

Chapter 6

What's Faith Got to Do With It?

ABSTRACT

Faith plays a key role in the lives of many college students. Religious experiences are often heightened at a time when learners seek to navigate academic and social demands. This chapter highlights a single narrative involving an act of forgiveness that changed a young man's life. The narrative also provides a backdrop for experiences of the five interviewees at the faith-based institution they attended. The stories they brought with them to college developed into radical shifts of faith and ultimately altered narratives that strengthened their spiritual journeys.

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INTRODUCTION

My story began when I was 15 years old. My father was watching over one of his friend's grocery stores in Portland. And soon after – maybe an hour later, after our family had gotten home while my dad was working at the store – a police officer showed up and said “Your father has been shot and he is off to the ICU.” So what happened was a shooting robbery and my father had been shot and he was taken to the hospital. And at that point, my whole life changed . . . ~Tim

Radical change can result from unexpected events and shifts in circumstances. Even incidents that happen in a single moment can forever alter our lives. For Tim, the staff member whose video narrative opens the chapter, such a moment occurred when a police officer showed up at his door. At fifteen years old, the wheels of Tim's life were firmly in motion and plans were no doubt set for the future. Yet all of that ended when he heard the fateful words, “Your father has been shot.” For comfort and healing, he would fall back on his family and spiritual upbringing. But the road ahead was filled with uncertainty and more changes to come.

Faith represents a unique aspect of diversity. Starting from an early age, religious narratives are dependent upon family history and geographical region; and may include monotheistic worship, communal or tribal gatherings, and individual prayer and meditation (Ota, 2007). Ideas are shaped, solidified, and reevaluated as children progress into adolescence and early adulthood. Research suggests that many college students recognize the importance of religion in their lives (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007; Wang & Distelberg, 2019) but often struggle to find balance between academic goals and spiritual practices. As a result, they may enter a liminal or threshold phase; a period of ambiguity and confusion about their personal faith journeys (Sharma & Guest, 2013). This struggle is integral to several religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism (Raguin & Bangdel, 2010) as believers must wrestle with uncertainty while seeking a deeper sense of self and community. Tim's traumatic experience occurred while still in high school and a sense of liminality followed him into college. His story was vastly different than most, but like many students he looked for ways to reconcile the past with a better path moving forward.

This chapter explores the power of spirituality through Tim's story and in the lives of the five student interviewees. Each was raised in a faith-based

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