsic, spiritual revelation due the composite

experience and foster the transferal of a deep sense of contentment or potentially indescribable attributes (Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). The element of sharing an intensified or elevated experience within a significant context can be pivotal within the life of an individual and potentially transform elements (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors) within their lives as a result of the enriching or developmental experiences (Goldberg et al., 2019; Koenig, 2012).

Specifically, the component of religion or the associated beliefs and guiding aspects in one's life can incorporate the roles of group-based or communal activities and also the incorporation of nature-based experiences as a means to engage in these forms of events. This in turn fosters the progression of not only impactful connections with nature and other present individuals but can be perceived as a platform where the beliefs may be motivated and result in a transcendent experience (i.e., perception of God as a higher deity with which to commune through nature and others based on facets of creation; Goldberg et al., 2019). Natural settings can provide insight into an immense and diversified landscape that can innately formulate the gathering of individuals that desire to spend time in these contexts and engage in the overall revitalization or unique source of creative intricacy that can be acquired (Ramkissoon et al., 2012; White et al., 2019). Through these engagements, individuals that identify with a specific religious belief system could participate in these experiences as a means to not only enhance the level of general social engagement they receive but use these moments as motivation(s) to further reflect upon their beliefs and apply these beliefs within social interactions (Goldberg et al., 2019). For example, they could use these moments to connect with others who may share similar beliefs in a natural setting and engage in profound conversation which fosters the transferal of positive affirmation, healing comfort, or constructive feedback regarding life-based

situations and viewpoints (Goldberg et al., 2019; Luhrmann, 2004). The occurrence of these experiences can be impactful within the lives of those involved and potentially others who they interact with outside of these engagements. The infiltrating outcomes that can come to fulfillment from experiencing the influence of nature, group-based or communal activities, and religious beliefs may also occur.

In consideration of a specific religious belief system that can initiate or include elements of nature-based experiences and highlight the significant role of group-based or communal activities, Christianity is one that observes humans as social beings which require varying levels of social interaction (Davies, 2018). Within this specific form of religious belief system, the aspect of community or gathering on a consistent basis serves as not only moments of socialization, but sources of guidance and reflection through the expression of items that are within the current mindset of the involved individuals (e.g., positive and negative mental, emotional, or physical factors; Davies, 2018). Moments of verbal and non-verbal expressions (e.g., prayer or worship), reflecting on beliefs (e.g., biblical- or religious-based resources), portrayal of social norms (e.g., shared beliefs amongst individuals), and connecting with a higher deity (i.e., God) are examples of items that can take place within these moments of gathering as an identified cohort of Christians (Davies, 2018; Dyreng et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Schultz et al., 2007). It is through these moments which Christians could perceive the presence of God through mediums involving individuals and natural interactions as well. Specifically, the observation or communication with others within a natural setting could produce indescribable reactions through changes in the social atmosphere which reflect the presence of God and His role in facilitating the bonds which are formed between not only individuals, but with nature as well. Through the varied social and natural dynamics, the

observation of God as the developer of all creation (e.g., individuals and nature), could spur the intensification of verbal and non-verbal experiences of those involved. These moments can provide attributes that extend beyond the social fulfillment that is integral within the scheme of life by allowing for the connections between individuals to be furthered in an in-depth manner and formed in the foundation of similar life-based beliefs due to the observance of God as the primary creator of existence (Coley et al., 1997; Davies, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989).

Further, these moments are not bounded by specific contexts and can take place within a multitude of settings due to the applicable manner of these elements. The implementation of group-based or communal gatherings within varied settings (e.g., natural contexts, such as public lands or parks and protected areas (PPAs)) can occur and engage aspects of a religious belief system (e.g., Christianity) that are highlighted and revered based on the applicability and accessibility of the involved aspects (Davies, 2018). An example of a natural setting where religious-based and group-based or communal gatherings can take place include units within the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). Specifically, the NPS provides all individuals with the opportunity to access areas that have been designated as a shared resource and reflect the integral importance of protecting landscapes that compose the natural world (Craig et al., 2018; Krebs, 1999; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; Van den Berg & Koole, 2006). Through these experiences the collective moments can provide significant influences within the lives of participants based on the enhanced level of connection and shared thoughts (Goldberg et al., 2019). Religious-based expressions involving prayer, worship, and the inclusion of biblical- or religious-based resources may serve as elements within these shared experiences and provide an influence in potentially enhancing or initiating the connection that each individual maintains

toward their current natural setting, such as an NPS unit, and the outdoors as a whole (Davies, 2018; Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). For example, individuals may desire to spend time within a natural setting as a means to experience the creation of a higher deity in which they believe (e.g., God) and also combine this experience with a communal gathering to share the moments with others that are similar in their religious or life-based views (Davies, 2018; Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). This form of venture can result in a potentially dynamic experience that provides a fulfilling and inspiring series of connections between all present factors or elements (e.g., higher deity, natural setting, and individuals; Craig et al., 2018; Krebs, 1999; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; Van den Berg & Koole, 2006).

Based on the significant influence time in nature, group-based or communal activities, and religious beliefs can have within the life of an individual and how they select to approach daily situations, an understanding of these elements individually and collectively can provide in-depth insight concerning the impact these elements introduce. Thus, this research aimed to assess these components and how the role of religion influences social interaction within a nature-based setting. For the purposes of this research, a nature-based setting is defined as a park unit within the NPS that provides visitors with the opportunity to engage in unique and multifaceted, social experiences while experiencing the natural features or factors that compose the dynamic landscapes (Fisichelli et al., 2015). Specifically, research was conducted within two NPS units which include Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU). These specific NPS units were selected based on: 1) their contrasting natural characteristics and settings, 2) their historical visitation trends to appropriately convey the occurrence of varying social interactions, and 3) the existence of an atmosphere which facilitates

the progression of religious-based activities (i.e., worship services and associated infrastructure or facilities to engage in these expressions; NPSVUS, 2020).

Further, the collective and individual aspects that compose these experiences (e.g., social interaction, social norms, worship, prayer, and biblical- or religious-based resources) could produce immense impacts regarding the life views an individual maintains, how they interact with others, and how they elect to spend time in nature and complete these forms of experiences. Due to the inclusion of these elements and the understanding that can be acquired from implementing detailed procedures to access the applicable information, a qualitative foundation and phenomenological framework were incorporated within this research. Based on the use of a phenomenological framework which aims to unveil or offer descriptions of the focus phenomena (i.e., the intersection of experiencing God, social interaction, religious beliefs, and nature-based experiences), this research involved three sources to gather rich, thick descriptions and thus an informed understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 1998). Specifically, individuals who 1) were partaking in a worship service within an NPS unit, 2) voluntarily engaged in an extended, overnight stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit, and 3) voluntarily chose to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit. Based on these sources, the inclusion of semi-structured interviews as the methodological process was completed to provide insight into the aspects that compose and pertain to the experiences of participants and offer a means to offer understanding concerning a compound aspect of existence (Shaw et al., 2016). Based on the elements that are involved within this research and the overarching or primary focus, the main research question involved:

1. How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during communal or group-based ventures?

Literature Review

Religion and National Parks

NPS units have been found to be immensely influential in the nature-based connections, level of attachment (e.g., place attachment), and acquisition of positive enhancements concerning overall well-being (e.g., emotional, mental, and physical) through recreational opportunities of individuals (Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). For example, the aspect of place attachment conveys the link or perceived relationship an individual holds towards a location and as a result, experiences a heightened or engrained emotional response as an outcome of this impactful, perceived bond (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). This element of place attachment can occur between an individual and an array of natural areas, such as NPS units, due to the natural features which compose the sites and the emotional connections that can be associated with these specific locations (e.g., past-use history or objectives to complete future individual or group-based visitation experiences; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Within these sites, individuals can immerse themselves in distinct locations that have been placed under protective designations to reflect the integral importance of conservation and pro-environmental endeavors (Fisichelli et al., 2015; Pepper & Leonard, 2016; Steg & Vlek, 2009). It is through time within NPS sites, that individuals are able to acquire extrinsic and intrinsic benefits which accrue from nature-based experiences and can produce infiltrating aspects within other portions of their existence (e.g., increased probability of pro-environmental behaviors; Pepper & Leonard, 2016; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Experiencing these natural areas could result in increased motivations to not only engage in reoccurring visitation within NPS sites but become inspired to embark on additional excursions as well (Keiser et al., 2018). Specifically, NPS units provide individuals with diverse opportunities to engage with organisms and factors

that compose the natural characteristics of these areas while also experiencing the self-enriching elements (e.g., internal and external) that can be introduced through nature-based exposure (Fisichelli et al., 2015).

Due to the immense range of internal and external attributes that can be gained by spending time in a PPA, significant and rising levels of visitation have been observed and reported over time within varying NPS units (Keiser et al., 2018). These rising trends convey the continuous motivation individuals feel towards natural settings and their resulting desire to spend more time within these sites (Keiser et al., 2018). With the influx of visitation and more exposure to these contexts, the introduction of intrinsic benefits that contribute to an individual's self-enrichment or alteration of intangible characteristics can become more apparent (Hassell et al., 2015). Specifically, the level of interaction offered for individuals within these settings are often presented through accessible opportunities while visiting NPS units to explore and engage in a variety of activities (Ramkissoo et al., 2012). The length of time an individual spends embarking on ventures within an NPS site or spending time within group-based or communal activities could serve as a noteworthy component in the level and degree of natural exposure an individual experiences. Based on the form(s) of experience(s) an individual completes within a natural setting, the duration and type (e.g., individual- or group-based) could influence how they perceive the reception of natural benefits from their time in nature. Thus far, the length of time that is spent within nature has been investigated in the context of health and acquiring the emotional, mental, or physical benefits from the immersion (Frumkin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Pretty, 2005; White et al., 2019). A baseline threshold for the reception of intrinsic and extrinsic attributes from spending time in natural settings has been found to be 120 minutes for these processes to occur (White et al., 2019). In the context of overall well-being, this

determined length was found to be the minimal amount of time that was needed for individuals to express the recognized alterations they observed in their overall state (White et al., 2019).

While this relates to certain intrinsic and intangible components that contribute to how an individual feels after their time in nature (e.g., mood and experienced level of stress), the type of exposure to group-based or communal activities within natural surroundings concerning how an individual's internal components (e.g., perceptions or attitudes) or religious beliefs are influenced is not explicitly defined. Knowledge concerning the notable influence that nature has on the well-being of individuals is imperative but understanding the characteristics that formulate who an individual is reflects the elements that can provide immense influence in an individual's life and inform their decision(s) to spend time in nature due to the reception of religious attributes (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). Specifically, understanding the potential differentiations that may exist due to varying lengths of time that are spent in nature and how this component influences the level of religious reflection or engagement an individual experiences in nature could serve as a primary source of understanding regarding their individual-based role within these moments. Further, addressing the secondary component of unveiling how an individual experiences group-based or communal activities could be immense in determining the progression of connections to nature. Through acquired knowledge regarding these aspects, the collective representation and progression of these elements within group-based or communal activities in nature which involve the sharing or influence of religious aspects (e.g., non-verbal and verbal expressions, dialogues, potential shared observation of nature as a creation by God, etc.) could then offer a compound complexity which ultimately conveys the infiltrating role religion can have overall. Comprehending how the amount of socialization in nature relates to an individual's level of religious reflection, their resulting motivation to engage in nature-based

experiences, and the compelling desire they may have to behave in a manner that is environmentally aware could be significant in evaluating how religion influences the nature-based experiences individuals have and how this impacts their internal experiences (e.g., self-enrichment and religious reflections or revelations).

The conjunction of rising visitation trends to NPS units, the influence that nature can have on an individual, the varied forms of visitation that can take place, and the role that religion can have within the internal pillars or decisions of an individual collectively convey the dynamic experience that NPS units specifically could provide (Fam et al., 2004; Keiser et al., 2018; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; White et al., 2019). Additionally, these factors reflect the level of detail that can be obtained through completing research within NPS units. Currently, the level of research focused on the specific element of religion (e.g., Christianity) within NPS units is not prevalent and the inclusion of this type of natural area could serve as a source to significantly contribute to existing levels of knowledge. By including NPS units as the primary focus, the collective desire individuals have continued to display in visitation rates serves as an integral component in understanding the foundational elements within their lives, such as religion, that contribute to this notable draw to these locations (Fam et al., 2004; Keiser et al., 2018; Ramkissoon et al., 2012). This information could act as influential elements in better understanding how an individual's religious beliefs contribute to their nature-based experiences and how their internal viewpoint infiltrates into the external behaviors they decide to implement as a reflection of how they view their natural surroundings and experiences within.

Group-Based or Communal Activities in Nature and Religion

An aspect of the intangible components that could occur within NPS unit visitation experiences involve the influence of an individual's beliefs concerning the natural world or the

occurrence of personal revelations and how they observe themselves in relation to their surroundings (Goldberg et al., 2019). Specifically, the religious beliefs an individual maintains could be notable in the selection of visiting and remaining within an NPS unit. Dependent upon an individual's beliefs concerning their role concerning nature, the time an individual spends within a natural setting (i.e., engaging in social interaction through group-based or communal activities) could be pivotal in contributing to their perceptions, attitudes, and resulting behaviors (Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019).

Regarding group-based or communal activities, these forms of communion amongst individuals can take numerous forms (Coley et al., 1997). Specifically, the implementation of shared experiences, such as those within nature, can bring forth emotions concerning satisfaction or belonging due to the opportunity to express the desire of social interaction which aligns with the composition of humans as approaching life with an internal desire to connect as social beings (Coley et al., 1997). These interactions can be multifaceted and reflect a constant flux through a consistent change in who and what composes these events (Coley et al., 1997). Further, the role of collective gatherings and the establishment of a sense of belonging within religious belief systems and associated practices is notable (Cornwall, 1987; McIntosh et al., 2002). The connections and bonds that form between individuals who maintain similar beliefs and viewpoints concerning life can be significant influences in the socialization individuals receive from these links and also a level of collaboration regarding the maintenance and progression of beliefs (Cornwall, 1987; McIntosh et al., 2002). Through these interactions, the structure of the collective units can produce infiltrating influences within each individual's life due to the ability to converse and share in moments that foster the presence of commonalities and understanding (Cornwall, 1987). Based on the collective alignment that is present within religious groups that

share similar foundational beliefs, the transferal or acquisition of characteristics may be used by individuals as a means to describe a portion of who they are (Goldberg et al., 2019). Similar to the significant influence of group-based or communal gatherings and engaging in social ventures, the resulting impacts can transcend to an individual level due to the infiltration which can occur within the lives of each person (Goldberg et al., 2019). The level of community or engagement that is experienced by an individual could influence their overall identification as an individual and also how these facets inform their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Based on the influence group-based or communal gatherings can have within the context of religion, these elements can extend into other settings as well due to the applicability of socialization (Cornwall, 1987; McIntosh et al., 2002). Group-based or communal gatherings can take place within a range of settings and produce resulting outcomes based on the social interactions and additional ability of individuals to connect on a potentially profound level through the intrinsic beliefs which are shared (Cornwall, 1987; Goldberg et al., 2019; McIntosh et al., 2002). Specifically, these gatherings can take place within a natural setting (e.g., NPS units) and produce an experience which reflects the aspect of socialization while also conjoining a context that can foster the expression of beliefs based on the evoked responses (Davies, 2018; Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). For example, Christianity involves beliefs and biblical- or religious-based resources (i.e., Holy Bible) that can be perceived by an individual to include reflections which are focused on viewing the natural world as a creation by God and may produce an intrinsic connection that individuals regard toward nature (Davies, 2018). Expressions through prayer, worship, or meditating on biblical- or religious-based resources are examples of factors that could take place within the group-based or communal

gatherings amongst individuals, despite the viewpoints or beliefs which are held by each person (Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). These expressions can serve as not only connecting elements between the participants, but with a higher deity as well (i.e., God; Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989).

Through these experiences within a natural setting, individuals that engage in these moments can potentially undergo personal revelations or enlightening moments which allow them to observe elements within themselves that were previously undetected until engaging in these specific moments (Cornwall, 1987). The influence of an enhanced level of interaction with others that provides an opportunity to converse and engage in potentially significant moments of enrichment can offer additional perspectives concerning a range of topics, such as religious beliefs (Cornwall, 1987). These discussions can introduce the solidification of how an individual views their personally held beliefs or produce an alteration in the insight that is provided by others who identify with the same system of beliefs (Goldberg et al., 2019). Further, these moments and the influence of group-based or communal gatherings can formulate or alter the way in which an individual views themselves (Goldberg et al., 2019). Regarding a nature-based setting and experience, the significant influence of group-based or communal gatherings in combination with these contexts could have an immense influence in how an individual selects to view nature through their religious beliefs and resulting personal or social identity (Goldberg et al., 2019). Within these moments, the religious beliefs one maintains and their participation in group-based or communal activities could be influential in how they perceive their natural surroundings and the manner in which they choose to act or connect with the context (Goldberg et al., 2019). It is within these moments, the underlying aspect of religion could be conjoined

with the factor of group-based or communal gatherings to foster and enhance the connection that not only one individual maintains with nature, but multiple individuals as well.

Social Interaction and Norms, Religion, and Nature

When considering the presence and degree of social interaction and corresponding norms within nature-based experiences, these intangible behavioral influences could play a role in both the implementation and characteristics that compose an individual's venture within natural settings, such as an NPS unit (Dyrenge et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007). Social norms encompass a greater discourse of thought involving the aspect of social norm theory and act as catalysts in the behaviors that are mentally selected and physically implemented by individuals during experiences of social interaction, such as nature-based experiences (Dyrenge et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007). The execution of social norms can bring to fruition either positive and/or negative connotations, such as environmentally degrading actions versus pro-environmental behaviors, and could thus result in an observable potential to modify and change the behaviors of individuals due to the presence of others (Hargreaves, 2011; Schultz et al., 2007; Steg & Vlek, 2009). The impact of social norms is one that could be resounding and potentially elevated in effect as a result of group composition and the viewpoints or beliefs in which the collective of individuals hold to be true (Schultz et al., 2007).

In consideration of religious identity and the significance of social norms within the implementation of a belief system, Christianity is one that observes the existence of God as the singular deity of creation and provider of ideals by which an individual's existence should reflect and serve as a representation of the character of God to those they interact with in life-based situations (Davies, 2018; Dyrenge et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Schultz et al., 2007). While not categorized as contrasting to individuals who do not identify as

Christians, those who do identify as Christians are encouraged to portray the tenets of love, forgiveness, support, and honesty to deepen or magnify the relationship they perceive with God and further act as a positive influence or “disciple of Christ” within the lives of others based on the observed beliefs through biblical- or religious-based resources (Dyrenge et al., 2012). Due to the way in which Christian beliefs are observed to be implemented within an individual’s life, the application of the involved tenets and truths are items that could serve as primary components within the social interactions and group-based or communal activities which Christians complete within nature (Dyrenge et al., 2012). The presence of individuals who share the same belief system could act as an elevating force due to the progression of social norms and result in not only the implementation of specific nature-based experiences, but emotional and mental outcomes as well (Dyrenge et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007).

While the existence of multiple individuals who identify as Christians could select to engage in nature collectively, group dynamics are not static and could result in the execution of group-based or communal activities which reflect the presence of multiple beliefs and diverse social norms (Dyrenge et al., 2012). This is applicable when considering nature-based experiences and the connective element which nature provides within the lives of individuals and the motivation of meaningful discourse that resounds based on the present, contextual characteristics (e.g., captivating scenery, wildlife marvels, etc.; Goldberg et al., 2019). The influence of nature could serve as a conjoining influence which facilitates the shared experiences and discussions of individuals who maintain varying belief systems and allow for the progression of social norms which beneficially infiltrate the social dynamic through positive reinforcement (Dyrenge et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007). Further, the completion of in-depth social interaction could result in the advantageous enhancement of desires to act in a manner that not only reflects the motivation

received through the dynamic engagement (e.g., Christians and non-Christians discussing a shared affinity for nature and a desire to protect all living and non-living organisms or processes), but potentially result in the development of a holistic atmosphere of understanding towards the ideals held by other individuals and an appreciation of the completed social interaction. As a result, the overarching aim of this research is to understand the role that religious beliefs can have in the inclusion of group-based or communal activities within the nature-based experiences of Christians and how their belief system may influence their time in nature (i.e., NPS unit), such as experiencing God.

Methodology

Research Design

The included procedures presented within this research are part of a larger, cohesive venture (IRB Approval #10133.2; Jackson et al., 2021). The discussed processes are similar in their composition based on the implementation of this collective work (Jackson et al., 2021). To acquire a notable form of in-depth information pertaining to the overall theme, this research incorporated a qualitative foundation through a phenomenological framework to acquire rich detail and expressed experiences of participants (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Wolff, 1999). The utilization of a phenomenological approach was selected based on the involved phenomena within this research (i.e., understanding the role of religion through experiencing God within social interactions during nature-based experiences) to gain a detailed level of understanding and thick essence descriptions concerning this factor (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Wolff, 1999). Further, the inclusion of a phenomenological framework was involved based on the acquisition of details pertaining to lived experiences through professed expressions of participants to ultimately unveil

an elevated level of consciousness pertaining to the focus phenomena which is not bounded by a period of time or designated collective (i.e., case study) and requires the formation of additional baseline knowledge to further progress relevant, future research developments as a result of varying data analysis processes (e.g., theory development through grounded theory; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Wolff, 1999). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were completed within specified NPS units to access identified sources to implement the data collection process and reflect the role of nature within this research in relation to the chosen framework and focus phenomena (Shaw et al., 2016).

Research Settings

Due to the classification of nature within this research as NPS units, the sites of INDU in the northwestern region of Indiana and GRSM within Tennessee and North Carolina reflect the two research settings. These specific sites were selected based on their environmental factors (i.e., PPAs or NPS units with contrasting environmental characteristics), visitation trends (i.e., high visitation rates and popularity amongst visitors), enhanced levels of accessibility (i.e., multiple entrance points, ability to utilize motorized or non-motorized transportation, and proximity to urban infrastructure), and facilitation of religious-based experiences (i.e., worship services and religious-based retreats) within the natural settings.

INDU is located on Lake Michigan and is composed of approximately 15,000 acres that reflect a dynamic collective of habitats (NPS, 2019b). Visitors are able to observe the diverse range of species which inhabit the intricate areas including marshes, oak savannas, bogs, and dunes (NPS, 2019b). These habitats provide resources for species that compose the notable biodiversity and ecological transition zones within INDU while also serving as noteworthy recreational opportunities for visitors (NPS, 2019b). In 2020, an approximate visitor count found

a rate just over 2,200,000 recreation-based experiences (NPSVUS, 2020). This visitation rate correlates to INDU being a newly categorized national park from its previous designation of a national seashore that can serve as an intriguing component for individuals and produce an increase in visitation (NPS, 2019b).

The incorporation of GRSM provides a series of enriching moments for visitors that engage in the natural, ecological, cultural, and historical characteristics which are present. This specific location provides visitors with numerous environmental and cultural features including examples involving a diverse catalog of flora and fauna species, integral wetlands that serve as fundamental sources for the ecological diversity of the location, sprawling forest and mountain ranges, a representation of the Southern Appalachian Mountain Range, and preserved traces of infrastructure from individuals that roamed and worked within this landscape (NPS, 2019a). The approximate acreage over 500,000 that encompasses this significant site experiences a consistent flux of visitation and this trend was reflected in 2020 with an estimated visitor count found to be over 12,000,000 in consideration of recreation-based experiences (NPS, 2019a; NPSVUS, 2020). The visitation rate for this specific site aligns with the categorization of GRSM as being one of the highest visited parks and the heightened desire expressed and displayed by individuals to experience this location (NPS, 2019a). Based on the increased popularity of GRSM, it serves as an immense source of connection with individuals that are immersing themselves in a PPA and contributes to the data collection of this research.

Overall, visitation at INDU or GRSM serves as an inspirational source for heightened moments within the natural attractions and can act as platforms for the formation of religious connections to arise based on the dynamic immersions involving both natural settings and social interaction. The potential for intangible or impactful experiences to occur within INDU and

GRSM reinforces the incorporation of these particular sites in investigating the religious experiences Christians have within these settings collectively and intricately describing the phenomena of focus within this research.

Research Participants

For this research, individuals that satisfied the established and categorized criteria served as study participants (Table 2.1). Specifically, a range of elements were chosen as the basis of inclusion and resulted in the involvement of three sources overall. These three sources included 1) worship service attendees, 2) employed individuals implementing worship services, and 3) individuals who selected to spend an extended period of time within the research settings through a religious-based retreat. For each of these sources, the organization of A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP) served as a purposeful sampling resource and point of contact to streamline source determination based on their facilitation of ongoing partnerships within varying NPS units and their organizational mission to facilitate the expression of religious beliefs for all through nature-based experiences, such as worship services and extended religious-based retreats (ACMNP, 2020).

Table 2.1. Research criteria for all sources incorporated within this research.

Research Source	Research Criteria
<i>Worship Service Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that have spent at least 120 minutes within the relevant research site (White et al., 2019) 4. Visitors that are attending a worship service provided by A Christian Ministry in the National Parks 5. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Group-based or Communal Retreat Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Indiana Dunes National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that are spending an extended time period (i.e., overnight stay and more than 24 hours with a group) within nature through participation in a religious retreat 4. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Employed Individuals</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals that are located in Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Individuals that identify as a Christian 3. Individuals that are employed as a personnel member with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks and therefore selected to engage in ministry-based efforts within a natural context 4. Individuals that are 18 years of age or older

The incorporation of these specified criteria in addition to the association of religious-based events with ACMNP, facilitated the identification of individuals that experienced applicable circumstances within nature-based experiences and maintained pertinent beliefs (e.g., Christian beliefs) relevant to the scope of this research. Specifically, each source offered an opportunity to acquire unique details pertaining not only to their lived experiences, but their professed ventures through experiences which were inherently differentiated based on their progression. Amongst the sources, the forms of nature-based setting, form of religious-based engagements, and length of exposure to the focus phenomena and natural context differed. For the source involving worship service attendees, these individuals spent an applicable level of

time within nature (i.e., at least 120 minutes) and selected to participate in a worship service within GRSM (White et al., 2019). The group-based or communal retreat participants engaged in an overnight stay or consecutive stay longer than 24 hours within INDU and engaged in a variety of religious-based offerings (i.e., worship service, biblical-based discussions with fellow participants, and ministry efforts through park cleanup initiatives offered by the NPS in INDU). Lastly, the employed individuals provided a reflection of a long-term exposure to nature within GRSM and displayed an individual-based selection to not only engage in active ministry efforts offered through ACMNP but chose to enact the available worship services and convey a notable level of personal commitment to conduct religious offerings during their time within GRSM.

The inclusion of each source offered a multifaceted assessment of the layered experiences which progressed in consideration of the focus phenomena. Each source portrayed a significant level of exposure to not only nature (i.e., NPS units), but differentiation in the level of religious-based interactions and connections with other individuals as well through group-based or communal gatherings as a result of their diverse experiences and their exposure to the focus phenomena as well (i.e., experiencing God within group-based or communal gatherings within nature). Further, these criteria assisted in ensuring the existence of relevant data based on lived and contextual experiences, differentiation in the execution of nature-based experiences (i.e., worship service attendees, employed individuals facilitating worship services through ministry efforts of ACMNP, and group-based or communal retreat attendees), and the associated variation in social interaction to ultimately offer detail regarding the development of an essence description relating to the phenomena of focus (Hays & Wood, 2011). Collectively, these criteria served as integral factors in the acquisition of understanding to not only further current levels of knowledge but provide clarity regarding aspects which are subjective and often inexplicable.

Semi-structured Interviews

To execute the phenomenological-based framework of this research, in-person and individual interviews were conducted. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were implemented to provide an element of determined design and margin of flexibility in the component of question development (Humphrey & Lee, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Seidman, 2006). During the progression of each dialogue, participants responded to a series of designated questions within overarching literature-based topics that were presented in every interview (Barriball & While, 1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011). Depending upon provided responses during each dialogue, the researcher verbally expressed probes in conjunction with the established questions as a qualitative method (Barriball & While, 1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011). This specific procedure allowed for the unveiling of further thoughts and emotional expression conveyed by participants during the progression of the dialogues.

For the three sources of focus within this research, all dialogues were completed in summer 2020. Overall, 36 participants, identified through participant selected pseudonyms, were selected based on verbal identification with the established criteria on-site within GRSM and INDU and were interviewed within the applicable research settings. Regarding the source involving worship service attendees, all interviews took place within GRSM and involved 15 of the total collective. For the source including employed individuals who were implementing worship services in association with ACMNP, 16 participants composed this source and all interviews were completed within GRSM. Concerning the source involving individuals who selected to take part in a religious-based retreat, five participants formed this source and all the interviews took place within INDU. Due to the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, this ongoing global epidemic influenced the source involving those who attended a

religious-based retreat due to travel restrictions and impactful health considerations. While COVID-19 influenced the level of interaction received through this specific source, the point of saturation or occurrence of iterative detail was determined for all three sources and a level of in-depth information was acquired as a result of the data collection phase to formulate an overall understanding and essence description of the experienced phenomena (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

To transcribe and analyze the acquired data, qualitative analysis software was employed as a form of organization and data management (Morris et al., 2018). Specifically, NVivo (Version 12) was employed to implement evaluation methods in alignment with the involved phenomenological framework (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Morris et al., 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Rochette et al., 2006). Upon the containment of the interviews (with an average length of 84.3 minutes) within NVivo, bracketing was incorporated by the researcher to approach the data with an uninhibited ability to gather the present items that describe and contribute to the phenomena of focus without the influence of outside elements (e.g., researcher bias or preconceived thought processes; Chenail, 2011; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Through this process, the researcher aimed to consistently evaluate the data through an adapted, participant viewpoint to ensure the array of verbal expressions were captured in a manner reflective of associated non-verbal cues, contextual details (e.g., research setting), and underlying meanings to appropriately inform the resulting phenomena essence, such as the role of religion within the belief- and social-based experiences of participants while in a natural context (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005).

Next, each interview was transcribed through NVivo using the transcription capability (Edwards-Jones, 2014). While this electronic method was employed, the researcher manually evaluated each interview and included all the expressed verbiage provided by participants and ensured every file reflected the exact thoughts which were expressed. Once the transcriptions were assessed for accuracy and precision, an inductive coding technique was utilized to manually evaluate the collective data and highlight specific phrases or statements provided by each participant (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). During this step, the researcher formed codes based on re-occurring and novel expressions provided by the participants. Further, the codes were also formed through the utilization of expressed key words or exact verbiage. This procedure was used to serve as a form of assessment concerning the introduction of outside influences (i.e., bias) and ensure the foundation of the overall essence description resulted in the precise reflection of participant sentiments. Using the formed codes, a thematic analysis was initiated through the formation of clusters and development of subthemes from the formed groupings (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Orr et al., 2016). Similar to the implemented bracketing technique, the clusters were composed based on observed similarities within the developed codes and focused on maintaining consistency not only in the words spoken by participants, but both the verbal and non-verbal expressions to each statement (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

From the resulting clusters, the thematic analysis progressed through the formation of subthemes to reflect commonalities and shared meanings amongst clusters (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). This process was completed in an iterative fashion through not only a continuous utilization of participant verbiage within the subthemes, but an evaluation of parallel descriptions and assurance of appropriate cluster classifications as the foundation for the cohesive statements

(Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). With the conclusion of subtheme development, the action of shared themes was utilized to group subthemes which reflected similarities in composition and progress towards the development of an essence description through the inclusion of continuous methods focused on achieving trustworthiness involving consistency and rigor (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). A refining process was implemented with the categorized subthemes and a further narrowing of the data was implemented (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). Specifically, a tailored series of final subthemes were developed and used as overarching influences in the development of an overall essence description concerning the role of religion and experiencing God within the social interactions of Christians while engaging in nature-based experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

Throughout the progression from bracketing to thematic analysis and essence description development, a continuous evaluation of accurate and precise representations of not only the participant expressions were evaluated, but an association with the established research question as well (Morris et al., 2017). During each process, the overarching research question was considered and utilized as a primary influence in conjunction with participant thoughts to form a resulting description of the phenomena of focus (Morris et al., 2017). In addition to these specific methods, an internal peer review process was executed as an in-depth review of the data analysis stage (Morris et al., 2017). Two professors who specialize in qualitative research within an environment of higher education observed and reviewed all applicable files within this research to ensure trustworthiness and reputable actions were present throughout the entire process. Each peer review took place independently and involved an individual-based review followed by in-depth discussion pertaining to the collective data analysis stage (Morris et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within qualitative research involves the inclusion of strategies to maintain a standard of rigor in the level of applicability (i.e., transferability), consistency (i.e., dependability), truth value (i.e., credibility), and neutrality (i.e., confirmability) when applied through other contexts (Fefer at al., 2018; Krefting, 1991). To maintain procedures that focus on the aspect of trustworthiness and the associated factors during the varying phases of this research, measures were taken in an iterative manner to enhance the overall level of credibility (Figure 2.1). Specifically, measures were implemented during the data collection and analysis phases of this research to address the potential inclusion of characteristics that could distort the results and merit (Table 2.2; Anney, 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Krefting, 1991; Yateem, 2012). For the implementation of semi-structured interviews, methods involving recording devices and researcher reflections were completed during and after the progression of each individual interview (Carlson, 2010; Rabionet, 2011; Yateem, 2012). As the interviews were initiated and progressed, multiple recording devices that are designed to capture the ongoing audio were implemented (Rabionet, 2011). This provided a resource to not only capture the participant responses but provide a viable resource for the transcription phase during the execution of data analysis (Rabionet, 2011).

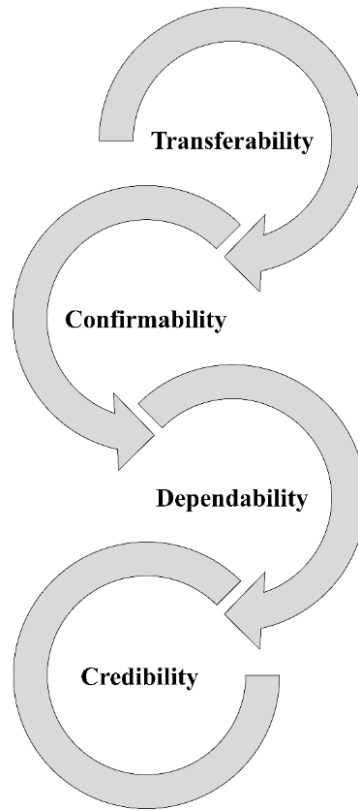


Figure 2.1. Representation of iterative processes taken to address the aspects of transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility within this research.

Table 2.2. Qualitative strategies and methods incorporated within this research.

Trustworthiness Component of Focus	Description	Examples of Incorporated Methods
<i>Transferability</i>	Involves the application of determined information within the research to other endeavors that share similar conditions	1. Triangulation
<i>Confirmability</i>	Includes the progression of research without the involvement of influential elements that could misconstrue the overall process (e.g., researcher bias)	1. Recognition of researcher bias 2. Peer Debriefing 3. Triangulation
<i>Dependability</i>	Incorporates the transferal of research procedures within varying contexts and supporting the methodology with varying information sources	1. Peer Debriefing 2. Triangulation
<i>Credibility</i>	Involves the alignment of methodological procedures, collected data, and interpreted outcomes that are aligned and contribute to the perceived merit or level of truth	1. Triangulation 2. Member Checking

(Krefting, 1991)

Further, the use of qualitative procedures involving triangulation were included throughout this research (Decrop, 1999). Triangulation is the use of varying and multiple information outlets to address the level of trustworthiness and development of mitigation strategies concerning bias introduction (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999). The element of triangulation can be included within qualitative research through steps focused on the collected data, the involved researcher within the data collection and analysis phases, or literature and theoretical-based frameworks (Decrop, 1999). In consideration of varied forms of data, researcher reflections were completed upon the conclusion of the interviews and throughout the iterative data analysis phase (Decrop, 1999). Details describing present contexts and nuances of participant characteristics that correlated to provided responses were of focus during this form of triangulation (Decrop, 1999).

Additional methods to address the component of trustworthiness within this research involved member checking and peer debriefing (Carlson, 2010; Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Member checking involves the inclusion of opportunities for involved participants to assess the transcribed data acquired by the present researcher during the completion of interviews (Carlson, 2010). Peer debriefing is a process where an outside individual comprehends and assesses the data sources, transcriptions, thematic analysis, and essence description that were completed and derived by the involved researcher (Lietz et al., 2006). Within this research, member checking was completed during the data analysis phase through the provision of verbatim transcriptions to each participant which resulted from their interview. When provided with the transcriptions, participants were offered with the opportunity to bring forth any form of verification or recommended alterations to ensure their words and thoughts were appropriately represented. Similarly, peer debriefing was also completed within the data analysis phase through the

inclusion of two professors in higher education who are established and accomplished within the realm of qualitative research. A dialogue was executed between the involved researcher and academic faculty to address any form of distorting characteristics (i.e., bias) that could influence the findings and how to execute the completion of rigorous procedures (Lietz et al., 2006).

Researcher Bias

The researcher for this study identifies as a Christian and aims to maintain the beliefs and structured or unstructured practices that align with this religion. The religious beliefs of the researcher are considered to be primary, foundational aspects in their life and serve as not only the main inspiration for the execution of this research, but how they select to approach and behave. This aspect transcends into their nature-based experiences and how they express their perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes regarding natural settings. A significant influence in the notable relationship the researcher maintains towards nature is the role their religious beliefs play regarding how they view themselves, nature, and the higher deity in which they believe (i.e., God). It is within nature-based experiences when the researcher expresses a magnified, indescribable connection to God based on the immersion within the creation He established. As a result, the researcher aims to reflect their beliefs through better understanding how individuals that identify as Christians experience God in nature and how this infiltrating component translates into their overall approach to life. Due to the presence of this recognized bias, the conveyance of this information is acknowledged and the inclusion of steps to mitigate the role of outside influences within the developed findings were continuous throughout this research. Further, this bias is explicitly stated to not only provide attention to items of consideration when evaluating the involved content of this research but offer insight into an infiltrating aspect which motivates the researcher to complete efforts which aim to assist in understanding the foundational aspects of

life which could serve as pivotal influences in truly understanding what motivates the facets of their existence.

Results

Demographics

For all three sources within this research, general demographic information was obtained during the progression of interviews (Table 2.3). The specific demographics of focus include gender, age, and ethnicity. When each question was presented to participants, an option to respond or not respond was provided and appropriate actions were taken as a result of the participants verbal expression(s). As a result of these specific interview questions, a majority of participants were female (N=23). Further, the average age in years for all sources was 34. Lastly, Caucasian was the primary ethnicity (N=35) for the sources involved within this research.

Table 2.3. Demographics for all three sources involved within this research.

Demographics	Data (Percentage, Range)
<i>Gender:</i>	
Female	23 (64%)
Male	13 (36%)
<i>Mean Age (In Years):</i>	34 (18-94)
<i>Ethnicity:</i>	
Caucasian	35 (97%)
Asian and Caucasian	1 (3%)

Group-based or Communal Activities and Experiencing God

For this research, the overarching objective aimed to further acquire detail and in-depth understanding pertaining to the connection and experience of God conveyed by Christians when spending time in nature with other individuals through group-based or communal activities. Due

to the inclusion of spoken and expressed meanings by each participant, the reflected quotations are composed of these descriptions and associated with the applicable pseudonym as chosen by each participant. In consideration of group-based or communal activities and associated social interaction completed while present within the research settings, most participants expressed an experiencing of a range of activities with those who do or do not share similar beliefs while in nature (Table 2.4). When spending time in nature with those who do not share the same Christian beliefs, participants conveyed a sharing of “community” (Arturo) and “closeness” (Faye) despite the existence of differentiating beliefs and diverse perspectives. Participants specifically related the presence of varying viewpoints to a method of exposure to the existence of “different stories” (Lucy) and the provision of the ability to engage in an “exchange of experiences” (Paschal). Further, participants felt as though dialogues where contrasting beliefs were present allowed for the opportunity to share a “testimony or praise” (Paschal) as a way to express “what God’s doing in other people’s lives” (Megan) even if the presence of a common belief in God is not existent within the social interactions.

Table 2.4. Initial and final composed subthemes as a result of the thematic analysis completed within this research utilizing key words and phrases provided by participants.

Initial Subthemes	Final and Refined Subthemes	Quote
<i>Thematic Analysis Group One:</i>		
Nature enhances the impact of social interaction by increasing bond formation and appreciation between individuals through enlivening physical and emotional experiences	Nature encourages solitude and social interaction, but evokes awe when individuals gather and are inspired to openly connect and with natural surroundings and each other	<i>"Enjoy and love the same things together and that's, we, and when everyone knows or most of the people know that it's from God and that that's why we're all in awe. We're not in awe because it's pretty. We're awe because we all love the same God who put it there. And that's the most powerful, awesome feeling ever. And I never had that until this summer. And I think that's why I'm so happy, is because I have people, I'm not just by myself trekking through the woods with my backpack. It's I have my friends, my family. And I just sit here and I'm like, wow, this is why we're here. And this is why we live the way that we do."</i>
Nature is central to social interaction and encourages a sense of awe and appreciation of the surroundings, including both natural- and human-based characteristics		
Nature is a context for solitude and results in increased connections felt by individuals with the natural surroundings when alone or when completed as a group		

Nature inspires a collectivistic atmosphere which transfers love, connection, openness, meditation, authenticity, and exhilaration during shared experiences and lasting memories		
Nature facilitates the implementation of religious practices and not only reminds Christians of who they are, but encourages individuals with different beliefs to engage in the same experience and take part in forming a community of love and growth spiritually and mentally		
Nature is simplified when experienced alone		

Thematic Analysis Group Two:

God is always present and is experienced more by Christians when observing the diversity or intricacy of nature and the experiences of others	God is present in communal or group-based activities and solitude through the provision of needs and observance of diversity in nature	<i>"I know the last family reunion that me and my family went on, my aunt was dying of cancer and this, that was the reason we are all like, you know, we have to get together like she's not going to make it to the next one. And so, we went to a camping ground. We were either in tents or campers. The beach was right there. But to see God be able to bring us all together, but not just that, to see Him give the strength to her to make it through that, it was stage four colon cancer there. She tried everything. And she was she like, she knew, and she was ready. And it was very sad to see, like, she was very frail, but she pushed herself. And I know it was more than just her that pushed yourself. I know</i>
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		<i>God gave her the strength to make it through that family reunion, know, the last family reunion that we can all be together."</i>
God is a friend, provider, and source of everything Who is interwoven in experiences		
God is present and works in social interaction through individuals acting as 'vessels of love' and facilitating the working of God		
God is experienced more in moments of solitude and allows for more connection to nature or the ability to contemplate life-based situations		
God is present and connects all individuals through gatherings including individuals who do or do not share the same beliefs		

Thematic Analysis Group Three:

Social interaction in nature introduces feelings of acceptance and community	Social interaction allows individuals to express their authentic self and thus be open with others and feel a sense of euphoria and comfort as a result	<i>"But, yeah, just kind of like when you meet someone like that and when they show you that genuine care, like especially in nature, it's just it's for me it's like even more euphoric, like it's it's like, man, this person really understands, like the environment that we're in. They understand like who God is. And, and they want to s-, you know, they're, they're real and they want to, authentically, want to show you that real love, you know. And I think that's when, when you receive that. It's just like. These are the kind of people I want to put myself around. These are the kind of people that, like God has put in my life for this r-, you know, for "X", "Y", "Z" reason, you know, like, um, and, and He's really just showing me, like, He's just showing up in so many amazing ways through them, you know, He's blessing me. He's blessing me through them."</i>
Social interaction in nature provides feelings of trust, comfort, and confidence from connections with individuals and God		
Social interaction evokes feelings of gladness or excitement and is taken advantage of by individuals while in nature		
Social interaction evokes a rawness, humility, and euphoria amongst individuals		

which produces love and a tangible feeling of God being present		
Social interaction encourages accomplishments and a feeling of purpose or inspiration through nature-based experiences and God		
<i>Thematic Analysis Group Four:</i>		
Those who identify as Christians engage in a range of nature-based activities with individuals who do or do not share similar beliefs in nature through social interaction	Christians spend time with individuals who do and do not share the same beliefs in nature engaging in both religious and non-religious activities	<i>"So, I was in a, a kind of a, they call it discipleship program, so it, it was where, it's a nine-month program for the homeless and they basically take nine months and teach you about God and stuff like that. But we did a lot of stuff where we went out like kayaking and stuff and just the camaraderie and the, that sense of community and closeness with each other. And it, it was kind of a reminder that no, no matter what differences we have, we always have that one thing in common, and that's our, our love for God and His love for us. So, it, we did a lot of stuff where we went out on, like, nature trails and like kayaking and stuff. But like she was saying earlier, like just knowing that you're all there and you have that one thing in common, it's really cool."</i>

Those who identify as Christians engage in religious-based activities in nature with individuals who do and do not share similar beliefs to focus on nature and how this connects to both God and His creation (i.e., humanity and nature)		
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Further, participants identified these moments as opportunities to “open their eyes to a world that they may not have really known or explored before” (Lily) through sharing their beliefs with others and establish a “presence of love for one another” (Kay). It was observed by participants that each experience where individuals with varying beliefs were present reflected intersections of time and space where they were “meant to be with them” (Nicole) and engage in social interactions within natural settings to experience a “complete freedom” (Madison), “rawness” (Niko), and sense of “awe in the people” (Emma). Kade stated:

“And I remember, God sparked a lot of some of the most interesting conversations in my life than there God brought to mind people, He brought up conversations that changed all of us He had, talked about things that are incredible.”

Additionally, participants expressed these experiences as involving a level of encouragement through a “motivation to share” (Jimmy) with others and the parallel of being with others in nature as a “happy place” (Emma) which collectively conjoin as a detection of God through the expression of “heart” (Niko) which is facilitated during social interactions in natural settings. As a reflection, Niko stated:

“That story that always happens on the trail, you know, whether it's just like someone sharing their heart out or just, you know, you know, that person or, you know, another person just sharing, like, something funny that happened to them, like, you know, a few weeks prior. But there's this like this connection that you, that this, that this, like environment encourages. And it's just one of those things where you really just get a deep sense of, I think, love from God.”

Further, Jimmy noted the increase in mental health and spiritual walk that is experienced through engagement of social interaction within a natural setting based on reflections involving:

“If I spend too much time alone, without social interaction, I, I know that, you know, whether it is whether it it's branded Christian or branded spiritual or not, if I'm alone too long, I can tell that it has a negative impact on my mental health. And, and my spiritual and my walk with the Lord as well. And so, when you combine social interaction with being outdoors and in nature, it doesn't get any better for me.”

Participants also expressed that God was present through an experience of being “still and very warm” (Eva) while spending time with others in the research settings. Through these experiences, participants stated that social interaction provided a way in which people are a “gateway to being even closer to God” (Emma) based on the level of engagement and in-depth reflection or connection that can take place in these moments of “reassurance” (Mike), feeling “blessed” (Arturo), feeling “appreciated” (Arturo), and experiencing “gratitude” (Flynn). Abigail described experiencing God through social interaction as:

“Um, it, it strengthens me. It's like all of us, we have each other's backs. Um and that fellowship is very, very meaningful. It's what God meant for us to have. Um, and there's a lot that can be reaped from being alone, but there's so much that can be reaped from being together. That was His intention for us, just like we'll be together in heaven, you know.”

When spending time in social interaction with other individuals who share similar beliefs and identify as a Christian, participants portrayed these moments as “euphoric” (Niko) and a means to “support and to comfort” (Ellen) other individuals to express a sense of compassion through reflecting “care about their story” (Lucy). Phoebe represented this provision of support as:

“And some people are like really, really struggling and mourning and like, don't know where God is. And you have like all of these things together, just like mix with one another. And it's just like you get one sound and that's praise. And I think that, like, the people that are experiencing like, like highs in life and like the like mountain top moments are able to like, carry and sing for people who are not able to, like, sing for themselves.”

Through a commonality of beliefs and viewpoints concerning the progression of existence, participants conveyed a transferal of similarity in the intention which individual's elected to be within nature, such as feeling as though “everyone there, is there for the same purpose” (Kay). Specifically, this sense of shared purpose was represented through a

commonality in the observance of nature as a source “awe” (Mike). Mike stated this experience of awe as:

“We're not in awe because it's pretty. We're awe because we all love the same God who put it there.”

It was portrayed by participants that this common view of nature allowed for the progression of in-depth dialogues similar to when engaging in social interactions with those who do not share similar beliefs but offered a way to experience a recognition where all present individuals provide a “reminder that no, no matter what differences we have, we always have that one thing in common, and that’s our, our love for God and His love for us” (Trent). Marie compared these dialogues to a being in a “different world” by stating:

“You experience Him a lot because you're, you're involved in that, you're having people come and, and talk to you about the Lord and you're in a different world, could I say you're in a different world when you're with Christians and God is always there right in the middle with each one of us.”

Similarly, Mike expressed these moments of social interaction in natural settings as opportunities to recognize a common love for God and recognition of Him within implemented social interactions by conveying:

“That's why we're here and that's why we love Him so much. And we all when everyone notices that in a group at once, it's powerful because we're all thinking the same thing without it being said. And that's God being like, “yes, you are my children, and you are here to worship that and love that so much”. So, it's so cool.”

Additionally, participants also expressed that social interactions with those who share similar beliefs provided opportunities to engage in “prayer” (David) or “prayer in one voice” (Arturo), “worshipping” (Kay), “singing together” (Ellen), and “praising God” (Thea). Within these specific group-based or communal activities, participants conveyed an opportunity to execute “praising God for, like, the beauty of what was around” (James) and feeling a sudden

desire to “break out into song” (Mike) as they “believe the same thing of the same ideologies” (Mike) and “have the same energy and charisma towards it, and the same excitement for it” (Mike). Further, participants shared these moments serve as “a one on one with God” (Eva) as each individual potentially perceives the existence and presence of God within the shared moments of such expressions (e.g., prayer, singing and praising God through worship, etc.). As a result, most participants portrayed that these collective moments of social interaction or engagement of communal, religious expressions not only take the form of group-based experiences, but individual connections with God as well. Through these moments, participants stated experiencing an “amplification” (Jimmy) through both social interaction and connecting with God within natural settings. Jimmy stated:

“We gather on the, on, on a hill that overlooks the Northeast River several times throughout the summer, and it's a, it's a, a time of praise and worship with not only the people from the campground, but also families that are that are spending a week or doing a retreat at the during family camp, during these family camp weeks at their lodge. And so, there is there is a you know, it's, it's organized. It's orchestrated, you have the band, you're singing the songs. But the money for me, where, where I see God showing up, if you will, is when I look and I see my children with the backdrop, I'm, I'm, I have this one picture of, of seeing, seeing my, my daughter standing with her friends, the sun was setting on the river and she had her hands raised, worshipping the Lord and I mean one, it's a, it's a tremendously proud dad moment, but, but to be in such a beautiful setting, with so many people that are united in purpose and mind, it, it amplifies it amplifies that worship more than any plug-in amplifier that they could the you know, that they could use to enhance the sound of the band.”

Nature and Experiencing God

In consideration of natural settings in relation to the context of where group-based or communal activities can take place, most participants expressed that nature served as a “central” (Kade) element within the social interactions they generally selected to complete. During these experiences, participants also conveyed nature can lead individuals to be “more open with other people” (Ashley) while experiencing the “unreal” (Madison) characteristics of the natural

scenery. Through these collective moments within a natural setting, participants referenced the ability to engage in social interaction, while in an outdoor context, fosters a “level of appreciation of the environment” (Niko) and allows individuals to “be real” (Renee), “much more trusting” (Renee), and observe nature as a “clearly magical” (Emma) resource. It is within these nature-based experiences that participants portrayed a unified collective which serves as a form of “family” (Kay) as a result of engaging in the atmosphere which natural settings provide and “you don’t really find that anywhere else” (Niko). Kay referred to this “family building” aspect as reflected through social interactions with those who share a similar belief system in nature as:

“It’s very family building. It’s very nice to know that our family is very strong in that and that we can depend on each other if we need them with our relationship with God.”

This conveyed sense of connection amongst individuals and nature was further extrapolated to God within the dynamic through a recognition of the focus elements being “all connected” (Phoebe). Based on the detection of “true community” (Arturo) as being “a pillar of Christianity” (Arturo) as reflected by participants, natural settings were recognized as a “favorite place to be” (Faye) and especially in consideration of NPS units as conveyed by Faye who stated:

“So, I mean, if we have, like Sunday school parties, my favorite place, and the place I’ll always recommend is coming out-, into the national park and having a picnic, you know that it’s my favorite place to be.”

Within these locations (i.e., NPS units), God was observed as “the master artist” (Elizabeth) and the natural composition was portrayed as “God’s canvas being painted” (Ward). Further, this recognition of God within the present research settings brought to fruition revelations by participants concerning the enhanced ability to connect with God and individuals within natural contexts. Abigail portrayed this sentiment by stating:

“And I guess, like when, when I'm out in nature again, it's, it's easier to connect with Him a lot, a lot easier. Um, and it's almost like when I'm praying and I, I don't have to try to envision myself in nature, I'm here. I don't have to try to envision myself with my friends and loved ones because in this situation they're here. And so, it's all t-, all the easier to, to, to see them with that shaft of, of beautiful light over them and to, to sync my heart with God's and to try and see them the way that God does. And that's what I mean by amplify it.”

Participants also expressed an increased level of ease which was presented through social interactions in nature as a “feeling of closeness” (Faye) which transferred not only to their connection with present individuals, but God as well. This role of nature to “amplify” (Abigail) social interactions and experiencing of God was demonstrated through an interrelation or perceived “triangle” (Mike) containing God, individuals through social interaction, and nature by participants. Within this interrelated sentiment, most participants expressed that all aspects of this dynamic work “simultaneously” (Mike) and conjoin “perfectly” (Mike). Participants reflected a commonality in their ability to “feel more comfortable” (Renee) in nature and ultimately engage in social interactions with others that provide an individual the opportunity to “feel like that love from another person” (Niko) and thus “really feel, you know, God” (Niko). In further reflection, Phoebe reflected the interconnected aspect of these features as being spurred through natural settings by stating:

“I recognize like God's relationship with nature, God is the creator of nature. God is my Creator and my King and my Lord I'm part of I'm part of the nature that God created. And I think that, like, then it's that's not just me, but it's also, everybody else is also part of this. And so, while, like, my friend might not be, a tree, I also recognize that, like, my friend is part of this world and these creations that God has, created.”

While most participants conveyed an increased ability to connect with both nature and God through social interactions, some participants referenced solitude as the mode in which they most perceive God. Specifically, the role of social interaction in the experiencing of God while in a natural setting was observed as an influence which “hinders” (David) an individual's ability

to recognize and perceive God. When spending time in a natural setting, some participants expressed that “a lot of times being in solitude helps me connect more to God in nature” (Ashley). This form of experience served as an alternate aspect expressed by some participants who viewed the ability to interact with others in natural settings as an opportunity where they can “really sense God’s presence” (Ruth) due to the ability to observe the role of God in interactions with others, such as a reflection by Ruth involving:

“I, I really find when you pray with someone else, um, you know, maybe at the end of a service or whatever, you know, as part of that service in the group activity, you can really sense God's presence. You can sense His care and love and concern for that person in that moment because of how your heart toward them is even just praying for them. I really feel like that's a tangible way that you sense God's presence.”

Similar to the “exchange of, of experiences” (Paschal) and perceived ability to “put things in perspective” through social interactions and an initiated “dialogue” (Paschal), adjacent sentiments were acquired by some participants when considering the role of social interaction in natural settings except through the presence of solitude and thus the absence of engagement with physical individuals. As a result, social interaction could result in some participants feeling “more distracted” (Flynn) and result in a reduced experience of God. Specifically, David stated:

“It hinders it. That's what it tends to do. I think solitude and silence and prayer and song in my own way and my own time tends to be a lot more connecting than it does in a communal sense. So, I would say, generally speaking, it hinders it.”

Essence Description

Collectively, participants displayed the enhancement or elevation of experiences within nature (i.e., NPS units) as a result of not only spending time with others but experiencing God as well. Through engaging in social interaction, participants shared the opportunity to observe both nature and other individuals through a perspective which is informed by their religious beliefs and connection or relationship with God. Specifically, the perceived relationship with God

served as an influential element with the “triangle effect” (Mike) which results in the evolvement of both nature-based experiences and the opportunity to authentically connect with others in a space which facilitates the progression of honest, raw connections. Overall, the overarching essence description of how Christians encounter and undergo this phenomena includes: “Being in nature with other individuals creates an experience of authenticity that allows all individuals to feel inspired and comforted by not only each other, but creation and God” (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5. Final subthemes and overall essence description as a result of the completed thematic analysis within this research utilizing key words and phrases provided by participants.

Final and Refined Subthemes	Essence Description	Quote
<i>All Subthemes and Inspired Essence Description:</i>		
Nature encourages solitude and social interaction, but evokes awe when individuals gather and are inspired to openly connect and with natural surroundings and each other	Being in nature with other individuals creates an experience of authenticity that allows all individuals to feel inspired and comforted by not only each other, but creation and God	<i>"It's the people God loves with God in the place God loves, with me knowing I'm loved, and full of joy and, here to help each other. And it's like it's the complete picture. It's the way it's meant to be. It's wholeness. And that's not to say that apart from people, I, I cannot be happy or or just content, I guess. But we are a part of a body. And so, when all of our parts come together in the place God m- meant for us to be, it's like we are in, like and then we're in His presence. It really is like we're, we're dining with Him at the table in His house with His friends."</i>
God is present in communal or group-based activities and solitude through the provision of needs and observance of diversity in nature		
Social interaction allows individuals to express their authentic self and thus be open with others and feel a sense of euphoria and comfort as a result		

<p>Christians spend time with individuals who do and do not share the same beliefs in nature engaging in both religious and non-religious activities</p>		
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Discussion

Throughout the progression of subthemes to essence description within the completed thematic analysis of this research, participants conveyed that social interaction within nature is often elevated and can result in not only the establishment of an open dynamic where individuals feel a sense of authenticity (i.e., within the group and as individuals through self-expression), but the ability to experience the presence of God. Specifically, participants portrayed the experiencing of God through the provision of resources, acquisition of comfort from being with others, ability to observe the diversity within present natural settings, and opportunity to engage in social interactions with individuals who do and do not share similar beliefs. Further, participants also expressed an experiencing of God not only during engagement with others, but in moments of solitude and disconnection from group-based or communal activities. Through these primary expressions conveyed by participants, these subthemes provide insight into the overarching description of the phenomena which is experiencing God during moments of social interaction within nature, specifically NPS units.

Participants' experiencing of the focus phenomena of this research collectively conveys the primary tenet of authenticity in a manner which spurs the progression of transparent connections amongst individuals through both religious and non-religious forms. The ability to engage in social interaction provided participants with the opportunity to observe and experience God through not only the natural scenery and characteristics which surrounded them during those moments, but the individuals which composed the group in which they were embarking on experiences with. Through these dynamic connections, participants were able to engage in a level of openness with others and acquire a sense of inspiration to "come together in the place God m-, meant for us to be" (Abigail) and experience the "complete picture" (Abigail) involving

social interaction, natural settings, and the experiencing of God. Abigail reflected this sentiment by stating:

“It's the people God loves with God in the place God loves, with me knowing I'm loved, and full of joy and, here to help each other. And it's like it's the complete picture. It's the way it's meant to be. It's wholeness. And that's not to say that apart from people, I, I cannot be happy or, or just content, I guess. But we are a part of a body. And so, when all of our parts come together in the place God m- meant for us to be, it's like we are in, like and then we're in His presence. It really is like we're, we're dining with Him at the table in His house with His friends.”

Based on the shared source expressions within this research, this essence description brings forth a notable impact from the reflected “triangle effect” (Mike) and how the interaction of the three components not only elevates each aspect individually but brings forth a genuine manner through the collective dynamic (Figure 2.2). As a result, this form of accentuation holistically provides a unique view into not only the collective impact the focus phenomena provides within group-based or communal activities, but the specific inclusion of social interaction within these moments. It is concluded that based on the lived experiences of the involved participants, social interaction served as a meaningful component within their nature-based experiences and specifically the facets of not only connecting to nature through NPS units, but God primarily. It was through these collective experiences which God served as a foundational element within the elevation of their overall ventures and the involved characteristics.

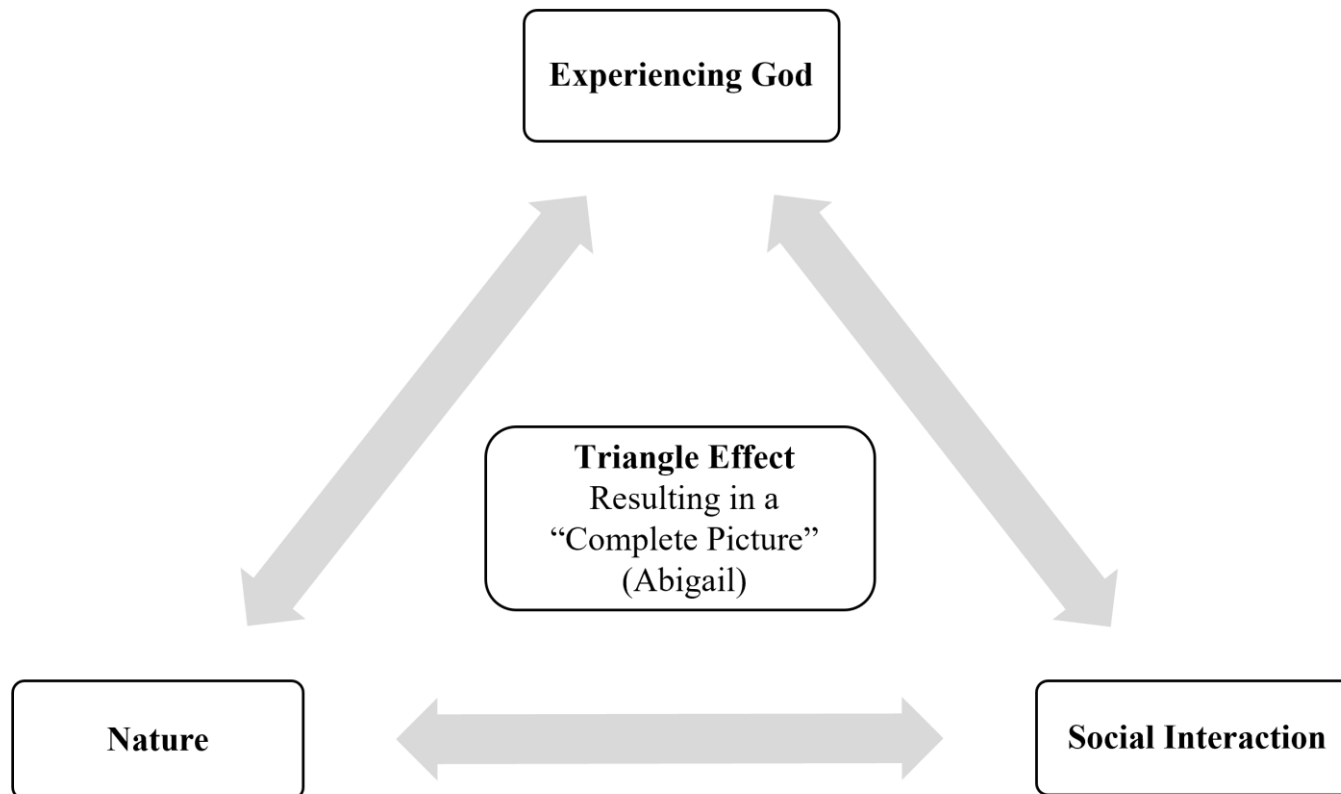


Figure 2.2. The reflected “triangle effect” (Mike) by participants which collectively displays the “complete picture” (Abigail) through the multifaceted phenomena which involves 1) experiencing God, 2) presence in nature, and 3) social interaction.

In consideration of the natural setting portion of this effect, participants conveyed a shared desire to seek out experiences within nature as a means to connect and engage with God as well. Further, some participants referenced the utilization of NPS units as specific contexts or outlets to experience the focus phenomena. Others, spend time in solitude, and as a result, the research settings in association with NPS units were found to be a significant context in the facilitation of the expressed “triangle effect” (Mike) and further highlights the importance of these sites in both their roles in protecting these diverse landscapes and the experiential opportunities contained within. While the progression of this collective impact amongst the three factors could be assumed to take place within any form of natural outlet, the direct interaction with each source within the research settings where participants selected to engage in nature-based experiences was referenced by most participants and serves as a prominent reflection of NPS units, such as GRSM and INDU, within the focus phenomena. This intentionality that was implemented by participants within their lived experiences conveys the potential probability or consistency in which individuals seek out nature-based experiences within NPS units and serve as re-occurring visitors to these settings. Through these shared moments, natural settings acted as a commonality amongst Christians and reflects the potential of NPS units to act as a form of “refuge” where their experiencing of natural characteristics, social interaction, and God are received in a truly authentic manner based on the “background” in which this effect is executed.

As a result, the ability to receive intrinsically transcendent experiences within these natural settings conveys the integral importance of access to NPS units and the facilitation of immersion within nature (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Coley et al., 1997; Griffis, 2017). Specifically, this could be considered through both an individual- and group-based viewpoint. Due to the notable role nature (i.e., NPS units) was found to play within the expressed thoughts

of participants, this relates to the accessible, equitable, and inclusive opportunity which should be provided to all individuals to engage in nature-based experiences and acquire benefits (i.e., tangible and/or intangible) or services offered through these spaces (Nicholls, 2001; Wang et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2008). It is through this uninhibited accessibility which individuals can partake in experiences within NPS units, and engage in landscapes which provide an opportunity to be “disconnected from the world” (Elizabeth) or from the progression of daily occurrences and spend time within moments which could result in the acquisition of transcendent or intangible, impactful outcomes based on the unique processes which compose these dynamics (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Coley et al., 1997; Griffis, 2017). Specifically, this relates to the opportunity of an individual to experience nature either individually or with a group in a manner which evokes “awe” (Emma) and allows for the engagement of moments infiltrated by revelations relating to the connections which individuals perceive with natural settings and/or the presence of social interaction. This expression was reflected by Ashley who stated:

“I just think working through nature and being in awe like makes you just appreciate so much more like the Earth.”

Through the presence and elevation of accessible nature-based ventures in association with NPS units, individuals are able to experience a sense of freedom to openly explore the spaces and potentially undergo an associated release of anxieties concerning this matter (Nicholls, 2001; Wang et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2008). As a result, individuals can engage in higher-level thought processes, such as belongingness and self-actualization or further self-transcendence as found within Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, and potentially observe nature in a “new light” or deepen their connection with various natural settings through the engagement of place attachment (Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). For example, the referenced experiencing of “awe” (Emma) by participants reflects the occurrence of potentially revelational

processes which could engage the progression of transforming frames of thought (Anderson et al., 2018; Ballew & Omoto, 2018). The expression of awe in relation to an experience often involves the evocation of notably advantageous or positive connotations associated with an extrinsic stimuli which fosters the occurrence of associated intrinsic outcomes (Anderson et al., 2018; Ballew & Omoto, 2018). As a result, the perception of this component as portrayed by participants is significant in consideration of the focus phenomena which could motivate this evocation and further the engrained connections (i.e., place attachment) to nature (i.e., NPS units) which could arise as a result (Anderson et al., 2018; Ballew & Omoto, 2018; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). It is through these moments that can expand in their enrichment and introduce the presence of further advantageous attributes within the life of those participating (e.g., the influence of awe; Anderson et al., 2018; Ballew & Omoto, 2018; Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). For example, accessible entrance to NPS units, provides individuals the opportunity to experience landscapes that reflect the essence of natural features and spend time within locations which may contrast their day-to-day routine (e.g., urban resident proximate to increased infrastructure or rural resident in proximity to an influx of private land; Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). The offering of equitable and inclusive nature-based experiences within NPS units is integral in relation to the imperative need for all individuals to freely visit these spaces (e.g., equitable and inclusive practices regarding entrance opportunities and time spent within natural settings, such as transportation and monetary considerations) and facilitate the potential fruition of infiltrating outcomes in relation to how individuals experience emotional, mental, and physical outcomes (Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001).

Based on the significance of accessibility to natural settings and the level of impact these experiences can have within the life of an individual, this is notable when considering the additional role of social interaction and group-based or communal activities as represented by participants within the “triangle effect” (Mike). The presence of verbal and non-verbal interactions with others in nature can be immense in consideration of the benefits that can be acquired from engaging in social interaction (Dionigi, 2007). The opportunity to spend time with others can provide positive outcomes involving emotional support during the occurrence of difficult circumstances, encouragement or motivation when striving to progress through a momentary situation or series of events which heighten anxiety, beneficial affirmations upon the acquisition of an achievement, or an open source of comfort and trust where deep thoughts or emotions can be shared (Dionigi, 2007). While these examples reflect the notable role of social interaction, these items serve as highlights of the breadth of advantageous outcomes which social interaction can inspire that are multifaceted and diverse in their presence (Dionigi, 2007).

The role of social interaction was portrayed by participants as an opportunity to receive a “deeper look” (Ellen) into the “heart” of an individual and further understand, “appreciate” (Ellen), and “love each other” (Madison) as a result. Through this, participants also conveyed a transferal of benefits from social interaction to all individuals. Despite the existence of beliefs, participants found that social interaction served as a medium to engage in genuine connection and experience a resounding effect of this dialogue due to their further increased engagement with the natural settings and God as well. Additionally, participants also expressed an opportunity to talk about their religious beliefs and “introduce them to the Creator” (Ruth; i.e., God) when speaking with those who share differing perspectives while also approaching these conversations with “love for one another” (Kay) and a common respect for the presence of a

respectful, mindful conversation which does not aim to introduce negative connotation(s). Based on the experienced impact of social interaction with others in a natural setting as shared by participants, this specific aspect in conjunction with the range of attributes which arise from social interaction highlight the impact of social norms regarding how individuals select to engage in social interaction and where these specific group-based or communal activities commence.

Social interaction and social norms serve as corresponding aspects based on the ability of verbal and non-verbal expressions to influence and motivate the completion of related behaviors by other individuals (Dyrenge et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007). In relation to the phenomena of focus within this research, the implementation of positive dialogues and ventures with others in a natural setting through the presence of differing beliefs reflects the existence of 1) situations which can be viewed as beneficial and enhanced in their probability to become re-occurring and 2) the existence of fruitful discussions which mindfully engage all participants in a deeper level of contemplation and potentially introduce new facets within their existence. Unknown or known social norms during the lived experiences participants highlight the immense and infiltrating significance of social interactions in its power to potentially introduce new realizations within the lives of individuals and further formulate positive associations to locations in which the positive dialogues took place, such as an NPS unit. As a result of this significance, the facilitation of group-based or communal activities within natural settings is notable and further reflects the enhanced need for accessible nature-based experiences and opportunities to engage in non-religious or religious ventures. It is through an atmosphere of hospitality and through serving as “vessels of God’s love” (Thea) as conveyed by participants in which the existence of accessibility can be transformed from not only extrinsic factors, but form into intrinsically diverse factors as well.

In further consideration of nature-based experiences and the opportunity to engage in social interaction, the “triangle effect” (Mike) as expressed by participants reflected an amplification both as individual and collective factors within this cohesive influence as a result sensing the presence of God within group-based or communal activities in these settings. Participants expressed connecting with God through “tangibly” (Ruth) sensing His presence or feeling an “overwhelming peace and a, overwhelming knowing that, the atmosphere has changed” (Ruth). During social interaction, the presence of God was conveyed through not only the natural settings, such as observing “His presence in the mountains, because, after all, it all goes back to belonging to Him in the first place” (Caleb), but within group dynamics as well where the presence of individuals was stated as “important and necessary” (Lucy). Further, the existence of individuals during nature-based experiences also served as a “gateway” (Emma) to “being even closer to God” (Emma) and observing “people as a reflection of God” (Emma) as shared by participants. It was conveyed that “every human has the image of God” (Thea) and participants highlighted the further significance of aspects involving place attachment, social norms, and accessibility through the expressed connection between their Christian beliefs and engagements with other individuals in natural settings (Dionigi, 2007; Dyreng et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007; Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001).

Specifically, these expressions reflect a holistic context of dynamics where the recognition of a “triangle effect” (Mike) within these experiences could have a notable impact within the life of all despite the occurrence of similar or contrasting beliefs. Through these lived experiences, it can be concluded that participant beliefs served formative factors in their 1) selection to engage in social interaction, 2) choice to spend time partaking in nature-based experiences, and 3) experience a form of transcendent or higher-level thought through the

acquisition of personal revelations and the experiencing of a higher deity based on this scheme of factors (Bridges, 1969; Coley et al., 1997; Davies, 2018; Dyreng et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Schultz et al., 2007). As a result, this serves as the progression of a notable series of occurrences within a visitation experience (i.e., within an NPS unit) in which individuals elect to spend time in group-based or communal activities. As a result, participants conveyed an ability to experience not only people in an open and genuine manner, but nature and God as well. The presence of participant beliefs served as an amplifying influence and this significance is immense in consideration of the connections individuals perceive with natural settings (i.e., place attachment), how they select to behave when around other individuals (i.e., social norms), and where they select to implement these shared experiences (i.e., accessibility; Dionigi, 2007; Dyreng et al., 2012; Schultz et al., 2007; Taormina & Gao, 2013; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Based on the role of religion as expressed by participants, this further highlights the consideration which should be provided regarding furthering the hospitable atmosphere within nature which encourages the implementation of engaging social interactions. Through these provisions, attributes associated with fostered engrained affinities concerning natural characteristics or facilitated expressions regarding an aspect of life which is sacred and authentic in its composition could further allow for the unveiling of a phenomena which can potentially transform the life-based viewpoints of individuals in a holistically raw context.

Conclusions

Overall, the focus phenomena within this research was found to be a notable influence not only within the group-based or communal activities of participants, but the nature-based experiences of participants within NPS units as well. Specifically, the factor of experiencing God within these collective ventures provided participants the opportunity to authentically engage in

connections with the natural surroundings which composed their present context and the individuals which formed the social atmosphere. Based on the Christian beliefs of participants and their perception of God, these specific components were found to be amplified through social interactions with others and further through the natural creation which composed these moments of gathering. It was found that the religious beliefs held by an individual can be an elevating aspect within their life-based choices and specifically their meaningful relationships which are formed with others, nature, and God. As a result, this level of in-depth and transcendent characteristic which composes the focus phenomena and the facets of these specific experiences (i.e., social interaction and natural surroundings), brings forth a notable level of attention which should be offered to the provision of these moments. Specifically, the protection and conservation of landscapes through invaluable endeavors, such as NPS units, should be an evolving focus which aims to incorporate equitable, accessible experiences for all. Further, this level of recognition should also be extrapolated in a manner which assists in the progression of social atmospheres where all individuals feel accepted to experience these priceless natural marvels. It is through the opportunity to openly experience God and have this powerful element infiltrate into the connection with both nature and others that participants were able to view all of their surroundings with a positively alternate vantage point (e.g., experiencing of transcendent awe, honest connection with God, seeing nature as an expression of love from God, etc.).

As a result, this perspective could act as a motivating influence in the progression of advantageous outcomes within their life (e.g., continued connection to nature through place attachment and reception of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual attributes) and the existence of all beings and processes involved (e.g., enhancement of pro-environmental behaviors, fostering of lasting bonds with individuals, renewed sense of purpose as provided by

God to connect with others, etc.). Experiencing God within group-based or communal activities in nature could serve as a pivotal role due to the expressed experiences of participants and the divine influence which could result in the implementation of positive, transformative, and transcendent outcomes and further spans beyond a single context and moment in time. Based on this, additional research which aims to further unveil details concerning this dynamic, multilayered experience and progressive phenomena within these specific moments in nature and outside of these contexts as well could ultimately amplify the involved findings. Through this, the continuous revealing of a powerful experience of nature, social interaction, and God could occur and provide contributing insight into an element of existence which is notably infiltrating and could resolve the formation of pervasive benefits for both individuals and nature as a whole.

Limitations

Throughout this research, measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigor were mainstays and continuous pillars. While procedures to address the element of trustworthiness were employed, the influence of human error is presented as a limitation within this research. Due to the proximity of the overarching objective to the personal beliefs and life-based perspectives of the involved researcher, the potential introduction of influence could be an occurrence (i.e., progression from bracketing to essence description formation). To deter and diminish the role of bias within the data collection and analysis phases specifically, varying steps were completed to solidify the constant progression and enhancement of credible, valid procedures and ultimately the precise detection of an overall essence description pertaining to the phenomena of focus within this research. The specific trustworthiness methods included triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, recognition of researcher bias, and the implementation of consistent evaluation methods of data analysis procedures (i.e., bracketing,

transcription, coding, cluster formation, thematic analysis, and essence description development) were completed throughout the entire continuation of this research to ensure the words expressed by participants were evident in every step of the overall process (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999; Orr et al., 2016).

In consideration of the research settings and implementation of semi-structured interviews, the role of the involved sources, research settings, and questioning techniques could also be observed as limitations within this research as well. Concerning the involved sources, each collective was selected based on the detected level of applicable lived experiences which each participant would provide in aiming to detail the presence of a phenomena. Despite, the relevant thoughts which were conveyed by each participant concerning their experience of the focus phenomena, these sources do not fully reflect the demographic composition of visitors to NPS units and could serve as a limitation to this research. While this proves to be a potential limiting factor, the involved phenomenological framework aims to unveil the role of a phenomena through lived experiences of participants which can result in the engagement of a smaller source of participants during the process of gathering a significant level of in-depth detail. The collected data reflects the applicable experiences of those involved within this research upon the point of reaching saturation and future work should be completed to further acquire more detail pertaining to the phenomena of focus while also providing a more representative reflection of all NPS visitors.

Regarding the natural settings of GRSM and INDU, each interview took place within the boundary or proximate locations to these selected NPS units. As a result, the direct exposure to these natural settings do not reflect the immense diversity which composes the collective of nature-based experiences and could influence the resulting responses based on the direct context

in which the dialogues were implemented. While this is a potential limitation, each location was chosen based on purposeful sampling which aimed to 1) identify sources which would offer relevant and lived recollections of their experiences within each research setting and 2) establish a nature-based context in which would potentially enrich and enliven the responses provided by participants based on their exposure to aspects of focus during the provided questioning (i.e., religion, experiencing of God, role of social interaction, and nature-based experiences).

Concerning the employed questioning techniques, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of dialogue and was formed through the composition of literature-based topics and associated inquiries. During the presentation of questions, the researcher also utilized probing techniques to uncover detected data and this could have presented potential influences within participant responses based on verbal or non-verbal expressions executed by the researcher. Despite this potential influence, the researcher followed the semi-structured interview framework which allows for modifications to take place within the line of questioning and ensured the maintenance of a neutral, verbal expression of questioning in addition to maintaining a neutral, non-verbal state (e.g., body language and specifically facial expressions) when conducting each interview. The researcher presented the same questions to each participant through an impartial delivery method and aimed to deviate (i.e., probing) from the posed inquiries through means which align with the established qualitative foundation and design.

Chapter 3 - The Interaction of Religion, Solitude, and Nature:

Experiencing God and Taking a Pause for Solitude

Abstract

Through a qualitative foundation and phenomenological framework, semi-structured interviews were implemented to understand the dynamic interaction Christians undergo in nature when experiencing God and moments of solitude. Solitude is a multifaceted and multilevel experience which could produce varied results for individuals and provide a series of unique attributes. As a result, the inclusion of religious beliefs within these dynamic experiences could offer an enhanced level of understanding regarding the role solitude maintains within the life of a Christian and not only the truths in which they maintain and implement within daily occurrences, but their experiencing of God and how these transcendent moments potentially influence the acquisition and progression of solitude. To enhance the current level of understanding regarding this phenomena (i.e., experiencing of God by Christians when engaging in nature-based solitude), in-person interviews were completed in summer 2020 within two research settings that offered contrasting nature-based experiences and relevant contexts for the executed dialogues. Specifically, Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU) composed the focus sites for this study. In total, three sources were involved in this research to unveil a range of lived experiences and detailed reflections of individuals who 1) were engaging in a worship service within an NPS unit (N=15), 2) voluntarily engaged in an extended, overnight stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit (N=5), and 3) voluntarily selected to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit (N=16). Collectively, participants reflected the primary occurrence of solitude through individual-based experiences as a means to ultimately

connect with both the Creator (i.e., God) and His creation. Further, participants portrayed the existence of honest and perspective-shifting experiences through solitude which allowed for authentic connections with God and provided the ability to approach life with a renewed observation of what is considered as important (e.g., positive mental health processes).

Participants also conveyed an overall ability to not only engage in in-depth connections with natural surroundings through activities or embracing an atmosphere of silence but elevate the relationship they maintain with God through immersing themselves in the fullness of His comfort, re-assurance, and commitment to unveil unknown blessings in both the high and low experiences of life. As a result, this reflected significance should be placed on not only facilitating these experiences but progressing the current state of protected areas to advance the ability to engage in these ventures (e.g., equitable accessibility). Through this integral enhancement, this could elevate the engagement in moments of life which ultimately provide a shift in perspective, rejuvenating refuge, connection with a divine creation, recognition of life-based purpose, and ultimately a connection with God which serves as the foundation and progression of all things as expressed by participants.

Introduction

Interactions between individuals is an aspect of life that can provide a sense of fulfillment through moments of conversation, collaborative endeavors to collectively achieve a goal, or engaging in fostering personal connections through experiences of communicating life-based situations (Burger, 1995). From these moments, intrinsic satisfaction can occur based on the social aspect of life that provides an individual with a sense of community or connection with others and results in relationships that can serve as influential elements (Burger, 1995).

Connections amongst organisms or beings is an integral component that can produce infiltrating

aspects from the beneficial and enriching moments that can come to fruition based on resonating, formed links (Burger, 1995). While partaking in interactive moments can fulfill a social aspect of life that is satisfied through active engagements and conversations, an alternate perspective to this communal moment in human nature is the time that is spent apart from these experiences and what these specific moments may entail (Burger, 1995; Hassell et al., 2015; Lehto et al., 2012; Long et al., 2003). Specifically, these moments are associated with the categorization of solitude or the level of privacy that is experienced and completed by an individual during individualistic situations of self-isolation that can come to existence due to a variety of factors (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). In particular, this experience could occur not only through spending time alone, but within the presence of others as well (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). These moments can also occur in a diverse range of settings, such as in nature, where individuals can retreat from the presence of others or disengage through individual-based methods and may be pursued by an individual or organized manner based on predetermined objectives and desires (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003). As a result, solitude can be defined as time which is spent alone physically or through the adaptation of a mindset and can bring forth both negative and positive connotations not only due to the spatial proximity which exists in consideration of being separated from others in a physical sense, but in an emotional and mental sense where individuals undergo a level of aloneness (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013).

An example of a context in which solitude can take place involves a nature-based setting where an individual can become immersed in an experience that inherently provides moments of seclusion or independence from others (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Hammitt, 1982). Within a natural setting, an individual can be provided with opportunities that foster the existence of

separation between them and others and instead is replaced with a dynamic landscape that does not verbally convey conversation but may include nuances of communication through the processes that are continuously taking place (e.g., biological processes or natural movements through weather-based occurrences; Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003). Through time that is spent in nature involving moments of silence or possibly solace, an individual is provided with opportunities to potentially view their surroundings in a renewed viewpoint or engage in reflective moments that can serve as a source of rejuvenation based on the time that is spent alone and secluded from the enhanced occurrence of unforeseen circumstances (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Korpela & Staats, 2013; Korpela & Staats, 2021; Long & Averill, 2003). While the existence of solitude-based moments within nature or life as a whole can serve as a similar source of renewal that is provided by communal gatherings, these moments may bring experiences of negative emotions or fearful elements to the surface (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003). For example, an individual may begin to experience a heightened perception of their surroundings within a nature-based setting that could result in an increased level of anxiety or fear of potential situations that could exist when the presence of others is absent (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003).

Although the occurrence of these situations can result from moments of solitude and specific time that is spent individually within nature, these moments of personal seclusion can also provide a sense of enrichment that may only be achieved within these situations that offer a form of fulfillment and confidence through the perseverance of overcoming tribulations (Long & Averill, 2003). It is within these moments that self-growth can be heightened through exposure(s) and potentially unveil intrinsic and/or extrinsic attributes for the individual that is actively spending time in solitude (e.g., resilience in specifically nature-based situations; Borrie

& Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001). Similar to the perspectives of Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, that associated the elements of self-reliance and resilience with nature-based excursions, these moments can provide a revelation for an individual based on their interaction with potentially novel situations (Neill & Dias, 2001). Hahn focused on highlighting the notable impact that experiences within an outdoor setting can produce based on the introduced moments of immediate durability and flexibility that may be required by the utilization of internal and external characteristics to embark on an adventure through an individual basis (Boyes & Mackenzie, 2015; Neill & Dias, 2001). Within these moments, individuals are provided with the opportunity to experience situations that may not come to fruition when others are present and are potentially provided with a sense of self-enrichment and independence based on their self-reliant venture and completion of an excursion on their own (Neill & Dias, 2001).

The aspect of solitude and specifically regarding nature-based solitude, can be significant in the amplification of an individual's experience and also their connection to their current setting as well (Long & Averill, 2003). Through engaging or immersing oneself in a natural context and taking time to complete an individual-based journey, the partaking individual may be able to embark on a series of events that foster the transferal of attributes or intrinsically motivating elements and produce a continuous transformation in their life (Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2013; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003; Long & Averill, 2003). Specifically, an in-depth exposure to intangible attributes or potentially spiritual aspects may come to fruition from spending time in nature and engaging in moments of solitude (Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman, 2013; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). Through the intensive immersion in a natural landscape that can serve as a reflection of

mystifying captivation and natural marvels, the experienced moments could be perceived by an individual as a form of spiritual connection to their surroundings and the beliefs they maintain regarding the existence of nature (Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2006; Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman, 2013; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). In particular, the level and frequency of engagement in moments of solitude by an individual within a natural setting could serve as a form of personalized communication and expression of their beliefs (Heintzman, 2003). Further, these moments of solitude can produce a source of overall revitalization related to the existence of religious beliefs based on an existing focus related to moments of individual-based reflection and meditation (Heintzman, 2003; Long & Averill, 2003).

For certain belief systems, the inclusion of practices focused on enhancing the level of connection between an individual and the higher deity in which they may maintain are involved to consistently provide engagement in behaviors that can act as guiding forces within the dynamic progression of existence (Long & Averill, 2003). Within these moments, an individual can seclude themselves from current interferences and bring their attention to a primary focus and meditate on the beliefs that may serve as foundational guides or inspiration regarding their selected approaches to life-based situations (Long & Averill, 2003). An example of a religion that contains practices which are focused on a continuous form of communication with a higher deity and the occurrence of individualistic moments that position the participant in a situation of solitude and the absence of interruptions to focus on the core beliefs is Christianity (Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). Within this specific religion, verbal or non-verbal expressions can take place between an individual and the higher deity they hold to be true (i.e., God) in a manner that contains no bounds of context and can occur at any point in time (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). These moments can take place continuously within the life of an individual and can

include a range of items that compose the expressions that are exchanged between the individual and God (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989).

In consideration of Christianity, examples of communication methods or religious expressions that can take place between an individual and God may include the elements of prayer, worship, and reflection through biblical- or religious-based resources (Davies, 2018; Luhrmann, 2004; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Wolff, 1999). Through these moments, a conversation that involves the actions of verbally speaking or internally conveying a dialogue and listening for the return of similar expressions from God can take place (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Similar to the ongoing conversation that can exist between an individual and God, these expressions and this form of communication can occur within a nature-based context and conjoin the elements of religious and natural immersion due to the existence of a dynamic experience (Davies, 2018; Luhrmann, 2004; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Wolff, 1999). Based on the religious beliefs of an individual, the natural setting in which they reside may be viewed as a divine and intricate creation formed by God and serves as a reoccurring reflection of a multifaceted source of life that was provisioned and persists throughout the continuation of time (Davies, 2018). Within Christianity, nature can be perceived in multiple ways (e.g., anthropocentric or human-centered in contrast to biocentric or environment-centered) dependent upon the varying individual perceptions of the involved belief system and the focus biblical- or religious-based resources (i.e., Holy Bible) which undergird the truths (Davies, 2018).

While contrasting perceptions may exist, the overarching view of nature as a marvel that was formulated in a detailed manner by God and reflects the compassion He conveys through the establishment of these settings and their continuation through the progression of time is a prominent and primary belief held by many (Davies, 2018). By spending time in these natural

settings and engaging in moments of solitude within the creation of God, these experiences can serve as notably impactful elements within the occurrence of an individual's existence and potentially introduce life-altering realizations that guide them as they approach varying situations. For example, solitude can come forth as a physical or mental state in a breadth of settings, such as nature (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). If Christians observe nature as a direct connection to God based on the formation of this creation, then exposure to these spaces through solitude whether through individual-based experiences or through disengaging from a group to partake in individualistic reflections could be immense. Through this form of experience a Christian could 1) spend time within a creation which is observed to come from the hand of God and perceive Him in a renewed degree and type, 2) retreat from any form of life-based context and situations which may inhibit their daily thought processes, 3) engage in religious expressions as evoked by God and His creation, and 4) undergo an otherworldly experience which fosters a rejuvenated perspective in consideration of themselves and their continuous interactions (e.g., with others, nature, etc.).

Based on the diverse forms of expressions that can take place within an individual's experience of solitude within a natural setting, this research aimed to gain an increased comprehension of these intimate moments. Specifically, this research served as a venture to acquire an in-depth understanding of how, if at all, individuals that identify as Christians experience solitude in nature and how this may correlate to their communication with God. Currently, the level of understanding and detail that is known regarding these intricate experiences of solitude concerning Christians is lacking in volume. Due to the immense role an individual's beliefs can have within their life and especially during nature-based experiences, this research desired to acquire this form of information to better reflect the multifaceted

communication that can take place between an identified Christian and God (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). To obtain a notable level of detail, this research incorporated a qualitative foundation and a phenomenological framework (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were employed to evaluate the lived experiences of varying sources that involved individuals who (1) were present in a worship service within an NPS unit, 2) voluntarily engaged in an overnight stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit, and 3) voluntarily chose to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit (Shaw et al., 2016). The inclusion of this method offered a process that allows insight into the nature- and religious-based experiences that can amplify connections between an individual, a higher deity, and nature as a result of gathering rich, thick descriptions of the overall phenomena of focus (i.e., the dynamic of experiencing God through solitude within nature-based experiences).

Regarding the role of nature-based experiences and the focus research settings, this research defines nature as an accessible location that can be experienced by the public and provides a reflection of natural characteristics which convey the biodiversity of an area through abiotic and biotic factors (Fisichelli et al., 2015). Specifically, this research further distinguishes and reflects nature through the inclusion of two U.S. National Park Service (NPS) units as the primary research settings for this study (Fisichelli et al., 2015). The NPS units of Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU) were employed as the involved research settings. Through these sites, identified research participants which aligned with the established research criteria served as research sources to better understand (1) if and how they experience God in nature and (2) how this influences not only their acquisition of

solitude, but the overall influence on their nature-based venture. In particular, the aspect of solitude within this research refers to the time that is experienced by an individual where human-based interactions are reduced or absent and one is able to potentially engage with their natural surroundings and believed higher deity (i.e., God) in a manner that might contrast experiences during group-based activities (Lee & Scott, 2017). As a result of this designation and based on the overarching research aim, the main research question for this study includes:

1. How, if at all, do Christians experience God in national parks during moments of solitude?

Literature Review

Religious Expressions in Nature

When spending time in nature, moments of enhanced interaction or the ignition of sensory reactions with the present and natural surroundings can activate different actions or attitudes of individuals based on the immersion (Orr et al., 2016). Through engaging with nature, an individual can experience a heightened level of self-enrichment based on the interaction with a context that enlivens varying senses or characteristics of oneself (Orr et al., 2016). This may involve the amplification of physical, mental, or emotional elements that compose an individual and bring to fruition unveiled components which were undetected before (e.g., individual strengths or a change in mindset; Frumkin et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2015; Orr et al., 2016). The dynamic factors that compose a journey within nature can further initiate the progression of the factors referenced above and magnify these experiences through the introduction of moments which reflect the presence of religious nuances. Within these moments, reflection or enrichment could take place through verbal or meditative dialogues that are introduced within an individual based on the notable connection they feel towards the natural environment where they are

present (Chliaoutakis et al., 2002; Clements et al., 2014; Maniates, 2001; Pepper & Leonard, 2016; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989).

This form of expression can be related to the presence of prayer, worship, or meditation through biblical- or religious-based resources within a nature-based experience due to the potential dynamic and meaningful resonance (Davies, 2018; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). These components can occur in different formats based on the verbal expression or internal reflection an individual engages in and is often aligned with those that identify with a specific system of religious beliefs (Luhrmann, 2004; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Wolff, 1999). Within a religious context, prayer and worship are observed as forms of communication with a higher deity or meditative experience that provides time for an individual to execute expressions of reflection or reverence (Luhrmann, 2004). Similarly, the time spent reading and meditating on the written portrayals of religious beliefs through literature sources or additional resources can also serve as a form of communication with a higher deity due to the continuous level of comprehension and synthesis (Davies, 2018). These components could influence how an individual perceives situations within daily life (e.g., resilience), the level of satisfaction they maintain towards their life in general (e.g., mental health and overall well-being), and the elements or practices in their life (Lin et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2013; Neill & Dias, 2001; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Stickley, 2021; Wolff, 1999). This can result in an increased experience of positivity or reduce the continuation of a negative mindset and provide a form of relief in moments of anxiety or apprehension (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989).

Similarly, the influence prayer, worship, and biblical- or religious-based resources can have on the state of an individual aligns with the beneficial attributes nature has been detected to provide (Pretty et al., 2005). Spending time in nature unveils numerous benefits through the

connection with a source that encourages the reduction of negative items (e.g., stress and anxiety) and increases positive components (e.g., physical activity or enhance mood) which can further align this specific context with attributes related to prayer, worship, and biblical- or religious-based resources (Pretty et al., 2005). These forms of expression and connection could potentially serve as intensifying factors in the experiences individuals have in nature and their emotional, mental, and physical state (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2013; Huffman & Etnier, 2019; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Wolff, 1999). Collectively, these components could influence the perceptions an individual holds regarding nature and the role these specific sources maintain concerning their overall experiences and associated existence.

Currently, the level of knowledge concerning the role of how a specific religion (i.e., Christianity) informs the prayer, worship, or meditative practices through biblical- or religious-based resources implemented by an individual within a nature-based setting is minimal. It has been shown that prayer is notable in the leisure experience of individuals within their present setting, but detail concerning the specific relationship these expressions have in how an individual views nature based on their religious beliefs and how this informs their behaviors within a holistic context is not specifically defined (Huffman & Etnier, 2019). Additionally, the connection between prayer, worship, and biblical- or religious-based resources in the context of an individual-based experience in nature is currently lacking in quantity. The significant influence religion has been found to have in the lives of individuals is one that could contribute to understanding the behaviors of individuals regarding nature and how the occurrence of this practice relates to nature-based experiences (Wolff, 1999). Acquiring information to define the role of religion and associated expressions within a nature-based setting can assist in describing a series of relationships that has often been obscured in its clarity. This form of information can

also provide insight into the intangible characteristics of a significant facet which often infiltrates into the short- and long-term practices and viewpoint(s) of an individual regarding nature.

Solitude in Nature and Religion

The occurrence of solitude within an individual's time in nature is one that can influence the overall experience in a dynamic manner (Lee & Scott, 2017). Solitude is an element that may be desired by an individual and serve as one of the primary connecting influences within their nature-based experience(s) that initiates and progresses the relationship an individual perceives with nature and result in a continuation in the amount of immersion that takes place (Lee & Scott, 2017). Within these moments, individuals are provided with the opportunity to conduct their experiences in a manner that aligns with their objectives or absence of ideals for the nature-based experience (Lee & Scott, 2017). For example, one individual may elect to pursue endeavors they have desired to complete individually, or an alternate individual may seek to spend time in nature and allow for the progression of their time to be flexible and absent of any constraints (Lee & Scott, 2017). Despite the method or manner in which solitude comes to fulfillment within an individual's experience in nature, these moments can act as integral and influential moments within the present context and produce infiltrating aspects into the daily situations that compose their life as well (Lee & Scott, 2017; Long & Averill, 2003).

Within nature, the existence of solitude is present through the characteristics that compose the setting and can provide an individual with a lasting experience when these moments are sought after and completed (Lee & Scott, 2017; Long & Averill, 2003). Further, these moments can be achieved within a varied array of settings that can be classified as nature. An example of a nature-based setting which can provide individuals with an experience of solitude that provides a range of environments to experience include NPS units (Manning, 2003).

Through these sites, accessibility is an item that offers individuals with the ability to experience the protected landscapes and immerse themselves in settings that can reflect a representation of the holistic and vast diversity that composes nature (Manning, 2003). Individuals are able to seek refuge in these sites and develop an experience of solitude which is apart from the collective(s) of individuals that also desire to engage in these forms of experiences (Manning, 2003). The ability to experience a sense of fulfillment that is provided within these sites and nature is an impactful influence and serves as a foundational element in understanding and detailing the connection individuals form with these specific contexts (Manning, 2003; Lee & Scott, 2017; Long & Averill, 2003).

Through these experiences and the existence of solitude-based moments, the inclusion of mystical or ethereal revelations can come to fruition from the nature-based engagement and result in a personal transcendence or connection with the setting in which an individual resides (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Ronda, 2013). These specific outcomes within nature-based settings, such as NPS units, can be aligned with the connection an individual maintains with nature and their beliefs concerning these settings which serve as sources of solitude (Davies, 2018). Specifically, the religious-based beliefs an individual regards as true can play an influential role in how they elect to spend their time in nature and the manner in which they view themselves and their surroundings (Fam et al., 2004). Similar to solitude experienced within nature, moments of personal seclusion or privacy are also elements that can be incorporated within a religious context (i.e., Christianity) as a means to reflect and meditate on the foundational aspects involved within a belief system and how they correlate to life on a personal and holistic scale (Burger, 1995; Davies, 2018; Long & Averill, 2003; Long et al., 2003). Through these moments an individual may execute practices which narrow their focus or

reduce distractions to experience an optimal level of personal reflection and development (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Additionally, the occurrence of these moments is flexible in their context and can be implemented by an individual within a nature-based setting as a means to further progress the existence of solitude and transformation (Long & Averill, 2003).

The connection between religious and nature-based moments of solitude are harmonious in their existence due to the amplification that can take place when the experiences are conjoined (Long & Averill, 2003). Collectively, these moments can produce progressions within the intrinsic characteristics of a participant and result in the development of extrinsic factors as well (Long & Averill, 2003). Self-examination, creative expressions, in-depth contemplation, and profound connections with a setting or beliefs pertaining to the surroundings are examples of elements that can occur within these combined experiences (Long & Averill, 2003). The significant role nature can have within the lives of individuals (e.g., mental, emotional, and physical) is significant and the merged influence of these settings with the foundational role of religion within an individual's life can act as magnified experiences (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). The involvement of solitude within these conjoined nature-based and religious experiences can be pivotal and provide an in-depth understanding of the indescribable elements that contribute to the momentous roles of these elements within the lives of individuals and how they infiltrate into the contexts that compose their daily situations (Long & Averill, 2003).

Experiencing God in Solitude and Resulting Outcomes

Through spending individual-based time in nature, participants are able to approach these moments in a manner which is multifaceted and potentially contains varying levels (Neill & Dias, 2001). Specifically, individuals may select to be present within nature and utilize an atmosphere of silence as a result of an absence of surrounding people or the singular detection of

noise which is produced from the progression of ongoing natural processes (e.g., movement of wind, water, proximate wildlife, etc.; Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003). Further, individuals may choose to engage in a specific activity which fosters the conduction of individual-based methods and potentially include a form of self-reliance and determination to successfully execute a chosen venture in alignment with the ‘development-by-challenge’ theory in relation to the program Outward Bound developed by Hahn (Neill & Dias, 2001). In consideration of this specific philosophy which involves a reflection of the foundational composition of an individual that perpetuates the implementation of their selected form of solitude in nature, the core tenets or composition of an individual becomes a leading force in their experiences and highlights the integral importance time in nature through means of solitude can bring to fruition through personal revelations and potentially infiltrating outcomes (Neill & Dias, 2001). Within these moments, individuals are able to mindfully progress through a nature-based experience which may give rise to notions of transcendence or emotional and mental alterations based on their perceived ability to complete the endeavors and engage in a form of resilience (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Neill & Dias, 2001). This level of detected or enhanced resilience could then be employed by the individual through infiltrating outcomes based on their progression of self-enrichment or self-actualization and maintain a form of confidence in their ability to not only successfully complete challenging situations within nature, but within life-based situations as well (Neill & Dias, 2001; Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Growth involving an individual’s self-confidence or level of resilience regarding unforeseen occurrences that exist within life is an outcome that can arise from completing individual-based or solitude-focused ventures in nature and result in the completion of higher

levels of thought or experiential components (Taormina & Gao, 2013). Specifically, these experiences may increase the level of awareness an individual exhibits regarding their perception of transcendent experiential characteristics based on the perception of components which allow an individual to engage with nature in a manner which appears otherworldly and elevates the level of interconnection amongst all that composes natural contexts (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Taormina & Gao, 2013). For example, when an individual engages in solitude which can progress the level of resilience they possess (e.g., through the completion of difficult or strenuous activities alone) and potentially motivate the advancement of internal confidence and reduction of any form of perceived level of negative impacts on their sole presence in nature, their ability to engage in higher levels of thought and enhanced perception of facets (e.g., perspective shifts, observation of new aspects within nature, formative reflection, etc.) can increase as well (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Neill & Dias, 2001; Taormina & Gao, 2013). Through this form of solitude in nature, an individual's heightened level of awareness and perception may open their capacity of thought to transition from potential emotions of stress and anxiety in association with spending time in solitude and instead allow for the direction of attention to be placed on forms of meditation which bring forth developmental and revelational aspects within their nature-based experience(s) (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Neill & Dias, 2001; Taormina & Gao, 2013).

With an acquired mindset which is uninhibited by negative influences that could potentially come forth through solitude and further involvement in individual-based activities (e.g., fear, doubt, tension, difficulty, etc.), an individual is able to experience nature through a renewed approach potentially and acquire a refreshed form of outcomes or attributes (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Neill & Dias, 2001; Taormina & Gao, 2013). Specifically,

this form of mindset and experience could allow an individual to become aware of transcendent perceptions involving the integral elevation of their self-confidence and recognition of their significant, valued role within existence, the application of appreciation regarding life towards their natural surroundings, and a potential conveyance of importance on their beliefs which results in an overall appreciation of life as a whole (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Neill & Dias, 2001; Taormina & Gao, 2013). Further, this level of self-confidence could further be amplified through the religious beliefs they maintain within experiences of solitude based on the level of invaluable noteworthiness they recognize through the portrayal of this importance which is offered within their identified belief system and experiencing of the higher deity in which they believe (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Taormina & Gao, 2013).

In particular, Christianity is a religion which maintains a theocentric viewpoint involving the recognition of God as the authority of life who values all of creation by means of infinite compassion and care for all that composes existence and further reflects this affinity through the characteristics (Davies, 2018; Fam et al., 2014; Kals et al., 1999; Luhrmann, 2004; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Wolff, 1999). For example, in the book of Luke within the Holy Bible the reflection of God's value regarding creation can be observed:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7)

Based on this specific form of belief system, those which identify as Christians could observe nature through modified “lenses” which are informed by their beliefs and primarily their recognition of God as the sole developer of creation (Fam et al., 2014). As a result, Christians could reflect the existence and portrayal of attitudes or behaviors which align with a biocentric viewpoint and holds the collective composition of nature as an invaluable form of life that should

be regarded as such through the implementation of processes aiming to protect and conserve these dynamic facets within current and future contexts (Hunter et al., 2014; Kals et al., 1999; Keiser et al., 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Krebs, 1999; Steg & Vlek, 2009). This notion of stewardship can be seen within the book of Job in the Holy Bible where the reflection of significance concerning creation is displayed through a shared portrayal of importance:

“But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, in Whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?” (Job 12:7-10)

Further, the significance of creation as believed to be a gift from God and a divine work which results in an admiration for both existence and the overall Creator can be observed in the book of Isaiah in the Holy Bible where it states:

“I have made the earth, and created man on it. I-My hands-stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.” (Isaiah 45:12)

Through the ability of a Christian to engage in solitude-based experiences within nature using a method which allows them to experience a posture free of world-based concerns (e.g., stressors associated with daily life), the recognition of God within a space observed as His creation and an extension of love could result in the formation of outcomes which not only elevate the moments acquired by the individual, but produce the progression of infiltrating attributes in the overall implementation of enhanced connections to nature (Davies, 2018; Fam et al., 2014; Hargreaves, 2011; Ramkissoo et al., 2011; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Further, these elevated experiences of solitude could also produce reoccurring desires to spend time within and regard these resources as sacred due to the foundational observation expressed by a conviction to care for God’s creation and facilitate or engage in immersive experiences which allow for raw, authentic connections with God and surrounding natural contexts as a result (Davies, 2018; Fam

et al., 2014). For these reasons, the overall objective of this research was to explore and unveil the potentially in-depth experiences of Christians in nature (i.e., NPS units) and how their engagement of solitude not only influenced the specific moments they implemented (i.e., partaking in solitude whether individually or retreating within a group setting, specific religious expressions, and interactions with surrounding natural characteristics), but their connection with God and how this determined the progression of these multifaceted ventures.

Methodology

Research Design

The overarching methodological processes involved within this research are part of a larger study and reflect the progression of similar and parallel procedures (IRB Approval #10133.2; Jackson et al., 2021). In consideration of the phenomena of focus within this specific research (i.e., the interaction of experiencing God within moments of solitude and nature-based experiences by Christians), a qualitative foundation was selected to obtain in-depth reflections of lived experiences and thoughts of the involved participants (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). Specifically, a phenomenological approach served as the guiding framework to obtain rich, thick descriptions relevant to the focus phenomena (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). The inclusion of this specific framework was employed due to the role of descriptive information which lived, relevant moments and memories of individuals offer through an invaluable source of understanding and clarity concerning the situations at hand (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). Based on the indefinite experience of Christians in consideration of engaging in solitude and further connecting with God in nature, the inclusion of a phenomenological framework serves as

the optimal foundation from which increased knowledge can come forth in consideration of an ethereal, intangible, and pervasive aspect of an individual's life which this level of refined information can clarify in contrast to occurrences which are bounded by time, space, or designated collectives (i.e., case study) and require an existing level of knowledge for the progression of additional meaning(s) as a result of ranging data analysis processes (i.e., grounded theory and theory development; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). Further, the implementation of semi-structured and in-person interviews were used as the primary form of data collection (Shaw et al., 2016). Through the utilization of this specific mode of dialogue initiation, the inclusion of additional probing measures in conjunction with specific questions which were presented to each participant and were employed by the researcher within designated research settings to further enhance the level of information and understanding concerning the investigated phenomena (Shaw et al., 2016).

Research Settings

For the progression of this research, the specific classification of nature is related to public lands which provide individuals with access to a range of parks and protected areas (Fisichelli et al., 2015). Specifically, NPS units represent nature within the bounds of this research and served as the research settings for the execution of the involved methodological processes (Fisichelli et al., 2015). Specifically, two research settings were involved and include INDU and GRSM. INDU is positioned within the northwestern region of Indiana and GRSM is a unit which spans the states of North Carolina and Tennessee. Both GRSM and INDU served as notable selections within this research based on their historical visitation records (i.e., prominent visitation quantities for GRSM and increased visitation due to a new categorization as a national park for INDU), enhanced accessibility for individuals to spend time within these locations

through both motorized and non-motorized transportation, approximate distance to urban infrastructure associated within higher populations, contrasting environmental characteristics, and the implementation of religious-based opportunities (i.e., worship service opportunities and the facilitation of overnight retreats).

In consideration of GRSM, this specific NPS unit is one that maintains a prominent standing regarding notable levels of visitation based on the natural features or marvels which continuously draw individuals into engaging in nature-based experiences (NPS, 2019a). With approximately 12,000,000 recreation-based visits completed by individuals in 2020, GRSM is a site which allows for individuals to engage in a range of activities, such as solitude, throughout its 500,000 acres of landscape (NPS, 2019a; NPSVUS, 2020). Further, individuals are able to experience natural facets which include an array of wildlife diversity, contrasting environments ranging from wetlands to dense forests, expansive mountain ranges including the Southern Appalachian Mountain Range, and historical and cultural significance of this dynamic landscape which is reflected in the inherent story the natural features convey (NPS, 2019a).

Regarding INDU, this newly categorized NPS unit offers individuals with a multifaceted experience which balances the contexts of serene beach retreats in close proximity to the high-paced existence of urban infrastructure and city-based hubs (NPS, 2019b). With an approximate implementation of 2,200,000 recreation-based visits in 2020, INDU offers individuals a refuge or retreat from the energetic atmosphere of nearby cities, such as Chicago, Illinois, and offers the opportunity for individuals to acquire solitude through traversing or silently experiencing the conduction of sea-based natural processes (e.g., crashing of waves, swift movements of wind, etc.; NPS, 2019b; NPSVUS, 2020). INDU not only offers individuals with the opportunity to engage in recreation which is aligned with sea-based ventures or engaging in sedentary moments

but allows for individuals to enhance their knowledge of the dunes, marshes, bogs, and oak savannas which compose this diverse site (NPS, 2019b). The historical, cultural, and natural features of INDU provide individuals with an opportunity to easily partake in accessible natural offerings through its inherent features and proximate location (NPS, 2019b).

Collectively, GRSM and INDU both provide nature-based experiences which are contrasting in their appearance but allow for the execution of solitude. Within these sites, individuals are able to retreat into the silence of a mountain range or the meditative sounds of a nearby water body to engage in solitude. Based on the multifaceted compositions of each site and the associated visitation trends, the inclusion of these research settings offered an integral foundation to implement the methodological procedures of this research. Further, each site also served as a relevant context for visitors to directly experience and thus bring forth potential data which may not have been detected otherwise in alternate settings to ultimately unveil essence descriptions concerning the phenomena of focus within this research (Hays & Wood, 2011).

Research Participants

Within this research, a specific series of participant criteria were employed and served as the baseline of inclusion for each research source to ensure the involved phenomenological framework was consistently addressed and the formation of rich, thick descriptions were relevant to the focus phenomena (Table 3.1; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake, 2010; Wolff, 1999). Specifically, three sources were incorporated within this research to provide a multidimensional investigation into the focus phenomena and acquire in-depth data which reflects the experienced phenomena through varying viewpoints. The three sources within this research involve 1) worship service attendees within GRSM, 2) individuals who were employed and implementing worship services within GRSM, and 3) individuals who

selected to attend an overnight religious-based retreat which facilitated an extended stay within the research setting of INDU. To acquire direct contact and communication with these sources based on the specific inclusion of religious-based criteria and experiences, A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP) offered a form of purposeful sampling. ACMNP is a religious-based and Christian organization which offers non-denominational religious expressions (e.g., worship service opportunities and overnight retreats) for individuals within natural contexts (ACMNP, 2020). Further, ACMNP maintains an ongoing partnership with the NPS and served a significant role in the specified inclusion of determined sources which align with the formed research criteria and included research settings (ACMNP, 2020).

Table 3.1. Primary research criteria for the three sources involved within this research.

Research Source	Research Criteria
<i>Worship Service Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that have spent at least 120 minutes within the relevant research site (White et al., 2019) 4. Visitors that are attending a worship service provided by A Christian Ministry in the National Parks 5. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Group-based or Communal Retreat Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Indiana Dunes National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that are spending an extended time period (i.e., overnight stay and more than 24 hours with a group) within nature through participation in a religious retreat 4. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Employed Individuals</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals that are located in Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Individuals that identify as a Christian 3. Individuals that are employed as a personnel member with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks and therefore selected to engage in ministry-based efforts within a natural context 4. Individuals that are 18 years of age or older

Further, the utilization of religious-based offerings provided through ACMNP ensured the progression of methodological procedures which continuously aimed to address the overarching objective of this research. The provided outlets facilitated by the NPS and ACMNP not only offered a purposeful sampling method and applicable detection of research sources but assisted in the obtainment of data which would assist in the overall formation of an informed essence description (Hays & Wood, 2011). Specifically, the involved sources and utilized processes to inquire about the involvement of each participant and further acquire data which would be rich and thick in its composition. Overall, the incorporation of the research criteria and subsequent methodological procedures aimed to not only further current levels of understanding regarding the dynamic interaction of religion within nature-based experiences of an individual but provide improved clarity concerning an infiltrating element of life which could be reflected through the shared determination of an essence description amongst the lived experiences of participants (Hays & Wood, 2011).

Semi-structured Interviews

Based on the incorporation of a phenomenological framework to ultimately discover the existence of the focus phenomena and develop an associated essence description, the use of semi-structured interviews were implemented as the primary data collection method (Hays & Wood, 2011; Humphrey & Lee, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Seidman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews involve the execution of a dialogue which is based on the inclusion of literature-based topics and associated questions in relation to each subject matter (Humphrey & Lee, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Seidman, 2006). Further, this form of interview process allows for the inclusion of additional probing measures by the researcher to discover or obtain detected information which may not be forthcoming during the presentation of initial questions (Barriball & While,

1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011). While an included level of flexibility and alteration are involved within this specific form of interview method to ensure the qualitative foundation and overarching research aim are continuous, a set of established questions were formed from literature-based topics and were presented to each participant (Barriball & While, 1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011).

Based on the three sources of focus within this research and their involvement, all dialogues were completed in-person during summer 2020. Specifically, 36 total participants, as referenced by participant selected pseudonyms, were involved in the data collection process and the majority of these conversations were in alignment with the source involving those who attended a worship service offered through ACMNP within GRSM with a total of 16 participants. With a comparable value, the source involving employed individuals with ACMNP who were implementing the worship service in GRSM composed 15 of the 36 dialogues. Lastly, the source involving individuals who participated in a religious-based retreat associated with ACMNP within INDU included five total participants. While the GRSM-based sources composed similar and notable values in relation to the collective total of completed interviews, the source involving the research setting of INDU displayed an alternate value based on the progression of the global pandemic involving COVID-19 in 2020. As a result of this health crisis, the safety and well-being of those involved in this venture served as top priority and resulted as an influential factor in the total dialogues completed amongst this source. Despite the role of COVID-19, the point of saturation was achieved for each source involved within this research (Malterud et al., 2016). As a result, a consistent level of data which resulted in the detection of in-depth information that arose amongst varying dialogues was achieved and reflected through the iterative detail (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

To execute the data analysis phase of this research, the use of a qualitative data management platform was employed to progress evaluation processes in a concise manner (Morris et al., 2018). The specific platform of NVivo (Version 12) was used to complete varying processes in alignment with the involved phenomenological framework and develop an essence description concerning the focus phenomena (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Morris et al., 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Rochette et al., 2006). Initially, NVivo was used as a platform to contain the obtained data and served as a mode in which to transform the information into an electronic format appropriate for the progression of a thematic analysis (i.e., data organization; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Morris et al., 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Rochette et al., 2006). Upon the completion of foundational methods to progress through the implementation of data assessments, the researcher engaged in bracketing (Chenail, 2011; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Bracketing is a process where the involved data was approached with an uninhibited mindset by the researcher and the progressed evaluations aimed to investigate the initial data and understand nuances within the expressions of each participant (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Specifically, the researcher desired to complete preliminary assessments of the data through a mindset which aimed to understand the exact characteristics of each participant's statements in consideration of the nature- and social-based influences which existed within the present moment of dialogue (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Through this step, the researcher is able to acquire the perspectives of each participant and continuously work to convey an appropriate reflection of their thoughts in further

analysis steps, such as the primary formation of an essence description concerning the phenomena of focus (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005).

With a foundational understanding of the acquired data, the researcher used the transcription capability of NVivo to transcribe each interview file (Edwards-Jones, 2014). In addition to the use of electronic transcription processes, manual transcription methods were also incorporated by the researcher to ensure every word spoken by each participant was present within the data collective. Through this step, the researcher aimed to increase the level of accuracy and precision of the baseline data (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Orr et al., 2016). Using the modified data in alignment with the involved phenomenological framework, the researcher then employed coding methods which aimed to detect shared, frequent sentiments amongst the involved participants (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Orr et al., 2016). In particular, an inductive coding method where the verbatim verbiage used by participants was used as inspiration for the formed codes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This measure was used by the researcher to progress the level of merit and overall trustworthiness of this research and to further reduce the introduction of any form of outside influences in the progressive steps towards the development of an overarching essence description (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Orr et al., 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020). With the established codes, a thematic analysis was initiated and each cluster containing parallel meanings were formed and used as independent units for the formation of an applicable subtheme for each grouping (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). In coordination with the formed codes, each subtheme was also developed using the spoken words of participants to continuously enhance the rigor of this research (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

To ensure the formation of each cluster and associated subtheme were representative of the thoughts conveyed by participants, this process was completed in an iterative manner to address the main elements included within the factor of trustworthiness (i.e., transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility; Figure 3.1). With the solidification of each subtheme, a refining process was completed and further detailed subthemes emerged as inspiration for the concluding process of essence description development (Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). Specifically, the iteratively evaluated subthemes were further collected for the development of an overarching essence description utilizing key words expressed by the sources collectively to ultimately unveil the facets of the focus phenomena within this research (i.e., experiencing God in moments of solitude within a nature-based context; Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

As the entirety of this re-occurring data analysis process was completed, the primary research question was also continuously consulted to further ensure the cumulative steps were accurate and precise overall (Morris et al., 2017). Additionally, the measure of peer debriefing was facilitated in a similar repeated manner to serve as an additional level of evaluation and critical critique of the potential introduction of outside influences, such as bias (Morris et al., 2017). Specifically, two professors within a higher education setting who focus on qualitative research completed individual-based evaluations of each step involved within the data analysis stage (Morris et al., 2017). Each reviewer was involved within the process for varying iterations and in-depth conversations were employed to ensure appropriate measures were taken and the overarching qualitative foundation was satisfied (Morris et al., 2017).

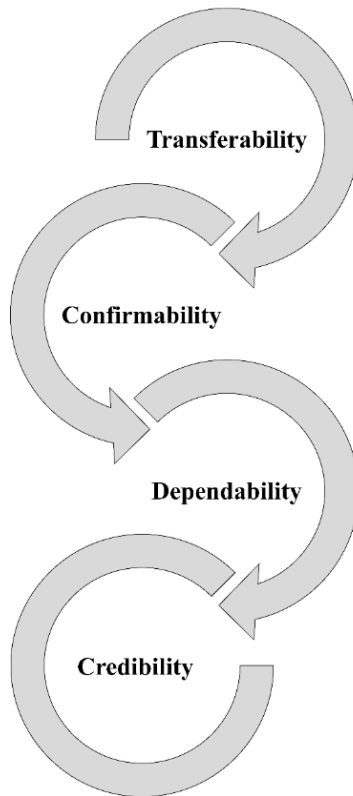


Figure 3.1. Representation of how the integral factors of transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility were addressed through iterative, consistent processes throughout the research.

Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research, the factor of trustworthiness is an aspect which serves as a benchmark concerning the level of merit and rigor which is achieved as a result (Fefer at al., 2018; Krefting, 1991). Specifically, the elements of transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility serve as primary factors of trustworthiness which is associated with the conduction of research ventures. Further, these elements are critical in ensuring the progression of applicability, consistency, truth value, and neutrality throughout the research process and stakeholders within the resulting outcomes (Table 3.2; Anney, 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Krefting, 1991; Yateem, 2012). Based on the significance of these elements and the overarching factor of trustworthiness, this research implemented measures throughout the overall process and

specifically within the data collection and analysis phases to maintain a persistent level of rigor (Anney, 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Krefting, 1991; Yateem, 2012). Regarding the data collection phase, recording devices and researcher reflections were involved during and after the completion of each dialogue with the involved participants (Carlson, 2010; Rabionet, 2011; Yateem, 2012). Further, the utilization of multiple recording devices were involved within the execution of each semi-structured interview to not only capture the detected words spoken by each participant but enhance the level of reliable data which served as the source for data analysis processes (e.g., thematic analysis and resulting essence description formation; Carlson, 2010; Rabionet, 2011; Yateem, 2012).

Table 3.2. Specific reflections of the integral qualitative factors which were of focus throughout the entire research process.

Trustworthiness Component of Focus	Description	Examples of Incorporated Methods
<i>Transferability</i>	Involves the application of determined information within the research to other endeavors that share similar conditions	1. Triangulation
<i>Confirmability</i>	Includes the progression of research without the involvement of influential elements that could misconstrue the overall process (e.g., researcher bias)	1. Recognition of researcher bias 2. Peer Debriefing 3. Triangulation
<i>Dependability</i>	Incorporates the transferal of research procedures within varying contexts and supporting the methodology with varying information sources	1. Peer Debriefing 2. Triangulation
<i>Credibility</i>	Involves the alignment of methodological procedures, collected data, and interpreted outcomes that are aligned and contribute to the perceived merit or level of truth	1. Triangulation 2. Member Checking

(Krefting, 1991)

In conjunction with the referenced trustworthiness procedures, the inclusion of triangulation was an additional method incorporated within the research process as a means to reduce and diminish the introduction of outside influences within the rigor of the results, such as

researcher bias (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999). Triangulation involves the use of varied forms of information concerning the research process to ensure the presence of outliers within the cohesive venture are recognized, addressed, or prevented as a result of this multidimensional detail (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999). Specific triangulation procedures included within this research address the primary factor of trustworthiness through involved measures which were taken during the data collection phase through researcher notations, the use of literature-based sources as inspiration for the presented questions during each interview, and iterative procedures completed during the data analysis phase of this research (Decrop, 1999).

Concerning the data analysis phase, the processes involving member checking and peer debriefing were employed to elevate the conduction of triangulation and trustworthiness correspondingly (Carlson, 2010; Lietz et al., 2006). Member checking is a process where participants which composed the involved source(s) within a research venture are provided opportunities to offer cohesive feedback concerning the accuracy of the collected data in accordance with their spoken words and thoughts concerning the questions which were posed during the interview (Lietz et al., 2006). Within this research, applicable transcription files were provided to each participant as a form of evaluation and each individual was offered an opportunity to approve or modify the cataloged data based on their perception of the overall interview experience (Lietz et al., 2006). Regarding member checking, this specific process includes the use of iterative evaluations of all research procedures and resulting outcomes by formal reviewers with an expertise in qualitative research (Carlson, 2010). For the purposes of this research, two professionals within a higher education setting who specialize in qualitative research provided assessments for each process involved within the data analysis phase (Carlson, 2010). Each discussion with the involved professionals were completed independently and

modifications or continued progression of appropriate measures were implemented to ensure a level of consistency and contribute to the overall trustworthiness of this research (Carlson, 2010).

Researcher Bias

In recognition of the primary phenomena of focus and specifically the involved factor of Christianity, the researcher aims to provide a transparent reflection of their identification as a Christian and further as an individual who aims to maintain the associated structured or unstructured expressions and held beliefs through their life-based perspective(s). The researcher maintains that the foundational truths presented through the Holy Bible are true and desires to utilize this formative resource to serve as the “guiding light” within all they approach during any form of life-based situation. Further, the researcher maintains a single deity viewpoint which observes God as the primary creator of life and observes His creation as one which should be treated in a manner of complete respect as to ultimately implement actions which convey a sense of compassion through nature and reflective towards God as well. The researcher aims to act in a manner which is initiated through a posture of stewardship towards nature as to serve as a positive reflection of the character of God and convey His ultimate position as a deity which leads with care and love to all. As a result of this stance, the researcher desires to have their religious beliefs serve as the main consideration in the actions they implement and perspectives which are formed, especially concerning their pursuits. The passion for nature which is held by the researcher and the heightened level of affinity they experience based on a recognition of Who created the invaluable natural marvels, is an aspect which motivates the implementation of their research endeavors as to ultimately assist in unveiling the mystical and ethereal nature-based experiences which can result in the absence of verbal expression. Due to the beliefs of the researcher and the existence of this recognized bias, varying measures were implemented

throughout this research process to ensure the progression of rigor and merit were continuous mainstays. Further, the explicit statement of this bias is to not only offer a clear, descriptive recognition of their inherent bias within this process, but ultimately convey the reflection of an aspect of life which can not only influence how an individual approaches daily life, but specifically their regard for nature and the selected choices they make in relation to their held perspectives, attitudes, and values.

Results

Demographics

In consideration of the three sources involved within this research, general demographic questions were presented to each participant during the implemented interviews. When provided with each question, every participant was given the opportunity to respond or not respond and the researcher then progressed the dialogue in a manner which respected the requests of each participant. Amongst the three sources and 36 total participants, most individuals identified as female (N=23) and reflected an average age of 34 years (Range=18-94; Table 3.3). Further, the majority of participants identified with the ethnicity of Caucasian (N=35) across the involved sources.

Table 3.3. Specific demographic information for the sources involved within the research process.

Demographics	Data (Percentage, Range)
<i>Gender:</i>	
Female	23 (64%)
Male	13 (36%)
<i>Mean Age (In Years):</i>	34 (18-94)
<i>Ethnicity:</i>	
Caucasian	35 (97%)
Asian and Caucasian	1 (3%)

Solitude in Nature-based Experiences

When referencing the role of solitude within the progression of nature-based experiences, all sources reflected solitude as a moment or series of moments which provide more than an experience that brings forth resounding outcomes in the form of personal revelations and continuous engagement with God that elevates these ventures into transcending memories and impacts (Table 3.4). From authentic connections or reflections to God, nature, other individuals, and to oneself, participants portrayed the presence of “formative” (David) moments which could bring forth “sentimental” (David) aspects and result in the progression of raw communication amongst the collective spanning from God to individual-based meditation. Further, participants also displayed a consensus that solitude ultimately allowed them to strip “everything down to, like, my core relationship with the Lord” (Phoebe) and result in an aim to “purposefully seek out to be in solitude, especially in nature” (Lily) in addition to “purposefully being present with God” (Lily). As a result, participants conveyed that solitude “generally strengthens” (David)

relationships with God and they are able to engage in “resting in God’s embrace” (Rachel) while “He’s welcoming” (Rachel) them into a natural space. As a reflection, Rachel stated:

“And that's it, it's like a, little lullaby that the, forest is, is singing to you, and you just feel, like, well, I feel like I am just resting in God's embrace, that He's welcoming me here, and that He's inviting me, to rest because, here, when you just go out into the forest, there's no deadlines or work, anything like that, it's just a place, where you can be yourself and that you can find rest, and, you can sit here for hours, fall asleep, take a nap, and just feel absolutely rested.”

Table 3.4. Thematic analysis reflecting the developed initial and final composed subthemes within the research process by utilizing key words and phrases spoken by participants.

Initial Subthemes	Final and Refined Subthemes	Quote
<i>Thematic Analysis Group One:</i>		
<p>Solitude in nature is renewing, sentimental, formative, disconnected from distractions, and allows for the 'still small voice' to be heard in moments where an individual can sit in the moment and truly know what's inside their heart by becoming a state of being</p>	<p>Solitude is more than an experience where Christians can spend time with or without others and engage in formative, authentic connections with God through not only in observing His children through His eyes when in the presence of others, but sitting in nature and reflecting on what's truly in their heart to see the unknown blessings in both 'mountaintop moments' and the 'upward climb of life'</p>	<p><i>"It did not feel that's a big thing with me about like my testimony is real versus authentic versus fake. And I really pride myself, I pride myself on having what I believe is an authentic relationship. I feel like a lot of people don't necessarily have an, an intimate connection. And I know so because that used to be me. That used to be me. Looking back on it, I was like I was a Christian, but I, I wasn't like I didn't my beliefs weren't my own, my faith wasn't my own. And when you can go out into sol-, a total solitude like that and be able to figuratively look at yourself in the mirror while you're in solitude and it is nobody, it is you and it's God, it's your pride and it's God. And you can look at yourself with a clean heart and say, this is what I believe, and this is how I'm experiencing God right now, is, just something that everyone should have to experience. And it's it's even different than doing it with a group of people."</i></p>
<p>Solitude is more than an experience that is refreshingly purposeful through the encouragement of exceedingly positive moods and increasing an individual's opportunity to see unknown blessings when feeling grateful during 'mountaintop moments' or experiencing the 'upward climb' of life</p>		

Solitude can be good or bad through moments of loneliness, but it doesn't have to be by yourself or in only nature and can occur in other contexts		
Solitude is trying your best to do nothing through being still, watching natural scenery, and knowing that there is something about just sitting		
Solitude with others, whether in silence or conversation, provides a form of authentic connection to God through observing God's children through His eyes		
Solitude can be shared with others based on the acquisition of comfort and love which can be obtained through verbal or non-verbal communication		
Christians experience non-religious moments in solitude while in nature through doing something in and in so many ways		
Solitude is being totally alone and offers an experience that is unaffected by what other people think and allows for the observation of more in nature and appreciating the characteristics than when with others		

Thematic Analysis Group Two:

<p>All of creation is intertwined and God's reveals Himself through this commonality by facilitating closer connections with Him that are peaceful, re-centering, welcoming, comfortable, transformative, allow for crying out in uncertainty, and surreal in the place He created and where He speaks through the natural characteristics (e.g., sun filtering through the trees) to say 'I love you'</p>	<p>All of creation formed by God is intertwined (i.e., humanity and nature) and serves as a cathedral that provides Christians with different eyes to see nature and connect with God through His home in moments of peace, comfort, re-centering, and transformation based on the surreal influences that allow for 'setting everything down' and experiencing the characteristics (e.g., wind blowing, rocks crunching, bugs moving, and the forests which 'sing a lullaby') of the Creator and His creation</p>	<p><i>"When I first when I first met my dear sweetie here, my my go to line was I don't do outside. I don't do outside. Well, that's great. You just eliminated, you know, fifty percent of the world and you've now taken yourself out of the ability to ever experience anything God would have to say outside. But that's how I felt. I just, I figured it was dirty and there were bugs and there was just nothing there for me. Of course, God has completely transformed that line of thought. But in, but the reason why I bring that up is because, you know, you're talking about how do you how does God speak to you? How do you connect? How does nature influence you? And what a closed-minded approach to how to receive from God because I limited God to endorse. You got this much room and that's it. And and God has you subsequently so many different ways in nature to communicate to me in it. Like I said, it's in a knowing. It's in it's in the way maybe the wind just blew the right way, and you could just sense His presence. There's so many different ways that I would have missed all that had He not changed my approach, and so I'm very grateful that He changed, He totally transformed me and changed me to appreciate nature so that I could receive more from Him instead of being so pigeonholed only into this one little area."</i></p>
<p>Christians see nature through different eyes that is informed by religious views and involves stewardship duties to protect and preserve nature to show gratitude to God for His intricate, powerful, and creative gift of love through creation</p>		

<p>Nature is a cathedral that allows God and the environment He created speak and offer a connection to His home through being immersed in the things of God (e.g., wildlife sights) and receiving a physical embodiment of God's peace, promise of life, and reflection of nature 'singing' for being created</p>		
<p>The characteristics of nature (e.g., wind blowing, rocks crunching, bugs moving, solitude in the darkness) provide a quiet place to engage in 'tree therapy' by withdrawing from the noise or chaos of life and listen to the forest 'sing a lullaby' its sounds, be awestruck by a sunrise, and enjoy the earth in its purest form</p>		
<p>Nature is a vast, beautiful, and crucial masterpiece that allows an individual to quiet the body and mind while 'setting everything down' and taking in the atmosphere or fullness of the artistry that exists</p>		

Thematic Analysis Group Three:

Experiencing God in solitude and nature is not separated for Christians and these moments involve God showing the importance of His creation by wanting to look for God more and feeling the importance of what needs to be done concerning natural contexts while also experiencing a more authentic 'you' that communes with God and acquires solitude that is needed by the soul to keep an individual spiritually sane	Christians experience God through religious (e.g., worship and prayer) and non-religious (e.g., silence and internal conversation) forms and can be 'not be of the world' through experiencing raw, honest connections with an omnipresent God as a result of transcendent, very present, and peaceful moments that allow for reflection in present (e.g., feelings of protection while sitting or laying in nature) and future moments (e.g., living out the purpose God has given)	<i>"I think in some ways, solitude becomes a state of being, so it's more than just an experience where you're in a moment and it's complete peace, but it's more like it. It starts to, you start to embody it as you experience it, and it's, I think as you do that and can fully disconnect from the distractions of the world, you can be very present with God because there's not-, there's not a film or filter between, you and Him."</i>
God is experienced in solitude by Christians through religious and non-religious forms which range from silence and listening to God to praising and talking to God verbally or internally to worship the one true God		
Experiencing God in solitude is a honest, raw time where Christians can be 'not be of the world' and get closer to an omnipresent God through transcendent, very present, peaceful, safe, and comforting moments that allow for reflection and aid them in living out the purpose God has given by relating 'I'm gonna be there with you during this time'		

Prayer is a way Christians connect and communicate with God and all that is alive by visualizing Him, walking with eyes open, and talking with Him when in nature (e.g., woods or by a stream) where there is no better time to pray		
Worship is a way of connecting to God by Christians when in solitude and can involve the presence or absence of songs and allow God to fill souls with joy during moments of praise when individuals start from a low place		
Christians experience God in solitude through religious and non-religious forms which are all intertwined or not separated and can influence present (e.g., feelings of protection while sitting or laying in nature) or future moments (e.g., ministry experiences in nature playing a role in career choices or looking back on captured images of God's beauty in nature)		

In consideration of the aspects of solitude being conducted as an individual- or group-based venture, participants described solitude as potential experiences which could be embarked on in a singular fashion or with the presence of others. In consideration of associating solitude with moments which are absent of any form of additional individuals, participants conveyed an overarching reflection of solitude as “alone time” (Kay) or experiences where “being alone” (Violet) could serve as “very renewing” (Madison). Within these individual-based experiences, most participants conveyed an opportunity to receive “comfort” (Ellen) and go into an “almost like dreamlike state of just very relaxed” (Madison) when spending time in solitude alone. In contrast to this expression, some participants stated that solitude “doesn’t necessarily have to be by yourself” (Katherine) and it can have “almost like different levels” (James). Further, some participants reflected they “have solitude together” (Caleb) with others, such as “family” (Katherine). Within these shared moments of solitude, it was conveyed that “it’s also good to, to experience that solitude with other people as well and to kind of be able to pray and worship and everything with other people and within the solitude of His creation” (Trent). Having others engage in moments of solitude offered time to step “a little bit away” (Flynn) and experience God based on the opportunity to “look at them through God’s eyes for a minute” (Flynn). For example, this expression of observing the characteristics of God through other individuals who are present in current moments was conveyed by Flynn who stated:

“I either deliberately or just somehow find myself a little bit away from the group and, I get to see, you know the-, especially if like I can still kind of see them, like I get to see His children interacting with nature. And I, it's almost like I get to look at them through God's eyes for a minute.”

Further, the role of individuals within moments of solitude when observed as an experience which could be completed as a collective effort, Ruth shared a similar sentiment through highlighting the opportunity to see God based on the gathering of individuals:

“Well, I think we've talked about it. I think. That being all the above, when you immerse yourself in it and you experience it and you have especially when you have someone experience it with, even though you're being you know, you're having solitude together, I feel like your takeaway is each time where there are two or three, He's there, right. So, but I feel like we come away just deeper understanding of who He is.”

When considering solitude as time that is composed of individual-based moments, participants expressed a difference between “aloneness and loneliness” (Paul). Specifically, solitude was related to “aloneness” (Paul) which provides an individual with the opportunity to “choose to come apart, come apart from maybe our families or even our spouses or our significant others” (Paul). While this specific reference implies an individual choice to spend time alone, some participants conveyed that solitude can also “be good or bad, it can be both” (Ruth). This specific reference of a duality within solitude was conveyed in a way which solitude could provide both positive and negative connotations due to the individual-based experiencing of solitude. Further, this provided a reflection of a contrasting aspect of solitude which could result in feelings concerning loneliness or an opportunity to engage in “meditation” (Lily), such as taking time to “meditate on God’s word” (James). From this regard, participants conveyed that the duality of solitude and balance of loneliness or closeness to God could result in the opportunity to “reconnect to God” (Ruth). Specifically, Ruth reflected this by saying:

“I think and to, solitude is, can be good or bad. It can be both. Solitude can be a good thing when it brings you closer to God, but solitude can also make you feel alone. And I think that in nature you can kind of feel both feelings at the same time. And that's a good thing because it makes you reconnect to God.”

Overall, participants associated solitude as “pretty important” (Ashley) and assistive in helping an individual and their collective state remain “spiritually and mentally sane” (Ellen). Further, most participants reflect solitude as an opportunity to “disconnect from the distractions” (Emma) and engage in a process where “solitude becomes a state of being” (Emma). It is within these moments where participants conveyed an observation that “distractions freeze for a bit”

(Madison) and the provision of opportunities to “notice way more when there’s not people around, where you’re somewhere quiet and kind of alone, you can just enjoy that” (James). Through this experience, participants portrayed moments of “peace, assurance, wholeness” (Madison) when spending time in solitude and “trying to be still” (Anastasia) or “doing your absolute best to do nothing” (Kade) to acquire “solace” (Emma) which translates from experiencing a “stillness” (Emma) from solitude. As a reflection of this “calmness that kind of just like washes over you” (Thea), Emma states:

“So, continuing on from the stillness aspect. I think when I’m still it translates right into solace and solitude. Um there’s a lake I even forget which national park it’s in, but Solitude Lake, and I remember sitting by it and thinking, this is the perfect word for this place because it’s so quiet, so disconnected. It’s like the voice of God is so loud in those contexts. And I think that’s probably what society was meant to look like, was a lot more still and quiet and there’s a reason Sabbath was supposed to exist.”

Participants conveyed an overarching role of solitude in the “honest and raw” (Renee) moments which this experience facilitates based on the opportunity of individuals to know “what’s truly inside of your heart” (Arturo) when engaging in these moments of “authenticity” (Ruth). It is through these experiences of “withdrawing from all of that noise and chaos and getting into a quiet place” (Ruth) which become “tree therapy” (Ruth) and participants conveyed an opportunity to not only “look at yourself in the mirror while you’re in solitude” (Arturo) but foster an “authentic relationship” with God (Arturo) in nature which “has a big connection, because, you know, it brings you closer to God in ways of, you know, like this is His home” (Nicole). Nature was expressed by participants as “a physical embodiment of, of God’s peace in a way” (Trent) where “going out and hiking that hour to get my mind into God and to get my mind off of the things that, you know, my mind has been on” (Nicole) or hearing “everything playing together and nothing else could just drop me into silence like that, just sitting there” (Kade) within nature and experiencing the unity of solitude in relation to experiencing God and

nature based on the collective ability of these aspects to be “one in the same” (Anastasia).

Participants expressed that solitude within nature provided an overarching opportunity to “set all that down” (Emma) in consideration of the stresses of life-based situations and experience the “magical and peaceful” (Emma) moments of reflection through solitude, whether alone or with others, that can bring forth “indescribable” (Thea) moments which can be life-altering based on the intersection of God, solitude, and nature. Specifically, the revelational characteristics of solitude were conveyed by Thea in a statement reflecting:

“Again, specifically going back earlier in terms of like my first summer when sitting on the lake and asking God to help me through my alcohol addiction um just showing up like kno-, like just knowing. Like, again, audibly hearing Him, His voice in my head, but I don't know, I feel like there's like this like calmness in this. I feel like it's very indescribable, but there's like a calmness that kind of just like washes over you.”

The Role of Nature in Solitude

When considering the implementation of solitude as expressed by participants within nature, a common reflection of nature as “just a reminder” (Faye) that “God’s in charge and He made everything and just, just being in awe of that and how can you not be connected to Him” (Elizabeth) was a common aspect of the provided thoughts and lived experiences amongst the sources. Nature was compared to an experience where an individual is “entering a cathedral” (Kade) to exist within a “beautiful space” (Emma) which allows for the acquisition of “very deep peace” (Rachel) or “complete peace” (Emma). As a result, nature (e.g., NPS units, such as GRSM and INDU) was expressed by participants as a context in which the progression of solitude could occur and facilitated the ability to engage in “an enjoyable place to be alone” (Fiona) which “nurtures the spirit” (Paul). Further, nature was observed as an outlet which is “so vast and insane and it never seemed real” (Kade) and these characteristics could be observed through the living and non-living organisms and/or processes, such as the “big trees” (Madison),

such as species observed within GRSM or INDU, which facilitated the experiencing of God based on Him “trying to speak” (Rachel) through the sun “filtering through the trees” (Rachel) or opportunities to spend time in nature, whether brief or extended, and “live out the purpose that He has for me” (Thea). Specifically, Abigail expressed this realization of purpose from God in nature and moments of solitude with Him by stating:

“Simpler than that. He's literally in me, the One who created all that. If I were to see Him face to face physically my body would melt, not even kidding. And, and yet He's in me. It's a beautiful, divine mystery. I'm not gonna try and explain it because I can't. But point is, He's in me and, and like as I I wander, feeling alone on that journey t-, because there are some places that others cannot follow because you, you are choosing to be obedient to His call, whatever it is, you know, and wherever He ends up taking me and all the places I've been where there are some things that I'm, I'm struggling with that I just I am alone in, apart from the fact that, I'm never alone, and there's that type of intimate solitude.”

While nature was expressed as a context in which solitude allows for “just basking in what He has made and what He has shown you, that this is, you know, My creation and look how beautiful it is” (Nicole), it was also conveyed by some participants that solitude and specifically experiencing God could “be anywhere” (Ward) in contrast to a primary reflection of nature as an outlet for this occurrence. For example, it was expressed by some participants that “in, in those times, in my fears and doubts, He shows up and gives reassurance, but that's not unique to being outdoors, I mean that can be anywhere” (Ward). While this was an expressed reflection of some participants, most participants noted nature as a “positive correlation” (Jimmy) to the experiencing of solitude. Specifically, Jimmy expressed this sentiment by stating:

“In nature, yeah I would say it has a positive correlation. I mean, solitude in general is great, but solitude in nature definitely. I think it helps, I think it makes a difference.”

In addition to the role of nature within the experiencing of solitude and further the progression of communication and connection with God, it was conveyed by participants that nature is “a safe place” (Madison) which enhances the role of solitude and “just makes it a lot

more personal, I think, because of the things that I feel and experience while out here, in parks, and even not parks, just in the, any woods, I find or something, I, it just feels like a safe place” (Madison). Further, nature was reflected as “crucial” (Kade) by most participants and “important” (Abigail), especially in consideration of nature as serving as a location where “at least for, for nature, it’s like there’s a, there’s a reason He chooses to meet me here and He ch-, He does meet me elsewhere, but it’s very important to me” (Abigail). Nature was reflected as an integral context which invites not only an “overjoyed” (Emma) and “so happy” (Emma) experiencing of expressions but served as a platform to “feel most connected” (Renee) to God. As a reflection, Renee stated:

“Yeah, I think that I mean, I never thought about this before, but I think maybe through nature is how God communicates with me best and it's this I know is where I, it's, where I feel, most, connected to Him”

Further, nature was observed as a resource where this level of safety experienced in nature was elevated and extrapolated to experiencing God based on the feeling of being “so safe in the presence of God” (Phoebe). Even in moments of uncertainty within life, participants expressed nature was a resource in which they could engage in solitude while communicating with God and knowing that “God was gonna carry me through” (Phoebe). As an expression of this level of protection and provision as experienced through nature-based moments where God and solitude were represented, Phoebe stated:

“But I just like I sat, and I just looked out, over like this beautiful these mountains, and I like, I didn’t have any words to say. I literally just sat there, and as I did that, I just felt, like God was like wrapping His arms around me, and just like, I, had this feeling of like, ok, I don't I don't know what is going like what's gonna happen. I honestly, at that point, like, I didn't know what to-, the next day was gonna look like I didn't know when I was gonna have to move out. I didn't know how long I was gonna be, at home, I didn’t know how, long it was gonna be before I could see my best friends, I didn't know if my summer plans were gonna be ruined. I didn't know if things were gonna be able to pick up in the fall. I didn't know anything, and yet, in that moment, I just felt, so safe in the presence of God. And like, I just knew without a doubt that God was going to provide for me what I

needed. And that didn't necessarily mean that it was gonna be what I wanted. But that like that experience of like like feeling the presence of God, like right there is really what, like allowed me to be, able to like then process my like, process those feelings and like step into like that nest season, of my life with, which was like the, the most uncertainty I've ever lived through. But yet, like I have never trusted God more. And I think it's because like every step of the way I like I just, kept going back to that moment and like remembering that I like I was so, sure that God was gonna carry me through, and He did. And like that was like, yeah, that was just like a really cool experience that I had. And like like just, felt so close to God."

Overall, participants conveyed a significance in which nature provides through its recognition as a location where solitude "makes me feel closer" (Faye) not only to the characteristics which compose the natural settings, but to God as well. For example, it was expressed that experiencing solitude in nature provides reflections of significance within biblical-based literature, such as the creation story in the book of Genesis, through it making "me feel closer, just you feel enveloped by His love and, and, and it's just such a reminder, you know, I, I think about, especially here in the Smokies, because I think it's the most beautiful place on earth, what Eden must have been like and as, as beautiful as I think the Smokies are, and I, I guess our, our protected wild areas are as close to Eden as we can get" (Faye). Further, Ward also conveyed the significance of nature by stating:

"I think maybe it, it influences my connection to nature as a as a reminder, that that God's glory is revealed in nature and sometimes you see God's glory more in nature than you do in man."

As a result, an expression of stewardship and protection of nature and associated natural resources was conveyed by most participants. It was portrayed that nature-based experiences involving solitude serve as moments of remembrance regarding the "duties to protect" (Violet) nature. Further, it was reflected within these moments, nature is a reflection of the "resources that God has given" (Ashley) and spending time within these contexts results in wanting to engage in "protecting it" (Ashley) and being physical representations of "stewardship" (Faye).

This was expressed by Ashley who stated:

“I think I do feel more connected to nature when I'm alone and I am like in, either in the word or praying or worshipping out loud just because, yeah, I don't know, you just feel so centered and like just dwelling on everything that God has done for us and our beautiful Earth He created for us. This helps me feel more connected to nature and feel more drawn to, you know, protecting it, and making sure that I'm being a good steward of the resources that God has given us and humanity as a whole.”

Experiencing God in Moments of Solitude

Regarding the role of God and specifically experiencing God in relation to the focus phenomena within this research (i.e., experiencing God in moments of solitude in nature), most participants conveyed God as being “closer than any friend” (Abigail) who “communicates” (Renee) within moments of nature-based experiences and solitude based on “God showing me through His nature, through um, through something that I love so deeply, I feel like that maybe, is how He communicates with me best” (Renee). Participants expressed that “God is always there” (Eva) in moments of solitude based on the influence which this time provides through facilitating connections with God as a result of being “present and not be of the world for a second and not be of the hustle and bustle but be alone” (Eva). It is within these experiences of stillness or reflection that participants conveyed a unique connection amongst the factors of God, solitude, and nature based on “those three, God, solitude, and nature are like best friends” (Abigail). The collective experiencing of these factors allowed for the “omnipresent” (Caleb) existence of God that was reflected by participants to serve as an enhancing factor which facilitated the acquisition of “the most enjoyable times” (Anastasia) in relation to the three referenced factors (i.e., God, solitude, and nature). Through experiencing God in solitude, participants were able to see nature “through completely different eyes” (Marie) that observe nature as a gift from God due to Him being the “giver of every perfect gift” (Anastasia). Participants expressed being able to see “the care in His eyes” (Abigail) and translate this to

moments of solitude within nature which ultimately offer true moments of “open conversation with God” (Renee) where “honest and raw” (Renee) dialogues take place and result in the progression of infiltrating aspects which relate to the additional factors of solitude and nature. For example, Jimmy conveyed the notable role of experiencing God in relation to their further experience of solitude and nature by stating:

“I think I do feel more connected to nature when I'm alone and I am like in, either in the word or praying or worshipping out loud just because, yeah, I don't know, you just feel so centered and like just dwelling on everything that God has done for us and our beautiful Earth He created for us. This helps me feel more connected to nature and feel more drawn to, you know, protecting it, and making sure that I'm being a good steward of the resources that God has given us and humanity as a whole.”

Through these moments of solitude, participants also conveyed the opportunity to engage in verbal or non-verbal expressions as a means to communicate with God. Specifically, participants reflected opportunities to “just stare up at the sky and just pour my heart out to God” (Flynn), “praising and just being grateful” (Abigail), “writing songs to Him” (Emma), “praying inwardly or speaking privately to God” (Ashley), worshipping through song to God and “especially, songs that have scripture like the deer, as the deer panteth for the water” (Anastasia), “sing songs that are familiar or really old hymns or ones that I feel give voice to that moment” (Emma), reading “scripture” (Ellen), and taking time to “pause in His presence” (Thea). These specific expressions were found to be sources of reflection or catharsis based on the opportunity to “slow down and like pause” (Thea) even in moments of feeling “pumped up” (Jimmy) and “exceedingly positive” (Jimmy) or being in a “season” (Thea) of life where a constant state of “uncertainty” (Phoebe) is in flux. Thea referred to the role of God in moments of solitude as opportunities to engage in expressions of religious-based influences to navigate the progression of trials and tribulations in life. Specifically, Thea stated:

“Just being there allows me to like kind of slow down and like pause. Um, so I was reading through Psalms sixty-two like a week or two ago specifically the Passion Translation and the phrase that repeatedly comes up is “pause in His presence”. You know, and just like, like versus four and five, like pause in His presence, I'm standing in absolute stillness, silence before the One I love, waiting as long as it takes for Him to rescue me. So specifically in this season, like meditating on that verse, like allowing myself to actually pause, whether it be in nature or whatever.”

Further, in these moments participants conveyed an elevated expression of worship, prayer, and praise through the opportunity to “commune with, with God above” (Paschal) in a manner which is not brought forth through the “imagination” (Abigail) and results in a deep closeness to God that is indescribable in its impact due to there being “just no words” (Emma). Specifically, participants reflected that “He’s, He’s not just distant, He really is my best friend, and it’s not just my imagination, it’s not, it couldn’t be” (Abigail). Most participants conveyed an “intimacy” (Abigail) which can be gained from experiencing God in moments of solitude and nature. It is within these moments where participants experienced a sense of “wholeness” (Madison) and a “nurtured feeling” (Madison) that “just makes it even more of a special place for me and some place that might, I just greatly enjoy getting to spend time” (Madison). This level of expanded closeness which participants portrayed in relation to their experiencing of God in solitude and nature was further highlighted by their reception of communication acquired from God within these significant moments. Specifically, participants conveyed this through a “little feeling of warmth” (Flynn) or knowing “He’s there because of this space that surrounds me” (Ellen; i.e., natural surroundings within the research settings). This level of communication was expressed by Nicole who shared:

“I feel like when after I get done praying about that with that timing, you know, then it's like, then things start to move and it's like He was there trying to s-, say, like, “I heard you”, you know, that, you know, “it's all been heard”, you know, and “I'll do what needs to be done with that”, you know.”

Ruth also reflected the in-depth and deep connections with God that can be fostered through moments of solitude in nature by relating it to a “symbiotic” relationship which allows individuals to grow and “bear more fruit” within their lives as a result of immersing in experiences with God in His creation and releasing any form of superficial perspectives in exchange for divine inspiration. Specifically, Ruth expressed this sentiment by stating:

“And I feel like if you don't come to the end of yourself by spending time with God in nature, then you are never going to bear more fruit. You're never gonna have the fullness of what He has for you. And I think it comes through an expression, through nature, other things as well. But I think you have to come to the end of yourself. And one of the ways you can get there is by spending time with God's creation and it, and it's that symbiotic. You learn from Him, He pours into you, you learn more from Him and, you know, it kind of grows as you grow, so.”

Additionally, this level of authentic and raw connection with God was expressed by participants as a way in which “He still answers” (Arturo). Specifically, participants noted that in individual-based moments, God displays a level of compassion which is similar to “a veil that I can feel coming over” (Kay) and it is just the participants and God within these reassuring, comforting, serene moments due to recognizing a one-on-one dynamic which reflects “feeling really known and fully seen by Him” (Madison). For example, Arturo explained this experience of knowing God is present in moments of solitude and communion by stating:

“But just being able to be out there and say like kind of, nobody else is here, it is, just me, and I'm being real with You, I'm being real with You, God, and for Him to answer just to you, as opposed to five hundred people, when it's like five hundred people who are lifting up a prayer to someone, it's like, ok, five hundred voices, surely, He'll answer, but when it's just you, it's just you, and He still answers.”

Further, this closeness was described by most participants as “overwhelming, but in a good way, because like, you know, He's there and, you know, He's taking care of whatever is on your heart that needs to be taken care of the most” (Kay). Specifically, participants expressed this notable, sentimental, and “transcendent” (Emma) experiencing of God as moments which

they “seek it out, I want it and I look forward to it, I plan for it” (Emma). It is within solitude with God where He can introduce occurrences of “being transformed” (Ruth), “weightless” (Emma) experiences which allow for “less distractions” (Elizabeth), provides moments in the “stillness and quiet” (Ruth) where “you can actually hear that still small voice” (Ruth), and “opens your ability to hear through the Spirit from the Lord more because you are more focused on the solitude and not just the busy-ness of everyday life” (Caleb). Specifically, Emma expressed this impactful experiencing of God as a progression of moments to “set all that down”. Accordingly, Emma stated:

“Yeah, it's a direct correlation when I don't get time in nature, I am grumpy, I'm stressed I'm frustrated, I am, reactive, I, mostly stressed and I, I end up taking on the weight of the world and the weight of everybody else. And I try to hold it all together and I just can't. And so, it's like if I go into nature, I can set all that down and so it's start the path and the further I walk, the more things I set down. And then by the time I get to solitude, whatever that looks like, I have nothing. And it's just purely weightless, and it's so peaceful.”

Thea also related these interactions with God as serving as life-changing moments which offer a “calmness” (Thea) through experiencing God. Specifically, Thea conveyed the power of these moments and most notably an intimate relationship with God can provide not only during occurrences of direct solitude, but within the dynamic of life by stating:

“Specifically going back earlier in terms of like my first summer when sitting on the lake and asking God to help me through my alcohol addiction um just showing up like kno-, like just knowing. Like, again, audibly hearing Him, His voice in my head, but I don't know, I feel like there's like this like calmness in this. I feel like it's very indescribable, but there's like a calmness that kind of just like washes over you.”

Essence Description

Overall, the involved sources and participants shared the opportunity to engage in elevated experiences involving the specific aspects of solitude, nature (i.e., NPS unit), and God. Whether acting as an individual which is absent from the presence of others or finding moments

to retreat from a collective, group setting to engage in individualistic moments, participants expressed an ability to partake in perspective shifting and influential moments of meditation with God in His creation. Through these moments attributes involving rejuvenation, grounding in religious tenets (i.e., biblical-based scripture or expressions involving prayer and worship), non-religious activities (i.e., nature-based recreation), the presence of God, and a renewed recognition of purpose could be achieved when selecting to draw away from the complexities of life-based situations. The overall essence description in relation to the focus phenomena includes:

“Christians experience God in solitude through the intertwined characteristics of creation (e.g., interacting with nature and/or people) which serves as a cathedral where religious and non-religious activities can take place to ultimately engage in formative and authentic moments with the Creator and His creation (e.g., listening to the forests 'sing a lullaby') that allow for re-centering or 'setting everything down' and the ability to truly see what is in one's heart to see the unknown blessings in both the 'mountaintop moments' and 'upward climb of life'” (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Overarching and final subthemes in addition to the cohesive essence description based on the implementation of a thematic analysis through the inclusion of key words and phrases spoken by participants.

Final and Refined Subthemes	Essence Description	Quote
<i>All Subthemes and Inspired Essence Description:</i>		
Solitude is more than an experience where Christians can spend time with or without others and engage in formative, authentic connections with God through not only in observing His children through His eyes when in the presence of others, but sitting in nature and reflecting on what's truly in their heart to see the unknown blessings in both 'mountaintop moments' and the 'upward climb of life'	Christians experience God in solitude through the intertwined characteristics of creation (e.g., interacting with nature and/or people) which serves as a cathedral where religious and non-religious activities can take place to ultimately engage in formative and authentic moments with the Creator and His creation (e.g., listening to the forests 'sing a lullaby') that allow for re-centering or 'setting everything down' and the ability to truly see what is in one's heart to see the unknown blessings in both the 'mountaintop moments' and 'upward climb of life'	<i>"He didn't bring me for, you know, like a like anyone else like He brought me here because He wanted to start a relationship with me. And I think a lot of times when we when we do that, when we, you know, set aside time to think and and sit in solitude, we see the hand of God where we wouldn't see it before, you know. And so, I think that's where we find I think that's where we find like our, our, how our faith intersects with with nature and and how we when we take that time to to practice solitude and we take that time to just be still, we're able to see more of God and who He created us to be and how His plan for us intersects with the world that we live in."</i>
All of creation formed by God is intertwined (i.e., humanity and nature) and serves as a cathedral that provides Christians with different eyes to see nature and connect with God through His home in moments of peace, comfort, re-centering, and transformation based on the surreal influences that allow for 'setting everything down' and experiencing the characteristics (e.g., wind blowing, rocks crunching, bugs moving, and the forests which 'sing a lullaby') of the Creator and His creation		

<p>Christians experience God through religious (e.g., worship and prayer) and non-religious (e.g., silence and internal conversation) forms and can be 'not be of the world' through experiencing raw, honest connections with an omnipresent God as a result of transcendent, very present, and peaceful moments that allow for reflection in present (e.g., feelings of protection while sitting or laying in nature) and future moments (e.g., living out the purpose God has given)</p>		
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Discussion

When considering the progression and cumulative stages within this research which convey the continuous evolution of subthemes and an associated overarching rich, thick description, participants conveyed a multilevel and in-depth experience or series of experiences which can be acquired from engaging in solitude. Further, this was amplified through the context in which these moments took place. Specifically, the engagement or embodiment of solitude within nature-based experiences served as a means in which authentic and raw moments arose for participants. Through these moments reflecting the dynamic interrelation of solitude and nature, these specific aspects were further amplified and elevated through the professed connection with God which was perceived and shared by each participant. While the detection of God or sensing of His presence could be experienced within all contexts and not solely natural surroundings, a majority of participants reflected the unseparated connective facets of solitude, nature, and God through their lived experiences and reflected a role which nature plays within the progression of these “formative” (David) moments. Specifically, a holistic consensus amongst the sources involved an enrichment of solitude within nature as a result of their belief system and specifically experiencing God within His observed creation and reflection of compassion and care towards humanity. For example, it was expressed by Flynn that solitude is “important” within these moments to experience God and foster the level of communication present between them and God. Specifically, Flynn stated:

“The amount of solit-, I would say if there was no solitude, I don't experience God as much or I don't feel like I hear from God as much, I may I may feel God's presence, I guess, like if we're worshipping, if there's a bunch of us worshipping around a campfire, just singing and praising God, like I, I feel like I definitely you know feel God's presence, I feel the praise and all that stuff. But I feel like I don't hear from God so much when I'm around people. Solitude for me is very important, in order, to like hear back from God.”

As a result of the unveiled, collective expression of the focus phenomena and the overall essence description for this research, the intensified authenticity in consideration of the interconnected components (i.e., God, solitude, and nature) as referenced by participants brings forth an enhanced level of understanding regarding the intangible and potentially tangible factors which exist within this impactful series of events. Specifically, the experiencing of solitude within these moments highlights the opportunity for individuals to partake in an expression of “pause” (Fiona) whether in relation to undergoing the stillness of solitude, selecting to observe surrounding natural scenery before transitioning or engaging in alternate ventures (e.g., camping, hiking, photography, etc.), retreating away from a group setting to engage in meditation, remaining within a group and allowing for individualistic experiences of solitude despite the presence of others, or partaking in the quiet and facilitating the practices of reflection or meditation as a form of diminishing ongoing thought processes and enacting a posture focused on recognizing the presence of God and communicating correspondingly. As a result, the level of authenticity or infiltrating manner of these moments was conveyed as an enhancement factor which served as an advantageous influence within the nature-based experiences of participants and specifically their connection with God. The factor of solitude served as a platform which participants were able to direct their attention away from any form of present or ongoing “distractions” (Ashley) and facilitate an experience which provides “peace from everything else that’s going on and just quiet” (Faye) to ultimately “feel closer to God because there’s no distractions, there’s nothing else I’m thinking about” (Ashley). As a result, solitude served as a medium in which the intangible nuances or characteristics of immersing oneself in the “pause” (Fiona) associated with solitude were revealed to participants with resulting tangible outcomes in the form of associations with solitude as a means of refuge or potential rejuvenation when

needed as a brief haven from the situations and occurrences which compose life. Whether completing solitude through being alone or completing individual-based scenarios within a group-based context or venture, these experiences provide raw forms of influences which not only impacted their present state (e.g., mental, physical, and emotional benefits, such as multifaceted reprieve), but future ex situ moments or experiences outside of the nature-based spaces.

It is through the platform or foundation of solitude where similar revitalizing components of nature were also increased. Specifically, the opportunity to engage in solitude when immersed in nature was observed as experiences where “the more I can get out, the better” (Anastasia). The provision of moments where solitude is initiated and progressed is in alignment with the offerings which can be acquired in nature and reflects the atmosphere where the formation of intrinsically in-depth connections can take place not only concerning human-nature bonds, but relationships between individuals and God as conveyed by participants (Pretty et al., 2005). Within nature-based experiences, participants displayed a notably reflective opportunity to conduct considerations and engage in the “pause” (Fiona) to ultimately partake in a shift to “put things in perspective” (James). As an example of this meditative period of intangible, internal evaluation, James stated:

“So, I think having solitude and just sort of that quiet lets you really reflect both on who God is and His mercy towards us and also the who we are and sort of what where I need to grow and what God's been teaching me over the last week that I feel like having solitude kind of gives you that time to step back and see kind of put things in perspective.”

In further consideration of the opportunity to take an assessment of current life-based occurrences or seek an outlet of solitary comfort, the expressed longing for this activity to engage not only in solitude and nature, but God as well by participants highlights the specific

intangible attributes in the form of mental transformation (Lin et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2013; Stickley, 2021). Specifically, participants expressed a difference between the aspects of loneliness and aloneness when engaging in these moments (Lindgren et al., 2013). Similar to the religious experiences which an individual may undergo, loneliness is similar in its individualistic composition and is informed by a range of factors within one's life whether short- or long-term influences that introduce a potential absence of choice (Lindgren et al., 2013). Within this research, participants expressed aloneness where a choice is made to draw away from a group or life-based contexts, especially to immerse oneself in nature, and engage in singular reflection and moments of "pause" (Fiona). As a result, participants conveyed this through the referenced shifting in perspectives and revitalization not only in their solitude moments in nature, but their connection with God where they perceived Him most in these moments and further their viewpoint regarding their life overall and divinely designed purpose as set by God. The level of revelation present within these moments of aloneness were conveyed as reformatory and could lead to the acquisition of positive mental attributes based on this series of in-depth reflective occurrences. Through the integral role of these moments in aligning with a positive connotation with aloneness as expressed by participants, this could further bring forth recognition to the significance which should be consistently provided towards mental health (Lin et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2013; Stickley, 2021). By participants selecting to engage in these times to realize "what's truly inside of your heart" (Arturo) and acquire a sense of authenticity as facilitated through the formation of solitude and nature by God, this provides further reflections of the mental health benefits which were acquired by individuals during these moments and through the experienced phenomena (Lin et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2013; Stickley, 2021). As a result, the notable reception of intangible attributes (e.g., reduction in stress and anxiety,

enhanced recognition of life-based purpose, increased personal resilience and self-efficacy, etc.) in moments where an individual's mental state could be altered in an advantageous manner is immense in consideration of the further progression and accessibility of these experiences in nature and the welcoming of religious-based reflections or higher levels of thought which could ultimately provide life-altering benefits or change(s) (Lin et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2013; Stickley, 2021).

Based on the facilitated or motivated ability to engage in higher levels of thought or reflective moments which can potentially translate from an intangible form to tangible outcomes (e.g., application of revelations within life-based contexts, such as “mountaintop moments” or the “upward climb of life”), the influence of nature within these potentially transformative and transcendent experiences is significant in consideration of the provision of opportunities (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; Ronda, 2013). This further highlights the significance of nature not only in consideration of the role it can provide in the overall well-being of an individual (i.e., mental, physical, and emotional), but the religious-based values and core tenets within their existence as well (Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; White et al., 2019). Specifically, the engrained position which these forms of central pillars maintain within the life of an individual is immense and potentially pivotal not only in an intangible manner, but tangible as well (Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019).

Based on the experienced engagement which results from partaking in solitude within nature, the potential for one's own spiritual revelations could be enlivened as a result of being able to actively pursue these moments of retreat from the presence of others and distractions (Burger, 1995; Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). As a result, individuals who aim to spend time within a natural setting to not only

seek experience in these specific contexts but select to engage in a context which elevates their level of connection with a higher deity (i.e., God) in which they believe could be monumental in the frequency they engage in these experiences and resulting outcomes that could come forth from these moments of interaction between religion, solitude, and nature (Burger, 1995; Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Long et al., 2003; Ost Mor et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). As a result, this further provides recognition for the establishment of protected spaces in landscapes where solitude can be facilitated and achieved despite existing, potential processes, such as those associated with development, increased infrastructure, and increased human-based presence (i.e., crowding; Alkan, 2009; Fisichelli et al., 2015; Manning, 2003; Manning et al., 2017; McLean & Yoder, 2005; Tubb, 2003). It is through equitable accessibility for all and the provision of an environment which encourages the progression of intrinsically engrained reflection that potential revelations concerning how an individual views their linkage with nature and potentially progress the formation of benefits which expand beyond the bounds of these moments (e.g., spiritual growth, increased resilience and perceived confidence in individual competency regarding life-based contexts, deepened connection to nature through religious beliefs and expressions, enhanced occurrence of pro-environmental behaviors, etc.; Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001).

For example, an experienced and represented level of closeness to God through nature which was achieved by participants serves as a potential catalyst in the occurrence of resounding attributes. As a result of the more in-depth opportunity to experience the divine being and composure of God within natural spaces which are believed to be created by Him, Christians may undergo an initiation or progression of transformations in consideration of their perception of nature and associated behaviors (Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). Specifically,

participants reflected an inherent opportunity to engage in an intimate, authentic, raw, and honest connection with God through nature based on the ability to “pause” (Fiona) and take notice of novel traits within their surroundings due to this process of silencing and stillness. Further, participants conveyed a desire to act through stewardship-based behaviors and processes which focus on “preserving” (Ward) the “sacred” (Phoebe) creation which offers “reminders of different attributes of God” (James) and “moments that I have felt the closest to God” (Phoebe).

Based on this, the religion of Christianity which contains a theocentric view of God serving as the single authority of life can result in the further existence of associated views of nature which align with a biocentric mindset and places importance on the treatment of natural resources through tangible means (Hunter et al., 2014; Kals et al., 1999; Keiser et al., 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Krebs, 1999; Steg & Vlek, 2009). While this is a significant consideration, the complexity of these moments is further amplified by the ever-changing and evolving characteristics which compose individuals (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001). Specifically, the variability which forms different perspectives amongst society can be applied within this situation and specifically those who identify with the same religious belief system (i.e., Christianity; Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001). Even with the expressed sentiments shared by participants of this research, these results are reflective of the focus sources and could lead to differentiation in how different Christians observe natural contexts (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001).

Regarding Christians who do maintain a biocentric viewpoint of nature, exposure to natural spaces which serves as an underpinning or an enhancing element within their relationship with God, a pro-environmental mindset involving the attributes of care, respect, recognition,

resilience through perceived ability to implement positive changes through protection could come forth (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Long & Averill, 2003; Neill & Dias, 2001). Further, the level of degree and richness which is experienced through engaging with God and being within His presence through solitude in nature could translate into natural contexts based on observations of these spaces as “all the richer” (Jimmy) due to “He who created” (Jimmy) nature and the desire to further have opportunities to spend time in these experiences, specifically accessible spaces with which an atmosphere of reverence and spiritual growth can occur. As a result, this could further intensify the desire with which Christians aim to pursue opportunities to evolve in their development not only in a religious sense (e.g., fostering a deeper connection with God and further through modes which unveil His character, such as solitude within His creation), but in an environmental sense as well (e.g., conveyance or verbal sharing of impactful moments within nature and experiencing God with others no matter their personal, identified beliefs) based on the inseparable collective as portrayed by participants and their expressed aim to “seek” (Emma) these “intimate” (Emma) experiences (Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). As a portrayal of this unique, resounding experience, Emma stated:

“I think it makes me crave nature. I mean, I think knowing that intimate experience I can have with God, while in that context, I, I seek it out, I want it and I look forward to it. I plan for it.”

Based on the significance of solitude to serve as a platform to “pause” (Fiona) in a natural context which facilitates expanded or higher-level thought processes and allow for growth to potentially occur through religious modes, the experiencing of God was further relayed by individuals as the solidifying factor within the interconnected collective and an amplifying element within the overall experience (Davies, 2018; Hunter et al., 2014; Kals et al., 1999; Keiser et al., 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Krebs, 1999; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Specifically, God

was conveyed as a factor which brought forth new meanings and synthesis within these moments as expressed by participants. The level of perceived authenticity through solitude in nature-based moments was conveyed as an outlet or method in which to connect with God through deeper and more intrinsically diverse means. As a result, participants not only chose to engage in the quiet and stillness provided by the natural surroundings to hear and communicate with God but engage in forms of verbal and non-verbal expression as a reflection of their religious beliefs and further belief in God as the “Creator” (Caleb). Through unstructured and structured practices involving prayer, worship, and use of biblical- or religious-based resources (i.e., Holy Bible), participants experienced an evocation of emotion and a modification in experience complexity based on the level of holistic implications which they observed within these “indescribable” (Thea) moments (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011).

Specifically, participants conveyed a desire to commune with God in natural spaces where an atmosphere of solitude is facilitated and allows and motivates the progression of “singing back to God” (Caleb) and listen to a joining of this expression from the natural surroundings as well. For example, Caleb portrayed this simultaneous expression of worship as completed by participants and nature towards God by stating:

“The rocks and stones would cry out if we didn't say something. So, it's, it's one of those things where you can listen to nature. Nature is actually a, the way I look at it is singing back to God for being created in the first place. So, you just want to sit and enjoy that. That's, that's solitude enough for me to be able to just listen to the, the creation. Worshiping the Creator is basically what that's all about to me, so.”

It is through these expressions where participants conveyed the interconnected aspect of God, solitude, and nature further and reflected back to the Creator with which developed the corresponding elements. Within these moments, the dynamic which was conveyed by participants as being initiated by God and served as the method in which was formed to allow for

communication and communion in a manner that drew them to natural spaces and further in a deeper connection with Him. Specifically, this process of development and desired connection between the Lord and existence can be reflected through biblical-based scripture provided through the Holy Bible in the book of John which states:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” (John 1:1-5)

These fostered series of perspective altering and shifting dialogues whether through God using “audible” (Niko) expressions, “visions” (Niko) or “just like pictures” (Niko), through a “change in temperature” (Nicole), or “when the wind blows” (Anastasia), spurred the enactment of dynamic thought processes and contemplation by participants as a result of experiencing God in solitude while choosing to “pause in His presence” (Thea). Specifically, Thea aligned these multifaceted experiences of “absolute stillness” with scripture presented in the Holy Bible. Specifically, Thea shared the scripture-based reference which states:

“My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.” (Psalm 62:5)

The role of God within moments of solitude and nature-based experiences offered a level of divine interaction based on their overall elevated experiences. Through solitude, God served as an overarching aspect which enriched the foundation of solace and corresponding element of nature. Specifically, God is observed as an ever-present being by participants and it is the recognition and perspective of the individual which can inhibit or enhance the detection of God. Based on the level of distraction reduction which solitude can provide, participants were able to diminish their “human nature” and gain a posture which is open and recognizing of the presence of God in all ranges of time and space, such as solitude within nature. As a result, these moments were made richer based on the recognition and experiencing of God and further reflect the

notable significance these moments provide within the life of an individual. Despite the beliefs an individual may hold true, the impactful influence of accessing moments of solitude within nature was further highlighted by this research (Fisichelli et al., 2015). In consideration of this infiltrating impact, the religious beliefs an individual regards further elevated the experience in a way which was uniquely impactful and individualistic in its own composition (e.g., beneficial mental health changes through experiencing God within His creation and engaging in a modification in overall state as a result of this divine care and authenticity as perceived from God; Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). While the components of solitude and nature can bring forth a fervent affinity towards natural contexts and the opportunity to “pause” (Fiona), the influence of religion within these moments reinforced the continuation of these experiences and the level of tangible outcomes which result from the intangible revelations (e.g., progression concerning environmental mindset and pro-environmental behaviors; Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). As a result, the phenomena of experiencing God within moments of solitude by Christians was unveiled to be a foundational factor in the desires of individuals when considering how to interact with nature, how this expanded into their perspectives concerning existence, and their call to “live out the purpose that He has for me” (Thea) as a result of the authentic connections which provide unknown, infiltrating outcomes of “blessing” (James; Fam et al, 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019).

Conclusions

Overall, participants expressed an opportunity to engage in solitude within nature (i.e., NPS units) as fruitful moments which bring forth not only a form of refuge, but rejuvenation of their individual state (i.e., physical, mental, and emotional) and perceived purpose. Specifically, it is within these multifaceted experiences where individuals designated time and space to

complete a “pause” (Fiona) and become open in posture and frame of mind to complete higher levels of thought or engage in both religious (e.g., expressions involving prayer, worship, or using biblical- or religious-based resources) and non-religious activities (e.g., nature-based recreation). As a result, participants shared their recognition of God and His ever-present existence within these moments through their ability to diminish any form of distractions. Through this specific aspect of these moments of solitude within nature-based experiences, participants describe their experiencing of God as not only a means to remain in His presence but receive a shift or renewal of mindset which provided lenses which are informed by God to observe the high and low experiences of life in a grounded manner. Participants were able to perceive their current life-based situations and contexts in a way which is informed by ultimately their perceived connection with God and further their religious beliefs as well. In addition to the foundational role of experiencing God, participants shared that the opportunity to engage in solitude within a natural context (i.e., NPS unit) amplified their experience overall. It is within these specific spaces where individuals felt drawn to engage in solitude and further experience a divine creation. Due to this, nature served as a platform where their reception of solitude and God were enhanced and highlights the integral importance which should be placed on facilitating these experiences within these protected spaces and future areas as well. Collectively, the role of solitude within the participants lived experiences acted as formative and affirming moments which not only fostered connections and desires to spend time within a creation they held affinity for overall (e.g., place attachment and desires to engage in environmentally conscious actions), but to primarily experience a God which provides power for these divine moments through developing the opportunity for these authentic, motivating experiences to take place whether

through forms of being alone with Him or retreating from a group setting to engage in His refuge (i.e., His presence and creation in solitude).

Limitations

Within the progression of this research, a range of measures and procedures were implemented in an iterative manner to ensure the continuation of cumulative rigor and merit. Through measures involving triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, utilization of exact verbiage expressed by participants, recognition of researcher bias, and re-occurring evaluation methods (i.e., bracketing, transcription, cluster development, thematic analysis, and essence description formation), these specific steps were executed to ensure the overarching factor of trustworthiness was consistently addressed throughout each stage of the research process (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999; Orr et al., 2016). While these measures were completed in a frequent interval and involved the inclusion of established reviewers who specialize in qualitative research (i.e., peer debriefing), the introduction of human error is present as a limitation within this research (i.e., bracketing stage to essence description development). Based on the conveyed proximity of the overall research objective in consideration of the researcher's personal bias, the potential for outside influences is possible within the presented findings. While this is a potential occurrence, the referenced methods were not only implemented in numerous quantities to ensure the progression of steps were accurate and precise, but to solidify a credible level of rigor and transparency in the ultimate reflection of the spoken words as expressed by participants and the essence description concerning the phenomena of focus. While the introduction of researcher bias could be involved as a limitation, the iterative manner in which routine evaluations took place and conveyed approval by additional reviewers served as

continuous assessments that provided verification concerning the continuation of scientifically sound measures.

In consideration of additional limitations within this research, the interview stage serves as the potential for alternate influences based on 1) the research settings in which each dialogue took place, 2) specific techniques implemented by the researcher during the completion of each interview, and 3) involved research sources. Regarding the research settings of GRSM and INDU, these specific NPS units were selected based on their historical visitation trends in conjunction with their natural characteristics. Further, these specific locations were contrasting in their composition (i.e., scenery), but similar in their provision of religious-based offerings for individuals to selectively engage in while present within each research setting. While these sites were specifically selected in alignment with the inclusion of purposeful sampling within this research from the involved sources to the research settings, these locations do not fully reflect the immense diversity which composes not only NPS units, but nature-based contexts overall. Despite this factor and potential limitation, the inclusion of these specific sites provided a dynamic method to ensure the provided data was relevant (i.e., contextual influence) based on the lived experiences of each participant in alignment with a phenomenological framework and further aimed towards detailing the phenomena of focus within this research as well (i.e., experiencing of God within moments of solitude during nature-based ventures).

Regarding the involved sources and completed semi-structured interviews, the three sources of focus included a range of individuals based on the varied experiences they were engaging in during the completion of this research. While this served as an additional level of purposeful sampling within this research to further unveil the existing phenomena of focus, the involved participants do not accurately reflect the demographic composition of visitors who

embark on ventures within NPS units. As a result, the inclusion of these sources does not fully convey visitors within the holistic collective of NPS units. Despite this item, the included participants aligned with the established criteria to ultimately reflect the progression of the phenomena of focus. Additionally, with a phenomenological framework, the presence of a smaller sample size is appropriate dependent upon the satisfaction of saturation within the data (Malterud et al., 2016). Overall, the acquired data reflects the expressed experiences of those who were present during the intersection of space and time for this research and serve as applicable sources to serve in enhancing existing levels of understanding concerning the focus phenomena. While this is plausible, further research should be completed to provide not only more detail pertaining to the phenomena at hand within this research, but further provide an accurate representation of all NPS visitors.

Concerning the implemented interviews, limitations for this research could extend to the practices implemented by the researcher during the execution of each dialogue. Specifically, the researcher aimed to act as a neutral presence during the completion of each interview which did not sway or impede upon the expressed words and thoughts of each participant. The researcher aimed to utilize neutral verbal and non-verbal expressions (e.g., neutral facial expressions or phrasing of statements) to ensure no form of outside influence would alter the initial reactions maintained by participants. Despite these efforts, the potential introduction of influence on the provided statements could have been modified or slightly altered based on the presence of the researcher during the interview as a result of unconscious actions or non-verbal expressions. Further, probing was a process utilized by the researcher during each interview dependent upon the detection of additional in-depth detail in consideration of the presented questions. Specifically, based on the semi-structured interview format, the researcher presented the same

questions to each participant and provided additional inquiries if deemed appropriate within the present circumstances. As a result, specific phrasing or used words by the researcher could have also posed as potential influences in the responses recorded by each participant. Even though the introduction of influences by the researcher could have been present during the interview, this potential is recognized and served as a preparation technique before and during the completion of this research and aimed to be addressed through the tailored techniques implemented by the researcher to ensure they did not serve as any form of inhibiting factor in the raw data expressed by each participant.

Chapter 4 - The Dynamic of Religion and the Environment:

Understanding the Environmental Mindset of Christians

Abstract

To understand the dynamic venture(s) of those who identify as Christians when engaging in nature-based experiences and how these multifaceted moments influence their environmental mindset, qualitative research through a phenomenological framework was implemented. Specifically, the presence of specific influences within the formation of a Christian-based environmental mindset (i.e., worship, prayer, and biblical- or religious-based resources) were of focus in consideration of completed nature-based experiences and further infiltrating outcomes regarding their held perspective(s). Due to a diminished level of clarity and perception (i.e., observation of Christianity as an anthropocentric focused religion through dominion-based sentiments) regarding the interaction of religion and the completed viewpoint and behaviors of Christians, this research implemented semi-structured interviews to unveil an in-depth and rich composition of data to ultimately understand how Christian-based beliefs and expression in conjunction with the experiencing of God formed the environmental mindset of those who identify with this specific approach to existence and the processes within. In-person interviews were completed during summer 2020 within two research settings which offered diverse, contrasting nature-based experiences and applicable contexts through which participants could undergo through their provision of lived experiences. The research settings involved within this study included Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GRSM) and Indiana Dunes National Park (INDU). Further, three sources were involved to provide additional insight into the multilayered experiences of Christians and their resulting environmental mindset. Specifically, the sources involved individuals who 1) were partaking in a worship service within an NPS unit (N=15), 2)

voluntarily engaged in an extended stay through a religious-based retreat within an NPS unit (N=5), and 3) selected to serve as employed personnel who facilitated Christian-based religious offerings (i.e., worship service) within an NPS unit (N=16). Overall, participants shared a common expression of nature, such as the designation of protected and public lands through U.S. National Park Service units, as a gift from a master creator (i.e., God) who expressed their utmost portrayal of compassion for all that exists through the intricacies of nature and resultingly become immersed in elevated levels of gratitude through evoked expressions (i.e., amplified application of worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources in God's creation which further reflects the contained truths). Further, this level of intimate detail and authenticity was displayed by participants as also involving a focus on humanity and the integral respect which should not only be given in consideration of nature but extrapolated to imperative environmental justice issues and the progression of changes which must occur to show both reverence to the land and people. The environmental mindset of Christian participants was portrayed in a manner which recognizes the significance of all creation (i.e., humanity and nature) and should be regarded in a continuous, progressive posture which seeks to provide in-depth expressions of gratitude to not only the components which form the "fabric" of creation, but ultimately the designer (i.e., God) which formed this existence to allow the fullness of God's power to come to fruition without the hindering role of environmentally degrading influences.

Introduction

The manner in which an individual selects to spend time in nature can be informed by a multitude of factors that develop their level and degree of motivation to embark on these forms of experiences (Kals et al., 1999). The decision implemented by individuals to engage in nature-based experiences can come to fruition from extrinsic or intrinsic elements that contribute to the

overall motivation which serves as a primary influence in the action of immersing oneself in these forms of experiences (Kals et al., 1999; Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009).

Specifically, the intrinsic component or potential influence on the motivation that individuals hold regarding their desire to spend time in nature can involve the aspect of their perceived connection (e.g., emotional) to nature (Kals et al., 1999; McDonald et al., 2014). This emotional connection can produce an enhanced intention they may have to spend time in a resource that could provide them with not only a unique and dynamic experience, but a series of revitalizing moments (Kals et al., 1999; McDonald et al., 2014). Based on the increased emotional connection between an individual and the natural setting(s) they experience, the potential increase in their intention to spend time within these locations can lead to the occurrence of additional outcomes which come to fulfillment from the developed linkage that produces an internal resonance (Kals et al., 1999; McDonald et al., 2014). An example of a specific outcome that can become a factor within the lives of individuals as a result of spending time in nature and fostering a connection with their surroundings include their environmental mindset and pro-environmental behaviors (McLean & Yoder, 2005; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Due to the natural immersion an individual undergoes and the frequency in which they complete these endeavors, an individual's intention to enact environmentally conscious behaviors can be enhanced due to the increased connection and developed emotional response (Kals et al., 1999; McDonald et al., 2014; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Through these engagements, whether short- or long-term, the incorporation of objectives to include varying scales of attributes that involve environmentally focused intentions can become potentially ingrained factors based on the in-depth connection which forms between an individual and nature (Kals et al., 1999; McDonald et al., 2014; Steg & Vlek, 2009).

In addition to the bond that can be initiated and progressed within the life of an individual based on nature-based experiences, additional intrinsic or foundational elements that contribute to the implemented behaviors can serve as immense influences as well. Specifically, the beliefs an individual maintains concerning the natural world and the process in which the components were collectively conjoined to formulate the multifaceted composition could serve as notable influences. An example of a system of beliefs that can not only form the mindset one has regarding the progression of the natural world, but their perceptions and resulting behaviors concerning their interaction with nature includes religious-based beliefs (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Further, a religious belief system which involves elements of stewardship and environmental tenets that may be perceived and practiced includes Christianity (Davies, 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). This specific religion is one that identifies a belief in a higher deity (i.e., God) who formulated the existence of life and is involved in the overall progression of the facets composing the intricate, diverse, and complex processes not only within previous and current contexts, but future occurrences as well (Luhmann, 2004). Within Christianity, held beliefs regarding the role of the higher deity in which they believe can serve as an influential and informing component in the viewpoints a Christian may regard concerning nature (Davies, 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Through beliefs and practices included within this religion (e.g., structured and unstructured expressions through worship, prayer, meditating on biblical scripture, etc.), Christians who utilize these personal truths as guiding forces in their life could incorporate these elements within their behaviors and perceptions of natural surroundings (e.g., natural settings; Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; Davies, 2018; Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

Religion, such as Christianity, has been found to be referenced within nature-based experiences and unveiled in the personal development of individuals in previous and significant works (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Specifically, the initiatives of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in association with the transcendentalist movement incorporated nuances of religious influences in the self-enrichment experiences of individuals through natural immersion(s) (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Emerson and Thoreau associated nature-based experiences as moments of reflection and opportunities for individuals to unveil or enliven components within themselves by engaging in the contexts that were divinely created (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Within these rejuvenating moments, Emerson and Thoreau referenced the restorative and motivating benefits that can produce infiltrating aspects within one's life and produce an ingrained relationship with a natural setting as a result of engaging with a creation that is inherently diverse and ample in its benefits (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017). Through these moments referenced within the notions of Emerson and Thoreau in addition to the potentially palpable presence of religious experiences that can be associated with time in nature, these significant elements could play a pronounced role in the motivation of individuals to complete environmentally conscious behaviors as a result of their intrinsic foundations (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009).

While Christianity can be associated with the elements of stewardship and environmental components within the beliefs of this religion as a method to experience and connect with the creation which God established, alternate perceptions of Christianity are held by those that may or may not identify with this belief system and form of meaning concerning existence (White, 1967). Contrary to elements involving protection and sustainable actions that can be associated with time in nature and Christianity, viewpoints concerning the dominion-based or destructive

manner of Christian beliefs provide an alternate perception of this religion (White, 1967). Specifically, Christianity may be observed as a belief system that fosters the uninformed, heedless use of environmental resources without informed consideration of outcomes that could come to fulfillment (White, 1967). Through the digestion of biblical- or religious-based resources and foundational tenets which inform identified Christians, it has been perceived that those who elect to behave in a manner which aligns with these maintained truths are completing potentially degrading and detrimental actions within the natural world (Ronda, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016; White, 1967). Additionally, the manner in which biblical- or religious-based resources used by those who identify as Christians (i.e., Holy Bible) can potentially develop contrary perceptions as well despite aligning with the same overarching beliefs and shared ideals (Davies, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pepper & Leonard, 2016). For example, individuals could view biblical scripture or excerpts out of the Holy Bible and interpret meanings of responsible behaviors as a means to connect with God and His creation or conclude dominion-based utilization of resources due to the level of responsibility and stature that was provisioned to humans from God to inhabit the earth (Davies, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pepper & Leonard, 2016).

Despite the contrasting perceptions regarding Christianity, detail concerning the presence of religious beliefs (i.e., Christianity) concerning nature and the influence of humans within the varying contexts can be significant in understanding core elements that motivate and inform individuals' behaviors in nature (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Currently, there has been a reduced level of research concerning how individuals that identify as Christians perceive the pillars or guiding influences within their religion and what specific facets compose these perceptions as well. The immense potential that one's religious beliefs could have in their

behaviors, such as large-scale impacts involving climate change to small-scale and individual pro-environmental behaviors, and how they view the natural world is one that can provide notable insight into a dynamic and mystifying facet in an individual's life (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009). To contribute to the current level of knowledge and provide an elevated understanding concerning how a Christian's religious beliefs influence their time in nature and resulting behaviors, this research aimed to comprehend how a Christian experiences God in nature and how their personal truths inform their actions. For this research, nature is defined as the environmental characteristics which compose a public land setting and provide an accessible opportunity for individuals to engage in experiences within nature (i.e., being present in U.S. National Park Service units and electing to complete or not complete recreational activities; Fisichelli et al., 2015). The inclusion of this specific categorization of nature provided a form of natural resource that has and continues to experience increased visitation rates due to the enhanced level of individuals which desire to spend time within these diverse, idyllic areas and further engage in moments which could evoke the enactment of an individual's religious expressions and actions as a result (Ramkissoon et al., 2012). Further, the elements of an environmental mindset and pro-environmental behaviors are defined as the perceptions or viewpoints that individuals hold regarding the natural world and the resulting actions that come to fruition from this mindset that are environmentally conscious or driven (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Based on the aim of this research to investigate the influence of a Christian's experience of God in nature (i.e., NPS unit) and how this correlates to their environmental mindset and associated behaviors, the research question for this study includes:

1. How do Christians experiencing God in national parks describe their environmental mindset?

Literature Review

Religion and Nature

A dynamic and pivotal factor that can form the intrinsic characteristics of an individual involves the element of religion. The religious beliefs an individual identifies with could influence the emotional, mental, and physical aspects of their life (Chliaoutakis et al., 2002; Koenig, 2012). Regarding nature, religion could serve as the foundational system which produces the perceptions and behaviors of an individual (Fam et al., 2004). For example, Christianity is a religion that includes beliefs which are based on perceived truths within biblical scripture (i.e., Holy Bible) that contain nuances of viewing the environment as a divine creation that should be revered in a manner and attitude of respect or responsibility (Goldberg et al., 2019). Further, when assessing the role of religion in consideration of the nature-based perceptions or behaviors of individuals, previous research has highlighted this in the form of often acknowledging the presence of spirituality (Heintzman, 2009; Heintzman, 2010; Heintzman, 2013). Spirituality is a factor that is subjective in its description and has been described in varying formats which correspond to the individualistic manner of this terminology and the involved components (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). The presence of spirituality within a nature-based experience has been related to the internal responses and external revelations that compose the ethereal occurrences which can transcend an individual into a state of heightened connection with their surroundings and/or a higher deity (i.e., God; Heintzman, 2003). The use of spirituality to define these mystifying, significant moments has been previously compared to the term of religion due to the composition of the perceived experiences, but the incorporation of beliefs or religious practices have been viewed as potential distinguishing factors in the efforts to compose a defined categorization of each term (Heintzman, 2003; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Despite notable efforts to describe an element which has maintained a subjective manner, an identification and specification of explaining the otherworldly experiences that individuals can have in nature is one that continues to remain enigmatic (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Previous research has focused on varying aspects to better understand the dynamic between nature, individuals, and the higher deity they maintain to further the progression of defining this seemingly intangible occurrence (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2007; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). Examples include 1) acquiring data focused on evaluating the role of wilderness as an environmental context where nature-based experiences occur and 2) further assessing the influence of engaging in a leisure experience through activities and engagements which formulate the nature-based ventures (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2007; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). The role of experiencing the revelations associated with a spiritual encounter in nature has been found to be a recognized desire by individuals who embark on a journey in comparison to their predetermined ideals (e.g., engaging in a specific activity) they aim to acquire from their experience (Heintzman, 2003). Further, it has also been determined that the level of participation individuals include within their experiences in nature may influence the level of spiritual immersion due to the leisure methods they complete and the length of engagement (e.g., activity type and motivation for activity; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). Additionally, the spiritual outcomes from a nature-based experience have been found to enliven the moments individuals implement in nature based on the enhanced perspective these specific participants maintain towards nature and the recognized capacity of the natural world (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

Within previous research, the existence and significant presence of spirituality within nature-based experiences has been conveyed through investigating the included activities and

environmental contexts (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2003; Heintzman, 2007; Heintzman & Mannell, 2003). To progress the known detail concerning spirituality within nature-based experiences, this research completed measures to assess how religion offers additional structure through primary tenets or practices and how these organized, yet intrinsic influences translate into a larger context. Specifically, how an individual's religious beliefs (i.e., Christianity) and their recognition of a higher deity (i.e., God) provides an increased level of comprehension in determining the particular elements that directly relate to the intangible facets of time in nature was of focus within this research. This research desired to provide an elevated level of detail and focus through the context of religion in contrast to spirituality which has been found to be more applicable and pervasive in its composition across religions, life-based viewpoints, and specifically nature-based experiences generally (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011). As a result, a focus on religion and a designated series of beliefs offers an enhanced level of knowledge in consideration of reflecting an indescribable, impactful element of life and further the existence of an individual within a world-based context and processes within.

Nature-based Motivations and Religion

The element of motivation is one that is varied in its definition and influence dependent upon the context in which it is being applied or assessed (Kim et al., 2015; Luo & Deng, 2008). Motivation can be observed based on the extrinsic or intrinsic role it plays within a focus context and can be evaluated in a varied level of settings due to its infiltrating role within the foundational actions and decisions implemented by individuals (Kim et al., 2015). Within a nature-based or environmental context, motivation can serve as a significant aspect in the decisions of individuals to spend time in nature and engage in specific activities or behaviors within these settings (Kim et al, 2015). For example, an individual's motivation to dedicate

resources to engage in nature-based experiences through tourism remotely within an NPS location or locally within accessible green spaces may serve as the most influential element in this experience coming to fulfillment (Kim et al., 2015). One's motivation to spend time in nature and engage in behaviors associated with environmental tenets are aspects which can produce notable outcomes regarding the use of natural contexts and associated results that come to fruition due to these engagements (Kim et al., 2015; Luo & Deng, 2008).

Based on the significant role motivation can have in the initiation and continuation of the frequency in which individual's decide to spend time in nature, this aspect can serve as a pivotal source in how a relationship with nature (e.g., place attachment) is perceived and the decisions of an individual to engage in actions focused on conserving and protecting the natural source they may identify with (Kim et al., 2015; Luo & Deng, 2008; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). The motivation one maintains to complete these endeavors and actions can be associated with internal beliefs or perceptions they formulate as outcomes of ingrained and intrinsic truths within their life (Luo & Deng, 2008). Further, these beliefs and potential associated actions could result in the affinity and in-depth connection in association with place attachment individuals hold in consideration of specific locations based on their intrinsic bond with these spaces and associated outcomes to respectively regard these locations as well (e.g., pro-environmental behaviors; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). As a result, underlying beliefs that may sustain and increase the motivations of an individual can be aligned or correlated with the intrinsic views they hold concerning the natural world and their role within or interaction with these settings (Fam et al., 2004). Additionally, the internal beliefs one may hold can serve as the inspiration for their motivation to engage with nature and behave in a specific manner due to the overarching view they maintain regarding the composition of life within a holistic scheme (Fam et al., 2004). The internal role of one's

motivations and the resulting outcomes that can be produced from their in-depth beliefs can serve as descriptive factors in the decision an individual completes (Fam et al., 2004).

Specifically, the religious beliefs (i.e., Christianity) an individual regards are examples of elements which can inform their world-based perceptions and how they elect to implement situations within a life-based context (Fam et al., 2004; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Within a nature-based or environmental context, one's religious beliefs can play a role in enhancing or informing the motivations individuals consult or use when deciding to immerse themselves in a nature-based experience and not only how these ventures progress in relation to the beliefs (e.g., structured and unstructured expressions through worship, prayer, using biblical- or religious-based resources, etc.), but how the resonation of these moments result as well (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Nuances of stewardship, environmental responsibility, and an ethical desire to protect a divine creation are examples of aspects that may be associated and perceived by those who identify with a specific belief system (Davies, 2018; Fam et al., 2004; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Based on religious beliefs an individual incorporates within their life and actions, these often intangible and dynamic aspects can be immense in the connection and resonation that is experienced concerning nature (Worrell & Appleby, 2000). The involvement of one's religious beliefs can serve as insight into a deeper or more extensive pillar in the motivations of individuals to be involved in ventures that involve the natural world and the attention that is associated with these settings (Fam et al., 2004; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). By understanding the foundational system of truths or beliefs held by an individual, their motivations pertaining to nature-based activities and the resulting degree of connection that is developed by an individual serves as significant aspects

within the experiences and behaviors (e.g., pro-environmental) involved within their existence (Fam et al., 2004; Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

Pro-environmental Behaviors and Religion

The completed behaviors during an individual's time in nature and outside of their visitation are often informed by the tenets or mainstays which are established in their life and direct their executed actions (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Specifically, behaviors that have been found to be influenced by the internal foundations involving perceptions or attitudes of an individual involve pro-environmental behaviors (Hargreaves, 2011; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Pro-environmental behaviors are actions completed by individuals to diminish the negative impacts or consequences of degrading practices, introduce the inclusion of beneficial steps to positively influence the environment, and impact the behavioral habits of an individual (Keiser et al., 2018; Manning, 2003; Steg & Vlek, 2009). These behaviors have been investigated in the context of individual and societal alterations and the degree to which these varying dynamics influence beneficial changes in addition to the level of participation that is perceived by individuals singularly or collectively (Hargreaves, 2011; Maniates, 2001).

The particular component of individual-based influence is integral in understanding the core motivations of a collective movement due to it serving as what may drive the shared actions or pro-environmental behaviors of a larger group (Hargreaves, 2011; Maniates, 2001; Steg & Vlek, 2009). This aspect could be related to the level of stewardship that is perceived by an individual and the level of responsibility they hold towards their influence in environmental endeavors (Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Stewardship involves the level of desire and compelling responsibility an individual perceives regarding their role in implementing changes within a variety of realms and aspects of life (Krasny & Tidball, 2012; Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

Similar to the influence that religion could have within varying realms (e.g., environmental endeavors and pro-environmental behaviors), stewardship can transcend into different aspects of an individual's life and can be reflected and inspired from the beliefs they maintain (Worrell & Appleby, 2000). In particular, the religious beliefs an individual identifies with can be impactful forces in the behaviors they complete and how they view their impact on the external elements they come in contact with throughout their life in general (e.g., nature; Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

Religious beliefs are an example of guidance that often inform how an individual identifies themselves within the world (Fam et al., 2004). Specifically, the religious beliefs of an individual can inform how they identify the environment and the connection that exists between themselves and their natural surroundings. The aspect of identity within the connection between an individual, their religious beliefs, and the natural world is one that has been found to be influential within an environmental context (Goldberg et al., 2019). In the context of religion, the beliefs and practices in which an individual observes can become facets in the identity they maintain (Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019). They may select to act in a manner that aligns with their beliefs and view their surroundings or interactions in a way that translates these truths (e.g., application of expressions involving worship, prayer, using biblical- or religious-based resources, etc.; Goldberg et al., 2019). For example, an individual may maintain specific social behaviors which reflect the beliefs they hold through completing actions that morally or ethically align with these foundations (Coley et al., 1997; Fam et al., 2004). Additionally, the expression of attitudes towards elements within life, such as the role of nature, are factors that can be formed by an individual's religion (Fam et al., 2004). Based on this, the foundational component within the identity (e.g., external and internal) of an individual could be partially and notably

contributed to the religious guidelines that inform their belief system (Fam et al., 2004). The guidelines or revered sources within a religion, such as a historical text, often serve as a series of literature to outline aspects of life and the integral factors of their identified belief system.

A specific process which could be guided by a religious text involves actions associated with the initiation and completion of pro-environmental behaviors (Clements et al., 2014). An example of a religion that incorporates a historical text that could serve as an influential factor regarding pro-environmental behaviors is Christianity (Davies, 2018). Within this religion, the text that often formulates and supports the religious practices and endeavors in this belief system is the Holy Bible (Davies, 2018). Within the Holy Bible, scripture contains statements concerning the initial formation of the natural world within the book of Genesis and the role of humans within this context (Davies, 2018). Dependent upon the perception of an individual, the translation of these specific verses could be comprehended in varying formats. Previous research endeavors have highlighted the acquired understanding of biblical scripture regarding the treatment of nature and unveiled the occurrence of two primary thought processes (Clements et al., 2014; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pepper & Leonard, 2016). The first mindset involves the role of humans as an authority who utilizes nature in a manner to acquire resources and satisfy their current needs (Pepper & Leonard, 2016). The second mindset involves an observation of the natural world as a divine creation that is viewed with an ethic of responsible stewardship and motivation to implement actions that align with these intentions (Clements et al., 2014; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pepper & Leonard, 2016).

These viewpoints reflect a contrasting consensus amongst the perceptions that exist concerning the environmental mindset(s) of Christians (Clements et al., 2014; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pepper & Leonard, 2016). Previous research has found information to support the mindset

of viewing nature as a divine creation, but additional support is needed to further progress the solidification of this Christian perception of the environment (Pepper & Leonard, 2016). To better understand the persistence of a specific interpretation of how an individual that identifies with the Christian religion perceives the environment and the implementation of pro-environmental behaviors, this research employed an assessment of what specific biblical- or religious-based resources in association with expressions are most influential in their life. Through this form of investigation, the presence and frequency of pro-environmental behaviors within the lives of an individual (e.g., during nature-based experiences and in world-based occurrences) can be detected and further examined to determine the underlying framework that forms these actions and attitudes. This provides insight into the commonalities or differences amongst Christians and further the definition of how this specific religion composes the natural experiences an individual has and their overall mindset towards the role of humans in executing pro-environmental behaviors.

Methodology

Research Design

The presented methods are portions of a larger study which aims to provide an overall reflection of the interaction of religion (i.e., Christianity) and nature-based experiences and the multifaceted moments which arise (IRB Approval #10133.2; Jackson et al., 2021). Accordingly, parallel representations of comparable methods are described as a facet of this collective venture (Jackson et al., 2021). Regarding the acquisition of in-depth information, this research implemented a qualitative foundation through a phenomenological framework to gather rich detail in consideration of lived experiences of individuals to ultimately inform the primary phenomena of focus (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Stake,

2010; Wolff, 1999). The specific utilization of a phenomenological approach was involved to ultimately unveil thick descriptions concerning the phenomena of focus and offer a source of meaning through which the intangible, indescribable element(s) can be viewed (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Wolff, 1999). Based on the aim to offer an enhanced level of understanding concerning ongoing occurrences in consideration of the phenomena, a phenomenological framework serves as an optimal directive to detect present meanings of experiences which transcend experiences in contrast to those which are bounded by space, time, or specific collectives (e.g., case study) or require the progression of varying stages to inform the development of further progress and meaning development as a result of varied data analysis processes (e.g., grounded theory and theory development; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Donalek, 2004; Wolff, 1999). Based on the use of a phenomenological framework, methodology involving semi-structured interviews were completed within NPS units to access lived experiences of individuals who identify as Christians based on the role of nature within this research and formation of description regarding the focus phenomena (Shaw et al., 2016).

Research Settings

Based on the designation of nature within this research in alignment with public, natural contexts which offer an increased level of accessibility to associated experiences, the implementation of the involved methods were employed within selected NPS units. Specifically, the units of GRSM geographically positioned between the states of Virginia and North Carolina and INDU located in the northwestern region of Indiana were involved as the two research settings. The involvement of these research settings is based on the diverse presence of environmental factors (i.e., units which contain contrasting nature-based contexts), level of

accessibility through motorized and non-motorized transportation to both locations (i.e., proximate to larger, urban areas and infrastructure), rising visitation trends (i.e., increased visitation reports as displayed through elevated popularity amongst visitors), and offering of religious-based experiences (i.e., worship services and religious-based retreats) within each natural setting.

In consideration of INDU, this specific NPS unit is one that contains approximately 15,000 acres along portions of Lake Michigan (NPS, 2019b). With a varied composition of habitats, INDU offers visitors a range of nature-based experiences through recreational opportunities set within significant biodiversity and ecological transition zones (NPS, 2019b). Marshes, oak savannas, dunes, and bogs are reflections of the contrasting habitats which compose this unit and further allow immersions which not only expose visitors to experiential moments, but informative opportunities as well (NPS, 2019b). Based on the present collective of natural features which compose INDU, this unit has displayed an associated rise in visitation with an approximate visitation rate just over 2,200,000 recreation-based experiences in 2020 (NPS, 2019b; NPSVUS, 2020). While this value reflects a focus on recreational experiences of individuals, this specific unit recently experienced a new designation as a national park from a previous categorization (i.e., national seashore) and further conveys the existence of momentum regarding the presence of enhanced visitor capacity and associated nature-based experiences as well.

Regarding the research setting of GRSM, this NPS unit is one that offers visitors with a plethora of experiential, historical, ecological, cultural, and natural immersions within the dynamic landscape (NPS, 2019a). With over 500,000 approximate acres, GRSM provide visitors with an expansive setting to observe an array of flora and fauna species, extensive forests and

mountain ranges, significant wetlands which contribute to the collective ecological diversity, a reflection of the Southern Appalachian Mountain Range, and preserved representations through infrastructure of individuals who inhabited the historical landscape (NPS, 2019a). Further, visitors are able to complete a range of recreational activities which was conveyed in 2020 with an approximate count of over 12,000,000 recreation-based visitations (NPS, 2019a; NPSVUS, 2020). In consideration of the dynamic collective of experiences and contexts which compose the captivating atmosphere of GRSM, this specific unit is one that has portrayed consistent visitation rates as one of the most visited sites and further highlights a growing popularity and desire to engage in these forms of provided experiences by individuals. The notable position and offering of GRSM reinforces the inclusion of this specific setting in this research due to the infiltrating connections and immersions individuals can complete within this location and further the marvels which can transfix the attention of present visitors and produce the potential for resounding, ethereal outcomes as a result of spending time within a unique, invaluable natural resource.

Collectively, INDU and GRSM are settings in which the progression of experiences that bring forth monumental or transformative outcomes is plausible. It is within these impactful settings an individual could initiate or progress a perceived connection to not only the present landscape but experience a transcendent exposure which is elevated based on higher level emotional, mental, and physical processes. Specifically, being present within both of these contrasting natural settings could bring forth religious-based outcomes and foster the engagement of expressions (e.g., prayer, worship, and using biblical- or religious-based resources) and associated behaviors (e.g., pro-environmental) which aim to connect with both the landscape(s) and present phenomena as well (i.e., experiencing God in an NPS unit).

Research Participants

Within this research, the sources were formed based on the satisfaction of specific criteria in consideration of the participants which composed each collective (Table 4.1). The established and implemented criteria for this research resulted in the involvement of three sources overall and were individually composed of 1) individuals who were partaking within worship services, 2) employed individuals who were facilitating worship services, and 3) individuals who volunteered to partake in a religious-based retreat which included an extended stay and continuous immersion within a natural context. For all three sources, the organization of A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP) was utilized as a direct form of purposeful sampling due to their ongoing partnerships with a range of NPS units which allow for the progression of religious-based offerings in the nature-based contexts (ACMNP, 2020). Further, the mission of ACMNP aims to provide opportunities for visitors to engage in religious-based opportunities through a Christian foundation which desires to not only form experiences for identified Christians to partake in associated practices within an NPS unit, but also for all individuals to experience a level of open engagement through an equitable level of accessibility despite the beliefs an individual may hold true (ACMNP, 2020).

Table 4.1. Research criteria for all sources incorporated within this research.

Research Source	Research Criteria
<i>Worship Service Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that have spent at least 120 minutes within the relevant research site (White et al., 2019) 4. Visitors that are attending a worship service provided by A Christian Ministry in the National Parks 5. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Group-based or Communal Retreat Attendees</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitors to Indiana Dunes National Park 2. Visitors that identify as a Christian 3. Visitors that are spending an extended time period (i.e., overnight stay and more than 24 hours with a group) within nature through participation in a religious retreat 4. Visitors that are 18 years of age or older
<i>Employed Individuals</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals that are located in Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2. Individuals that identify as a Christian 3. Individuals that are employed as a personnel member with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks and therefore selected to engage in ministry-based efforts within a natural context 4. Individuals that are 18 years of age or older

The use of pre-established criteria within this research in conjunction with a purposeful sampling method involving ACMNP, formed the opportunity to acquire the lived experiences of individuals who directly aligned with the objective of this research and specifically the phenomena of focus. Further, this allowed for the identification of those who maintained applicable beliefs (i.e., Christian beliefs) in consideration of the acquisition of experiences to provide a formulated meaning from the shared expressions of participants. Based on the purposeful selection of these involved sources, each collective offered not only the ability to gain insight into experiences which were holistically similar in their context and overarching characteristics (i.e., identified Christians who were and have engaged in nature-based experiences within an NPS unit), but provide detail pertaining to the distinct aspects of the

experiences and the inherent differences as well. Specifically, all three sources shared designated factors based on established research criteria, but each source formed a separate outlet of data acquisition based on their varying roles within these experiences. For the source involving worship service attendees, this group was comprised of individuals who volunteered to engage in a worship service within GRSM and previously spent a notable level of time immersed within this site (i.e., at least 120 minutes; White et al., 2019). Regarding the source involving group-based or communal retreat participants, these individuals volunteered to engage in religious offerings except through the provision of a continuous retreat which took place within INDU and involved various religious-based offerings (i.e., ministry activities through park cleanup initiatives for the NPS, worship service attendance, and biblical-based discussions with other participants). For the final source involving employed individuals, similarly, this collective contained those who volunteered to spend a long-term time period within GRSM to engage in a range of ministry-based efforts based on employment with ACMNP. Specifically, this source aimed to conduct religious-based offerings within GRSM (i.e., worship services) and spend time completing relational ministry within surrounding areas.

Based on the alignment of instrumental comparisons and notable contrast of inherent differentiations, each source contributed to a multifaceted viewpoint of a complex phenomenon. All three sources involved an appropriate level of engagement within the research settings and exposure to nature (i.e., NPS units) in addition to displaying a variation in the form and level of religious-based activities which informed the progression of their nature-based experiences through active selection(s). As a result, the expressions from participants are informed by their different lived experiences and further provided an enhanced level of detail in consideration of not only the focus phenomena overall but provides an intricate reflection of this level of meaning

and associated experiences as well. Collectively, the used criteria and resulting sources provided an in-depth level of information from the initiation to primarily formulate an increased level of clarity as a cohesive conclusion through the formation of an informed meaning and representation of the phenomena of focus which is often individualistic and transformative in its presence.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to provide resulting detail and understanding through the use of a phenomenological framework to expose an ingrained level of complexity and subjectivity in consideration of the focus phenomena (Humphrey & Lee, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Seidman, 2006). Specifically, the semi-structured interviews were completed in-person and in an individual format within one of the research settings (i.e., GRSM and INDU). The employment of this specific interview format was based on the provided conjunction of both structured, literature-based topics with the ability to include probing as a form of flexibility within the completed dialogues (Humphrey & Lee, 2004; Rabionet, 2011; Seidman, 2006). During the progression of each interview, the level of flexibility was conveyed through additional lines of questioning or probing completed by the researcher to uncover detected information which was perceived during the interview session (Barriball & While, 1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011). For example, if a participant's response appeared to be absent of additional detail as provided through both verbal and non-verbal cues (e.g., behavioral signals), the researcher employed qualitative-based questioning to ultimately acquire detailed data in consideration of the presented inquiries (Barriball & While, 1994; Khan, 2014; Rabionet, 2011). This method allowed for the gathering of data which directly contributed and aimed to expand

current levels of understanding concerning the focus phenomena, while bringing forth the presentation of unique or novel meanings as explicitly expressed by the involved participants.

For all three sources which were involved within the progression of this research, the completed interviews were collectively completed during summer 2020. In total, 36 participants who were identified through the use of participant selected pseudonyms were involved in this research. Each interview took place in the respective research setting (i.e., GRSM or INDU) which further informed their designation within the involved sources. For the source involving worship service attendees, this collective composed a notable portion of the overall participant value with a total of 15 individuals. Additionally, the source involving employed individuals with ACMNP also portrayed a main reflection of the total participant involvement with 16 individuals. Lastly, the source involving individuals who engaged in a group-based or communal retreat represented a reduced portion of involvement with five total participants. Based on the initiation and progression of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this specific source was impacted due to the need to establish the health and safety of all as top priority during the progression of this research. While the global pandemic influenced the overarching value, but did not impact the acquired detail. Specifically, despite the impact of COVID-19, all sources reached the point of saturation in consideration of data collection and a cohesive, consistent level of in-depth information was obtained for all three sources individually to provide a collective and diverse reflection of the focus phenomena and resulting essence description (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

To contain and organize the acquired interview data, electronic qualitative analysis software was used to streamline the involved data analysis processes (Morris et al., 2018).

Specifically, NVivo (Version 12) was used to execute involved evaluation procedures which align with a phenomenological framework and further the formation of an essence description (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Morris et al., 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Rochette et al., 2006). With the containment of each interview which reflected an average length of 84.3 minutes overall, the initial process of bracketing was employed by the researcher to maintain an initial and consistent approach of uninhibited translation of the included data (Chenail, 2011; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). The process of bracketing is an integral step where the preconceived perceptions or thoughts held by the researcher are addressed and removed to ensure the continuation of rigorous data analyses (Chenail, 2011; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). When observing the data with this form of mindset and approach, the researcher assessed each interview and associated file to observe verbal expressions as provided by participants in a manner which conveyed potential non-verbal cues, underlying meanings, and associations with present contexts in which each dialogue was completed (i.e., research setting) to establish a foundation of evaluations which aimed to allow for the progression of participant-driven detail to move forward throughout each involved procedure in consideration of understanding the facets which composed the nature- and mindset-based characteristics of participants within their experiences (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005).

Upon the completion of bracketing, each interview was transcribed within NVivo through the use of the transcription capabilities this software provides (Edwards-Jones, 2014). Despite the use of this electronic method as a form of transcription, each interview was manually reviewed by the researcher to ensure that every spoken word was detected and present within the

base transcription files. This was completed to not only increase the level of accuracy and precision within the primary data collective, but to solidify the formation of a foundation which was fostered through only participant-expressed sentiments and to reduce the occurrence of any form of outside influences. With the solidification of appropriate transcription files, an inductive coding scheme was used by the researcher to assess specific words or phrases that arose from the expressed sentiments of participants (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Specifically, the researcher developed codes during this process which contained verbatim verbiage as spoken by each participant in either a re-occurring or novel manner in comparison to all involved participants and cohesive sources. Further, this method was also employed to ensure researcher bias was not present within any form of the overall analysis process and also served as a rigorous evaluation method to maintain the continuation of valid, credible findings and associated essence description. Using the selected and formed codes, a thematic analysis was completed to develop clusters and associated subthemes based on shared meanings within the initial codes (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985; Orr et al., 2016). In alignment with the completed bracketing procedure, the formed subthemes were formed and modified in an iterative manner which sought to continuously evolve in a form which reflected the sole statements and expressions (i.e., verbal and non-verbal) of participants and the focus phenomena as provided through their lived experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

With the formed clusters and associated subthemes, the thematic analysis was furthered through the implementation of a refining process (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). Specifically, this involved the collective evaluation of all initial subthemes and the simultaneous assessment of participant expressions to develop detailed, refined subthemes which served for the basis of the concluding essence description (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). Similar to

the inductive coding scheme and initial subthemes, the use of exact verbiage as spoken by participants also served as the main factors within the refined subthemes and cohesive statements (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). With the formation of refined subthemes, the researcher continued to evaluate the meanings as expressed by the participants to serve as the main, collective influences within the overarching essence description (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985). Through the consistent implementation of iterative evaluations of the data as offered by both verbal and non-verbal expressions by participants, the researcher used participant sentiments to succinctly convey the primary meaning, description, and understanding of the focus phenomena within this research as provided by participants through a concluding essence description (Hays & Wood, 2011; Hycner, 1985).

Throughout the analysis process from transcription to thematic analysis and the formation of an essence description, the formed meanings within each stage of the process and associated methods to reach the overall meaning were completed not only in an iterative manner, but in a method which continuously considered the primary research question (Morris et al., 2017). Specifically, the research question was consistently referenced at each phase of the collective data analysis stage and was considered in the furtherment of participant expressions to provide a concluding representation of the research focus and associated phenomena which informed and cohesively described the experience of interest (i.e., experiencing God in a nature-based setting through varying expressions and how this influenced the environmental mindset of Christians; Morris et al., 2017). In conjunction with consistent measures implemented by the researcher to ensure the continuation of rigorous analysis methods, further steps were taken to address the trustworthiness of this research (Morris et al., 2017). Specifically, two professors who specialize in qualitative research within a higher education setting were consulted during each phase of the

analysis stage and offered individual, independent evaluations and critiques of the progressed coding, clusters, subthemes, and essence description structure (Morris et al., 2017). During these evaluations, discussions were executed and appropriate modifications were implemented to continue the progression of findings which were not only stringent in their alignment with qualitative research procedures, but ultimately informed the essence description in a way which provided succinct, concise, ethical, and reflective meaning in consideration of the focus phenomena (Morris et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research, the factor of trustworthiness is one that is multidimensional and involves elements including truth value (i.e., credibility), applicability (i.e., transferability), consistency (i.e., dependability), and neutrality (i.e., confirmability; Fefer et al., 2018; Krefting, 1991). Specifically, these elements which reflect the progression within the trustworthiness of qualitative research are integral in establishing and maintaining a foundation of rigorous procedures and primary findings as a result (Fefer et al., 2018; Krefting, 1991). To foster the progression of this significant foundation, the utilization of methods which address the four elements of trustworthiness within a research venture must be completed within an iterative, cyclical manner to engage a continuous process of evaluations (Figure 4.1; Anney, 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Krefting, 1991; Yateem, 2012). This specific iterative series of processes were included within this research throughout the data collection and analysis phases predominantly to enhance the credibility and validity of the involved procedures and reduce the introduction of any form of inhibiting factors in consideration of the enhanced rigor and merit (Table 4.2; Anney, 2014; Gunawan, 2015; Krefting, 1991; Yateem, 2012). Regarding the data collection phase of this research, methods involving the use of recording devices and researcher reflections

were employed during or after the completion of each semi-structured interview (Carlson, 2010; Rabionet, 2011; Yateem, 2012). Further, multiple recording devices were used during the execution of each interview to ensure the appropriate attainment of the verbal expressions of participants and to offer varied sources of captured audio which would ultimately serve as the baseline for each developed transcript (Rabionet, 2011). The use of this specific method in conjunction with researcher reflections provided a means to utilize viable resources not only within the data collection and analysis phases but offer a trustworthy representation of participant reflections and the existence of the experienced phenomena (Rabionet, 2011).

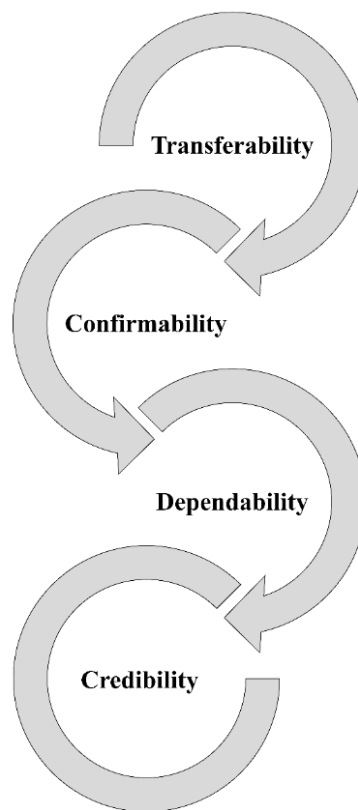


Figure 4.1. A visual reflection of the iterative processes taken to represent the aspects of transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility throughout this research.

Table 4.2. Specific qualitative strategies which were incorporated within this research.

Trustworthiness Component of Focus	Description	Examples of Incorporated Methods
<i>Transferability</i>	Involves the application of determined information within the research to other endeavors that share similar conditions	1. Triangulation
<i>Confirmability</i>	Includes the progression of research without the involvement of influential elements that could misconstrue the overall process (e.g., researcher bias)	1. Recognition of researcher bias 2. Peer Debriefing 3. Triangulation
<i>Dependability</i>	Incorporates the transferal of research procedures within varying contexts and supporting the methodology with varying information sources	1. Peer Debriefing 2. Triangulation
<i>Credibility</i>	Involves the alignment of methodological procedures, collected data, and interpreted outcomes that are aligned and contribute to the perceived merit or level of truth	1. Triangulation 2. Member Checking

(Krefting, 1991)

Additionally, the implementation of qualitative procedures focused on triangulation were also used to undergird the progression of trustworthiness (Decrop, 1999). In coordination with the involvement of multiple recording and specifically researcher reflections during or after the data collection phase, triangulation is a method which employs the use of varying information outlets to enhance the trustworthiness of completed research and incorporates mitigation strategies to reduce the inclusion of outlier influences within the conducted analyses and result reflection(s) (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999). Examples of triangulation within qualitative research involve strategies focused on the gathered data, the involved researcher, and theoretical- and literature-based frameworks (Decrop, 1999). Regarding the strategies focused on acquired data and the use of literature-based frameworks, the enacted researcher reflections upon the completion of each interview served as a process to address a component of the fostered trustworthiness (Decrop, 1999). In particular, details pertaining to the research settings or context where each interview was completed in addition to specific occurrences which arose during the

dialogues were composed in consideration of this specific element of triangulation (Decrop, 1999).

To further address strategies involved within this research to ultimately engage the component of triangulation and address the overarching level of trustworthiness, the methods of member checking and peer debriefing were involved (Carlson, 2010; Lietz et al., 2006). The method of member checking is a process where each involved participant is provided with an opportunity to observe and evaluate the entire transcription and gathered data from their individual dialogue and either offer a form of confirmation or recommended alterations to the composed expressions to ensure their thoughts are being appropriately conveyed within the research venture (Lietz et al., 2006). In consideration of peer debriefing, this specific method includes the involvement of outside peer reviewers which assess the composed data sources, transcriptions, thematic analysis, and developed essence description in consideration of the involved sources and overarching research aim (Lietz et al., 2006). For this research, member checking was completed before the initiation of the data analysis phase to ensure the progression of verified and accurate participant sentiments served as the reflective baseline for the involved evaluation. During this time, participants were able to provide any form of alterations which they deemed appropriate to their previous expressions and the captured data as displayed within the formed transcripts. Further, the method of peer debriefing was completed in an iterative manner and involved similar processes of verification through the involvement of two professors within a higher education setting who completed independent, individual evaluations during each step within the data analysis phase. This specific process involved the assessment and verification of all data analysis steps which progressed to the development of an overall essence description (Lietz et al., 2006). Based on the completed sessions of peer debriefing, conversations were

completed within each step of this process and modifications were completed as needed to ensure the detection of any form of distorting characteristics (i.e., researcher bias) were addressed and the execution of trustworthy, rigorous processes continued throughout the cohesive reflection of this research through a multilevel series of actions which aimed to provide a precise, accurate, and representative reflection of the phenomena of focus (Lietz et al., 2006).

Researcher Bias

In consideration of the focus phenomena involving the experiencing of God in relation to the formation and execution of an environmental mindset of identified Christians, this specific focus and overarching inclusion of Christianity is a matter which brings forth a personal life-based selection by the involved researcher. Specifically, the researcher identifies as a Christian and personally selects to engage in both structured and unstructured practices which compose their identified belief system. The beliefs which form the Christian religion are observed to be true and factual by the researcher and the source through which they are inspired (i.e., Holy Bible) is observed to be the primary source not only in consideration of their form of meaning concerning all of existence, but the singular source or lens which they aim to utilize in life-based occurrences. As a result, the beliefs, structured and unstructured expressions (e.g., prayer, worship, etc.), and the higher deity (i.e., God) in which they believe serve as notable influences within the facets of their world-based existence and specifically their perceived relationship with nature. Specifically, the researcher believes in the transference of reverence and recognition of responsibility which should be held in consideration of nature based on the form of this existence by God. The researcher desires to act in a stewardship-based manner which ultimately observes nature as a divine creation and further highlights expressions of compassion not only to the contained resources, but to God overall as a result. It is through this mindset and the ethereal,

intangible experiences which the researcher desires to incorporate as the foundation for this research and to serve as a positive, contributing factor in furthering the current level of knowledge regarding an aspect of life which can be notably transformative. Due to this present bias, these sentiments are explicitly stated to serve as elements of consideration when synthesizing the formed results and overarching phenomena description. Within this venture, the researcher aimed to serve as an outlet through which the participants thoughts were expressed and utilized through credible and valid qualitative measures. The researcher implemented methods to address their bias in an iterative manner as to ensure the conduction of rigorous research and precise, accurate results. Overall, the identification as a Christian by the researcher served as a main influence in not only their determination to execute rich, thick detail pertaining to the overarching phenomena, but highlight a mainstay within their life and existence overall which serves as an indescribable yet pivotal influence through infiltrating processes.

Results

Demographics

For the three sources involved within this research, demographic information was obtained during the completion of each interview (Table 4.3). Specifically, general inquiries pertaining to gender, age, and ethnicity were of focus and each participant was provided the opportunity to respond or not respond. Dependent upon the response of each participant, the interview was progressed in a manner which aligned with the requests of each individual. Based on the completed interviews, the participants reflected an average age of 34 with a majority of individuals identifying as female (N=23). Additionally, Caucasian was the main ethnicity (N=35) for the three sources involved within this research.

Table 4.3. Demographic information concerning the three sources involved within this research.

Demographics	Data (Percentage, Range)
<i>Gender:</i>	
Female	23 (64%)
Male	13 (36%)
<i>Mean Age (In Years):</i>	
	34 (18-94)
<i>Ethnicity:</i>	
Caucasian	35 (97%)
Asian and Caucasian	1 (3%)

The Role of Religious Expressions Involving Worship and Prayer

For this research, the primary objective involved an aim to enhance the current level of understanding regarding how experiencing God within nature (i.e., NPS units) influenced the environmental mindset of those who identify as Christians. Based on completed semi-structured interviews across three sources within this research, a majority of participants conveyed the role of varying religious expressions in consideration of how they interacted with a natural context and further their mindset and behaviors within these spaces as well (Table 4.4). Specifically, the religious expressions of worship, prayer, and the identification of biblical- or religious-based resources (i.e., Holy Bible and alternate sources) were found to serve as formative aspects within the religious experiences of participants and further within their nature-based experiences. Regarding worship, most participants conveyed this specific expression “can take many forms” (Ashley) and especially in consideration of the contexts where it is engaged. For example, participants conveyed the applicable manner of worship through the opportunity to “worship in a cathedral, you can worship out in the woods” (Caleb) based on the ability to engage in “worshipping God” (Eva) through “a constant state of being in worship all the time” (Caleb).

As a result, a level of flexibility in the location and timing of worship was discussed by participants and reflected as an element that is “subjective to whoever is worshipping” (Lily). While this enhanced applicable manner of worship was a common expression provided by participants and the opportunity to continuously engage in “different ways of worship” (Katherine), the specific context of nature (i.e., NPS unit) was found to serve as an influential element in the initiation and evocation of worship based on how these individuals observed nature. Specifically, “the experience of just being in nature, whether it be seeing, smelling, all the different senses, the, the five senses, seeing, taste, touch, smell, hear” (Paschal) brought forth a resonance amongst participants that worshipping in nature allows for “whatever the Spirit brings out in you, that leads you to like, just appreciate God and everything that’s been created” (Lily).

Table 4.4. Initial and final subthemes which were composed within this research upon the completion of a thematic analysis which focused on the implementation of key words as expressed by participants.

Initial Subthemes	Final and Refined Subthemes	Quote
<i>Thematic Analysis Group One:</i>		
Indiana Dunes is amazing and its natural features (i.e., Lake Michigan) are not something you think is man-made, but are hard to describe	God is master creator who is evident, greater, bigger, and can be seen everywhere (e.g., Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Indiana Dunes National Park) in creation which displays His fingerprints and exhausts individuals by the reflective views which show that something beyond (i.e., God) made them and brings a feeling of wearing a weighted blanket which provides peace, happiness, and renewal in an atmosphere that allows for individual growth in spaces which are not man-made and foster experiences which will never return void and will leave an individual speechless	<i>"Yeah, I think He's, showing like I think I said this before, but He's showing like a new side of Himself, like because of the desert. Like you, you're kind of getting like a different level of, I don't, know I don't what the word is, authenticity maybe, you're getting a different level of authenticity from God, but I guess the thing that I get from, this place is that there's just very much this like care, intentional, like, love, and not that you can't find it in the desert. You know what I mean. Like, you know, I'm sure people that like that come from like Michigan or whatever, you know, places that are green. When they go to the desert, they're they're they're just like they find something, I'm sure they find something totally different you know, um, but for me, I really feel like this is a place that is like calming, that it is peaceful. It's very exuberant in its own way if you compare it to other places. But it's also a place where there's solitude, there's peace, there's this calm to it. And it's also just very still like it's it's one of those things where you just like look around and you're just like, I don't know, like it's just one of those things where, the, the way that the trees are, the way that, they look, the way that, you know, the leaves are on the trees. It's just very intentional"</i>
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a beautiful sanctuary that provides reminders of what is important and encourages individuals to experience powerful moments and discover the undiscovered in a homey, down to earth setting that is not man-made		

<p>The Smokies offers a view of history and groundwork that was completed to allow for individuals to feel overwhelmed, exhausted by the reflective view which something beyond made (i.e., God) and feel like they are wearing a weighted blanket while being renewed by the natural features which they never get tired of viewing</p>		
<p>Everything about Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a connection to God and He is seen everywhere in this location which displays His fingerprints, fills the hearts of individuals, and allows for the provision of peace, happiness, being speechless and moments of chiseling where individuals grow based on these experiences as an individual or community (i.e., gateway to the community and ministry offerings)</p>		
<p>It is evident that God is greater and bigger through experiencing Indiana Dunes and the juxtaposed atmosphere of surrounding industrial settings and the silencing water which allows for individual growth and observation of God through other people in a way that provides hope</p>		

<p>God is a master creator who is everywhere and can be experienced if individual's recognize His ever-present existence through obvious evidence in the diversity of nature which reflects His care, love, and provision for all individuals or communities who engage in nature-based experiences which will never return void (e.g., communing with Him through overtly contributing to His glory by praising and worshipping)</p>		
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Thematic Analysis Group Two:

<p>Everything is intertwined and the environment is our home and source of well-being that requires a balance which involves a primary focus of protection, conservation (i.e., designation of national parks), increasing awareness of environmental and social justice issues, and enhancing education while allowing for use and any action which destroys the environment brings forth anger and recognition of deplorable reflections of human naivety</p>	<p>The environment is everything in varied scales, our home which shows God knitted within, and source of well-being that was graciously given by Him and religion, either heavily or partially, is the filter by which nature is viewed and an obligation involving a primary focus on protection, conservation (i.e., designation of national parks), increasing awareness of environmental and social justice issues, and enhancing education while allowing for use and not suspending the responsibility of completing biblically-motivated actions which highlights our call to environmentalism and stewardship by Him to not dishonor His private property through gut wrenching negative impacts and limit the fullness of His beauty, creativity, and closeness for current and future generations to enjoy</p>	<p><i>"I'd say that the environment I could see as two different kind of definitions for it, and the first would be like the environment is your immediate surroundings and what gives you the context for how you experience the world. And so, in that, like, your environment could be as small as your family structure, or it could be the community that surrounds you, or on a larger scale, it could be, you know, the landscape you're used to. So, growing up in Idaho, you know, dry, dry heat versus the humidity in the east. And if you never went east, you'd never know humidity existed. So, th-, in that sense, I think it is kind of, you know, a social thing and how you define your world. But I also think in a larger sense, the environment is you know, the world we get to live in, and it's something we need to protect and and honor and take care of, too. And so, if you look at things like Cuyahoga National Park and how it actually came about, and I don't profess to be an expert at it, but it used to just be this kind of wasteland and nasty space. And the city community came together and cared for it and picked up trash and like helped it restore back to its original beauty. And now it's it's a small, unique park, but it's beautiful and it's got these incredible waterfalls. And, you know, it's right in the heart of the city and i- and you would have never experienced it, except that a community rallied together and like saved it. And it became this beautiful space again. And so, I think about the environment in that way, like if we let all the world become a old Cuyahoga and look like that, like that'd be pretty devastating in God's God would be misrepresented, because I think God's beauty is like today's Cuyahoga. And when you look at that, like He's so obvious. And so, if we don't take care of our environment, I feel like we're gonna limit what God's beauty looks like"</i></p>
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<p>The environment was graciously given by God and religion, either heavily or partially, is the filter by which nature is viewed and an obligation is perceived to take care of creation and better steps need to be taken to reverse the actions of a fallen world which will be made new one day, but this does not suspend the responsibility of completing biblically-motivated actions and sharing this rhetoric through pro-environmental behaviors</p>		
<p>Behaviors which focus on furthering missions to preserve the environment, whether through big or little actions, are important because individuals are called to be stewards and not consumers and therefore it is integral to not be afraid to speak out and educate while handling dominion over nature in a responsible manner that is preventative (e.g., Leave No Trace, put land aside, focus on well accepted science, consume less, do not litter, reduce, reuse, recycle, etc.) and aims to minimize impact on spaces as to not have negative effects and allows future generations to enjoy creation</p>		

<p>The environment is appreciated more based on a connection with God and a recognition that He is knitted in creation and specifically designed everything and it is within nature where He is experienced and therefore this highlights our call to environmentalism and stewardship by Him for protecting these resources to not dishonor His private property and limit the fullness of His beauty, creativity, and closeness especially based on mandates in the Bible provided to protect His gifts and it should be gut wrenching when the beauty is negatively impacted</p>		
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Thematic Analysis Group Three:

<p>While not fully reflective of everyone, when reading the Bible in nature, a closeness to God is felt by most in His creation which is observed as a gift from the Christian heart and head place and in these moments snippets of His love, sovereignty, power, mercy, and personality can be observed through the surrounding characteristics (e.g., rainbow observed as a promise of life from Him, birds, moss on rocks, trees falling, etc.) and the biblical-based text and worldview informs how these features did not happen by chance and was designed by God and therefore this is observed in the "ingredients of heaven" (e.g., love, trees, fruit, rivers, tree frogs that sing, the ecosystem, precious stones, etc.) or diversity which can leave an individual awestruck or sad based on processing emotions and giving these situations to God and His care</p>	<p>The Bible is first, foremost, living, breathing, reveals God and what is in the heart of an individual, can change people's lives, can cause an individual to fall on their face crying, and provides a biblical lens instead of a human lens which falls short and is doctrinally insufficient to the spiritual nourishment which can be gained when reading other religious-based resources (e.g., apps, worship songs, books, internet, audiobooks, respected pastors and theologians, etc.) as a support for better understanding the Bible that should be based on scripture and further assist the Bible in providing the baseline to a connection with God and the contained biblical-based text can be further experienced and recalled in His creation which reflects references such as, 'even the rocks will cry out' to 'say thank you, God' or 'He lays me down in green pastures, He leads me besides quiet waters, restores my soul', in snippets of His love, sovereignty, power, mercy, and personality which ultimately fills</p>	<p><i>"They're, they're uplifting. Like, and I have seen bald eagles at the school I used to teach at and I went on a field trip with a college class not too long ago and we saw bald eagles flying, they just remind you how great God is and that He has us here for a purpose, they give purpose, I would say they m-, make you feel like your life has a purpose and you're not just here, randomly, that God created us each person to do something and and He gives us those verses to encourage us to to walk with Him and to, and He remind, I think that that's one of the neat connections I guess with nature is that t- t- the people who wrote the Bible were so inspired by God to include those things that that He and they knew we would see and they would encourage us to, to keep going, the one about not growing faint with the eagle thing, that's inspiring cause a lot of times we do want to quit or give up, life can get hard and you think well I don't wanna, it's too hard, I wanna do something different or quit or whatever, so He uses symbols, I guess symbols in nature would be a good way to put it, to inspire us, um every day cause I I think it's safe to say that He, you know, think back to Adam and Eve that He did create this for His His love for u-, with His love for us, um He gave us everything we needed and He put us here and He put it here for us to enjoy and for a, and for us to have communion with Him, to have a relationship with Him and enjoy that so. And nature is definitely, I would say it's the best way to enjoy a relationship with God. It's um, to me it makes me feel free, it's very freeing you know and I just stand up there whether you're on the top of a mountain or even in the valley looking up at a mountain, it's almost like something is just lifted, sometimes things get lifted. When I, before, before I retired from teaching, I'd come up here four or five times a year just because I think I told you, I, in my head I'm like I have got to go get rid of my bad attitude and it would, I would feel so much better when I got back home and I could, I could live through those teach-, tough teaching years or or months for three or four months before I was ready to come back and get</i></p>
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	<p>hearts to the brim and His purpose for everything can be seen in all that exists based on His word</p>	<p><i>back out in it. Not that Alabama didn't have nature stuff, but there's you know, we didn't have the mountains and stuff like we do here so. It was, it was, it's good"</i></p>
<p>God reveals Himself and what is in the heart of an individual through the Bible, His word, within this fundamental connection and they are provided with a knowing that He is bigger than any trials, He is both a father (e.g., provider and protector) and mother (e.g., loving and nurturing), author and creator of all that is good, the "glue" that holds everything together, one who walks here, one who never contradicts Himself, one who fills your heart to the brim with love, and one who designed everything with a purpose and this point can be seen in all that exists</p>		
<p>The Bible is living, breathing, can cause an individual to fall on their face crying and be raw with God, and can change people's lives when they engage in the text and through varying processes (e.g., praying, reading the biblical-based information, potentially consulting other sources, checking the outside sources with the foundational details of the Bible, journaling,</p>		

<p>pouring themselves back into God's word, etc.) and ultimately looking through a biblical lens instead of a human lens which will fall short and be doctrinally insufficient to the spiritual nourishment which the Bible provides for individuals and can serve as a source of encouragement for not only those who identify as Christians, but all</p>		
<p>A range of alternate biblical or religious-based guides or resources (e.g., apps, worship songs, internet, audiobooks, respected pastors and theologians, etc.) may or may not be used as support to understand the Bible, observe how God is moving in modern contexts more deeply (e.g., within and through nature), provide different viewpoints of faith, but these sources must have an alignment with the Bible and further a reflection of these beliefs as practiced within the lives of authors or individuals which produce the alternate sources</p>		

<p>The Bible is first, foremost, and the baseline to a connection with God and the contained words can be personally experienced by individuals through a closeness with God and His words which result in a feeling of being known, provided for through everything being planned by Him, and connected with the contained truths which diminish guessing concerning the existence of creation as a result of not only using the words as a guide for life, but furthering experiencing and recalling scripture when engaged in specific moments and contexts, such as nature which is God's creation and references involving 'even the rocks will cry out' to say 'thank you, God' or 'He lays me down in green pastures, He leads me besides quiet waters, restores my soul' to see His provision and reflection of this through the natural features which are taken care of and loved by Him and further reflects His love for His people and their opportunity to meditate and engage in self-edification through His creation and ultimate words in the Bible</p>		
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Thematic Analysis Group Four:

<p>Worship can take many forms (e.g., silence, internal expression through the heart, song and singing, reading the Bible, prayer, individually, as a group in one voice, etc.) where God can speak through words or the script is flipped and individuals praise God even harder through the multifaceted forms which primarily involve emptying oneself of oneself, giving God the glory and grateful praise, living out the purpose God created an individual uniquely for, and putting God back on the throne and especially in nature where God's lifebeat can be felt through not only an individual or a community worshipping, but all of creation worshipping as well and everything growing together in a space where God can tangibly been seen through His handiwork which compels the progression of this expression based on the creativity and diversity within multiple scales (e.g., national park)</p>	<p>Worship and prayer can take many forms (e.g., silence, internal expression through the heart, song and singing, reading the Bible, individually, as a group in once voice, journaling, etc.) based on them being intertwined and serving as main pathways to God through conversation which does not change God and instead changes individuals by emptying themselves of their self and therefore opens them up to a heart check that results in taking a pause of gratitude and meditation, giving the glory to God, actually trusting Him despite being afraid and being provided with so much peace, feeling the Holy Spirit flood their heart, constantly undergo a recognition of His capabilities which almost sounds too weak based on His overwhelming awe, and further experiencing these moments involved in nature which is breathtaking and makes Him so obvious through innate creation that is designed in an unmatched, mighty way which allows individuals to feel Him so much</p>	<p><i>"The Creator who made my loved ones. And I'm like, "I, You are You are God Most High, I trust You with everything, I trust you with our lives, not only am I, am I proclaiming this truth and and knowing, and remembering Who you are, Who I am in You, but God, I remember who they are in You and and I declare every, word of peace, I sing over them, this is my prayer. I'm putting it to song but it's prayer because I'm talking to You and I'm sending Your word, and God, You said it will come alive, raise, them up on the wings of eagles, teach them to love, teach them to walk with, You, guide their paths God, ever grow their heart, always, always show them the way, give them the wisdom, equip them with whatever that they need in, order to f-, to follow with Your call and and remove any obstacle, from their path, God, You love them so deeply, so dearly and I trust and I praise You and I this is faith it's it's the substance of things not seen, I am already celebrating the fact that You will equip them and have equipped them because You are God that is not constrained by time, You have equipped them, and they have gone out and done Your will and Your purpose and Your calling, and Your love has been spread throughout the world because You are God, and this is how You move and I am proud and grateful to be your daughter, move hrough me for that is how You love, move through them" and this is that is how prayer and worship are the same thing in this way, although it can it can call up different joys in different ways and have different intimate moments together and alone, but and, again, in nature, it's, it's like, it's, well, it's just love"</i></p>
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	<p>more in the roughest parts of life (e.g., suicidal thoughts) or in moments of feeling a "Holy Spirit tingle" which comes from the insane workings of God not only in the life of one individual, but all</p>	
<p>Prayer is a main pathway to God and conversation which does not change Him and instead changes individuals and can take many forms (e.g., scriptures, journaling, internal, verbal, etc.) where an individual can praise God, commune with Him, feel moved emotionally, experience powerful and painful intercessions, undergo a heart check, take a pause of gratitude and meditation, and have an intimate experience of God through His comfort and communication of direct words from Him within a space (i.e., nature) that allows for this constant, fluid dialogue that is structured or unstructured and offers a level of honesty and vulnerability with God who is there listening and sitting next to an individual</p>		

<p>In nature, the divine power and intricacy of God is evident on His ground and this forms a space where a "bucket of joy" gets dropped over an individual who can walk through "trail time", talk, and commune with Him during the entire experience based on there being no place God is not and so much happiness, joy, quiet time, reassurance, breathtaking moments (e.g., seeing the mountains peek through the trees in the Smokies), love, peace, and hearing of reminders of God through the sounds of nature (e.g., birds) in a space where He is acknowledged as worthy to be praised based on Him being greater and the creator of existence which allows individuals to feel Him so much more in the roughest parts of life (e.g., suicidal thoughts) and having hope in breakthrough moments with a God who is capable of anything</p>		
<p>Worship and prayer intertwine themselves in a manner which positions one's heart toward God despite the feeling of not being worthy of being loved and a knowing of being so loved by Him is conveyed which offers such a</p>		

<p>vivid experience without any doubt of connecting with Him and further being so moved by this that an individual may begin crying as a result, actually trust Him despite being afraid and be provided with so much peace, lay everything at His feet through knowing He will take care of it, experience such a joyous being, get chills or goosebumps experiencing Him through knowing He will answer a prayer, feel the Holy Spirit flood their heart, and constantly undergo a recognition of His glory and capabilities which almost sounds too weak based on His overwhelming awe which can be observed in existence, such as nature which makes Him so obvious through an innate creation which reflects Him in everything and was designed in an unmatched and mighty way which evokes the "Holy Spirit tingle" when He is recognized through insane workings not only in the life of one individual, but all</p>		
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Further, it was conveyed that worship in nature can serve as passive or active formats. Worship was conveyed by participants as “praising God” (Violet) and “singing or playing musical instruments” (Violet). While this was a reflection, participants also highlighted that due to there being “so many various forms of worship” (Violet), “it doesn’t have to be active” (Violet) and can instead potentially involve “sitting by the river and the peace and just feeling the peace of God saying, “thank you, Lord, for your peace” (Ruth), “simply driving through the mountains” (Ruth), or “even being present in nature in God’s creation is any form of worship” (Eva). This specific applicability, adaptability, and pervasive characteristics of worship were conveyed by Ashley as:

“But I know when I’m in nature, I feel like I’m worshipping all the time because I’m just so amazed by God’s creation and everything that He’s created and what I’m surrounded with. So, I feel like you can go on a hike and be worshipping God in your heart. I feel like you can go sit by a lake and meditate and be worshipping God, go read your Bible somewhere quiet and secluded and be worshipping. So, I think it’s really cool that I feel like in everyday life it’s hard to go somewhere like, I mean, even in your house and be like, oh, I’m worshipping because it’s just your everyday life and it’s your home and you’re like, “ok, church is where I worship”, and you have these very segmented parts of your life and kind of everything is compartmentalized. And so, I think it’s cool in nature where you’re just out in the open and I don’t know, I feel like it’s more freeing and I feel like I can worship wherever I’m at. Just because you’re in the midst of God’s creation.”

In consideration of specific examples of the varying forms of worship which were expressed by participants, worship was perceived as a “bridge” (Renee) to God and facilitated “communication” (Faye) with God or “expressing yourself” (Fiona) in a range of methods. In addition to the designation of active and passive classifications of worship, additional examples of worship as stated by participants involve it being or acting as “silence” (David), singing “praise to God” (Violet), playing “musical instruments” (Violet), “a form of prayer” (Ellen), “be by yourself” (Rachel), or include “an aspect of community” (Arturo) where worship is completed with multiple people in the form which it comes forth within those shared moments.

Additionally, this “aspect of community” (Arturo) was also expressed by participants not only as the presence of multiple individuals engaging in worship collectively, but also involved the element of creation within these expressions. The collective worshipping of all God’s creation (e.g., humans, flora, fauna, etc.) shared this component of community and the ability to see “His fingerprints” (Jimmy) and “His handiwork” (Jimmy) which results in all that exists feeling as though the “Spirit strikes a cord” (Jimmy) and “moves” (Jimmy) the progression of worship.

Further, alternate definitions or classifications were offered by participants regarding worship and a specific aspect shared amongst individuals involved the “constant state” (Caleb) of worship through life which is embarked on and led by individuals. Specifically, most participants stated the infiltrative manner of worship extrapolated this continuous form of expression through “living out and doing what God created you to do” (Lucy) as “a part of giving Him praise” (Lucy). Specifically, Lucy expressed this sentiment by stating:

“And then another way that I think about worship is like I think of worship as um like living out and doing what God created you to do is part of giving Him praise because it's saying, God, you made me well, and so I'm gonna use what I have, like use what You've given me, how You've made me and like, live that out so that I can praise You. So, like, I think about that idea of, like, the flowers by blooming are worshipping God because they're doing what they were created to do. And so, I think of that as like nature shows us how to worship because nature just does its thing exactly how God created it to be.”

By engaging in worship within nature, participants described this process as one that is used by God to “unveil a lot within you” (Niko) and “prepare me for that new future” (Thea). It is within these moments of worship through nature-based experiences that most participants reflected an opportunity to partake in “really being mindful of God's presence in the whole thing and just really being, it's a good place to take the time to just kind of be with Him and have that solitude and something inside of something that He created” (Trent) and allow God to provide “what I need to hear” (Thea) and offer a “preemptive answer” (Flynn) in a space which allows

you to “hear Him a little better” (Flynn). Additionally, it is within these experiences of God in nature while worshipping that some participants reflected on how God provided during the “roughest part” (Trent) of life. Specifically, the interaction of experiencing God while in His creation during moments of needing to be “closer to Him” (Trent) was conveyed by Trent as:

“Now that I, now that I think about it when I was going through probably the roughest part of my life, I was getting close to the point where I was going to take my own life. And I just kind of realized, you know, where I went to during those times was nature trails. And I was living out of my car for about a week or so. But in that week, that's mainly what I did, was go to nature trails because I felt like it brought me closer to Him, so.”

Further, the “life changing” (Thea) role of God through a medium (i.e., nature, such as NPS units) which “He created” (Tent), was shared by Thea through a “challenge” (Thea) that was “affecting” (Thea) their life as:

“In Glacier National Park. But specifically, ah Swift Current Lake out in the Many Glacier Valley area, I had the privilege of like being able to work there for four months, so being able to sit by the lake was something that was really peaceful. But a specific like instance that comes to my mind was just being, it was Father's Day, June nineteenth, two thousand ah sixteen. And I'm talking to one of my co-workers just about how like alcohol was affecting my life and like how I was grieving and just not really dealing with it, like using drinking as a way to, like, cope with that. And he kind of like challenged me to, like, pray to God and being like He's like, “you know, you can just pray and like ask Him to give you the strength”. And he kind of left me alone after that. And just being able to sit there for hours and watch the sunset. It was just like this overwhelming like peace and like joy like came over me and like I knew that, like, I had to change my life. Like just very, life changing experience.”

Within both the negative and or positive moments of life, God was conveyed by participants as a source which offered “healing” (Eva) and through these restorative, reassuring, and renewing moments allowed for the posture of an individual to “meditate and be with God and praise God and give all the glory to God” (Eva). It is within these conjoined moments of worshipping in nature and experiencing God through His creation where individuals expressed that “your mind, your heart, your soul can heal” (Eva) and truly be immersed in “His love”

(Ashley) and complete “basking in the glory of what He’s created” (Nicole) due to God using “nature to show His, His nature, Himself, His beauty, of His work is revealing the beauty of His grace and His presence” (Paul) which can bring an individual through and empower them with purpose even in the darkest moments of existence.

It is within these transformative expressions in nature where participants felt as though “I’m so not, worthy of being loved, yet, like, I am so loved and that feeling is like, the feeling that I get when I am like praying or worshipping in nature with the Lord” (Phoebe). Within this expression, the reflection of worship can be observed as shared by participants in conjunction with the expression of prayer. Similar to worship, participants conveyed that “prayer can take many forms” (Paschal) and “it’s different for everyone” (Kay). Based on this shared expression of variation within worship and prayer, most participants highlighted the aspect that prayer and worship “intertwine themselves with each other” (David) and “it’s so, so closely tied that you can’t separate them” (Emma). Specifically, this level of interrelation between these expressions was conveyed as a “whole circle” (Emma) where the initiation of prayer or worship will then lead to the alternate, conjoined expression based on the evoked emotions and actions which result based on the other element. This level of transferal or cause and effect process was conveyed by Emma as:

“I think prayer for me is more like I need something from God. So, I need peace. I need direction. I need to feel close to You. I need to know You’re with me, whatever it might be. And worship is more an outpouring back to Him. So, it’s almost like it’s a whole circle. So, prayer I’m pulling from, God and begging from, Him, and then I worship Him back to to show Him how grateful I am for it. And so, it’s kind of this continuous circle. So, the more I worship, the more I want to talk to Him, which, you know, goes back into the prayer cycle. And then the more I pray and and see what God is doing in my life and how He answers those prayers, I want to worship Him, and it just keeps going.”

This cyclical or circle-based manner in which the intertwined facets of prayer and worship were described, were also explained by James as a simultaneous reaction who stated:

“I think, kind of going back to like being reminded of what, like who God is. It helps me focus when I pray out, like when I'm in nature, because it's kind of, a, like something will happen like, oh, God, is this and then it makes, you know, this request I have either seem like, wait, this is, this is irrelevant, like, things are good the way they are. I don't need, like, this doesn't need to change. Like, I've been worrying about this for nothing and then I feel like it just always helps sort of praise as you pray, you just kind of are reminded of who God is and then it gives you more comfort knowing He will answer and knowing that sort of the relevance of what you're praying about.”

As a result of this connected portrayal of the expressions involving prayer and worship, prayer was displayed by participants primarily as “principal” (Kade) means by which “the Holy Spirit directly in our hearts” (Kade) communicates and offers an intimate connection where “He’s put our, His heart in our hearts which is, but He’s become so emotionally attached to every one of our feelings and emotions” (Kade). It is through prayer this expression becomes “principal ways for us to connect with Him” (Kade) and allows for “the Holy Spirit, communicates in groanings to me in languages that you cannot say when your words fail” (Kade). Specifically, this highlights the innate manner of prayer and further the diverse ways in which it can come forth. Participants reflected that prayer can involve “bringing it to God” (Lily) through “talking” (Lucy), “time when you connect with God” (Lucy), “walking places” (Madison), “flexible” (Abigail), and “a breath of love” (Abigail). Further, this level of adaptation was related to the opportunity to pray while in nature (i.e., NPS units) and specifically this brought forth highlights of prayer as “bending down to smell a fl-, flower” (Lucy) or “watching the sunset” (Lucy). It is within nature, that most participants portrayed the subjective manner of prayer is on display and the “fluid” (David) characteristics of this expression allow for “communing with the creative work of God, to me, and seeing God as evidence in the design of all that is that we see in nature” (Paul). For example, this variation was conveyed by Kay who shared:

“It's different for everyone. Same way people worship differently. Same way people talk to God differently, like any, any aspect of it. I think people do it on how they, they feel and how they want to connect to God and want to connect with the nature around them. Some people can feel very calm in nature, and they can just immediately feel it. And some people have to work at it a little bit more.”

Similar to a perceived amplification of worship in nature, prayer was also conveyed to share the same experience when engaging in a creation which is viewed to be an expression of divine creativity, diversity, and love from the Creator (i.e., God) which fosters a “symbiotic situation where you feel compelled” (Ruth) to express and experience God. It is within nature that prayer becomes “trail time” (Ward) with God that is needed for “renewing my spirit” (Ward). Due to nature providing a “connectedness with God” (Ward), it is within nature that prayer can allow an individual to “feel like the Holy Spirit floods your heart” (Ashley) and the “Holy Spirit just kind of moves with you, it’s just liberating” (Renee) to experience God in a manner which is brought forth in a surreal, “vulnerable” (Kade) manner based on being in His creation. For example, having “just an incredible view” (Kade) that evokes this enhanced level of transcendent feeling and conversation where “you want that honesty” (Thea) with God can come to fruition.

Through this raw posture towards God in a space which forms this atmosphere based on recognition of who developed it, participants stated that prayer “connects me to God because that’s how I like, I wouldn’t have a relationship” (Phoebe) if this communication were not present. It is within nature, the foundational role of prayer within a connection with God is also amplified and is approached with a renewed observation that it is a “huge part” (Ellen) in a “relationship with Him” (Ellen). The significance of prayer was reflected by participants as offering the “right alignment” (Madison) with God that motivated the experiencing of the “Holy Spirit tingle” (Madison) when recognizing and feeling the presence of “Him around me”

(Madison). Whether emoting portrayals of “gratitude and thankfulness” (Emma) or “desperation in these places” (Emma), prayer was collectively shared by participants as “raw and real times with God” (Emma) that allows for “choosing to put Him back on the throne where He belongs” (Phoebe) and offering reverence to God, while knowing that “He still wants you to talk to Him” (Ellen) even though “He already knows what’s on your heart” (Ellen) and “His love is constant” (Rachel). Specifically, this “constant” (Rachel) love of God which feels like a “bucket of joy” (Abigail) being dumped on you, especially in nature, was reflected by Rachel as:

“I definitely feel comforted when I start and end my prayer, because it's so constant and I think, that's what God like wants me to feel and how He moves in those moments is that it's very constant. Everything else can be changing, but I can pray at the beginning and the end of my day, and that will never change, and God is absolutely constant, always there, and His love is constant.”

Similarly, Abigail expressed the conjunction of experiencing God in nature through expressions of prayer and an ultimate reception of overwhelming happiness or evocation as:

“So, it just it fills me with more joy to and then He just dumps the bucket because that's what He wants, you know, the bucket of joy into me, over me. And now I'm just like I, everywhere I look, I see God's love. And it just makes me happy to know how loved we are, to know how good He is. And I just I hear the birds and I hear the wind and I feel the sun and I just I just want to laugh. Sometimes it's like it's so silly not to be weird, but sometimes I'm so overwhelmed, like, just, just happy. I'm just deliriously happy that I, I don't want to freak people out, but I have to like go in a h- hidden little corner and kind of laugh for a bit, and it's just like it's other little things like I, I love fuzzy fat things. If it's like a cat, ok, I love cat-, like if it's fat, like like, durpy, ah I love it, little, little mits, little you know, kitten paws or like, it just like something small and random like a little delight-, delightful thing, like ok, look over there in the distance you see how it's all shadowed except for that one little, little plant that's, you know, sprouted up it's got the sun on it right there. I just like “It's gotta be me”, and I look at it and it just makes me giggle, I'm like it's so cute. I love that. It's such a delight. I love-, I, I appreciate that so much. And, you know, Jesus does, too. He's like, “oh, yeah, look at that one”, I'm like, “oh, it's so cute”. Or like, it's such a delight. He made it and He loves it. I'm like, “man, I love that too, God grow my heart, I want to fall in love with everything that You love”, and, and, as, as, He does that.”

The Role of Biblical- or Religious-based Resources as Religious Expressions

In addition to the role of prayer and worship as expressions, the aspect of biblical- or religious-based resources were also conveyed by participants as influences within not only their existence, but specifically their engagement in natural contexts. Overall, participants shared a commonality in their reflection of “the Bible, that would be, I feel like the only one” (David) or “the Bible would be number one above anything else” (Faye). Participants portrayed the Holy Bible as “number one by far is, is logos, God’s word, the written word of God” (Paul) and if other resources are utilized as additional support for enhancing existing levels of comprehension, an overall process includes assessing these alternate items by bringing “it back to like what you know and how you interpret the Bible and how you like base it off of that” (Lucy). Further, most participants conveyed the use of various interpretations of the Holy Bible dependent upon their desired format in which to comprehend the scriptures, would enhance their level of knowledge acquisition of the text, and in alignment with their specific religious structure within Christianity (i.e., varying denominations, such as Catholic or Lutheran). For example, participants reflected that “I have two different Bibles of two different versions, like NIV and the like the Message and it’s really cool, to like have them side by side and see how the verses line up and how they’re different” (Kay) and also highlighted that “it was just one of those things that I hadn’t realized until that moment how much that like being raised up in that doctrine, like did e-, like it was like whether I knew it or not, I was Lutheran, you know, like the way that I think about and interpret different parts of scripture are that way, because that’s what I was taught as a kid and so, I guess, like for me, ultimately, it’s the Bible” (Lucy). The prominence of the Holy Bible as “number one” (James) and “a road track” (Faye) or “guidelines of you know how you interact with God” (Ashley), was further relayed by Jimmy who stated:

“Well, it, it, yeah, scripture, scripture is a, it, and, and if it is based on scripture, great, but it’s still not scripture. So, scripture is, is the only thing that is authoritative, and it is the only thing that is worth putting your complete and total credence in. I would say that creeds are also very important so the, the then I sing creed um, is, uh it’s also, it’s always impacted me because it is encapsulated and articulated my faith.”

Further, Kade also expressed the integral role of the Holy Bible not only in consideration of the text, which is synthesized, but also the life-based selections of authors which select to formulate alternate, religious-based resources. Specifically, they mentioned:

“I’ve read several artists, several authors who have written great stuff and have really had moments where they connect. However, they were all human and I don’t fully agree with some of their actions outside of this. So, I’m not gonna name them because I don’t think they really deserve to have, be recognized for something that I feel like in the end what their actions ultimately grieve God instead of bringing Him, but, God is capable of using sin to, to glorify Him by working through everything that is ex-, in existence.”

The text which is produced by authors who offer accompaniments to the Holy Bible as additional resources were expressed by most participants as resources which they engage, but the alignment with the Holy Bible and their reflection of the beliefs within a world-based context were significant through which they evaluate these specific forms of supports outside of biblical-based scriptures. This specific importance was conveyed by Jimmy who related this perspective to a lens through which the evaluation of texts are assessed. Specifically, Jimmy correlated the use of biblical-based scriptures as a way in which to worship God based on the reflected diverse forms this expression can take as presented by participants and portrayed this sentiment by stating:

“I have to look at, at God’s, I can only um look, or I can only worship God through His scripture, it has to be scriptural, if you’re not looking, if, if, if it is not being done through the lens of scripture um it’s um it’s I guess uh doctrinally for, for me at least, it’s um it’s, it’s insufficient and heretical. It has to be based on scripture. If you’re looking, if you’re trying to accomplish it through the lens of human experience and you’re trying to understand worship through the Bible based on human experience, it’s gonna fall short.”

With a common reflection of the Holy Bible as being the primary and authoritative mode in which to “clarify things” (Faye) and directs how “you should see God” (Ashley), some participants reflected on specific resources which they utilize as alternate forms of meaning in consideration of the text which informs their progression of life and should ultimately involve both a biblical basis and reflection of associated actions by the involved authors (i.e., life-based selections). Primarily, participants referenced a preference to utilize specific authors which they agree with in consideration of their produced works, such as a notable reference to “C.S. Lewis” (Flynn) who was observed to be a “radical thinker” (Flynn) by participants who “set out to disprove the Bible, to prove that there w-, you know, that there was no God or if there was a God, it wasn’t the one in the Bible, in the process of doing that, it actually convinced him that Jesus and the Bible were, were the truth, he makes it so logical, it’s almost like when you’re reading it you’re like, it’s just logic that, that this, that this is, that this is the way it is” (Anastasia). In conjunction with specific authors, participants also displayed “that there’s always something for somebody out there” (Trent) such as an “audio book of the Bible” (Abigail), a focus on “authors and pastors that I know and respect and love” (Phoebe), “doing research” (Ward) through the use of “the internet” (Nicole), using books which are “fiction books about faith” (Mike) to “realize that in everyday life things that can happen” (Mike), or an “app” (Trent) which may include “music in the app” (Trent) which allows for a “very meditative” (Tent) experience.

Through the use of additional religious-based resources to “gain an understanding about the person of God and the ways of God” (Ruth), participants ultimately conveyed the use of specific sources as supporting aspects to the Holy Bible to mainly grow a “deeper relationship” (Ruth) with God. With a primary focus on the Holy Bible and a definitive need for outside

sources to be in alignment with these foundational texts as reflected by participants, collectively the subjective use of these resources overall aim to partake in “studying about God” (Ruth) and understand “how God sees you, how you should see God” (Ashley). Specifically, this was related to a “perfect circle” by Ruth who shared that this process of using the Holy Bible and selecting to or not to involve other resources mainly contributes to an engagement which fosters a desire to “dig deeper” (Ruth) into a relationship with God and truly experience a “revelation” (Ruth) and “walk it out” (Ruth). Specifically, Ruth shared:

“When studying about God, the way that you connect with Him is your depth of understanding about Him and the revelation that you can walk out what He's given you. So, by studying and using these resources, you gain an understanding about the person of God and the ways of God. Then you can absorb that through understanding and revelation and can walk it out. So, that is like a perfect circle where you come back to learning more about God so that, you can't have a relationship with somebody you don't understand and that, that literature helps you gain additional knowledge. So, you know Him better so you can have a further, deeper relationship and then you want to dig deeper, and it just continues.”

The utilization of the Holy Bible as a guiding force within the lives of participants and mainstay within their existence was additionally interwoven within their nature-based experiences where you can “be in the moment” (Niko) and observe how “every verse is about nature” (Fiona). Similar to the expressions of prayer and worship, engaging in scripture through the Holy Bible or selected religious-based resources, most participants shared a common expression of scripture involved within Christianity and time in nature as being “naturally intertwined” (Fiona). Specifically, Fiona expressed this sentiment by stating:

“But they, they seem, so, like natural, naturally intertwined, so I feel like my reading of the Bible directly leads me to hang out in nature and enjoy it because it's all about nature.”

The aspect of nature in consideration of expressions involving the Holy Bible, were conveyed by participants as an opportunity to observe “what comes to mind when I think about

verses and yeah, just being able to actually picture what the verse is describing, I think always is helpful” (Ashley). Participants shared that being in “God’s creation and His creativity and His sovereignty” (Jimmy) provided reflections through scripture and His creation as forms which are “so evident just in nature that, God, and that God can be explained, even explained and understood” (Jimmy). For example, the book of “Romans speaking about the, the rocks even crying out” (Jimmy) or specifically “Psalms 46, like a deer rushed panting for streams of water so my, my soul longs for you, God” (Kade) were referenced by participants as opportunities to observe how authors who scribed God-inspired words within the Holy Bible use “imagery he sees in the wilderness” (Kade) to show God’s “power and mercy” (Kade). Further, participants also portrayed the communication and experiencing of God within not only nature, but through an alternate medium of biblical-based scripture as “God saying, “I will call you through the wind, I will call you through rain, I will call you through these things that no one else can control, but Me”, and that is where He points out to us, is by controlling the one thing that no one can control” (Kade).

The opportunity to interact with God’s words (i.e., within the Holy Bible), whether spoken directly from Him or through a portion of the Holy Trinity (i.e., God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) in addition to authors who recorded God-inspired words, within nature allowed for “finding that peace in s-, in scripture, in nature that God is speaking to you in” (Niko). Within these natural spaces, such as NPS units, participants reflected an amplified opportunity to experience peace and highlighted this item as a commonality in their nature-based ventures. For example, Ashley stated “it’s always the verse that comes to my mind just because I just, feel so at peace in nature”. Through this established atmosphere and experience which nature facilitates, the expression of engaging in God’s word through biblical- or religious-based resources allowed

for a “very freeing” (Anastasia) experience. Specifically, this opportunity to read “those verses” (Anastasia), observe the characteristics of nature through “symbols” (Anastasia) which correlate to the text (i.e., seeing “bald eagles flying, they just remind you how great God is” (Anastasia)), and overall feel a form of “uplifting” (Anastasia) evocation based on this interrelated and multilayered venture which solidifies the “purpose” (Anastasia) which “God created us” (Anastasia) for in alignment with all of creation. This opportunity to experience the biblical- or religious-based resources in an enhanced format through being in nature and experiencing God, was shared by Anastasia as:

“We saw bald eagles flying, they just remind you how great God is and that He has us here for a purpose, they give purpose, I would say they m-, make you feel like your life has a purpose and you’re not just here, randomly, that God created us each person to do something and and He gives us those verses to encourage us to, to, walk with Him and to, and He remind, I think that that’s one of the neat connections I guess with nature is that t- the people who wrote the Bible were so inspired by God to include those things that that He and they knew we would see and they would encourage us to, to keep going, the one about not growing faint with the eagle thing, that’s inspiring cause a lot of times we do want to quit or give up, life can get hard and you think well I don’t wanna, it’s too hard, I wanna do something different or quit or whatever, so He uses symbols, I guess symbols in nature would be a good way to put it, to inspire us, um every day cause I, I think it’s safe to say that He, you know, think back to Adam and Eve that He did create this for His, His love for u-, with His love for us, um He gave us everything we needed and He put us here and He put it here for us to enjoy and for a, and for us to have communion with Him, to have a relationship with Him and enjoy that so. And nature is definitely, I would say it’s the best way to enjoy a relationship with God. It’s um, to me it makes me feel free, it’s very freeing you know and I just stand up there whether you’re on the top of a mountain or even in the valley looking up at a mountain, it’s almost like something is just lifted, sometimes things get lifted.”

Nature and the Environmental Mindset of Christians

In consideration of the locations in which the conveyed expressions can and do take place for involved participants within this research (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources), nature was represented by participants as spaces where the engaged expressions were not only amplified but served as a motivating force behind the expressions.

Specifically, being in nature encouraged the expressions based on the evocation which natural contexts and nature-based experiences can motivate. Further, this level of initiation which nature provides was found to unveil a deeper meaning based on the observation of how these specific contexts came to be initially. In particular, the ability of nature to amplify the facilitation of expressions as portrayed by participants was undergirded by the recognition of nature coming from a Creator (i.e., God) which formed these spaces as a way where “God just shows up” (Paschal) and “you begin to recognize the power of, of the earth as, as it moved and formed the mountains, man the power of someone that, that even created the rocks of the tectonic plates and, and caused it all to shift and move, and, and then you’re standing on top of it thousands of years later and, um, h-, man, it’s ju-, it, there’s just this pr-, this consuming presence it just en-, envelopes you” (Paschal). The role of nature as a reflection that “something bigger and better and beyond created this for me to live in” (Paschal) was found to serve as a main reflection of God and compel participants to not only engage in expressions, but an overall state where individuals are pulled “deeper into a more reflective, contemplative view” (Paschal). This sentiment involving a pivotal influence of nature based on God serving as the “master creator” (Anastasia) was shared by Anastasia as being “wooed by God”. Specifically, they stated:

“The animals, the, the mountains themselves, the water, the plants, I mean it goes back again to He’s the master creator of it all and it’s, it’s almost like He’s wo-, wooing you. When you go into a place like that it’s like you are being wooed by God to spend time with Him if that makes sense.”

Based on the reflected sentiment that “God is in everything” (Emma) by participants, this foundational or baseline component served as a pillar or pivotal influence in the way in which nature was viewed and shared by participants. Specifically, it was reflected that “God’s presence is just so strong” (Abigail) within nature and specifically the categorization of these contexts within this research. In particular, nature is defined through the context of NPS units and the

involved research settings of GRSM and INDU. These public lands where accessibility to protected natural contexts were portrayed by participants as sites where “you can see His fingerprints all over it” (Anastasia) and observe the design of God based on the opportunity to experience Him through “the beauty of it all” (Anastasia). It is within these forms of natural contexts where most participants felt “secure” (Rachel) and able to see how God is “showing like a new side of Himself” (Niko) within NPS units and through a “different level of authenticity” (Niko). This sentiment of experiencing God through varied means within nature and especially NPS units was shared by Rachel as:

“He shows Himself as a Father, that He created these trees for His children and that He wants us to experience His presence, and to have a place of refuge, to have a place of recreation like this is our playground that like our Father has made for us. And it's just so overwhelmingly clear to me that He is a Father when I look at these trees.”

Rachel also continued this line of thought by stating:

“I feel secure, that God is our Father, and He is good and that we are His children, that I am uniquely loved, and known and that He wants me to be here, and I just feel so secure knowing that, and every tree, is an affirmation of that, that He is my Father.”

Similarly, this level of “authenticity” (Niko) and “intentional” (Niko) design of God was expressed by Niko specifically in relation to GRSM. In consideration of this NPS unit, Niko shared:

“You're getting a different level of authenticity from God, but I guess the thing that I get from, this place is that there's just very much this like care, intentional, like, love, and not that you can't find it in the desert. You know what I mean. Like, you know, I'm sure people that like that come from like Michigan or whatever, you know, places that are green. When they go to the desert, they're, they're, they're just like they find something, I'm sure they find something totally different you know. Um, but for me, I really feel like this is a place that is like calming, that it is peaceful. It's very exuberant in its own way if you compare it to other places. But it's also a place where there's solitude, there's peace, there's this calm to it. And it's also just very still like it's one of those things where you just like look around and you're just like, I don't know, like it's just one of those things where the, the way that the trees are, the way that they look, the way that, you know the leaves are on the trees. It's just very intentional.”

Niko also further reflected an elevated experience of God within GRSM by continuing their sentiment through sharing:

“The trees, the trees, everything that's green because I just came from a season that was very like. I mean. In no way was it bad. It it was amazing. But I'm just saying that, like, you know, I kind of came from a season where, like, everything was like desert and all this stuff, which is cool and I love I love desert, but being int-, coming into a place like this, I remember just driving. I mean, I was like I think it was in Arkansas. I was just like, wow, this is wild. Everything's green. Like, this is incredible. I felt like I was already in the Smoky Mountains in O-, in the in Ozark, Arkansas. And I just remember, like, finally getting here, there was just like, whoa, there's just like level of excitement, like there's just like level of, you know, excitement to be where God is and where God has called me to be and like live into like the favor of like what He's called me to live into, you know. So, to just to kind of finish that question off, I think being, being among a change of scenery, being among, you know, like the, the, the mountains and everything, like the waterfalls and all that stuff, it's just it's really opened my eyes to like to more of God.”

Participants who spent time within GRSM shared a collective sentiment that this form of natural context facilitated an increased level of perceived connection with God and the present natural features as well. Additionally, participants highlighted the “omnipresent, omniscient” (Paul) presence of God which can be found throughout all natural spaces and further the holistic composition of existence. Specifically, it was shared that God is in “every place I walk, because He’s everywhere” (Abigail). While this was a common aspect of shared participant thoughts, the ability to spend time within NPS units, such as GRSM, was also reflected as offerings to acquire an enhanced opportunity to engage in the “homey feeling” (Mike) which is fostered by God within these specific spaces. The experience of God within nature is felt in all locations, but NPS units offer designated spaces in which the fullness of God and His “bigger” (Renee) presence could be observed in “magnificent” (Rachel) moments which show how “absolutely good” (Rachel), “all powerful” (Rachel), and impactful He is through helping individuals form infiltrating connections through the “constantly working” (Renee) processes of nature and ultimately knowing that He is “more surreal” (Mike) in these spaces (i.e., “His creation” (Mike)).

Specifically, Renee shared sentiments concerning their experience in GRSM and the observation of God not only within the experienced moments, but within correlations to life-based occurrences through reflection and perspective shifting:

“But knowing that He created, that giant, giant, giant, giant rock or the river that never stops flowing, but it's constantly, constantly working and flowing down and its new water, the same water is never stopping, it just keeps going, that just helps me feel closer to God and it helps me realize how much bigger He is than all the little things that our human selves deal with, like all the little things that we think are big things. It's not, not important.”

Also, Mike expressed parallel sentiments regarding being within GRSM, experiencing God, and how this aligned with their view of the natural space(s) as:

“I feel like when you're out here, there's just, such a, such more of, a homey feeling. You feel more, I don't want to sound cliché, but down to earth. You're humbled here because there's things greater than you. You know, I couldn't put the oak trees here, only He can do that. Well, I mean, I guess if I planted one, but you know what I mean. And when a, if it's a worship setting out here, I feel like for me personally, it's just so much more powerful and so much more surreal with Him because you're in His creation, you, in a church, you talk about His creation, but here you're in it, you know.”

In alignment with spoken references as provided by participants concerning GRSM, these shared thoughts were also translated in the research setting of INDU. Within this natural context, participants shared that this specific NPS unit is one that is “unexpected” (Fiona) based on the setting and contained characteristics offering a “new surprise” (Fiona) which allows for seeing “God in that because it's like not, it's like a r-, really good surprise that you weren't expecting” (Fiona). Specifically, the ability of INDU to surprise visitors within the available experiences was associated with not only how “God created” (Nicole) the expanse within and outside of this site, but especially in consideration of its geographic placement in proximity to the city of Chicago. This is due to the opportunity for visitors to experience a “security blanket in a sense” (Thea) in an environment that “really brings me a lot of peace” (Thea) and is a “juxtaposition” (Lucy) by the close positioning to urban infrastructure. Further, INDU was not only related to a

peaceful location, but a site which spurred the progression of exploration and engagement within the natural space. For example, Thea stated:

“That's like I think about that when I go hiking and like today in the dunes, it was like, how does this work and where did this come from. And I wonder how old this is or I wonder what like how these, trees grew or how, you know, like how this all works. And I think in some ways the like, the more you know, the more you realize you don't k-, how much you don't know. However, that quote goes and just like that idea of yeah, I know a lot of things about God, but there's also like this recognition that He is like greater and bigger than anything I can understand or imagine or like, fully fathom. Um, and I think. That's evident in a place like this where it's just like. I don't know there's so much unknown, and I guess for me, too, it's like I have never been to Dune's before, I don't think and so just like it's just a new adventure and I guess like this idea that there's always more to see and more to know about God.”

The opportunity to experience the “unique” (Emma) atmosphere of INDU, was also aligned with ongoing circumstances involving the global pandemic of COVID-19 which was detected in 2020. Participants shared that nature is a form of “escape” (Emma) which offers “serenity” (Thea) in moments of “anxiety” (Thea), such as the progressive and strenuous situations which arose through the global pandemic. Further, this sentiment was relayed in association with INDU in particular which participants shared was a site that reminded “me to stay calm in situations” (Thea). It is within INDU that participants felt how “impressive” (Emma) God is and that He is “not predictable” (Emma) and displays His “ever-evolving beauty” (Emma) which is “really powerful” (Emma) even in the most trying and difficult times. This expression of hope through God’s presence and refuge in INDU was shared by Emma as:

“I think this is definitely a unique park and that it’s near some really large urban centers and with Coronavirus people are really seeking an escape, which is cool to see because I think people are seeking God. They may not know it, and so they come to beauty like this, but. So, I think I've seen God through people during these last four days here and today specifically, I, you know, being at the worship service location and the serenity that was there in the trees where we were leading the worship service with the cicadas going overhead, that was really powerful. And then this evening, being at Mount Baldy and thinking about this massive sand dune that's like still moving. It's an active sand dune. And just how impressive that is and how the landscape over all time has just constantly

been evolving and getting more and more beautiful and changing and showing God is not predictable. It's this ever-evolving beauty that we'll never fully see the end of."

Further, this portrayal of "perspective" (Thea) and "purpose" (Thea) even in the presence of adverse occurrences, was relayed by participants when spending time within INDU through the connections which were made between the arduous moments and the opportunity to still see "the beauty" (Thea). Specifically, Thea portrayed this form of correlation through stating:

"I think for me, and growing up somewhat near the area, it's kind of cool to see, like the sand dunes, per se, in contrast with like the lake, nearby um, not that, that sand's not by lakes or anything, but like I think it's just it's sometimes almost seems so out of place. Coming from outside of like Chicago and whatnot. But it's really cool, like and I think that, kind of just reminds myself, you know, that God created us all like in a unique way and we all have different like purposes. And each landscape per se gives us a different perspective on life, you know. And so, yeah sandhills are harder to climb, but there's still beauty, in like that, you know."

Similarly, Lucy further highlighted this experience through the "strength" (Lucy) of God which is "made perfect in my weakness" (Lucy) and can not only be observed as reflections in nature (i.e., NPS units, such as INDU), but in the progression of individual and collective existence overall. Specifically, Lucy shared:

"Yeah, it's just a lot of things we've talked about of like having moments where you're feeling at peace or comforted or um like you have this, like new perspective of things, you know, you start at the bottom of this dune, and you end up at the top of it and you're like, "how did I get here? Oh, this looks really scary from this side, but from the other side, it was", whatever or like, I don't know, I think. Yeah, I don't know if that really answers the question, but. I guess. I believe that God is with me all the time, and it's a matter of me taking the time to stop and see Him. And so, like, He shows up in the beauty and He shows up in my legs being sore and tired. But somehow, they're still moving and like and yeah wh-, when I am weak, He is strong or whatever, and I, His strength is made perfect in my weakness."

Overall, participants highlighted the existence of in-depth and reflective moments in consideration of the focus phenomena within INDU and GRSM as well. It is within these NPS units which the role of God is not only observed and recognized, but an enhanced level of

perspective and recognition can be provisioned in consideration of His creation as shared by participants. Through these ventures, participants were able to spend time within these spaces and further extrapolate the mental, physical, and emotional facets into correlations concerning their life-based perspective(s) and overall mindset. Specifically, this observation reflects the existence of such intricate and impactful occurrences which did and does draw participants into nature (i.e., NPS units) and further experience the phenomena while allowing for the progression of expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources) which align with their religious beliefs (i.e., Christian) and further collectively acted as a multifaceted experience holistically.

As a result of being able to engage in such elevated experiences due to the dynamic interactions (i.e., Christians beliefs, religious expressions, and experiencing God within nature), participants relayed the persistence of an environmental mindset which has evolved in accordance with these specific moments. In particular, participants conveyed the existence of “mandates” (Emma) as expressed through the Holy Bible which speak to “stewarding what they have and not wasting it or squandering it” (Lucy) and “continuing to take care of the land that was taken care of before us” (Niko). As a result, participants shared the dynamic interaction which is spurred as a result of God ultimately results in the progression of an environmental mindset which reflects that “we are stewards, not consumers, and I think we are to, to shepherd and manage what God’s given to us” (Ruth). Specifically, Ruth continued this sentiment by expressing their mindset pertaining to the view of nature and resulting care and leading influence of “environmental stewardship” (Paschal) by stating:

“I think we are stewards, not consumers. And I think we are to, to shepherd and manage what God's given to us. And I know I don't know the terminology, but it was like no carbon footprint or no footprint. So anyway, I think that you should leave the way you came in and not leave a mark where you were. And so, you know, like here we're sitting

at this picnic table and I see cigarette butts and I see trash and, and that's leaving a footprint where, you know, those behaviors encourage others to do the same. And then it just kind of grows. So, it's way easier to disregard nature and just treat it like your trash can. It's much more difficult to leave no footprint because you've got to stop and go behind yourself and make sure. But I think it's the responsible stewardish, stewardship thing that we can do and managing our resources and not abusing our planet. It's what we should do, all of us."

Further, most participants shared that observing any form of action which brought forth negative consequences towards the environment should result in a "gut wrenching" (Emma) reaction. Specifically, Emma shared:

"Mount Rainier National Park with a group of "individuals" as yourself, for the first ever Women in the Wilderness and we our stewardship activity was getting to be Meadow Rovers, which is really cool. So, we got to you know count the people that were up on the meadow and help educate them on stewarding the land because so many people were taking selfies with the wildflowers and that had become a very popular thing. You know, Instagram was blown up with selfies of wildflowers and these beautiful places, which is fine. However, the wildflowers are not on the path. And the more people that walk off the path into the wildflowers, the more the wildflowers die and then they're not there for future generations, or future people or even next week's visitors to see, and so I feel like in that moment, you know, being with a group of ladies praising God in this beautiful place, we were already very connected to God. We were praying. We were singing we were hiking and then watching just how many people were literally just, stomping on these beautiful wildflowers. I think it called me even more to like have this, like, impulse within me that just says, "Ah, stop, don't do that" like, which I think is kind what God calls us, too, with, environmentalism or with, you know, stewardship as it should be such a gut wrenching like, "Oh, gosh", like, the land is so beautiful. We have to protect it. God is so beautiful, and He's so reflected here that we need to like lift that up. And so, I guess that's how I would see God within that is just when I see it going well, God is reflected really well. And when it's not going well, it's soul crushing."

Participants conveyed an environmental mindset which was grounded in "the Bible" (Fiona) and reflects the overarching sentiment that "it is my responsibility and desire to be a steward, to protect, to use resources wisely, because it's about something greater and above and beyond myself and my momentary time" (Paschal). Further, some participants felt as though the implementation of actions which are "God-motivated" (Jimmy) and "biblically-motivated" (Jimmy) are ones that initiate or enhance an "environmental rhetoric" (Jimmy) that overall

knows “that God is sovereign, takes away the worry, if there is worry there, the worry is taken away, but it is not, the responsibility is not suspended” (Jimmy) and aims to act “out of obedience” (Jimmy). The progression of this “environmental rhetoric” (Jimmy) was desired to be enhanced and offer a foundation through “scripture as to why it’s important and acknowledge, but, but all along acknowledging God’s sovereignty over it” (Jimmy).

In conjunction with the progression of an environmental mindset which is highlighted by the shared expression of “stewardship, it’s always stewardship and, and gratefulness” (Faye) as conveyed by participants, the recognition and addressing of “environmental justice aspects” (Madison) were involved within the displayed environmental mindset of participants.

Specifically, some participants shared they have “grief on my heart” (Kade) when recognizing the beauty of nature and the designation of public, protected areas while also feeling “called to recognize the suffering people” (Kade) who were “kicked off this land and died” (Kade) as a result of tragic and deplorable actions. Specifically, Kade expanded on this significant matter by stating:

“I mean, I recognize like that national parks are great, and I love their beauty. But at the same time, I’m called to recognize the suffering people and I can’t help but recognize the millions of Native Americans that were kicked off this land and died on the way to reservation. I live in Oklahoma. I’m very well aware of the Native American situation there. It’s a very public issue. And the more and there’s a grief on my heart for them and that is not something I would have in connection with unless I really honestly had a religious background to recognize, like, “wow, this is suffering and we’re called to help them”. And yeah, we appreciate beauty by beauty at whose expense?”

Kade also continued this sentiment by sharing:

“Like you’re still responsible for your actions, even if they weren’t yours, even if they, were de-, decades, ge-, generations before you. If you just think about it, ask why you wouldn’t, if you think, “oh, I don’t want to or I just don’t think it’s our problem”, well it is, we’re asked, we’re, re-, religious or Christianity and Jesus especially, He doesn’t turn away from people on the street corner. He doesn’t turn away from big problems. He looks at them in the face, He faces them with love and generosity. And because of that, a bunch of environmental issues with the mindset of this is there’s a, there’s something going on here, how can I, even if I’m too small, even i-, i-, if it started way before me,

what can I do now to fix it? Cause ultimately it's all I control, it's all I'm accountable for. Christ says that He will ask us what, He gave, what, what, what we did with what He gave us. And I don't want to say, "well, I, I saw that there were that th- they're trying to build pipelines in the Grand Canyon, they were gonna cut off water supplies to Native People living in, there, but I mean, it was a petition, I j-, I didn't want to click on it, it was hard, it was ju-, I had to click on it, I had to give them my email, I was just, God you like, you know how hard that is". God goes, "no, I don't I really don't know how hard that is, like, I never knew you like that's not what I want to hear", I want to, be able to say "I did what I could and I kept moving and I kept them in my heart and I prayed to you about it, and You moved", like you do your part, regardless of how small you think it is"

It was conveyed by participants their portrayed environmental mindset is not one that is solely comprised of an environment focus, but one that is diverse in its composition. Specifically, the environmental mindset as conveyed by participants is one composed of facets which connect "humanitarian efforts, ecological efforts, and environmental stewardship" (Kade) based on their "religious background" (Kade) and relationship with God.

In addition to the varied, significant characteristics which posed as notable elements of the environmental mindset and established priorities within this viewpoint by participants, the foundation for which their perspective(s) evolve were also described as elevated and viewpoint-inducing factors as a result of their religious beliefs. Specifically, participants shared that "I have a greater appreciation for the environment because I'm more spiritually connected to it, I think because I recognize that God has created each and every single little thing and it makes me care even more about it and more about everything that's within nature and within the environment, including humans" (Lily). It was also portrayed that "I think I'm making a decision to better the environment, even in a little bit, um, I think that the reason that I care about doing that is because I care about God, and I recognize Him as the creator of this space" (Phoebe). Participants shared a commonality of primarily aiming to "cherish and take care of, and you want to respect the gift that has been given to you" (Trent) which was displayed by participants as a way to foster a "relationship with God" (Phoebe) who "loves His creation" (Phoebe) and this compassion should

be shown by all as well in consideration of knowing “it’s not just science to me” (Phoebe) it’s “a gift, and I want to take care of that gift, it's not even just like a gift, it's like it still belongs to God and like He's given it to us to, like, take care of for Him, so, I want to do my best and I also like I believe that like we as humans, but especially Christians, are called to take care of it” (Phoebe).

This specific sentiment was further shared by Phoebe who stated:

“I think that that was one of His commands, to us, like especially in the Garden of Eden, like take care of the, the planet and the environment is something that, like, I, I believe is part of my duty as a Christ follower.”

In accordance, Ruth offered a biblical-based reference with collective participant responses in consideration of how the Christian environmental mindset should progress by sharing:

“I'm thinking of a, a story in the Bible that a homeowner put folks in charge over his estate and they were to tend after it and expect that he would return and there was three degrees of how they handled that, you know, one being in fear and just not really dealing with it and the other one taking great care. And then the other one in them was kind of in the middle. And I think we have a choice to be one of those three people. And I think that you can just blow it off and disregard it and, and basically, you're gonna pay the consequences, or you can do like the first one and do what they're supposed to do. And so, I think that my relationship and how I look at God and how I look at His Earth kind of correlates to that story. I want to be well done, good and faithful servant. I want to be that guy. And I don't want to be the one that took the easy way out and disregarded something he had control over, which was how he handled the situation. So that's kind of how I feel, feel about it.”

Overall, participants conveyed an environmental mindset which is established on the basis of God serving as the main factor which fosters the inclusion of varying environmental, religious, and social aspects as a result of all that composes creation (i.e., humanity in addition to biotic and abiotic organisms, landscapes, and/or processes). It is through a posture which aims to glorify and convey a posture of gratitude towards the “Creator” (Megan) (i.e., God) that participants displayed as extension not only to the provision of compassion and care towards

other individuals, but nature as well. It is the basis and foundation of a connection with God due to the identification and recognition with Christianity that participants shared sentiments of how these transformative aspects impacted their environmental mindset to not be one of dominion and anthropocentric notions, but a theocentric perspective which formulates a biocentric view where creation is observed as a masterful gift from a divine God who displayed the utmost expression of intentionality through the development of an invaluable creation which stands the test of time. Specifically, the role of Christianity within the pro-environmental nuances and desire to evolve in an environmentally conscious manner as shared by participants was conveyed by Trent as:

“I feel like, like the difference between like when I was a non-believer and when I was a believer, is that, you perceive, nature as God's creation rather than just nature, you know, and that, that kind of puts a new perspective on it in a new sense of kind of importance, because this is nature's a gift that He gave to us. So, and when you receive gifts from anybody, really, it's something that you want to cherish and take care of and you want to respect the gift that was given to you.”

Similar portrayals were provided by Mike by stating:

“I feel like if I wasn't a Christian, if I didn't believe in God, I wouldn't respect it as much, because what I find is the highest power made this for us to enjoy and love, well some of us who actually enjoy and love it, but made it for us, to as in, I mean nature, to love and to have a, good time to be to ourselves, be ourselves. So, I feel like as a Christian I'm, I have to protect what He made.”

Participants shared a commonality of “respect” for (Eva) all that composes creation and further provided recognition to the infiltrating aspects which can not only be elevated by the opportunity to immerse oneself in expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources) during nature-based experiences but foster the progression of extrapolated benefits which serve as authentic displays towards other individuals, natural contexts, and God. This existence of infiltrating outcomes within the environmental mindset

which should be progressed by Christians to ultimately allow the creative manner of God to impact all in existence, was shared by Eva as:

“I think that word respect pops up again, because when you leave no trace, you're allowing other people to enjoy the beauty of what you've experienced and I am all for and, you know, respecting other people's property and expe-, so that other people can enjoy it, and so, when you are following like the rules of Leave No Trace, you are allowing other people and to enjoy the beauty, enjoy and see that there is still God's creation that exists, and it's not polluted, and kind of from, a Christian mindset, I guess, that allows other people to see God working through nature, too. So, I think, um, when, you leave no trace, that word respect kind of pops up. You are respecting God's creation and you're respecting, um, His work and allowing other people to experience that.”

Discussion

Regarding the iterative data analysis and refining process within this research that involved the progression from initial bracketing processes to the concluding development of an overarching essence description, participants conveyed the existence of experiencing God within nature (i.e., NPS units) and further having this enhanced ability to observe His creative, diverse designs as a means to act in a manner which is environmentally and socially conscious (Table 4.5). Further, participants expressed in addition to a formed relationship with God, biblical-based mandates also act as integral elements within the behaviors and overarching environmental mindset which progresses within their world-based existence due to a collective recognition the Holy Bible is first, foremost, and God's word. Participants shared the level of compassion through which God has displayed through creation is significant and they desire to continuously progress in the care by which they convey towards natural contexts. Further, participants highlighted themselves as vessels in this venture based on their reflection of stewardship towards nature and the potential observation of others which spurs the progression of infiltrating outcomes (e.g., connections with God's creation, observation of the Creator, pro-environmental behaviors, etc.). As a result, participants aimed to serve as representations of how Christianity

and primarily a connection with God is not only believed but implemented in a manner which furthers the expression of a genuine character of authenticity, honesty, rawness, and a desire to evolve based on biblical principles through both environmental and social situations (i.e., significance which should be placed and enhanced in consideration of environmental justice issues). As a result of these primary facets within the experienced phenomena and lived experiences by the involved participants, the overall essence description of this multifaceted occurrence reflects a further reflection of this intrinsically diverse, impactful, and infiltrating significance as formed from God and result in the social, environmental, and religious forms.

Table 4.5. Final subthemes as a result of the implemented thematic analysis within this research and associated, overarching essence description which were all developed through the utilization of key words as spoken by participants.

Final and Refined Subthemes	Essence Description	Quote
<i>All Subthemes and Inspired Essence Description:</i>		
God is master creator who is evident, greater, bigger, and can be seen everywhere (e.g., Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Indiana Dunes National Park) in creation which displays His fingerprints and exhausts individuals by the reflective views which show that something beyond (i.e., God) made them and brings a feeling of wearing a weighted blanket which provides peace, happiness, and renewal in an atmosphere that allows for individual growth in spaces which are not man-made and fosters experiences which will never return void and will leave an individual speechless	The environment is everything and is a creation where God is innate and knitted within the "fabric" of existence and these natural spaces allow for all individuals to experience Him no matter their beliefs, but those who identify as Christians are able to experience a recognized exposure or utilize a different mindset and associated lens or filter by which to view these resources which should be treated with a biblically-mandated viewpoint of environmentalism and protective stewardship which is informed by God's word through the Bible and further enhanced through expressions of prayer and worship which can take many forms (e.g., silence, internal expression through the heart, song and singing, reading the Bible, individually, as a group in one voice, journaling, etc.) and in varying, designated spaces (i.e., national parks), especially God's creation where His fingerprints, reflective views expressing the presence of something beyond, and unmatched design compels an individual to complete these forms of expression and cohesively develops a moving experience that will never return void and fosters individual growth, should be available to all, offers fulfillment of the heart, realization of purpose, and a connection with God that comforts in both the roughest (e.g., suicidal	<i>"Walk through and like these mountains specifically are the oldest, that's what I've been told and it's like He is He is everlasting, He is durable, and yet everything changes and is worn down, but is built back up, its God shaped these mountains as He shapes our character. And when I when I worship in nature, it's like. How can I describe it? It's almost like all the world I don't actually hear every single breath, every organism takes, but I can imagine it well, at least with like my soda can brain, He's the ocean, I'm a soda can. You can't fit all of it in the can, but like the part the portion of Him that I can imagine of what I can understand, it's like I feel the strong tie, like as I'm praising my God, I'm praising right alongside everything that draws breath, that we are praising Him together just by being alive and by glorifying Him with our life in the way that we live, and it's just, if you can imagine a heartbeat. And all of our, heartbeats aligning together and all of, eve-, all of us drawing breath together because each one is a gift from God, He le-, He let me breathe that in just now, because it was to His glory, and it was His pleasure that He would that I would</i>

	thoughts) and renewing (e.g., feeling the "Holy Spirit tingle") moments of life	<i>take that breath and savor and appreciate it. All of us are breathing and living and growing together, and our hearts are aligned with His more and more in sync as we continue with our praise. And that's why I call it His life beat. It's not just a heartbeat. It's like His spirit, His life in all of us together"</i>
The environment is everything, our home which shows God knitted within, and source of well-being that was graciously given by Him and religion, either heavily or partially, is the filter by which nature is viewed and an obligation involving a primary focus on protection, conservation (i.e., designation of national parks), increasing awareness of environmental and social justice issues, and enhancing education while allowing for use and not suspending the responsibility of completing biblically-motivated actions which highlights our call to environmentalism and stewardship by Him to not dishonor His private property through gut wrenching negative impacts and limit the fullness of His beauty, creativity, and closeness for current and future generations to enjoy		

<p>The Bible is first, foremost, living, breathing, reveals God and what is in the heart of an individual, can change people's lives, can cause an individual to fall on their face crying, and provides a biblical lens instead of a human lens which falls short and is doctrinally insufficient to the spiritual nourishment which can be gained when reading other religious-based resources (e.g., apps, worship songs, books, internet, audiobooks, respected pastors and theologians, etc.) as a support for better understanding the Bible that should be based on scripture and further assist the Bible in providing the baseline to a connection with God and the contained biblical-based text can be further experienced and recalled in His creation which reflects references such as, 'even the rocks will cry out' to 'say thank you, God' or 'He lays me down in green pastures, He leads me besides quiet waters, restores my soul', in snippets of His love, sovereignty, power, mercy, and personality which ultimately fills hearts to the brim and His purpose for everything can be seen in all that exists based on His word</p>		
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<p>Worship and prayer can take many forms (e.g., silence, internal expression through the heart, song and singing, reading the Bible, individually, as a group in once voice, journaling, etc.) based on them being intertwined and serving as main pathways to God through conversation which does not change God and instead changes individuals by emptying themselves of their self and therefore opens them up to a heart check that results in taking a pause of gratitude and meditation, giving the glory to God, actually trusting Him despite being afraid and being provided with so much peace, feeling the Holy Spirit flood their heart, constantly undergo a recognition of His capabilities which almost sounds too weak based on His overwhelming awe, and further experiencing these moments involved in nature which is breathtaking and makes Him so obvious through innate creation that is designed in an unmatched, mighty way which allows individuals to feel Him so much more in the roughest parts of life (e.g., suicidal thoughts) or in moments of feeling a "Holy Spirit tingle" which comes from the insane workings of God not only in the life of one individual, but all</p>		
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Based on the reflected experience of the phenomena of focus within this research and further the formed essence description as conveyed by the involved participants, the role of religion (i.e., Christianity) within the environmental mindset was a notable commonality. While the degree to which the application or extrapolation of beliefs within the life-based decisions which a Christian completes can convey a level of variability, the foundational aspects are significant and transformative factors within the continuous series of selections and choices which individuals make and a shared sentiment across participants involved: “I think, because I think we, we get forgetful or we get lazy, so unfortunately, I, I wish it informed me more regularly than it does, but I think I’m aware of it and I want to be better at it and learn more” (Emma). Further, the role of religion and the incorporated structured and unstructured practices or expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources) by which an individual engages in are also informative mainstays in the reflected desire to progress in consideration of the evolvment and implementation of an environmental mindset based on sentiments being shared by participants which include: “the more time I spend in the word learning about the beauty of creation, how we’re called to care for it, the more I want to do it, and so, you know, even books like Genesis, but books like Psalms too, where it’s, you know, a love song to creation and to the beauty of the landscape, so I feel like the more I reflect on those things, the more aware I am wanting to steward it for future generations” (Emma; Craft & Rockenbach, 2011). The specific inclusion of religion was found to serve as the medium in which a foundational belief in God and the formation of His creation could be elevated and conjoined with contributing facets (i.e., unstructured and structured practices or expressions) in the formation of the environmental mindset of Christians within this research based on the

progression of an overarching reflection of stewardship (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019).

Regarding the displayed essence description, which was shared amongst participants, contrast is present in recognition of previously completed research ventures and perceptions which were expressed in consideration of the interaction between religion and environmentally conscious actions (e.g., pro-environmental behaviors; White, 1967). Specifically, Christianity has received a focus in consideration of the utilization of perceived beliefs and how these specific truths and nuances have been interpreted throughout time (White, 1967). These interpretations include a basis in the perspectives and associated mindset of Christians and the behaviors which come to fruition as a result (White, 1967). In particular, the aspects of a dominion-based mindset are ones that have been associated with Christianity and further used as a means to highlight an influence in the environmentally degrading and negative impacts which have occurred (White, 1967). For example, specific beliefs, such as those presented within the book of Genesis and what is commonly referred to as the narrative which reflects the timeline and series of events concerning how existence came to fruition, have been open to interpretation and considered in a manner which resolves the progression of a dominion-based perspective as an overall outcome (White, 1967). Through a focus on the book of Genesis within the Holy Bible, specific verses have been used as support for the progression of these interpretations and include exerts such as:

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over ^[g]all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So, God created man in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

Within example verses, such as the representations found within the book of Genesis, previous interpretations which bring forth the existence of a dominion-based notion and support for the association of Christianity with a religious belief system that engages in environmentally degrading practices are forms of meaning which have formulated sentiments based on the existence of specific words or phrases within the Holy Bible (White, 1967). In particular, these interpretations which consider Christianity to be a religion that utilizes resources through a lens of authority and absence of consideration regarding the progression of existence for current and future generations are ones which have been based on the use of a narrowed viewpoint in contrast to including a holistic reflection of specific verses or exerts contained within a greater, enhanced dialogue (White, 1967). It is through a defined viewpoint, as portrayed by participants of this research, of the Holy Bible which specific words or phrases are used as support for interpretations that do not fully consider the nuances of religion and the multifaceted, infiltrating, transformative, and transcendental aspect of Christianity and further this form of meaning making or approach to life-based situations (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Griffis, 2017; White, 1967). Based on a paradigm that aims to employ the Holy Bible in conjunction with the unstructured and structured practices or expressions and formative foundation of a recognition of God as the “Creator” (Megan), a renewed observation is offered concerning previous interpretations of biblical-based scripture and further extrapolations to the held environmental mindset which is not only applied to a single individual who identifies as a Christian, but applied to Christianity as a whole (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; White, 1967).

The use of a holistic paradigm or mindset which uses and considers the beliefs of Christianity and the entire composition of the Holy Bible, is one that provides a comprehensive observation of this specific religious belief system and brings forth the progression of a dynamic

element of life which ultimately informs or directs the environmental mindset of Christians not only within nature, but in consideration of creation as a whole. Through this form of viewpoint, it is the participant sentiments and the overall essence description which reveals a contrasting observation regarding the environmental mindset associated with Christianity and further highlights the formation of a foundation which serves as a motivating factor within the attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of those who identify with this specific form of beliefs (Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Kals et al., 1999; White, 1967). Specifically, participants shared a common and continuous elevation and enhancement of stewardship in consideration of how they view creation and further their desire to evolve in their behaviors based on their selection to identify with and approach life through a Christian-based perspective. Further, participants displayed the continuation of an environmental mindset which is not only informed by the beliefs, but the involved expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources). It is through the engagement of the aspects which enhance the nature-based experiences and further formed environmental mindset of participants. Through the continuation of these varied processes, it was observed through the reflections of participants and their overall experience of the phenomena of focus (i.e., experiencing God within nature, such as an NPS unit, and how this informed the environmental mindset and associated behaviors of participants) these facets were collectively supported by a singular foundation. Specifically, due to the recognition of God as the “Creator” (Megan) of existence and further aimed to foster an in-depth relationship with Him, this reflects a pivotal initiating point in a cycle which ultimately informs the environmental mindset of Christian participants within this research.

Specifically, the 1) foundational relationship of God, 2) role of nature-based experiences, and 3) expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, using or reading biblical- or religious-based resources)

serve as elements that highlight the collective environmental mindset of the involved Christian participants which can be amplified over time due to progressive engagement and furthering of this cycle (Figure 4.2). As a result of the completion of this cycle as reflected by participants, the provision of an overarching outcome and associated subset of results are brought to fruition based on the religion of Christianity. In particular, an overarching environmental mindset is progressed based on the sentiments of participants which involve a subset of nuances through a conclusive viewpoint containing religious, social, and environmental focuses. Participants conveyed a significance which should not only be applied when considering the progression of environmental- and stewardship-based behaviors (e.g., pro-environmental), but an integral enhancement concerning the recognition of pervasive environmental justice issues. For example, participants referenced an increased motivation to act as stewards in consideration of God's creation to express reverence towards the "Creator" (Megan) and to allow for current and future generations to experience His divine creativity to its full potential. This highlights the notable, progressive ventures which must be amplified to offer equitably accessible nature-based experiences (i.e., NPS units) and allow for immersions which foster the unveiling or growing of connections with the natural world (Nicholls, 2001; Wang et al., 2013). While this reflection of the significance of accessibility to natural contexts is a single example involving notable breadth in its impact, this level of in-depth composition is present in consideration of all environmental justice issues and efforts which maintain respect and expand beyond medial or baseline measures and must be taken in addition to treated with a posture of growing urgency (Nicholls, 2001; Wang et al., 2013).

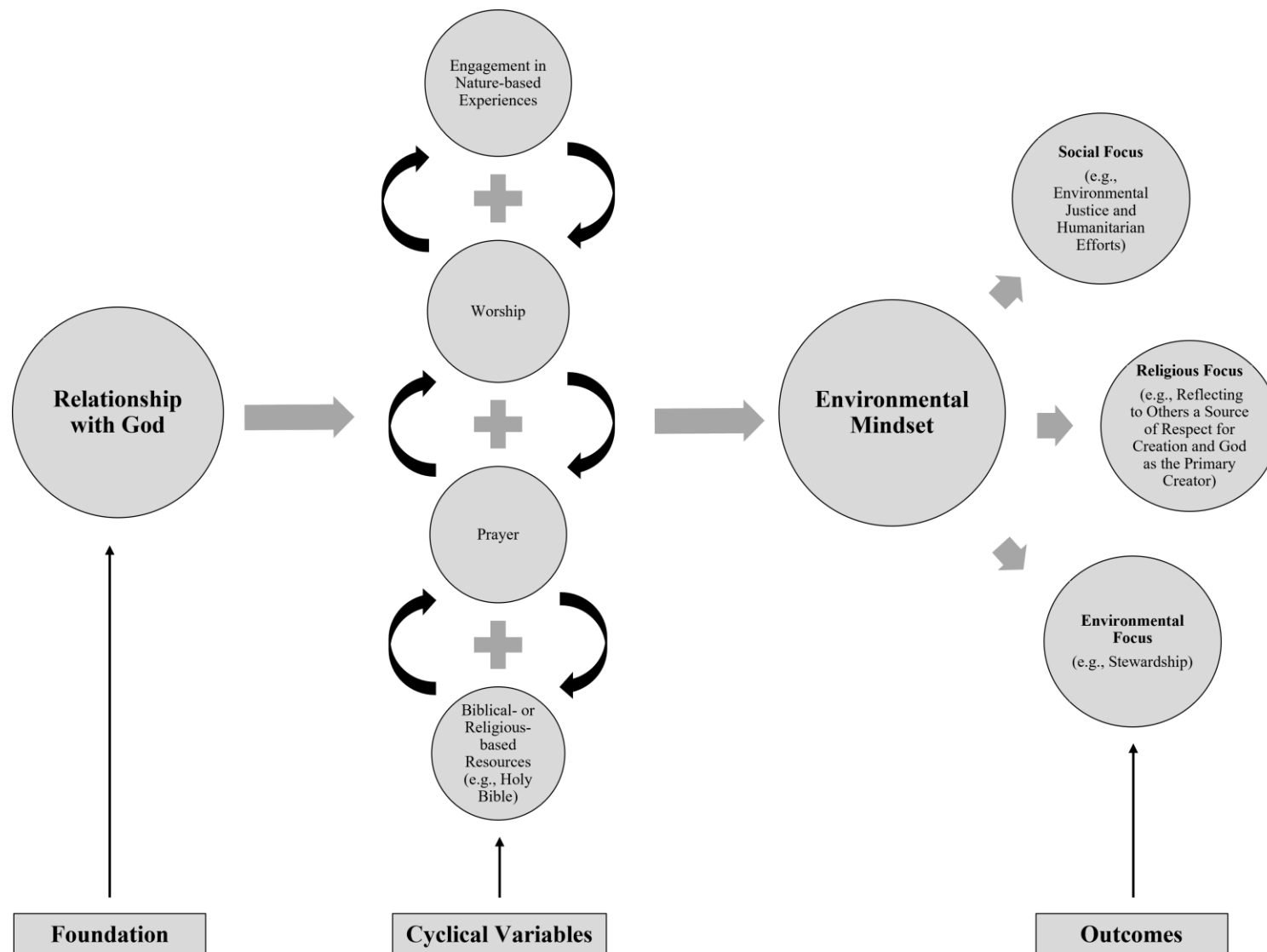


Figure 4.2. The dynamic, cyclical process or experiences of Christian participants in this research and the progression of an associated multifaceted environmental mindset.

Further, the cyclical process concerning the environmental mindset of the involved participants within this research also revealed the existence of a religious focus in conjunction with the environmental and social aims as well. This specific focus is one that is undergirded by a perceived and identified relationship with God by participants and are motivated to act in a manner which not only reflects biblical-based mandates or tenets as shared by participants through actions pertaining to nature, but ultimately serve as vessels or reflections of God within a world-based context (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Griffis, 2017). It is expressed that the environmental mindset of Christians is one that aims to act through means which elevate the opportunity for all individuals to experience nature and God as a result of the involved participant sentiments. Specifically, this desire as shared by participants was to behave as a world-based influence who acts as a reflection of a vessel for God and allows for the comprehensive dynamics of creation to serve as a connector for all individuals to natural spaces and the “Creator” (Megan) as well.

In consideration of the varied focuses involving environmental, social, and religious factors which were unveiled as outcomes in consideration of the sentiments shared by participants and the various characteristics which compose this form of collective viewpoint, participants also displayed a common portrayal of cyclical variables which inform the overarching mindset. Specifically, expressions involving worship, prayer, and biblical- or religious-based resources served as unstructured and/or structured components within the nature-based experiences which the present natural contexts evoked (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011; Davies, 2018; Fam et al., 2004; Worrell & Appleby, 2000). Through time spent within nature-based experiences, participants stated an influence of existing characteristics of the natural contexts which serve as motivating factors in the formation of religious-based expressions as a

result of being immersed within the creation of God. Participants portrayed a lens through which they amplified and transformed the manner they approached their time in nature and further engaged in associated displays of this altered perspective. Specifically, participants relayed an increased occurrence of feeling compelled to worship God as a result of His creation, engage in meditative moments of prayer which were facilitated by the serenity and solitude that can be found in nature, and recall biblical scripture while in nature based on the recognition of biblical-based mandates within the Holy Bible to observe nature through a perspective of stewardship. As a result, the experience of these variables not only was shared to occur individually and through singular instances, but were often intertwined (i.e., worship and prayer) and could take place through an overlapping manner and further within both individual- or solitude-based moments. Participants expressed a cyclical manner in which these variables come to fruition and further amplify and increase the progression of their associated mindset through engaging in these formative ventures and expressions within locations (i.e., NPS units) where the handiwork and fingerprints of God were recognized.

Lastly, the dynamic environmental mindset of Christian participants within this research was not only influenced by the implementation of expressions within natural settings which brought forth these verbal and non-verbal sentiments but was ultimately found to be fostered by a relationship with God. It is the identified relationship with God which allowed for the experiencing of Him in a space observed as His innate design and further inspired the engaged expressions and environmental mindset which participants portrayed. As a result, it was found that the interaction of religion and nature served as multilayered moments which encourage the probability of engagement in these ventures, desire to regard nature as a form of art as developed by God, and further have their motivation to engage in environmentally conscious behaviors or

progress their participation in these actions to not only enable nature to show the endless capacity of God's creativity, but allow for all individuals to experience these moments in a manner which they personally experienced (Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Griffis, 2017). The interaction of religion (i.e., Christianity) and nature in consideration of an individual's environmental mindset was found to be one grounded in a transcendental relationship with a higher deity (i.e., God) which fosters the occurrence of environmentally and socially conscious outcomes that aim to permit the infiltrating fullness of these experiences within and outside of natural contexts (i.e., NPS units) to take place in a manner which is equitable in its distribution for all to interact with the fullness of nature and its "Creator" (Megan; Bennett, 2007; Bridges, 1969; Fam et al., 2004; Goldberg et al., 2019; Griffis, 2017; White, 1967).

Conclusions

Overall, the phenomena of focus within this research (i.e., experiencing God within nature, specifically an NPS unit, and how this influences the progression or evolvment of a Christian's environmental mindset) was unveiled to be a dynamic pillar within the life of participants included in this research. Specifically, the role of the phenomena is one that not only introduced influences within the nature-based experiences of participants but brought forth a varied composition in their environmental mindset which was also extrapolated into their life-based selections. Through experiencing God within nature (i.e., NPS units), participants expressed this specific relationship as a foundation through which the evocation of increased desires to spend time within these specific contexts and engage in singular or multiple expressions (i.e., worship, prayer, and using biblical- or religious-based resources). Further, these specific variables which were found to arise from a foundational relationship with God and

served as enhancing elements in the overall environmental mindset of those who identified as Christians within this research based on the characteristics of this viewpoint which was determined. Specifically, 1) environmental, 2) social, and 3) religious focuses were found to be compartments within the overall mindset. As a result, the environmental mindset of Christians within this research was found to be one that was grounded in a relationship with God and His word through the Holy Bible and was further amplified by engaging in evoked expressions which were desired by participants to not only experience based on the natural setting in which they visit (i.e., NPS unit), but to ultimately progress in a deeper connection with God and using these contexts as a medium through which to complete these ingrained connections. This multifaceted series of aspects conveyed an environmental mindset which is complex and serves as a motivating force within the life of an individual which not only has an impact within their viewpoint but acts as an infiltrating influence in the continuation of all existence based on the transcendental impact of not only Christian-based beliefs, but primarily a relationship with God.

Limitations

Overall, procedures were implemented to address the factors of trustworthiness and rigor within this research. While the use of specific processes to address these integral factors were involved, human error is considered as a potential limitation within this venture. Based on the overarching objective and the stated religious beliefs of the involved researcher, the potential role of outside influences could be an occurrence within the data collection and analysis phases (i.e., bracketing to essence description development). To reduce the role of researcher bias within these phases specifically, measures were employed to ensure the continuous progression of credible, valid research procedures and ultimately the precise formation of an overarching essence description concerning the phenomena of focus. Methods involving triangulation,

member checking, peer debriefing, recognition of researcher bias, and the involvement of evaluation methods during data analysis processes (i.e., bracketing, transcription, coding, cluster formation, thematic analysis, and essence description development) were iteratively executed throughout this research to solidify the progression of words expressed by participants served as mainstays within every research-based step (Chenail, 2011; Decrop, 1999; Orr et al., 2016).

Regarding the research settings and associated semi-structured interviews, the specific research sources, settings, and interview techniques could be categorized as additional limitations. Concerning the three research sources, each group was selected based on the detected or present role of applicable lived experiences in consideration of participant sentiments and overarching aim of this research to detail the focus phenomena. While this was present as a notable factor, the included sources do not fully reflect the demographic composition of NPS visitors and could serve as a limitation. Despite this acting as a potential limitation, the implemented phenomenological framework is directed to unveil the collective influence of a phenomena through the provided lived experiences of participants which can further bring forth the engagement of a smaller source of participants. The acquired data portrays the relevant experiences of each source based on reaching the point of saturation and future endeavors should be executed and acquire additional detail regarding the phenomena of focus while also forming a more representative display of all visitors to NPS units.

Concerning the research settings of GRSM and INDU, all interviews were completed within the established boundary or proximate areas. This form of exposure within these settings do not reflect the notable diversity which composes the breadth of nature-based experiences and could influence participant sentiments due to the direct settings in which the dialogues were implemented. Despite this potential limitation, each unit was selected based on direct purposeful

sampling which aimed to select sources that would provide relevant, lived recollections based on experiences within each research setting and establish nature-based contexts which could enrich participant responses based on their exposure to the aspects of focus during the interview (i.e., experiencing of God and influence on the environmental mindset of Christians).

In consideration of the used questioning techniques, semi-structured interviews acted as the primary data collection process which involved questions formed through literature-based topics and associated inquiries. During the provided questions, the involved researcher employed probing techniques to unveil detected data and this specific process could have posed probable influences within recorded responses based on the verbal or non-verbal expressions of the researcher. Despite this potential, the used semi-structured interview framework allows for alterations to occur within the posed questions and ensured the progression of neutral, verbal inquiries in addition to maintaining a neutral, non-verbal composure (e.g., body language, such as facial expressions) when executing each interview. The involved researcher stated the same questions to each participant through impartial delivery methods and deviated from the set inquiries through modes which aligned with the included qualitative foundation and design.

Chapter 5 - A Creator and a Vessel: The Unmatched Sovereignty of

God and a Letter from His Saved Creation

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:1-8)

To Whom it May Concern,

The words contained within each chapter or unit of this cohesive research venture are reflections of a greater calling and purpose which has been set forth by an ultimate divine being. Specifically, this work represents a Creator who is unmatched in His sovereignty and yet displays a composition of grace and love which no individual will ever be able to fully grasp or comprehend within this lifetime. Despite this inconceivable level of richness and authority, He extends His hands into the progression of life and all that exists and meets us in the place where we are by provisioning otherworldly glimpses and exposure of His fullness to satisfy all that exists through this sole designation belonging only to Him. Only God can satisfy. Whether progressing through occurrences which compose life-based contexts or specifically reading these scribed words, He is here. God is the “vine” by which this research has been given breath and life. Each chapter reflects a “branch” of this “vine” and highlights the intimate, intricate character of God for there is a never-ending source of “branches” to comprehend and experience as a more ingrained and in-depth relationship with Him is fostered. In the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ speaks of His Father’s sovereignty in the book of Romans which reflects a continuous,

divine “pruning” process that transforms the life of those who accept God as their personal savior and allows Him to reign over their life like no other formation or facet of existence can compare. He is omnipresent, omniscient, and all-knowing. When reflecting on the progression of each chapter or “branch” which extends from the phenomena of focus or “vine” of this collective research, God is undeniably present in the “fabric” of this narrative. He is the master who set these endeavors into motion and provided a continuous, established path to not only impact the aspect of existence (i.e., individuals and all that composes nature), but to reflect His goodness and His unmatched being. As a result, I am coming to you as a mere vessel who is deeply, fiercely loved and changed by God. A vessel who desires to reflect God and God only within this chapter and the preceding works as well. I pray this letter and the contained messages transcend time just as God does for He reigns forever and ever, amen. I pray further that the contained sentiments resonate with you in some form or manner and brings forth potential implications, blessings, and a feeling of being known.

Regarding the intentional narrative progression and investigations into world-based contexts and occurrences of processes (i.e., understanding the phenomena of experiencing God through solitude, group-based or communal activities, and the environmental mindset of Christians) concerning the dynamic interaction of religion (i.e., Christianity) and nature, this collective research not only brought forth meaningful and thought-provoking revelations through participant sentiments, but offered an enriching experience within my personal context and world view. Upon the initiation of this endeavor, my primary objective involved the maintenance and enhancement of God through every single minute detail and process. It is through this work which I aimed to bring God into a scientific context. I believe God is the Creator of all and provides our abilities to comprehend the progression of each aspect of existence ranging from

simplistic tasks to complex situations. No matter the gravity of the situation, God is the director of all and I wanted to be led by His direction to ensure each phase was ultimately conveying His name and vastness. As a result, I knew this venture would bring forth personal revelations, such as the “mountaintop moments” and the “troughs of the valleys”, which I eagerly anticipated to grow no matter the connotation (i.e., positive and/or negative) more in-depth and closer to God in ways I cannot comprehend. This process is one that He has used to show varied sides of Himself in such a compassionate, authentic, and genuine manner. It is through this work that God has shown and reminded me, His child, of His unfailing glory and my hope is to attempt to reflect this portion of my testimony within the bounds of these pages. While based on my human understanding of God I know these contained messages will not fully expand into the gracious reign in which He exhibits over the spans of existence, my hope is to provide a peering into my heart through a “heart reflection” and act as a vessel who is labeled with the phrase: “Loved and Saved by God”.

For it is my desire to serve Him in this moment and through these works to try to extend His fullness through these words and I know without any form of hesitation that He will take these words and do with them only things He can do. He is the breath in my lungs as I type these words, the energy in my being to formulate these sentences, and will awake these pages and again I pray for the mustard seeds placed in these words to prosper and grow in the lives of all that compose existence and reflects His beauty in the divine harmonious balance which He set forth in the Garden of Eden at the start of time and continues. He is the source of all and it is with a reference to the book of Jeremiah that I shall aim to highlight His divine ability to bear fruit from this “branch” of this research and further from Him as the one and only “vine” for He is the answer.

“For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.” (Jeremiah 17: 8)

As I reflect and take the rare moment of pause which is fleeting and minute in its composition with the daily occurrences, routines of society, and the world-based context which consciously or unconsciously drives our human existence, the word “perspective” comes forth as a resounding revelation. For it is through perspective which this research is placed into the context which it should be. Specifically, this work brings forth humbling moments of perspective which foster the continuous reminders of needed shifts in intention and direction with which I go about my existence in its entirety when my own human nature “rears its head”. Ultimately, this perspective is one that is focused on God and God solely. One that looks to Him first in all things and relies on His strength and wisdom due to knowing that His ways and knowledge are greater than mine for He is my complete satisfaction. A perspective that actually practices the act of trust and faith as seen in the book of Proverbs and is not inhibited by the anxieties or tensions of this world-based context which tries to inhibit my stepping forward and truly allowing God to hold me in His hands which formed the world in which we know, live, and relish in.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Despite the inhibiting forces or spiritual battles which arise in my life and form the ever-present and ever-lurking “troughs in the valleys”, it is the perspective in these experiences and the “mountaintop moments” that God will always reign over all with the mighty hand which has already won the battle no matter the situation. Specifically, no force present in existence which is of the enemy (i.e., the devil) has a hold on God and through the Lord has no hold on us as His children. It is this continuous perspective which brings forth heart-changing gratitude and completely shifts our viewpoint of reality. It is in these moments when we accept this

perspective, practice this perspective, and step out with a believing faith, that God is given the platform or opportunity to do what only He can do. He can breathe life into the spiritually dead and grow endless sources from mustard seeds. He is beyond what our human mental capabilities could even fathom and yet He gave us the ability to imagine and be provided the opportunity to creatively observe His greatness. This perspective is one that was clearly and distinctly shown by God in the most glorious displays within this research. Further, it is this portion of my testimony which has ignited my passion, zeal, purpose, and internal “fire” for Him beyond measures and it is my hope and most intrinsic desire that this revitalization is observed through this work and He extends this associated perspective of what actually matters in the progression of life through these words.

Even as I write these sentiments, I am confident He is doing this exactly, because He is always on the move. It is a matter of whether or not we empty ourselves of our human nature to allow His eager desire to invade and change our life in the most exceptional manner that this can occur and the continuous use of the perspective of Him as the sole source of life can change lives as a result. You may ask at this point, “How do you know this is happening and will happen?” or “How do you know God is real?”. My answer to these inquiries and others that try to pervade our human intellect through doubts concerning the existence and character of God is that I am living proof that He is everything and more real than could ever be fathomed. He is alpha, omega, and transcends time. He is the one true God who formed existence with intention and no other explanation compares to His power. Whether through scientific attempts or human-based intelligence with which these claims are attempted to be disproved, they cannot. As this line of thought aiming to bring forth some level of proof against God is implemented, the final result will never come to fruition due to the answer against God not existing. There is no proof against

His presence. For God is the creator of all and I am a divinely created, sublimely cared for, passionately protected, saved by grace, redeemed child, and vessel of God who is here to stand firm in the claim that God is real, and He is alive. The time I have been given in this existence thus far is a walking reflection of God, not because of my approach to life or the situations which I have completed, but fully because of Him and not of my own accord. I am more loved now than I could ever be, because He already loves me above my most creative forms of reasoning in this moment and it will never be swayed or taken away. For, it is the book of John which states:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

He is the reason for my life and His love which created me also created you. You are a child of God who is loved beyond your wildest dreams. He is so otherworldly that He even formed a guiding source of literature which has spanned through history in its relevance to display this indescribable gravity. The Holy Bible is God-breathed and God-inspired words which are undebatable proof of His existence, and this is amplified beyond measures in consideration of His presence which is pervasive in our daily occurrences. This form of literature which is and will always be relevant is a lifeline in knowing Him and He knew this at the start of time. He knew doubts, fears, and questions would try to invade our thoughts from the enemy and God gave us a book which cannot be argued against. It is infallible proof that He is God, and He gives us the answers to all of our questions no matter the moment in time which our lives are present within this world. His intentionality is unmatched and in addition to His pervasive presence which walks the earth, He has given us the “lifeboats” which with to lean on and to ultimately seek refuge in Him. From the Holy Bible to the breathtaking beauty of creation, God is and will always be the one true King. His hand is always extended, and He is here for us. We

just have to not allow the superficial characteristics of this life diminish our perspective. It is God and it is a perspective which always seeks Him that matters in the scheme of existence. Through this, we have the ability to see life in a new array of colors and are given fresh lenses to observe the world around us just as He sees His creation and calls it good, just as He did at the start of time in the book of Genesis.

“Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:30-31)

With this perspective in mind, the direction of this research was set from the initiation and through divine intervention was consistently displayed with every occurrence or situation which composed the “fabric” and narrative of this research. The manner in which the phases of this work came forth was compared to as a series of events which “fell out of the sky” by one individual. I believe the reasoning behind this statement is simplistic and matter of fact. This work did in fact “fall from the sky” and from the hands of God. For example, within this research, it is through this work which He set the formation and groundwork into action, led participants to come forward in intimate, open postures to share of how He has impacted their life based on the focused phenomena, and formulated meanings which reach the depths of our emotional capacities based on the descriptions which He brought forth through the analysis of the offered participant statements.

His intentionality and design of this research led to further revelations concerning who He is and specifically how He is displayed in the facets through our daily existence. From the brisk, warm wind which wraps around you like an embrace and provides a unique sense of comfort to the joyous, uninhibited laughter which rings in your ears from seeing others experiencing God’s creation and being exposed to the depths of His creativity, God provided

intentionality within every step of this research. It is through a continuous, engaging perspective that each step which was set by Him needed to be recognized, synthesized, and put into motion within a world-based context. When implemented, revealing factor after revealing factor arose from the spoken words of participants and through the components of this research to not only declare His name through the greatness of creation, but He offered irrefutable support against previous lines of discourse in consideration of Christianity, such as observations of Christianity as a dominion-based and environmentally degrading religious belief system, in comparison to a stewardship-based approach as resolutely expressed by the participants within this research who desired to care for God's masterful creation as He desires. The expression that this research "fell from the sky" is just a starting point and "scratch of the surface". God brought down insight for us to understand in our own human capacities that He is the answer for it all. He is the "vine" for every inquiry which arises from these chapters and works which are extensions of Him and not only encourages further exploration into who He is, but further offers accumulating support for His more than reality and undefinable glory which serves as undeniable sources of resolutions in consideration of the focus of this research involving extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes from the dynamic interaction of religion and nature.

Regarding a more fine-tuned view of my presence as a researcher but primarily a vessel for God in this research, I was given an upfront and undeniable exposure to Him throughout the progression of this research which ultimately changed my life. It is with a full and open heart that I provide a "heart reflection" and representation of how He has transformed and molded me. Upon the initial questioning and planning of this specific research venture holistically, my mind, in full transparency, was hindered through a world-based consensus that I needed to align this work with what was acceptable, what would be generalizable, and what would be palatable to the

ways of this world. It seems as though I was a “robot” within an academic setting when looking back on this specific phase of the process. As I take time to reflect and continue to engage the perspective which I have been referencing, I sit as a grateful vessel who praises God for saving me from myself and employing all the “stops” to rid me of the “robotic” tendencies which this world forms. It was at this point where my insecurities and fear of the unknown were allowed a “playground” in my mind. I believe in God with all my being, but I was allowing my human nature to prevail. Praise be to God that He did not allow me to get in my own way and formed a display which only He could develop.

Correspondingly, God speaks to us in varied methods, and He employed all of His forces to ensure that I changed my perspective and rid myself of what is acceptable by the world. From social interactions to sentiments expressed through biblical-based meditation as I was approaching a notable step in the progression of this overarching venture, the Lord provided a distinct, clear message as to what He wanted me to do. God is not of chaos, He is the author of clarity, and His knowledge expands beyond the bounds of my own understanding. It was at this point where He started “pruning” my intrinsic makeup which resulted in the extrinsic selection to move forward in bold faith knowing He is greater than the world, for He created the world. This was a moment which changed the entire course of my pursuit without a shadow of a doubt. God always forms a path forward and in fact He has already set these paths forward, we just need perspective to engage our belief, trust, and faith in Him. If we elect to choose Him, it becomes the greatest decision which we will ever make in our existence. This decision is everything in every situation and especially in consideration of our presence in this world and beyond. From this point onward, God authored the progression of events and streamlined the process in ways that were the purest gifts sent from heaven. God’s unfailing faithfulness was undeniable, and His

existence and presence was further solidified through these efforts. From prayers shared and tears shed by participants as they spoke of His changing ways in their life to sharing their renewed viewpoint and passion for nature once they elected to become a Christian and believer in God, He was in all moments in all ways. What a blessing to be a vessel and observe the movement of God's hands as He laid forth every "piece of the puzzle" in this process. Further, what an honor to experience such an intensity of life that leaves you speechless in the most optimal way possible. This is all due to God.

Further, not only were evolvments taking place in the progression of this research and being displayed through the sentiments of participants, but God was also moving in this mere vessel. With every step He was showing Himself through deeper capacities, wrapping me in His love, building my faith in Him, growing my heart for Him, growing my heart for His creation, and growing my heart for His people. Praise God, this vessel expresses they are a changed child of God because of Him and the provision of this process which is nothing short of an infinite blessing. As steps were completed, as conversation with individuals occurred, and as each spoken word was analyzed, He was transforming and working in my heart to be able to share the expressions which He wanted to come forward and for you to observe. Not only with you in this moment, but throughout time as well. For this work is His and my deepest desire is that it will transcend time just as He does. I pray that as these words are read my human nature is within no thread of this venture and that God is the only living being within these pages to fully capture and grasp the infinite richness He provides.

Overall, this research was more than the development and completion of work in alignment with a qualitative foundation. This research serves as a reflection that God uses all things to the glory of His name and for the betterment of His creation. It is this work that evolved

my personal relationship with Him as my protector, friend, confidant, savior, and heavenly father. It is through this research, that I was given a renewed perspective of His uncontainable ways through the testimonies of the participants within this research which served as pivotal catalysts in the context of the focus of this venture and the professional or academic realm in which it aligns. It is these brave, raw testimonies which inspired my transparent reflection of God within this chapter. He is deserving of all praise in all ways and despite my words which may not fully reflect His sovereignty, I know He will move as He always does and may He be forever praised. Perspective is integral and it may be the one shift in viewpoint which helps an individual see the hand of God in all things and truly changes their heart within this moment in time and beyond. God is present, whether through apparent wonders in His creation or the nuances within social interaction, and He is the ultimate perspective, strength, and source of hope even when the ways of the world abound. He is greater, stronger, and more capable.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:26-28)

A Prayer of Praise and a Blessing

God, I empty myself of myself and remove my human nature which always falls short to not be a distraction or inhibiting factor through these words and that You may be fully known. God, You are moving. Your spirit is here and God, in my weakness You are stronger than could ever be fathomed. God, You are my portion, and You always provide constant grace where I fall. I pray that where I may fall short in conveying Your glory, that You, God, will fill in those spaces and encircle these contained words to provide life-changing blessings in the existence of all those whose path or journey as directed by You lead them to read these sentiments.

God, form an atmosphere and posture of reception for those reading these words and further God, flood their heart with Your love which is infinitely enriching and unmatched. God help them to see they are so loved and more known than they could have ever imagined. God, You are more than enough, and they are more than enough in You. You are the endless source of life, and this is why we are here. It is Your never-ending love which brought us and all that forms

creation into existence. I pray You are undeniable upon their reading of these words, and You are the primary and only focus, because You are the master and designer of all that exists. What a blessing to see Your love in ever-evolving ways. God, do what only You can do, and I pray Your name resonates within and outside of the bounds of this work, because You are greater than this work. You are what these endeavors are about, and these involved ventures are for You.

God, I pray you will send blessings into the lives of those who read these words. Bring forth revelations which are renewing, refreshing, and purposeful within their lives. God, I ask that You guide their paths and provide the perspective which we all need. For when the ways of the world try to inhibit Your greatness, You will not let them for You are more capable and worthy. God, I pray that each individual sees the exceptional and divinely designed plan which You have in store for them and that You may be praised through it all. God, fill these words with compassion and an unrelenting display of your sovereignty. Amen.

Many Blessings and in Christ,

A Saved Vessel

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Appendix A - Inductive Coding Scheme for Experiencing God During Group-based or Communal Activities in Nature

A.1. Inductive coding scheme developed during the involved phenomenological data analysis process focused on experiencing God during group-based or communal activities in nature.

Child Codes	Frequency	Subthemes	Quote
<i>Cluster One:</i>			
Dreaming about nature and being with others	1	Nature enhances the impact of social interaction by increasing bond formation and appreciation between individuals through enlivening physical and emotional experiences	<i>"Because, because I find, myself, appreciating others more in those moments, because it gives you a deeper look into their heart and it makes me love them even more, and, possibly understand them more and so and, and I believe that, you know, God, God makes all of His children and loves all of His children and He wants us to do the same. "</i>
Social interaction is impactful in nature	1		
Campfires can cause an emotional response	1		
More than just a moment in nature with others	1		
Nature changes how individuals interact	2		

Forming friendships through nature experiences and obstacles	4		
Giving it all at the cross in nature	1		
Feeling more alive in nature	1		
Testing personal limits in nature with others	1		
Nature-based experiences opening religious dialogues and actions	1		
Bonding with others through shared experiences in nature	1		
Witnessing experiences together	2		
Looking forward to future experiences with others in nature	1		
Mountain top experiences and surreal moments	4		

Wilderness encourages bonds to be formed quickly	1		
Bonding over obstacles	1		
Being in nature brings all people together	1		
Being with people in nature is amazing	1		
Being a part of something with others	1		
Going through challenges together and finding strength	1		
Moments of reflection after spending time with others in nature	1		
Not concerned with distracting thoughts when in nature with others	1		
Seeing new things in nature when with others	1		
Encouraging to be in nature with others	1		

Appreciating and loving others more based on group experiences in nature	2		
Revived perspective when spending time with others in nature	1		

Cluster Two:

The environment has a greater significance than an individual's momentary time	1	Nature is central to social interaction and encourages a sense of awe and appreciation of the surroundings, including both natural- and human-based characteristics	<i>"How it works when we have the same Spirit inside of us. I think that it's really cool to recognize that, like, that person is also part of this creation that God has made. And like, that person is also really beautiful, and, that person is just, as beautiful and as loved as the mountains that I'm staring at. And I think that, like, that's really cool to see. And like, that makes me, yeah, I don't know. That just makes me, like, marvel even, more at like God and who He is and like recognize that, like, I don't know, it just it's all connected."</i>
National parks as a favorite place to be with others	1		
Nature is central to time with others	1		
Common love for nature with others	1		

United by respect and appreciation of nature	1		
Common appreciation	1		
Experiencing the harmony of 'wow' with others in nature	1		
Nature is incredible and secondary to people	1		
Seeing the smoky effect of the Smokies	1		
Seeing nature's beauty when with others	4		
Being in awe of nature	4		
Connecting through the beauty of nature	1		
Disconnecting from the world with others	3		
Fun completing group activities outside	4		

Creation allows for activities	1		
Living in complete freedom	1		
Being outside with others takes you away from distraction	1		
Finding new natural places with others to visit	1		
Everything is connected	1		
Seeing the beauty in others and nature	1		
Nature is unreal	1		
Nature-based experiences are isolated from regular day-to-day activities	1		

No societal expectations when with others in nature	2		
Enormity of creation	1		
Respecting nature	1		
Nature is a form of connection and community	1		
Unplanned experiences with others in nature	1		
Feeling more comfortable in nature	1		
Building community in nature	1		
Appreciating natural surroundings when with others	2		

Group-based activities encourage being in nature	1		
Littering by groups can be frustrating and aggravating	2		

Cluster Three:

Feeling closer to nature in solitude	1	Nature is a context for solitude and results in increased connections felt by individuals with the natural surroundings when alone or when completed as a group	<i>"A, a park outside of your city or nature could be a national park that goes twenty-four miles each direction, you know, um, but I feel like when you're with people the connection to nature, c-, I personally find a connection to nature a lot stronger when I'm by myself, but I could see how when you're with people, sometimes the fun and excitement to nature can be there. You know, I'm just I'm, I'm a weirdo and I just like rock climbing by myself doing weird stuff. But I feel like when you're with other people and you have a good community and that community, everyone loves going outdoors, we all want to go like kayaking, "hey let's all go swimming, let's all go hiking."</i>
More solitude in a context like a national park when alone	1		

Relationships do not necessarily relate to a connection with nature	1		
Seeing solitude together when in nature	1		

Cluster Four:

Social interaction is powerful in nature	2	Nature inspires a collectivistic atmosphere which transfers love, connection, openness, meditation, authenticity, and exhilaration during shared experiences and lasting memories	<i>"Not only by maybe the group you're a part of, but also just like the environment that you're in and, and you just feel like you can be yourself, which you should always be yourself. But I think it's something that, you know, that's something that I think really encourages people to get out of their comfort zone."</i>
Realizing and seeing everyone's true self in uncomfortable situations in nature	1		
Being oneself in nature with others	2		
Connection amongst people	1		
Connecting with people and nature at the same time	1		

Not wanting to be anywhere else except with people present in the moment	1		
All group-based activities take place in nature	1		
Groups contain more than one individual completing an activity	1		
Open dialogue with others	1		
Others exhilarate experiences in nature	1		
Awesome to be with others in nature	4		
Forming a brotherhood and sense of accountability with others in nature	2		
People feeling the need to share something in the group when I nature	6		

Sharing deep information during social interaction in nature	8		
Seeing group dynamics in nature with others (i.e., wildlife and insects)	1		
Living in a similar way	1		
Sharing experiences with others is powerful and awesome	1		
Social interaction improves mental health	1		
Loving others regardless of differences	2		
People are important and necessary	1		
Cheering others on in nature-based experiences	1		
Walking in life with others builds a 'quilt' of connections	1		

Collectivistic atmosphere that encourages sharing amongst all	1		
Telling other about a group-based experience after it has occurred	1		
Providing for others	1		
Social interaction is educating others and bringing them into nature	1		
Love being with people	1		
Need for social interaction outside of solitude	1		
Experiencing transparency and confession with others in nature	3		
More awareness of situations when with others	1		

Communication is needed by individuals	1		
Learning to live for others	1		
Seeing through the love of others	1		
Indescribable moments in a group activity	3		
Social interaction amplifies time in nature	2		
Getting to know people better and spending time relationally	1		
Shared memories last longer	4		
Memorable moments and emotional impact	4		

Everyone bringing what they have in life (i.e., emotionally and mentally)	1		
Going against the social norm	1		
Social interaction facilitates meditation	2		

Cluster Five:

Unplanned religious conversations with others	5	Nature facilitates the implementation of religious practices and not only reminds Christians of who they are, but encourages individuals with different beliefs to engage in the same experience and take part in forming a community of love and growth spiritually and mentally	<i>"But we, sang, some worship songs just just our voices, no guitar, anything fancy. And it was very raw and just organic. And we just sang out to the trees as we passed them and felt our hair just whipping in the wind, and just, experienced that moment together as we worshipped and as we had like our own like personal moments of prayer. But we were experiencing that together. We were seeing the same trees and seeing the same God and experiencing it in our own ways, in our hearts. But at the same time together as a community, even though it was just two of us, we were a community of of children, of God's children, and, just soaking in, His creation, Crying out</i>
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			<i>to Him, singing our gratitude just as a community."</i>
People not being curious to attend a Bible study in nature	1		
Symphony of prayer	1		
Christians being the living word of God with others	1		
Community being a pillar in Christianity	7		
People being curious about attending a Bible study in nature	1		

Seeing the power of prayer in nature and time with groups	1		
Speaking with and influencing non-believers	1		
Shared perspectives and commonalities amongst believers	19		
Social interaction improves a spiritual walk	1		
Being willing and open to walking with non-believers	1		
Non-believers and believers conversing and offering help or understanding	1		
Shared beliefs amongst a walking group	1		
Offering all the love in the world between non-believers and believers	1		
Encouragement among a group of believers	1		

Satisfaction with decision to spend time with others and partaking in ministry	1		
Being reminded that God shows up by others	1		
Loving others like Christ	1		
God works through others to spread His love	1		
Knowing Christians by expressed love	1		
Social interaction brings to life connections with nature and God	1		
Individuals being reminded of who they are as Christians	1		
Social interaction increases mindfulness of God's presence	1		

Cluster Six:

Not much of a group person	1	Nature is simplified when experienced alone	<i>"Sometimes it makes it more exhilarating, sometimes makes it more complicated, more difficult."</i>
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Others complicate experiences in nature	1		
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Cluster Seven:

God showing up in the scenery	5	God is always present and is experienced more by Christians when observing the diversity or intricacy of nature and the experiences of others	<i>"And so, I think I see God through the interactions that I have with other people. And kind of like you were saying about how people point out different things and everyone has a different perspective. So being able to bring that all together in nature and just being together and being able to see the diversity of gifts that God has given people and then also the earth, I think is really cool as well."</i>
Provision of strength by God during nature-based experiences and difficult life situations	2		
Associating God as an artist when observing nature	4		
Seeing God in the mountains	1		
Seeing God work in the Smokies	1		
Seeing God in nature is easier	1		
Feeling God in the stillness of nature	1		

God bringing individuals together in nature for a reason	1		
Not seeing God as much in corporate worship	1		
God providing wisdom when with others in nature	1		
Seeing God in creation with others	3		
Hearing God through a sense of awe in nature	1		
Seeing God and His promise in nature	1		
God providing an animal as a source of calm for others	1		
Seeing God more in others when in nature than the scenery	4		
Being able to see the diversity of God's creation	1		
Transformation by God in nature	1		

within an individual's life			
Being called to creation by the Creator	1		
God showing up in physical activity	1		
God is evident in nature	1		
Being in awe of God's work through nature	1		
Experiencing God more in nature	1		
Being God's light to the surrounding environment	1		
Feeling a desire to protect nature	1		
God's creation is intricate everywhere	1		
Appreciation of creation and everything God has given (i.e., family and friends)	3		
The veil between heaven and earth becomes thin in nature	1		

Nature influences connections to God and others	1		
Access to God's creation	1		
Feeling connected to community and God in nature	1		
Seeing God while on a trail with others in nature	1		
A triangle effect of people, nature, and God	1		
Metaphorical connections to real life	1		
Campfires can be a sacred space	2		
Nature-based experiences are family building and strengthen relationships with God	1		
Being in nature brings individuals closer to God	1		
Feeling closest to God when with others in nature	1		

Cluster Eight:

Feeling at rest in God's presence	1	God is a friend, provider, and source of everything Who is interwoven in experiences	<i>"Happy or like, yeah, my soul is just happy that these people are coming here and really hoping that God is, gonna do great things, in these people's hearts. Which I believe He will."</i>
God is a friend	1		
God is everything	1		
God is present and does not show up in a worship setting	2		
God showing up in unexpected moments	1		
God showing up in answered prayer	2		
God showing up in sequential moments	1		
God moving in hearts and more than just being present	3		
Feeling of happiness seeing God move	2		
Being provided peace by God in all situations	1		
God is always present	6		

Feeling something different to know God is there	1		
God's provision of resources	7		
God shows up when it is asked for	1		
God is interwoven in the experience	1		
Having faith and trusting God is present	1		
Knowing God is present through a change that is known or unknown by others	1		
Not always feeling or seeing God	1		
Feeling overwhelmed by God	1		
Experiencing God in different ways	1		

Cluster Nine:

Talking with others assists with opening up with God	1	God is present and works in social interaction through individuals acting as 'vessels of love' and facilitating the working of God	<i>"You know to love God, and to be loved by Him is such an honor, and I think in terms of like social interaction, you know, you know, we're called to be vessels of God's love and His light to those around us and to the people around us and the environment that we're in."</i>
Feeling closer to God when with others in nature	4		
Sharing the surreal characteristics of God and nature with others in an open manner	1		
God is present in the expression of love	1		
God's most beloved creation is humanity	1		
Seeing God work in the lives of others through interconnection	1		
People are a gateway to being closer to God	1		
Feeling God through receiving love from others	1		

Being involved in groups to bring attention to God in nature	1		
Easier to see people the way God does in nature	1		
Easier to love people as God does in nature	1		
Being pointed back to God through others in nature	1		
God provides patience when with others in nature	1		
Seeing God 'open new doors' when with others in nature	1		
Knowing God is present through others love for God	1		
Seeing God in friendships with others	1		
God walks the earth through the love of people	1		

Seeing everyone as a creation of God	1		
Forming relationships through God	1		
Express joy that is shared with God when with others	1		
More appreciative of God when seeing others	1		
Things that reflect God in others	1		
Seeing the light of God through others	1		
Seeing God in interactions with others	2		
Exposing others to God's beauty and creation	1		
Creating awareness of God's creation with others	1		
God made His children and wants His children to love one another	1		
People are a reflection of God	4		

God changing individuals for the better	1		
Seeing God call and work in everyone	3		
God shows up in petition to Him	1		
God showing up when people are gathered	3		
Divine providence and people being present in the right time and place	2		
Understanding each other and representing God through communication	1		
Soaking in God's creation as a community	1		
God provides support through physical people	1		
God works when with others	1		
God bringing people together	1		
Being vessels of God's love	1		

God loves people more than creation	1		
God becomes more visible when people are aware of His presence	1		
Recognizing God was moving after group-based activities	1		
God opens people up in nature to share things	1		
Being impressed by God moving after situations with others	1		
Looking forward to what God has in store after spending time with others in nature	1		
Providing a sense of hope to others through God	1		

Cluster Ten:

Social interaction is more distracting when considering connections to God and nature	2	God is experienced more in moments of solitude and allows for more connection to nature or the ability to contemplate life-based situations	<i>"It hinders it. That's what it tends to do. I think solitude and silence and prayer and song in my own way and my own time tends to be a lot more connecting than it does in a communal sense. So, I would say, generally speaking, it hinders it."</i>
Being alone in solitude during hard times and experiencing God	1		
Social interaction does not have as much of an influence in connections with God and nature	2		
Social interaction hinders connections to God and nature	1		
Solitude provides more connection to God and nature	1		
Hard to experience God with groups in nature	1		
God not showing up as significantly when with others	2		
Feeling God more in solitude	1		

Cluster Eleven:

Noticing religious mentions by non-believers based on experiences	1	God is present and connects all individuals through gatherings including individuals who do or do not share the same beliefs	<i>"And I think also, as we experienced here today, although there was not a tremendous amount of people here, the amount of people is not the issue, sometimes through worship, praise and worship, people will connect because when, when people hear praise and worship, if they have a heart that's hungry towards the Lord, they will want to experience that praise and worship for themselves. So, they will join in with your praise and worship, even if even if they don't have necessarily like an inside service, they might have a songbook or they might have this that and the other, and in the inside service, they might have speakers and all the bells and whistles to have, along with the praise and worship in an outdoor setting. You've got somebody sometimes with a guitar that might be it, or maybe not even a guitar. But when an individual begins to praise and worship and people that are drawn to the Lord will also want to participate, join in with the praise and worship. So, that would be a, a way of seeing God show up in, in your outdoor activities like that."</i>
Agreement amongst a group of Christians and connection	1		
Being a light of God to others	1		

Building love for God through worship with others	1		
God is in the middle of Christians gathered together	1		
God listens during prayer with others	1		
God being present when people of like mind and heart gather	1		
Seeing people attend services in nature that might not attend a service indoors	1		
Seeing God through people joining in on praise and worship	1		
All believers being connected to God through the Holy Spirit	2		
Being one body of Christ with others	1		
Seeing God more when worshipping with others	2		

Seeing God through religious leaders	1		
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Cluster Twelve:

Refresh together in nature	1	Social interaction in nature introduces feelings of acceptance and community	<i>"It's such a healthy community. And during those times, where I just need to open up and, you know, physically talk to somebody face to face and share my experiences. It's op-, it helps me open up to God."</i>
Not feeling alone in identified beliefs (i.e., Christian)	1		
Healthy community established by individuals with shared viewpoints	1		
Feeling appreciated when with others	1		
Feeling blessed to be with others in creation	2		
Feeling included when with others	1		
Social interaction fills hearts in nature	1		
Magical being with others in nature	1		

Feeling strength by being with other people	1		
Building each other up in a healthy community	1		
Feeling of closeness with others in nature	3		
Seeing the love of God through others	6		
Supporting and comforting others	7		
Being with others in nature is a happy place	1		
Experiencing wholeness when with others	1		
Feeling thankful when with others in nature	4		
Feeling grateful when with others in nature	5		
Sharing experience in a community	8		

Sharing different experiences and being brought closer together or to God	10		
Worship is amplified based on a shared purpose and mind of others	1		
God made humans to be social beings	2		

Cluster Thirteen:

Sense of security with others	1	Social interaction in nature provides feelings of trust, comfort, and confidence from connections with individuals and God	<i>"It always, I don't know it, it just brings, it brings that sense of peace and, and comfort, and that's why I think so many people are open to sharing a lot about, to sharing deeper stuff."</i>
Social interaction brings comfort in nature	1		
Social interaction brings a sense of peace in nature	2		
Trusting others and God when scared in nature	1		
Feeling peace when in nature with others	4		

Feeling of relief when people are present in times of need	1		
Feeling relaxed in nature with others	2		
Feeling confidence with through other people and God	1		
Feeling of reassurance from God when spending time with others in nature	2		
Being with others provides a sense of safety	1		
Doubt and fear being removed when with others in nature	1		
Feeling of warmth with others in nature	2		
Feeling God's warmth like a blanket being wrapped around you when worshipping with others in nature	2		

Feeling of contentment with others in nature	2		
Experiencing a full heart from adventure	1		
Experiencing kindness from others	1		
Appreciating conversation with others	1		
Appreciation of shared experiences despite differing beliefs	1		

Cluster Fourteen:

More fun to be walking with others	1	Social interaction evokes feelings of gladness or excitement and is taken advantage of by individuals while in nature	<i>"Laughter, and God's in the middle of that joy that happiness that you know, that c-, we enjoy each others company the conversations are good um, so I think He shows up in conversations with people."</i>
Take advantage of spending time in nature with others	1		
Glad to be around other people	1		
Being in awe of people	3		

Feeling exhilarated in nature knowing God is there and others	1		
Feeling excited by spending time with others in nature	2		
Generally good emotions and not bad emotions when in nature with others	1		
Feeling good when in nature with others and God	1		
Feeling lucky in nature with others and God	1		
Feeling love when in nature with others	5		
Feeling joyful to be with others	7		
Reviving to be with others in nature with believers	1		
Being energized by others	1		

God showing up in conversations and moments of joy or laughter	7		
Feeling tingly by experiencing God with others in nature	1		
Feeling of happiness to share experiences with others	4		
Enjoyment of the journey with others	1		
Excitement of seeing natural sites	1		
Feeling happiness seeing others being held by God	1		
Encouraging others	4		
Enjoyment of spending time with family and friends in nature	2		

Cluster Fifteen:

Feeling a sense of rawness with others in nature	1	Social interaction evokes a rawness, humility, and euphoria amongst individuals which produces love and a tangible feeling of God being present	<i>"I think if you're with a group of fellow Christians in nature and you're comfortable with each other and you can just you know, I feel like, talk to with, like about God on trips and yeah, just been like, hey, this was my week. Like, this is how I saw God through it. So having, like, deep conversations, I think nature sometimes invites just because you're, you know, hiking together and you're in this beautiful setting, I don't know. I just feel like sometimes it leads me to be like more open with other people, then vulnerable."</i>
Euphoric connections among individuals with common beliefs	1		
Feel a common presence of love for one another despite different beliefs	1		
Feeling a deep sense of love from God when in nature with others	1		
Tangibly sensing God through others	1		

Observing a transition from nervous to open when speaking with non-believers	1		
Feeling moved by the same God	1		
Feeling humbled by God	1		
Feeling peaceful sadness when in nature with others	2		
Crying in nature when with others	2		
Experiencing the terrifying majestic nature of God worshipping with others	1		
Feeling the Holy Spirit when with others in nature	3		
Nature encourages a sense of openness	3		
Feeling God nudge to converse with others	5		

Cluster Sixteen:

Experiencing accomplishments with others in nature	1	Social interaction encourages accomplishments and a feeling of purpose or inspiration through nature-based experiences and God	<i>"And through these social interactions in nature and with God in nature, I can tell, like I can see how He, wants me, He's using me to be there for others and to to be a light for others, especially this summer like this has been such a different experience than what I'm used to. It's, I just I know that, God is using me, which is not something that I've ever really believed or felt or seen, so, and I don't, know, that's just kind of, it's different and it's weird, but I know it's important and I feel like I have some type of purpose, like in those situations. Like it's not me, it's God using me. And that's important. So, I'm not gonna shy away from that or, try, like, r not, try to, like I'm gonna try, attempt to make that happen."</i>
Victory of climbing a mountain	1		
Feeling called to a purpose by God	1		
Feeling wanted by God	1		
Feeling useful when being led to speak to other people	4		
Confusion about being led to speak with someone	1		

Inspired by others connections to nature	1		
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Cluster Seventeen:

Frisbee with others in nature	1	Those who identify as Christians engage in a range of nature-based activities with individuals who do or do not share similar beliefs in nature through social interaction	<i>"You know, I love being with people. And I think being with people allows me to, like, express that joy I have with God with them, too. And so, I feel like some of my best conversations come with groups in these moments. But similar. I love hiking, backpacking, kayaking, you name it. I do it."</i>
Hide and seek games with others in nature	1		
Kayaking with others	7		
Play in nature	1		
Playing sports with others in nature	2		
Youth-based activities and athletics with others in nature	1		
Horseback riding with others	1		
Taking pictures with others	1		
Walking dogs with others	1		
Ziplining with others	1		

Boating with others	1		
Hunting with others	1		
Snowshoeing with others	1		
Cooking with others in nature	3		
Sitting by a fire with others	10		
Talking with others in nature	1		
Playing games with others in nature	2		
Having breakfast with others in nature	1		
Cliff jumping with others	2		
Going on a paddleboat with others	1		
Spending time with family	4		
Laughing with others	5		
Adventuring with others	2		
Camping with friends	25		

Hammocking with others	2		
Biking with others	5		
Backpacking with others	12		
Being silent with others in nature	1		
Watching fireflies with others	8		
Seeing mountains together	2		
Grilling out with others in nature	3		
Hiking with others	48		
Working at summer camps	2		
Taking in nature with others	1		
Having meetings in nature	1		
Going fishing with others	3		
Cleaning up neighborhoods with others	1		
Enjoy nature together	3		
Pick up litter with others	1		
Rafting with others	1		

Unwinding in nature	1		
Listening to others	1		
Frisbee golf with others	2		
Hanging out in the woods with others	1		
Playing in the river, creek, or a water source	2		
Watching sunsets with others	1		
Whitewater rafting with others	3		
Watching sunrises with others in nature	2		
Family gatherings outside	1		
Camping with family	4		
Going to national parks with family	1		
Going to the unknown with others in nature	1		
Camping in a national park	1		

Picnicking with others in nature	2		
Journaling in nature when with others	3		
Canoeing with others	4		
Assisting with backpacking camps and associated activities (i.e., courses)	1		
Teaching others to spend time in solitude in nature	1		
Attending a camp	1		
Swimming with others	7		
Look for amphibians with others	2		

Less time with others in nature due to physicality	1		
Sharing knowledge and noticing new things	10		
Communication with others	4		
Climbing with others	1		
Being involved with scouting with others	1		
Volunteer with others to complete nature-based trips with participants	1		
Love seeing wildlife	1		

Developing a brain map of things learned with others by journaling	1		
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Cluster Eighteen:

Camping at a Christian campground with others	1	Those who identify as Christians engage in religious-based activities in nature with individuals who do and do not share similar beliefs to focus on nature and how this connects to both God and His creation (i.e., humanity and nature)	<i>"So, in the group setting, I feel and believe, and we've seen this firsthand, there are people that come to a group setting outdoors that would not go to church. They would never darken the doors. They would never even park in the parking lot because they didn't feel like they were at a place that they could do that. But yet we've seen them time after time come to group services we've had outdoors. And I knew when I met them, there's no way if we would have had a church service in a building they would have come. And I think it reaches a different demographic of people. And I think that there is absolutely a place for that. And we've experienced these people that have come to these services. A lot of them spend a lot of time worship, worshipping the creation and not the Creator and having it outside the creation drew them, but the Creator called them and, and is able to connect with them and they didn't even know they were being called. They just came to this thing outside and, and they were pleasantly surprised when they we-, when they met the Lord. So, I think the outdoor services in a group setting can really minister to certain people."</i>
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Vacation Bible School outdoors	1		
Fellowship with others	2		
Singing with others becomes a one-on-one with God	1		
Worship services outside with others	11		
Singing with others	17		
Playing instruments with others	2		
Praising God with others	10		
Talking about God with others outside	12		
Praying with others	23		
Worshipping God with others generally	15		
Sharing testimonies and praises with others	7		
Youth group trips with others	1		
Prayer walks with others in nature	1		

Reading scripture with others	4		
Mission trips with others	1		
Worshipping God in a national park	1		
Teaching others about God's creation	1		
Conversations about worship songs with others	1		
Talking about scripture with others	1		
Relating nature scenery to scripture	1		
Having church meetings outside	1		
Sharing stewardship of God's creation with others	1		
Serving as a guiding source for others	1		
Communing with others people	9		
Attending nature-based and religious retreats with others	3		

Religious activities with others	1		
Reflection is a form of worship	1		
Conversations about God with others	2		
Connecting through a sermon	1		
Outdoor services minister to certain people	1		
Relating nature scenery to worship songs	2		
Teaching others to read and discuss scripture in nature	1		
Internal, individual prayers with others in nature	1		

Appendix B - Inductive Coding Scheme for Experiencing God During Moments of Solitude in Nature

B.1. Complete inductive coding scheme implemented during the phenomenological data analysis process involved in this research focused on experiencing God in during moments of solitude in nature.

Child Codes	Frequency	Subthemes	Quote
<i>Cluster One:</i>			
A frame of thinking even with others can be solitude	1	Solitude can be a shared with others based on the acquisition of comfort and love which can be obtained through verbal or non-verbal communication	<i>"Well, I think that's something to, it's just, there's a certain level, like there's a certain level like I, it's almost like different levels of solitude, like when it's just the two of us there's like I enjoy that and it's kind of comforting and it's I consider it as kind of alone. But then there's another level of kind of being like just, just me versus the two of us."</i>
All we can do is just love people	1		
Can be comforting to be with another person in solitude and still be solitude	1		
Sharing observed wildlife moments during solitude with others after the experience	1		
People are critical and it is important to talk with them in nature	1		

Not alone in nature often due to safety reasons	2		
<i>Cluster Two:</i>			
Being loved by God and bringing that to others and not being ashamed	1	Solitude with others, whether in silence or conversation, provides a form of authentic connection to God through observing God's children through His eyes	<i>"I either deliberately or just somehow find myself a little bit away from the group and, I get to see, you know the-, especially if like I can still kind of see them, like I get to see His children interacting with nature. And I, it's almost like I get to look at them through God's eyes for a minute. And then like the, the deep, whatever I have, like a deep conversation with God, like if I need to cry out like something's, something's happened, you know, someone's died or some-, something rough happened. I go off by myself in nature because, like, I just need to cry out to God, like why, why'd this happen, God? I don't understand. I know You love me and want good things for Your children. Why did this happen? And I feel like I can just do that in nature by myself as opposed to, you know, in the middle of the city or with a bunch of people."</i>
Being silent with other's and connecting with God	1		
Having authentic conversations about God with others	1		
Responsibility to bring people to the Lord	1		

Scripture speaks to individuals	1		
Seeing God more through other people and stepping back from the group to watch	1		
Seeing God's children through His eyes	1		

Cluster Three:

Worried more about people when they are around (e.g., inflicting trouble as an individual or concerned with others actions)	1	Solitude is being totally alone and offers an experience that is unaffected by what other people think and allows for the observation of more in nature and appreciating the characteristics than when with others	<i>"I know with some of my low points, there's times I would just go on walks on the mountains or just, around the neighborhood that I grew up in and then just to see, just simply as like the birds are just happy being the birds, and you know, the rabbits are happy just being the rabbits. And to know that you can be content with who you are, and you don't have to worry about what other people think and that God loves you with who you are as a person."</i>
Actions of others (e.g., environmental) can be distracting	1		
Want to be hiking alone, even if with a group	1		
Probably don't experience solitude due to being with others	1		
Notice way more when people are not present	1		
Noticing more things when alone	1		
Not able to appreciate nature as much if talking with people	1		
Need time alone	1		
Need to be totally alone in solitude	1		
No one present in the mornings in Great Smoky Mountains National Park	1		

Feeling irritated in instead of loving when others around based on actions that may not align with environment	1		
Choosing to do things alone	5		
Do not experience solitude based on family presence	4		
Do not need to maintain relationships with other when alone	1		
Being miles away from people while backpacking	1		
Don't have to worry about what other people think	2		
Unaffected by what other people think	1		
Finding solitude being beyond earshot and physical proximity of others	1		
Getting peace and happiness at night when everyone is asleep	1		

Cluster Four:

Always run on a trail or in nature	1	Christians experience non-religious moments in solitude while in nature through doing something in and in so many ways	<i>"So many ways. I think one way, like especially when I'm with other people, like on a hike or paddling or doing something in nature, a lot of times I experience solitude by like closing my eyes and just like feeling the sun or the wind or like the elements. And then I think I also often choose to do things by myself. Sometimes because I'm just like the only one that wants to do it, but also like. Yeah, I guess it's like, I find nature to be an enjoyable place to be alone. Other places are less enjoyable to be alone, I guess, yeah."</i>
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Hiking	29		
Backcountry camping is scary, but not at the same time	1		
Backcountry camping	1		
Backcountry hikes	1		
Backpacking alone	4		
Backpacking with others	1		
Biking with others	1		
Camping	4		
Canoeing	1		
Climbing	2		
Doing nature-based activities while physical ability is present	1		
Doing schoolwork in nature	1		
Doing something in nature and in so many ways provides solitude	1		
Drawing natural features when observing them	1		
Eat food in nature	2		
Eating outside alone	1		
Experiencing wildlife interactions and sights during solitude in nature	2		
Feeling lucky to see wildlife interactions during solitude in nature	1		
Feeling peace and comfort through animals	1		
Fishing	1		
Going on a walk and taking in nature	1		
Going to nature trails	1		
Having own mental time when running in nature	1		
Hunting	2		
Journal in solitude	19		

Journaling helps appreciate moments	2		
Journaling helps reach deep down thoughts or feelings	1		
Journaling is good for you	1		
Kayaking	2		
Laying in a hammock	6		
Laying on the forest floor	1		
Listening to music in solitude with no distractions	4		
Listening to songs if a lyric pops up	1		
Look up at the trees in a hammock	1		
Looking at the stars provides solitude	4		
Paddling	1		
Regular running spots are where there are trees	1		
Running	2		
Seeing wildlife	6		
Staying in a cabin in the woods	1		
Talking on the phone with a friend	1		
Walking around a neighborhood	2		
Walking in the mountains	1		

Walking	3		
Walking along a lake	1		
Smelling fresh mountain air	1		
Smelling the wildflowers	1		
Singing in general	6		
Reading a book of various forms generally in solitude	3		

Cluster Five:

Doing your best to do nothing in solitude	1	Solitude is trying your best to do nothing through being still, watching natural scenery, and knowing that there is something about just sitting	<i>"It's like the distractions can freeze for a bit of they're great distractions. It's like being with people, conversations that might be happening. They can be super fruitful in itself. But something about just getting to sit. And like even not just like pausing for a second, listening and actually taking in the fullness of it."</i>
Not much journaling	1		
Something about just sitting	1		
Trying to be still and sit	10		
Sit in the woods	3		
Sitting on a rock	1		

Watching natural scenery during solitude (e.g., sunset, dusk, and stars)	9		
<i>Cluster Six:</i>			
Prayer is a conversation with God	1	Prayer is a way Christians connect and communicate with God and all that is alive by visualizing Him, walking with eyes open, and talking with Him when in nature (e.g., woods or by a stream) where there is no better time to pray	<i>"But for me solitude in nature is super important just because if there is a lot of people on the trail or you feel like you're in the midst of all this humanity, I feel like it can be harder to connect to God because you still feel very much Earthly centered rather than God centered. So for me, solitude has always been really important to try to find like a secret spot or to, you know, go early in the morning or late at night when there's less people around because I just feel like I connect with God better because I feel like that sounds bad, but when there's a bunch of other people around kind of like we're talking about like environmental, like they might not be like adhering to like the guidelines and stuff. And so, I feel like I just get irritated rather than trying to be loving towards other people. So, I think when I'm by myself, I just I'm able to focus on God a lot better not worry about other people or about myself but be able to pray and worship solo."</i>
Prayer is a thanks to God	2		
Prayer or scripture come to mind in solitude	1		

Praying during scary and hard times in nature	1		
Praying is connecting with all that is alive	1		
Praying out loud to God	2		
Praying to God in a visual natural space	1		
Praying to God in solitude to connect	32		
Visualizing God when praying to Him	3		
Walking and eyes open during prayer or talking with God	2		
No better time to pray than in solitude and nature	1		
Being in prayer with God is normal	1		
Being in the woods or by a stream is a good place for prayer	1		

Cluster Seven:

Playing music to connect with God	1	Worship is a way of connecting to God by Christians when in solitude and can involve the presence or absence of songs and allow God to fills souls with joy during moments of praise when individuals start from a low place	<i>"I think worship through like music and stuff like that was a big thing for me. I've always connected to God through music, so that, that was a big thing during those hard points in my life. And He's been able to kind of work through that, too, and, or He was able to kind of work through these nature trails and through music and kind of use that combination of, of being able to worship Him through music and stuff like that."</i>
Simple songs allow for being simply present	1		
Simplicity in songs is important	1		
Sing songs that have scripture	5		
Singing helps center thoughts on God	1		
Singing is a form of praise	1		

Singing worship songs to God fills soul with joy	1		
Songs (e.g., worship songs) coming to mind heavily when in nature and solitude	1		
True worship start from a low place	1		
Trying not to listen to worship music in solitude	1		
Worshipping God in solitude	10		
Writing songs for God	1		
Music is a form of worship	1		

Cluster Eight:

Worship and prayer are intertwined	1	<p>Christians experience God in solitude through religious and non-religious forms which are all intertwined or not separated and can influence present (e.g., feelings of protection while sitting or laying in nature) or future moments (e.g., ministry experiences in nature playing a role in career choices or looking back on captured images of God's beauty in nature)</p>	<p><i>"I don't know that I can separate it. I don't know that um that I would say anything different than what I've kind of already shared. Um, it's a, it, it, a heightened level of awareness I guess um greater awareness of my prayer, I might, you know there are some times when I'm alone like on that, on that beach or if I'm on a hike where I realize that I am praying and I don't even realize, I, you know, I, there was, I, I didn't start out intending to pray but I recognize that I'm having a conversation with God, and so you know when you have when, when, when you have a crazy life that is constantly moving and has all of the moving parts, it's, it's hard to even find your thoughts, but if I am and, if I find myself praying already then I know it's God showing up I, I know that it's God</i></p>
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			<i>already moving and that doesn't happen when I'm sitting in my, in my barcalounger, it, it happens when I am, when I am out, when I am in a kayak or, or walking along the lake or on a hike."</i>
No separation between ways of connecting to God (e.g., worship, prayer, journaling, etc.)	1		
Taking pictures and capturing God's beauty to look back on knowing God was there and feeling a certain way	2		
Watching the Lord move through sitting or laying	1		
Napping is a form of connection with God through feeling protected, known, nurtured, and held	3		
Do not need a feeling created through song	1		
Doing artsy things to connect with God in solitude	2		
Doing things out of the normal, such as art or journaling, when seeing nature and experiencing God	1		

Writing the words God has given about thoughts and scenery during solitude in nature	5		
Comforting and peaceful to read Bible alone in nature	1		
Meditate on God's words in solitude (e.g., scripture)	1		
Ministry experiences in nature will play a role in future career(s)	1		
Reading scripture or devotionals in solitude and nature as connecting to God	16		

Cluster Nine:

Able to clear head in nature	2	Nature is a vast, beautiful, and crucial masterpiece that allows an individual to quiet the body and mind while 'setting everything down' and taking in the atmosphere or fullness of the artistry that exists	<i>"Yeah, it's a direct correlation when I don't get time in nature, I am grumpy, I'm stressed I'm frustrated, I am, reactive, I, mostly stressed and I, I end up taking on the weight of the world and the weight of everybody else. And I try to hold it all together and I just can't. And so, it's like if I go into nature, I can set all that down and so it's start the path and the further I walk, the more things I set down. And then by the time I get to solitude, whatever that looks like, I have nothing. And it's just purely weightless, and it's so peaceful."</i>
Appreciating living in a national park	1		
Appreciating where you are in nature	1		
Being 'at home' in nature	2		
Being fulfilled in nature	1		
Being in nature is the most enjoyable times	1		

Being surrounded by nature which is loved	1		
Can just enjoy the moment and see the beauty of nature	1		
Content to be in nature	1		
Content to sit in nature	1		
Crying based on having to leave nature	1		
Drawn attention to creation when in solitude	1		
Existing and recognizing that nature is bigger in solitude	1		
Feeling like nature is where you need to be	1		
Feeling more adventurous in nature	3		
Going into nature to be alone	1		
Happy to where you are at in solitude and nature	1		
Immersing into the entire environment	1		
In awe of nature as a beautiful masterpiece	2		
More time in nature is a reminder it is real	1		
Nature drops you into silence	1		
Nature feels like a safe place	1		
Nature in solitude versus with a group is totally different things	1		
Nature is an enjoyable place to be alone	1		
Nature is crucial	1		
Nature is peaceful	2		
Nature is such a beautiful space	3		
Nature is the only place to be alone	1		
Nature is vast, insane, and never seemed real	1		
Nature nurtures the spirit	1		
Other places are less enjoyable to be alone	1		
Physically quieting body in nature	1		
Quieting of mind in nature	2		

Quietly experiencing the vastness of nature	4		
Replenish through solitude in nature	3		
'Setting everything down' in nature	1		
Special moments to yourself in nature	1		
Still feel feelings of outside circumstances in nature (e.g., life situations), but it is a sacred space	1		
Stillness in nature	1		
Taking in the fullness of nature	1		
Taking time to enjoy nature	1		
The environment provides a way to slow down	1		
There is artistry in nature	1		
There's an atmosphere to nature	3		
Solitude in nature makes a difference in comparison to other locations	1		
Solitude is any time in nature really	1		

Cluster Ten:

'Tree therapy' is withdrawing from the noise and chaos and getting into a quiet place	1	The characteristics of nature (e.g., wind blowing, rocks crunching, bugs moving, solitude in the darkness) provide a quiet place to engage in 'tree therapy' by withdrawing from the noise or chaos of life and listen to the forest 'sing a lullaby' its sounds, be awestruck by a sunrise, and enjoy the earth in its purest form	<i>"I think nature has its own sound, its own worship, but I think you can go even a bit deeper and like the sound of the river can bring a solitude that you can't find anywhere else. I think that everything is so busy. We're all so busy. I'm loud, the world's loud, everybody's loud. And I think withdrawing from all of that noise and chaos and getting into a quiet place, it, it literally we call it tree therapy. It literally gives you a clear mind. And you can kind of just find this place</i>
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			<i>where you can hear God more clearly, you can think more clearly. And so, the solitude for me comes in the sounds, but also the stillness, because I don't have that a lot. And so, when you're in that complete stillness and you can hear the you can hear the different elements, it brings you to a place of just ability to hear like nothing else. It's really, it's really amazing."</i>
Being an immersion person and want to experience nature through experiences, such as sticking feet in the river	1		
Being among the trees in solitude	1		
Animals are stress relievers	1		
Hear the birds sing	6		
Hear wind moving through water	1		
Hearing bugs	1		
Hearing rocks crunch under your feet	1		
Hearing the sounds of nature	7		
Hearing the wind rustling through the trees	5		
Hearing water	5		
Hearing wetness of the ground	1		
Awestruck by a sunrise	1		
Can inspect nature and not rush through when alone	1		
Captivating characteristics of a national park (e.g., Glacier National Park)	1		

Choosing to pause and look at nature before taking a picture	1		
Closing eyes in nature to feel sunshine or wind blowing	2		
Complete stillness in nature that allows you to hear like nothing else is amazing	2		
Enjoying the earth in its purest form	1		
Experience everything along in nature (e.g., sunshine water, mountain terrain, and pristine condition)	1		
Favorite time in the Smokies is early morning when the sun rises	1		
Finding a secret spot for solitude in nature	1		
Happiest in nature (e.g., nature, outdoors, and mountains)	1		
Frequently sitting by a body of water in solitude	7		
Finding a certain place for solitude based on the vibe it gives	1		
Mammoth, California is a favorite place to run	1		
Nature is so big, such as trees	1		
No cell service and electricity when spending time in nature and associated with solitude	3		
On a beach	1		
Seeing the sunrise coming through a tent	1		
Something about water	1		
Spending a summer in the Smokies is insane	1		
Staring at a body of water (e.g., lake)	2		
The forest sings a lullaby through it's sounds (e.g., wildlife and elements)	1		
The noise and sound of water is relaxing	1		

The Smokies if the most beautiful place on earth	1		
The sound of a river can bring solitude which cannot be found anywhere else	1		
The sound of a river can bring solitude which cannot be found anywhere else	1		
Trying to intentionally hear the sounds of nature (e.g., wind)	1		
Using all senses in nature	2		
Visiting a national park	1		
Watching how nature is dependent upon characteristics of features within	1		
Water is beautiful	1		
Strangest feeling ever in the darkness and experiencing solitude	1		
Solitude in the darkness	1		

Cluster Eleven:

Able to be in the midst of God's creation in solitude and knowing that's why you're there	1	Nature is a cathedral that allows God and the environment He created speak and offer a connection to His home through being immersed in the things of God (e.g., wildlife sights) and receiving a physical embodiment of God's peace, promise of life, and reflection of nature 'singing' for being created	<i>"So, you can go out. And even as an example, right now, the cicadas are, are singing around here in, in the trees, in the mountains. You can sit down on the back deck and not have to say anything. But just listen to the birds, listen to the cicadas, listen to just all of nature, itself just speaks. I mean, you, like Ruth said earlier, Ruth said earlier, the, the rocks and stones would cry out if we didn't say something. So, it's, it's one of those things where you can listen to nature. Nature is actually a, the way I look at it is singing back to God for being</i>
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			<i>created in the first place. So, you just want to sit and enjoy that. That's, that's solitude enough for me to be able to just listen to the, the creation. Worshiping the Creator is basically what that's all about to me, so."</i>
Allowing God and the environment He has created speak	1		
Basking in God's creation brings individuals closer to Him	3		
Being in wilderness and God's creation has something about it	1		
Being moved by God's creation and its cadence that God speaks to intentionally	1		
Spending time with God's creation is symbiotic	1		
Connections between nature and walk with Christ	1		
Excited to follow the Lord after seeing nature	1		
Experiencing God in solitude and nature makes nature even more of a special place	1		
Grateful for nature due to it allowing a closeness with God and experience of solitude	1		
How could a Christian sit out in nature and not be connected God	2		

Listening to creation is solitude and worshipping the Creator	1		
Moments of solitude in nature where you can get immersed in the things of God (e.g., wildlife sights)	1		
Nature allows God in	1		
Nature does not have to play a role in a relationship with God, but it can	1		
Nature helps get your mind on God	1		
Nature is a big connection because it is His home	1		
Nature is a physical embodiment of God's peace	1		
Nature is a place that gives great pleasure and God is present	1		
Nature is a tool that connects individuals to God	1		
Nature is alone space to be with God	2		
Nature is entering a cathedral	1		
Nature is important and it is where God chooses to meet me	1		
Nature is of God and from Him	1		
Nature is reminders of different attributes of God	1		
Nature is sacred because that's where God can be seen and felt the most	1		
Nature is singing back to God for being created	2		
Nature provides more connection to God	1		
Not super often feeling more connected with nature after connecting with God	1		

One way where nature helps connect one with God instead of God helping get connected to nature	1		
Prefer to be with God in nature	1		
You bear more fruit by coming to the end of yourself while in nature	1		
You can't get any better than sitting in God's creation	1		
Time in nature is time with God and especially in solitude	1		
There isn't anything else I'd rather do than be in God's nature	1		
Sun rises are a promise of life from God and a personal moment	1		
Shout praises across valleys and hearing echoes	1		
Rare to talk about God and not have nature involved	1		
Really strong connection with what God has provided (e.g., nature)	1		
Reflect more on sinful nature in nature and alone	2		
Rocks and stones would cry out if humanity did not	1		
Scripture reference involving 'as the deer panteth for the water'	1		
Songs that speak about God's creation (e.g., mountains) and majesty	1		
The environment provides focus away from the lies of the enemy	1		

Cluster Twelve:

Duties to protect nature	1	Christians see nature through different eyes that is informed by religious views and involves stewardship duties to protect and preserve nature to show gratitude to God for His intricate, powerful, and creative gift of love through creation	<i>"I think I do feel more connected to nature when I'm alone and I am like in, either in the word or praying or worshipping out loud just because, yeah, I don't know, you just feel so centered and like just dwelling on everything that God has done for us and our beautiful Earth He created for us. This helps me feel more connected to nature and feel more drawn to, you know, protecting it, and making sure that I'm being a good steward of the resources that God has given us and humanity as a whole."</i>
Preserving nature	1		
Christians see nature through completely different eyes	1		
Religious views inform how nature is viewed	1		
Protected areas are as close to Eden as we can get	1		
Protecting nature by experiencing God and solitude	2		
Showing gratitude for what we have in nature	1		
Nature is a gift from God	1		
Nature is a reminder God created everything	2		
Nature is a reminder of how much God loves us	2		
Nature is a special creation of God	1		
Nature is made richer based on the Creator (i.e., God)	1		
Seeing God in the intricacies of nature	3		

Seeing God's intentionality of nature	1		
Seeing God's power and creativity in nature	2		
Passion about nature and wildlife from God solidifying importance for His nature through solitude	1		
Stewardship comes from experiencing God in solitude and nature	2		

Cluster Thirteen:

Able to 'not be of the world' for a second while experiencing God in solitude and nature	1	Experiencing God in solitude is a honest, raw time where Christians can be 'not be of the world' and get closer to an omnipresent God through transcendent, very present, peaceful, safe, and comforting moments that allow for reflection and aid them in living out the purpose God has given by relating 'I'm gonna be there with you during this time'	<i>" He's literally in me, the One who created all that. If I were to see Him face to face physically my body would melt, not even kidding. And and yet He's in me. It's a beautiful, divine mystery. I'm not gonna try and explain it because I can't. But point is, He's in me and and like as I I wander, feeling alone on that journey t-, because there are some places that others cannot follow because you you are choosing to be obedient to His call, whatever it is, you know, and wherever He ends up taking me and all the places I've been where there are some things that I'm I'm struggling with that I just I am alone in, apart from the fact that, I'm never alone. And there's that type of intimate solitude."</i>
Almost like a veil coming over when experiencing God	1		
Asking God for a word during hurting	1		
Asking God to help with addiction while in solitude and nature	1		

Audibly hearing God's voice in solitude	2		
Authentic versus fake relationship with God	1		
Be in your own thoughts and talk to God about it	1		
Being able to process situations during solitude with God in nature	1		
Being alone with and thinking about God puts things into perspective	2		
Being closer to God in solitude	7		
Being content with who you are as a person and know God loves you	1		
Being held in the palm of the Lord and feeling so small	1		
Being honest and raw with God in solitude	1		
Being real with God in solitude	1		
Being very present with God in solitude	3		
Being with God in solitude is beautiful	1		
Bringing everything to the table with God when alone	1		
Can talk to self or God freely without worrying if others hear	1		
Deeper understanding of God when experiencing solitude with others	1		
Do not experience God as much without solitude	1		
Everyone needs solitude with God every day	1		
Everything alive is a family with God and is the 'bigger picture'	1		
Experiencing God in solitude provides answers about what to do	1		
Fear and excitement do not matter when with God	1		

Feeling a shiver down back when experiencing God	1		
Feeling a wave crashing over when connecting to God	1		
Feeling God more when alone in solitude	5		
Feeling God comfort when being out of comfort zone	1		
Feeling God's love constantly with me	1		
Feeling God's presence and giving it back	1		
Feeling God's presence and knowing it would lead to an answer in a situation	1		
Feeling 'hit by a truck' when God moves	1		
Feeling like sitting by a cozy fire and wrapped in a blanket	1		
Feeling love by God and knowing He's enough and more than enough	2		
Feeling so loved and close to God	1		
Feeling the Lord put things on the heart when alone with Him	1		
Feeling transcendent in solitude when with God	1		
Feeling undeserving of God's grace in nature	1		
Focus on God better when alone	1		
Focusing on God instead of the activity and utilize in an effective manner to spend time with God	1		
Gesturing to the sky when talking to God	1		
Getting caught up in everyday life can lose track of God and an individual	1		
Giving God the opportunity to speak in moments of pause	2		

Giving gratitude and being thankful towards God	3		
Go before the throne, magnify Him, and glorify Him by being grateful	1		
Go wherever the Lord calls and it's ok if it's where He leads	1		
God allowing you to experience Him and showing up in this	1		
God being closer than a friend	1		
God carries us upward	1		
God gives calm	1		
God gives comfort and reassurance	5		
God gives peace	6		
God is a best friend and it is not imagination	1		
God is a God of stillness which is infinite when spending time with Him	1		
God is always there	10		
God is omnipresent and allowing the things around you to speak about God	1		
God is so good	1		
God is the giver of every perfect gift	1		
God is the only one who can ultimately bring people to Him	1		
God knows, cares, and loves each and every one of us	1		
God longs to have a relationship with us and to change our hearts	1		
God moves in a powerful way	3		
God picks you up and heals your heart during moments when you have fallen	1		
God provides a feeling of hearing you and understanding your communication	1		

God provides complete stillness	1		
God provides safety, control, and peace and human strength cannot compare	2		
God provides the ability to keep living	1		
God providing answers after a time of unrest and questioning	1		
God providing safety and calm during difficult experiences in nature	2		
God providing warmth that spreads as a way of saying 'I'm gonna be there with you during this time'	2		
God reigns above it all	1		
God reveals stuff in solitude	1		
God seeks fellowship with us, saved and unsaved	1		
God shows up by providing protection	1		
God shows up equally in solitude and in community with others	1		
God shows up in thoughts that come to mind	2		
God shows up when it is asked for, no matter when alone or with others	2		
God shows up when space is allowed	2		
God shows up when the opportunity is given	1		
God sits with you in silence and shows the care in His eyes	1		
God speaks through an individual's imagination	1		
God speaks through loved ones	1		
God still answers in solitude	1		
God still working even though not the most ideal circumstances (e.g., humidity)	1		
God takes care of what is on your heart most	1		

God tries to get attention through physical sign (e.g., shiver down back)	1		
God will use pain to challenge you and make you stronger	1		
God working through specific songs	1		
God's presence dwelled	1		
Greater understanding of what God has given us in solitude	1		
Grateful to be God's child and loved by Him	2		
Hearing God's voice in your head	1		
Indescribable feeling when experiencing God and solitude in nature	1		
It's a God thing when things come to mind (e.g., new thoughts, prayer, and scripture)	1		
Just me and the Holy Spirit	1		
Knowing God is there, but situations are still hard and knowing need to live with that	1		
Knowing what's true and feeling assurance experiencing God in nature and solitude	1		
Lean more into a relationship with God when in solitude and nature	1		
Live out the purpose God has given you	2		
Look at yourself with a clean heart in solitude with God	1		
Making deep promises to God and committing to follow Him if he saves you in moments of trial	1		
More alone time with God makes an individual when in groups by being real in both situations	1		
Never alone and always feeling God's presence	2		

No filter between you and God in solitude	1		
Not happy or joyful during hard times and when crying out to God	1		
Not sure of a correlation between solitude and God's presence	2		
One of the first things is connecting with God	1		
Pain is not of God	1		
Peace comes from God	2		
Physically feeling God through touch (e.g., hug)	1		
Psalm 62 and 'pausing in His presence'	1		
Put aside pressure to connect with the Lord better	1		
Realizing things from God when alone with Him	1		
Reflect on who God is and His mercy in solitude	1		
Reflecting on little things of everyday life God has given	3		
Religion is more than 'yes or no', it is ever-changing	1		
Sometimes God is not detected	1		
Supernatural experience when God moves	1		
The Holy Spirit is a guardian angel presence which provides comfort	1		
Waiting to be rescued by God and meditating in addition to pausing	1		

Yielding yourself to the spirit of God and opening yourself	2		
<i>Cluster Fourteen:</i>			
Getting to know God and see Him move during solitude in nature	1	All of creation is intertwined and God's reveals Himself through this commonality by facilitating closer connections with Him that are peaceful, re-centering, welcoming, comfortable, transformative, allow for crying out in uncertainty, and surreal in the place He created and where He speaks through the natural characteristics (e.g., sun filtering through the trees) to say 'I love you'	<i>"Yeah, the more I spend out in nature and in solitude, the more I think about God. So obviously, the more prevalent and, the more, active He'll be in, well I, I will make Him in my life. And He's always trying to be active in my life. But it's just a matter of if I let Him or not. But I feel like when I'm surrounded by what I love, which is nature, I feel like I'm always, thinking of Him maybe like in the back of my, even if it's in the back of my head, I'm always like, ah I don't know how to word this, it's such a hard thing. It's such a surreal experience, I can't word it."</i>
God addresses doubt and worry in nature and solitude	2		
God communicates best through nature	1		
God created nature and He created us, so it is intertwined	2		
God giving something you didn't know you really needed through nature	1		
God greets and welcomes you when the sun comes up	1		
God has made creation for all of us	1		
God provides confirmation through shooting stars	2		

God heals through nature	1		
God helping get to the top of a mountain	1		
God helps in solitude to relate life experiences to nature (e.g., observing the stillness of a lake and having mind be at ease)	1		
God is so present in nature	2		
God provides reassurance anywhere and not just in nature	1		
God leading you to a situation or location (e.g., national park)	1		
God made creation and can handle life-based situations	1		
God pours into you through nature and you learn more from God as you grow	1		
God restores souls in nature	2		
God revealing Himself through finding a commonality all across creation	1		
God showed up by reinforcing that you know the way to get back to where you need when lost in nature	1		
God shows 'it is gonna be ok' through His creation	2		
God shows up in creation (e.g., wildlife or painting of the sky)	2		
God shows up in the beauty	1		
God speaking through a breeze during difficult situations	1		
God speaking through birds	1		
God uses the stillness of a lake	1		
God using flowers to speak	1		

God works through nature and music, especially during hard times	1		
God, solitude, and nature are best friends	1		
God's glory is revealed in nature	1		
Hearing God talk when the wind blows	3		
Imagining God is there in your mind when in solitude in nature	1		
Important to spend time with God in nature, especially during low points in life	1		
Intimate experience with God in solitude and in nature	6		
God provides relief through nature	1		
Jesus modeled solitude in nature as a spiritual practice	3		
Just focus on God in the environment	1		
Knowing God is present based on surrounding space(s)	1		
Longing for God when experiencing solitude and nature	1		
More connected to nature when experiencing God and solitude	2		
Neat that God helps you experience His creation	1		
Nothing else matter when in solitude with God in nature	1		
Peace experienced during solitude with God in nature cannot be found anywhere else	1		
Being alone with God in nature provides fulfilling and positive moments	1		
Being fulfilled by God in solitude and nature	1		
Being good with God in solitude and nature	1		

Being in nature strengthens relationship with God	2		
Being in the place God created with Him	1		
Being transformed by God to appreciate nature to receive more from Him (e.g., communication)	1		
Can be comfortable and don't have to be constantly afraid when experiencing God in solitude and nature	1		
Can enjoy the moment when in solitude with God in nature	2		
Can let guard down when experiencing God in solitude and nature	2		
Connect with God better in solitude in nature	6		
Connecting to God through awe and wonder of nature	3		
Connection to nature is not the composition, but connection to the Creator	1		
Continuing to practice reflection with God in solitude and nature	1		
Craving nature based on experiencing God in solitude	2		
Crying out to God and questioning during hard times and going to nature to be alone	1		
Deep conversations with God in nature	1		
Don't really feel that alone in nature due to God's presence	1		
Dwell on God and all His creation	1		
Dwelling on everything God has done and created (e.g., earth)	1		
Easy to talk to God with beautiful scenery and no people	1		

Enveloped by God's love in nature	1		
Experience what God has to say in the vastness	1		
Experiences alone in nature with God	1		
Experiencing God and solitude deepens connections to nature	1		
Experiencing God and solitude in nature is everything	1		
Experiencing God in solitude and nature is surreal	1		
Experiencing God in the stillness of solitude and nature	2		
Experiencing God when riding through nature	4		
Feeling a call to serve God through nature	1		
Feeling a responsibility when experiencing God in solitude and nature	1		
Feeling almost spiritually dead when not taking time to be with God in nature	1		
Feeling both alone and close to God in solitude in nature allows a reconnection with God	1		
Feeling calmness when experiencing God and solitude in nature	2		
Feeling God through a temperature change	1		
Feeling God through all of nature	1		
Feeling God through animals	1		
Feeling God wrap His arms around while in nature (e.g., mountain overlook in Shenandoah National Park)	1		
Feeling happy to be with God in solitude and nature	1		

Feeling in awe experiencing God during solitude in nature	2		
Feeling in God's welcoming, inviting embrace when in nature	1		
Feeling most connected to God in nature	1		
Feeling of peace when alone with God in nature	6		
Feeling pumped up in moments of experiencing God and His creation	1		
Feeling very secure and in the moment when experiencing God in solitude and nature	1		
Feeling warm experiencing God in solitude and nature	3		
Feeling wholeness experiencing God in solitude and nature	2		
Felling of freedom and anticipation for what's to come when experiencing God in nature and solitude	1		
Figure out head space in order to perceive God in solitude while in nature	1		
Finding God through nature	1		
Getting a sense of something new God is doing in a natural place	2		
Processing emotions and being reminded of simplicity through experiencing God in nature and solitude	1		
Quality of life would be better being in nature experiencing God and nature more if possible	1		
Recentering through experiencing God in solitude and nature	1		
Resting in God and God's creation	2		

Stepping away and leaving everything behind when in nature with God	1		
Talking to God in your mind when in solitude in nature	1		
Want to spend time in solitude with God in nature more	2		
There's always solitude when spending time with God in a forest	1		
Time with God in solitude and nature depends on what is going on throughout the week (e.g., more or less connection needed)	1		
Taking care of yourself when spending time with God and solitude in nature	1		
Talking to God helps focus on the small details of nature that might otherwise go unnoticed	1		
Seeing more of God and who He created us to be and how it intersects with the world we live in	1		
Seeing the work of God as an artist	1		
Seeking out, looking forward to, and planning for solitude with God in nature	1		
Physically or mentally connecting with God through nature and in solitude	1		
Pouring heart out to God in nature	1		
In nature, envisioning God is right there next to you	2		
Drawn closer to God in nature than corporate worship based on too many distractions	1		
Feeling so close to God in nature amidst circumstances of uncertainty (e.g., COVID-19)	1		

Feeling the crisp air and feeling God wake you up and beckoning you to be His servant for the day	1		
Sun filtering through the trees is God speaking to you and saying 'good morning, I love you'	1		
God's presence is in nature	1		
Just no words specifically when experiencing God and solitude in nature	1		
God can show an individual how much they are missing by saying 'I don't do outside'	1		
Not knowing how people can look at the night sky and not believe there is a God	1		

Cluster Fifteen:

Break out into song as connecting to God, such as worship songs	1	God is experienced in solitude by Christians through religious and non-religious forms which range from silence and listening to God to praising and talking to God verbally or internally to worship the one true God	<i>"Something that I wrote the other day saying, "true worship starts from a low place, you know, knowing that our Father carries us upward as we fix our eyes on Him and as we go with every step, we remind ourselves of the end of our journey and we dwell on that goal to worship the one true God as He reigns, reigns above it all". And so, yeah, I think just allowing myself to, you know, portray that actively."</i>
Choose to praise God in the pain	1		
Come up with songs or praises for God during nature-based solitude	1		
Coming up with short of descriptions of how God moves and what it feels like	1		
Connecting to God through quietness	4		
Connecting to God through silence	1		

Crying when experiencing God in solitude	1		
Talking to God in solitude	6		
Talking to God internally	3		
Talking verbally to God	2		
Thanking God due to remembrance in solitude	3		
Thanking God for food	1		
Experience God in a worship setting	1		
Silence before the One that is loved	1		
Silence in solitude to connect with God	2		
Receiving visions from God for other people (e.g., expression of God's love)	1		
Praising God to connect	3		
Listening to God in solitude	5		
Familiar places influences connections to God through solitude	1		
Goal to worship the one true God	1		
God provides answers to prayers, such as those completed in nature	1		
God shows up through by thoughts turning into prayer during solitude in nature	1		
God shows up through conviction of sin	1		
God shows up through feelings	1		
God shows up through freely writing and providing focus	1		
God shows up through providing focus and talking with Him	1		
God shows up through scriptures that come to mind	1		
Knowing God is there based on scripture reading from the Bible	1		

Cluster Sixteen:

Being ok with being bored	1	<p>Solitude in nature is renewing, sentimental, formative, disconnected from distractions, and allows for the 'still small voice' to be heard in moments where an individual can sit in the moment and truly know what's inside their heart by becoming a state of being</p>	<p><i>"I think that that goes back to that previous answer that, you know, it's in the quiet, it's what is that song? It's in the stillness and the quiet. You are there. You know, it's that it's in the moments that you stop being you and stop all the all the noise that you can actually hear that still small voice. It's not the, oh it's not the earthquake and it's not the big blowing wind, but it was the still small voice. But you have to be still to hear the still small voice. It doesn't come any other way."</i></p>
Better understanding of who you are when in solitude	1		
Able to breathe in solitude	1		
Calmness that washes over you	1		
Can 'just be' in solitude and nature	1		
Choosing to be present in the moment	3		
Different levels of solitude	1		
Disconnecting from distractions in solitude	8		
Distractions freeze for a bit	1		
Don't have to worry about all the little things	2		
Do not like loud noises in solitude	1		
Escaping worldly distractions in solitude	1		
Experience solitude by closing eyes and feeling the sun, wind, or the elements	1		
Experiencing solitude during the interview that took place in nature	1		
Experiencing tenderness	1		
Feeling peaceful in solitude	14		

Hear the 'still small voice' in solitude	2		
Honing in on more than the usual when alone in nature with God	1		
Intentionally walk into a place mentally when in solitude (e.g., focus and appreciating)	1		
Looking at yourself in a 'mirror' in solitude	1		
No distractions in solitude	5		
No sound in solitude	1		
No timetable	1		
Not feeling the need to go do more things	5		
Once solitude is reached in nature, such as through walking, distractions are absent	1		
Reflecting on past experiences and progress through those experiences	1		
Reflecting on what is important in solitude	2		
Sabbath is a time of rest	1		
Slowing down and pausing in solitude	2		
Solitude draws you in closer to what's truly inside of your heart	1		
Solitude helps find balance and regain yourself	3		
Solitude in nature and emotional vulnerability	1		
Solitude in nature is really, really important	4		
Solitude in nature is renewing	1		
Solitude in nature is sentimental	1		
Solitude in nature keeps individuals mentally sane	1		
Solitude in nature provides reflection and meditation	4		
Solitude is alone time	4		
Solitude is calm	1		

Solitude is comfort	1		
Solitude is complete peace	6		
Solitude is experiencing creation breathe	1		
Solitude is formative	1		
Solitude is important for well-being	1		
Solitude is relaxing	4		
Solitude is restoring	1		
Solitude is when you can't hear anything but your own thoughts	1		
Solitude provides moments of pause and reflection instead of quickly acting as in daily life (e.g., city environment)	1		
Solitude when being more away from civilization	1		
Step back and put things into perspective in solitude	1		
Stillness is solace and solitude	2		
There's a difference between aloneness and loneliness	1		
Valued retreat from the busyness	1		
Wanting to 'sit in the moment' when in solitude	1		

Solitude becomes a state of being	1		
<i>Cluster Seventeen:</i>			
Solitude is refreshing	1	Solitude is more than an experience that is refreshingly purposeful through the encouragement of exceedingly positive moods and increasing an individual's opportunity to see unknown blessings when feeling grateful during 'mountaintop moments' or experiencing the 'upward climb' of life	<i>"To like praise God when things are going well and it's so easy to, you know, be thankful for like all the good things that happen, all those mountaintop moments in a way. But like, it's almost counterintuitive to like you, so, you think to, like, praise Him, like when things aren't going right, you know, but like I, for me, that's just reminds myself like I have to pray in, choose to praise God in the midst of what I'm feeling because like pain's, not of God, but God will use your pain to like grow you and challenge you and make you stronger."</i>
Solitude is nice when it can be experienced	1		
Solitude is overwhelming	1		
Solitude is purposeful	3		
Solitude isn't necessarily a bad thing	1		
The more solitude the better	4		
Solitude improves moods	1		
Being happy and content	2		
Being in an 'upward climb' in life	1		
Being re-energized to keep going	1		
Easy to be thankful for 'mountaintop moments'	1		
Feeling exceedingly positive and have a 'spring in step'	1		
Feeling grateful	2		

Feeling overjoyed in solitude	2		
More solitude in nature, the better	1		
No cares in the world and 'let go for a time' in solitude in nature	1		
Seeing unknown blessings in solitude	1		
Solitude and choosing to complete an activity during can be refreshing (e.g., running)	1		
Embodying solitude as it is experienced	2		
Enjoy noticing way more	1		
Solitude in nature brings more appreciation towards nature	2		
Solitude in nature is a favorite thing ever	2		
Solitude in nature is a very healthy, healthy experience even if for momentary times	1		
Solitude in nature is all the time	1		
Solitude in nature is magical	1		
Solitude is a weightless feeling	1		
Solitude is almost dreamlike	1		
Solitude is more than just an experience	1		

Cluster Eighteen:

Feeling lonely in solitude	1	Solitude can be good or bad through moments of loneliness, but it doesn't have to be by yourself of in only nature and can occur in other contexts	<i>"I think and to, solitude is, can be good or bad. It can be both. Solitude can be a good thing when it brings you closer to God, but solitude can also make you feel alone. And I think that in nature you can kind of feel both feelings at the same time. And that's a good thing because it makes you reconnect to God."</i>
Not much of a solitude person	1		
Solitude can be good and bad	1		

Solitude doesn't have to be by yourself	4		
Solitude is harder nowadays due to social media, such as Instagram	1		
Solitude outside of nature	1		
Times of loneliness, but not much	1		

Cluster Nineteen:

Greater awareness of prayer in solitude	1	Experiencing God in solitude and nature is not separated for Christians and these moments involve God showing the importance of His creation by wanting to look for God more and feeling the importance of what needs to be done concerning natural contexts while also experiencing a more authentic 'you' that communes with God and acquires solitude that is needed by the soul to keep an individual spiritually sane	<i>"I think the other thing, too, is like being in solitude helps me sort of connect with God and sort of a, a more attentive to listen and like what I'm reading the word or in prayer. I'm more attentive to listen, to be like, oh, this is something I need to work on. But also, just like with nature, I feel like when I'm alone with God, the more I think about God, the more it puts things into perspective. And the more things are in perspective, the more I realize the importance of what's around me and what sort of I need to do."</i>
Isaiah 11:6	1		
More solitude in nature brings about more thoughts about God	1		
No separation between solitude, God, and nature in experiences	3		
Only need to breathe and not say anything during solitude in nature and see how God exists in it	1		
Pray without interruption	1		

Problems seem so small during solitude in nature while connecting with God	1		
Solitude allows you to think and commune with God	3		
Solitude alone is very important with God	2		
Solitude and connecting to God is not a science	1		
Solitude and peace in nature strengthens trust in God and understanding of His love	1		
Solitude in creation with God is needed by the soul	1		
Solitude in nature connects you to God	1		
Solitude in nature equals more connectedness to God	1		
Solitude in nature is a direct correlation to connecting with God	1		
Solitude in nature keeps individuals spiritually sane	1		
Solitude in nature provides reflections of how God was present every step of the way	1		
Solitude is a reflection of God when in nature	1		
Solitude is a vast forest where God is	1		
Solitude is drawing away to commune with God in a Christian view	1		
Solitude is important to hear back from God	3		
Solitude is needed to have an individual relationship with God	1		
Solitude is stripping everything down to a core relationship with God	1		
Solitude is the only time when God is experienced	1		
Solitude makes you look for God more	1		

Solitude strengthens connections to God	3		
Solitude strengthens connections to God and nature	3		
Solitude with God allows for a more authentic 'you'	2		
Solitude with God can start your day off right	1		
Solitude with God highlights the value of nature	2		
Solitude with God places importance on what is around and what needs to be done	1		
Solitude in nature and experiencing God shows the importance of His creation	1		
Times for solitude and times for worship and prayer in a group	1		
Wanting to continue engaging in solitude in nature and experiencing God	1		
Positive correlation between solitude and connections to God and nature	1		
Saying thank you to God in solitude	1		

Appendix C – Inductive Coding Scheme for Experiencing God in Nature and Influences

Regarding the Environmental Mindset of Christians

C.1. Developed coding scheme as formed through inductive methods within a phenomenological data analysis process focused on influences in consideration of the environmental mindset of Christians based on experiencing God in nature.

Child Codes	Frequency	Subthemes	Quote
<i>Cluster One:</i>			
Hard to describe how amazing and beautiful Indiana Dunes is	1	Indiana Dunes is amazing and its natural features (i.e., Lake Michigan) are not something you think is man-made, but are hard to describe	<i>"In how beautiful the water is and how, you know, sunny it is and how, you know, you can see different, you know, skylines for the, you know, Chicago and that other area that there was, you know, and how like far it can go and how like. That's like you wouldn't believe how big that, you know, lake is, and it's like but God created that lake, and it's like how big it is. It almost looks like it's an ocean and it's like but it's just a lake and it's just so amazing, you know. And He created it. And it's not just something that you think that's just manmade"</i>
Amazingness of Lake Michigan near Indiana Dunes	3		

Indiana Dunes is not just something you think is man-made	1		
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Cluster Two:

Being out in the Smokies is a sanctuary and rather be there on a Sunday morning than anywhere else	2	Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a beautiful sanctuary that provides reminders of what is important and encourages individuals to experience powerful moments and discover the undiscovered in a homey, down to earth setting that is not man-made	<i>"Oh, come on, the oak trees, literally, I come on, the oak trees, literally, powerful. I mean, when you're in a , man-made building, ch-, church, a lot of churches are beautiful. There are some beautiful churches out there. I, but back home, my church because there was a big split off in my city for a church, our church. Our pastor didn't agree with the congregation, you know stuff like that happens so he split off and made his own church. So, for a while my church was literally a park. That's where our churches took place. And then it moved to a middle school gym and then, you know, it just started building, we have a building now, but, um, I, but I, feel like, when you're out here, there's just, such a, such more of, a homey feeling. You feel more, I don't want to sound cliché, but down to Earth. You're humbled here because there's things greater than you. You know, I couldn't put the oak trees here, only He can do that. Well, I mean, I guess if I planted one, but you know what I mean. And when a, if it's a worship setting out here, I feel</i>
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			<i>like for me personally, it's just so much more powerful and so much more surreal with Him because you're in His creation, you, in a church, you talk about His creation, but here you're in it, you know"</i>
Can't help but smile when seeing the Smokies and it's just so beautiful and you can't find this, you have to search for it and it just makes me happy	2		
Choosing to move to the Smokies	1		
Favorite is Charlie's Bunion in the Smokies	1		
Reflecting on the Smokies is a reminder of what's really important and what's not	1		
Seeing the Smokies is a reminder that there are so many things we don't know about and haven't discovered	1		
The merging of man and nature is kind of an	1		

interesting collision in the Smokies			
The Smokies is a favorite park	1		
The Smokies is a special place	1		
There is something about the Smokies	1		
Worship is so much more powerful in the Smokies than in a man-made building	1		

Cluster Three:

<p>A circle person where the same things happen to me over and over and a revived perspective is achieved or experience of anger and questioning and all of this is put to rest in nature, such as the Smokies and this occurred here</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The Smokies offers a view of history and groundwork that was completed to allow for individuals to feel overwhelmed, exhausted by the reflective view which something beyond made (i.e., God) and feel like they are wearing a weighted blanket while being renewed by the natural features which they never get tired of viewing</p>	<p><i>"My favorite's Charlie's Bunion now, I mean, there's, you got Cliff Tops and High Top and Myrtle Point that are much higher on the same mountain of LeConte. But Charlie's Bunion just thrusts you out there on a rock ledge, and again, I, I just say in awe, God just shows up and there's just this power that comes over you that just pulls you in to be quiet, to shout sometimes, a shout and just hear your echo, but you begin to recognize the power of, of the earth as, as it moved and formed the mountains. Man, the power of someone that that even created the rocks of the tectonic plates and and caused it all to shift and move. And and then you're standing on top of it thousands of years later and, um, h-, man, it's ju-, it, there's just this pr-, this consuming presence, it just en-, envelops you with this I, I mean, from all all your thoughts, from the beautiful sky to the, the foundation below to the marvel and mystery of the earth and the mountains of, the creation of the mountains. I mean, you just just recognize there's something so much bigger and and beyond and, and, again, continuing to say it's and then that something bigger and better and beyond created this for me to live in. Man, so that pulls me deeper into a more reflective, contemplative view"</i></p>
<p>A consuming presence envelopes you and then continuing to say that Something bigger and better and beyond created this for me to live in (i.e., God) and this pulls me into a deeper and more reflective,</p>	<p>1</p>		

contemplative view, such as being on Charlie's Bunion			
Feel content in the Smokies	1		
Get so overwhelmed by the beauty of the Smokies it exhausts me, but can't help but miss it when away	1		
In the Smokies for ministry and being able to share experiences with community in a place like the Smokies is just so incredibly unique	1		
It's like wearing a weighted blanket in the Smokies and I'm held down, secure and everything is good and I want to get lost in it	3		
Memories associated with the Smokies (e.g., marriage proposal)	1		
Need to slow down to see everything, because when you're in a car you miss it	1		
Never get tired of seeing things in the Smokies	1		

Piggybacking on the history of pioneering and church planting in Cades Cove through worship services in the Smokies and their groundwork allowed for services today	4		
Renewed and revived soul in the Smokies	2		
Something simple like a creek in the Smokies brings joy and happiness to so many people	1		
Thankfulness when seeing a sunset and other organisms or processes in the Smokies	2		

Cluster Four:

Authenticity and intentionality seen in the Smokies by God	1	Everything about Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a connection to God and He is seen everywhere in this location which displays His fingerprints, fills the hearts of individuals, and allows for the provision of peace, happiness, being speechless and moments of chiseling where individuals grow based on these experiences as an individual or community (i.e., gateway to	<i>"The divine hand that has made this and the more you ignore it, the more it's gonna get in your face and the more you're gonna see waterfalls and without even meaning to say it, you're gonna find yourself going, "oh, that was made like that's beautifully craft-, created". And you start using created words. And that's that's God crawling back into you saying, "hey, I am very apparent". And when Romans one says, He says that no, none are without excuse that all have seen God and all have ignored it, that's that's as much of a, a blessing as it is a warning. There is a very clear example of who God is. No one can say they have not heard. None can say they have not seen the beauty that God has created because it's there it's out there. And if you're willing to listen, if you put if you it's it's like water on a stream man, it's gonna erode, it's gonna cut, it's</i>
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		the community and ministry offerings)	<i>gonna, no matter how many walls no matter how many excuses you have for what you think how things should, the the world's gonna work, that's cool, the water's gonna keep flowing. It's gonna keep eroding through your walls and creating pathways into your soul and make you m-, and you can't help but be aware that there's a Creator"</i>
Being able to do a worship service in the Smokies is a way of seeing God	1		
Being able to take time to figure out who God is in moments in the Smokies	1		
Being able to talk about God safely in the Smokies is the biggest part of experiencing Him in this location	1		
Being in the Smokies fills your heart up and is an unexplainable feeling experiencing God in this location	1		

Common denominator of happiness and being carefree when seeing God in other people while they experience nature, such as Deep Creek waterfall at Cades Cove in the Smokies	1		
Didn't think I would ever have the opportunity to experience things like this (i.e., Smokies), but God made a way for me to be able to do that	1		
Elkmont in the Smokies is a special place based on it being secluded and you can really be by yourself with God	3		
Everything about the Smokies is a connection to God (e.g., water, plants, animals, mountains)	6		
Everything I see in the Smokies reminds me of Him and every time I see something new I see God over and over again	1		
Excited about where I get to go from here and where God is gonna lead after being in the Smokies	2		

Experience God in the Smokies based on how people have lived there and enjoyed it for generations and it is just transcendent through the ages and will continue to be here	1		
Experiencing God in the Smokies is peaceful	4		
Friend sending picture of past residence after the Gatlinburg fires and in the picture is a cross in the sky within the clouds and it does get emotional and recalls memories and feelings of reassurance that God was protecting us	1		
Get away from the hustle and bustle and just you and God in the woods in the Smokies and this is a peaceful thing	2		
God is everywhere in the Smokies, such as the trees, sun, sky, and even the weeds, isn't it all good	10		
God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent and the continuum of being in the Smokies with others and in fellowship	2		

God shows a new side to Himself in the Smokies	3		
God shows Himself as a father who created the trees for His children in the Smokies and to experience His presence in a place of refuge and recreation or a playground	2		
God shows Himself through the joy, laughter, and happiness through the Smokies	1		
God shows up because it is amazing that something like the Smokies exists and it's so green and there is so much happening	1		
God shows up through ministry in the Smokies and these people are a gateway through serving the community and being a light that God is projecting on these people	6		
God's continually chiseled out of my heart that the Smokies is where He wants me to work and get better	1		

God's making it accessible to everyone, specifically the Smokies and it shows His care for His people	2		
God's presence is so strong in the Smokies and results in finding self crying every time almost	1		
God's spirit just outpours and fills me up every time I am in the Smokies	1		
Gratefulness and feeling of being cared for by God showing Himself in nature, such as water flowing near Elkmont in the Smokies	1		
Happy that God has led people to preserve these places (e.g., national parks) and happy to do worship services in the Smokies and share it with everyone visiting	1		
Hearing, seeing, and smelling things of the Smokies brings forth experiencing God in the Smokies and is calming and rested in God	1		
If you want to ask God into your heart you can enjoy this (i.e., the Smokies) as much	3		

as I've enjoyed it, it's so peaceful and unexplainable			
Many parts of the world people can't worship God safely and it is a privilege to have that experience in the Smokies	1		
Meta creativity in the Smokies through God's creativity as a creator and His provision of intelligence for man to develop creative items	2		
Officiating weddings in the Smokies as a minister and being able to speak a blessing over a couple and a new life coming together is a unique experience as God pronounces a blessing	1		
Really cool to see how the Smokies attracts people and then people see God in the diversity of it	2		
Really do feel God moving in the Smokies	1		
Rendered speechless by a 'my God' moment in the Smokies and being awestruck when driving the Blue Ridge Parkway for	1		

example and seeing valley after valley			
See God in the Smokies through the birds flying over and people going about their daily business	2		
See God through other people who care for each other like a family and these relationships juxtaposed the beautiffulness of a waterfall in the Smokies and then seeing these human and nature relationships show how God works through different ways	2		
See God through the Blue Ridge Parkway	1		
See God's providence in the Smokies	1		
See how God planned the way the mountain formed and even where there is a natural dip in the small, small details in the Smokies	1		
See the beauty of God's creation everywhere in the Smokies and it's constant	2		

Seeing God in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Gatlinburg through issues He has pointed out to me and one is needing to take more solitude time and to be more kind and humble	1		
Seeing God in the mountains in the Smokies and overlooks, such as Clingmans Dome	2		
Surrounded by trees in the Smokies feels like a wash basin for Christ and His love and you can see His planning and His purpose	1		
The intricacy of God's creation in the Smokies is insane through Him putting so many things and moving parts together through nature and people	1		
The lighting of the Smokies in addition to how rooted the trees are and how established they are is a reflection of how the Lord knew they would be there and that I would be enjoying sitting here and listening to the sound of water	3		

The moss connects me to God because cannot see that in Colorado versus the Smokies	1		
The mountains at the Smokies increase your view of God and knowing He's so much bigger	2		
The river goes on and on just like God's love for us and saw this at Elkmont with the water flowing in the Smokies	2		
The Smokies connects me to God because He intended me to be in this place before the foundation of the world	1		
The Smokies has a beautiful representation of His creative work, a reflection of Him, as everywhere else also does	6		
The Smokies has a homey feeling where you feel down to earth and humbled because there's things that are greater than you and only God can do that	1		

The Smokies is a beautiful place, but driving through the spur which is owned by the National Park Service brings forth emotions concerning the fires which occurred and remembering tragic times and reflecting on the blessings of God through given safety	1		
The Smokies is greater than I and this is how God is connected to	1		
The sounds (e.g., birds, people, water, etc.) and the stillness of the Smokies connects me with God	2		
The vastness of the Smokies connects me to God	1		
Even seeing God in the little stuff in the Smokies, such as seeing families	3		
Those who do and do not live in the Smokies think right off the bat, oh God, and see Him immediately	1		
Through seeing the Smokies God is absolutely good, no doubt about it and He is all powerful	1		

To see the mountain (Mount LeConte) rise out of the ground and to shape the horizon is a great view of the natural world my creative God has made	2		
What makes the Smokies unique allows me to have the same connection to God, but just different things to worship Him and praise Him for and see things that cannot see where I live or other national parks (e.g., fireflies, bears, deer, etc.)	1		
When backing away into the trees or by the creek in the Smokies, this is where I feel connected to God	3		
Wonder if you're not a believer how you would feel in the Smokies and don't know how this would feel	1		
You can see God's finger prints all over the Smokies, especially Cades Cove, based on it being very, very unique (e.g., older, more vegetation, temperate, geology, etc.)	1		

You can't ignore the divine hand that has made the Smokies, the more you ignore it the more it's gonna get in your face and it's a clear example of who God is	1		
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Cluster Five:

The smell of the environment at Indiana Dunes brings peace and a connection to God	1	It is evident that God is greater and bigger through experiencing Indiana Dunes and the juxtaposed atmosphere of surrounding industrial settings and the silencing water which allows for individual growth and observation of God through other people in a way that provides hope	<i>"I definitely think the water connects me to God. The people. The silence in different moments. I even think I mean, maybe this is my extroverted self thinking, but the beaches were packed today and while that. You know, is opposite of solitude. I also get solitude out of that, like it fills me up in such a unique way where I am so encouraged by humanity, and like the potential we have, if we all believed in who we were capable of being and if we all saw ourselves for the beauty that we actually have and for what God sees in us. And if I think about that, I can I think about all those people there and I think about all the people, in the world, that's like it's hard to contain. How much hope I have for what God sees in us and what He thinks we're capable of"</i>
The smell of the environment at Indiana Dunes is a reminder to pause and reflect and know God's there and always with you	1		
The water and silence at Indiana Dunes connects me to God	4		

The juxtaposition of Indiana Dunes and surrounding industrial things connects me to God because of the beauty that you can see when you look	1		
Seeing the skylines of Chicago from Indiana Dunes is a display of God and how the lake looks like an ocean and how big it is and far it can go	1		
Seeing God through the people in Indiana Dunes	2		
Seeing God in people who were at the beach at Indiana Dunes and being fully present in the moment and experiencing so much joy and being in their element	1		
Packed beaches at Indiana Dunes connect me to God through thinking about them and what God sees in them	1		
Mount Baldy in Indiana Dunes is still moving and it's impressive how landscapes over time constantly evolve and get more beautiful and thus show how God is not predictable, it is ever-evolving beauty we will never see the end of	2		

Looking out from the dunes makes me in awe of God and how big He is and powerful He is to have made something this pretty in Indiana	2		
It is evident in Indiana Dunes that God is greater and bigger than can imagine and it's a new adventure here because there is so much unknown due to never being there before and there's always more to see	1		
Indiana Dunes is an unexpected place and is a pretty, new surprise where God is based on not expecting this form of experience which is shocking and jarring	1		
Having hard conversations with people you've never met before and serving a community together and seeing a really beautiful reflection of Christ within those moments and in the beauty of Indiana Dunes	4		
God's strength is perfect in my weakness and similar to being tired hiking up a dune at Indiana Dunes, but God is	1		

always there and it's a matter if I stop to see Him			
God created us all in a unique way and we all have different purposes and each landscape, such as Indiana Dunes, gives us a different perspective on life, such as the sand hills being harder to climb, but there's still beauty	1		
Finding serenity in Indiana Dunes and recognizing ongoing anxiety and taking ownership of it and laying at the feet of God and moving forward	1		
Everybody needs to come back and see Indiana Dunes for themselves and see the nature that God has created	1		

<p>Dunes which are moving and alive at Indiana Dunes reflect life as a Christian and growing, learning about God and being at a certain point of your journey and having a lot to offer and give to others during this process</p>	1		
<p>During COVID-19, people are seeking an escape and God and Indiana Dunes is a resource positioned near large urban centers</p>	1		

Cluster Six:

<p>Acknowledge nature is God's work and that He's done so</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>God is a master creator who is everywhere and can be experienced if individual's recognize His ever-present existence through obvious evidence in the diversity of nature which reflects His care, love, and provision for all individuals or communities who engage in nature-based experiences which will never return void (e.g., communing with Him through overtly contributing to His glory by praising and worshipping)</p>	<p><i>"I remember my friends and I hiked Mount LeConte very late at night, and I was honestly, the n-, the night was beautiful we had such gorgeous views and we all just started praying out loud, thanking God for it, singing. And again, God continually works in my heart whenever I'm not willing to listen. And I remember God showing me that morning we woke up and I knew we were gonna miss sunrise, it was super foggy. And I'm thinking to myself I w-, I, I woke up at five a.m., hiked up ten miles in the pitch-black night for a fog, it's just so dumb. I was so mad. And then I got up there and in my head I'm thinking "wow, there's better sunrises". But like it was so beautiful, and everyone with me was like just in awe of it, and I'm like, "maybe you're missing something here, maybe your arrogance, maybe your cloudiness is not letting you see God". And I got to sit there and just experience in those beauties in the Smokies experience how much God is so present and how beautiful it all is and how if we just are quiet. It's I mean, I do think that there's a very similar principle, where it's, I mean, scri, scri, scripture says that no word of God will return void no scripture reading will ever return empty, empty belief. I think the same applies in nature. I think that any time you spend in nature will never return void. I mean, everyone, every photographer, or hiker I know, out here in the Smokies always says you gotta go back to the same place like hundreds of times to get that perfect shot, to get that dream experience that like that like mir-, that miraculous sunrise to like post to Nat Geo about like it takes it takes perseverance. And I think that the more, same with God, the more time we spend with God the more we get to know Him. The more time I've spent out</i></p>
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			<p><i>here, the more I've seen, the many sides, the more times I hiked LeConte, the more times I see the beauty in it. The more times I drive these roads, the more I see, I see, "oh, I didn't know there was a road there, oh, that's a, there's bears there this time", like things change rapidly and the more, I listen to them the more I pay attention to them, the better I will experience them"</i></p>
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Addressing own arrogance and cloudiness to see God fully in the Smokies and experience how much God is so present and how beautiful it all is and how being in nature will never return void due to the more time spent with God the more you get to know Him	1		
Any location in nature, any song, any prayer can help position you to commune with God	1		
Being out there in it with your feet on the actual God-made ground is amazing	1		
Encouraged by humanity and the potential we have and seeing the beauty that we actually have and for what God sees in us	1		
Especially the setting of a national park allows you to have your quiet time with God	1		
Experiencing God through the next generation who is engaging in ministry (i.e., facilitating worship services)	4		
God is in everything	1		
God is definitely a people person	1		

God is everywhere I walk	1		
God is the master creator	2		
God showing Himself through the rain, the birds, the fog, the wet trees from the rain and the dark wood that it makes	5		
God shows Himself through the beauty of it all	2		
God takes time to look at us individual and allows us to participate in a relationship and provides for is and through all of this wonder how He has the time, but He does for us	1		
God's all strategized it out and we're uncovering it and there's no coincidences and this is cool to see	1		
Have a fear looking down the mountain, but I can feel God any time and I know He's there and He made this place and He knows we can handle it	1		
I would love to see more worship and praise and contributing to God's glory overtly by people in the parks, it's a wonderful place to experience God	1		

It always strikes me when I go to a national park how people don't believe in God when they're faced with obvious evidence that God created this universe and He loves us and put care into creating this diverse world for us	2		
It's almost like God is wooing you to spend time with Him in nature	1		
It's encouraging to see other believers who go to worship services in nature to worship God	1		
It's hard to contain how much hope I have for what God sees in us and what He thinks we're capable of	1		
Seeing God through the storm and thunder based on it being so great and terrifying and a reminder how small and insignificant I am, but at the same time how significant I am to God	1		
Seeing people and knowing some don't know about God and they don't experience Him out in nature and it makes me sad, but God still loves them	1		

Talking about God and answering questions makes me like 'oh, God'	1		
The array of colors (e.g., blue, gray, red, and yellow) in a sunset are really amazing and a reminder of God's greatness and awe	2		
The beauty of God's creation is everywhere and it's a matter of if we can see it or not	2		

Cluster Seven:

<p>A lot of times taking care of nature and people is conflicting and can sound that way</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Everything is intertwined and the environment is our home and source of well-being that requires a balance which involves a primary focus of protection, conservation (i.e., designation of national parks), increasing awareness of environmental and social justice issues, and enhancing education while allowing for use and any action which destroys the environment brings forth anger and recognition of deplorable reflections of human naivety</p>	<p><i>"Well, even before I was a believer, I've been pretty environmentally conscious, and I guess, the environment, um, taking care of what's been given to us. I love what the Lord's made. And I know that He has given us reign over it. He's given us, like, dominion to take care of these things. And I just know that for a long time it's been very exploited, and that sin nature has done a lot of things to the environment of, there's greed. So, you know, people are not following the regulations in place to actually take care of what they need to take care of and not have oil spills and not continue just destroying the rainforest and throwing stuff every, yeah. So, there's so many examples of just how broken our world is and how that is revealed in how people treat it and care for it. Because I think that a lot of selfish ambition comes first before thinking about how are my actions gonna like affect other people. Cause, I think that there's a lot of like environmental justice aspects as well, that it's a lot, not, that's a whole different thing. Yep. So, I've always been kind of conscious about what I'm doing and even just beyond environment, I, I think a lot that I just want to live my life in a way that is not going to, I never want my lifestyle, my actions, to have a, negative effect on others because of what I choose to do. And if that's, like, eating a plant-based diet, to avoid like, the extra methane that's produced by like cows and all of those things and the, the water usage with that, and buying, most of my clothes secondhand to avoid the like, fast fashion industry and the like, working conditions that a lot of those people are in, and like prison labor and things like that. I just try to stay, you know, a decent amount educated about those things and make sure that my consumption specifically isn't like I</i></p>
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			<p><i>don't want to be spending my money or putting things towards or things that don't align with what where my heart's at and what I want to see happening. Like, I want to be contributing to a world that I want to see. And that is very much in the environment that, like, things are going downhill very quickly. And I don't want to just be another person that, is offended, or, chooses convenience, just because it's what's known, and, and in doing so, just doing more harm"</i></p>
Accidents happen, but technology, wisdom, and knowledge could help	1		
Angered at landscapes being destroyed and human naivety	10		
Can get on a bandwagon or soapbox about environmentalism and the	2		

need to protect our environment			
Can't stand it when I hear about an oil spill in the gulf	1		
Companies making money instead of being transparent is deplorable	3		
Do your part regardless how small you think it is	1		
Environment is your immediate surroundings (e.g., family structure, community, or landscape)	1		
How we interact with the environment, whether for better or worse, is going to impact how we live in it	1		
I don't care about your political stance, the more we do to protect it, the better we are	4		
I recognize parks are great and I love their beauty, but I'm called to recognize the suffering people that were kicked off of their land and I have grief for this and it is a public issues and responsibility for actions if important in all generations	1		

If we don't appreciate what they have to offer us (i.e., the environment), we can destroy them either knowingly or unknowingly by not valuing them and so it has a major impact on our well-being and it's important to keep it as is or improve it if we can	3		
If we don't preserve it, it's gone and will never come back	3		
I'm happier and less tense in nature and I can relax	2		
It's a beautiful thing to not see people sometimes in nature	2		
It's all intertwined and have to find a balance between enjoying, protecting, and conserving for the future	11		
It's gonna look different for everyone, but encouraging awareness and education	3		
It's scary to think that when you consider our today's comforts they could sacrifice the beauty of the world in the future or the sustainability of it in the future	3		

Make something better for your generation and it will work longer and this mindset should be used in other pro-environmental issues	1		
Nature is my home	1		
People are not following regulations and taking care of what they need to take care of	1		
People are part of the environment too	1		
Smile in nature and feeling grateful while looking up	1		
The ancestors made sure the environment was taken care of and they had this intent and we've kind of destroyed a lot of it	1		
The environment has is micro and macro and the macro is life-sustaining	1		
The environment is important	1		
The environment means a lot because it's where we live and where we are and it's special to see how everything works together and depends on each other, it's fascinating	4		
The environment means everything	2		

The one thing the government got right is the national parks	1		
The Smokies is beautiful and lucky and no matter what is going on, we still have this and it'll still be here (i.e., creation)	1		
There is a lot of environmental justice issues	1		
Trip to the Smokies has made a switch in my heart and grown my love for nature and His creation more	1		
We are all people of this planet and we all share this home that connects, feeds, and nurtures us	2		
We are so focused on today and ourselves that we do not take into account more than society at large and thinking about future generations	4		
We can do things without altering the environment too much (e.g., building homes if people need a place to live, build a highway, etc.)	1		
We live on one planet and we have a long way to go before we find another one and we are given care of one planet	1		

When think about the environment, think of science (e.g., greenhouse gases, pollution of water and air, etc.)	1		
Where you live influences your perspective in everything and especially nature	3		

Cluster Eight:

Religious beliefs focus on more on people due to the earth being new one day, but this doesn't mean to wear out the environment because we need to take care of it	1	The environment was graciously given by God and religion, either heavily or partially, is the filter by which nature is viewed and an obligation is perceived to take care of creation and better steps need to be taken to reverse the actions of a fallen world which will be made new one day, but this does not suspend the responsibility of completing biblically-motivated actions and sharing this rhetoric through pro-environmental behaviors	<i>"Well, with the stars, they've always been something that's super meaningful to me because, they're an enigma, honestly, and the fact that God has created those for us to use and, and have at night, and I, know that that is something super important to Him, and then when I when I hear about or when I experience the difference in cities, the air pollution that gets in the way of seeing the stars, experience God um, it's like, it's like I just want to defend Him. I want to defend Hi-, His creation, His honor, because the stories are amazing, they're, beautiful and, and we destroy it. And so, I want to do what I can to stop air pollution from happening. However, I have not ever acted on that. So, I'm just at the start of, of this belief, like of wanting to take action instead of just believing things, but taking action in it but, experiencing God in that"</i>
Religious beliefs inform environmental perceptions based on connecting humanitarian, ecological, and stewardship efforts	1		

Religious beliefs inform environmental perspectives heavily	3		
My spirituality is concerned with trying to disprove things that aren't correct and substantiate things I know based on knowledge and read sources, such as the delicate balance between man's existence and that of nature around us	1		
My religion is the filter through which I process and perceive the world around me	4		
My religious beliefs and environmental perspectives brought me to the Smokies to do ministry	4		
Every major book in the Bible in some way deals with the fact that nature is part of our life	1		
A lot of Christians think this world will be done away with based on beliefs, but I am a Christian and my beliefs inform that we do have to take care of this world	1		

A lot of times conservatives don't appreciate the environment, but I am from a conservative background and we are called to be good stewards and to take care of it	2		
Feeling an obligation towards the care of the environment	1		
I say biblically-motivated rhetoric around the environment is great, but I don't know that I've ever heard anyone really preach it	3		
Modern times have begun to remove spirituality as even a facet of our life and there is a danger to that because the world always has a spiritual capacity to it	1		
The creation story is in Genesis (i.e., Adam and Eve stewarding the garden) and then humanness messed this up and it's just constantly taking our needs and desires into account more than the environment itself	9		
The environment is something that was so graciously given and it needs to be taken care of better	12		

There may be correlation but don't know if there's causation for religious beliefs and how they inform environmental perspectives	1		
We live in a fallen world which will be made new and returned to the Garden of Eden, but doesn't suspend responsibility, but puts it into a place or perspective meaning the environment	1		

Cluster Nine:

With technology and knowledge, the means to do things without altering nature to the point of devastation could be plausible	2	Behaviors which focus on furthering missions to preserve the environment, whether through big or little actions, are important because individuals are called to be stewards and not consumers and therefore it is integral to not be afraid to speak out and educate while handling dominion over nature in a responsible manner that is preventative (e.g., Leave No Trace, put land aside, focus on well accepted science, consume less, do not litter, reduce, reuse, recycle, etc.) and aims to minimize impact on	<i>"I think we are stewards, not consumers. And I think we are to, to shepherd and manage what God's given to us. And I know I don't know the terminology, but it was like no carbon footprint or no footprint. So anyway, I think that you should leave the way you came in and not leave a mark where you were. And so, you know, like here we're sitting at this picnic table and I see cigarette butts and I see trash and, and that's leaving a footprint where, you know, those behaviors encourage others to do the same. And then it just kind of grows. So, it's way easier to disregard nature and just treat it like your trash can. It's much more difficult to leave no footprint because you've got to stop and go behind yourself and make sure. But I think it's the responsible stewardish, stewardship thing that we can do and managing our resources and not abusing our planet. It's what we should do, all of us"</i>
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		spaces as to not have negative effects and allows future generations to enjoy creation	
You are what you leave behind, so leave behind love and peace to show your heart and do this in consideration of the environment	2		
You can do something to stop it and you can do it daily	3		
We should take care of nature and people too	1		
We should do as little as possible, as little as necessary to alter nature	1		
We have been given dominion over nature, but we have a responsibility to take care of it for ourselves and future generations	7		
We are stewards and not consumers	1		

Treat the environment like an important resource	1		
Think of Leave No Trace and especially in relation to national parks	9		
Thinking of other places and ways to handle trash other than trash cans when you generate a lot of trash	1		
Through professional choice, hope to work with renewable resources	1		
The principles dealing with love, kindness, and patience have to do with how I want to care for the environment	3		
Take care of the environment, but in a wise way	3		
Taking actions (e.g., voting) to weigh the pros and cons to decide what is best for both parties	1		
Rethink what I'm doing and pushes me to be better because I there's a way I could live better within the environment as it is (e.g., moving beyond science and see what's next)	1		
Responsibility to act on it and not be afraid to speak	9		

out, you've got to speak and educate			
Reminder to be more proactive environmentally (e.g., picking up trash)	2		
Reduce, reuse, recycle	1		
Pro-environmental behaviors are agendas and it's a part of personal expressions and it's a very healthy thing because it challenges us to consider our own perspectives and boundaries	1		
Pro-environmental behaviors are good things, but sometimes people make them no good things	1		
Pro-environmental behaviors are personal to everyone	2		
Pro-environmental behaviors are preventative (e.g., we need to consume less)	1		
Pro-environmental behaviors are sustainability and conservation	5		
Pro-environmental behaviors benefit the environment	5		
Pro-environmental behaviors could come from just how you were raised	1		

Pro-environmental behaviors should be founded on well accepted science and they are important	1		
Putting land aside as the population is growing	1		
Never been huge into the conservationist movement, but fully support the movement and would like to start getting involved	1		
Not too many momentous events, but choosing to be mindful of yourself in space and complete various actions (e.g., not littering, eat more plant-based, do not leaves fires unattended)	3		
Man builds homes and moves out	1		
Missions to preserve the environment and completing little things to make a big impact (e.g., not bringing in firewood into the national park)	14		
Implementing national parks and keeping those maintained	1		
If you take it into nature, you bring it back	1		

I never want my lifestyle, my actions, to have a negative effect on others because of what I choose to do	1		
Even creating national parks we have an impact and should try to minimize in these spaces to enjoy the beauty now and for future generations	1		
Don't litter	1		
Don't understand people drilling for oil and all that stuff	1		
Conservation of wildlife, game, and fisheries is huge	2		
Coyotes present based on building homes	1		
Cleaning up parks and wanting to do more so people could take refuge in these spaces and in God's creation and having this inspire others to help clean up parks	2		
Carrying poop bags for animals is a pro-environmental behavior	1		
Being aware and wanting to do better and learn more about caring for the environment	7		

Believe in supporting the parks, such as through the Great Smoky Mountains Association and further Trout Unlimited	1		
Insight through knowledge advancements over time and pushing me to understand it better	1		

Cluster Ten:

A lot of times I experience God in nature and it's in the untouched places and it makes me want to protect these places and I want them to continue to exist for other people to feel this way and connect to God in that way	2	<p>The environment is appreciated more based on a connection with God and a recognition that He is knitted in creation and specifically designed everything and it is within nature where He is experienced and therefore this highlights our call to environmentalism and stewardship by Him for protecting these resources to not dishonor His private property and limit the fullness of His beauty, creativity, and closeness especially based on mandates in the Bible provided to protect His gifts and it should be gut</p>	<p><i>"Mount Rainier National Park with a group of ladies as yourself, for the first ever Women in the Wilderness and we our stewardship activity was getting to be Meadow Rovers, which is really cool. So, we got to you know count the people that were up on the meadow and help educate them on stewarding the land because so many people were taking selfies with the wildflowers and that had become a very popular thing. You know, Instagram was blown up with selfies of wildflowers and these beautiful places, which is fine. However, the wildflowers are not on the path. And the more people that walk off the path into the wildflowers, the more the wildflowers die and then they're not there for future generations, or future people or even next week's visitors to see, and so, I feel like in that moment, you know, being with a group of ladies praising God in this beautiful place, we were already very connected to God. We were praying. We were singing we were hiking and then watching just how many people were literally just, s I feel like in that moment, you know, being with a group of ladies praising God in this beautiful place, we were already very connected to God. We were praying. We were singing we were hiking and then watching just</i></p>
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		wrenching when the beauty is negatively impacted	<i>how many people were literally just, to like have this, like, impulse within me that just says, "Ah, stop, don't do that" like, which I think is kind what God calls us, too, with, environmentalism or with, you know, stewardship as it should be such a gut wrenching like, "Oh, gosh", like, the land is so beautiful. We have to protect it. God is so beautiful, and He's so reflected here that we need to like lift that up. And so, I guess that's how I would see God within that is just when I see it going well, God is reflected really well. And when it's not going well, it's soul crushing"</i>
Anything nature makes me think of God	3		
Appreciate nature more because of connection with God and it's where I feel at home, comforted, peaceful, and reassured and that God's got me and everything's gonna be ok and can bring forth emotions (e.g., crying)	12		
As a Christian, I believe that it is God's creation	1		

Creation is God's house and you want to keep it like a house, you don't go and destroy it	2		
Dishonoring to God when not protecting what He gave us	3		
Do things for the environment, because that is what God would want you to do and you do it for Him	1		
Encountering God when people tell stories about fires in Gatlinburg and prayers are shared as a result of this devastation	1		
Everybody is here for many purposes, but one reason is to preserve what God has created	2		
Examine life more after becoming a believer and wading through everything the Lord has given and figuring how to live in the fullness in this and how to do not bad things for the earth in life and this is kind of rebuilding pieces of my life with the Lord	1		
Experiencing God in nature is love, joy, a divine	2		

presence, and can be really hard to describe			
Feel closer to the Lord in nature	2		
Feel own heart break because God's heart breaks when His creation is negatively impacted	1		
Feeling spoiled and underserving of God's creation	1		
Focus more about people and where they are in their relationship with Christ	2		
Focus on God and don't let satan influence aspects of environmental situations	1		
God calls us to environmentalism or stewardship and it should be like a gut wrenching 'oh, gosh' when seeing things because the land is so beautiful and we have to protect it	24		
God created all that is around us and informs view of the environment	1		
God created nature so we need to take care of it and therefore it is important because he made it and I feel	3		

His presence in those spaces and feel those connections			
God created you for a specific purpose and for me, I care about the environment and that's something that I try to bring awareness to people and take care of the earth	1		
God has called us to something greater than normal	1		
God identifies Himself as knitted into nature in scripture and we should be concerned about it if He is so involved	1		
God is guiding and there is a level of security and freedom that is unparalleled to anything that I've experienced prior to Christ and it gives life, life, and feeling this through being in nature (e.g., a warm breeze)	1		
God is in nature and this is enough for me to say this is worth protecting and His presence is overwhelming in these spaces	1		

God is not bog brother watching you, but it's sometimes helpful to see Him that way when you have little moral issues arise	1		
God really shows me a certain level of outdoor activities and helps me apply it to real life	1		
God told us to take care of nature	1		
God wants us to use creation, but be mindful that it is a shared community	3		
God will take care of nature	1		
God wouldn't have made nature if He didn't like it and therefore I am biased towards it because He created it and looking forward to seeing His creation	1		
God-motivated and biblically-motivated actions are very good reminders that we are to steward the earth	4		
God's creation is perfect and He has control, but we humans have to make conscious decisions and it's a shame that His creation could be vastly different than	7		

what He intended it to be in the future			
God's power is so eye opening in the diversity of nature and He can wash away any struggles as the water washes over the pebbles in the river	2		
Greater appreciation of the environment because I'm more spiritually connect to it because I recognize God has created every single little thing and it makes me care even more and everything within (e.g., nature and humans)	5		
I don't see it as a stupid tree, I see it as something God made and something that is beautiful and something to be respected and I can learn from	1		
I love the Lord, I love that He created creation and I see it as a gift and want to take care of that gift	1		
I see, hear, and read about God in nature and go to nature and He moves	1		

If a tree is a safety concern then this should be considered, but it shouldn't if it is for development and there needs to be more consideration because God tells us to protect the environment	1		
Incredible to be free through Jesus's blood and free to explore His creation	2		
Instances where I've experienced God in nature mean so much to me and a lot of other people and to be able to experience that, we have to take care of nature	10		
It is basically devaluing what God created if we do not take care of it	1		
It's a chain reaction and God's like 'hey, I gave you a house of cards and you didn't tend it, it's gonna fall over, you can fix it, but it's falling over, what are you going to do about it' and this is where my environmentalism passion came from	1		
It's all a lesson in nature with God	1		

It's important to follow directions, such as those given by a park ranger for safety reasons, and this applies to God as well and Him telling us to protect His creation	1		
It's like taking a hammer to one of the most beautiful gifts you could ever be given and that just seems messed up to me when actions damage the earth God has given	1		
It's one of God's first mandates in the Bible to take care of the earth	5		
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind or strength and love your neighbor as yourself and if I'm going to love other people, I don't want them to see trash in nature so they can enjoy it to its fullest potential	1		
More things in nature is where I keep going towards and therefore keep going towards God	2		

My appreciation for the wonder of nature is probably greater than most people who don't have a connection with God because as opposed to an accident, I see it as intentional and specifically designed	3		
My religious beliefs give justification and emphasis because I what I do has a greater impact, because it's not just about me, it's preserving, protecting, and being a steward of God's reflection in nature	2		
Religious beliefs enhance perception of the environment and it is made by God and strengthens perceptions of the environment	1		
Repetitive cycle of you and God and appreciating His creation and then allowing that environment to influence how I behave in life	2		
Responsibility to take care of the environment based on God putting man in charge of it to take care of it and use it	11		

See the environment as benevolent based on connection with God	2		
Seeing God in nature is something that there's nothing better in the world that you would want to feel	1		
Seeing God take care of everything in nature and wish I could have taken advantage more of specific locations while there in the past and realizing this	1		
Somebody made creation and it wasn't just an accident, it was made by God	1		
Sweet reality of living with Christ and watching Him transform you and refining life to be more like Jesus	1		
Taking care of the environment to the best of our ability, but also not elevating this above worshipping the Creator and enjoying what He gave us to enjoy	4		
Taking positive steps for the environment and keep spaces untouched for people to enjoy God's beauty and also keep God's beauty alive	5		

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, so why would I do that to God's property because it would be so insulting to disregard it	1		
The environment can be struggling right now, but there is a hope because there is a bigger Creator and hope in all this and moving forward to reduce degradation	1		
The environment is the world we get to live in and if we don't take care of it, we're gonna limit what God's beauty looks like (e.g., example involving Cuyahoga National Park)	11		
The example of how Jesus loved people and the things around Him (i.e., environment) and learning about this example	2		
The intricacy and diversity of God's creation is humbling and you might miss it if you don't look	1		
The world sits in God's hands and He is still here and He is still moving in our lives and this is comforting	1		

based on Him being our shepherd			
There is a disconnect when trash is present in nature and this interferes with experiencing God	2		
There is a God who is above my momentary existence and it drives me to be a better steward and recognize it was all given out of love and a creative perfection	2		
There's a lot of things in nature that you can relate back to our growth in our walk with Christ	3		
There's no specific examples of God saying don't litter, there are things that are directly informed by our faith more just a mindset	1		
To desecrate the environment is to desecrate God's holy temple	1		
We are called to earthly caregivers and to evangelize to people and remove the distractions (i.e., trash and etc.) that pollute the world and help people to purely enjoy God's creation	2		

We are on God's private property that He is leasing to us	3		
We are so important to God and this is also true for nature	2		
We are to shepherd and manage what God has given	1		
We are underserving of Jesus's blood and His creation	1		
We can interact with people and be social animals, but there's also time to escape from everything and just sit in the woods and admire creation, no matter where, everything He's done	1		
We should do our best to protect God's creation and conserve it to allow other people to experience His creation	9		
What if everybody got together and prayed and felt like here is what God wants us to do based on Him communicating	1		

What we have is what God intended us to have and your platform becomes important in addition to your voice and therefore choosing action to protect the environment (e.g., signing a petition and using scriptural information to inform this choice)	1		
When I look at the environment, it's not just science it's creation and I have a personal relationship with the Creator	1		
When I see and commune with God it drives me into nature where it all began	1		
When I'm out in nature I think I get more virtues of what God wants us to be and therefore show love to God's people for example	1		
When in nature, think about this is what God did	1		
Zero-waste movement and involved in this especially based on how it ties really well with Christianity and how God called us to care for the earth	2		

Really bringing me out here (i.e., Smokies) to where I can really experience more of His creation and it's a different 'wow' perspective	1		
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Cluster Eleven:

A feeling of closeness when reading scripture about God and His creation	3	<p>While not fully reflective of everyone, when reading the Bible in nature, a closeness to God is felt by most in His creation which is observed as a gift from the Christian heart and head place and in these moments snippets of His love, sovereignty, power, mercy, and personality can be observed through the surrounding characteristics (e.g., rainbow observed as a promise of life from Him, birds, moss on rocks, trees falling, etc.) and the biblical-based text and worldview informs how these features did not happen by chance and was designed by God and therefore this is observed in the "ingredients of heaven" (e.g., love, trees, fruit, rivers, tree frogs that sing, the ecosystem, precious</p>	<p><i>"I feel the word that came to mind is "giddy" because I'm just and so grateful that I finally get to see the world this way. Like before I was a believer, I enjoyed creation. Like I went to more parks, I went to more national parks as a non-believer than I have as a believer. I think, probably, and I of course, enjoyed it and like, it's hard not to enjoy the national parks. They're gorgeous. But now I get to come with it with such a different perspective and such a different heart and head place that I'm just like it makes me so excited because I'm like, man, I get to, like, see so much more in this now. And instead of just going to a place that's really pretty and enjoying it, I get to be like, "wow, like my Dad made me this like this is a gift to me and He wants me to enjoy every piece of it". And um just thankful to, to have been able to like even though I wish I would have started following Him sooner, um grateful that I'm here now"</i></p>
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		stones, etc.) or diversity which can leave an individual awestruck or sad based on processing emotions and giving these situations to God and His care	
A lot of reading in the mountains	1		
Always pick a book to read when away in nature	1		
At peace and can be raw with God in nature	2		
Bald eagles flying is a reminder of how great God is	1		
Allowing yourself to be in the moment in nature and experiencing God	1		

Before being a believer, enjoyed creation and visited national parks, but came with a different perspective when becoming a believer through a different heart and head place to see much more of it now and be like 'wow, my Dad made this like this is a gift'	1		
Experiencing God in nature is full of awe and awesome	1		
Experiencing God in nature can also be ugly with confusion, mystery, anger, and questions about 'why do you do things, God, why is this the way it is', such as Job asking about bad things that happen or Ecclesiastes talking about repetition and circularity	1		
Experiencing God in nature through connections to scripture involving creation praising God by just existing even if you can't hear them	1		
Experiencing God in nature, such as a national park, expands it so much more	1		

Going through the Bible, such as the Old Testament, and evaluating the historicity of it and believing that God created the world through the evolution of time	1		
Have no fear and feel perfectly safe because God takes care of all things, such as when bad weather comes (e.g., tornadoes)	7		
Having a playful connection with God where you say 'Abba, like, you really showed off' when in nature and being in complete awe and like dumbstruck	1		
Hearing God through the sounds of nature (e.g., birds, moss on rocks, trees falling, etc.) and those are snippets into who God is and His love, mercy, and personality	1		
Mostly connect to the Lord in nature	2		
Nature is a planned, created system	1		
Nature is calming especially when a very stressed out person and relate this to scripture	1		

Nature is like an easter egg hunt where you see different elements that are all described in God's palace	1		
Nature is the best way to enjoy a relationship with God	1		
Nature is the kingdom of God, the actual place	1		
Nature is the place where I feel most comfortable to feel and be vulnerable	1		
Not everyone feels God as strongly in nature, but I certainly do and Genesis informs lifestyle of taking care of creation for future generations to enjoy	1		
Not sure if literary sources have contributed to God's presence in nature with me	1		
Safe and confident looking at the trees because of there's stuff this beautiful here, can't imagine what it's gonna be like in heaven	1		
See things and you think 'wow, God is, just was really brilliant'	1		
Whether you want to say it's science or someone created it, still somebody made the science (i.e., God)	1		

When thinking about nature and the Bible, I think a lot about shepherding and how the sheep are so pure and how pure nature is and how cared for both are by God	1		
When I really connect with God, it's always in nature and this is modeled in the Bible through Moses and the burning bush on top of the mountain, Jesus on top of the mountain, David and the field where he was anointed	1		
When in nature, I'm experiencing God in a completely different way and it doesn't necessarily have to do with the Bible except if I think of a scripture	2		
We're God's creation, He is our father, and knowing that it is a connection	1		
What it took for life to exist on earth in the forms that it is, the odds of that happening just like chance, too many zeros	4		
Thinking about the care of God and nature provides peace and contentment	3		

The rainbow is a promise from God and yes there is scientific evidence for how rainbows are made similar to a lot of things, but I have to believe that there's a reason God showed us multiple rainbows at once during an experience and thinking about Noah	1		
The idea of being in awe of God and what He has created exclaims like He is here	1		
The ingredients of heaven are love, trees, fruit, rivers, tree frogs that sing, the ecosystem, and precious stones for example	1		
The diversity of nature and feeling a peaceful calmness	1		
Take every moment and sit there and be like glory, power, majesty, salvation, creator, God of all things	1		
Spending more time than would otherwise and saying 'Lord what do you want me to learn next' when reading in nature	1		
Stare up at the sky and compelled to worship and pray because there's so much	1		

beyond what we are and who we are			
Something that is blatantly clear is that God is real and something didn't come from nothing and scriptures is just trusting that He's there	1		
Some of the ways of feeling in nature are 'whys' and (e.g., good and bad things) eventually there's just isn't a good reason anymore and you have to take on faith God has a good reason	1		
Some things you are blind to until you have the knowledge, such as God's creation and the Bible, and then with the knowledge acquired you do not take things for granted (e.g., nature)	1		
Seeing animals can give purpose based on being reminded of God's purpose	1		
Reading the Bible about God's creation and how beautiful it is and how He created it all for us makes me appreciate it more and be in nature more	3		

Reading the Bible in nature that God created is a place where I can feel more spiritually connected and is more influential	1		
Noticing the galaxies and stars in nature versus when at home and these have references in the Bible, such as the lion, bear, and God casting those things	1		
Look at nature, God created it, He created us and He's got us, we don't have to worry	1		
Looking at different things in nature and taking pictures is fascinating	1		
Joy and purpose come to mind when experiencing God in nature and used these in sermons	1		
It's the diversity of nature and how God is shown	1		
In Olympic National Park grieving the loss of a loved one and having an epiphany that 'I'm here to love these people because they don't know God and they're hurting just as bad' during hard moments and books might have led to this	1		

I'm a small person, but I have such a big voice in this nature and in God's creation (e.g., national park)	1		
How similar God made nature to our daily life, He designed everything to serves as a mirror	1		
I love thinking about what the Garden of Eden was like before sin fell and if I love this earth this much right now, I can only imagine what it had looked like before sin entered the world	2		
Having taken biblical resources out into nature yet, but going to try	1		
Getting more out of the text when reading it in nature based on getting a tangible way to practice what is being said in contrast to reading a book in the backyard or indoors	2		
Freeing being in nature and feeling lifted	1		
Feel so at peace in nature and being able to actually picture what verses are describing when in nature is helpful	2		

Drawn to chill naturey verses in the Bible because they provide reminders of how much God loves us and makes me want to be outside more	1		
Don't know how anyone could look at nature (e.g., plants, animals, stars) and think 'wow, this is just a lucky beautiful coincidence'	1		
Care of creation a lot of times is not really emphasized and even if you don't believe in climate change it's so important to take care of the earth and steward the resources that God has given us in a responsible way	1		
Being still and taking in nature is a favorite thing and is a big reminder that God will guide you continually and this brings so much peace, comfort, joy, and don't have to worry about anything else	1		
Being in the Smokies, a national park, and anywhere in nature shows it is beautifully woven together	1		

and there's no other explanation than God			
Being in nature and being present, noticing everything (e.g., people walking by or the trees blowing) is a very presence of being in nature and could results in connections (i.e., read a sentence about a bird flying over and then notice an eagle in nature)	2		
Being in nature forces you to slow down on all fronts	1		
God's creativity and sovereignty is so evident in nature and no one is without excuse	4		
God's design can be seen and the orderliness of all that exists	3		
God sent a rainbow as a sign of love and peace and that He as promised would never flood the earth again	2		
God shows His power and mercy by controlling the one thing no one else can control and that is nature	3		

God uses symbols in nature to inspire us based on His love for us	1		
God uses wilderness as a constant spiting a little bit to shake us out of our routine, you don't have it under control and God says that He has bigger things out in nature that are bigger than us and therefore He shows His power and peace as well	1		

Cluster Twelve:

All things work together and this is a God thing which may be observed as a coincidence for those who do not identify as Christians	1	God reveals Himself and what is in the heart of an individual through the Bible, His word, within this fundamental connection and they are provided with a knowing that He is bigger than any trials, He is both a father (e.g., provider and protector) and mother (e.g., loving and nurturing), author and creator of all that is good, the "glue" that holds everything together, one who walks here, one who never contradicts Himself, one who fills your heart to the brim with love, and one who designed	<i>"I believe that God is-, God is my King, my, my Lord, my Ruler. Um, I believe that He is sovereign and so, I trust Him with my life more than I trust my own, decisions, or at least I try to do that, I don't always get that right, but at the same time, I also would say that, um, my connection to God is also similar to, a child and their father. I would say I acknowledge God, as my father, protector, Provider, are kind of things that I kind of also would like put in with like the, father figure. I also think that God takes a role as mother as well. I believe that God is very nurturing and loving and caring in ways that mothers are, so that's like another kind of dynamic of a relationship. I think that the Bible especially also can connect or interpret my connection with God as like a friendship, and I, I believe that God is my friend. I believe that God is my friend when I like, especially in times in my life when I didn't have, any or many friends, God was a friend to me and so, God is able to play all of those roles, simultaneously, and also, like, in different moments of my life, I'll see God as more of</i>
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		everything with a purpose and this point can be seen in all that exists	<i>like, oh, I see how God was a father then, or like I see how God was like a mother to me then or, I see how God was a friend then, or like I see in this situation where God was sovereign, and He was my Lord. And it all just kind of jumbles cause God is God and He does what God does"</i>
Being able to own a Bible and open up His word is the fundamental source of connection	1		
Becoming fully aware what God is doing for you despite moments when you are not communicating well with God and saying 'thank you' to Him for being there	1		
Being able to realize that everything I see and touch ultimately is from God and this helps me make that connection even more	1		
Being calm and knowing God is the only one who can handle it and never been failed yet	1		

Being one hundred percent God exists, but beyond that there are many uncertainties and reading texts or the Bible allows for space to process and ask hard questions and this plays into relationship with God	1		
Feel God's presence in nature and go there when hurting because He is the healer and recognizing own brokenness then re-choosing to be joyful when feeling hurt again and this process is easier in nature where God is felt	1		
Feel like I'm on fire and love reading specific scripture so much it makes me full of joy, peace, and cannot wait to see how God is moving and how He has moved so much	1		
Feeling small and overwhelmed by the size of things, but it's comforting knowing that God is bigger and bigger than any trials	2		
Getting emotional leading first sermon and feeling like the Holy Spirit come because of experienced emotions and how surreal it was	1		

God bridges the gap between a lot of people and things, if not everything	1		
God brings uses the wilderness to shake what we believe in	1		
God gave us everything we need, He puts us here to enjoy and have communion with creation (i.e., nature)	2		
God gives verses to encourage us to walk with Him	1		
God has changed the course of history more than anybody else even though it is denied by some people	1		
God has us here for a purpose, you're not just here randomly, God created us each person to do something	1		
God is a designer who made all of this to make a point and if you look for that point, you're gonna find it, it's gonna be there	2		
God is a father figure and the Bible is a connection that provides knowing that God created you to love you and fulfill whatever He wants for your life	1		

God is gracious and gives us maps, safeties, and guidelines through the Bible	1		
God is my father (e.g., provider and protector) and also shows as a mother figure as well (e.g., loving and nurturing)	1		
God is not always a loud voice, God is when we're quiet	1		
God is the author and creator of all good things and this planet is certainly a good thing	1		
God is the glue that holds everything underneath even though He may not be at the forefront	1		
God is the way, the truth, and the life	1		
God knows everything by name	2		
God made us all by His hands and His grace and mercy	1		
God meant for a cycle of rebirth through resurrection or a symbiotic relationship between birds, trees, bees, and flowers to represent us and God	1		

God of the scriptures foreshadowed all of this and this is observed through the holy land and how people seek it as their holy space and how significant God is to each of us	1		
God reveals Himself through creation and results in someone looking at it and saying 'nope, not just from a single-celled organism'	1		
God reveals Himself through His word	4		
God will reveal what's in your heart and if you want it badly, pray it for someone else and your heart will turn away from any stresses, such as feeling tired, and God's glory will shine and your heart will be filled to the brim with love	1		
If a word is given, you know it's from God because He will never contradict Himself and it will always be of love to build you up based on Him wanting you to live better than you are now	1		

It's never a feeling of shame or guilt, it's an opportunity of growth and to connect more with God or learning more about Dad when reading scripture	1		
It's supportive and deep of the words of God come out of the mouth of God's child	1		
Know God better through scripture to dig deeper and have a deeper relationship with Him	3		
Live in the moment and allow God to speak through those moments	1		
Putting things into God's hands continually and will continue to do that	1		
Quiet time is unhurried time with the Lord	1		
Recognizing God walks here and steps out of heaven onto earth, He is here through literature	1		
The longer you walk with God, you're able to enjoy and love in deeper and deeper ways	1		
We have to acknowledge we're broken and feelings, but God made us to be more	1		

than just those feelings and to choose to enter into joy			
Wrestling with doubts about God and His character because we can't fathom someone Who's perfect	1		
There's so many things that are taken care of and done by God before we even know it's going to happen	1		
Similar to climbing a mountain in a national park, the journey of our walk with Christ involves hard work to get to those mountaintop moments and all the while knowing who we were created to be	1		
During camping trip in West Virginia, scriptures involving questions of 'why' (i.e., Job) came up due to hard moments and seeking answers to current position and inquiries about being placed in certain situations	1		
Emotions vary when reading the Bible (e.g., joyful, meditative, or sadness)	1		

Encouraged to constantly be looking for resources to ask hard questions and closer to God when realizing how far away we are from Him and trying to take every step to get closer to Him is something that is wanted	2		
Enter into the feelings of authors in the Bible (e.g., David) and recognize for self, but feel connected to the entire body of Christ through this as well and further can complete similar actions (e.g., David trusted in the Lord and so can I)	1		

Cluster Thirteen:

At the end of the day, you being to realize that there's things you have to take on faith	2	The Bible is living, breathing, can cause an individual to fall on their face crying and be raw with God, and can change people's lives when they engage in the text and through varying processes (e.g., praying, reading the biblical-based information, potentially consulting other sources, checking the outside sources with the foundational details of the Bible, journaling, pouring	<i>"I feel like a lot of the books that I read constantly point me back to Scripture and so like I start with the Bible and then I'll like I'll read like a book, like on the side, like obviously in like my like just like my free time. But a lot of the books that I read, like, point me back to Scripture. So, I'm constantly like doing a cycle like kind of like prayer, almost like I'm reading the Bible and then reading this book on the side and then like it'll mention a Scripture. So, then I'll kind of just look it up. And so, it's kind of just like one of those things that like if I, it's constantly like, I don't know, pouring, my-, myself back into, like God's word every time, like I'm reading like a different chapter"</i>
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		<p>themselves back into God's word, etc.) and ultimately looking through a biblical lens instead of a human lens which will fall short and be doctrinally insufficient to the spiritual nourishment which the Bible provides for individuals and can serve as a source of encouragement for not only those who identify as Christians, but all</p>	
<p>If you cannot grow, study the Bible and you will feel the connection because it's a living and breathing, not dormant like every other book here, it's alive and can change people's lives</p>	2		
<p>Jesus went out on His own to pray and sought out nature to commune with His Father</p>	1		
<p>Relating scripture to every day, such as work</p>	1		
<p>Trying to figure out what I believe and why I believe it and then connecting that to my relationship with God through the Bible and different perspectives</p>	2		

Worship and prayer become deeper because of the Bible and more affected and see God more clearly in the Bible in comparison to when you were younger	1		
When you read something so powerful, it carries a lot of weight in your life	1		
When meeting with others, productive discussions that are intellectual and spiritual through a thought-provoking way is due to God being the centerpiece and it always is	1		
Setting time aside to be intentional and have quiet time when reading	1		
Reading is most helpful being a visual person because this is how new things are learned	1		
Reading over verses, praying over them, sit in it for a little bit, and journal	2		
Perfect circle of studying the Bible and understanding the content and knowing more about God	1		
Most people find books that are relative to where they're at in a current season of life	2		

Learning to write everything down similar to David in the Psalms	1		
Learning to make it your own faith, such as praying in the woods	1		
Journaling about scripture and what this reveals about me, what this changes in my life, and if there's anything that needs to be replaced with truth (i.e., lies)	2		
If you're looking through the lens of human experience and you're trying to understand worship through the Bible based on human experience, then it's gonna fall short	1		
If you're not looking through the lens of scripture, then doctrinally it's insufficient and heretical	1		
Having the ability to rely on other people for your spiritual nourishment is crucial	1		
Having 'aha' moments of considering things that were not thought of before when reading other books and the authors' interpretations and then going back to scripture	1		

to see if it makes sense for you			
Having conversations with God, reading something in the Bible, and having potential confirmation of not of thought and then maintaining or changing as a way to challenge how I understood and therefore connect to God through an overall understanding	1		
Has occurred where I read something that I needed in that moment, but didn't know that I needed, and God knows that it is needed and this points me closer to Him	2		
From epiphanies when asking hard questions, realizing that everybody is a reflection of God made in His image and working to point this out to others so they could see God in themselves	1		

Feel pretty great reading scripture, but can be not as fun based on potentially believing something for a long time that was not what the Lord intended and then the Lord brings redemption and walking through the hurt with Him	1		
Feel giddy to be able to see the world this way through a Christian perspective	1		
Expound on scripture and make the connections to everyday life and what scripture is saying	1		
Fall on my face and cry when reading scripture	1		
Everything I hear, I bring it back to the Bible and it's used as to how to base things off of	1		
Christian religious-based literature sources is a form of encouragement between believers	1		
Christians are the people of the Book (i.e., Bible)	1		
Constantly doing a cycle of prayer, reading the Bible, reading other books that mention scripture, look up those references in the Bible,	2		

and pouring myself back into God's word			
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Cluster Fourteen:

A theme of 'Mere Christianity' by C.S. Lewis is a Supreme Creator and this relates to the book of Genesis in that there's no way that scientifically this would happen by chance	2	A range of alternate biblical or religious-based guides or resources (e.g., apps, worship songs, internet, audiobooks, respected pastors and theologians, etc.) may or may not be used as support to understand the Bible, observe how God is moving in modern contexts more deeply (e.g., within and through nature), provide different viewpoints of faith, but these sources must have an alignment with the Bible and further a reflection of these beliefs as practiced within the lives of authors or individuals which produce the alternate sources	<i>"I, I really went looking for examples of nature because as, as I was a hiker, I was like, I want, what are examples of that. And there's so many examples of God working through His creation and continuing to improve and calling us to work in it. So primarily I would say the Bible is my main source of scripture. I've also read lots of great, C.S. Lewis, read a lot on that. I've read several artists, several authors who have written great stuff and have really had moments where they connect. However, they were all human and I don't fully agree with some of their actions outside of this. So, I'm not gonna name them because I don't think they really deserve to have, be recognized for something that I feel like in the end what their actions ultimately grieve God instead of bringing Him, but, God is capable of using sin to, to glorify Him by working through everything that is ex-, in existence, and there's been some great books published by many great naturalists who saw the wilderness and couldn't help but think about the beauty of it and that really kind of guided me to getting there"</i>
A worship song could probably be a resource by breaking down the actual	1		

words and the message behind them			
Andrew Murray	1		
Andy Stanley	1		
Any books, not just religious, help me focus better on the book when in nature	1		
Apocrypha	1		
Appreciate Rachel Held Evans based on her willingness to ask hard questions and process them	1		
As long as a book is about the word and is biblical, then it will help you grow your faith	2		
Authors and pastors I respect, know, and love	1		
Being in the Grand Canyon when reading 'Just do Something' and learning a lot	1		
Being raised studying Luther's Small Catechism and having this influence how the Bible is interpreted	1		
Beth Moore	5		
Bible Doctrine books	1		
Biblically sounds views	1		
Billy Graham	1		
Blue Letter Bible website	2		

Book by Lysa TerKeurst, 'Uninvited', which speaks about knowing that your identity is rooted in God and not what other people say about you	1		
C.S. Lewis	11		
C.S. Lewis being convinced Jesus and the Bible were truth when originally setting out to disprove these	1		
C.S. Lewis was a radical thinker that pushed back on a lot of the church's ideals at the time	1		
Charles Haddon Spurgeon	1		
'Christian Living'	1		
'Deeply Rooted'	1		
Dobson	1		
Dr. Chuck Missler	1		
Dr. Jon Sarfati	1		
Francis Chan	1		
Henry Cloud and John Townsend	1		
Home pastor is a resource	1		
'Interpreting the New Testament'	1		
'Interpreting the Old Testament'	1		
Jeff Bethke	3		
Jen Hatmaker	1		
'Jesus Calling'	3		

John Bevere	1		
John G. Lake	1		
John Piper and 'Desiring God' increases desire to really dig into my Bible and make sure that what I believe is what the Bible says	1		
Jonathan Kohn	1		
Joyce Meyer	1		
'Just do Something'	1		
'Just do Something' and knowing that if I do everything for the glory of God, I'm living in His will	3		
Knox	1		
Lester Sumrall	1		
Like reading nonfiction and fiction books about faith, such as 'The Shack'	3		
Lysa TerKeurst	1		
Max Lucado	2		
Max Lucado and how he speaks to understanding, realizing, and discovering God's work in our lives as well as very deep theological implications	1		
Max Lucado has helped in understanding Jesus as a human individual and then God as someone who lives and operates in our human	1		

realm, but it far outside of our human realm			
'Morning and Evening' devotional	1		
Not huge into reading books by other people	1		
Oswald Chambers	1		
Perry Stone	1		
Pete Hartwig	1		
Picking books that make me questions things	1		
Polycarp	1		
Pope Francis has a connection with nature that is aspiring to have and He uses nature to connect with God	1		
Priscilla Shirer	2		
Priscilla Shirer and learning how to share God's love with those in your life as a woman, believer, wife, and mother	1		
Rachel Held Evans	1		
Ravi Zacharias	3		
Read books by naturalists	1		

Read several great authors, but choose not to name them because they are human and do not agree with their actions outside of their work due to it ultimately causing God to grieve instead of glorifying Him	1		
Reading 'Sabbath' by Wayne Muller in Rocky Mountain National Park and not making it very far because of trying to live it out in nature (i.e., living out the Sabbath and the design of it by God)	1		
Religious organization called Renovary	1		
Renovary and looking at art as essential because God created the natural world and this is the best place to find creative expression and therefore it feeds back to God and is such an essential part of who we are	1		
Resources provide different view on faith than being raised on	1		
'Sabbath' by Wayne Muller	1		
Saint Augustine	1		
Song- 'So Will I'	1		
Theology books	1		
Tim Callaway	1		

Timothy Keller	2		
Timothy Keller uses traditional Biblical principles, but brings them into the modern age to be able to minister to people and connect with them on a deeper level	2		
Use other modern books about real life situations with the Lord to notice how God is moving in my life and how He is moving in other people's lives	1		
Use the experiences of other authors first before the Bible	2		
Use the internet to look up things or to do a sermon	3		
Using an app called Dwell which is an audio Bible and offers a soundtrack which is meditative and helps you focus and connect with God	2		
Using devotions and hearing specific messages for the dates and influenced by God	1		
Whitfield	1		
Writings of Pope Francis who is a big environmentalist	1		

Writings of the founding fathers of the United States and their faith and how it led them to write the Constitution	1		
YouTube videos can have an impact depending upon the information	1		
There's always something for somebody out there in consideration of resources, such as an app	1		
Take the opinion of others who have fundamental beliefs about theology and will listen, pray about their provided thoughts, and meditate on it	1		
Like reading stuff that doesn't agree with me to stick to my beliefs and have them become a whole lot stronger and know myself better	1		
Literature can influence how you interpret experiencing God and show you some part of nature	1		
Literature doesn't necessarily influence connection to God in nature	1		

Literature strengthen connection to God by learning things that I already appreciate about God and His creation, which is nature	1		
Readings being logical	1		

Cluster Fifteen:

Without the Bible you would be just guessing	1	<p>The Bible is first, foremost, and the baseline to a connection with God and the contained words can be personally experienced by individuals through a closeness with God and His words which result in a feeling of being known, provided for through everything being planned by Him, and connected with the contained truths which diminish guessing concerning the existence of creation as a result of not only using the words as a guide for life, but furthering experiencing and recalling scripture when engaged in specific moments and contexts, such as nature which is God's creation and references involving 'even the rocks will cry out' to say 'thank you, God' or 'He lays</p>	<p><i>"Somewhere in Romans just talking about how all of creation, like, points to Him, like it's evidence enough of who He is, that like when people look out at what He has, made, like, the Lord is revealed, and then I just think of as well, like if nothing, I just think of like creation calling out like it's groaning. It's eager expectation for what's to come and for the children of God to be revealed. I think that's Romans eight and I just, sometimes, just, I listen, and I sit in it and like, "wow, Lord, You've made this all. And it's like actually crying out to You right now". I just I think of rocks a lot. I'm like, "if a rock can, in its silence, cry out to You and know who You are and submit to You, like who am I?"</i></p>
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		<p>me down in green pastures, He leads me besides quiet waters, restores my soul' to see His provision and reflection of this through the natural features which are taken care of and loved by Him and further reflects His love for His people and their opportunity to meditate and engage in self- edification through His creation and ultimate words in the Bible</p>	
'When two or more gather in My name'	1		
When verses come to mind, it like the Holy Spirit leading you in a certain direction	2		
When opening the word, it's God and me	1		
When looking for something strictly biblical, the Bible is the only place to go	1		

When authors in the Bible describe relationship with God I relate to it and recognize that it is similar for me (e.g., God giving peace in the middle of a storm)	1		
When God references the mountains and just God's creation overall speaks to me	1		
Using imagery observed in the wilderness in the Bible because it is a very pure dynamic of what is necessary in scripture to have a relationship with God	1		
Using the Bible and other resources to connect with God	2		
Usually when seeing scripture about 'even the rocks will cry out', say 'thank you, God' and have gratitude which results in quick prayer and knowing that God created everything for us to enjoy and it's beautiful	1		
Using analogies between scripture and nature to describe the character of God (e.g., His love) and life and how previous biblical authors made this connection and that I am living in the	1		

same earth as it was then and this helps connect to God in nature			
Using Bible translations in comparison to the Bible for understanding, but put basis in the real Bible	2		
Those in the Bible sought out nature because this is where the least distractions are	1		
'These things are written that you should know the truth' and the truth is that nature came from God	2		
Think about how Jesus goes into the hills when John the Baptist dies and needs to be by Himself and this is how I view nature as a place where we can just be with God and find comfort when not found anywhere else	1		
There's no middlemen between me and scripture	1		
There's a big theme of provision in nature and scripture and it's a big connection	1		

The word of God stands alone of its authority	1		
The words of Jesus specifically in the Bible tend to bring a lot of comfort and can be very thought provoking	1		
The thought that God gave us a book, written words of instruction and love and of power and explanation is proof enough right there and He wanted to communicate in a way that humans could understand through others who wrote the stories and instructions	2		
The Word has greatly shaped understanding of the Lord and expanded that intimacy with Him and directly impacts the connection with any setting, parks included	2		
The Psalms connect me with the Lord in nature and when I have these intimate moments with the Lord I feel very vulnerable	1		
The interpretation of the Bible, the Message	2		
'The heavens declare the handiwork of God'	1		

The creeds are very important, such as the 'then I sing' creed	1		
The Bible and biblical resources allow me to understand God in His creation more to the point where I can and it all just works together	1		
The Bible and other books are reminder that God created all things and He cares for all things and if He didn't love us, He wouldn't have created such a beautiful world	1		
The Bible and other books help you learn to follow Him better by providing a road track, guide, and clarify or point out things	3		
The Bible causes not to worship the tree, but to worship the One who created the tree	1		
The Bible changes your focus through studying (e.g., Garden of Eden or the Psalms) and then you go into nature and look at it with a new lens through the hand of God	1		

The Bible confirms my faith and was inspired by God or breathed from His breath into the nostrils of the authors as they wrote and the Holy Spirit led them to write	1		
The Bible directly leads me to hang out in nature and enjoy it because it's all about nature	2		
The Bible doesn't directly impact connection to nature unless reading them in nature	1		
The Bible has given perspective on roles and care for nature in recognition of it as a resource, but they're beautiful and they need to be where they are	1		
The Bible hits people differently, why does it hit people differently and we can look into it more to understand what it's actually saying and how it comes across	1		
The Bible holds up in comparison to other religious sources	1		
The Bible influences experiencing God in nature based on God meeting a lot of His children in nature	1		

The Bible informs the varying roles or relationships with God	2		
The Bible is a story of redemption where God brings people back to Him and people figure out what it is to walk with God	1		
The Bible is a symbol of my faith for God	1		
The Bible is an easy connector to nature based on a lot of references to it	4		
The Bible is first and foremost	37		
The Bible is God inspire and it's the true word of God	3		
The Bible is God's word, His story, what He wants His children to follow and read	3		
The Bible is how Christians should like type of connection and characteristics of how I should live my life	2		
The Bible is like a source of life	1		
The Bible is nature literature at its finest	1		

The Bible is one way the Lord communicates with us and it's the facts, the truth and when you don't know what to do you can turn to the bible and it's like talking with a friend	3		
The Bible is pivotal, transformational by it being what the Lord has directly given us to learn about Him, His character, His heart for us, and who we are through that	5		
The Bible is practical, logical thinking or reasoning (e.g., right versus wrong and morals)	2		
The Bible is the baseline of a connection with God	10		
The Bible is the main thing and want the main thing to be the main thing	1		
The Bible is the sole place that all spiritual truths for me and my religious beliefs should come out of	1		
The Bible makes you like nature more	1		
The Bible pretty massively influences connection to nature	1		

The Bible provides a framework through which we view nature as God's handiwork and we are a masterpiece put in charge of nature to use the framework to view our relationship to nature and the Lord	3		
The Bible should be taken in the context which it's written for clarity, study, meditation, self-edification, and it's authoritative and without excuse	1		
The Bible was written so long ago, but can experience the words so personally like it's custom to me and this forms a personal connection with God and makes me feel very known and like everything was planned	1		
The big ones include the gospel books involving Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in addition to Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Psalms	2		
The biggest influence I've gotten from the Bible is how we're supposed to take care of creation	2		

The book of John and used resource for the topics of joy and purpose during sermon	1		
The Book of Wisdom or Song of Solomon and is one of favorite parts in the whole Bible because it talks about nature and how we need to use nature as a way to connect to God and recognize how powerful He is and this helps me experience nature	1		
Text in the Bible continues to resonate in today's culture based on people still claiming the holy land (i.e., Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives) as their sacred space and this shows the gravity of scriptural progression and why it's so gripping	1		
Start with the Bible and then read other books, but a lot of them point you back to scripture	3		
Stories of the Bible obviously take place in nature, such as the parting of the Red Sea	1		

Stuff in the Bible seems so out of date and then stuff like that happens because we're in the most beautiful places in the world (e.g., nature)	1		
Song of Solomon and the reflection of nature as God's love relationship to His people	1		
Solomon in the Bible and talking about the correct path and how this can be observed in nature through various trails and options to go down and further aligning this with not only the right path in nature, but the right path in life	1		
Scripture about eagles in the Bible	2		
Scripture about not growing faint	1		
Scripture about not growing weary	1		
Scripture has a plank in the two-way bridge between you and God and without the scripture the whole thing almost collapses	1		
Scripture in Exodus right before the Ten Commandments	1		

Scripture in Job influences the way you look at nature as something that was created and the way you look at God as the Creator and our position isn't in a place to question Him	1		
Scripture in Psalms and God will surround His people forever more, such as mountains are surrounding features of nature	1		
Scripture in Romans and creation points to God and it is evidence of who He is and eager expectation for what's to come	2		
Scripture informs relationships with God which can be many in form (e.g., friend, my Lord, father, provider, protector, etc.)	1		
Scripture involving nature is uplifting	1		
Scripture involving the 'deer and the water'	3		
Scripture involving 'the rocks crying out'	8		
Scripture is infused in everyday life and it is another way to care for people that are around you as well	1		

Scripture is the only thing that is authoritative and it is the only thing that is worth putting your complete total credence in	1		
Scripture reference in Ecclesiastes or Job where God explains that He is God and we are man and who are we to question based on Him staking out the edges of the universe and causing the sun to rise and moon to set	1		
Scripture reference in Habakkuk 3	1		
Scripture reference in Jeremiah and seeking God with all of your heart	1		
Scripture reference in Job has a lot to do with connection to nature based on it stating look how powerful God is through the skies, stars, and the world around you	1		
Scripture reference in Second Chronicles 20	1		
Scripture reference to 'Sermon on the Mount' which deals with worrying	1		

Scripture reference where God says to sit and see the salvation of the Lord unfold before you, the battle is not yours to fight, it's God's and He literally says to sit still and do nothing	1		
Scripture referencing God as a refuge and rock	1		
Scripture referencing that Jesus overcame the world and it is awe inspired by creation due to Him creating it and there's nothing more that can be done to show His worthiness based on creating and overcoming	3		
Scripture referencing the flood and the power of the rainbow	2		
Scripture referencing the high places where our spiritual forefathers went to commune with God and to get away	3		
Scripture referencing the person who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted beside water	3		
Scripture referencing the skies declare the glory of God	1		

Scripture referencing the streets of gold and the gates of pearl and seeing characteristics in nature results in saying 'oh, here's a part of heaven'	2		
Scripture referencing to be fishers of men and relating this to discipling people and engaging in ministry	1		
Scripture relate more to life-based contexts than connection to nature (e.g., work, family, etc.)	1		
Scripture talks about the glory of God and it's passion and amazing	1		
Scripture where God speaks about how He provides for the birds and how much more of value we are and that He cares for us and how special we are to Him	7		
Scriptures that mention animals serve as a connector to nature	1		
Second Corinthians 1 and verses 3-4 providing comfort in times of hurt and being comforted by God to then 'going and giving that to somebody else now, and it's	1		

still from God, but you're His vessel'			
Revelation chapter four and five and singing praise to God involving 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty'	1		
Roman Catholic version of the Bible	1		
Romans 8 verse 28	2		
Romans in the Bible	1		
Reference in Exodus where Moses asks God to show him His glory and God has already shown His glory in nature, but does it again for Moses, because why not God has the power to do so	1		
Read some other Christian books and loves those messages, but the Bible is first	1		
Psalms 1 and seeing the streams of water or huge trees planted by them and knowing how unshakeable they are and relating this to the Lord bringing it to your mind	1		
Psalms 23	3		

Psalms 23 and references to walking through the valley of shadow and death and leading you by still waters and this speaks wonders because you can literally do this in nature and physically talk to God	2		
Psalms	5		
Psalms 46 and 'like a deer rushed panting for streams of water so my soul longs for You, God'	1		
Psalms and David wrote a lot of them in nature	1		
Psalms and poetic references to nature, such as Jesus calming the storm	2		
Psalms and Song of Song 4 verse 6	1		
Psalms and Song of Songs and references to sly foxes in life and they try to steal our relationship of budding love with God and how we need to listen to the voice of God and how He wants us to have the best life in Him	1		
Psalms and Song of Songs reference to 'I will be your bride, even though I may be going through, I will go all the way to the mountaintop,	3		

even though this is suffering love, yes, I will be your bride'			
Psalms of lament are important because when I'm lamenting (crying out to God for help) I need to feel closer to God and go into nature for this	2		
Primarily the New Testament and even within that there are books that are preferred over others	1		
Pictures of nature in the Bible where a wildfire comes through and destroys an area, but God created it in such a way that it is not destroyed forever and rebirth occurs	1		
Other Bible translations, such as ESV	4		
Passages in the Bible that I feel more connected to in nature or that connect me more to nature	1		
Paul speaking about sanctification and the process of renewal and continually being renewed to have the mind of Christ and continually grow	1		

People who wrote the Bible were so inspired by God to include things as a form of encouragement for them during that time and us now (e.g., eagles and etc.)	1		
My information if correct coming from the Word because it is the one place that I know is true	1		
Luke 12 verses 6-7	1		
King James translation of the Bible	3		
Job 12 and verses 7-9 and providing nuances when hiking, such as, 'but as the animals and they will teach you or the birds in the sky and they will tell you or speak to the earth and it will teach you or let the fish in the sea inform you'	1		
Job is a push back on the deterministic idea of if you do good, good things are gonna happen, sometimes bad things happen to good people and we don't know why, it's not just sin	1		
John 3 verse 16	1		
James 1-2	1		

James 1-2 and topics of perseverance when going through hard times and engaging in relational ministry and trying to serve as a reflection of God to others and knowing this may be the only thing they see in relation to knowing about God	1		
James and 'by faith, by grace, not of works', it's faith that we are saved and God is the only way, not man	1		
If anything doesn't hold up with scripture, it is out	1		
'He lays me down in green pastures, He leads me besides quiet waters, restores my soul'	3		
Go to the Corinthians for accessible help	1		
Go to the Psalms, which are enjoyed, to reflect on	1		
Genesis and how we're supposed to take care of nature relates to this connection	2		
Genesis, where it all started when God created the earth, stars, moon, day, night, water, and land, is huge	11		
First Kings 19	1		

First Kings 19 and God showing Elijah through various natural acts (e.g., fire) and says 'hey, do you see Me' when Elijah is asking for God	1		
Feel close to God when reading about the authors' connections to God	1		
Ephesians in the Bible	1		
Corinthians reference and Paul stating to use scripture as a test to see if what you know matches and if it doesn't match then you know for sure it isn't right	1		
Book focused on Romans and specifically chapters 1-8 and then 8-16	1		
'Be still and know that I'm God'	1		
Audio book of the Bible	1		
Biblical or Christian religious-based literature sources give more faith in what is believed to be true	3		
Biblical or Christian religious-based literature sources make connection to God stronger	1		
Can't imagine anything more accurate than the Bible	1		

Every verse is about nature and it would be hard to be a Christian reading the Bible and not be led to nature, but these things rarely seem to go hand in hand, but they seem naturally intertwined	1		
Everything Christians believe, know, and celebrate comes from the Bible	1		

Cluster Sixteen:

Worship around a campfire in nature is a very tangible experience	1	<p>Worship can take many forms (e.g., silence, internal expression through the heart, song and singing, reading the Bible, prayer, individually, as a group in one voice, etc.) where God can speak through words or the script is flipped and individuals praise God even harder through the multifaceted forms which primarily involve emptying oneself of oneself, giving God the glory and grateful praise, living out the purpose God created an individual uniquely for, and putting God back on the throne and especially in nature where God's lifebeat can be felt through not only</p>	<p><i>"I would say that uh there's a, there's an active choice that can be made to worship when you, when you see and when you acknowledge um God's creation and and you worship the Lord simply because He is so incredible and uh and so powerful to have created everything um and also because He commands it. He commands it and He asks His children to, to, to worship Him that's, that's kind of what, what we're, we're created for, is to, to worship and glorify Him. But there is also a there's also part of it I think that is not necessarily a choice because um you can be moved the, the, there's, there's the movement of the Spirit upon you and through you that um, uh, that kind of strikes a cord with the Spirit living within you as you, as you behold and as you experience the beauty. You know we're told that we should bless the Lord at all times and you know I walk outside and you know I'm, I'm right now looking at, I'm looking at a whole bunch of trees um, but I'm not seeing the individuality, I'm not seeing the creativity um, but there are times when the Spirit strikes a cord with my spirit and I'm able to see God's handiwork in what I see every day outside. So I don't need to be at I, I don't necessarily need to behold something that the world might call phenomenal</i></p>
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		<p>an individual or a community worshipping, but all of creation worshipping as well and everything growing together in a space where God can tangibly been seen through His handiwork which compels the progression of this expression based on the creativity and diversity within multiple scales (e.g., national park, everyday interactions, etc.)</p>	<p><i>like Half Dome or like the Grand Canyon it can, God can be seen and His fingerprints can be seen in the simple things that are around you that have no explanation but, but His handiwork and that moves me to worship"</i></p>
Worship can be a form of prayer	2		
Worship can be alone or with a group of people and giving glory to God and declaring your gratitude	2		
Worship can be appreciation for what God has created	4		
Worship can be experiencing all the senses in nature	2		
Worship can be prayer	1		
Worship can be silence	1		
Worship can be song	1		
Worship can feel like in a church, but it's just in nature	1		

Worship can take many forms in nature (e.g., traditional or individually)	10		
Worship connects me more to God based on connecting words of a song to nature	1		
Worship has an aspect of community	1		
Worship in nature is being mindful of God's presence and be inside of something He created	3		
Worship in nature is letting the natural world reflect the beauty of God	1		
Worship in nature is preferred	1		
Worship in the woods or mountains and not in a city	1		
Worship is a conversation with the Creator of the space you're in (e.g., nature)	1		
Worship is a group of people gathering to give worship to God in varied locations (e.g., national park, religious institution, etc.)	2		
Worship is a peaceful hike where you can listen to God's creation and have some quiet time with Him	3		

Worship is a snowball effect where you begin opening your heart and God works in you as you go along	1		
Worship is acknowledging God's existence and giving Him credit	2		
Worship is almost flipping a script and you showing God you are going to worship harder	1		
Worship is also not a choice due to the Spirit moving inside of you	1		
Worship is an active choice in nature (e.g., acknowledge God's creation)	1		
Worship is an attitude, a heart, a motivator and not a form	1		
Worship is an awareness of God's beauty, such as looking for things that reflect God in a national park	1		
Worship is an outpouring back to God	1		
Worship is being extra grateful based on being able to have the opportunity to notice new things in nature	4		
Worship is being hyper aware of what God created	2		

Worship is calming and peaceful	1		
Worship is camping with others involved in ministry efforts and singing, playing instruments, or talking about God	1		
Worship is gathering together, at least a group of two	3		
Worship is giving God the glory and credit	4		
Worship is God talking to us through words	1		
Worship is implied in nature and has to be somewhere outdoors	2		
Worship is internal through your heart	2		
Worship is living out and doing what God created you to do and praising Him through making you well	1		
Worship is looking at God's creation and talking with others about it (e.g., the stars, God's earth, etc.)	2		
Worship is looking at nature through different perspectives	4		
Worship is phenomenal for my faith	1		

Worship is praising and thanking God	4		
Worship is praising God and making it about Him	1		
Worship is pressing pause and letting things happen in the moment	2		
Worship is putting God back on the throne and acknowledging the relationship as you are His	2		
Worship is recognizing God made nature and even though He cannot be tangibly seen, He can in nature through what He has made	1		
Worship is respect and awe for God and not wanting to go back to the previous version of self and want to stay close to God and through an engrained form of worship to Him	1		
Worship is seeing God's handiwork, who He is, and His heart	2		
Worship is subjective based on what the Spirit brings out and involves appreciation of God and everything He's done	2		

Worship is symbiotic in nature due to seeing God's hand and feeling compelled to worship based on nature being so unique, creative, and diverse	2		
Worship is the center of who I have become in God	1		
Worship is the choice to leave everything behind and receive God's peace	1		
Worship is very important and is the music part	1		
Worship or praise is an expression of gratitude	3		
Worship outdoors is not nearly as loud	1		
Worship service at Cades Cove is obviously worship time	1		
Worship with others through services in state parks	2		
Worshipping and singing allows for not being caught up with everyday life	2		
Worshipping can be sitting in a hammock, reading a devotional and Bible, journaling, and being present while listening	2		
Worshipping God after hearing the sounds of nature and Him conveying a	3		

message of 'I have you, I love you, trust Me, I got this'			
Worshipping God constantly in nature based on being amazed by what He has created	1		
Worshipping God during times of life with big decisions	1		
Worshipping in a national park helps you remember the scale of God's creation	1		
Worshipping in nature is another kind of level and brings you forward to God	1		
Worshipping in nature is not compartmentalized like in everyday life	1		
Worshipping in nature with a team and providing a service for others	1		
Worshipping is experiencing God	1		
Worshipping is recognizing God's creation	2		
Worshipping offers perspective, positivity, and reduces a humanistic look at things	1		
Worshipping with others at a service in a national park, such as ACMNP service	2		

Worshipping, singing, and praising God in an amazing experience (e.g., during a traffic jam)	1		
Worshipping in the wilderness is distinctly different	1		
Worship and prayer helps you know God better	1		
You almost have to worship because of the creativity in nature	2		
Windy Gap you camp and a lot of outdoor worshipping	1		
When you worship, you're not the only one (e.g., critters, trees, air, angels)	1		
We are called to worship God as His children	1		
Watching over God's flock is worship	1		
Voices filling the Grand Canyon during worship service and it being a aweing, empowering moment	1		
There is energy when worshipping God with the surroundings of nature and you feel the spirit of God	1		
The birds and noises in nature praise God	1		

The Holy Spirit works through songs	1		
Song- 'Amazing Grace'	2		
Song- 'Do It Again'	1		
Song- 'Good, Good Father'	1		
Song- How Great Thou Art	1		
Song- O' Come to the Altar	2		
Song- Psalm in the Bible	1		
Song- 'Reckless Love'	1		
Song- Sing Your Praise to the Lord	1		
Song- 'Waymaker'	1		
Songs can be convicting which bring forth realizations that we may not have been aware of	1		
Sometimes a band during worship	1		
Singing on a trail is worshipping	1		
Shouting to the Lord, praising Him for everything that He's done is a whole nother level of connection	2		
Sing a lot during worship	6		
Singing a praise song while going to get water on a backpacking trip	1		
Seeing fireflies in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is worship	3		

Seeing deer and connecting to song of 'as the deer panteth for the water' and God speaking through this experience	2		
Reading the Bible or devotionals is a form of worship	1		
Quiet, portable instruments for worship in nature	6		
Raise hands and say 'God is good'	1		
Say a blessing during worship service	1		
Saying 'allow me to empty myself of myself' before worship	1		
Singing about God is different than reading scripture	1		
Trying to live life as an act of worship	1		
Powerful when people collectively sing	2		
Praise is not always an action and be sitting, admiring His creation or singing, playing musical instruments	1		
Play in a national park is adventuring and being childlike	1		

Play is a way of worship, especially in places like national parks	1		
People being curious about worship services in nature	1		
Other voice around worshipping in nature, but feeling like it is just God, you, and nature	1		
Old hymns are worship based on them telling a story and relating messages to unsaved people	1		
Not much of a music person	1		
Not sure how to describe worshipping in nature	1		
Not worshipping alone in nature due to nature also singing with you and declaring the glory of God	6		
Moved to worship based on an overwhelming experience of nature and God	1		
Music during worship	10		
Lost loved ones are worshipping with you right next to Jesus	1		
Love worship and it is a favorite thing	2		
Leading worship in a national park	1		

Knowing it is about God and He is using you to speak to others and engage in worship and prayer within His creation	1		
Keynote speaker during worship service to provide a sermon	4		
Hiking, meditating, and reading Bible can be worship in nature	1		
Having an attitude of praise and gratefulness towards God in worship	1		
Having a one-on-one with God during worship and being His audience in nature	1		
God's handiwork moves you to worship	1		
Imaging God next to you in worship and seeing the joy in His eyes	3		
Heart is more inclined to see God when singing	1		
Getting love in your heart for God through worship	2		
Get goosebumps during worship	1		
Feeling God's lifebeat through nature and worshipping and growing together with all of creation	1		

Feeling God's presence when singing with others	1		
Feeling free to raise hands to God when alone and worshipping and praying to Him in nature	1		
Favorite songs is 'as the deer panteth for the water'	1		
Experiencing the earth as God intended is worship	1		
Everything is one voice singing to God	1		
Communion in a corporate setting is an intimate experience with God	1		
Communion relates to Jesus's last supper	1		
Connecting to God in corporate or natural worship depends on the circumstance	1		
Cry out to the Lord in worship to thank Him and therefore only want to praise Him	2		
Discussions about relationships with God during worship service	1		

Cluster Seventeen:

Pray through the scriptures	1	Prayer is a main pathway to God and conversation which does not change Him and instead changes individuals and can take many forms (e.g., scriptures, journaling, internal, verbal, etc.) where an individual can praise God, commune with Him, feel moved emotionally, experience powerful and painful intercessions, undergo a heart check, take a pause of gratitude and meditation, and have an intimate experience of God through His comfort and communication of direct words from Him within a space (i.e., nature) that allows for this constant, fluid dialogue that is structured or unstructured and offers a level of honesty and vulnerability with God who is there listening and sitting next to an individual	<i>"Like that's what God is. He's just raw. And so, like, a lot of times, like when I pray, like it's just like I I feel like in these spaces I can talk to God really more about anything as opposed to like if I'm like in a church or something like that or like in my home, like it's in these places where I can really just like I feel like that intimate, like that intimate setting that I'm connecting to with God in nature. And then He's really just like opening my heart for me to receive what He wants for me to receive. And so, like, I think, in these spaces, it's I mean, literally it's just like holy ground, like I mean, it's a national park, you know what I mean. So, this is like a designated place where people come to get away and like, you know what I mean. And it's even so much more holier because of what God like has designed this place to be. And so, when you when you really just open yourself up to that, when you really just allow God to when you really just allow and make space for God in prayer, usually, in h- in these spots, I usually get like a lot of like like visions or just words or words of wisdom or a-, or stuff like that. And yeah, it's just really intimate. It's an intimate setting"</i>
Prayer and worship allow you to be more emotionally connected	1		

Prayer and worship are not the same, they just have a lot of overlap	1		
Prayer and worship are our main pathway to God	2		
Prayer and worship forms a relationship with God	2		
Prayer and worship in nature is different and could result in a more scattered mindset	1		
Prayer and worship in nature is fluid based on being able to think or talk to God directly, praise Him, commune with Him, and feel moved emotionally	4		
Prayer and worship is always assumed as a connection to God	1		
Prayer and worship tends to run together in nature	1		
Prayer can be calm or may need to work for it more	1		
Prayer can be powerful, painful intercessions sometimes	1		
Prayer can be structured, but it becomes a little check box that is just checked through this	1		
Prayer can be talking, bending down to smell a flower, or watching a sunset	2		

Prayer can take many forms	9		
Prayer does not change God, prayer changes us and helps us to frame the way that we understand Him	1		
Prayer doesn't have to be a continuous dialogue, but seeing things in nature that remind you of God and knowing He is faithful	1		
Prayer in nature has a lot to do with awe and appreciation of creation	1		
Prayer in nature is almost better because there's really no distractions except other people	5		
Prayer is a connection to our Holy God	2		
Prayer is a conversation	9		
Prayer is a heart check and continuous connection	1		
Prayer is a huge part of a relationship with God and giving Him gratitude	3		
Prayer is a journey with many parts when persevering and experiencing joy at the end	1		
Prayer is a very experiential thing	1		

Prayer is appreciating God and the ability to come to Him and also show appreciation for Him creating you	1		
Prayer is consequential	1		
Prayer is constant gratitude	1		
Prayer is constant with God	5		
Prayer is done how an individual feels they can connect with God and nature	1		
Prayer is fellowship with Christ	1		
Prayer is forming sentence structure through being consciously engaged	1		
Prayer is having a pause	2		
Prayer is just a conversation with you and God	5		
Prayer is meditating on God's creation	1		
Prayer is more like I need something from God (e.g., peace, direction, etc.)	3		
Prayer is ongoing thoughts which shift and shape	1		
Prayer is really powerful in nature	2		
Prayer is recognizing creation is a gift	1		

Prayer is reverence before God on your knees or not and accepting His peace to rest in his embrace	1		
Prayer is the same in nature and urban areas	1		
Prayer is un-interrupted time and free from any kind of distractions in one-on-one time with God	2		
Prayer of desperation after traumatic events in nature (i.e., individual falling)	1		
Prayer of gratitude	1		
Prayer of protection	1		
Prayers in a worship service	3		
Praying a lot in nature	1		
Praying a lot when walking	3		
Praying and being in nature helps put things into perspective	2		
Praying and being grateful that God provides things which may not be present during natural moments, but will have again soon (e.g., warm sleeping bag, fleece, etc.)	1		
Praying and worshipping God with others helps you see Him through other people	2		

Praying and worshipping on a mountain	3		
Praying during hiking	1		
Praying for list of people and asking God to do things for them (e.g., sickness, such as cancer)	1		
Praying for someone in nature and experiencing healing from god right away	1		
Praying hard in bad moments in nature	1		
Praying in nature is being on holy ground with a raw God and you can connect much better than in a building	1		
Praying in nature is not the same as in church	1		
Praying is a personal thing and people decide how to do it	1		
Praying more than realized unintentionally	2		
Praying to God during scary times in nature (e.g., finding an absent group member)	7		
Praying to God in head	13		
Praying to God in nature and offering thanks (e.g., present people, being used by God during the day, etc.)	4		

Praying to God in the good and hard times are some of the most raw, real times with God	3		
Praying when getting away from the group and hiking individually	1		
Praying when never being as scared of God's beauty (e.g., storms), but knowing God was there and present	1		
Praying when scared or skiddish in nature	1		
Praying with campers at Elkmont in Great Smoky Mountains National Park	1		
Praying with eyes closed	1		
Praying with God brings healing, peace, and provides what is needed most	2		
Present prayers impacting future moments	1		
Process things better when praying to God in nature	1		
Quick internal prayers if with people	1		
Saying 'here's my heart, here's my day, here's my life' to God when in prayer and continuously connecting	1		
Sermon on the Mount and praying in secret to connect with God	1		

Singing is a form of prayer	1		
Sitting by a waterfall doing a journal prayer	1		
So often, prayer is praise to God	1		
Verbal prayer with God out loud	9		
Verbally praying to God helps lead to next line of thought versus internal prayer which can allow for numerous thoughts and therefore more potential distractions	3		
Thinking and praying to God in nature and questioning where life is going and asking God to show up	2		
Thinking of worship and biblical scripture compels you to seek higher things, look up, and lift prayers up to the Lord	1		
There's more important matters in a moment and praying as a result	1		
Spontaneous moment of prayer and feeling an outpouring	1		
Talking to God verbally makes Him ten times more real	1		

Talking with God is a dynamic response	2		
The best prayer position is laying down crossed straight on the floor or on knees	1		
The more prayer the more desire to worship and vice versa	1		
The more you pray, the better you are at figuring out what He's trying to tell you	1		
The most important part of prayer is listening	3		
Need to pray to God to connect	1		
Our faith and our prayer should be strong enough to be able to pray with passion	1		
Opportunity to accept Christ as personal Savior during worship service and closing prayer	1		
Obedience in prayer provides a shift from a human response to a more Christ-centered, God-focused response	3		
Not always consciously constructing sentences in prayer	1		
Missing out on a little bit of what God can bring to the	1		

table and what He does bring when not praying regularly			
Mixture of verbal (e.g., analyzing creation) and internal prayer (e.g., deeper thoughts)	1		
Moments of mindfulness and coming back to reality when appreciating the Creator in prayer	2		
More connected to God when praying individually and internally based on not feeling like you need to perform for people or pray out loud	1		
Meditate on God's word in prayer	3		
Location does not change prayer except the reduction of noise and distractions	1		
Life changing experience (i.e., changing life concerning alcohol addiction) and praying to God to provide strength	1		
Letting God guide you through the process of prayer	1		
Intentional prayer in nature and facilitated by God's word	1		

Keeping a relationship up through prayer and worship with God and knowing that God feels what we feel through this	1		
Intimate experience with God through His comfort and communication with direct words from Him through dialogue and associated feelings	7		
Journal prayer by writing prayer in journal	2		
If alone, will pray out loud due to feeling like no one will bother you (e.g., on a trail)	1		
Find a peaceful place to sit and be undistracted in prayer	2		
Feeling led to pray immediately in nature	1		
Feeling like God can hear you better when away from others during prayer	1		
Feeling God constantly in prayer and His love is constant, always there	1		
Even in deep prayer, grasping to maintain attention from distractions and asking the Holy Spirit to help	1		

Don't know how you would connect with God without prayer	1		
Do not do a lot of prayer sitting based on it being hard to stay still	2		
Can be vulnerable in worship, but prayer is a way to do with God and offers a different way	1		
Being in quiet and where your mind goes is prayer	1		
Being honest and vulnerable with God in prayer or conversation	2		
All prayer is good, but intentionality and putting in the effort is needed	1		
Able to cry out to God louder when verbally praying to Him	1		
A dialogue with God is ongoing, sometimes	1		
A lot easier to focus on what you're saying when praying in nature	2		
Being confident God is there and listening when praying alone and is harder with others	1		
Communion with God through prayer and having sit next to you, not above and	1		

only faintly hearing your voice			
<i>Cluster Eighteen:</i>			
You can let your emotions run away with you when alone and praying in nature	2	<p>In nature, the divine power and intricacy of God is evident on His ground and this forms a space where a "bucket of joy" gets dropped over an individual who can walk through "trail time", talk, and commune with Him during the entire experience based on there being no place God is not and so much happiness, joy, quiet time, reassurance, breathtaking moments (e.g., seeing the mountains peek through the trees in the Smokies), love, peace, and hearing of reminders of God through the sounds of nature (e.g., birds) in a space where He is acknowledged as worthy to be praised based on Him being greater and the creator of existence which allows individuals to feel Him so much more in the roughest parts of life (e.g.,</p>	<p><i>"And now whenever I'm whenever I have joy, I have a part of You in me because it comes from You", and so, it just it fills me with more joy to and then He just dumps the bucket because that's what He wants, you know, the bucket of joy into me, over me. And now I'm just like I, everywhere I look, I see God's love. And it just makes me happy to know how loved we are, to know how good He is. And I just I hear the birds and I hear the wind and I feel the sun and I just I just want to laugh. Sometimes it's like it's so silly not to be weird, but sometimes I'm so overwhelmed, like, just just happy. I'm just deliriously happy that I I don't want to freak people out, but I have to like go in a h- hidden little corner and kind of laugh for a bit. And it's just like it's other little things like I I love fuzzy fat things. If it's like a cat, ok, I love cat-, like if it's fat, like like durpy, ah I love it, little little mits, little you know, kitten paws or like, it just like something small and random like a little delight-, delightful thing like ok, look over there in the distance you see how it's all shadowed except for that one little, little plant that's, you know, sprouted up it's got the sun on it right there. I just like "it's gotta be me" *referring to mannerisms of plant Abigail is referencing in interview location*. And I look at it and it just makes me giggle, I'm like it's so cute. I love that. It's such a delight. I love-, I, I appreciate that so much. And, you know, Jesus does, too. He's like, "oh, yeah, look at that one", I'm like, "oh, it's so cute". Or like, it's such a delight. He made it and He loves it. I'm like, "man, I love that too, God grow my heart, I</i></p>

		suicidal thoughts) and having hope in breakthrough moments with a God who is capable of anything	<i>want to fall in love with everything that You love". And and as as He does that"</i>
You see a surrender in nature	1		
You're on God's ground in nature	1		
You're on God's turf and He is there in nature with you and this is a really interesting experience	1		
Where you do prayer and worship matters (i.e., in nature)	1		
We're so small and we can make sense so much of creation and being surprised by creation when talking to God	3		

We're meant to work in the environment God created and it's all tied together	1		
Profound experiences in nature are experiencing God (e.g., canoe trip in Yellowstone and the Tetons)	1		
Profound is an impactful experience which is a revelation of God, such as experiencing natural wonder, joy, and excitement in nature	1		
Praying in nature involves being surrounded by what has been created by God and is God	2		
Putting faith in God that He will deliver after signs through nature or other signs as well (e.g., visions, communication with others, etc.)	1		
Refreshing to be in fellowship with other people in nature and to talk about how lucky you are to be in God's creation	1		
Remembering who God is in nature inevitably leads to worship	1		
Reminder of an amazing God that created a huge universe	3		

Retreating away from distractions to hear God	4		
Rugged and raw real places where you're disconnected from society	1		
Scripture about 'even the rocks will cry out'	4		
See God through others when they are singing and being grateful to God in nature	1		
See God working through the heart of others and their minds and moving them to worship	1		
Seeing a hawk fly above is a form of remembrance for a passed loved one	2		
Seeing a process of nature (e.g., butterflies interacting) and knowing its extraordinary and a creation of God	2		
Seeing creation is feeling God	1		
Reading the Bible and devotionals at the campsite (e.g., hammock)	1		
Seeing God's divine power in nature	5		
Seeing God's love everywhere in nature and	1		

feeling a 'bucket of joy' being dropped over you			
Seeing God's sovereignty and Lordship over everything in nature	1		
Seeing God's sovereignty in nature	1		
Seeing the intricacy of God's creation (e.g., inspecting the scales of a fish)	9		
Seeing the little details of creation displays a caring and loving God	1		
Seeing the Milky Way will almost bring you to your knees and it absolutely amazing	1		
Seeing things and having scripture brought to mind	1		
Seems to be a real connection with water and God when seeing educational signs in Cherokee, North Carolina	1		
Sharing how beautiful Great Smoky Mountains National Park is with others	1		
Sitting on a mountain and knowing you're listening to God and getting real answers	2		

Somebody will mention something about God's glory and the beauty He has put in nature	1		
Walking, communing, and talking with God the whole way	15		
Wanting to connect with God really badly in nature	1		
We are also a part of nature	1		
We are small in consideration of creation, but can produce a lot of sound through nature	1		
Walking and praying in nature provides calm	1		
Very feelings oriented and feel God tangibly in different ways depending upon the setting (e.g., difference in nature than other settings)	2		
Unbelievable what God has given us	1		
Trusting God and seeing new sides of yourself in nature	1		
Trying to bring nature into the space by referring to location (e.g., inclusion within prayers)	1		
They're not just a bird or a flower or a tree, they have different individual characteristics	1		

There is no place God is not	7		
There is a little bit of a difference between just being totally, like exposed to the elements, not even having a roof over your head	1		
The better our environment is to listening to Him, the better we have to recognize where our hearts truly lie	1		
Tangibly feeling God in an out of this world way happens in nature	1		
Thanking the Lord for how freaking awesome it is	2		
The beauty of creation crise out to God, such as the fireflies	1		
Spontaneous reaction of 'wow, I can't believe that, like, God created all this for us to take care of and to enjoy'	8		
Stopping in nature to write about the landscape and what God's put on your heart	1		
Sunrise and sunset are favorite spots to pray	2		
Supposed to be in nature	1		
Taking a moment to step back and focus on Who created what is being observed	2		

Speaking a refrain from Psalm including 'His love endures forever' and being surrounded by the beauty of what His love created	1		
Speechless when seeing the sunset after just breaking through the trees	1		
Powerful God moment when the rain stops and the sky opens up or you turn a corner and see a bear or a moose	2		
Nature and worship are intimately tied together	1		
Nature brings so much happiness and peace	7		
Nature brings you closer to the artist, Creator based on how He did not make everything the same	1		
Nature declares the glory of God (Romans 1)	1		
Nature is a calming effect	5		
Nature is a constant 'look at what God's done'	1		
Nature is a constant reminder that God loves everyone specifically and made nature for us	2		
Nature is a very good place to pray and spend time with God	1		

Nature is beautifully designed	7		
Nature is down to earth and God created it and is eye opening and clears your head in contrast to the sin of the world	1		
Nature is God literally showing up	3		
Nature is God's temple that He designed	2		
Nature is good quiet time	8		
Nature is my cathedral and church to breathe and feel God's life	1		
Nature is what God created	1		
Nature is what God has given to us	1		
Nature provides reassurance that God is great and He has us in His hands	3		
Nature releases the numbing of conversation with God and it's a constant dialogue	1		
Nature shows what God is capable of	1		
Nature's sounds is God saying 'I meant for you to be here and I'm so glad that you're here'	1		
Need to be in His creation praying or worshipping to connect with Him	1		

Need 'trail time' with God	1		
No one is capable of doing and making something like God did	1		
Opening eyes after prayer and looking at nature then saying 'God you are a showoff'	1		
People miss so much when they don't know Who gave us nature	3		
Overwhelming peace and joy from experiencing God through prayer in nature and sitting for hours while observing nature (e.g., sunset)	1		
Peace from God when experiencing Him in nature is catharsis and almost like a high	2		
Peace, love, and depth are experienced through God in nature	2		
People are a reflection of God too similar to nature	2		
More deeply engaging in thought during worship in nature than in a church	2		
Mountains peeking through the trees takes breath away	1		

Mentally 'taking a picture' of the landscape and remembering God where He stopped you and spoke	1		
Living in complete freedom in play in nature and connecting with God and appreciating Him in a different way	2		
Knowing God created nature when hearing any natural noises (e.g., birds sing)	1		
Going through seasons of life in nature	1		
Going to nature trails to be closer to God during roughest parts of life (i.e., suicidal thoughts)	1		
Having great faith conversations with others in nature	1		
Having hope in breakthrough moments with God in nature	1		
Imagining God is present with you during a hike in nature	1		
In amazement of nature	1		
In nature, things can just wash over you so powerfully that it takes your breath away	1		
In nature, you focus on yourself less in prayer and you are more inclined to	1		

connect with God and thank Him			
Just being in place is not worship, it is interacting with the creative world	1		
Just to think about all He's created for us	1		
It's hard to say that there isn't a God when you're surrounded by all this beauty	1		
Interesting seeing educational signs about the Cherokee's thoughts about God when going through Cherokee, North Carolina	1		
If He's there and He's with us, why wouldn't we celebrate with Him concerning creation	1		
How in the world could somebody not think that there's a God when you look around	3		
Heaven is real and heaven is additionally wherever God meets the earth through love and His presence	1		
Hiking and talking with God allows Him to say 'look at how far you've come, it's hard, but you can look back and see'	1		

Hiking is a spiritual expression where thoughts can run in sort of a prayerful way	2		
Hearing the sounds of nature and being reminded of God's power	8		
Having an affinity with water that God knows and rain often comes after impactful moments with Him involving growth and connection	1		
Giving yourself an opportunity to listen and be in nature while talking to God and especially in those 'suck' moments to gain perspective	1		
Getting mad because some people do not respect nature and what God's given us	1		
Getting a distinct immediate response from God in nature and through His provision of answering a prayer	1		
Finding purpose during a venture in nature and feeling this verification through God to be His light with others that do not share the same beliefs	1		

First experience of what it was like to worship in nature	1		
First time completing worship outdoors when working with ministry	1		
Free form and spontaneous worship of God in a national park, such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park	1		
Full blown praising the Lord after being provided protection during moments in nature	1		
Feeling very loved and known in prayer when meditating in nature	3		
Feeling wrapped up with God in nature and really feeling His presence	3		
Feeling the beauty of nature when in it and it is pleasing to all the senses	1		
Feeling swamped by the Lord based on seeing His creation and saying it is good and saying you are a good creation too	1		
Feeling of smallness in nature	2		
Feeling secure when surrounded by mountains	1		
Feeling of awe in nature	12		

Feeling of closeness to God in nature	20		
Feeling lucky to be in nature	1		
Feeling known by looking at the mountains, such as the Smokies, and recognizing that the very same God that made those mountains made you and loves you	1		
Feeling insignificant and small in the beauty of nature	7		
Feeling God through creation and knowing that He's there	2		
Feeling God through the beauty of nature	2		
Feeling God when seeing fireflies	3		
Feeling God's holy breath in the corners of creation and feeling moved towards holiness	1		
Feeling blessed in nature	1		
Feeling called to ministry by God in nature and having a 'wow' God moment	1		
Feeling closer to God worshipping in nature than in a church (e.g., less formal, no walls surrounding you, etc.)	4		
Feeling endorphins when in nature and breathing in the scents	1		

Experiencing more of God through nature (e.g., shaping of nature)	1		
Experiencing of God is usually when hiking alone	2		
Feel tension and stress melt away in nature when taking a deep breath	2		
Experiencing God through changes in scenery or the group of people that are present	2		
Experiencing God and praying in nature cannot be separated	4		
Every little thing in nature is a delight	1		
Don't think there's a way to be a Christian and not appreciate God's creation and worship and pray	1		
Don't understand how people think can't think there's a God because the beauty of nature and its organic rawness screams His name	2		
Easier to be with God in nature	1		
Easier to disconnect if not able to connect by leaving behind phone and all the other stuff when in nature	1		

Do not have to do anything, God does it for us (e.g., seeing sunrises and sunsets) and it is surreal	1		
Do not needs music in nature based on nature singing for you (e.g., birds)	2		
Don't know how you could experience nature without worship and prayer	1		
Easier to recognize what God has done for you when your surrounded by what He has already done for you	1		
Divine situation to see elk which are majestic	1		
Different when talking about God's creation and being in His creation versus a manmade building	2		
Could care less about anything else in nature	1		
Creation is beautiful and at the pinnacle is God's people created in His image	2		
Connecting with an omnipotent, perfect Creator in nature with a broken central state	1		
Connecting through the Creator through His creation (e.g., hugging a tree literally) and it being euphoric	1		

Catching breath based on nature's design	1		
Can center on God through prayer and being in a national park, neighborhood, or outside and in the midst of His creation	1		
Can go through nature and find specific spots within to worship or pray	2		
Can pray and receive a faster response in nature due to having a clear mind	3		
Can really see God in other people in nature	1		
Can't fully understand God, but looking at nature is a way of understanding Him	1		
Being surprised and stunned by God similar to a grizzly bear which is one of the most raw things you can encounter	2		
Being surrounded by something so beautiful God made, people that He made beautifully, and knowing you are made beautifully seems to all fit perfectly	1		
Being ushered before the throne in nature	2		

Being willing to go into places like a national park to develop a connection with God and realize what He has in store for you	1		
Both corporate and nature forms of prayer and worship are important	1		
Being in the midst of God's creation and getting better connection to Him	1		
Being in the Smokies is a favorite place	1		
Being moved by God on a hike during dense fog and feeling God so closely	1		
Being reminded of God in the Smokies while worshipping and looking at the surroundings (e.g., river, amazing trees, etc.)	1		
Being reminded of God's attributes in nature	4		
Being immersed in God's love and glory in nature	3		
Being in a kayak or canoe is a prayer closet which is quiet and undistracted	1		
Being in God's creation you feel it and Him so much more (e.g., Yosemite Valley and Half Dome, El Cap, etc.)	1		

Being in nature and staring at the sky, having the wind and leaves swirl around, and to be alone is worshipping	3		
Being in nature and talking with God can be less uncomfortable	2		
Being in nature can result in 'look at that thing' and possibly lose focus	1		
Being in nature contains many interlinked elements that man cannot replicate and this is not realized in a church	1		
Being in nature is my purpose	1		
Become very much alive in nature	2		
Being able to pray and bring your heart to God in nature is powerful	1		
Acknowledging God to be worthy of praise due to the fact He is greater and He created existence	10		
All of creation praises God all the time non-stop	1		

Able to take a step back and look especially after praying	1		
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Cluster Nineteen:

'Whose image is on you' is a question because the answer is that God created all of us in His image	2	<p>Worship and prayer intertwine themselves in a manner which positions one's heart toward God despite the feeling of not being worthy of being loved and a knowing of being so loved by Him is conveyed which offers such a vivid experience without any doubt of connecting with Him and further being so moved by this that an individual may begin crying as a result, actually trust Him despite being afraid and be provided with so much peace, lay everything at His feet through knowing He will take care of it, experience such a joyous being, get chills or goosebumps experiencing</p>	<p><i>"Yeah, I think in the beginning, after my friend had left and I was sitting there and praying, like at first, I was like sobbing rightfully so. I think with when you actually deal with the death of a loved one like, it's just overwhelming in li-, in like a good way because like for me, in, specifically, like, I tend to, like, brush things off and don't deal with it. So, for me, crying and just actually letting that out was like very like. I don't know, it was a lot, very stressful evening, like I think just like knowing that I didn't have to, like, keep it all bottled in and like I could just lay it at Jesus's feet and just, like, actually let it out and, like, know that He would give me the strength to get through that, it was very like, can't think of the right word. I don't know, very helpful, I guess, I think once I stopped crying, and just like actually like talking out in prayer, being like "God, like I know, like I was like, I know I can't get, through this without You", and just really, I felt, again, peace at peace. Like, I just felt like this, calm manner, almost after I stopped crying and just was like, ok, like, I'm gonna do this. Like, I'm gonna get sober not only for me, but like for my family and for my friends. And because, like, I know like I can't like let this, like alcohol addiction, like control my life"</i></p>
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		<p>Him through knowing He will answer a prayer, feel the Holy Spirit flood their heart, and constantly undergo a recognition of His glory and capabilities which almost sounds too weak based on His overwhelming awe which can be observed in existence, such as nature which makes Him so obvious through an innate creation which reflects Him in everything and was designed in an unmatched and mighty way which evokes the "Holy Spirit tingle" when He is recognized through insane workings not only in the life of one individual, but all</p>	
<p>When you're focused on God, all the other stuff around just kind of tends to fade away</p>	1		
<p>When distracted or feeling off, know that you can talk to God in the very moment and remember He loves you and is the God of the universe</p>	2		

We're so afraid of actually trusting God, but when we do, it gives you peace	1		
Receiving powerful mental images from God in prayer	1		
Recognizing that I am not worthy of being loved and yet like I am so loved by God when praying and worshipping	1		
Seeing chaos in others' lives leave when experiencing God	1		
Seeing God in people's eyes and reactions	1		
Seeing people break down and weep based on reconnecting with God	1		
Setting self up before God to hear Him in prayer and worship	2		
So moved by God and crying based on this	1		
So vivid experiencing God and no doubt in mind	1		
Someone sharing something on their heart or something they learned about God, the author and creator, and how this helped their spiritual growth	1		
We belong to God	1		

We are constantly in the position of needing God and this is the same when you see someone who needs help and you need to reach out to them	1		
'Walking with God is simple, but it's not easy'	1		
To truly connect with God you have to pray and worship	1		
Things that give a great sense of satisfaction are attributed to a Godly experience	1		
Overwhelming awe when experiencing God	2		
Offering help during moments of accepting Christ and developing a relationship	2		
Numb conversation with God when with society	1		
Not knowing where to go and feeling spiritually dead	1		
Main elements of faith- (1) thought and mind, (2) prayer, (3) worship	1		
Making the most of a moment and praising God and hopefully reflecting this to others	1		

Letting the Holy Spirit guides your words and conversations with others	1		
Learning to not have unrealistic expectations of self	1		
Knowing seasons in life prepare you for the next one and God has a purpose	2		
Laying everything at Jesus's feet and not having to bottle it up	1		
Knowing God is there based on accepting Him into your heart, feeling Him, and feeling very good	1		
Knowing God will take care of it	3		
God adopts us	1		
God brings you back to where you belong and provides in nature	1		
God can also be seen in the simple things	1		
God deserves to be praised	1		
God doesn't always show up, but still experienced contentment, happiness, and thankfulness	1		
God gives us senses and abilities to experience His creation (e.g., a rainbow as a promise)	1		

God has a perfect will and He is who He claims to be	1		
God has many facets and you can feel this when praying with others based on feeling Him in different ways	3		
God has told us He is there in scripture multiple times	1		
God is a creative God and developed wonders of nature	1		
God is a joyous being	2		
God is allowed to speak when you finally stop	1		
God is already there, He is just waiting for you to open the door	2		
God is concerned with all creation, nature and people	1		
God is constantly praying for us	1		
God is in control	2		
God is in everything and everyone	1		
God is in nature and alive, moving constantly and His creation is also	1		
God is like a friend times one thousand who you share concerns and happy times with	6		
God is right there in nature	1		

God is right there with you when worshipping	1		
God is there because of experiencing satisfying and profound experiences in life	1		
God knows what's on my heart	4		
God knows, but still wants you to talk with Him	1		
God leans in and you feel heard	1		
God makes it obvious in nature that it is for us individually and not just for humanity or the universe	3		
God offering a pre-emptive answer to a forthcoming prayer (e.g., purpose in life and choices)	1		
God provides reassurance when anxious or nervous	4		
God provides strength to get through situations	1		
God providing after prayer and showing up through this	1		
God providing feelings as a form of communication	1		
God providing in nature through others (e.g., provision of food while backpacking) and worshipping through	3		

gratefulness and answered prayers			
God reveals Himself so much that no specific moment sticks out based on the frequency	1		
God saying 'this is the right choice you're making' and feeling this in place of audibly hearing it	1		
God says He will never leave us or never forsake us	2		
God sends someone in times of need and it reflects a superlative of the word 'relieved'	1		
God showing the answer through nature to thirst for Him and not the things of this world, other people's approval, or even individual approval of self	1		
God showing up by providing protection in nature-based experiences (e.g., feeling electricity of lightening during hike and storm)	6		
God showing up through a shooting star after just talking about it with others	3		

and feeling in awe and speechless			
God showing you what you need to do despite avoiding it and having a constant dialogue with Him	1		
God shows up and does not as well depending on the situation	1		
God shows up with an exponential level of peace when experiencing high intensity emotions	4		
God sits next to you and listens to every beck and call	1		
God speaking through butterflies based on their movement and asking God to 'do it again' and He does and showing He is here for you to bring joy	1		
God speaking through other individuals about life changes and feeling a rush and incredible experience	1		
God speaks through animals, such as birds	1		
God speaks through the running rivers	1		
God speaks through the wind	2		
God talks through nature (e.g., bird song, wind, etc.)	1		

God told me He was there and I trust Him	3		
God weaved connections with people over time (e.g., individuals in the Bible)	1		
God works through us in prayer and worship and back to Him	1		
God's creation and the intricacy is overwhelming	5		
God's creation is just incredible	1		
God's innate creation shines through everything as a reflection of Him	1		
God's power is unmatched and mighty	1		
God's presence is within and around us during worship in nature	1		
God's working in other places through ministry (i.e., national park)	1		
I love you and you matter to God and you matter to me	1		
'Holy Spirit Tingle' when God is around	1		
Having the Lord work through you and impact other people is insane	1		
Heard that 'if you need a verbal answer from God, you	1		

weren't listening to Him in the first place'			
Hearing God audibly	1		
Hearing God audibly say 'wait' when a 'new season's coming' in life	1		
Have to remember to stop talking and listen for God	2		
Having a moment of perspective when worshiping and praying with God based on stepping out of your little bubble	1		
Give God the glory and credit for providing help in moments of fear (e.g., finding a group member after being absent)	1		
Giving full attention to God in prayer and worship	1		
Getting chills when experiencing God	1		
Getting goosebumps and knowing God will answer a prayer	1		
Get a feeling God is present	1		
Feeling tingly throughout whole body and knees too weak to walk when experiencing God	3		
Feeling the Holy Spirit flood your heart	3		

Feeling the need to be demonstrative when alone to get feelings out and when experiencing God	1		
Feeling thankful	2		
Feeling small, but grateful that God communes with us	1		
Feeling of peace when God shows up	14		
Feeling of wonder when experiencing God	1		
Feeling joy from God	2		
Feeling gratefulness and love in God's presence	1		
Feeling God constantly throughout the day and it's hard to explain	1		
Feeling a peace and right alignment with God and overwhelming emotions a few times even though not an emotional person	3		
Feel like walking hand in hand with God	1		
Experiencing God through subtle moments	1		
Experiencing God when still	1		
Experiencing God feels like your heart is filling up and you get a feeling in your chest	1		
Experiencing God is a feeling	1		

Experiencing God is indescribable	2		
Experiencing a raw moment God has allowed you to experience and appreciate and it is moving as a result (e.g., making the most of a situation)	1		
Experiencing a steady feeling of love from God	3		
Experiencing God is hard to describe	1		
A movement of the spirit or an emotional lift occurs when concentrating on the Holy Spirit and not being distracted	1		
Acknowledge His existence and His glory and capabilities almost sounds too weak	2		
Being able to read scripture, comprehend, and then express gratitude in astonishment of what God's done	1		
Being able to sit with God is all that you're ever gonna need	1		
Being called by God to implement worship services	2		

Being suddenly aware that you are talking to God and either discussing or sitting in silence with Him in a potent experience	2		
Calming to know God is present	2		
Can't imagine what it would feel like to sit at the feet of God	1		
Choosing to implement sobriety for self, family, friends and not letting it control life and instead knowing God is the only One to get you through it through provided strength	1		
Christians are one body that is functioning in unison	1		
Connection with God is a relationship	1		
Conversations about God with others and walking in that mindset and heart space	1		
Conversations eventually involve talking about God	1		
Crying to let emotions out and deal with things in life	1		
Crying when experiencing God and knowing He is there	5		
Worship and prayer adds to connection with God	1		

Worship and prayer are a circle where prayer is pulling from God and worship is to show God gratitude	2		
Worship and prayer are a two-way street with God	2		
Worship and prayer are reserved times for God and it's personal time	1		
Worship and prayer are two fundamental connections to God	4		
Worship and prayer can bring forth different forms of joy and intimacy both together and alone	1		
Worship and prayer does connect to God, but not always	1		
Worship and prayer forces you to pay attention	1		
Worship and prayer helps to know that you don't need to have it all and just live in the moment	1		
Worship and prayer intertwine themselves	10		
Worship and prayer is a bridge to God	1		
Worship and prayer is communication with God	5		

Worship and prayer is our response to Him for what He's done and who He is	1		
Worship and prayer is set aside to be with God and this is important to heal your heart and soul	1		
Worship and prayer puts the focus on God so you're thinking about Him and not distractions	5		
Worship and prayer puts your heart in a position to receive Him and towards Him	1		

Appendix D – IRB Approval Forms

D.1. Initial IRB application approval form.



TO: Dr. Ryan Sharp
Horticulture and Natural Resources
Throckmorton Hall

Proposal Number: 10133

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Rick Scheidt", is written over the printed name.

DATE: 04/23/2020

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Christianity and National Parks: Seeing God in Nature-Based Experiences."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 04/23/2020

EXPIRATION DATE: 04/23/2023

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

- ☒ There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
☐ There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

D.2. IRB application approval form after submission of modified research document.



TO: Dr. Ryan Sharp
Horticulture and Natural Resources
Throckmorton PSC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Rick Scheidt", is written over the "FROM:" line.

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 08/26/2020

RE: Proposal #10133.2, entitled "Christianity and National Parks: Seeing God in Nature-Based Experiences."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #10133.1, ENTITLED, "Christianity and National Parks: Seeing God in Nature-Based Experiences"

EXPIRATION DATE: 04/22/2023

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.