

Introducing The LaB: Journal of Positive Psychology Agapology and Spirituality

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I (Noel) was born into a close-knit, deeply religious African family where faith served as the cornerstone of our lives. Growing up in one of the poorest parts of my country, I witnessed firsthand the harsh realities of poverty, chronic disease, and the daily struggle for survival. These experiences left an indelible mark on me, shaping both my fears and my aspirations. As a child, I was deeply afraid of pain and death but yearned for a life filled with love and prosperity. This early exposure to life's adversities ignited a passion in me to explore the concepts of love and prosperity.

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Over the years, my personal experiences, combined with my service as an educator and clergy, drove me to embark on a scholarly journey that integrates theology, philosophy, and psychology. My quest has been fuelled by a profound thirst for God's love (agape) and prosperity (bliss), and more specifically, an enduring question: what role does adversity play in the relationship between these two?

This inquiry led to the birth of Agapology—a term derived from the Greek word agape (divine love) and the suffix -ology (the study of). Agapology explores the nature, characteristics, and implications of divine love, examining its relationship with both prosperity and adversity. Through a series of scientific studies, I have uncovered a powerful truth: there is a profound connection between agape and bliss, and adversity serves as a catalyst for this relationship.

Bliss, often equated with flourishing, transcends mere happiness. It is a state of holistic well-being that nourishes every dimension of life—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. At its heart lies secure, loving relationships, which serve as the foundation for four transformative virtues encapsulated in the LOVE model: **Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity**. Linkedness embodies a profound sense of connection and belonging rooted in unconditional acceptance and harmony with God, others, and the broader world.

Opulence reflects trust in divine provision and confidence in one's worthiness and ability to achieve both material and spiritual abundance. Valory represents the fulfilment and peace that come from living a purposeful life aligned with God's will, fostering a deep sense of meaning. Equanimity signifies the courage and resilience to face life's struggles with faith and strength, transforming adversity into opportunities for growth and spiritual refinement. Together, these principles form a holistic framework for thriving and well-being.

Together, these virtues form the core of bliss, providing a holistic and enduring pathway to flourishing. Agape is the ultimate source of LOVE—the essential nutrients required for bliss. This nourishment is internalised through a secure spiritual attachment to a benevolent God, cultivated through spirituality. However, studies reveal that adversity plays a pivotal role in fostering this attachment.

Central to the LOVE model is the theory of Differential Bliss Receptibility (DBR), which proposes that adversity heightens spiritual sensitivity and transcendence, creating the ideal conditions for spiritual growth. Adversity fosters a heightened craving for spirituality and enhances one's capacity to embrace it. In turn, spirituality unveils agape, which serves as the source of LOVE virtues and lays the foundation for achieving a state of bliss.

In this publication, I document a journey of scientific discovery that demonstrates how divine love, nurtured through spiritual attachment and catalysed by adversity, unlocks the transformative power of bliss. The interplay of agape, adversity, and spirituality offers a profound framework for achieving holistic well-being and living a truly flourishing life.
