

STRENGTHSFINDER AND ITS USE WITHIN THE WELS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020

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## ABSTRACT

WELS pastors have a multitude of thoughts about StrengthsFinder. They have a variety of responses along with different opinions on how it should or shouldn't be used. This thesis explores StrengthsFinder as a whole. The thesis starts by looking at what StrengthsFinder is along with an explanation. It follows by looking at how Grace in Action uses StrengthsFinder, and how it has been used within our synod. Closing out the thesis the reader will find opportunities and obstacles followed up with my thoughts on the matter.

## INTRODUCTION

The business world is always trying to discover new ways to run a business more effectively. Over the course of many years, businesses have used different personality tests as well as methods of categorizing people. Some businesses even went as far as to compare individuals' forehead sizes and make assessments and hypotheses from that data.<sup>1</sup> It may seem extreme to be measuring the size of people's foreheads to see how each person can best be used within the workplace. Yet, it shows just how invested businesses are in trying to determine how to best manage their employees to produce a higher quality of work more consistently. With a better understanding of their employees and their talents, businesses feel they can better manage them and run more successful businesses.

Businesses have spent many resources, such as time and money, experimenting in different ways to make their businesses more efficient. They spend time learning about their employees in order to put them in the best position to use their talents effectively. In doing this, the business is hoping to recover the time and money they spent. They hope to do so by placing their employees in a position that will allow them to flourish and produce better work or a better product. In the end, businesses may save money by placing people where they will succeed, allow them to cut the number of employees needed to complete the job, or accomplish more work with the same number of employees.

<sup>1</sup> Annie Murphy Paul, *The Cult of Personality: How Personality Tests Are Leading Us to Miseducate Our Children, Mismanage Our Companies, and Misunderstand Ourselves*. New York: Free Press, 2004.

Since the turn of the century, businesses have been using StrengthsFinder to help figure out the strengths of their employees. In return they are able to better use their employees in a way that enhances the ability of each individual employee and the company as a whole. Businesses spend their time and resources on StrengthsFinder because it has proven beneficial.

How does StrengthsFinder fit into ministry? Have you ever sat around a table with a group of people, such as a committee church or a faculty or a church council, and thought, “How could we make this group run more efficiently?” It may be as simple as getting to know each other outside the work place. Understanding each person of the group outside the walls of the church can lead to a better understanding of fellow council or committee members inside the church.

I have always been interested in learning more about my strengths and how they can best be used to serve a group, and how I fit into God’s plan for ministry. In college, one of the ways we learned about ourselves was through the Myers/Briggs personality test. Although a personality test does not tell you everything you need to know about yourself, it was a useful tool to understand my strengths and weaknesses and the types of people with whom I work well. It was interesting to contemplate the results of the test, and the results made me look at how I lived my life. The Myers/Briggs test inspired me to better know and understand myself. I did not simply believe everything the personality test told me about myself. Instead, I took the results and processed them myself for a while. Next I asked some of my closest friends if they thought the same things I thought based upon this test. I sought out those I worked with on a daily basis and people I respected. If their thoughts were similar with mine and matched what the test said, I took the results more seriously. Some of the questions I asked myself were: Did I step on other people’s toes because I enjoy doing new things and thus take away opportunities for others to

step up and participate as well? Is it true that I don't get along well in a working environment that includes certain types of personalities? I was intrigued by whether or not this was an accurate description of me.

I don't believe I am the only one who is intrigued by such personality tests. I don't believe I am the only one who wants to know more about myself and where my gifts lie. People want to know about themselves so they are able to build on what they know or change what they don't like. Looking at the top industries in the United States, people don't seem to be satisfied with who they are and what they see in the mirror. The cosmetic industry reached 532 billion dollars in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Living in a superficial culture as we do, people turn to cosmetics to change what they look like. By changing what they look, people hope others will see them in a different way as well. Changing how they look makes them feel like a new person, makes them like someone they haven't been before. People are interested in themselves. People are interested in changing the view of themselves and personality tests allow people to get to know themselves and think about what they should change.

StrengthsFinder has been used for nearly 20 years in the business world. People want to know who they are, have access to a test that tells them exactly who they are, and better know and understand where their gifts lie. But how can StrengthsFinder be used in the WELS? This thesis will look to answer that question. In order to answer that question, these questions will also be answered: What exactly is StrengthsFinder? What does the test tell a person? How has StrengthsFinder been changed to fit the WELS? How is it being used in the WELS today? How does StrengthsFinder line up with what Scripture has to say? Finally, as these questions are

<sup>2</sup> Bethany Biron, "Beauty Has Blown up to Be a \$532 Billion Industry - and Analysts Say That These 4 Trends Will Make It Even Bigger." Business Insider. Business Insider, July 9, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/beauty-multibillion-industry-trends-future-2019-7>.

answered, I will present the pros and cons of StrengthsFinder from those who have interacted with StrengthsFinder. I will also propose if and how StrengthsFinder has a place in the WELS.



## PART I: WHAT IS STRENGTHSFINDER?

### **Background**

Don Clifton is the founder of StrengthsFinder. He was born in 1924 and fought in World War II. Upon his return from the war, Don became a Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska. Clifton studied people. He studied their strengths to see how they would be able to fit into a working world. He helped men and women who wanted to develop their job into a fulfilling career.

Clifton understood there were many tests in this world that focused on studying the weaknesses of people. These tests told a person what they, their coworkers, or their company were doing wrong. In order to not make these weakness sound like a bad thing, they named these areas of weakness, “areas for improvement.” There is even a DSM-IV manual (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders), which Clifton called, “A bloated catalogue of what’s wrong with people.”<sup>3</sup> Clifton wanted to look at the positive attributes of people rather than what is wrong with them. Clifton simply wanted to reverse the trend of focusing on people’s weaknesses and focus on people’s strengths.

Clifton’s emphasis on focusing only on a person’s strengths is called positive psychology. “Positive psychology is a field that emphasizes optimal human functioning and factors that contribute to a sense of well-being and the ability to contribute to society.”<sup>4</sup> This positive psychology test was designed for individuals to learn about themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Rath, *Strengthsfinder 2.0*. New York: Gallup Press, 2017, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Laurie A. Schreiner, “A TECHNICAL REPORT ON THE CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER® WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS”, 1.

“Specifically, the strengths philosophy is the assertion that individuals are able to gain far more when they expend effort to build on their greatest talents than when they spend a comparable amount of effort to remediate weaknesses.”<sup>5</sup>

Clifton started his endeavor in 1969. He opened what was called Selections Research Inc., which began to look at the strengths people had and how those strengths could fit into the workplace. His company grew into a large human resource consulting company. As his company continued to grow, he purchased Gallup in 1988.<sup>6</sup> Previously, Gallup was an organization in New Jersey that sampled a wider variety of demographics to make polls fairer. Clifton’s decision to combine his organization with Gallup was one of his best decisions. Joining with Gallup allowed him to work with some of the brightest researchers in the following areas: leadership, management, and peak performance.

In 1998, Clifton decided he wanted to make a common language for talent. Clifton and his group looked at 100,000 talent-based interviews, studying and examining them for patterns. They looked at tests from a wide range of jobs and experiences: executives, salespeople, customer service representatives, teachers, doctors, lawyers, students, nurses, and several other professions and fields.<sup>7</sup> In the end, all of these studies Clifton conducted with the researchers’ help and knowledge led to the rollout of StrengthsFinder in 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Phil Punzel, *A Quantitative Study of the Effects of Professional Development with the StrengthsFinder Assessment*. 2019.

<sup>6</sup> “C Is for Don Clifton: His Work On Strengths And With Gallup.” *The Positive Encourager*, June 5, 2015. <https://www.thepositiveencourager.global/don-cliftons-approach-to-doing-positive-work/>.

<sup>7</sup> Rath, 16.

## The Test

Don's study of the many different professions led him to narrow down people's traits into 34 different talents. He felt 34 was a good number of themes because 34 themes expressed a common list of talents that would be recognized across many different cultures. The test is also used around the world, both in business and personal relationships.

The StrengthsFinder test has 177 questions. These questions are not typical questions. The question is more of a "select the statement that best describes you." Looking at the chart below, both ends say "Strongly Describes Me," while in the middle says "Neutral." In the chart below the question is, "Do I have a commitment to growth or a commitment to my values?" This may spark a conflict within the test taker. The test taker may think, "I have a commitment to growth and I have a commitment to my values? Which do I choose?" At this point the neutral button is the best option for the test taker because one of the descriptions does not describe the test taker better than the other.

The image shows a screenshot of a test question interface. At the top, there is a progress bar with "Start" on the left and "Finish" on the right. Below the progress bar, there are three labels: "Strongly Describes Me" on the left, "Neutral" in the center, and "Strongly Describes Me" on the right. Below these labels is a horizontal row of five colored buttons: dark orange, medium orange, yellow, light orange, and dark orange. Each button has a small white circle in the center. The second button from the left (medium orange) is selected, indicated by a blue dot. Below the buttons, there are two text options: "I have a commitment to growth." on the left and "I have a commitment to my values." on the right. At the bottom center, there is a "Next" button.

One other interesting aspect of the test is that the test taker has 20 seconds to answer each question meaning the test taker must think and act quickly. Twenty seconds was the set amount

of time given because studies have shown that the instinctive response is the most natural.<sup>8</sup> If a test taker thinks too long about a question, the test taker may be inclined to answer in a way they want to be viewed rather than allowing the test to give accurate results. When one misses some questions, selects neutral for a good number of questions, or lets the 20 second clock run out for too many questions, the results will read “inconclusive.”

Each question on the test is connected to at least one of the 34 themes. Some questions may be connected to more than one of the themes. Appendix 1 shows the list of 34 themes and how many questions deal with each theme. According to the appendix the questions affect the themes 289 times, yet there are only 177 questions. There are more effects on the themes than there are questions. This proves each question has a 61% chance of affecting more than one theme

This 30 to 45-minute test claims to be able to tell more about an individual than an in-depth interview would be able to tell you. The test asks descriptive questions reaching the highest achievers across many different careers and environments.<sup>9</sup> Does this make the test reliable? The reliability of this test will be studied later in the paper.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The test itself is called StrengthsFinder, but technically the results given by the test tell you what the person’s talents are. These talents may not be the test taker’s current strengths. In other words, it tells you what you are naturally good at. It is important to know a talent does not always become a strength. A talent needs to be worked on in order for it to become your

<sup>8</sup> Rath, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Schreiner, 3.

strength. The equation Tom Rath uses in his book is Talent + Experience = Strength.<sup>10</sup> This equation is similar to the saying, “Hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard.”

Someone might be extremely talented in a certain area, but when they don’t have experience in that area, or refine that talent, it simply stays a talent rather than a strength.

To prove his point, Tom Rath uses the example of Rudy Ruettiger from the movie *Rudy*.

While Rudy might have scored a perfect 5 on a 1-5 scale for investment (the time he spent practicing and building his knowledge and skills), let’s assume he was a 2 on the talent scale. So his maximum potential for building strength in this area was only 10 (5 x 2), even when he scored as high as possible on the investment scale. And it is likely that Rudy had teammates for whom the inverse was true – they were a 5 on talent and just a 2 on time invested, which is clearly a waste of talent. And once in a while, you see a player like former Notre Dame great Joe Montana, who had abundant natural talent combined with hard work and the right development opportunities. This combination of a 5 in both areas—which yields a total score of 25, compared with Rudy’s score of 10 – is what can elevate someone to an entirely different level.<sup>11</sup>

Someone could have the ability to score a 25 in a category while another has the ability to reach a score of 15. This test focuses on placing people where they have the most potential to succeed. They take those who have the highest potential, scores such as a 25, and give them the proper experience to reach the highest potential.

The definition Dr. Schreiner, who has a Ph.D. from Azuza Pacific University studying and reporting on the use of StrengthsFinder with college students, gives of a strength focuses on the aspects mentioned above. “A strength was defined as a talent that was honed with the knowledge and skills that were needed to achieve excellence. The CSF was designed to measure the raw talents that could then be developed into strengths.”<sup>12</sup> To clarify, Clifton StrengthsFinder is CSF.

<sup>10</sup> Rath, 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Rath, 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Schreiner, 2.

The person taking the test can see where their talents lie and, with experience, turn the talent into a strength by mastering it.

Strengths and weaknesses go hand in hand. One cannot have strengths without weaknesses. StrengthsFinder does not call them weaknesses, instead they call them “lesser talents.” If you neglect these lesser talents, they become weaknesses. If you recognize and know your lesser talents, they continue to be lesser talents rather than becoming weaknesses. Test takers can balance their lesser talents by partnering with someone who is more talented in the area the test taker isn’t or knowing there needs to be a system to assist you with the lesser talent.

StrengthsFinder describes a weakness as anything that gets in the way of a person’s success. There are certain questions that can be asked in order to identify a weakness. Does this theme, also known as a strength, ever undermine my success? Have I ever received negative feedback related to this theme? Does my role require me to use this theme, but I feel drained when I do? If someone answers yes to any of these questions, StrengthsFinder suggests you find a way to manage areas of lesser talents.

### **The Results**

Once the test is taken, the test taker immediately sees the results. If the test taker does not purchase all 34 strengths, the test taker will only receive their top five strengths but if they pay for all 34 strengths, they will receive them in order from 1 to 34. These 34 strengths fall under four domains: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking.

The Executing domain describes a person who efficiently accomplishes tasks. Executing has nine themes within the category: Achiever, Arranger, Belief, Consistency, Deliberative, Discipline, Focus, Responsibility, Restorative. These are the themes that “do.” These themes

describe the people who are the drivers behind the action. Someone with Executing themes works with speed, precision, and accuracy in order to accomplish tasks when they need to be finished.<sup>13</sup>

The Influencing domain has eight themes: Activator, Command, Communication, Competition, Maximizer, Self-Assurance, Significance and Woo. Freeburg, who uses StrengthsFinder with his work through a group called Leadership Vision, describes this category best in his article when he says, “These eight themes enable individuals or groups to sell the big ideas. They are able to take charge, speak up and be heard. They are extremely helpful when you need to reach a broader audience or meet a bigger goal. This can happen both internally with the team or external constituents. They tend to influence forward.”<sup>14</sup>

The Relationship Building domain has nine themes: Adaptability, Connectedness, Developer, Empathy, Harmony, Includer, Individualization, Positivity, Relator. All the themes in this domain relate to how the test taker views relationships with others. An individual with Relationship Building strengths can see how each person fits into the big picture and play a role in a larger group. The person who has high marks in the Relationship Building themes is the relationship builder in the group.

Strategic Thinking is the final domain. This domain has eight themes: Analytical, Context, Futuristic, Ideation, Input, Intellection, Learner, and Strategic. This domain focuses on the ability to think critically and/or problem solve. It is important to recognize this could relate to

<sup>13</sup> Nathan Freeburg, “How to Understand the Four Domains of Strength.” Leadership Vision, March 12, 2019. <https://www.leadershipvisionconsulting.com/how-to-understand-the-four-domains-of-strength/>.

<sup>14</sup> Freeburg, “How to Understand the Four Domains of Strength.”

the current situation of the person or the obstacles that may come up in the future. People who have strengths in this category have the ability to think things through before taking action.<sup>15</sup>

Once the results have been tabulated you can view the results of your top five or all 34. The top five option costs \$20 and all 34 costs \$50 at first or an additional \$40 if you decide to purchase them after paying for your top five. Some businesses or groups find the top five sufficient for their needs. Others like to see all 34. The reasoning behind seeing all 34 is that you can see what your bottom strengths are and use that information for your benefit as well.

Appendix 2<sup>16</sup> demonstrates what would be seen if only the top five were purchased. It shows the top five themes of the person, which are: Belief, Futuristic, Woo, Achiever, and Responsibility. Scanning the appendix shows the strengths the participant has and provides a longer definition as to what each strength means. These definitions give a brief overview of what the strengths of a particular person are. When you look at them, you can put the themes into the domains where they belong: belief-executing, futuristic-strategic thinking, woo-influencing, achiever-executing, responsibility-executing. Businesses and groups will take the top five themes combined with the domains they fall into and attempt to pigeonhole who a person is and how the person can be best used within the business.

Appendix 3<sup>17</sup> shows the whole list of 34 themes made visible. Appendix 3 is only the front page of the report. The rest of the report gives an in-depth explanation of each theme within the top ten. The results also give a couple bullet points for potential blind spots within the theme which are areas the test taker needs to look out for as they meet or interact with others, plan

<sup>15</sup> Freeburg, "How to Understand the Four Domains of Strength."

<sup>16</sup> Used with test taker's permission.

<sup>17</sup> Used with test taker's permission.



work, or carry out the work. It also describes where the person lies within each domain. It states whether you are highest in executing, influencing, relationship building, or strategic thinking. Finally, the report gives a brief paragraph about each theme in order that the test taker might know the general idea of each theme.

One important piece of information to remember is different combinations of themes can cause one theme to be defined differently between two different people. Rath uses the theme, “learner,” as an example. There are many different ways someone can be a learner. They can learn by reading, doing, or simply watching. The Learner theme could mean something totally different within a completely different list of top five themes. Rath says StrengthsFinder has accounted for this. Since many people have taken the test, there is a database with more than five thousand descriptions for each theme depending on how other questions were answered and depending on the other themes in the top five or top ten.<sup>18</sup> Thus, two completely different people could have the theme, “Learner,” but have completely different descriptions under their theme.

Deciding on how in-depth the test taker wants the results to be will help the test taker decide which report they will purchase. Each report lets the test taker learn about their strengths and gives useful information to go along with the report. The test may also tell the test taker what their weaknesses are and allow them to claim them, ask for help, or strive to do the task to the best of their ability.

<sup>18</sup> Rath, 25-26.

## Reliability

StrengthsFinder has been around since 1998, but what testing has been done to determine the reliability of this test? Dr. Schreiner speaks to the reliability of the test completed in 2004 through 2005. This test consisted of contacting 750 students from 14 different colleges and universities. Of those 750 students, only 438 students data was used in the study. The participants varied in gender, race, and age. These students took the test twice, 8 to 12 weeks apart. This is the test-retest reliability method. The results came back and proved StrengthsFinder was a reliable test.

The highest possible test-retest reliability score is 1.00, which would indicate that all students who took CSF responded *exactly* the same 8-12 weeks later as they responded the first time—despite not knowing their initial results. Most statisticians agree that a test-retest reliability estimate of .70 is evidence of acceptable stability over time. The mean test-retest reliability estimates across the 34 themes in this college students' sample was .70, which meets those standards.<sup>19</sup>

Another way to check its reliability is to see how much change there was within the top five of people who took it more than once. While thinking about this aspect of reliability, it is important to remember that there are 278,256 possible combinations. Looking at Appendix 1, you will notice some themes only have four questions that coincide with that theme. Therefore, if an answer is different in one of those four questions it can cause a significant change in where the theme lands in the top 34. With all that in mind, here are those results:

Thus, the likelihood of retaining exactly the same themes, particularly in the same order, is very small. However, 52% of the students in this sample had at least three themes that remained among the top five themes both times. Another 35% retained two of their top five themes over time, 11% retained only one of their themes, and 2% did not retain any of the same five themes from time 1 to time 2. A further frequency analysis indicated that in the vast majority, the themes that did not remain in students' top five in the retest did remain in their top ten.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Schreiner, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Schreiner, 6.

The theory in the paragraph above can be tested using Appendix 2 and 3. The test results of Appendix 2 and 3 are from the same person who took the test two years apart. Appendix 2 only has the top five test results. This means the top five strengths from appendix 2 and 3 will be compared. When you compare the top five of Appendix 2 with the top five of Appendix 3, it shows only two of the top five are the same. Therefore, this test taker falls to the 35% of those who had two of the same top strengths. Now look at where the other three top five themes of Appendix 2 showed up in Appendix 3. They show up in position 7, 9, and 12. Therefore, it also holds true to the reliability test as explained above. Those not in the top five of one test don't drop all that far down the list in the other test.

## PART II: STRENGTHSFINDER'S USE WITHIN THE WELS

### **Grace in Action**

Grace in Action ministry was formed in 2011. Grace in Action focuses on helping churches and groups in the WELS, ELS and CELC by providing coaching, leadership training, and donating resources. Grace in Action also assists in these denominations by providing expertise in areas such as: Christian team building exercises, strategic planning, leadership health and resiliency, transformational leadership, leading in a multicultural setting, ministering across the generation's, the GROW tool, leadership coaching, and StrengthsFinder team training.

The first step Grace in Action does is have the congregation, church council, or committee take the StrengthsFinder test. Once the test has been taken Grace in Action examines the data and establishes a meeting time. This meeting can take up to three or four hours depending on the group. During the meeting, Grace in Action goes over the results of the StrengthsFinder test and how to use the results in a way that capitalizes on the strengths of the group. Grace in Action does all this while looking through the eyes of Scripture and focusing on how people fit into kingdom work.

### **Similarities**

What are some of the similarities between the strategies used by Grace in Action with the other strategies used by Don Clifton? They use the same StrengthsFinder test that was described above. They receive the same results, either the top five or all 34. They agree with the idea the test simply tells a person their talents, and one must couple that talent with experience for it to truly become a strength. The test must also be explained because some words used in the domains and themes may have a certain connotation when in reality it is not what

StrengthsFinder intends. For example, look at the theme “Input.” If you hear someone has the “Input” theme, and you have never heard of StrengthsFinder before, you may think this person loves to share their ideas and always has to be heard. That is not accurate according to the test. Input means the person likes to collect and archive.<sup>21</sup> The person with Input likes to have all the information before they give their input. But when they do give their input, it would be best to listen to them because they have been taking in all the information and processing it for a better result.

### **Differences**

The first difference between Clifton StrengthsFinder and Grace in Action are the domains. The Clifton StrengthsFinder uses four domains also known as categories, Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking. Grace in Action has expanded the domains to eight instead of the original four. Those eight domains are: Traction, Seeing (Mind’s Eye), Lifestyle, Problem Identification, Driving, Interpersonal, Wild Cards, and Problem Solving.

The first domain is Traction. Three themes fall under Traction: Focus, Command, and Activator. What does it mean if a theme falls under the Traction domain? These are considered the strengths that move ideas forward. Without traction a car’s wheels will simply spin before it eventually starts moving forward. In the same way, a project may not get started on time if there is not someone within the group who has a strength in the Traction domain. The Traction strength propels projects, but eventually it must hand the task off because Traction strengths don’t always finish tasks.<sup>22</sup> For instance, do you know anyone who always has ten projects going

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 3.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Gostchock, “WELS Commission on Discipleship.” Waukesha, WI October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. (GIA Presentation).

on and would rather start another project than finish one of the other ten they have started? They might have strengths in the Traction category.

Individuals with strengths in the Traction domain often like to hand off the project to the Driving domain. The Driving domain has five themes: Significance, Maximizer, Self-Assurance, Competition, and Achiever. The Drivers like to finish a project. The Driving domain does not find much joy in starting the job, but those with Driving love accomplishing the job. They like the satisfaction of finishing the job.<sup>23</sup> You may know people in your life that must finish one task before they begin another. They also may never want to begin a task because they struggle with finding traction and desire to do so.

The next group of themes comes from the Seeing (Mind's Eye) domain. The seven themes under this domain are: Deliberative, Analytical, Context, Connectedness, Strategic, Ideation, and Futuristic. The Seeing domain looks at the past and the future and puts it all together.<sup>24</sup> While attending a meeting, a person with strengths in this domain may recall a time when the same situation was encountered in the past and how it was handled and turned out. The Seeing domain is cognizant of how their immediate decisions affect what might happen in the future. They have the innate ability to think through the whole process.

The next domain is Interpersonal. The seven themes that fall under this domain are: Relator, Maximizer, Developer, Includer, Empathy, Individualization, and Woo. This domain focuses on human interaction. People who have interpersonal themes understand and can relate to other people. It also makes it easier for them to work alongside others. Not only do they get

<sup>23</sup> GIA Presentation.

<sup>24</sup> GIA Presentation.

along with other people, but they thrive on human touch and interaction.<sup>25</sup> You may know these people as the extroverts in your friend group or friends who seems to remember the names of many people they meet.

Lifestyle is the next domain. The seven themes that fall under this domain are: Belief, Responsibility, Discipline, Adaptability, Consistency, Harmony, and Positivity. This domain has the greatest influence on strengths in other domains. For example, someone who has Belief has strong ideas about life.<sup>26</sup> To others they may seem opinionated and stubborn, stuck in their beliefs. Another example can be found in Positivity. Someone with Positivity always has the glass half-full mentality. Each theme in this domain affects other domains, many of which are easily seen when one reads the explanations of each of these themes.

The Wild Card domain is different from all other domains because the themes under this domain need to be paired up with themes from the other seven domains to be considered a strength. There are two themes under this domain: Communication and Learner. When they are partnered up with other themes it is a positive experience for the whole team.<sup>27</sup> For example, someone who has themes from the Interpersonal domain combined with Communication theme will be able to get to know others and connect them with the next person with whom they should talk.

The Problem Identification domain does exactly what it sounds like, identifies problems. The three themes under Problem Identification are: Strategic, Ideation, and Intellection. The Problem Identification themes excel at identifying the root of a problem and foreseeing problems

<sup>25</sup> GIA Presentation.

<sup>26</sup> GIA Presentation.

<sup>27</sup> GIA Presentation.

that might arise. They can see through all the surface issues and identify the real root of the problem.<sup>28</sup> These types of people are especially helpful when there is a problem between two people, a flaw within a plan or a person experiencing life crisis. You already may be thinking of someone who constantly brings up potential problems they foresee in a plan or an idea. This is not because they are against the plan, but they see potential problems that others do not and may never see.

The final domain is Problem Solving. The five themes under this domain are: Restorative, Input, Arranger, Analytical, and Deliberative. Individuals within this domain work closely with those in the Problem Identification domain. The Problem Solvers not only solve the issues, but also identify the steps needed to come to that resolution.<sup>29</sup> Some may say these two domains are the same thing, but there is a subtle difference. Not all people who identify the problem can come up with the solution. And not all people who can up with the solutions can identify the problem.

A study of the different domains reveals how people can be completely different. Some people like to jump right in while others like to sit back and make sure they have thought it all through. Some people like to branch out and challenge themselves to meet everyone at a gathering, while others are fine meeting one person and getting to know that one person extremely well. Every person has different themes or strengths. Identifying and knowing each person's strengths can enable a group of people to see how each person fits into the group.

Grace in Action also speaks of the 80/20 rule. The 80/20 rule says humans are made up of 80% nature and 20% nurture. The rule comes from the idea that your top five strengths make up

<sup>28</sup> GIA Presentation.

<sup>29</sup> GIA Presentation.



80% of who you are by nature.<sup>30</sup> The name of the process is different, but the understanding is similar. Previously, the statistics showed how many top five strengths stayed the same when the test was taken more than once. This statistic proves how little a person changes over the course of several years. However, what actually changes is the 20% of the 80/20 rule. The 20% reflects where the test taker can change as a person throughout their life. This 20% change does not innately change the strengths or the nature of the test taker. For example, someone who is a “Woo” does not learn to be an extrovert who can walk up and talk to almost anyone. Rather, talking to people is something they enjoy doing. Talking and getting to know people energizes them. Woo is a part of the test taker their whole life. Nurture has an effect on nature, but it does not create it.

Another difference between Clifton StrengthsFinder and Grace in Action is the use of Scripture. The fact that Grace in Action uses Scripture may seem obvious, but there is an important point behind it. StrengthsFinder is a part of the Positive Psychology movement. Positive Psychology does not leave room for original sin. Instead, it states if everyone looked at the positives of people and their abilities, life would be better. If the focus is on a person’s strengths, everything in life from interactions to jobs to whom someone is as a person will be better and more positive.

The final difference is the found in the pyramid Grace in Action uses within its presentation. Appendix 6 shows a pyramid and gives a picture of the pyramid. The pyramid has four tiers. The bottom tier, which is the biggest and therefore the most important, is remembering that we are redeemed children of God. Moving up a tier you see “Spiritual, Emotional, and Physical Health.” The next tier is “Gospel-produced fruit of the Spirit.” The very top tier consists

<sup>30</sup> GIA Presentation.

of your top five or eight strengths. If you don't have any of the bottom three tiers the use of your top strengths in the top tier is going to crumble and your strengths become useless. The pyramid ranges from simply remembering who you are as a child of God, to having good physical health. For example, if someone does not get the recommended amount of sleep needed each night, they are not going to be able to use their strengths to their full potential. If someone is hurting emotionally, they probably aren't going to be in the right frame of mind to think clearly. It seems logical, and as Christians the most logical and solid foundation is who we are in Christ.

### **Commission on Discipleship**

I was able to sit in a StrengthsFinder training session and gather research. In this training session Grace in Action went over StrengthsFinder with a group of people. Pastor Donn Dobberstein and the WELS Commission on Discipleship were kind enough to let me sit in as Dr. Scott Gostchock led the Commission through what their strengths meant to each person as an individual and for the team as a whole. Having an opportunity like this was very helpful in gathering information on how Grace in Action uses StrengthsFinder to enhance ministry.

Dr. Gostchock took the Commission through a presentation on StrengthsFinder. He started with a devotion on 1 Corinthians 12:1–18. Gostchock proceeded to explain how Grace in Action uses StrengthsFinder. Following that explanation, Gostchock walked through each strength. When each strength was brought up, he requested those with that specific strength to stand. Gostchock explained what the strength was, what attributes are seen in a person with that strength, and how that strength can be used for the benefit of the group. As he presented the attributes seen in the person, it was interesting to see how the members of the team agreed with his description. He walked through how a team might work together with the different strengths

they had. It was interesting to see the lightbulb moments within the Commission on Discipleship as they learned how they could enhance their team. This brief overview made the meeting seem short, but the meeting itself was three hours long and Gostchock wished he would have had more time to explain things further.

Appendix 5 is a chart Dr. Gostchock shared with the Commission. The chart shows the expected results to run an efficient team and the actual results. The areas where the actual is much lower than the expected are areas in which you look to add people.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Gostchock said the results in Appendix 5 were pretty good. Traction, Driving, and Problem Solving were lower than expected. Traction, Driving and Problem-Solving areas were the ones where more attention may be directed or where members of the Commission with these strengths will be identified and counted on because they excel in those specific areas.

Toward the end of the meeting, the Commission asked each other how they might use this test. The discussion was brief, but brought some good ideas. Some members thought the Commission should split up into groups with many different strengths within each group. Having two groups made up of different people with different strengths allows a task to move through the group faster.

Other options consisted of making groups of people with similar strengths. Then the tasks would move from group to group depending on what strengths are needed within each task at the moment. For example, each task starts within the group specializing in the Traction domain, the domain that gets things started. As the task moves forward, it is passed off to the Problem Identification domain and the Problem Solvers. Eventually it ends with those who have strengths in the Driving domain, the domain that finishes tasks. As soon as the Traction domain completed

<sup>31</sup> GIA Presentation.

the start of the task, they could start a new task, or they could even be working on multiple tasks at the same time.

It was interesting to see how the Commission on Discipleship was excited and interested to see how this test might allow them to work together to expand the kingdom. I could sense enthusiasm in the room at the end of the meeting. People were genuinely interested to see how this would affect their future meetings together.

A month and a half after the meeting I was able to follow up with Pastor Dobberstein. I asked him how the Commission on Discipleship had used StrengthsFinder or if there was any more discussion as to how they would use StrengthsFinder in the future. He responded with the following:

For my Commission on WELS Discipleship, Strengthsfinder will help better align discipleship tasks with personal strengths. I don't want a commission that simply meets once a year, rubberstamps decisions, and listens to reports. Each commission member brings their strengths that create a marvelous balance. For example, the ELS asked us to a joint meeting in January to discuss congregational confirmation resources. Who should go? Pastor Jon Bergemann has intellection and context as his #1 and #2. I need those gifts at the table.<sup>32</sup>

Pastor Dobberstein uses StrengthsFinder to improve efficiency in meetings and helps place the different members of the Commission where they can best use their strengths for the benefit of the team, and ultimately for the benefit of the ministry. The Commission on Discipleship is full of gifted pastors who all could have attended the meeting with the ELS. Yet, StrengthsFinder showed who would best be suited to attend the meeting.

<sup>32</sup> Interview of Pastor Dobberstein.

## PART III: INTERVIEWS

### **The Interview Process**

The use of Grace in Action has grown throughout the WELS, so talking with them was the obvious first step. After talking with Grace in Action, I asked them for groups they had taken through StrengthsFinder. I was given a list of many schools and churches who had used StrengthsFinder and the first one I settled on was St. Peter's Lutheran Church and School in Appleton, WI.

St. Peter's in Appleton has a large faculty and staff who have all taken the StrengthsFinder test. Therefore, it made sense for St Peter's to be a resource who represented a larger faculty and staff in the study. I was able to get in contact with Mr. Phil Punzel, the principal at St. Peter's. He gave me the contact information for the faculty members under him. I sent the fifteen faculty members a SurveyMonkey asking them three questions about their thoughts on StrengthsFinder. The questions are discussed later on. I asked for positive and negative aspects of StrengthsFinder and how it has affected their ministries. Out of the fifteen faculty members I emailed, I received responses from five of them. The SurveyMonkey keeps the results anonymous. Therefore, I do not know what each faculty member said.

The document Grace in Action gave me also contained the name of Pastor Jay Bickelhaupt. Pastor Bickelhaupt's congregation in Billings, Montana, uses StrengthsFinder with the small faculty they have. However, I focused more on Pastor Bickelhaupt's use of StrengthsFinder within the leadership groups of his congregation. I chose Pastor Bickelhaupt's and his congregation because his congregation presented a contrast to the much larger setting of St. Peter's in Appleton.

Therefore, I could compare the results from a much larger school and church to a smaller preschool and church.

I also was privileged to have a half hour phone interview with Dr. Scott Gostchock. I requested this phone interview after I was able to meet and watch Dr. Gostchock walk through StrengthsFinder with the WELS Commission on Discipleship. I used this interview to solidify what I heard in his meeting with the Commission. It was also a time for me to ask specific questions I had. After my conversation with Dr. Gostchock, I needed to speak with people who shared opportunities StrengthsFinder provides and people who saw obstacles in the way of the use of StrengthsFinder. These individuals included faculty members of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, faculty members of Wisconsin Lutheran College, and active parish pastors. For those who were close enough for me to visit, I scheduled a time and spoke with them in person. I interviewed those who were farther away via phone or e-mail, depending on what worked best for them. Some interviews were focused on the use of StrengthsFinder in the WELS. In other conversations I was not looking for how StrengthsFinder was being used, but reactions to StrengthsFinder and its use in the WELS. I knew I was reaching the end of the interviews when I heard similar thoughts on the matter: positive thoughts or thoughts concerning the obstacles. These interviews will be reflected in the section on advantages and obstacles of StrengthsFinder.

### **Interviewees**

#### **St. Peter's, Appleton Faculty**

The faculty and staff at St. Peter's Appleton numbers upwards of 50. I did not interview all 50 because not all of them are well versed in StrengthsFinder. Of the 50 staff, 15 faculty members

use StrengthsFinder on a regular basis and have seen it used within the faculty for many years.

Therefore, the survey was sent out to 15 faculty members.

The first question I asked them was how StrengthsFinder has been useful within the faculty at the school. One faculty member said,

It has proven useful in that it's opened my eyes to the different gifts/strengths here among us. I know who some "go-to" people are for different problems, events, or input that I need. It's also helped me to understand my peers and to adjust my expectations for them. For example, if I know that a certain faculty member is more analytical as opposed to empathetic, then I will take a technical or scheduling issue to them as opposed to going to them when I've had a rough day and need a friend to listen and share encouragement.<sup>33</sup>

This faculty member knows to whom they can go in time of a need and be shown empathy. When this faculty member is stuck on a specific analytical problem, the faculty member doesn't need to spend eight hours trying to figure it out. Instead, they take the issue to someone who is analytical and the problem is solved much more quickly. The individual who was having the problem feels a sense of relief and saves time while the person who is analytical feels helpful. The same can be said about the one who shows empathy. The faculty member with empathy enjoys listening to other's problems. If the analytical person had to listen to someone's problem, they might be holding back the words, "Get over it!"

Another typical response received on the survey was that StrengthsFinder serves to provide talking points between two people who have taken StrengthsFinder.<sup>34</sup> One of those talking points is asking the question, "What are your top five strengths?" Writing on this topic has made me realize this is the number one talking point. I have been asked by at least 20 people what my top five strengths are after telling them about my thesis. People who are well versed in

<sup>33</sup> Interview of St Peter's Faculty.

<sup>34</sup> Interview of St Peter's Faculty.

StrengthsFinder, such as a faculty at St. Peter's in Appleton, can turn this question into an hour-long conversation about each person's top five strengths.

One individual who participated in the survey commented on a reservation they had concerning StrengthsFinder.

It's not been helpful to hear a few utter comments like, "That's not in my wheel house so they're just going to have to find someone else to do that." While the person may have a bit of a point, "opting out" of serving or upholding characteristics of someone in the public ministry (ie. Making yourself available for needed conversations, following through on assigned tasks, etc.) is a misuse of the StrengthsFinder information. This is rare, but has happened.<sup>35</sup>

This comment shows what some people may see as StrengthsFinder's biggest obstacle, using StrengthsFinder to get you out of a certain task. Knowing your own strengths does not mean you will always be working within your comfort zone. As this quote points out, it would be a misuse of StrengthsFinder if someone uses this as a reason not to fulfill a part of the interviewees calling in the public ministry.

One of the final questions asked of the faculty was, "Is StrengthsFinder a good use of your time and resources?" The overall response was, "yes." St. Peter's chose to use StrengthsFinder in a way that would be a benefit to the church, school, and the faculty and staff connected with both. Therefore, in a situation like this many people found the use of StrengthsFinder extremely beneficial.

#### Pastor Jay Bickelhaupt

Pastor Bickelhaupt is a pastor at Apostles Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. I was directed to Pastor Bickelhaupt by Dr. Gostchock as well as my thesis advisor, Professor Pagels. He and

<sup>35</sup> Interview of St Peter's Faculty.



his church have been using StrengthsFinder since April of 2017. The congregation covers the cost for the test and anyone is able to take the test. StrengthsFinder is used specifically within a group of 25-30 leaders, male and female, in the congregation. Apostles has a meeting in which they have a certain number of assignments needing to be completed or distributed to committee members. The ministry support team, a team made of up of men and woman, have the list of tasks needing to be completed in front of them as well as each team member's strengths. While they are looking at the strengths of the team members and the tasks at hand the team is not assigning tasks to individuals. Rather, as a ministry team, they are discussing how they are going to accomplish all the tasks and get them done well and in a timely fashion. Thus, the use of StrengthsFinder helps Apostles Lutheran Church practice good stewardship of time. Speaking of stewardship, Pastor Bickelhaupt also offers StrengthsFinder to those who are taking Bible Information Class at the church during the stewardship lesson.<sup>36</sup>

StrengthsFinder has also helped Pastor Bickelhaupt personally. He uses StrengthsFinder with his vicar that he receives every year. He has the vicar take StrengthsFinder because it helps him get to know his vicar in a short period of time. StrengthsFinder also helps him see how he and his vicar can work together throughout the year, maximizing their efforts in the short time they have together.<sup>37</sup>

Through the use of StrengthsFinder, Pastor Bickelhaupt has increased his trust with the people with whom he works. StrengthsFinder allows him to get to know each person better. When you know someone better you trust them more. When you don't know someone, miscommunications can happen simply because you do not know the other individual's

<sup>36</sup> Interview of Pastor Bickelhaupt.

<sup>37</sup> Interview of Pastor Bickelhaupt.

personality. Along with these miscommunications comes a lack of trust in each other. Think of it this way. You're sitting in a meeting and someone who has strengths in the Input domain likes to collect and gather information. They may sit back in their chair, have a look on their face that may show disgust, and not talk much. Meanwhile the person who has strengths in the Ideation domain enjoys throwing thought after thought on the table not caring what is kept or thrown out. The person with strengths in Ideation may think they annoy the person who has strengths in Input. The person who has Ideation strengths might be annoyed at the one with Input strengths, thinking he or she doesn't talk much and doesn't appear to want to be in the meeting. Whether anyone is annoyed or not, the person with Input strengths is taking all the information the person with Ideation is throwing out, processing it, and getting ready to speak. When the person with Input strengths does speak people should listen because it's probably one of the better ideas or a combination. Instead of the two individuals being annoyed with each other, they can easily work together and come up with the best idea possible when each knows and understands each other's strengths.

This example shows how StrengthsFinder can create trust. The person with strengths in Input trusts that the person with strengths in Ideation will speak up about their ideas, thus getting others to do the same. The person with Ideation trusts that the person with Input will take all that information in and think of the best possible outcome. It also helps to have a person with strengths in Input in a team meeting when the meeting seems to be at stand still. Looking to the person with Input can often get the meeting back on track and moving forward.

The last thought Pastor Bickelhaupt shared emphasized how knowing the strengths of others allows you to be more evangelical. StrengthsFinder allows him to see people for who they are, not who he might want them to be. It helps him understand God's people and, more than

that, understand himself when trying to relate to God's people. It provides an idea of how the people he works with are wired and allows him as their pastor to be more specific when ministering to them.

## PART IV: RESULTS

The results of my study on the use of StrengthsFinder in the WELS will display opportunities and obstacles. These opportunities and obstacles were the ones expressed to me through conversations and interviews I had concerning StrengthsFinder. It is important and good practice, no matter one's opinion regarding StrengthsFinder and if and how it should be used within the WELS, to properly lay out the opportunities and obstacles. Once I have laid out the list of opportunities and obstacles, I will give my thoughts on StrengthsFinder and its place within the WELS.

### **Identified Advantages of StrengthsFinder**

Throughout the paper above some advantages of StrengthsFinder have been brought to light. This section will put in one place together the advantages that come along with the use of StrengthsFinder, while also expounding on them.

Starting with the advantage that was brought up many times in my conversations, is the ability StrengthsFinder has to teach you about yourself. StrengthsFinder teaches you where your strengths lie and why you do what you do.

StrengthsFinder is also a conversation starter. For example, if someone you don't know gets a call to your congregation and you don't know the individual's personality and interests, you can look at their Strengths as a starting point in getting to know them. StrengthsFinder gives you knowledge you can use to spark a conversation. Moreover, you have sparked a conversation that allows you to get to know the person and how you can work together in your ministries.

StrengthsFinder helps relationships. In my phone interview with Dr. Gostchock, I asked the question, "Have you seen StrengthsFinder fix relationships?" Dr. Gostchock says he has seen

it helps strained relationships between two people who haven't been getting along. The effect it has on broken relationships is not the same.<sup>38</sup> Broken relationships are just that, broken. A simple StrengthsFinder test cannot fix that. But the strained relationships usually consist of a misunderstanding of the other person and why they do what they do. Getting to know each other through StrengthsFinder allows people currently in strained relationships to work towards having a better understanding and appreciation for the other person and hopefully mending the relationship.

StrengthsFinder helps you be a better steward of your time. It speaks to the areas that are not your strengths. It suggests scenarios in which you should partner up with someone with strengths in a different domain and can help you use your time better. Someone who struggles doing Excel spreadsheets can give all the information to someone who excels in Excel spreadsheets. The individual who enjoys Excel spreadsheets feels their abilities are being better used because they are working with their strengths. The one who struggles with Excel spreadsheets feels their strengths are being better used because they aren't spending five hours on a spreadsheet that ends up being mediocre. Instead, they were able to spend time completing other tasks they get done in less time.

### **Identified Obstacles of StrengthsFinder**

Throughout much of this paper the focus has been on what StrengthsFinder is and how it is being used. Yet there are people who see obstacles that need to be overcome when using StrengthsFinder. Very few of the people I talked to thought there was absolutely no use for

<sup>38</sup> Phone interview Dr. Gostchock.

StrengthsFinder, but a few saw some obstacles it presents. People who use StrengthsFinder on a regular basis in their life also see and know about these obstacles.

“Are humans meant to be pigeonholed down to 34 strengths?”<sup>39</sup> An individual I interviewed wrestled with that question. That is the question one individual I interviewed wrestled. This obstacle takes into account how God has made us. We are beautiful human beings, so why not let us be who God has made us to be? Aren’t humans more beautiful than the list of 34 strengths?

Businesses use StrengthsFinder to manage their employees in order to get as much out of their employees as possible. A couple pastors I talked with said it begs the question, “are we trying to manage our members and faculties or are we trying to equip our people?” Is a pastor okay being called a manager? What are the definitions of both manage and equip? Those who manage something have a specific purpose in mind. They administer and regulate, and they maintain control and influence. The definition of “equip” is to supply someone with the particular things they need for a purpose. So are you trying to be the manager who puts people where he thinks he will be helped out the most? Or are you trying to equip people so that they may be able to serve in a wider compacity? These are two very important questions when we discuss StrengthsFinder.

A final obstacle some shared is the cost. Is it a good use of money to pay \$20 a person to receive the results of StrengthsFinder? Will these results still be worth \$20 in 10 or 20 years, or will it turn into the many other tests that over the years have come and gone? So, is it worth \$300 for a faculty or church council of 15 to take this test? Does it tell them something they don’t already know about themselves, but just haven’t cared to talk about with each other? Cost plays a

<sup>39</sup> Personal interview.

role in the church as it does in most aspects of life. Some people think the money put towards StrengthsFinder could be better used.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview.

## PART V: RESPONSE

When people asked me about my thesis and I mentioned I was doing StrengthsFinder, the reactions differed across the board. Some people had never heard of it. Some people were strongly against it and others were strongly for it. Talking with those who were strongly against or for allowed me to hear opinions from different angles.

I believe StrengthsFinder is useful, but it can be misused. As many of my interviews and experiences have shown, StrengthsFinder can be used to help better understand people who are working with you. However, we cannot let it be the only way to get to know people. Personally, I believe by the time someone has graduated from college they know themselves well enough to know their strengths. They know what they excel at and what they enjoy doing. In some instances, why not just take the time to get to know someone? Why not show you are interested in them? Chances are you will learn their strengths. You will learn what they are good at and you will learn how you can work together. I fear StrengthsFinder may replace getting to know someone personally with assumption of who they are because we assume if we know their top five strengths, we already know them.

One reason people may hold back from sharing what they know or feel are their strengths is because they don't want to come off as full of themselves. It's weird for someone to advertise they are good at getting to know people and connecting them with others in the congregation or school. If someone were to tell you this is their strength you might think they are full of themselves, but if a test tells you it is their strength then the question arises, "why haven't we been using this person in this role all along?" There is a difference between someone who is full of pride and someone who is being honest about the gifts and talents God has given them. It is



my feeling that in some circumstances we don't need a test to tell us what we are good at because that person probably already knows. Just trust the person.

When considering the WELS Commission on Discipleship, a group of pastors who are from all over the United States, there are different factors coming into play. I am sure most of the pastors in the group have heard of one another, but do they know each other on a personal level? No. When they come to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry for a few days of meetings, having StrengthsFinder in front of them allows them to have a jump start on knowing how the group will work together. This goes for many other WELS committees where pastors travel from far away for meetings over a short period of time.

Now, consider the faculty of a school. The problem concerning school faculties is they don't all have the same size faculty. In a conversation I had with my thesis advisor we discussed proposing an imaginary line where we can separate different size faculties. The imaginary line is when the whole faculty can no longer fit into a house for the faculty Christmas party.<sup>41</sup> The faculty that fits into a house for the Christmas party is probably able to gather together more often than a faculty that does not fit. Therefore, the smaller faculty has the opportunity to spend more time together outside school and get to know each other. StrengthsFinder may not be needed immediately in a smaller faculty because they have more of an opportunity to get to know each other. A larger faculty, like St. Peter's in Appleton, may not have as many opportunities to get together as a whole faculty. At those faculty gatherings the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher may never speak with the 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher. In this case, StrengthsFinder allows for the whole faculty to get to know each other and work more efficiently. In both cases StrengthsFinder can

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Prof. Pagels.

be found useful, but in the smaller faculty setting, it may not be needed if the faculty simply gets to know each other.

I believe the use of StrengthsFinder comes down to one thing; being humbled by God. When one is humbled by God, test takers are able to use StrengthsFinder in a way that enhances ministry, especially in the areas of how councils, faculties and synodical groups work together. When discussing StrengthsFinder's use in the call process, I believe there needs to be more information gathered which this paper does not have.<sup>42</sup> But using StrengthsFinder to see how God has blessed different people does prove useful.

As far as cost goes, if you are going to use the results to benefit the team, it is worth the money. Many churches spend money on pens, pencils and pads of paper with church information on them. Where do those pens, pencils, and pads of paper sit? In the bottom of cabinet where very few people know they are. I would raise the argument StrengthsFinder is a better use of money than those pens and pencils. Yet, just like all those pens, pencils, and pads of paper, if you are not going to use StrengthsFinder then it too is a waste.

Therefore, the one main takeaway would be, yes, StrengthsFinder can be useful. StrengthsFinder has been used by many people within the WELS, in many different circumstances, and been extremely helpful. But StrengthsFinder is not the only useful tactic that can be used. Treating StrengthsFinder as an option is a great idea, but don't throw out the most precious way of getting to know someone. Don't throw out the most personal way to get to know someone. Don't throw out talking to someone one on one.

<sup>42</sup> I have my thoughts on this topic but I did not look into it as deeply as needed to comment on it. I am willing to discuss my thoughts with those interested in this topic; Maybe a thesis topic for the future.

## CONCLUSION

I have always been interested in personality tests and learning about myself. Although StrengthsFinder has taught me a little more about myself, it also reaffirmed what I already knew. Do not let StrengthsFinder replace getting to know one another in personal settings outside of the workplace. Do not let it be an excuse not to do something out of your comfort zone. Do not think God can't and won't work through those skills that are not your strengths. Recognize how StrengthsFinder can be useful for your faculty, church, or council and use it that way. Allow StrengthsFinder to be the tool it was made to be. If you think it won't be useful, then maybe it isn't for your group. Whatever you do, find a way to continue to grow and work for the good of the ministry.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1: Number of Statements Associated With Each Theme**

CSF Theme	Total Number of Items	CSF Theme	Total Number of Items
Achiever	6	Futuristic	8
Activator	7	Harmony	5
Adaptability	8	Ideation	7
Analytical	11	Includer	7
Arranger	13	Individualization	6
Belief	11	Input	5
Command	9	Intellection	10
Communication	9	Learner	8
Competition	7	Maximizer	7
Connectedness	8	Positivity	12
Consistency	8	Relator	8
Context	4	Responsibility	11
Deliberative	8	Restorative	6
Developer	10	Self-Assurance	13
Discipline	14	Significance	12
Empathy	6	Strategic	4
Focus	12	Woo	9

<sup>43</sup> Asplund, Jim, Sangeeta Agrawal, Tim Hodges, Jim Harter, and Shane Lopez Lopez. "THE CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER 2.0 TECHNICAL REPORT." *THE CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER 2.0 TECHNICAL REPORT*. Gallup, n.d. Accessed October 17, 2019. 3.

## Appendix 2

GALLUP®

CliftonStrengths®

Name Here

Date taken: 12/12/2012

Depending on the order of your themes and how you responded to the assessment, some of your themes may share identical insight statements. If this occurs, the lower ranked theme will not display insight statements to avoid duplication on your report.

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### Your Top 5 Themes

1. Belief
2. Futuristic
3. Woo
4. Achiever
5. Responsibility

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## Belief

### SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People who are especially talented in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their life.

### YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS

#### What makes you stand out?

It's very likely that you may be zealous — that is, fervent and enthusiastic — about solving problems that affect the quality of your life. Once in a while, you devote all your time and energy to a specific cause. Perhaps your core values explain why you participate in certain social, political, educational, religious, legal, or environmental activities. Driven by your talents, you are naturally compelled to admit the truth. If someone asked you or told you to intentionally mislead someone, you would reply, "I cannot and I will not do that!" By nature, you periodically think about ways you can provide for the basic needs of your entire family as well as the desires of particular individuals. Perhaps caring for your loved ones is one of your top priorities. Instinctively, you have no doubts about being linked in some way with everything in the universe. This includes all creation and all humankind. Because of your strengths, you probably have a reputation for working hours and hours when the assignment adds special meaning to your work, studies, or life in general.

#### Questions

1. As you read your personalized strengths insights, what words, phrases, or lines stand out to you?
2. Out of all the talents in this insight, what would you like for others to see most in you?

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## Futuristic

### SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People who are especially talented in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their visions of the future.

### YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS

#### What makes you stand out?

By nature, you occasionally spend a lot of time considering what the coming months, years, or decades have to offer you. When you ponder the future, you might consider what kind of world you will live in as you move through each stage of your life. Driven by your talents, you may set aside quite a bit of time to contemplate what the world could be like years or decades from today. Perhaps ideas come to you when you are in the company of particular visionary thinkers. Sometimes these individuals stimulate your inventiveness. Chances are good that you occasionally share your dreams about the coming months, years, or decades with people who appreciate your originality. Perhaps less imaginative individuals rely on you to tell them what is possible. It's very likely that you may find yourself spending a lot of time contriving innovative ideas about what will be possible in the coming weeks, months, years, or decades. At times, you give hints of being an inventor, a visionary, or a dreamer. You might consider new or different ways to use your finely honed — that is, sharpened — skills and knowledge. Because of your strengths, you are innovative, inventive, original, and resourceful. Your mind allows you to venture beyond the commonplace, the familiar, or the obvious. You entertain ideas about the best ways to reach a goal, increase productivity, or solve a problem. First, you think of alternatives. Then you choose the best option.

#### Questions

1. As you read your personalized strengths insights, what words, phrases, or lines stand out to you?
2. Out of all the talents in this insight, what would you like for others to see most in you?

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## Woo

### SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People who are especially talented in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.

### YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS

#### What makes you stand out?

Instinctively, you customarily enjoy being the person who gets people talking. When outsiders or newcomers have little or nothing to say, you usually find a way to ease them into the dialogue. It's very likely that you are talkative and friendly in the presence of newcomers. You delight in pulling outsiders or strangers into group discussions. You are likely to involve them in casual conversations with one or two other people. By nature, you routinely start talking with strangers to fulfill your emotional needs. You are energized by the conversations and by watching them become more comfortable with you. This probably fills you with a sense of importance, kinship or joy. You can make these strangers-turned-friends feel a lot better about themselves. Because of your strengths, you frequently need to know that others appreciate your ability to involve newcomers in discussions. You normally use compliments to acknowledge the talents or successes of those you meet. This prompts many strangers to say, "I've heard you are very friendly. Now I know it's true." Chances are good that you naturally enjoy beginning discussions with newcomers or outsiders. These private exchanges typically provide insights into the special talents, sources of inspiration, or other traits of each individual.

#### Questions

1. As you read your personalized strengths insights, what words, phrases, or lines stand out to you?
2. Out of all the talents in this insight, what would you like for others to see most in you?



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## Achiever

### SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People who are especially talented in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

### YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS

#### What makes you stand out?

Chances are good that you do a fine job of imparting knowledge to individuals. You spend a lot of time preparing appropriate stories, vivid examples, graphic illustrations, or useful materials to enliven your training sessions. By nature, you ensure that your work, living, and study areas are kept neat, spotless, and orderly. When things you value are in their proper places, you probably improve your overall efficiency and productivity. Driven by your talents, you frequently work without much rest. You typically want to pinpoint useful and intriguing facts. You likely have a need to explain why various events unfolded as they did. This information undoubtedly permits you to produce more and better results. Because of your strengths, you exhibit a natural aptitude for overcoming difficulties. You are frequently called upon to identify problems and then make needed repairs or implement appropriate solutions. You work so diligently that you ignore all kinds of distractions. Instinctively, you work diligently to discover how something functions. You probably enjoy studying various problems, processes, or mechanisms for hours. Why? They simply fascinate you. You certainly find this research mentally stimulating.

#### Questions

1. As you read your personalized strengths insights, what words, phrases, or lines stand out to you?
2. Out of all the talents in this insight, what would you like for others to see most in you?

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## Responsibility

### SHARED THEME DESCRIPTION

People who are especially talented in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

### YOUR PERSONALIZED STRENGTHS INSIGHTS

#### What makes you stand out?

Chances are good that you might be an individual performer who wants to be held accountable for certain results. Why? You might accomplish a bit more when expectations are established. You sometimes set expectations for yourself when no one else does. Driven by your talents, you are sometimes open and honest about who you are, what you have done, what you can do, and what you cannot do. Maybe your straightforward explanations and stories help listeners see you as you see yourself. You might reveal your strengths and limitations. You might choose to be forthright and plainspoken. This partially explains why various people seek your company and want to work with you. Perhaps your words and examples move them to action. Because of your strengths, you normally strive to do things right. Taking shortcuts strikes you as unprincipled, thoughtless, and careless. You likely refuse to produce sloppy work or engage in unethical practices. Instinctively, you volunteer for additional duties. You really enjoy being given authority over projects, individuals, or groups. You expect to be held accountable for the results you produce as well as your words and deeds. It's very likely that you yearn to be given additional duties. You expect to be held accountable for your productivity, profit, behavior, comments, and actions.

#### Questions

1. As you read your personalized strengths insights, what words, phrases, or lines stand out to you?
2. Out of all the talents in this insight, what would you like for others to see most in you?

## Appendix 3

CliftonStrengths®

Name and Date Taken

# Your CliftonStrengths 34 Results

You are uniquely powerful. Your distinct CliftonStrengths 34 profile sets you apart from everyone else. This is your talent DNA, shown in rank order based on your responses to the assessment.

Use this report to make the most of your strongest CliftonStrengths themes, navigate the rest and maximize your infinite potential:

- **Read and reflect on your results** to understand what you naturally do best.
- **Learn how to apply** your strongest CliftonStrengths every day.
- **Share your results with others** to create stronger relationships and improve teamwork.



### STRENGTHEN

1. **Harmony**
2. **Consistency**
3. **Significance**
4. **Belief**
5. **Woo**
6. Individualization
7. Responsibility
8. Communication
9. Futuristic
10. Relator

### NAVIGATE

11. Includer
12. Achiever
13. Arranger
14. Competition
15. Command
16. Analytical
17. Self-Assurance
18. Context
19. Restorative
20. Activator
21. Focus
22. Developer
23. Adaptability
24. Connectedness
25. Discipline
26. Positivity
27. Ideation
28. Maximizer
29. Learner
30. Intellection
31. Empathy
32. Deliberative
33. Strategic
34. Input

You lead with **Influencing** CliftonStrengths themes.

■ **EXECUTING** themes help you make things happen.

■ **INFLUENCING** themes help you take charge, speak up and make sure others are heard.

■ **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING** themes help you build strong relationships that hold a team together.

■ **STRATEGIC THINKING** themes help you absorb and analyze information that informs better decisions.

READ "IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION: THE CLIFTONSTRENGTHS DOMAINS" SECTION TO [LEARN MORE](#) >

### Appendix 4

Employee 1	Responsibility	Deliberative	Analytical	Harmony	Belief
Employee 2	Intellecion	Context	Adaptability	Strategic	Learner
Employee 3	Woo	Activator	Maximizer	Adaptability	Empathy
Employee 4	Belief	Developer	Responsibility	Harmony	Maximizer
Employee 5	Woo	Maximizer	Belief	Futuristic	Strategic
Employee 6	Achiever	Responsibility	Positivity	Connectedness	Activator
Employee 7	Harmony	Learner	Input	Connectedness	Relator
Employee 8	Responsibility	Deliberative	Input	Intellecion	Restorative
Employee 9	Individualization	Strategic	Positivity	WOO	Communication
Employee 10	Positivity	Belief	WOO	Includer	Harmony
Employee 11	Strategic	Communication	Activator	Maximizer	Individualization

### Appendix 5

Category	Expect	Actual	Index
<b>Traction</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Driving</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Seeing</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Lifestyle</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Problem Identification</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Problem Solving</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Wild Card</b>	<b>5.9%</b>	<b>7.3%</b>	<b>124</b>

## Appendix 6

# Total Performance Factors

- Remember who you are
- Grow in and address challenges/threats to health and resiliency
- Rejoice in the fruit the Gospel produces as you serve others
- Focus on strengths; look for partner-up opportunities



## **Appendix 7: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES**

Donn Dobberstein (WELS Commission on Discipleship) Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, Email interview, November, 2019.

Dr. Scott Gostchock (Member of Grace in Action team), interviewed by Caleb Klatt, Phone interview, October, 2019.

Dr. Michael Berg (Professor of Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College), Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, October, 2019.

Dr. Aaron J. Palmer (Professor of History at Wisconsin Lutheran College), Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, October, 2019.

Earle Treptow (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President) Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, October, 2019.

Jay Bickelhaupt (Pastor at Apostle's Lutheran Church, Billings, MT), Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, Phone interview, November, 2019.

Keith Schreiner (Pastor at Christ Lutheran Church, Marshall, MN) Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, Email interview, December, 2019.

Richard Gurgel (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor) Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, October, 2019.

St Peter's Lutheran School, Appleton, WI, Interviewed by Caleb Klatt, SurveyMonkey, October, 2019.

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