

CHRISTIAN counseling TODAY

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**Faith, Religious Community,
and Human Flourishing**
Harold G. Koenig

TUNE in to the Positive
Jon Gordon

**Core Strategies for Flourishing
in Life in Challenging Times**
Catherine Hart Weber

**Human Flourishing: Empirical
Research and Impact on Everyday Life**
Tyler J. VanderWeele

**Positive Life Lessons Learned
from Death's Doorstep**
Gary J. Oliver

**The Psychology of Joy and
Happiness: Seven Neuroscience
Secrets of Contentment**
Daniel Amen

A photograph of two hikers on a mountain peak. One hiker, wearing a red jacket and a yellow beanie, is leaning over and helping another hiker, who is wearing a red jacket and a red beanie, up a rocky ledge. The background shows a vast mountain range under a clear sky.

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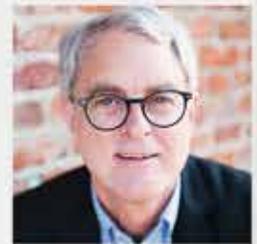
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Daniel Amen, M.D., is a physician, adult and child psychiatrist, and founder of Amen Clinics with 11 locations across the U.S. Amen Clinics has the world's largest database of brain scans for psychiatry, totaling more than 230,000 SPECT scans on patients from 155 countries. He is the founder of BrainMD, a fast-growing, science-based nutraceutical company, and Amen University, which has trained thousands of medical and mental health professionals in the methods he has developed. Dr. Amen is one of the most visible and influential experts on brain health and mental health, with millions of followers on social media.

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“A kiss from my mother made me a painter.”¹ – Benjamin West

“**N**ot a chance... not a prayer... not one. I just don't see it.” How many times have you heard that said about someone, especially in sports?

The odds of playing college or pro-level sports are slim to none. When you add a bad outing or two and a negative coach along the way, things can get ugly quickly. However, add in a coach who saw and said differently—“*Let me work with you, and let's see what could happen.*”¹ Oh, the struggle... “head games” from Little League to the big leagues.

According to the National Alliance for Youth Sports, around 70% of kids drop out of organized sports

by age 13.² Sure, there are many reasons behind the exodus, but I have rarely met a kid who did not want to succeed on the field or court or dream of that walk-off hit, buzzer-beater shot, or the celebratory dog pile at the end of the game. Somewhere, somehow something happened... or *didn't*.

One of the joys of my life has been the wonderful opportunity to coach several professional athletes in the sport they love. As a result, I learned early on the higher you go in athletic competition, the tighter the skill gap and the more people with talent look alike.

The real struggle that separates everyone is the battle of the mind.

I realized that even in the beauty of the game, the mind can be a very accessible, focused, and powerful place—but, at times, it can also be very dark, turbulent, and toxic. Hence, as the Pogo cartoon says, the great enemy or opponent is, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” The ability to press through, rise above, overcome challenges and adversity, and be resilient is everything. The best news is that this inner excellence can be crafted and shaped!

The Apostle Paul spoke of the power of our minds, or mindset, in Romans 12:1-2 (KJV), “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto*

Being competitive means exhibiting that single-minded drive and motivation to do whatever it takes.



God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” He writes in 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV), “... we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” And in Philippians 4:8 (KJV), he goes on to say, “... think on these things.”

What is amazing to me is the power of “people fuel.” That term, aptly spoken, brings hope and life to another. External forces stoke the internal fortitude necessary to rise up. When we encourage, we “give courage” to another and bring hope and life. Not convinced? Ask anyone you know if they ever had a bad coach and listen closely to how they respond. Or better yet, sit and listen to the stories of a coach they loved.

My focus in this article is to share eight principles on how to help individuals break through periods of difficulty, slumps, challenges, or feeling stuck and obtain peak performance. This applies to both sports and mental health. *Why?* Because we know

that storms come in any season. Just read Job 5:7 and 14:1. We are living in unprecedented times. Life is different today—people are tentative, fearful, empty, and exhausted. They are hurting, confused, angry, anxious, discouraged, and depressed. Every day we see people battling, feeling stuck... like they are struggling for clean air. In counseling, we hear terms like collective trauma being used more often.

But there is also good news! I have learned through the years that people tend to be most open to change during times of challenge or crisis. In my work, my focus is often on the psychology of stress vs. the psychology of success. This ability is related to resiliency. My friend and colleague, Dr. Kathy Koch, says resiliency is “... recovering readily from disappointment, failure, defeat, adversity, and trauma.”³

The 8 “C” Factors for Building Resiliency

The following factors can be utilized to help those we work with build resiliency.

1. Clarity. Having clarity is the ability to see the reality of the situation clearly for what it is and is not. It is working through doubt-confusion and stinking thinking (lost like a ball in high weeds).

2. Commitment. Being committed is to carry into action deliberately—to be ALL IN, willing to let other things go no matter the cost. Preparation leads to execution.

3. Control. Being in control is having power over, and regulating, emotions and behavior. It is focusing on what you can control and being free from distractions.

4. Confidence. Having confidence is possessing a “can-do” attitude, conviction, and certainty vs. mental chaos—both internally and externally.

5. Competitiveness. Being competitive means exhibiting that single-minded drive and motivation to do whatever it takes. Joe DiMaggio said late in his life that he would give up his records and trophies if he could compete again.

6. Composure. The calmness of mind and ability to stay within

yourself is composure. It is necessary to be in control under stress—when your heart rate goes up, you begin to sweat, your muscles tense, and your breathing changes so you can remain calm and play big when fear attempts to make you play small.

7. Courage. Being courageous is having the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, or withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. Author, Paul Stoltz, is quoted as saying, “Only climbers get to the top,”⁴ when comparing success with a mountain.

8. Consistency. Consistency means sameness, repeatability, muscle memory, and firmness of character free from variation.

This issue of *CCT* magazine examines the power of positivity, motivation, and psychology. My prayer is

that God will help you use these principles and strengthen your influence on the Kingdom as you minister to those needing help, hope, and encouragement. ✕

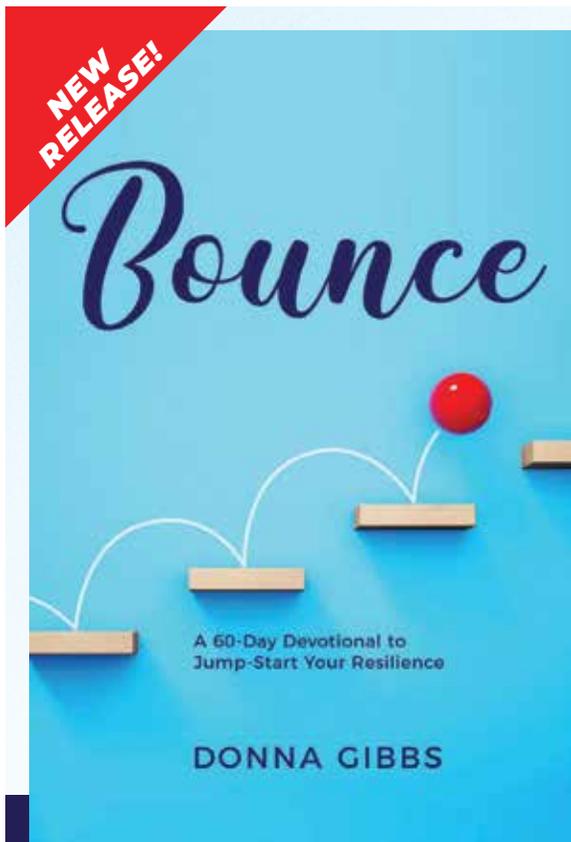


TIM CLINTON, ED.D., LPC, LMFT, BCPCC, is president of AACC, the world’s largest and most diverse Christian counseling association. He also serves as the Executive Director of the Liberty University Global Center for Mental Health, Addiction, and Recovery. Tim is the co-host of “Dr. James Dobson’s Family Talk,” heard daily on nearly 1,400 radio outlets. Licensed as a Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, he is recognized as a world leader in mental health and relationship issues and spends much of his time working with Christian leaders and professional athletes. Tim has authored or edited nearly 30

books. He and his wife, Julie, have two children and two granddaughters.

Endnotes

- 1 West, B. (n.d.). “A kiss from my mother made me a painter.” Quote-fancy. <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1632186/Benjamin-West-A-kiss-from-my-mother-made-me-a-painter>.
- 2 Dilworth, K. (2015, March 24). *Would you let your child quit a sport mid-season?* National Alliance for Youth Sports. <https://www.nays.org/would-you-let-your-child-quit-a-sport-mid-season>.
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- 4 Stoltz, P. (1999). *Adversity quotient: Turning obstacles into opportunities*. Wiley.



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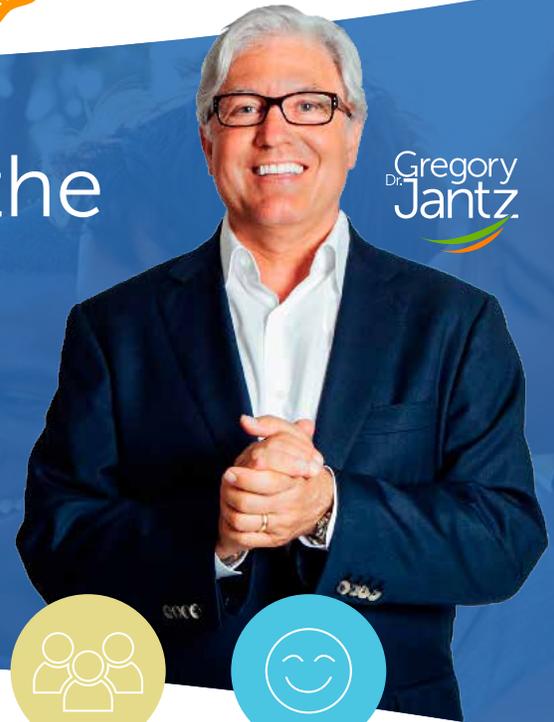




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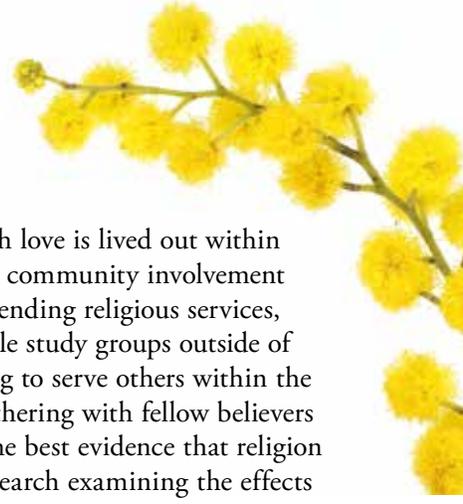


Nothing is more important than faith. “Human flourishing” becomes possible when sincere faith is combined with active involvement in a religious community and regular engagement in private religious activity. In this article, I examine these three components (faith, religious community activity, and human flourishing) and describe how they are connected based on the latest research published in peer-reviewed academic journals. First, I define these terms, then describe a theoretical causal model linking them together, and end by briefly summarizing the support from research endorsing this model.

Faith

Nothing is more important in a person’s life than what they place their faith, trust, and hope in. In real life, people put their faith in many things other than God. The object of faith may be a spouse, a child, a grandchild, a parent, sports heroes, pop singers, religious leaders, or sometimes even a political figure. Others have faith in their education, career, accumulating money, a prized possession, or achieving recognition and fame. Whatever the object of faith, this is the god they will serve and the master of their life. It will consume a person’s time, finances, and energy. It will rule their emotions, behaviors, and, ultimately, their physical health.

Attachment, at its extreme, to a substance like alcohol, drugs, or food or an activity such as sex, work, screen time, or even a person has the potential to become an addiction. Addiction is a state where a person spends most of their



time and resources on something. In that case, the object of faith will rule and control every aspect of life. The two words that describe addiction of this type are “compulsion” and “enslavement.”

What do you put your faith in? What do you spend most of your time, money, and attention on? What do you think about the most? This is the object of your faith and has the potential to determine your happiness, well-being, and health. Faith in God, in contrast, does not lead to enslavement but freedom. This God is pure and absolutely good. This God really and truly exists, just as everything else exists in the natural world, but cannot be seen, audibly heard, or physically touched. However, Jesus Christ is *“the image of the invisible God...”* (Colossians 1:15, NIV) and the Creator of heaven and earth and ourselves (Psalm 100:3).

Why is faith in God so important? One reason is suggested previously—whatever a person puts their faith and trust in, whatever they become attached to, has the potential to control and enslave them. Being enslaved to God should lead to freedom like nothing else can. No longer will one’s happiness and well-being be determined by someone or something else, but rather by a God alone who is good and truly loving. Faith in God, above all else, is the first of the 10 Commandments and the first of the two Great Commandments. Nothing is more important (Koenig & Koenig, 2023).

Although of primary importance, and necessary, faith is not sufficient by itself. Something more must accompany faith. The missing element here is love, since faith without love is *“nothing,”* as the writer of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 emphasizes. In the second great commandment, Jesus said that the love of others is *“like”* the first great commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). This means that the command to love others is similar to the command to love God. Thus, one must balance the love of God with the love of neighbor. The order here is important. Love of God comes first, thus giving the strength and ability to love a neighbor. The terrorist loves God but not the neighbor and the socialist loves the neighbor but not God. Both must be present, *“... faith expressing itself through love”* (Galatians 5:6, NIV). This leads to the second subject of this article: the faith community.

Religious Community

Faith expressing itself through love is lived out within a faith community. Religious community involvement has two do with regularly attending religious services, participating in prayer or Bible study groups outside of religious services, volunteering to serve others within the religious community, and gathering with fellow believers to encourage one another. The best evidence that religion affects health comes from research examining the effects of attending religious services on mental and physical health, which I will later review.

Spending time with other believers is essential for maintaining faith. Individuals who have a relationship with God can help encourage and bolster our faith, as we do in turn for them. Giving and receiving spiritual support is for Christians what it means to be part of the “body of Christ.” Engaging in praise and worship together as a community brings a person into the very presence of God. Indeed, God *“inhabitest the praises”* of his people (Psalm 22:3, KJV). As we fellowship with one another and share our burdens and joys, sing praises to God and engage in corporate prayer, and listen to sermons, all are united in common belief and commitment. The writer of Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) stresses how important this is: *“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Bear in mind, however, that participating in a faith community may be more difficult for some than others. For extroverts who love getting together and socializing with others, getting involved in a faith community is easy and consistent with their natural tendencies. However, it may not be so easy for introverts who would rather spend time alone reading or contemplating. Easy or not, though, the Bible says to do it and do it regularly. This requires finding a religious community that nurtures one’s spirit with the truths of God. Unfortunately, not all religious communities do that, necessitating the search for one that does.

Engagement in private religious activities, such as prayer and Scripture study, goes hand-in-hand with religious community involvement, each reinforcing the other

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and both supporting and being strengthened by faith. Engagement in religious community activity without a devoted private spiritual life or a private spiritual life without active involvement in a religious community is inconsistent with what Scripture teaches about the path to a full life—turning now to the psychological, social, behavioral, and physical rewards promised to those who place God first and diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Human Flourishing

Dr. Tyler VanderWeele, who is an endowed professor of study design and biostatistics at the Harvard School of Public Health, defines human flourishing as:

“... doing or being well in the following five broad domains of human life: (i) happiness and life satisfaction; (ii) mental and physical; (iii) meaning and purpose; (iv) character and virtue; and (v) close social relationships” (VanderWeele, 2017, p. 8149).

I now describe these five (six) dimensions of human flourishing as mentioned by Dr. VanderWeele.

Happiness and Life Satisfaction. This dimension includes positive emotional states such as psychological well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction, as well as optimism, hope, mastery, resilience, and the feeling that life is full and complete. This is the kind of life that Jesus promised: “... *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (John 10:10, NIV).

Mental and Physical. Mental health refers to the absence of mental health problems that affect our ability to function in social, occupational, or recreational settings. These problems include depression, anxiety, addiction (e.g., alcohol, drugs, sex, food, etc.), negative feelings of any kind, and inner conflicts over moral transgressions. Physical health, in turn, refers to being physically well and having the physiological reserve necessary to function independently and thrive in activities that require physical effort. Physical health includes the engagement in behaviors that maintain health, such as participating in regular exercise, eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and avoiding harmful habits such as smoking, vaping, excessive use of alcohol, or too much screen time.

Meaning and Purpose. The presence of meaning and purpose means one has a reason to get up in the morning, believing they can make a real difference in the world. A person with meaning and purpose has objectives and goals they are striving to accomplish and is motivated to participate in activities that bring about the good. A person with faith in God and Jesus Christ is assured of having meaning and purpose in life, no matter what happens. Indeed, “... *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28, NIV).

Character and Virtue. Character is the result of forming a habit of adhering to moral and ethical values regardless of circumstances; it is how a person acts alone when no one is watching. The “cardinal virtues” include prudence (practical wisdom), justice, courage (fortitude), and temperance (self-control). All require a considerable amount of self-discipline. Acting to promote the good and delaying gratification for a greater good, even when life is challenging, is the heart of character and virtue.

Close Social Relationships. One of the most important components of a flourishing life is having close, meaningful relationships with friends, co-workers, and family members. Close social relationships involve giving and receiving emotional support during difficult times, painful losses, and distressing, traumatic events (mostly involving giving).

Financial and Material Stability. Although not included in the initial five dimensions of human flourishing, VanderWeele added this dimension to ensure that such flourishing could be sustained over time. For an individual to continue to flourish over time, they must have adequate financial and material resources. Indeed, it is difficult



True human flourishing is not possible without belief in God's actual, real, and objective existence and the diligent seeking of God through public and private religious practices. Human flourishing is the inheritance due to a committed believer.

to flourish when poverty-stricken or forced to live in a neighborhood where crime, addiction, and physical threats are the norm.

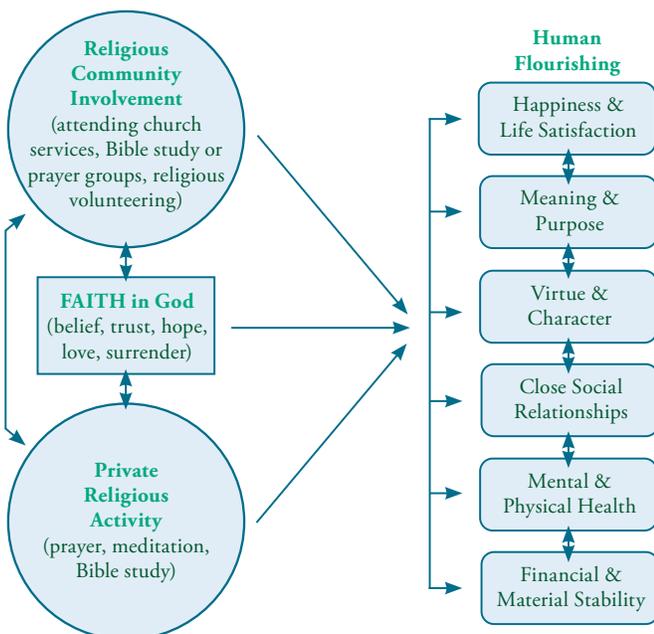
Other Dimensions. VanderWeele (2017) does not limit the dimensions of human flourishing to only these six. He acknowledges that there may be other dimensions of human flourishing as well. He notes that:

“Someone who is religious, for example, would almost certainly include some notion of communion with God or the transcendent within what is meant by flourishing. I would only argue here that, whatever else flourishing might consist in, these five [six] domains above would also be included, and thus these five [six] domains above may provide some common ground for discussion” (p. 8149).

Modeling the Relationships

Based on objective research, I now describe a theoretical causal model that illustrates how faith, religious activity, and human flourishing are related (see **Figure 1**). In this model, faith in God (belief, trust, hope, love, and surrender) *directly* influences all six aspects of human flourishing and *indirectly* does so through religious community involvement and private religious activity (which, in turn, reinforces faith in God). Faith in God is at the center of this model. Nothing is more important; faith is

Figure 1. Theoretical causal model illustrating the pathways by which faith, together with religious community and private religious activity, influence human flourishing.



the symphony director of everything in the model. True human flourishing is not possible without belief in God's actual, real, and objective existence and the diligent seeking of God through public and private religious practices. Human flourishing is the inheritance due to a committed believer.

Supporting Research

A vast and growing body of scientific research shows that religious involvement is related to each of the previously described six aspects of human flourishing. Much of this research is from leading academic institutions and published in mainstream scholarly journals in psychiatry, medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, and public health—scientific fields that have historically been quite skeptical about religion. A more comprehensive review of the most recent studies may be found in the 3rd edition of the *Handbook of Religion and Health* published by Oxford University Press (Koenig et al., 2023).

Happiness and Life Satisfaction. Many studies document the impact of religious belief and activity (RBA) on psychological well-being. Systematic reviews of the quantitative research published in the 1st and 2nd editions of the *Handbook* identified 326 quantitative peer-reviewed academic reports on the subject. Of those, 256 of 326 (79%) found that greater RBA was associated with or predicted greater happiness, life satisfaction, and other indicators of psychological well-being; only three of those 326 studies (<1%) reported significantly lower well-being among the more religious (Koenig et al., 2001; 2012). Recent studies since 2010 support these earlier findings (Koenig et al., 2023).

Meaning and Purpose. In the systematic review of the research described earlier, RBA was consistently related to greater meaning and purpose (Koenig et al., 2001; 2012). In fact, 42 of 45 (93%) quantitative studies found greater meaning and purpose among those scoring higher on RBPs. More recent research using larger samples and better methodology has reported similar findings (Chen & VanderWeele, 2018; Chen et al., 2020a).

Virtue and Character. Numerous studies have examined the relationship between religious involvement and altruism, volunteering, gratitude, forgiveness, delinquency, and crime, reflecting the effects of RBA on virtue and character. The majority found that greater religious involvement was related to significantly greater



involvement in altruistic activities and volunteering (33 of 47 studies), increased gratitude (five out of five studies), increased forgiveness (34 of 40 studies), and lower levels of delinquency and crime (82 of 104 studies). More recent research confirms these findings (Koenig et al., 2023).

Close Social Relationships. Close relationships with family members and extended social networks are central to human flourishing. Because religious teachings strongly encourage mutual support and dependability in human relationships, a connection with religious involvement is expected. The systematic review mentioned earlier found that RBA was associated with significantly improved social support in over 80% of quantitative studies (61 of 74 studies). More recent research supports these findings (Semplonius et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2020a).

Mental and Physical Health. RBA influences virtually all aspects of mental health, including the likelihood of depression, anxiety, problems with substance use and abuse, and suicide risk, as well as physical health and longevity.

For example, 272 of 444 quantitative studies (61%) examining the relationship between RBA and depression found that religious involvement was associated with less depression and faster recovery from depression, and in randomized controlled trials, religious interventions significantly reduce depressive symptoms (Captari et al., 2018; Koenig, 2018). In a more recent prospective study, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health followed 9,862 young adults (average age 23) for up to six years, finding that those attending religious services at least weekly were nearly one-third less likely to develop a depressive disorder during follow-up (RR=0.69, 95% CI=0.57-0.84) (Chen et al., 2020a).

Likewise, 240 of 278 studies (86%) found that RBA was associated with less alcohol use/abuse. Similarly, 155 of 185



studies (84%) found significantly lower illicit drug use/abuse levels among the more religious. Numerous studies have shown lower rates of PTSD among those reporting higher RBA, including one of 3,151 U.S. veterans that found 54% lower lifetime history of PTSD (OR=0.46, 95% CI=0.22-0.95) and 70% lower current PTSD (OR=0.30, 95% CI=0.10-0.90) among the more religious (Sharma et al., 2017).

Suicide risk is significantly lower among those scoring higher on RBA (106 of 141 or 75% of quantitative studies). More recently, studies from the Harvard School of Public Health have reported that frequent religious attendance consistently predicts a lower risk of completed suicide and, in addition, fewer deaths from “diseases of despair” (due to drugs, alcohol, or suicide) (VanderWeele et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2020b). Lower suicide risk was also found for a national random sample of Americans followed for nearly two decades (Kleiman & Liu, 2014). In a meta-analysis involving 2,339 suicide cases and 5,252 matched controls, Wu et al. (2015) reported a 62% reduction in suicide risk among the more religious (pooled OR=0.38, 95% CI=0.21-0.71).

Psychological, social, and behavioral problems are known to reduce physical fitness incrementally over time. The systematic review above identified hundreds of quantitative studies on RBA and physical health (Koenig et al., 2012). The majority of those studies found that religiously active persons experienced less heart disease, lower blood pressure, lower rates of stroke, less cognitive decline with aging, increased concentration, less physical disability, better immune function, lower levels of stress hormones, and lower death rates from cardiovascular disease and cancer. More recent research published in some of the world’s top public health journals since 2010 has reported similar findings (Pantell et al., 2013; Li et al., 2016; VanderWeele et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2020a).

Financial and Material Stability. Although RBA is strongly associated with lower socioeconomic status, if a young person is religious or raised in a religious environment, their chances of obtaining a good education are much higher. The reason is that education is less likely to be interrupted by alcohol use, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, or delinquent behavior because religious families: a) instill religious values in youth, and b) are more likely to monitor youth activities. Completing one’s education, in turn, will improve the chances of a good job, leading to greater financial and material stability. Furthermore, religious beliefs promote a strong work ethic (being a responsible, dependable, hard worker) and encourage helping others at work, which enhances job stability and improves performance (Koenig et al., 2023, chapter 16).

Summary and Conclusions

Nothing is more important than faith. Faith in God (and Jesus, who is God in the flesh, and the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of God) influences every aspect of health and human flourishing. Faith reinforces and is reinforced by community and private religious activity. Faith and religious activity, in turn, directly and indirectly influence each of the six aspects of human flourishing: happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, virtue and character, close social relationships, mental and physical health, and financial and material stability. There is plenty of objective evidence derived from a large and growing body of quantitative scientific research that now supports such claims. ✨



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TUNE

in to the Positive

You have likely heard of the ancient Cherokee story of the two wolves. A grandfather teaches his grandson about the battle that goes on inside people. “My dear grandson,” he says, “the battle between two ‘wolves’ is inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.” The grandson reflected momentarily and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf wins?” The old Cherokee replied, “The one you feed.”

We have also seen the image in pop culture, movies, TV shows, and cartoons, with the devil speaking to the person over one shoulder while an angel speaks over the other. Throughout the story, the main character listens to both voices and has a choice to make. It is these same two voices that are also present in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had a choice between the voice of God calling them into relationship, oneness, abundance, and love and the voice of the serpent instilling doubt, lies, fear, lack, and pride to create separation and division.

The truth and reality of our existence are woven into an ancient Cherokee story, pop culture, psychology, and ancient biblical stories. We have a choice between two voices and frequencies: positive and negative. One leads to unity, wholeness, love, and positivity. The other leads to division, separation, fear, and negativity. Which frequency and voice are you tuning in to? This is not a theoretical question but an essential one for your mental health and well-being. Let me explain why.

I was walking one day last summer when a thought popped into my head that the brain is an antenna. I had been pondering how thoughts work and trying to figure out why people with mental health issues experience more negative thoughts, separation, and depression. If thoughts are spiritual and no one has ever found them inside of a brain, then what is the relationship between brain health and mental health? Why does a healthy brain lead to more positive thoughts, whereas an unhealthy brain leads to more negative ones? What is the mechanism whereby thoughts and the brain interface and interconnect?

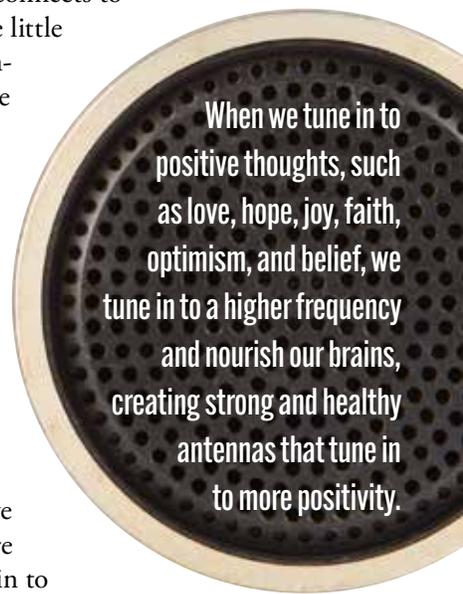
Once I realized the brain is more than just the hardware where the activation of a thought happens and also an antenna that tunes in to positive and negative frequencies, it all became clear. Consider that we perceive and interact with the world through vibrations, wavelengths, frequencies, color and sound spectrums, electromagnetic fields, electrical impulses, neurosynaptic connections, and neurons firing in the brain and quantum mind and field that we are just beginning to understand. As we interact with our world, our brains—without guidance—constantly convert vibrations and wavelengths into electrical signals interpreting and creating our reality. Even at the neurological level, a synapse occurs in our brains when

the axon tip of a transmitter connects to a receiver. In essence, we have little antennas in our brains responsible for how we communicate and perceive the world.

An antenna is a device designed to transmit and/or receive signals within a certain frequency range. I am convinced that our brains, which are antennas, tune in to both positive and negative frequencies. As we move from oneness to separateness, we also move from positive to negative because the energetic structure of our brains/antennas tunes in to a lower frequency. Negative thoughts operate at a lower frequency, whereas positive thoughts operate at a higher frequency. The more we tune in to negative thoughts, such as fear, worry, doubt, jealousy, anger, or unworthiness, they negatively affect our antennas, causing them to tune in to and receive even more negativity. When we tune in to positive thoughts, such as love, hope, joy, faith, optimism, and belief, we tune in to a higher frequency and nourish our brains, creating strong and healthy antennas that tune in to more positivity.

When listening to the radio, every station is simultaneously being broadcasted over the airwaves. However, you hear only the station that you tune in to. Similarly, you can tune in to faith, love, hope, belief, peace, and joy, giving you life, confidence, courage, and calm. Or you can tune in to fearful words that create doubt and discouragement, distract, deceive, divide, and weaken your outlook.

The positive stations broadcast messages to move you toward your destiny, while the negative stations send messages that lead to your demise. Your destiny is voice-activated, so what you tune in to matters greatly. The frequency and words you tune in to, believe, and trust will either lead to your weakness, separation, and defeat or your strength, wholeness, and victory. It is a simple choice between your destruction and your destiny.



When we tune in to positive thoughts, such as love, hope, joy, faith, optimism, and belief, we tune in to a higher frequency and nourish our brains, creating strong and healthy antennas that tune in to more positivity.

JON GORDON

In this spirit, let's talk about how you can TUNE in to the positive every day and enhance your mindset, mental health, confidence, and happiness. I have created a TUNE acronym to help you take action and put this into practice. Do it for 10-30 minutes a day for 30 days, and let me know how you feel. I am confident you will feel much better as you renew your mind and take every thought captive.

TUNE

T: Trust and Truth

Trusting God and speaking truth begin the process of tuning to a higher frequency. In every moment, you have an opportunity to believe the lie of fear and doubt or trust in the creator of the universe. Take time each day to talk to God and tell Him you trust Him and His plan for your life. Whenever you start to feel fearful or have doubt, simply pause and say, "I trust in you, God." It is also very helpful to read God's truth. When you read the Bible and devotionals, you will understand the truth and promises God made to humanity, including you. The more you know His promises, believe they will come to pass, trust in these truths, and speak truth to the lies broadcasted by negative stations, the more you raise your frequency.

U: Unite with God

To unite with God, you must make time to spend with Him. Make time each day for prayer, where you practice gratitude, praise God, repent, surrender, trust, and receive Him and all He has to offer. I usually do this on a walk and start with gratitude, where I thank God for everything in my life, even the challenges. Then I will praise God, tell Him how awesome He is, and be in awe of the universe and all of creation. Next, I repent to God for not loving and trusting Him with all my heart and for other areas in my life where I have fallen short. Then I ask God for guidance, wisdom, and provision for my needs. I surrender and ask God to make me an instrument of His peace, joy, love, and miracles He wants to see in the world. I ask Him to use me for His purpose and guide me toward my purpose—have me help who He wants me to help and do what He wants me to do. I surrender, acknowledge my need for His presence and power in my life, and express how I am nothing without Him. Then, I expect and trust God will answer my prayers and trust in His plan for my life. I expect He will give me what I need and ignore what is not meant for me. Finally, I receive all the love, joy, peace, and blessings God has for me and say it out loud to accept His goodness. This practice has changed my heart, mind, soul, brain, and life in amazing ways.

Find meaning in the mundane, purpose in the pain, and focus from the frustration. Through all your daily challenges, keep thinking with faith and hope.

N: Neutralize the Negativity

Even when you make time for God and unite with Him, negativity will sneak in. This negativity can turn your dial to a lower frequency and sabotage you if you let it. When it does, the key is to speak truth to the lies and positive words to the negativity. If you do not take every thought captive, your negative thoughts will take you captive. On the left side of a piece of paper, write down the common negative thoughts that usually pop into your head. On the right side, write down the words of truth and encouragement you will say to neutralize the negativity and fuel your mind with positivity. Anytime negative thoughts come your way, talk to yourself with these positive words instead of listening to the negative thoughts. Talk to yourself... do not listen to yourself.

E: Elevate Your Thinking

Everything I mentioned in TUNE elevates your thinking. The key is to keep doing it. Take every thought captive and be intentional with your thinking. Constantly return to the truth when the lies start to take hold. When you begin to feel entitled or complacent, focus on appreciation. When you appreciate, you elevate. If you feel fear, remind yourself that love casts out fear and focus on loving the process rather than worrying about the outcome. When you feel lost, pray for guidance. If you feel weak, pray for strength. When you want to give up, remind yourself how far you have come, where you are going, and why you are going there. As you face a challenge, find the opportunity to learn and grow. When going through a difficult time, tell yourself to stay on the roller coaster and trust that the adversity will build your character and strength. Find meaning in the mundane, purpose in the pain, and focus from the frustration. Through all your daily challenges, keep thinking with faith and hope. Faith in God and hope for the future give you power in the present. Stay positive. Be optimistic. Keep believing and trusting that the best is yet to come. When you elevate your thinking, you boost your mind, soul, and life. ✦



JON GORDON, M.A., is the best-selling author of several books, including *The Energy Bus*, *The Power of Positive Leadership*, and *The One Truth*. This article offers concepts from Jon's newest book, *The One Truth*.

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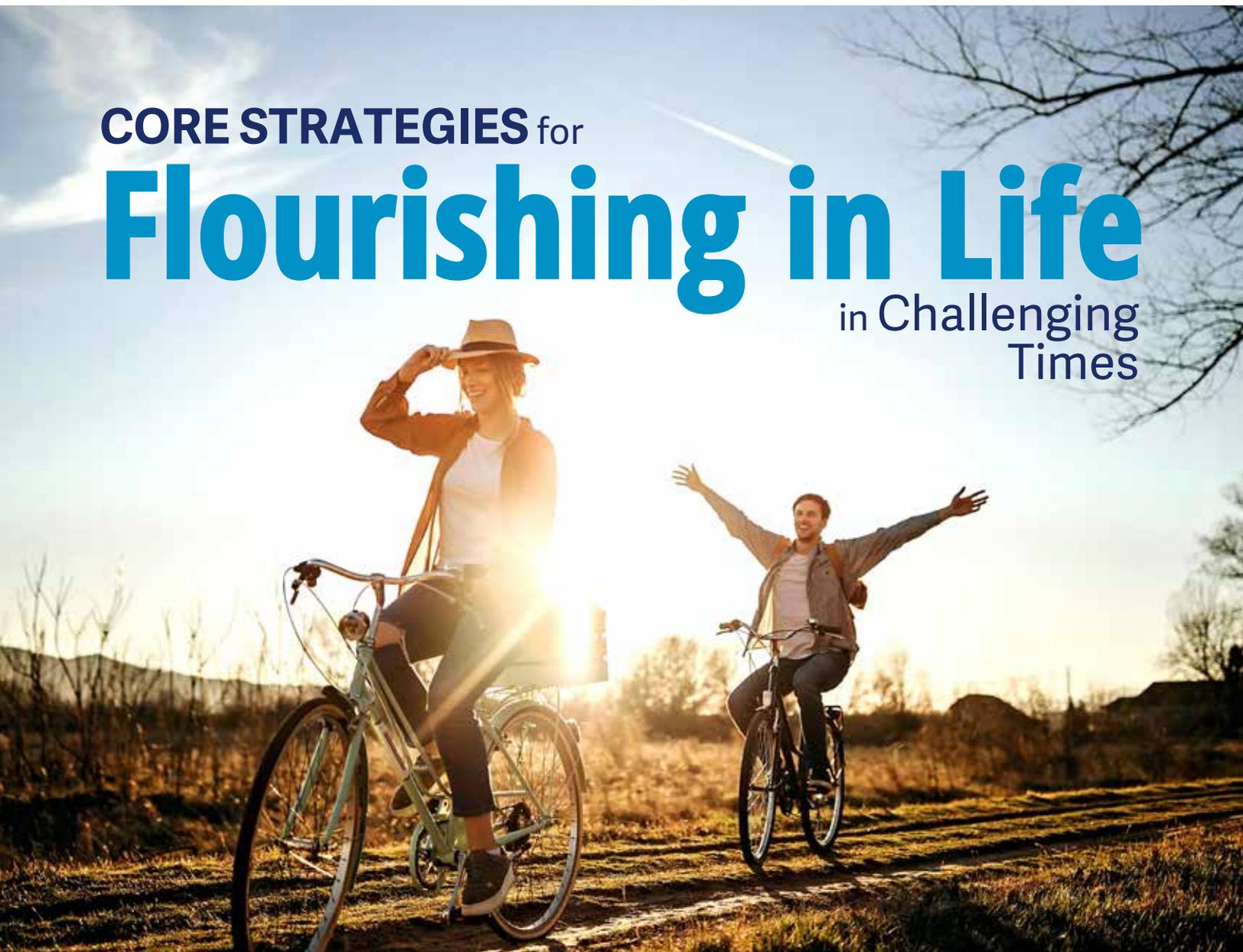


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CORE STRATEGIES for

Flourishing in Life

in Challenging
Times



The Science and Theology of Human Flourishing has been a growing theme in positive psychology for a few decades, and I have been following the progress with intrigue. Millions of research dollars have been spent on topics and interventions related to character development, healthy relationships, communities, positive emotions, and emotional virtues. And since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there has been increased interest, especially in preventing languishing and promoting resilience. How do we “grow back better” and not languish in challenging times? How do we still thrive, in “the life we have to live,” with so much change, uncertainty, loss, and disappointment?

What it Means to Flourish

When you consider the concept of “human flourishing” or the “science of well-being,” what comes to mind? Views are different for each of us depending on our circumstances and season of life. However, we know the Judeo-Christian faith is all about an invitation to human flourishing. All the fundamental forces of nature are directed toward our continual growth—to live fully alive, wholeheartedly, and abundantly. Biblically, we are designed to thrive in *shalom* in all our life systems and daily experiences—living in wholeness, well-being, and harmony with God and others, restoring life to all it is meant to be.¹

In psychological terms, these themes are influenced by Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*, which means “a life well lived.” We should have a sense of well-being and positive functioning in our spiritual, personal, and social lives—experiencing high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It includes a life of vigor, vitality, goodness, generativity, and continuous growth. Having close relationships and a purposeful life of fulfillment, where we contribute in meaningful and productive ways, are essential. This also includes rising to challenges and being resilient through adversity, struggles, sadness, sickness, loneliness, and languishing.²

From Languishing to Flourishing

Unfortunately, however, the reality is that we live in a fallen, broken world where life, as it was intended to be, has been violated. We will not have uninterrupted health, peace, and happiness every day. We will have struggles, illness, conflict, sadness, disappointment, pandemics, losses, and uncertainty in this life. We will get stuck. At times, the 3:1 ratio considered for well-being will be imbalanced. Overwhelmed by adversity, we can spiral down and not fully meet the criteria for mental ill-health, burnout, or depression—but languish. Symptoms include decreased vitality and well-being, lack of excitement, feeling joyless and aimless, being easily distracted, having a sense of stagnation and emptiness, and muddling through the day as in a fog.

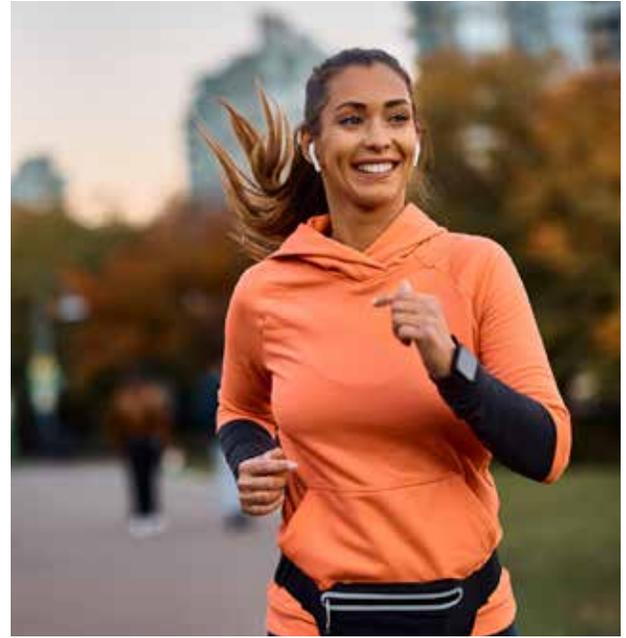
Thankfully, God desires that we always seek to live and grow toward renewal and flourishing as long as we have breath and strength. Our souls can be restored. We can be fruitful and even thrive around the challenges in life. Even if we are partly broken or have chunks missing, with God’s life-giving Spirit in us, His invitation and promise is that we can still somehow thrive and be “fresh, vital, and fruitful,” even into old age.

“The righteous will flourish like the date palm [long-lived, upright and useful]; They will grow like a cedar in Lebanon [majestic and stable]. Planted in the house of the Lord, They will flourish in the courts of our God. [Growing in grace] they will still thrive and bear fruit and prosper in old age; They will flourish and be vital and fresh [rich in trust and love and contentment].”

– Psalm 92:12-14, AMP

We should have a sense of well-being and positive functioning in our spiritual, personal, and social lives—experiencing high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

CATHERINE HART WEBER



Principles and Practices for Flourishing in Life

Many well-being practices explored, researched, and prescribed originate from, or validate, our Judeo-Christian heritage. I have integrated the best of these into a Flourishing In Life Model and Coach Training courses based on my book, *Flourish*.³ Over the last few years, I experienced the benefits of these core strategies in new ways during very difficult times that peaked when my parents passed away within two weeks of one another in the middle of the pandemic.

Those I have worked with and completed the Coach Training courses have also found these extremely encouraging and transformative for healthier, resilient living during challenging times. As you read further, I invite you to consider what resonates as an invitation at this time.

1. Pray. There is plenty of evidence of the benefits of centering our hearts and spirits to connect with God in prayer and meditation, especially in stressful times.⁴ *Spiritual practices* deepen our faith walk and relationship with God and strengthen our spiritual core and stress resilience. They are also a profound predictor of health, reducing blood pressure, strengthening the immune system, and reducing mental illness.⁵ Spending time in silence, deep reading of the Bible and other inspirational resources, attending worship services, listening and singing to music, spending time in nature, and connecting via in-person community are all proven ways to increase well-being.

2. Thrive. During stressful and uncertain times, there is a tendency to get off regular rhythm and routine. *Whole person self-care* and getting back to basics can provide the restoration and resilience the body, brain, mind, and soul need to feel centered and safe. Also, eating healthy, sleeping enough, breathing deeply, and moving more are important factors to thrive. Rest and restoration, play and creativity, and being intentional are also vital in managing energy and living a balanced lifestyle.

Improving mental and emotional health starts with having a healthy theology of emotions. Additionally, *managing difficult emotions* by learning to lament and process loss, disappointment, anger, uncertainty, and change is necessary. By integrating these into our stories, we will receive God's help to make it through the challenges.

A *positive mental attitude (PMA) and mindset* have proven to be significant for developing healthy habits of the mind and brain. We must challenge and replace automatic negative default thinking, self-talk, and the stories we tell ourselves that can perpetuate difficult emotions.

Cultivating positive spirit emotions, such as joy, peace, hope, and optimism, creates an upward spiral. A healthy theology of joy enables us to experience the essence of the Christian experience. We are encouraged to discover what brings us joy and use these joyful strategies as much as possible for our happiness and well-being.

Gratitude and appreciation are viewed as the gateway to joy. HeartMath, "a system of effective, scientifically-based tools and technologies to bridge the intuitive connection between heart and mind and deepen heart connections with others,"⁶ as well as other research, validates how practicing daily gratitude and expressing appreciation to others powerfully impact higher brain states and calming effects on the body.

Spending time out in nature, especially with awe and wonder, has proven healing benefits and is being

Overall well-being requires investing time in building a support network of good relationships with family, friends, meaningful community connections, colleagues, casual friendships, and professional resources.

promoted with “eco therapy” and “forest bathing” (by the Japanese).⁷ Medical professionals now provide “green prescriptions”⁸ for those who would benefit from nature-based activities and exercise for improved mental and emotional well-being. Even increased views of ocean blue space are significantly associated with improved mental health and lower levels of psychological distress.

3. Love. Since the pandemic, America has been in an increasing loneliness epidemic. Lack of in-person connection has increased mental, emotional, and physical health risks. The U.S. Surgeon General stated this is worse than smoking 15 cigarettes a day!⁹ Overall well-being requires investing time in building a support network of good relationships with family, friends, meaningful community connections, colleagues, casual friendships, and professional resources. This also requires dealing with difficult people, managing conflict, and processing forgiveness. According to Blue Zones[®] research, people live healthier and longer when they have healthy social connections that contribute to a hopeful, positive mental attitude and share in the good and bad times.¹⁰ We are definitely better together!

4. Purpose. Practicing the Judeo-Christian faith gives us a deep sense of meaning and purpose. Although we still have challenges in life, even with mental and emotional health, and sometimes languishing, when we are meaningfully engaged with

faith practices, work, community, and a sense of purpose and vocation, we can respond to stress more effectively by having a buffer and immunity against the worst. When our emotions and behaviors are better regulated, we can stay more focused on prioritizing what matters most and have hope to flourish and experience overall well-being, even as we age.

What incredible and hopeful news! May we continue living into God’s *shalom* and the promise of ongoing renewal and flourishing, encouraging others along the way. ✠



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HUMAN FLOURISHING: Empirical Research and Impact on Everyday Life

The Human Flourishing Program¹ at Harvard University is devoted to studying and promoting human flourishing. We have been studying the distribution and determinants of different aspects of well-being and are launching a Global Flourishing Study² to help advance our understanding of flourishing yet further. However, we also work toward developing and disseminating various activities for flourishing based on our own research and that of others. We have created an evidence-based guide³ to activities for flourishing along with a free, corresponding, easy-to-use flourishing app⁴ and summarized some of this work in a prior blog post.⁵

Many of the flourishing activities correspond to various practices within the Christian tradition. For example, one of the most widely studied well-being activities involves gratitude exercises. One might, for instance, try writing down three things one is grateful for three times a week over the course of a month or two, or even longer. Evidence from numerous randomized trials (thoroughly analyzed in this meta-analysis⁶) suggests that the simple activity of focusing the mind on what is good in one's past or present can help increase happiness, relieve symptoms of depression, and perhaps even improve sleep.

Personally, I try to practice these gratitude exercises regularly, both on my own and with my family, and have noticed a marked improvement in our lives together when we do so. I have also described these gratitude exercises at student events and have had students return months later expressing how helpful they were in getting them through

difficult times. These exercises are certainly not going to solve all of one's problems; however, it can be beneficial to remember what one is grateful for, especially when most headlines today seem to offer further reasons for discouragement or anger. Even amid significant challenges, there are important goods in our lives that we sometimes take for granted; we need to pause, see them, and rest in them.

You can enhance your flourishing not only by changing how you think but also by changing how you act. Another example, this time corresponding to the Christian teaching of loving one's neighbor, is carrying out regular acts of kindness. Likewise, several studies⁷ have shown this to have significant effects on well-being. The idea here is to pick one day each week and, on that day, try to perform five acts of kindness toward others that one would not ordinarily do otherwise. It can take considerable planning to carry out five in a single day; however, the planning itself, the deliberate intention to do good for others, can also have significant effects on one's well-being, improving happiness and positive emotions. By carrying out such acts of kindness, we can, over time, develop a disposition toward seeking the good of others, which is one of the central components of love. Moreover, there is evidence that such acts of kindness often encourage others to carry out similar altruistic acts, inspiring further acts of kindness. This is a simple activity, but if practiced by an individual, a community, or our world, the consequences could be profound.

Yet another activity, again rooted in Christian teaching, that can enhance flourishing is the practice of forgiveness. Forgiveness might be



... acts of kindness often encourage others to carry out similar altruistic acts, inspiring further acts of kindness.

conceived as replacing ill will toward an offender with goodwill. Considered as such, forgiveness is distinct from excusing or condoning the action; it is distinct from reconciliation and does not require foregoing justice. One can forgive an offender and hope for their ultimate good while also pursuing a just outcome. As I have summarized elsewhere,⁸ prior research⁹ and randomized trials¹⁰ on forgiveness indicate that such forgiveness can improve mental health and well-being, in addition to its possible effects on restoring relationships. Most prior forgiveness interventions have required many sessions with a trained therapist. However, there are now self-guided workbook interventions¹¹ employing Dr. Everett Worthington's REACH model of forgiveness, where each letter of REACH stands for a different part of the process:

- R:** Recall the hurt and let the emotions associated with it surface; do not suppress them.
- E:** Empathize with the offender, trying to understand their reasons for the action without condoning it or invalidating one's feelings.
- A:** Altruistic gift; realize that forgiveness is an altruistic gift that can be offered or withheld, and one has oneself sometimes done wrong and is forgiven.
- C:** Commit to forgive and try to replace ill will with goodwill.
- H:** Hold on to the forgiveness, realizing that emotions take time to heal, and sometimes the anger will return.

We recently evaluated the effects of the REACH Forgiveness workbook in a randomized trial¹² of about 4,500 participants in five relatively high-conflict countries: Columbia, South Africa, Ukraine, Indonesia, and Hong Kong. The workbook was effective not only at increasing forgiveness but also lowered depressive and anxiety symptoms and increased hope and various aspects of flourishing. Given the ease of dissemination of such workbooks, the public health consequences¹³ could be profound.

TYLER J. VANDERWEELE

For full flourishing, we need community engagement, whether at home, work, church, or elsewhere.

These are just a few of the activities that could be widely distributed or employed in clinical counseling, classrooms, workplaces, personal use, and beyond that could enhance flourishing. Many of the activities for flourishing that have been studied in psychology literature have been found to have beneficial effects on happiness and life satisfaction, as well as mental and, perhaps, even physical health. However, to enhance flourishing in other domains, such as increasing one's sense of meaning and purpose, improving one's character, or deepening one's relationships, more will often be needed than simple individual activities.

For full flourishing, we need community engagement, whether at home, work, church, or elsewhere. Our evidence-based guide also describes activities that can enhance engagement and well-being in each of these contexts. The effects of weekly attendance at religious services¹⁴ seem especially powerful and profound. These activities are, of course, in no way exhaustive. Still, they represent what individuals and communities can easily do to help enhance flourishing and how we can orient our minds, actions, communities, and relationships toward what is good. Community engagement is vital to flourishing, and engaging in the aforementioned communal and institutional pathways¹⁵ is beneficial. ✕



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Positive Life Lessons Learned from Death's Doorstep

The Back Story

In 2005, my dad died, and my wife, Carrie, was diagnosed with metastatic pancreatic cancer and given less than six months to live. In 2006, I had my fifth cancer surgery. In 2007, my middle son, Matt, died, and only two months later, my wife of 27 years passed away. In 2008, my only sibling, Marsha, died. So, I buried my dad, son, wife, and sister in just four years.

On May 6, 2010, I received my sixth cancer diagnosis, just one day after the third anniversary of my son Matt's death. This cancer diagnosis required surgery lasting more than 10 hours, removing 80% of my tongue and replacing it with skin from my legs. I was told that I would probably never be able to speak again and have a feeding tube for the rest of my life.

Less than a year later, I was informed my cancer had returned, that it was inoperable, and that I should go home and call hospice, as I most likely had less than three months to live. Yet, somehow, I knew I was not alone, that God's promises were still in effect, and these circumstances did not change the reality of the faithful God I had served for most of my life.

The following are just a few of the priceless gifts the Lord gave me along the journey that transformed my relationship with Him. Hopefully, others see God living in and through me from how I speak about His love and grace.

Emotional Growth

A roller coaster is fun to ride, but it would not be enjoyable to live on. Yet, in God's hands, it can also provide a greater opportunity to learn when you can and cannot trust your emotions. Fear, discouragement, depression, anger, and anxiety are just a few of the emotions we will all face in life, and sometimes they can seem to block our awareness of everything else, including God's power, presence, and promises.

I have spent most of my life speaking, teaching, writing, and helping people work through difficult and debilitating emotions. During my *dark seven years of the soul*, I had to face those same emotions head-on and decide if I was going to believe their lies and let them determine my reality OR choose to take them captive to Christ and trust what He has promised. Truthfully, there were many days I would have to remind myself that "feelings do not always equal facts," especially when success looked like merely getting out of bed (it was not always easy) and putting one foot in front of the other.

God also trusted me to come face-to-face with the thoughts and feelings that would have seemed overwhelming and impossible to cope with at one time. I engaged in hand-to-hand combat with hopelessness, helplessness, loneliness, a depth of loss, disorientation, futility, irrelevance, and more. Through it all, God helped me rediscover that He cannot leave or forsake me. He is unable not to be present or keep His word. He is a promise keeper. Even if, at times, God seems to take His time showing up (smile), He will be faithful.

Relational Growth

Another gift was learning to better understand the *healing power of friends* in ways I had never imagined. I learned new approaches to giving and receiving love and support at a time when I had no idea what I needed and was just hoping to survive another day.

Appreciating the *power of presence* was another gift—the power of God's presence with me through others. Sometimes just being with someone and saying, "I don't know what to say, but I love you, and I'm here with you," can be unbelievably powerful.

.. I had to face those same emotions head-on and decide if I was going to believe their lies and let them determine my reality OR choose to take them captive to Christ and trust what He has promised.

GARY J. OLIVER



Spiritual Growth

During the darkest and most discouraging, depressing, and debilitating times, the Lord encouraged me to begin each day by counting my blessings—one by one—and I was truly amazed at the difference that made. They were no longer just words in a song that had lost most of their meaning. It became a refreshing and renewing habit. One of God's greatest gifts was His repeated promptings to do a deep dive into the word JOY, and what I discovered was remarkable.

- Did you know a primary objective in Jesus' teaching was that His disciples might experience *JOY*?
- Did you know the words *Joy/Joyous/Joyful* are found more than 200 times in Scripture?
- Did you know the verb, *rejoice*, also appears well over 200 times?

With more than 10 years of undergraduate and postgraduate training in theology and over 30 years in ministry, I had almost no idea of the significance of real *sovereign joy* and the substantial difference it could make in one's life.

The Bottom Line

Although I do not like losing loved ones, having multiple cancer surgeries, and being told I have less than three months to live, God used death, darkness, and debilitating diagnoses in my life to help me discover a renewed focus on the good news and, in the process, it put everything into a fresh perspective.

I learned that success is not primarily how *long* I live but how *well* I live. I learned that God could use losses, tri-

als, and tribulations to help His children surrender the illusion of control. I cannot CONTROL "how long" I live, but with God's help, I can control "how well" I choose to live for whatever time He decides to give me.

During my adventures with discouragement and darkness, I was given eyes that see things I had never noticed before, ears that hear with a new acuity and clarity, and a heart that is much more tender. I have grown emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. I have discovered a significant difference between surviving and thriving, and I know Christ did not die and rise again for us to merely survive. Just treading water is not what He meant by "becoming more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37).

If I am told, yet again, that I may only have three months to live, how will I respond? After prayerfully reflecting on what God has lovingly taught me through the adventures of the past several years, I realize the most important considerations are not:

- IF I'm going to die... it's going to happen.
- HOW I'm going to die... I cannot control that one.
- WHEN I'm going to die... I cannot control that one, either.
- IF it's going to be difficult or painful... it probably will be.

However, when I finally come face-to-face with death—when it becomes my turn to cross that river—the most significant bottom-line consideration will be HOW I can reflect and manifest the goodness, grace, and mercy of my precious Lord that I so abundantly experienced throughout my life in such a way that people will be able to see the difference Christ makes in every chapter of life... especially the final chapter.

My hope and prayer are to draw on and drink from the reservoir of resources God has given me and, with His grace, respond in a manner that will cause people to say, "How great is our God!" In the meantime, every day is a gift of grace with new opportunities to "count our blessings" and be a testimony to a quality of life that refuses to be defined by our circumstances but instead by God's completed work for us on the cross as we serve a risen Savior. To God be the glory! Today, I have more hope, peace, and joy than ever... and I did not learn it from books. ✕



GARY J. OLIVER, TH.M., PH.D., is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, author of more than 20 books and 350 articles, a senior facilitator for the spiritual formation trainers, *Going Deeper Together*, a national and international speaker, and serves on the Executive Board of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

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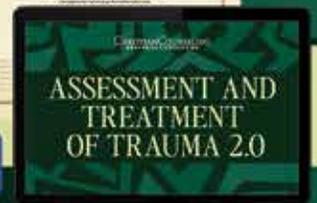
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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF JOY AND HAPPINESS:

Seven Neuroscience Secrets of Contentment

For years, people have been on a quest to find the keys to joy and happiness. In recent years, psychologists have made some enlightening discoveries about the primary sources of contentment. About 50% of happiness lies in our genetics, 10% depends on our life experiences, and the remaining 40% is derived from our daily routines and mindset.¹

This is good news, as it indicates that we have quite a bit of influence over our own sense of happiness. In general, experts suggest that happiness comes from new experiences, adventure, strong relationships, gratitude, and more. However, most of the research to date has ignored the following seven critical elements of a joyful life.

1. People need to tailor happiness strategies to their brain type. Happiness is not one-size-fits-all. What makes one person happy may make another person decidedly unhappy. You need to know your brain type to find what brings you the most joy.

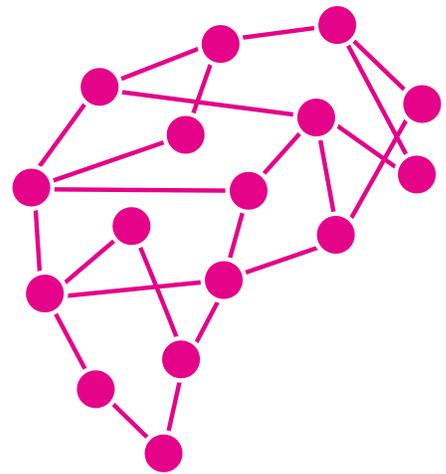
In the past 30-plus years, our team at Amen Clinics has built the world's largest database of brain scans related to behavior, with more than 225,000 brain SPECT scans. These scans have shown that certain patterns of brain activity correlate to personality types, which helped us identify five primary brain types:

- **Balanced:** People tend to do well in life when the brain shows overall healthy activity. What makes these people happy? They like to follow the rules, be on time, have financial security, and do meaningful work.
- **Spontaneous:** When the brain's prefrontal cortex has lower-than-average activity, people are more likely to be impulsive and creative. They love surprises, new adventures, risk-taking, and last-minute plans.
- **Persistent:** When an area called the anterior cingulate gyrus has higher-than-average activity, people tend to worry more and be strong-willed. Routines and predictability make these people happy.
- **Sensitive:** When there is more activity than average in the limbic system—the brain's emotional centers—people have deep feelings and sometimes sadness. These people thrive on close relationships, alone time, and finding creative ways to express their emotions.
- **Cautious:** When the amygdala and basal ganglia are more active than average, people tend to be more anxious, prepared, and risk-averse. These individuals get pleasure from checking off their to-do lists, being on time, and living in a calm environment.

2. Happiness requires a healthy brain. One of the main neuroscience secrets to contentment that happiness experts and researchers are missing is brain health. Only when the brain is healthy can you consistently implement happiness strategies.

To optimize the brain, follow these five simple tips:

- **Enhance blood flow** to the brain with regular exercise.
- **Protect your head** from trauma by using your seat belt, wearing a helmet when biking or skiing, and holding handrails when going down stairs.
- **Limit exposure to toxins** that damage the brain, such as alcohol, marijuana, mold, and chemicals in household cleaners and personal products.
- **Balance your neurohormones** because hormonal imbalances can make you irritable, fatigued, anxious, and foggy.
- **Get seven to eight hours of sleep** because sleep problems make you cranky, moody, and forgetful.



DANIEL AMEN



3. Your brain needs targeted nutrients every day to boost happiness. Your brain needs specific nutrients to function optimally. Unfortunately, research shows that too many Americans lack these necessary nutrients.² Because of this, supporting the brain with nutritional supplements is essential. I generally recommend a multivitamin/mineral, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D (if your levels are sub-optimal), and probiotics for overall brain health.

When it comes to enhancing happiness, my favorite supplement is saffron. Numerous studies point to its potent mood-boosting properties, and some research concludes that saffron is as effective as antidepressant medication in treating mild to moderate depression.³

4. The foods you eat either enhance happiness or steal it. Choose foods you love that love you back. This means opting for food that makes you feel good in the short term and the long run. Foods that boost moods, enhance energy, and calm stress include:

- Fruits and vegetables, especially berries and leafy greens
- Sustainably raised fish and meat (such as salmon, beef, chicken, and turkey)
- Eggs
- Nuts and seeds (such as macadamia nuts, almonds, and Brazil nuts)
- Healthy oils (such as avocado, olive, and coconut oil)
- Organic, unprocessed foods
- High-fiber, low-glycemic foods
- Dark chocolate (low-sugar varieties in small amounts)

5. Master your mind. Your mind can be a troublemaker, and undisciplined thinking can fuel unhappiness. One of the keys to contentment is learning that you are not your mind. When you can create psychological distance from the chatter in your mind, you gain control over your thoughts and feelings rather than letting them control you.

Giving your mind a name is a simple technique to create a separation. This helps you observe your thoughts from a distance

Knowing your purpose in life gives you a sense of meaning and helps guide you in decision-making. And when you make better decisions, you increase your chances of a contented life.

without letting them ruin your day. I call my mind Hermie after the pet raccoon I had as a teenager. She was a real mischief-maker, just like my mind can be at times. When my mind is acting up, I can choose to ignore it or put Hermie in a metaphorical cage.

6. Notice what you like about others more than what you do not like. This is such a simple, yet powerful, happiness strategy. Too many of us pay more attention to what we do not like, which drives negativity and reinforces bad behavior in the people around us. I learned this important lesson decades ago when I took my seven-year-old son to a water park.

We went to the penguin show and watched as one named Fat Freddy put on a spectacular show—bowling with his nose, counting with his flippers, and more. He did everything the animal trainer asked him to do. Whenever I asked my son to do something, it would turn into a discussion, and he still would not want to do it. What was the trick?

Unlike most parents, the animal trainer explained that she paid attention to Fat Freddy whenever he did something she liked. She gave him a hug and a fish. I realized I was paying more attention to my son when he did things I did not like, essentially training him to act up to get my attention. When I started noticing him when he did something I wanted, his behavior improved dramatically.

Try focusing on what you like about your loved ones. This can lead to greater satisfaction in your relationships, which is one of the key ingredients in overall contentment in life.

7. Know your purpose in life. As a psychiatrist, I have found that when my patients lack a spiritual connection or have no sense of purpose, they tend to be more unhappy. Life can feel empty and meaningless.

I believe we all are spiritual beings created with a divine purpose. A deep sense of spirituality and knowing your purpose are essential for happiness. For example, in a study involving primarily Christian women, researchers found that frequently attending religious services is linked to a reduced risk for depression.⁴

To find your purpose, ask yourself these three questions:

- Why is the world a better place because you breathe?

- What skills do you have that could be helpful to someone today?
- What can you do to make the world a better place?

Knowing your purpose in life gives you a sense of meaning and helps guide you in decision-making. And when you make better decisions, you increase your chances of a contented life. ✕



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Positive Psychology and Biblical Wisdom:

STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING WELL-BEING AND HUMAN FLOURISHING

The Origins of Positive Psychology

Following World War II, Dr. Martin Seligman expressed concern over the fact that psychology was too narrowly focused on understanding and curing mental illness in its various forms. This narrowing of focus led him to assert, “Psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best.”¹

Seligman’s concerns led him to develop positive psychology, which, since its onset, has had a major influence on the disciplines of counseling and psychology. At present, his approach is focused on the topic of well-being.

Well-being theory comprises five elements that are independently measurable and collectively determine the quality of life experienced by any individual.

Seligman’s Five Key Aspects of Well-being (PERMA™)

Positive emotion is an essential element in Seligman’s theory of well-being. “The other four aspects stem from Seligman’s view that pleasantness is not sufficient; flourishing lives have additional features.”² The additional features advanced by Seligman are *engagement*, *relationships*, *meaning*, and *accomplishments*.



Biblical Wisdom and Positive Psychology

Christian counselors pay particular attention to biblical wisdom to understand what is required to achieve well-being. Professor and author, Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr., commenting on the goal of biblical wisdom, asserts: “Wisdom in the biblical narrative has as its chief goal the mastery of the ‘art of steering life.’”³ Fuhr maintains that Solomon in Ecclesiastes “... embarks on a quest to find a solution to the dilemma of meaninglessness, to discover if there is anything that wisdom may offer that will provide leverage in dealing with the discovery of a way to the better life; a life characterized by well-being in spite of experiences with the negative dimensions of reality.”⁴

The published research on positive psychology serves to demonstrate the valuable role it has played in helping people achieve higher levels of well-being and human flourishing. Solomon expresses his confidence that biblical wisdom greatly benefits those seeking the path that leads to well-being and human flourishing (Ecclesiastes 10:9-10). Advocates for positive psychology have developed methods for assessing individual strengths and weaknesses in the various aspects of PERMA.[™] In what follows, we will examine points of convergence between positive psychology and biblical wisdom on aspects of critical importance in the quest for well-being.

Biblical Wisdom on the Value of Positive Emotion

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon advocates for continually cultivating the emotion of joy. Despite the reality that life under the sun can be harsh, Solomon counsels that man should “... eat and drink and find enjoyment in all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life, which God has given to him, for this is his reward” (Ecclesiastes 5:18, MEV; also see 3:22 and 8:15). God gives the gift of joy to those who will receive it (Ecclesiastes 5:19). Christian counselors share biblical wisdom with those

they serve. We share that wisdom because we believe that when properly understood, it increases our capacity for consistently experiencing *positive emotions* like joy, peace, and gratitude. Advocates for biblical wisdom and positive psychology agree that *positive emotions* play a significant role in achieving well-being.

Biblical Wisdom on the Value of Engagement

Engagement describes an aspect of well-being in which the individual is fully engrossed in an activity or experience in the moment. *Engagement* may imply participation in an experience that is transformative. *Engagement* (meditation) in biblical wisdom changes people from the inside out. Solomon asks, “*Who is like a wise man?... A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the harshness of his face is softened*” (Ecclesiastes 8:1, MEV). We are strengthening the *engagement* aspect of well-being when, “*Whatever your hands find to do, do with your strength...*” (Ecclesiastes 9:10, MEV). *Engagement* with work and wisdom are two of the many ways that Christian counselors may assist those they serve with the enhancement of their well-being. Wisdom’s emphasis on the role of *engagement* in achieving well-being represents another point of convergence with positive psychology.

Biblical Wisdom on the Value of Relationships

Biblical wisdom, like positive psychology, emphasizes the importance of positive *relationships* for developing well-being. Wisdom counsels: “*Two are better than one, because there is good reward for their labor together. For if they fall, then one will help up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up*” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, MEV). Also, “*Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun; because that is your reward in life and in your toil...*” (Ecclesiastes 9:9, MEV).

RON HAWKINS

Biblical Wisdom on the Value of Meaning and Purpose

Positive psychology and biblical wisdom stress the value of believing in something bigger than the self as a requirement for achieving a sense of well-being. However, unlike positive psychology, biblical wisdom is committed to what that “something bigger” is in its ultimate form. Wisdom points us to the God who makes everything beautiful in His time, who created man upright, and who knows what is good for man (Ecclesiastes 3:11, 6:12). This God transcends the self and is worthy of our worship and service. Humans are created in His image, have immense value, and have been given dominion over all of creation. Wisdom counsels that serving God and others with the strengths and gifts we have been given unites us with His work in our world to fill us with a sense of *meaning* that fosters and deepens our awareness of well-being.

Biblical Wisdom on the Value of Achievement

Wisdom counsels a life committed to achievement: *“In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not let your hand rest; because you do not know which activity will find success, this way or that way, or if the both will be good”* (Ecclesiastes 11:6, MEV). Also, *“Sweet is the sleep of a laboring man, whether he eats a little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not let him sleep”* (Ecclesiastes 5:12, MEV). Christian counselors and advocates for positive psychology recognize the contribution *accomplishments* make to well-being. We help those we serve to identify their strengths for accomplishing something positive in our world.

Conclusion

Christian counselors applaud the shift in positive psychology from a disease model to a strength-focused model. We see value in assessing well-being through the prism of PERMA™ and find support for that in biblical wisdom. We value the tools and strategies developed by Seligman and others for measuring and modifying the strengths of each aspect and believe they may prove helpful for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our service. ❖



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Wisdom counsels that serving God and others with the strengths and gifts we have been given unites us with His work in our world to fill us with a sense of meaning that fosters and deepens our awareness of well-being.

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Short-term Psychotherapy Perspective and Influence

When their engine broke down in the story, *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper & Long, 2005), the engineers needed help to get its cargo of food and toys to children across the large mountain that loomed in front of them. Their first attempts at soliciting help were unsuccessful. The Shiny New Engine declined, and the Rusty Old Engine rumbled on without stopping to help, blaming old age and fatigue. Eventually, a Little Blue Engine happened to pass by, and the engineers flagged it down, asking it to show favor. Despite being small and tired, the Little Blue Engine was moved to help. Struggling up the mountain, towing the weight of the broken train, the Little Blue Engine declared “I-think-I-can” over and over again.

Like the broken-down train, our clients present needing help. Many are like the broken-down train that was stuck but knew where it wanted and needed to go. Others are like the Little Blue Engine, attempting to accomplish a seemingly impossible goal but unsure how. Short-term therapies, such as solution-focused therapy, use positive psychology principles when clients are unaware, unable, unprepared, or unmotivated to realize their goals. These approaches share several assumptions about people and their problems that can aid our clients and ourselves.

The Little Engine That Could fable illustrates an important distinction of short-term therapies; the difference between could (can) and would (will). Though two other engines were capable, they would not; they were not motivated to do the job. The Rusty Old Engine might have helped but could not. In contrast, the Little Blue Engine was not sure it could do the job, but it decided to try. Despite the long, arduous climb and even slowing to a crawl near the top of the grade, the Little Blue Engine succeeded. Its “I-think-I-can” mantra sustained its motivation until it pulled the broken locomotive over the high mountain.

JOHN C. THOMAS



As it started the downhill glide, the Little Blue Engine congratulated itself with, “I-thought-I-could, I-thought-I-could,” relishing the success of what seemed undoable.

Second, a fundamental tenet of short-term therapies is that clients are sometimes so focused on their difficulties that they forget their strengths. Short-term approaches help clients access their abilities and put them to work in the interest of solving their problems. These approaches seek to identify client resources and co-create solutions in accordance with the client’s goals. The humanistic-based perspective views each human being as possessing all the resources to meet life demands and overcome life’s obstacles. To accomplish this goal, therapists unearth ways clients have successfully handled past challenges and connect them to their own strengths and unrealized potential so they can move toward health and away from unhealthiness. Realizing that there is more than one way to reach a goal, reorienting focus from the negative to the positive, and moving clients past the process of suffering form the heart of a counselor’s mission.

Third, many clients perpetuate their problems and inability to move forward. Like a car tire stuck in the mud, continuing to press the accelerator only worsens the situation. Clients need to stop doing what is not working, label it, and cultivate ways of solving their problems. Therapists emphasize collaborating with a client’s goals rather than directing them. They leverage client strengths, capabilities, and abilities to construct strategies that bring about the desired change. Therapists guide and coach clients to reach their hoped-for change by imagining that the obstacle or barriers to achieving their goals have been overcome.

Fourth, short-term therapies recognize that change is constant. While counselors help clients realize that problems will always be encountered

and, in some cases, persist, clients may unwittingly fight change. Solution-focused therapy clinicians, O'Hanlon and O'Hanlon (2006), believe one must work hard not to change. Had the broken train decided to maintain its status quo, it would have had to work hard at not working to solve its problem.

Fifth, focus on what is possible and changeable rather than impossible and intractable. The stranded locomotive could not move forward on its own. It needed help. Although appeals for help were initially refused, it persisted in soliciting assistance from others. The engineers would not waiver from their goal of delivering their toys.

Last, a client must be both committed and motivated to change. Like the Little Blue Engine, people can move toward accomplishing a goal when they are dedicated to action and motivated. Though many confuse the terms *motivation* and *commitment* and use them interchangeably, there is a distinction. When someone does not perform well and seems indifferent to pursuing a goal, it is accurate to say that person is neither motivated nor committed. However, motivation and commitment are high when a bold goal is reached. In both circumstances, the words are basically interchangeable. Yet, it is possible to have one without the other. For example, when a bride or groom shares vows, they make a firm commitment to love and fidelity. When coupled with motivation, marital promises are pursued, and any hardships are endured to honor the commitments. If sufficient difficulties arise and the "I-think-I-can" mindset is lost, disaffection may occur and compromise motivation. The commitment may linger, but sustaining the necessary behaviors to honor the vows is difficult without the motivation to support it. While commitment is the agreement to do something, motivation provides energy, direction, and intentionality toward a particular behavior. It requires a resolute mindset. Once the Little Blue Engine was committed to helping, it was motivated to take action by its behavior of pulling the broken train over the mountain. It was a difficult task, perhaps seemingly impossible, but envisioning the desired future brought the engine to its destination.

Whether the broken-down train or the Little Blue Engine, the focus was on the present situation and the preferred future of getting over the mountain. Together they found real solutions that could be applied now rather than later. Goal attainment requires focusing on what one can do rather than why one cannot. Encouraging clients, gently nudging them, and facilitating a belief of "I-think-I-can" leads to the cheerful refrain of "I-thought-I-could." ❖



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While commitment is the agreement to do something, motivation provides energy, direction, and intentionality toward a particular behavior. It requires a resolute mindset.



The Secret to Happiness and Joy

Have you ever struggled to find happiness and joy? My patients often tell me how desperate they are to find happiness, but many only seem to find more pain and misery. I have discovered that most people do not know the secret to happiness and joy.

And what is that secret? Both happiness and joy are byproducts—meaning you cannot get happiness and joy directly. They are the result of some other action—much like sawdust is a byproduct of woodworking.

Happiness

Happiness is the byproduct of healthiness in all domains—physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual. When we are sick—physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, or spiritually (guilt, shame, condemnation)—we are not happy.

Happiness comes from healthiness, which is experienced only when we are in harmony with God’s design laws for life—the protocols upon which the Creator God has built reality to operate. For example, we cannot have health while violating the laws of health. This is why the Bible repeatedly tells us, “... *Happy are those who keep God’s law!*” (Proverbs 29:18, GNT).

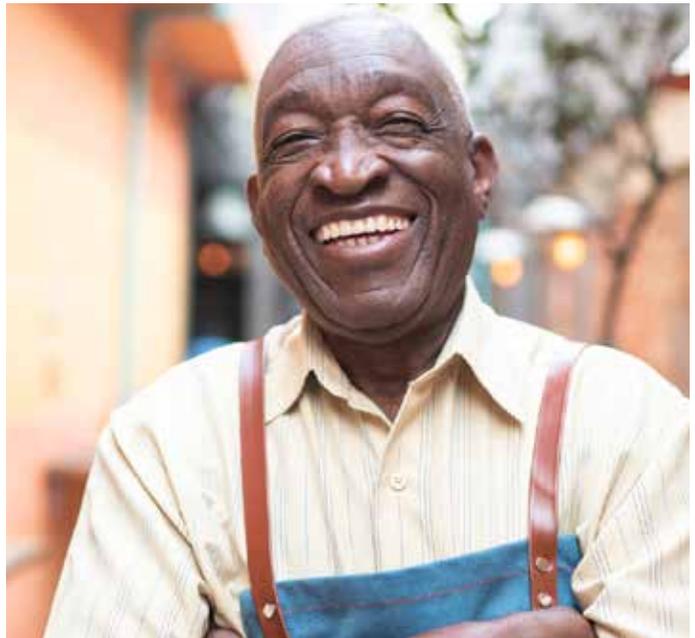
While we cannot choose to “be happy” or seek to obtain happiness directly, we can choose to do what is healthy. We can examine our lives and ask, “Is there any place where I am doing what is unhealthy physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, or spiritually?” Then, we can choose to live in harmony with God’s design laws for life. And as we decide on healthiness, the byproduct is ever-increasing happiness.

However, many fail to understand this and, instead of pursuing healthiness, they substitute it with pleasure-seeking, something which in the immediate moment will make them feel good (e.g., drugs, alcohol, casual sex, gambling, etc.). However, all too often, this violates the laws of health and causes only greater unhappiness, often leading to addiction as people double down on more pleasure-seeking rather than seeking healthiness.

Joy

While happiness is the byproduct of healthiness, joy is the byproduct of living in harmony with God’s purposes. God created humankind in His image and purposed that we should love others and use our abilities to build, develop, advance, discover, and invest our physical and mental energies in godly achievement.

Parents, for example, experience joy in procreation. Artists and musicians experience joy in pouring out their passion into beautiful works. Farmers experience joy in a bountiful harvest. Scientists and mathematicians experience joy in new discoveries. And we all experience the greatest joy when we love others—when we give of ourselves for the good of others. This is why true life, health, happiness, and joy are found in living like Jesus, “... *who for the joy set before him endured the cross...*” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV84).



TIMOTHY R. JENNINGS



Jesus knew intimately the joy of acting to save others, love others more than self, and fulfill the purpose of His Father in heaven. And God, through Jesus, offers us the privilege of partaking of His divine nature and having His designed law of love restored in our hearts and minds (2 Peter 1:4; Hebrews 8:10). Such a state is the healthiest, happiest, and most joyful way to live.

Even our physical bodies benefit from living this way. The Bible says, *“A merry heart does good, like medicine...”* (Proverbs 17:22, NKJV). Medical science confirms that mirthful laughter from a heart at peace is physiologically healthy! Here are just a few findings:

- Mirthful laughter reduces inflammation, improves diabetes control, and reduces incidences of heart attacks.¹
- Cardiologists at the University of Maryland found that patients suffering from myocardial infarction (heart attack) were 40% less likely to laugh. However, laughter was shown to reduce the risk of having a heart attack.²
- Other researchers found beneficial effects of laughter on blood vessels. Nitric oxide is a chemical that the body uses to dilate blood vessels. Mental stress was shown to degrade nitric oxide. This detail would mean that laughter minimizes the adverse effects of stress by reducing the breakdown of nitric oxide, leading to vasodilatation and better blood flow.³ On average, laughter increased blood flow by 22%, and stress decreased blood flow by 35%.⁴
- Laughter has been shown to improve the response of the immune system.⁵
- Researchers also found increased blood levels of interferon-gamma (an immune product that fights infections and cancers) in 10 healthy fasting males after being shown a comedy video ($p=0.02$).⁶ As a result, interferons have become a line of pharmacotherapy in viral infections, systemic carcinomas, and hepatitis B and C.



“A merry heart does good, like medicine...”

(PROVERBS 17:22, NKJV)

In addition, laughter provides many more benefits: reduced anger and irritability, improved mood, decreased stress and tension, improved pain threshold, improved lung function, and reduced blood sugar levels.⁷

So I invite you to be happy by pursuing a healthy life—in harmony with God’s design laws—and to live joyfully by choosing to fulfill God’s purposes for your life. ✦



TIMOTHY R. JENNINGS, M.D., is a board-certified psychiatrist, Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, Fellow of the Southern Psychiatric Association, and past president of the Southern and Tennessee Psychiatric Associations. Dr. Jennings has authored many

books, including *The God-Shaped Brain*, *The God-Shaped Heart*, and *The Aging Brain*. He is the president and founder of *Come and Reason Ministries*; more of his material can be found at www.come-andreason.com.

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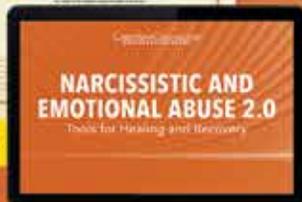
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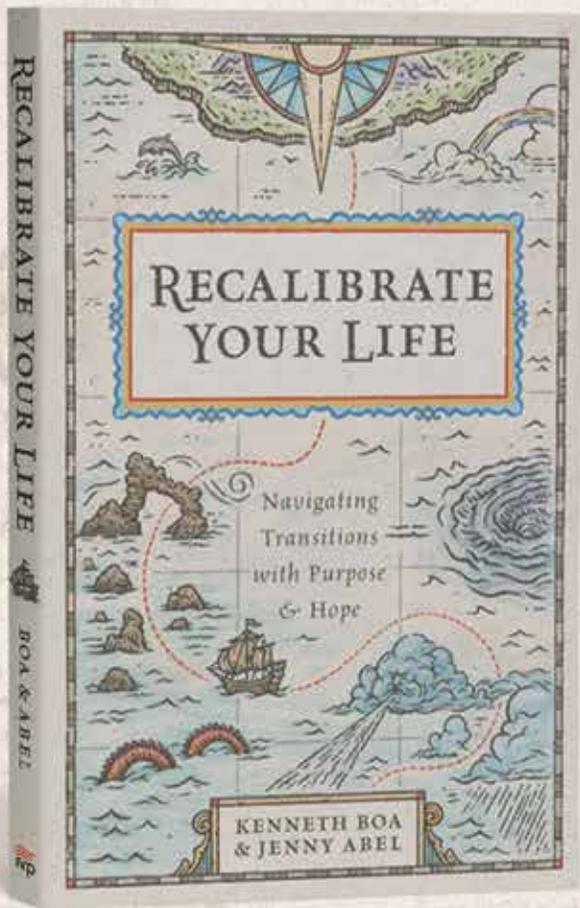
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Avoiding Toxic Positivity in the Church

An elderly man in our church loves to poke at me on Sundays and ask, “How’s the sermon looking today?” “Probably a single or a double, but I’m shooting for a standup triple,” is my typical response. After all, preachers cannot hit home runs every Sunday. The best we can do is prepare, pray, aim for the fences, and trust God with the results. We preach plenty of sermons that are just okay, and that’s okay.

I bet you have read a social media post from a church leader that reads something like, “Tomorrow’s service is going to be lit.” Such posts are usually tagged with a flame emoji or two. We pastors sure love to hype up church members for the Sunday experience!

Why do we do that? Why do we feel it is necessary to spin an “everything is awesome” message? Why do our video announcements start with, “I am so excited!”? Hype can be exhausting and unsustainable. It also does not accurately depict the range of emotions present when churchgoers gather.

Churches unintentionally use toxic positivity to maintain organizational momentum, which also denies or minimizes congregational emotions, experiences, and needs. Budgets, buildings, and administrative demands can lead a church to be one note in its messaging: “Good Vibes Only.” That is why you will never see a tweet that reads, “Tomorrow’s service is going to be okay.” That just doesn’t get people excited.

I love gathering with God’s people. Sunday morning worship is the highlight of my week. I have great anticipation for what God



is going to do in the hearts of His people, but I also know that not everyone showing up is full of joy and ready to party. In Romans (12:15, NIV), Paul tells us to “*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*” Every gathering at our church involves people who are rejoicing and mourning. Sunday sometimes feels like we are on a roller coaster of emotions.

We rejoice with a newlywed couple, then moments later find ourselves mourning with a spouse finalizing a divorce. We rejoice with

the one released from prison and mourn with the parent whose child was just sentenced. We rejoice with the young mom who beat cancer and mourn with those recently diagnosed. We rejoice with parents welcoming newborns and mourn with those who miscarried. This perspective is precisely what Paul meant when he said, “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*” (Galatians 6:2, NIV). When God’s people gather, we carry one another’s burdens.

I am not a big roller coaster guy, but I ride them for my son. However, it only takes a few dips, turns, and loops before my motion sickness kicks in. My son and I were once able to ride four roller coasters in an hour due to low theme park attendance. It wiped me out. There was no recoup time between rides. My body shut down, and I was done for the day.

That is what Sundays often feel like. Standing in the church's foyer, I move from one conversation to the next—one minute, rejoicing, and the next, mourning. For this reason, I never want our church to be a “Good Vibes Only” kind of place. It is not reality. It does not meet people where they are and invalidates hurt and pain.

Churches need to offer more hope and less hype. They need to be okay with difficult emotions. Toxic positivity runs from negative or difficult feelings and denies painful experiences. “Good vibes only” push a “Don't be sad, be happy” agenda; however, we in the Church say it is okay to be sad. Solomon teaches that sadness is good for us: *“Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure”* (Ecclesiastes 7:3-4, NIV).

The house of mourning is a funeral where we wrestle with weighty issues and life's questions. How am I living? How am I loving? Do the people closest to me know how much they matter to me? Wisdom is gained when we sit with and answer these questions. *“A sad face is good for the heart”* because wise people do not avoid pain or deny reality. Instead, they process it in light of eternity.

In difficult and painful seasons, wise people weigh everything temporal against the eternal backdrop. Toxic positivity focuses on

circumstances in the here and now, but the Christian's positivity is rooted in Christ and our future hope. We have good news even when circumstances are dire. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV), *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

Churches must be okay with difficult emotions because our focus is on Christ. We *“... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV). It is not helpful to tell someone to “Look on the bright side.” Instead, say, “What you are going through is not easy. How can I pray for you?” Then, together, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Rather than telling a family member or friend to “Stop being so negative” or “You should be over this by now,” offer to walk it out with them. Substitute it with something like, “I hate that you are going through this. I am here for you when you need me. Let me know how I can best pray for you.” Letting someone know that you see their hurt, fear, and pain is one way of helping them carry their burdens.

I pray that your church's next Sunday gathering, and mine, will always be good with hands lifted in worship, heads bowed in sadness, laughing, crying, clapping to upbeat music, and lamenting over a touching song. I pray for you as you enter into the feelings of others and carry one another's burdens. ✕



TED CUNNINGHAM, MACE, is the founding pastor of Woodland Hills Family Church in Branson, Missouri. He is a graduate of Liberty University and Dallas Theological Seminary.

Churches need to offer more hope and less hype. They need to be okay with difficult emotions. Toxic positivity runs from negative or difficult feelings and denies painful experiences.

Doing God's Work



How are you and I to think about the lives we live and the work we do? What does it require? And how are we to tend to ourselves so the work does not twist us up and lead us to feed off those we are meant to serve? *“For which of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”* (Luke 14:28, LEB). Wise words.

I suspect many in the counseling field started out with a desire to care for others who are suffering and a hope of educating others. I have worked alongside many therapists over the decades—both in the U.S. and around the world. Many are

burnt out or sliding in that direction... or feel like they are drowning in the sorrows and sufferings of others. I know that feeling. So does our Lord. In fact, the weight of humans' sin, sorrow, and suffering did drown Him. He chose to be crushed by that weight so we do not have to.

How are we to care for the weight we bear? It makes us vulnerable to harming both ourselves and others. Many are surprised by the toll the work can take. No one told us, and we usually do not know how to care for ourselves in that place. No one told us that our clients are not the only ones vulnerable to the weight of evil and suffering. No one told us we should count the cost. For many, no

one ever told them there was a cost. Helping is such a lovely word. Who knew you could drown in it?

Many of us were also never taught of the dangers. It is not hard for the work of helping others to become ego food. So we feed ourselves by seeking fame in a large organization and on the esteem it brings. We prop ourselves up with fame, books, money, or drawing huge crowds. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things. Our Lord became famous and drew large crowds, but they were not His food. Actually, He was theirs and also wants to be ours.

Sadly, we have witnessed many in Christendom who seemingly started out well. However, somewhere down

We start out thinking it has to do with caring, compassion, perseverance, and wisdom—nice things. And, indeed, it does. However, counseling also involves indescribable suffering, inarticulate moaning, impenetrable darkness, inconceivable deception, cruelty, brutality, and evil.

the line, they got off the rails. They looked for ego food, wealth, fame, and success and did not count the cost. They began to build but could not finish. Though they acquire the trappings of success and are believed to be flourishing, they are, in fact, destroying both themselves and the lambs. We have seen much of that in the news.

So here I am writing to an audience of people who are caregivers. In case your work has not taught you yet, counseling is not nice. We start out thinking it has to do with caring, compassion, perseverance, and wisdom—nice things. And, indeed, it does. However, counseling also involves indescribable suffering, inarticulate moaning, impenetrable darkness, inconceivable deception, cruelty, brutality, and evil. My history as a psychologist who works with trauma makes that pretty clear. I suspect most of you know that entering into suffering of any kind invites garbage and pain into your lives.

Counseling exposes us. We go into the helping professions because we think we are caring, good listeners, or compassionate. Perhaps others have told us so. And, of course, we want to help. Whether or not such things are true about us will be exposed in this work. When you are a therapist, people line up to bring you the worst of themselves. As I am sure you know, the worst in someone else tends to bring out the worst in us. Consider the exposure as something orchestrated by the Spirit of God and ask Him to show you yourself, search you out, and give you more of Christ so that when that space in you is roughly

bumped again, the likeness of Christ will spill out. Instead of harshness and condemnation, show love; instead of fear, show truth.

You sit with pain and want to alleviate it, which is good, but be careful. Pain is a sign that something is wrong and is how we know disease is present. The absence of pain creates a silent killer. Listen to pain, study it, and hear its story. It is one of the ways you will learn what is wrong, diseased, or damaged in the person with whom you sit.

As you do these things, know you are doing *God's work* with Him. Caring for broken people is *not our work*. It is a piece of the work of God in this world, and we have been called to share in it. If you are gifted to bear the burdens of others, then it is *His work* you have been blessed to do. It is backward for us to think it is our work and then ask God to help us. It is *His work*, the people are *His people*, and even you are not your own.

You will be doing *God's work for Him*. It is His work, and you are His instrument. That means your work should look like Him—using His ways, bearing His character, and wearing the fragrance of Christ. You can only do God's work through Him, as He does His work in you. We cannot do the work of the Redeemer unless He first does His redemptive work in us. Let the work expose you to yourself and allow that exposure to take you to the Cross with a heart that pleads for God's redemptive work in you.

On building for eternity, Scottish evangelist and teacher, Oswald Chambers, said, "Our Lord implies that the only men and women He

will use in His building enterprises are those who love *Him* personally, passionately and devotedly.... All that we build is going to be inspected by God.... These are days of tremendous enterprises, days when we are trying to work for God.... Profoundly speaking, we can never work for God. Jesus takes us over for *His* enterprises, *His* building schemes entirely...."¹ ✠

DIANE LANGBERG, PH.D., is globally



recognized for her 50 years of clinical work with trauma victims. She has trained caregivers on six continents in responding to trauma and the abuse

of power. For 29 years, she directed her own practice in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania—Diane Langberg Ph.D. & Associates. Now, in partnership with Dr. Phil Monroe, Langberg, Monroe & Associates continues this work, which includes 17 therapists with multiple specialties. Dr. Langberg is the author of several books, with her newest being *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* and *In Our Lives First: Meditations for Counselors, Volume 2*. She is the recipient of the Distinguished Alumna Achievements from Taylor University, the AACC Caregiver Award, the Distinguished President's Award, and the Philadelphia Council of Clergy's Christian Service Award. Dr. Langberg is married and has two sons and four grandchildren. For more information, visit www.dianelangberg.com.

Endnote

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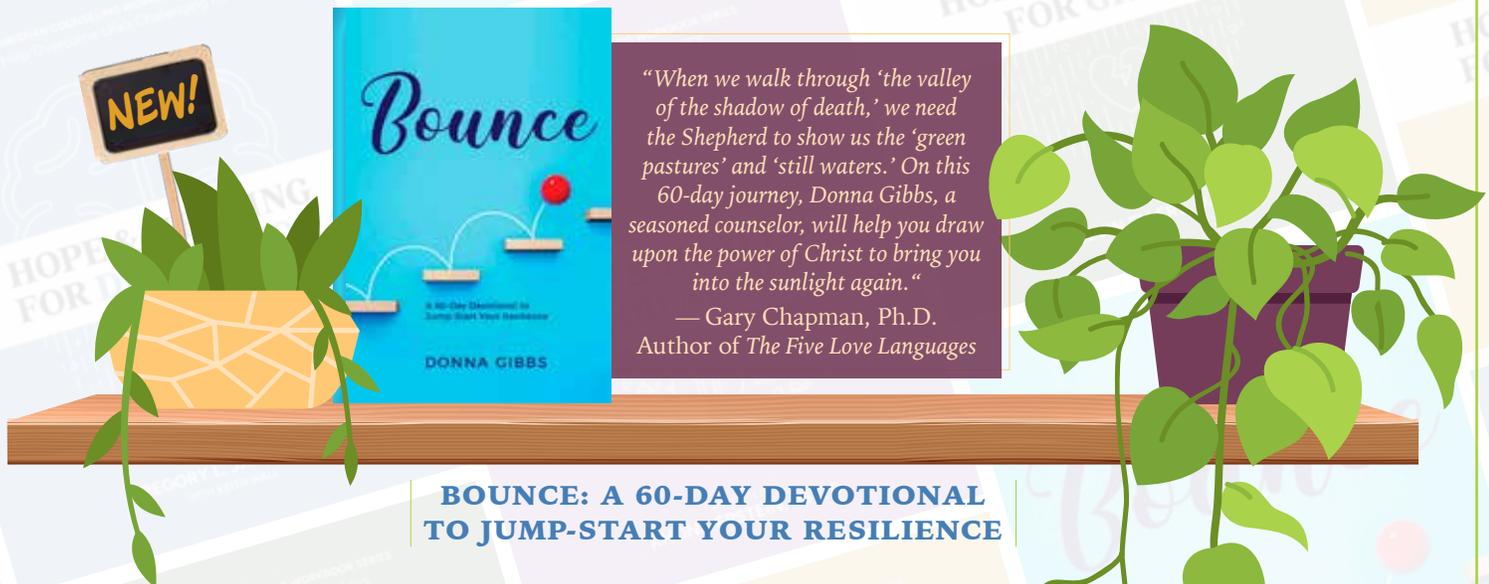


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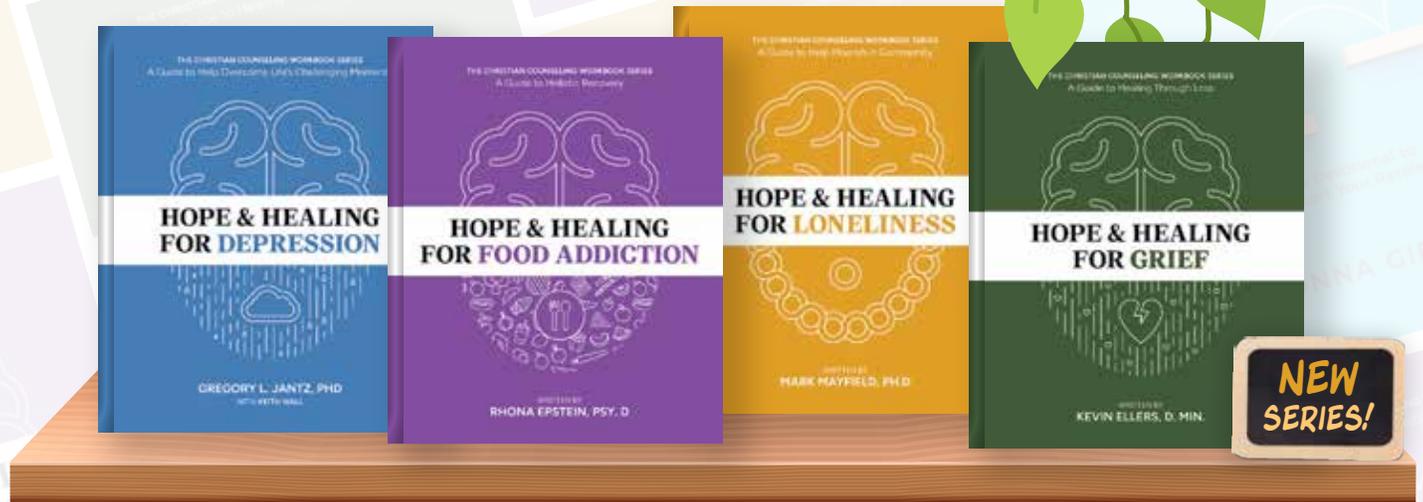
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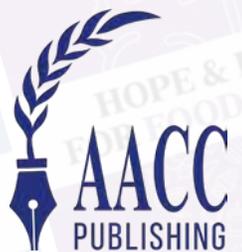
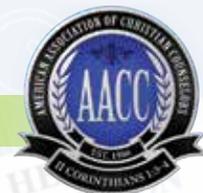
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Two Sides of Psychology's Normal Curve: Fear and Love



There is only love and fear. Perhaps I should explain. I am a longtime admirer of Bono, the lead singer of U2 for 47 years. In the early fall of 1986, I was sitting in a car with a friend after a long day's work. Clarence was a family practitioner. I was a newly minted clinical psychologist. We were partners in a new venture, a medical and psychological practice called Four Seasons Family Care. We were more than a bit nervous as business was not yet booming, but our student and small business loans were.

Clarence thought a little distraction couldn't hurt. So, he inserted a cassette tape and punched play as he asked, "Ever heard of U2?" Then, an

Irish baritone who thought he was a tenor began singing the song, I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For, from the Joshua Tree album. When the song was finished, I asked him to play it again. We listened to those soul-reverberating words seven more times. I had found something I was looking for... a couple of new friends.

As I type these words, I am almost 37 years removed from that first encounter with Bono. I have played that one song hundreds and hundreds of times across the decades. As the singer himself would confess in his autobiography, *Surrender*, at the heart of the song is John Bunyan's idea of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Or, he quickly admitted, "my lack of it." His honesty

about the journey was and is so refreshing. I have always been drawn to sincere and transparent searching and repulsed by false findings, dogged certainty, and the devout who claim no doubt.

According to Bono, "The story of every pilgrim is the running toward and the running away from enlightenment."¹ I am sure Ignatius of Loyola would applaud this, based on his attention to noticing our times of *consolation* (love-driven movement with and toward God) and *desolation* (times of fear-driven movement away from God and further into the kingdom of ego and control).

I'm not saying that I became a U2 groupie, but during one family vacation that involved driving from the

trickling origins to the mouth of the Mississippi River, we listened to all of U2's current music in chronological order. Our purpose was to identify any songs *without* a spiritual reference. After listening to more than 120 songs, we could only find two that omitted a reference to God, Jesus, an image from Scripture, or deep spiritual longing. Oh, and I confess that I have made at least one pilgrimage to Dublin.

So, I was pleased but not surprised that one of my Christmas presents this year from my daughters was a copy of Bono's autobiography, *Surrender*. I was surprised, however, to come across a poem by Australian cartoonist, Michael Leunig, titled, "Love and Fear." It begins with a series of bold claims: "There are only two feelings. Love and fear. There are only two languages. Love and fear. There are only two activities. Love and fear. There are only two motives, two procedures, two frameworks, two results...."²

As a psychologist, these words deeply resonate with me. Both sides of the normal curve are brought into focus by only two words. And, after all, I should know. I invented positive psychology... but don't tell Martin Seligman. He still claims it happened in his garden back in 1998, just after his young daughter rebuked him for being too grumpy. I think her words were, "If I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch." The rest is revisionist history.

But I know better. In the mid-1980s, I began drawing two normal curves next to each other. One was a right-side-up version of the famous curve, and the other was an upside-down rendition drawn just to the right. The point was to describe how psychology and counseling were about normal making (helping people on the wrong side move to the center of the curve by becoming less anxious, angry, and depressed), while

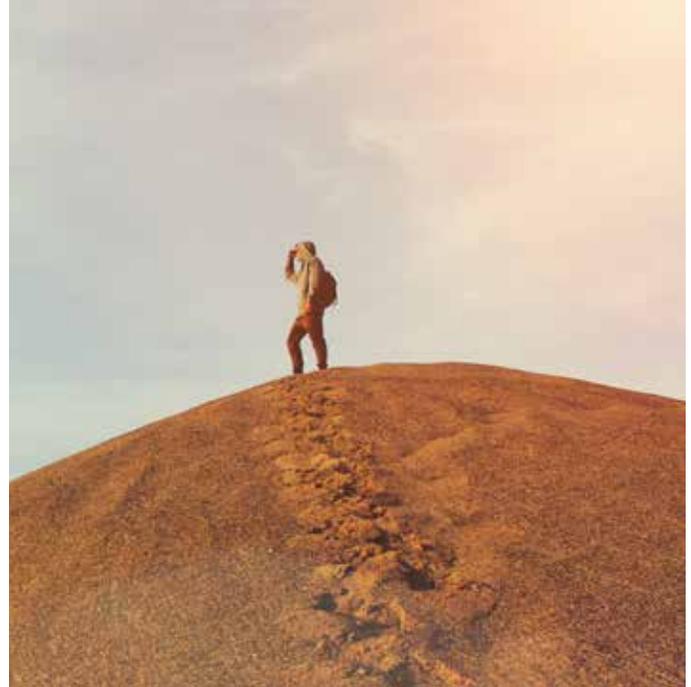
spiritual formation (represented by the invisible, upside-down normal curve to the right of the normal pole) was about abnormal making (helping folks become abnormally peaceful, joyful, and loving). However, now I think I may just need to stop whining and being such a grouch. And, Martin, I am kidding, of course.

Love and fear. So basic to human life. So profound. We are created in the very image of God, with a primary mission statement of growing into divine likeness. The "beloved" disciple, John, provides the best definition of our development goal—God is love. "... *God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him*" (1 John 4:16, ESV).

In my opinion, the opposite of love is not anger, not hate. The opposite of love is fear. Anger is just one of the many patterns we are prone to use in an attempt to manage fear. If I love a person, I am in a disposition of being willing to act on what is good for them. However, if I am angry with someone, it is most often because that individual has blocked or gotten in the way of an object or goal I was pursuing to help me calm some underlying fear. If you threaten my bank account, you bring to the surface my fear that I will not have enough resources to handle the future. If you threaten someone I love, my fear of being without that person flashes into the foreground and sprays up into anger.

Perhaps it is the primacy of fear that motivated the writers of Scripture to use the phrase "*fear not*" 366 times—once for every day of the year, including leap year.³ Maybe on a biological level, the centrality of love and fear come from the two divisions of our autonomic nervous system: sympathetic (the fight or flight response that is triggered when we fear threat) and parasympathetic (the calming response associated with

In my opinion, the opposite of love is not anger, not hate. The opposite of love is fear. Anger is just one of the many patterns we are prone to use in an attempt to manage fear.



love, relaxation, laughter, and sexual intimacy).

My intent here is not to prove that the poet previously referenced, Michael Leunig, is right. However, my last four decades of earth life have made me willing to give him the benefit of the doubt. It wasn't long before psychological services at Four Seasons Family Care were booming. And it wasn't too many years after when I began musing about how it seemed I had never spent time with a client who did not quickly take me to places of "compassion deficits" in their life and then to fear-management strategies that were no longer working.

While thinking back over a few decades of spiritual formation conversations, it wasn't too many years ago that I began to view all vices and virtues in terms of fear and love. It strikes me that once Adam and Eve decided to separate themselves from love, they awakened to a much smaller world, a world permeated with fear. For the first time, there was fear of death, loss, pain, rejection, etc. *ad nauseam*.

Take a spin around the vices described on the Enneagram. I think

a strong case can be made that every vice is simply a classic pattern for attempting to allay fear by managing and controlling it through behaviors and thoughts that can be controlled. That is to say, I believe each vice can be explained in a way consistent with a particular fear management strategy that we can control; and that each virtue can be seen as an alternative response to the fear that flows out from the experience of a deep and pervasive love. For example, the vice anger results from believing that I and the universe must be perfect to avoid rejection. The opposing virtue of serenity flows from learning to experience the deep love that created the universe and smiles at my imperfections.

Bono's autobiography, *Surrender*, reaches a crescendo in two of his final chapters. One is aptly titled, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," and the other is titled from the solution to the quest, "Moment of Surrender." In the end, this wonderful poet and articulate observer of life makes a not-so-subtle suggestion. If you want to find what you are looking for, let go of your attempts to

manage your fears and surrender to love. As it turns out, fear and love are physiological opposites. Each has the power to cast out the other. They are two notes that cannot be played at the same time. ✦



GARY W. MOON, M.DIV., PH.D., served as the founding Executive Director of the Martin Institute for Christianity and Culture and the Dallas Willard Center

for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College. He continues to direct their resource development initiatives by serving as the director of *Conversatio Divina: A Center for Spiritual Formation*, www.conversatio.org.

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Clinical Pearls of Wisdom and Practice: Part One



The medical practice involves the acquisition of therapeutic facts and the art of applying these facts in the service of patients. For more than 20 years, this column has reviewed both the science and art of applied psychiatric practice. Reflecting on these years, the following is part one of a collection of “Shrink Notes” clinical pearls of wisdom for patients and practitioners seeking to promote better care delivery.

Choosing Medications

There are four variables to consider when choosing a medication—safety, tolerability, efficacy, and cost. The drug must be safe and not pose a significant risk of serious illness. Other medical problems and medications provide a context for whether the medication will be safe. For example, giving a stimulant for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to someone with hypertension is risky.

Second, the drug must have a low risk for side effects, or the patient may refuse to take it. Third, the medication should have a mechanism of action different from drugs that have not worked in the past. Finally, the medicine must be cost-effective. Using generics or manufacturers’ discount coupons for branded products is helpful here. Sometimes the price per pill is the same regardless of dosage. So, cutting a larger drug dosage in half to achieve the desired amount can reduce the cost by half. Freezing the pill for an hour before cutting can minimize splintering.

Medication and Dosage Changes

Keep medication regimens as simple as possible to decrease drug interactions that are not always predictable. Drug interaction apps look at how one drug interacts with another. However, if a patient takes five medications concurrently, the app cannot

predict how all five drugs interact with each other in real-time. Make one change at a time gradually so it is clear what was responsible for a good or bad result. Do not change medications too quickly; some may take six to eight weeks to reach maximum benefit. However, do not wait too long to change a drug that is clearly not working. When making changes, it is important to have a clear timeline for when to expect improvement.

Always consider dosage changes before altering medication if it is not entirely effective. Many variables influence how one should view the dosage of a medicine. A particular drug can be used at a low dosage for a specific diagnosis and a higher dosage for a different diagnosis. Atypical neuroleptics are an example of this, as low dosages are used to augment antidepressants in treating depression but much higher dosages in psychosis. Lithium is used at a low dosage in patients with suicidal thoughts and

depression but in much higher dosages in patients with bipolar disorder. Other co-administered medications can influence dosing issues. Bupropion is often given with other antidepressants to reduce sexual dysfunction. However, bupropion may increase the blood level of the other antidepressant by inhibiting the liver clearance of the drug. In this situation, a lower dosage of the other medication may be necessary.

Additionally, age is a variable in pediatric and geriatric patients. Age-related changes in how the liver metabolizes medication (and other factors) will often result in lower dosages needed in these two populations. Cigarette smoking may increase the liver clearance of some medicines, requiring higher dosages. Also, some patients have differences in liver clearance of medications based on their genetic pharmacokinetic profiles, with resultant changes in dosage. So, whether a dosage is high or low depends on many contextual and diagnostic variables. “Dr. Internet” does not emphasize this when informing patients on whether their dosages are appropriate.

Measuring Improvement

Patients and doctors must have metrics by which improvement can be measured. Rating scales are available for many diagnoses for evaluating progress. Mood charts are a helpful visual aid for bipolar disorder. Having patients rate themselves on a Likert scale of one to 10, with 10 being great, is a simple tool for having a “number” to follow. Behavioral functioning is another way of measuring impact by listing the activities a patient *cannot* do because of their illness. Subsequently, we would follow the three activities that are most important to the patient for evidence of improvement. This approach moves it from subjective feelings alone to objective, measurable behaviors.

Getting input from relatives and friends about these behaviors can also help the patient have context for their self-assessments.

Common Triggers

Medication failures may be due to triggers that commonly disrupt efficacy or promote side effects. Caffeine can promote anxiety itself or increase anxiety side effects of medication. Sleep disruption can trigger mania, worsen cognitive function, and prolong the time to full recovery from depression. A high-fat diet can impair the absorption of erectile dysfunction drugs with the appearance of treatment failure when the drug is never absorbed. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that can understandably destabilize mood disorders and interact with psychiatric medications to cause accidental alcohol intoxication with low intake. Not eating properly can decrease the absorption of some medicines in clinically significant manners. Frequent usage of marijuana may trigger problems by direct effects on the disease state or drug interactions with various psychiatric medications.

Side Effect Management

The worst-performing medication on earth is the one patients will not take because of side effects. Since many side effects are related to medication dosages, a reduction in dosage is a good first intervention if possible. Some side effects may reflect drug-drug interactions. Subtracting out a non-essential medication or supplement may be a solution. Then, adding another drug to treat the side effect is an option. It is usually preferred to subtract rather than add another medication if possible, as adding a medicine can result in problematic “multiplication” through drug-drug interactions. Side effects vary in intensity and disruption in a patient’s

life. This issue can only be evaluated by a serious doctor-patient discussion. The benefit of the treatment may be worth relatively mild side effects, such as dry mouth or constipation. Side effects should also be evaluated in the context of how long treatment will be required. For example, sexual dysfunction is a milder issue in treatment that may require four to six months but a much larger issue if lifetime treatment is needed.

Improving Compliance

Nearly half of patients will make a mistake if a medication is scheduled to be taken more than once daily. Thus, reducing the number of scheduled dosages is important. Use a phone or watch alarm for alerts on dosing times and associate medication dosing with other activities like brushing teeth, eating a meal, or arriving at work. If supplements are recommended, screenshot them before leaving the appointment. When tempted to skip or stop medications, remember what feeling bad felt like psychologically, socially, and spiritually. Additionally, untreated psychiatric illness can worsen medical problems, such as diabetes, pain syndromes, and heart disease. *Correctly* taking medications can represent a meaningful investment in multiple sectors of life.

Look for the next edition of “Shrink Notes” for part two of my collection of clinical pearls of wisdom for patients and practitioners pursuing improved healthcare approaches. ✖



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Positivity and Motivation in Self-advocacy: Lobbying Rules Every Therapist Should Know

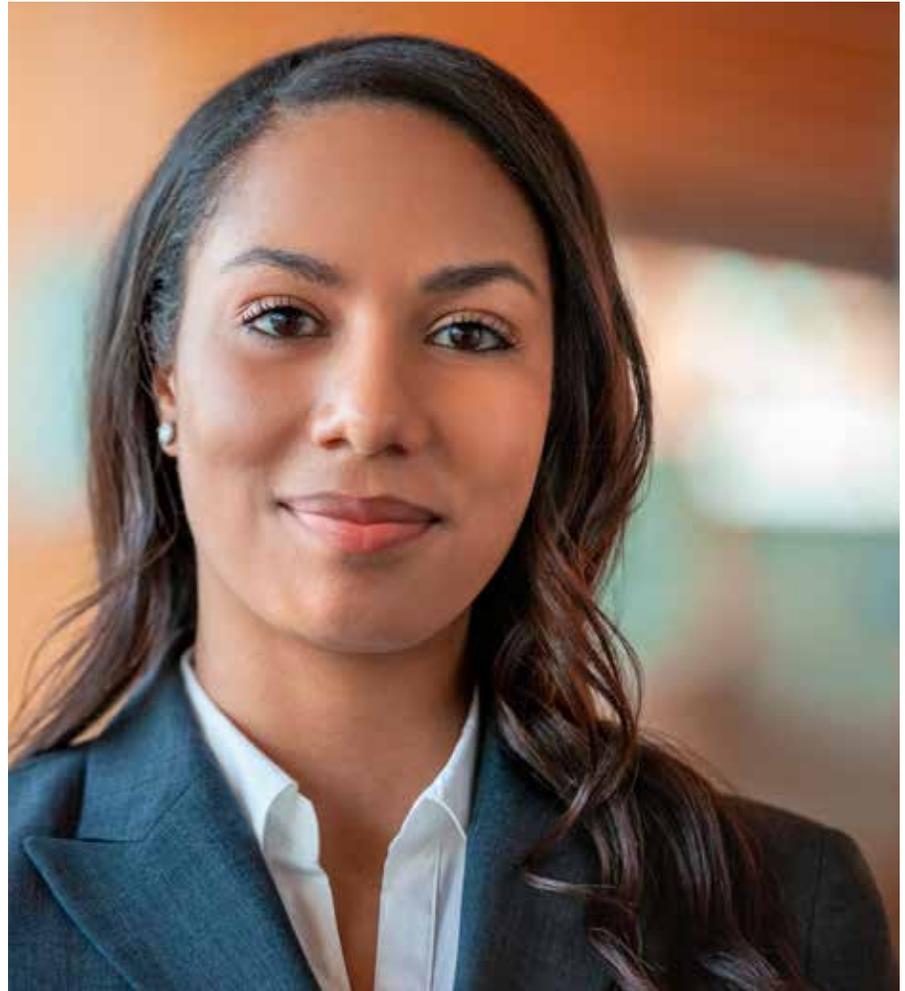
As a presidential election approaches, our nation faces unprecedented political divisions. Unfortunately, these divisions are negatively impacting mental health in America. A 2021 study concluded, "... perceptions of partisan polarization may represent important factors that are linked to the onset of mental health and sleep disorders."¹ You may even be experiencing some anger or stress in your own practice.

Fortunately, there is hope. One essential aspect of positivity and motivation is the ability to advocate for oneself. Danielle Dahl, managing editor at Everyday Power, notes, "Self-advocacy can be a terrifying process for many people... [but] it will increase your self-confidence and self-worth."²

Whether for you or your client(s), lobbying can act as an effective tool to exercise one's voice in the political process because "... lobbying provides access to government legislators, acts as an educational tool, and allows individual interests to gain power in numbers."³

Avoid Imposing Values on Clients

When engaging in political discussions, however, there are important rules that you must remember. While therapists may lobby legislators and public officials in their individual capacities, they should avoid discussing their political concerns with clients. The ACA Code of Ethics states, "Counselors are aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors [on their clients]." The AACC generally affirms



the concept of not imposing one's values on a client.⁴ You may, however, suggest lobbying clients as a way for them to self-advocate and have their voices heard, as long as *you remain viewpoint neutral*. On the other hand, there is no legal or ethical obligation to mention lobbying as an option for clients. For example, if you have a client who is avidly pro-abortion and you are pro-life, you need to suggest lobbying to that client. As an American, you also have the right to lobby in your individual capacity without involving your clients.

State Laws and Requirements

If you, or your client(s), plan to do extensive lobbying, you may trigger a state lobbying law requiring you to register as a lobbyist.⁵ Aside from state requirements, individuals are generally free to lobby and even provide testimony before hearings. For example, suppose your client feels strongly that anti-bullying laws are needed. In that case, they may testify, communicate with legislators, and engage in other activities to promote an anti-bullying bill without limitation. As an *individual*, you may

also attempt to influence legislation without limitation. If, however, you are a member of a tax-exempt organization or practice formed as a 501(c)(3), additional restrictions apply *when representing the organization*.

Lobbying Rules for 501(c)(3)s

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) states, "... [i]n general, no organization may qualify for section 501(c)(3) status if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as *lobbying*) 501(c)(3)."⁶ If a 501(c)(3) spends more than a substantial part of its total activities on lobbying, it could lose its tax-exempt status. However, the exact percentage of what would constitute "substantial" is unclear. The IRS has noted that 5% or less fits the "insubstantial" definition.⁷

In any event, most 501(c)(3) counseling centers spend much less than 5% of their income on "lobbying." Specifically, to be lobbying, one must be in an activity "attempting to influence *legislation*."⁸ The IRS states, "*Legislation* includes action by Congress, any state legislature, any local council, or similar governing body, with respect to acts, bills, resolutions, or similar items (such as legislative confirmation of appointive office), or by the public in referendum, ballot initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure. It does not include actions by executive, judicial, or administrative bodies."⁹

Fortunately, there are notable exceptions to what is considered lobbying that allow 501(c)(3) counseling centers to advocate for themselves without threatening their tax-exempt status.

Lobbying Exceptions

First, lobbying would also not include *nonpartisan research*, such as analysis, research, or study of an issue, if the outcome is objective and the organization makes the results generally

If a 501(c)(3) spends more than a substantial part of its total activities on lobbying, it could lose its tax-exempt status. However, the exact percentage of what would constitute "substantial" is unclear.

available. It is even permissible to advocate a particular position or conclusion on an issue if the organization provides a sufficiently full and fair discussion of the facts to enable the reader to form an independent opinion. For example, a counseling center could commission and publish a study on post-abortion stress.¹⁰

Second, a 501(c)(3) counseling center can give *technical advice* to a government agency or legislative committee if its advice is requested in writing. For example, a counseling center may be asked to provide advice on how legalized marijuana impacts mental health.

Third, a 501(c)(3) counseling center can engage in activities in its own *self-defense* or where the proposed action would directly impact its existence. For example, a nonprofit counseling center opposed to a law banning Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) could testify that enacting such a law would limit their ability to exercise free speech rights and the rights of their clients to determine the course of their treatment, or where legislation proposes to remove the tax-exempt status of all counseling centers.¹¹

Finally, a 501(c)(3) counseling center may *communicate* with government officials *on a general subject*, such as the increasing prevalence of suicidal ideation among teenagers. In this case, the activity would not be influencing any legislation.

In short, your clients should feel free to engage in legislative advocacy without restrictions. In your individual capacity, you may also feel free to

engage in legislative advocacy. While 501(c)(3) counseling centers face more restrictions, the guidance previously mentioned may help such organizations be involved in self-advocacy.

A Final Point about Political Campaign Intervention

It is important to note that both 501(c)(3)s and *churches* are restricted from engaging in "political campaign intervention." The restrictions in this area are different than what was previously discussed. The IRS has published guidance¹² on this topic, which is essential to read if a 501(c)(3) counseling center or church counseling center wishes to participate in a campaign for office or promote a particular candidate for public office. ✕

The information contained in this column is provided for educational purposes only. Nothing in this column should be construed as legal advice, and readers should seek advice from a qualified attorney within their jurisdiction for concerns/questions on specific matters. Law varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

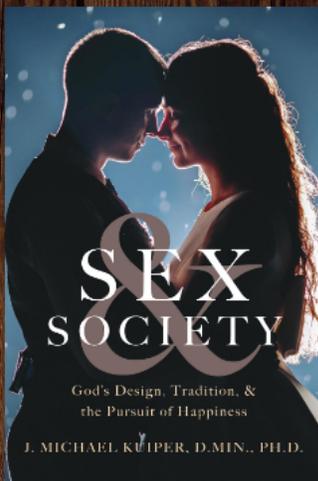


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Endnotes

- ¹ Nayak, S.S., Fraser, T., Panagopoulos, C., Aldrich, D.P., & Kim, D. (2021). Is divisive politics making Americans sick? Associations of perceived partisan polarization with physical and mental health outcomes among adults in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine*, 284, 113976. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113976> (accessed 15 May 2023).
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- ³ Weiser, D. (12 July 2021). *Why lobbying is legal and important in the U.S.* Investopedia. Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/043015/why-lobbying-legal-and-important-us.asp#:~:text=Lobbying%20is%20an%20important%20lever,to%20gain%20power%20in%20numbers> (accessed 15 May 2023).
- ⁴ See generally, ES1-500: Cultural regard in Christian counseling – A call to dignity. *AACC Code of Ethics* (2014). Available at: <https://www.aacc.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AACC-Code-of-Ethics-Master-Document.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2023).
- ⁵ For a list of lobby laws for each state, see <https://www.ncsl.org/ethics/lobbyist-registration-requirements> (accessed 15 May 2023).
- ⁶ See <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying> (accessed 22 May 2023).
- ⁷ See <https://www.churchlawcenter.com/nonprofit/what-does-no-substantial-part-mean-in-irc-%C2%A7501c3/> (accessed 22 May 2023).
- ⁸ *Id.* at 7.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ See <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/private-foundations/exception-for-nonpartisan-analysis-study-and-research> (accessed 22 May 2023).
- ¹¹ See <https://www.tenenbaumlegal.com/articles/limitations-on-lobbying-activities-everything-that-501c3-organizations-need-to-know/> (accessed 22 May 2023).
- ¹² See <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/published-guidance-on-political-campaign-activity-of-501c3-organizations> (accessed 22 May 2023).



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The Cost of Confidence



*“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”*

– Habakkuk 3:17-18, NIV

A person’s true character often does not come out in times of prosperity but when times are hard. This is no less true of leaders whose measures of leadership are tested in the fires of adversity when conditions are challenging, things are difficult, and people are problematic. Leaders

can focus on the negative in stressful times, with dictates, decrees, fiats, and finalities. Crises can prompt severe, fearful reactions, but leaders are called to thoughtful, confident responses.

There is a cost, however, to confidence. There is a cost to positivity. Depending on the circumstances,

this cost can be high. As a leader, you are visible to everyone inside and outside your organization. Those you work with look to you to set the “tone.” Positive leadership takes your energy and pours it into those around you, while negative leadership sucks energy, creating anxiety, stress, fear, and burnout.



You are called to a higher standard of conduct, positivity, and motivation on days when you feel like it and, especially, on days when you do not.

The last several years have been stressful for organizations and leaders. There were times it seemed the fig tree was not going to bud, and many of us were not sure there would be grapes on the vine. We had to deal with unprecedented crop failures and livestock and livelihood loss. There were times, personally and professionally, when I intensely identified with the first part of the Habakkuk passage. And days when it was all I could do to gather up my spiritual courage and repeat to myself, as many times as it took, to confidently believe, "... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

I learned if I relied on myself to power my positivity, I was bound to fail. How could I motivate others when I could barely motivate myself? The power of my positivity lay not within myself but within my confidence in God, my Savior. In Him, I could rejoice. In Him, I could be joyful and patiently, confidently, and positively wait for the figs to bud and the grapes to appear, for the crops to produce and the livestock to return.

As a leader, I do not know where you are in this process. If you have not seen the return, I urge you to stay strong, positive, and continue to motivate those with whom you work. Be confident, not with worldly confidence but with divine confidence. Divine confidence is not a sugarcoated, false presentation that denies the truth most people can see. Jesus, the great motivator, did not try to diminish or gloss over the truth of

what was coming for His followers. He said, *"A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:32-33, NIV). Jesus explained the reality "on the ground" (*in this world, you will have trouble*), then pivoted with the eternal reality (*I have overcome the world*).

There is a reason you are in a leadership position, and there is a cost. You are called to a higher standard of conduct, positivity, and motivation on days when you feel like it and, especially, on days when you do not. You are called to this higher standard when days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and even if months turn into years.

The good news is that a reward comes with the cost of this higher standard. Jesus alluded to this in Luke 6:32-35 (NIV) when He said, *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High..."*

Children of the Most High recognize the true source to power their positivity and use that power to help motivate those they lead, in good times and bad.

- Pray for strength for yourself and others, especially people with whom you may be in conflict.
- Listen to what those in your organization need and withstand the temptation to view these needs as additional burdens.
- Explain what you can do and why... and what you cannot do and why.
- In all situations, be calm, positive, and motivational, recognizing it is not just what you say but how you say it.
- Be sure to share any good news as widely as possible, whether yours or others.
- Practice self-care because your energy level directly affects those around you.
- Reiterate the reason for the work—purpose is a powerful motivator.
- Do not sugarcoat the challenges or hoard the solutions.
- Be grateful for the good. ✕



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is the founder of The Center • A Place of HOPE (www.aplaceofhope.com), a healthcare facility in Edmonds, Washing-

ton, which emphasizes whole-person care, addressing the emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual aspects of recovery. He is the author of multiple books, including his latest, *Triumph Over Trauma*. Dr. Jantz is a sought-after speaker in person, on television, and on radio (www.drgregoryjantz.com).

Exploring Keys to Health Behavior Change, the Role of Optimism and Pessimism in Older Couples, and Increasing Motivation in Athletes



In this Research Digest, we will examine the role that motivation and competence play in making positive health behavior changes. We will also consider how optimism and pessimism influence older couples' sense of support. Finally, we will look at the growing field of sports psychology and key strategies to inspire motivation in athletes.

Health Behavior Change

Sheeran, P., Wright, C.E., Avishai, A., Villegas, M.E., Rothman, A.J., & Klein, W.M.P. (2021). Does increasing autonomous motivation or perceived competence lead to health behavior change? A meta-analysis. *Health Psychology, 40*(10), 706-716.

Sheeran and colleagues ask about the role people's sense of autonomous motivation and perceived competence play in positive health behavior change. In autonomous motivation, individuals act "with a sense of volition— for reasons of enjoyment, personal utility, or consistency with personal values, as opposed to acting because of reward or social pressure, or to avoid guilt" (p. 707). With perceived competence, people highly evaluate their capability of performing the target positive health behavior. Does current evidence from valid experimental studies demonstrate these concepts can play a role in promoting health behavior change? To find out, the researchers used a meta-analysis that combined the results of 67 randomized experiments. The included studies focused



primarily on increasing physical activity and decreasing sedentary behavior.

The findings were enlightening. Studies to increase *autonomous motivation* resulted in a medium change in health behaviors, and those that increased *perceived competence* led to small-to-medium health behavior change. Experiments that combined both of these factors did not produce a more significant effect on behavior change. The researchers noted that intervention strategies for both approaches need further development. Less than 40% of studies on each produced positive health behavior change. Thus, inspiring health behavior change continues to be a complex endeavor, but these two strategies may be useful components of interventions to lead to such change.

The Role of Optimism and Pessimism in Older Couples

Segal-Karpas, D., & Arbel, R. (2022). Optimism, pessimism and support in older couples: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality, 90*(4), 645-657.

How do people's attitudes of optimism or pessimism influence marriage in the later years of life? Segal-Karpas and Arbel investigated the role of these attitudes in older couples' perception of support utilizing data from a longitudinal national

study (the Health and Retirement Study). They examined data collected from the 2006, 2010, and 2014 time periods. The researchers' sample consisted of 1,681 U.S. couples. The couples were predominantly white (about 85% of the sample), married an average of 34 years, and each spouse was 50 years old or older.

In their study, Segal-Karpas and Arbel identified increases in husbands' pessimism as a key contributor to future perceptions of decreased marital support. "Thus, men's gloomier outlook on life may color their perception of marital support" (p. 652), though their pessimism did not appear to impact the wives' perception of support. The researchers theorized that older men may be more dependent on their wives for social support than the wives are on them. Older women may have more external sources of support in addition to their marriages compared to men. The researchers' findings appear consistent with current studies on older couples, although more investigations are needed.

In the between-person analyses, "... husbands' and wives' perceived support in the relationship was positively associated with both partners' optimism and negatively associated with both partners' pessimism" (p. 654). This may suggest that as older adults' optimism increases and pessimism decreases, they are more

attuned to their partners' needs and more capable of providing support. Other interpretations are also possible. While recognizing the limitations of their study, the investigators noted their overall results suggest that in therapy, treating maladaptive "future-oriented cognitive schemas" (p. 654) related to pessimism may be particularly important when working with older couples.

Increasing Motivation in Athletes

Munz, S., & Jones, B.D. (2021). Increasing athletes' engagement and performance using the MUSIC model of motivation. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics, 15*(4), 263-281.

Sports psychology is becoming a growing field for counselors. When working with athletes, motivation plays a crucial role in their effective long-term performance. Coaches, athletes, and clinicians can struggle with the numerous sports psychology theories and volumes of research to turn current information into practical applications to maintain and increase athletes' motivation. Consequently, Munz and Jones developed a MUSIC model to serve as an accessible framework to organize prominently researched motivational concepts. They have used this model with collegiate and younger athletes.

The "M" in their model stands

for “eMpowerment.” This involves athletes having choices and a sense of control over their learning. Self-determination theory provides a basis for these strategies. “U” is “useful.” Athletes need to comprehend why what they are practicing or learning is beneficial for their goals. Expectancy value theory and goal-setting research inform this component. The “S” stands for “success.” Athletes must think their efforts will lead to success. Self-efficacy theory is an example theory for this part. The training methods must maintain the athletes’ interest (“I”). Intrinsic motivation and interest theories influence this section. Finally, athletes must believe the coaches care (“C”) about them personally and professionally. Self-determination theory shapes this aspect of the model.

Substantial research has been done

on the theoretical underpinnings of the MUSIC framework. This model highlights the multi-faceted nature of instilling motivation in others. A limitation of the model concerns distilling complex motivational factors into five basic categories. The authors do not claim this is a comprehensive framework. Instead, as the principles are applied, coaches and clinicians can delve further into the research to discover the nuances of instilling motivation.

Conclusion

In this Research Digest, we have seen the potential role autonomous motivation and perceived competence can play in promoting health behavior change. We also saw how optimism and pessimism impact older adult couples’ sense of support. Husbands’ pessimism appears particularly

pernicious. Finally, we explored multiple strategies (MUSIC) to motivate athletes to maintain their training. Christian clinicians can add important faith elements in each area to make their work with clients even more impactful when appropriate. ✕



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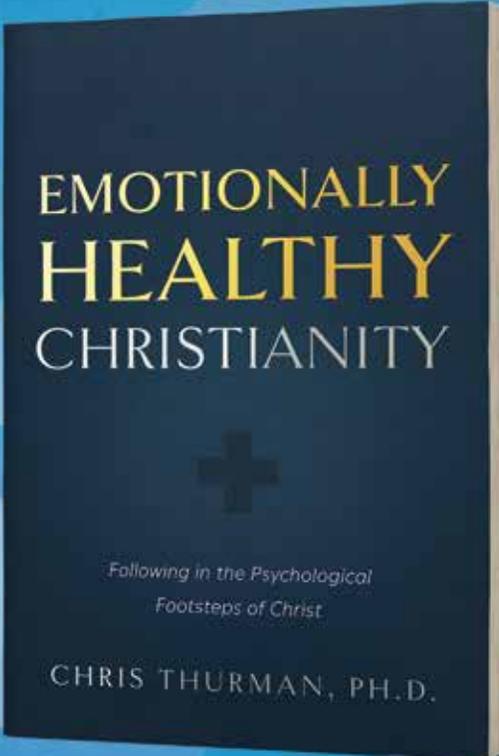
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Core Strategies for Flourishing in Life in Challenging Times – Catherine Hart Weber

- Research validates that practicing daily gratitude and appreciation
 - a. powerfully impacts higher brain states and calming
 - b. lowers cholesterol and blood pressure readings
 - c. improves the chances of job promotion
 - d. significantly reduces divorce rates when practiced

Faith, Religious Community, and Human Flourishing – Harold G. Koenig

- Acting to promote the good and delaying gratification for a greater good is
 - a. the basis of all religious belief systems
 - b. the foundation of Western democracy
 - c. the heart of character and virtue
 - d. all of the above

Human Flourishing: Empirical Research and Impact... – Tyler J. VanderWeele

- REACH is a four-step process of
 - a. human flourishing
 - b. showing kindness and goodwill to others
 - c. developing and showing gratitude
 - d. forgiveness

The Cost of Confidence – Gregory L. Jantz

- In a leadership position, you are called to
 - a. identify problems and initiate solutions
 - b. keep staff moving and on task at all times
 - c. a higher standard of conduct, positivity, and motivation
 - d. avoid or discipline negative people

Positive Life Lessons Learned from Death's Doorstep – Gary J. Oliver

- A primary objective of Jesus' teaching to His disciples was
 - a. that they experience joy
 - b. that they endure tribulation
 - c. that they resist the enemy
 - d. that they experience peace

Two Sides of Psychology's Normal Cure... – Gary W. Moon

- The author says that each vice can be explained as
 - a. a lack of self-control
 - b. a fear management strategy we can control
 - c. a form of perceived self-preservation
 - d. a maladaptive coping mechanism

Short-term Psychotherapy Perspective and Influence – John C. Thomas

- Goal attainment requires focusing on
 - a. both education and experience
 - b. support from others who are available
 - c. a long-held vision and passion
 - d. what one can do rather than why one cannot

The Psychology of Joy and Happiness... – Daniel Amen

- The author noted that his son's behavior improved when
 - a. he paid him to be good
 - b. he slept 10+ hours at night
 - c. he noticed him when he did what was wanted
 - d. he acted sad over his bad behavior

The Secret to Happiness and Joy – Timothy R. Jennings

- Jennings asserts that joy is a byproduct of
 - a. living in harmony with God's purposes
 - b. putting others before yourself
 - c. following the laws of nature as God intended
 - d. denying oneself of earthly pleasure

TUNE in to the Positive – Jon Gordon

- The key to neutralizing negativity is
 - a. speaking truth to the lies
 - b. speaking positive words to the negativity
 - c. taking every thought captive
 - d. all of the above

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Increase awareness and content expertise on current trends in mental health practice.
- Be able to articulate a more comprehensive understanding of this issue's core theme.
- Be able to integrate spirituality and faith-based constructs into the delivery of care.

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

Please rate the following on a scale of 1–5 (1 meaning **Poor** and 5 meaning **Excellent**):

- _____ This issue of CCT is relevant to my practice as a mental health professional.
- _____ The articles in this issue are comprehensive and well written.
- _____ I would recommend this home-study program to other professionals.

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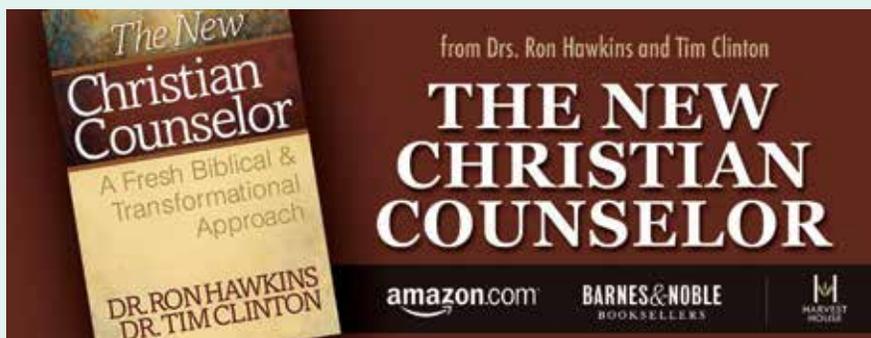
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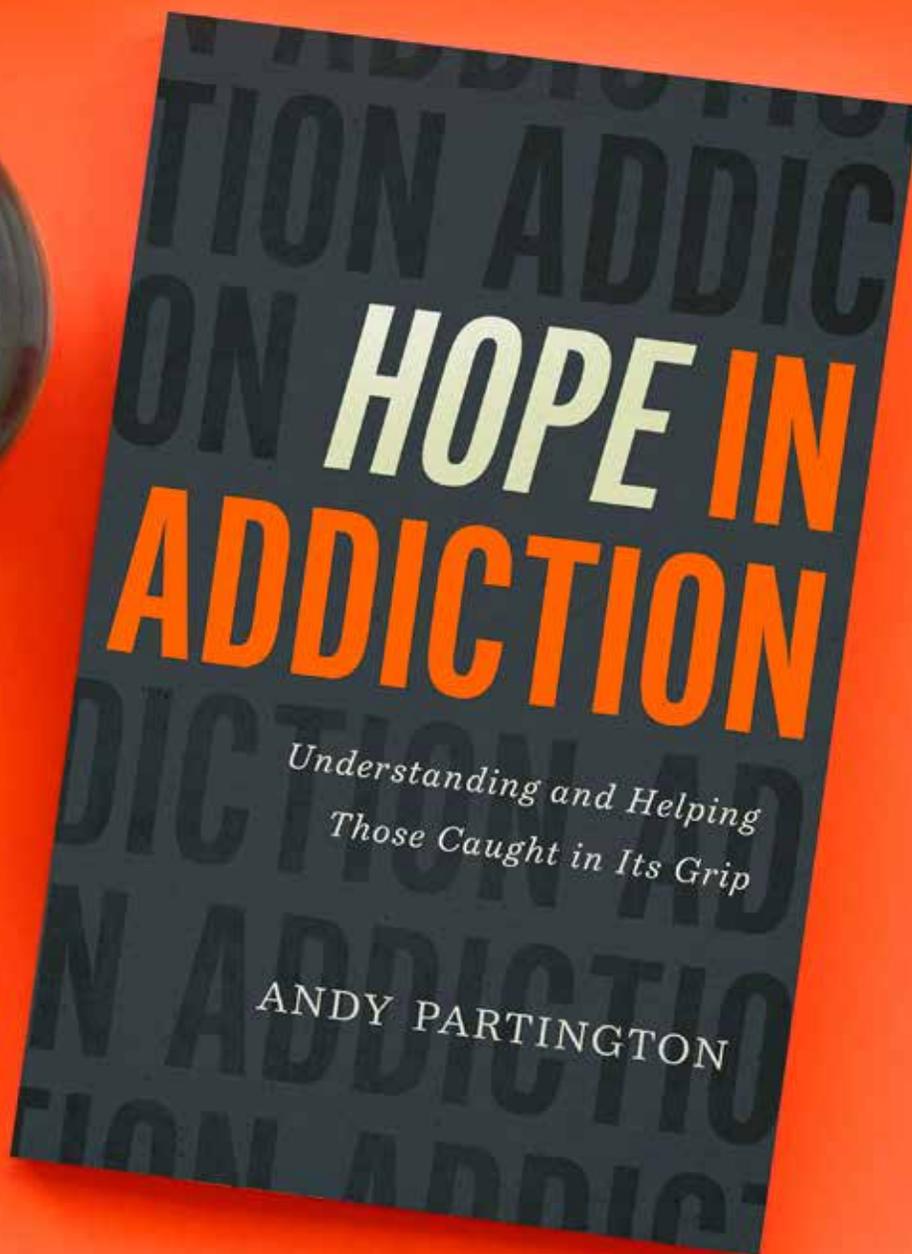
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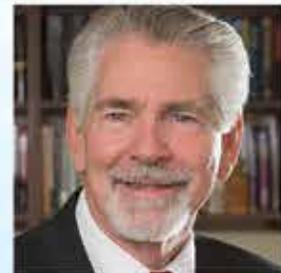
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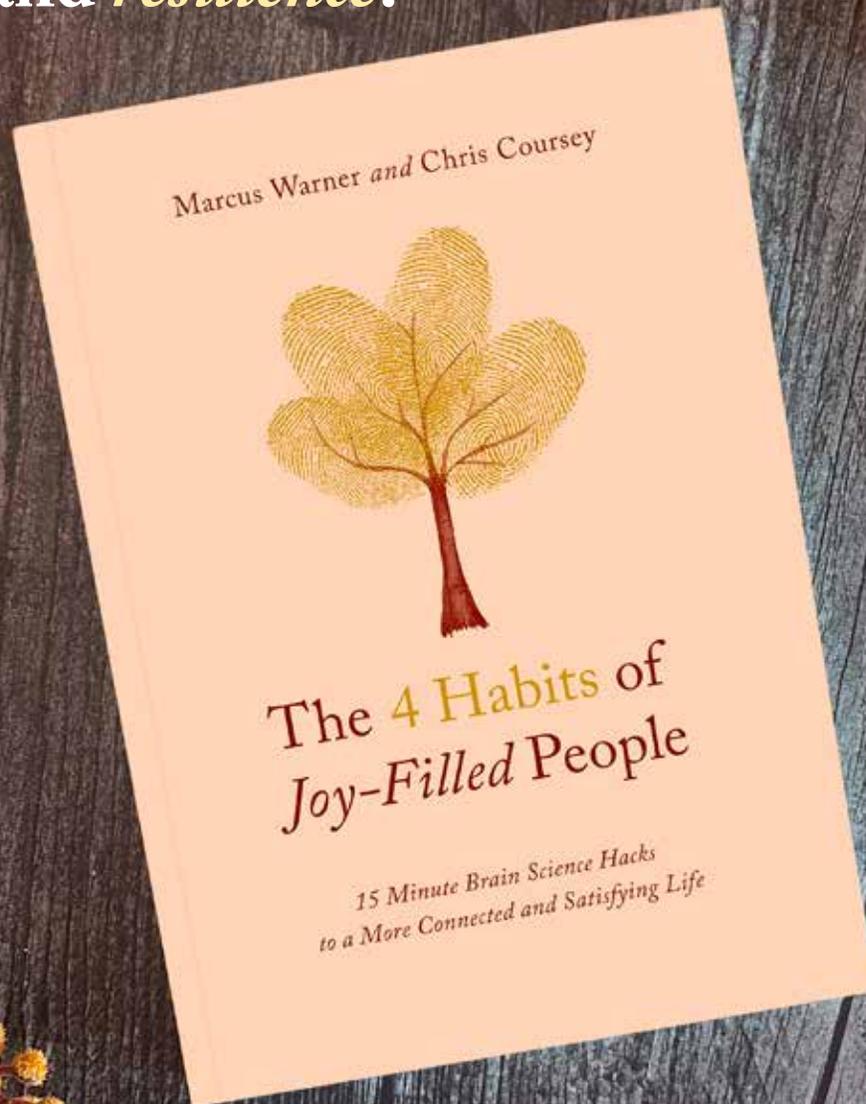
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