The LaB Journal of Positive Psychology Agapology and Spirituality January 2025, Vol 1(1): 3 - 19

LOVE: A New Psychological Model of Bliss

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Abstract

Bliss, akin to flourishing, represents a holistic state of optimal well-being that transcends fleeting happiness, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. It goes beyond mere survival, integrating physical, economic, social, mental, and spiritual well-being, extending into eternity. At its core is a divine essence rooted in a secure, personal relationship with a benevolent God. This connection forms the foundation for four core virtues: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—acronymised as LOVE. Linkedness emphasises unconditional acceptance and belonging, fostering harmony with God, people, and nature. It nurtures identity as a beloved child of God and trust in His steadfast love. Opulence assures divine provision, combining faith in God's providence with confidence in achieving material and spiritual abundance. Valory highlights purposeful living aligned with God's will, bringing joy, tranquillity, and fulfilment. Equanimity embodies resilience and courage, trusting in divine strength to navigate challenges and uncover hidden benefits. The LOVE Model is the first relational psychological framework of bliss, integrating the transformative roles of attachment, spirituality (attachment to the divine), and adversity. It underscores agape—selfless, unconditional divine love—as the primary source of the LOVE virtues and the essential foundation for. Unlike models that rely on ethical principles or human effort, the LOVE Model highlights the transformative power of a secure spiritual attachment to God, fostering virtues that enable holistic well-being. Innovatively, the model introduces Differential Bliss Receptibility (DBR), which suggests that adversity heightens spiritual sensitivity, enabling individuals to transform adversity into growth, ultimately, bliss. By framing adversity as a catalyst for flourishing and emphasising secure divine attachment, the LOVE Model bridges psychology and spirituality, offering a transcendent, adaptable framework for well-being across diverse contexts.

Keywords: LOVE, Spirituality, Bliss, Flourishing, Adversity.

Citation
Maturlu, N., (2025). LOVE: A New Psychological Model of Bliss. The LaB: Journal of Positive Psychology Agapology and Spirituality, Vol. 1(1), 3–19.

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Introduction

Bliss, akin to flourishing, is an ideal state of existence that represents more than mere survival; it signifies a life imbued with purpose, fulfilment, and joy. Bliss is based on philosophical, religious, and psychological concepts, highlighting its multifaceted nature as a state of thriving.

Philosophical Perspectives on Bliss

Bliss has been a central theme in philosophical discourse. Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* provides a foundational understanding, transcending fleeting happiness and representing a life lived in accordance with rationality and virtue (Aristotle, 1926). *Eudaimonia* is equated with living a good life through meaning (*logos*) and virtues (*aretē*) (Aristotle, 1926).

For Aristotle, virtues are habits that develop stable character traits (*hexis*) crucial for achieving *eudaimonia*—a flourishing and fulfilling life. *Eudaimonia* is attained through reasoned actions and the deliberate cultivation of virtues like wisdom and courage, which promote a well-rounded and deeply satisfying existence (Davis et al., 2023).

Other philosophical traditions offer varied insights into bliss. Stoicism emphasises living in harmony with nature and cultivating resilience through virtues like justice and temperance (Epictetus, c. 50-135 AD). Confucianism connects bliss to societal harmony, fulfilled through virtuous social roles (Confucius, 551-479 BCE). Utilitarianism links individual bliss to the greatest collective happiness (Mill, 1863). Existentialists, such as Sartre, focus on authenticity and personal responsibility, viewing bliss as a product of living meaningfully in an indifferent universe (Sartre, 1946). Buddhism sees bliss as the cessation of suffering, attained through the Eightfold Path and leading to enlightenment (Buddha, c. 563-483 BCE). Meanwhile, Taoism equates bliss with living in harmony with the Tao, embracing simplicity and balance (Laozi, c. 6th century BCE). The Feminist Ethics of Care highlights relationships, empathy, and nurturing as central to achieving bliss (Gilligan, 1982).

Religious Perspectives on Bliss

In Judaism, bliss is encapsulated in the concept of *shalom*, which represents a holistic state of peace and well-being. This includes material, emotional, and spiritual prosperity, rooted in adherence to the Torah (Exodus 20:1-17). *Shalom* reflects a life lived in alignment with divine principles, fostering harmony and fulfilment (Neusner, 2004).

Christianity frames bliss as "abundant eternal life," centred on love (*agape*) and a deep relationship with God. In John 10:10, Jesus Christ emphasises abundant life as one of inner transformation and eternal significance. This relational model of bliss focuses on divine grace rather than human effort, with love (agape) as its foundation (Thayer & Smith, 2016). Christianity's perspective extends beyond temporal existence, offering eternal communion with God as the ultimate state of bliss.

In Islam, bliss is described through *Falah* (success), *Sa'adah* (happiness), and *Tazkiyah* (soul purification). These concepts emphasise spiritual growth and alignment with divine will. The Qur'an underscores *Tazkiyah* as a means to achieve both worldly and eternal bliss (Qur'an 23:1-11; 91:9-10). This holistic approach integrates faith, morality, and personal development to achieve a balanced and fulfilling life (Al-Farabi, 1997).

Psychological Perspectives on Bliss

William James, known as the Father of American Psychology, was a pioneering philosopher and psychologist whose work integrated psychology and philosophy, especially in pragmatism and the study of religious experiences (Perry, 1935; Schultz & Schultz, 2015). James made significant contributions to understanding human flourishing, which is a central theme in his work (Pajares, 2003). His focus on human potential and optimal functioning laid the groundwork for aspects of modern positive psychology (Myers, 2004). His concept of bliss was closely tied to his pluralistic and pragmatic worldview, emphasising individual experience, personal growth, and the transformative potential of religious and philosophical insights (Gale, 2005; James, 1896).

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs positions self-actualisation—realising one's potential—as central to human bliss. Beyond self-actualisation, Maslow introduced self-transcendence, where individuals connect with higher ideals or causes, such as altruism or spirituality, to achieve a profound state of bliss (Maslow, 1943,1971). His ideas reflect a holistic view of human potential and spiritual fulfilment, aligning with Aristotelian *eudaimonia*.

Positive psychology offers several models to understand bliss. One of the models of flourishing is Seligman's PERMA model, introduced in *Authentic Happiness* (2002) and *Flourish* (2011). PERMA identifies five core components of well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Positive Emotion involves feelings of joy and optimism. Engagement refers to deep involvement in activities, often leading to a state of "flow." Relationships emphasise the importance of social connections for emotional support. Meaning involves a sense of purpose derived from contributing to something larger than oneself. Accomplishment focuses on achieving goals and building competence. Complementing PERMA, Seligman and Christopher Peterson introduced the Values in Action (VIA) Classification, which identifies 24-character strengths grouped under six virtues: courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to Seligman, these strengths are foundational for well-being, with "signature strengths" being the most central to an individual's identity. Using these strengths authentically fosters increased happiness, life satisfaction, and purpose. It often induces flow, enabling individuals to navigate challenges and build meaningful relationships.

Seligman's PERMA framework of flourishing remains influential but is not the sole approach. Other perspectives include self-determination theory (SDT), which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential for achieving bliss. It posits that fulfilling these psychological needs leads to intrinsic motivation and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The subjective well-being (SWB) model developed by Diener et al. (2017) focuses on emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and the balance between positive and negative emotions. Bliss, in this model, is evaluated through individuals' perceptions of their happiness and quality of life. Ryff's psychological well-being model outlines six dimensions: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relationships. Together, these dimensions create a comprehensive framework for understanding bliss (Ryff, 1989). Huppert (2009) integrates emotional, psychological, and social components of well-being, highlighting the interplay of positive relationships, autonomy, and purpose in achieving bliss.

Positive psychology faced early criticism for its overly simplistic focus on positive emotions, often neglecting the vital role of negative experiences. Scholars like Kristjánsson (2013) and Lazarus (2003) argued this binary view led to a "tyranny of the positive," pressuring individuals to sustain constant happiness with adverse psychological impacts (Held, 2002). They highlighted that emotions such as suffering and anxiety are integral to the human experience and contribute significantly to personal growth and resilience (Lazarus, 2003).

Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP) emerged in response, recognising the importance of both positive and negative experiences in fostering a balanced, fulfilling life (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016). It reframes negative emotions as essential catalysts for growth. Positive Psychology 2.0 (PP 2.0), or Existential Positive

Psychology (EPP), builds on SWPP by addressing deeper existential concerns like mortality and meaning. Proponents like Wong emphasise its relevance in global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which heightened awareness of loss and existential anxiety (Wong, 2011, 2020). PP 2.0 underscores that true well-being arises from integrating life's darker aspects, offering a more resilient and profound form of flourishing (Wong et al., 2021).

Bliss: The Basics and the Quest for New Psychological Model.

Bliss, therefore, is a state of optimal well-being that transcends fleeting happiness, encompassing profound fulfilment and flourishing. It integrates insights from philosophy, religion, and psychology, emphasising the cultivation of virtues, meaningful relationships, and spiritual fulfilment. Unlike transient pleasure, bliss reflects a deeper sense of thriving, where individuals balance positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health.

Central to this experience are core virtues—such as kindness, hope, meaning, faith, and love—which not only foster personal growth but also provide a stable foundation for meaningful relationships, resilience and lasting fulfilment. While virtues may have biological or natural roots, their development largely depends on external sources of nurturing. The potential for virtues exists within individuals, but their growth is influenced by the quality and security of connections to external "virtuous" sources. These sources range from inanimate objects to divine figures. The quality of bliss depends on the security and consistency of these attachments; more dependable sources provide robust support for virtue cultivation. This relationship can be understood through John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. A secure relationship with a virtuous attachment figure facilitates the transfer of virtues. Frequent experiences of benevolence from this figure foster a positive view of oneself, others, and the world, providing a stable base for resilience and bliss.

The quality and security of virtuous sources vary significantly in their ability to offer consistent support. Inanimate objects, such as material wealth or hobbies, offer the lowest quality attachment for cultivating virtues, providing only temporary satisfaction without fostering long-term growth. These sources often lead to superficial fulfilment and emotional instability (Dittmar, 2008; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In contrast, animate beings, like pets, offer moderate security, providing more consistent emotional support that fosters virtues such as empathy and responsibility. However, their limited capacity for moral or intellectual guidance constrains deeper virtue development (Beck & Madresh, 2008).

Human attachment figures, such as parents and caregivers, play a crucial role in fostering virtues like love, empathy, and trust through secure and responsive caregiving (Bowlby, 1969). Secure attachments promote psychological well-being and virtue development, while insecure attachments, caused by neglect or inconsistency, can hinder this process, leading to emotional instability (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Sroufe, 2005). However, human attachments are inherently less secure than spiritual ones due to human fallibility. Caregivers' consistency can fluctuate as a result of factors such as misplacement, unintentional separation, personal challenges like stress, illness, financial constraints, or even death, all of which can undermine the security of the attachment. Despite these limitations, human figures provide significant emotional support and play a foundational role in cultivating virtues, ultimately contributing to the experience of bliss.

Spiritual or divine figures, such as God, offer the highest quality attachment for virtue development.

Perceived as omnipresent, omnibenevolent, and morally infallible, they provide unwavering support and moral guidance, fostering virtues like forgiveness and compassion (Pargament et al., 2000). Unlike human figures, their transcendent nature ensures consistent nurturing, even during adversity, promoting resilience and flourishing. Spiritual attachments are thus considered the most secure and effective for cultivating lasting virtues. Unsurprisingly, scholarly evidence indicates a significant positive relationship between spirituality and flourishing (Granqvist, 2020; Maturlu, 2024a,2024b,2024c).

However, the relationship between spirituality and flourishing is complex, particularly in the context of adversity. While spirituality often enhances well-being, adversity and suffering can reduce overall well-being and hinder personal growth (Bickel et al., 1998). Chronic stress, a common outcome of prolonged adversity, is associated with mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, significantly impeding bliss (Keyes, 2007; Schneiderman et al., 2005). Yet, suffering, despite its challenges, can also be a catalyst for virtue cultivation, long-term growth, mental resilience, and flourishing. It fosters deeper reflections on life's purpose, strengthening one's spiritual and emotional capacities. Through adversity, individuals often develop a more profound sense of meaning, enhancing their ability to flourish over time (Maturlu, 2024b; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

To our understanding, no psychological model to date fully integrates the transformative roles of attachment, spirituality and adversity. This underscores the need for a new relational psychological model of bliss: LOVE. The LOVE model encapsulates the power of attachment, spirituality and adversity, emphasising how a secure relationship with the divine and the growth derived from life's challenges can foster holistic well-being.

The LOVE Model: The Fundamentals

Within the LOVE Model, bliss transcends mere survival, representing a holistic state of well-being across physical, economic, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Its defining feature is its divine essence, rooted in a secure, personal relationship with the benevolent God. This connection provides the foundation for four core virtues: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—acronymised as LOVE. Through this secure relationship with God, individuals internalise these virtues, fostering bliss. The LOVE Model thus frames bliss as a dynamic state of flourishing, sustained by the transformative power of divine love (*agape*), extending beyond the present life into eternity. As the Bible declares in 1 John 4:8, "God is love." This divine love, *agape*, transcends human understanding and serves as the fundamental "fuel" for the soul. C.S. Lewis famously compared humanity's need for God's love to a car's need for petrol; just as a car cannot function on anything but petrol, the human soul cannot truly thrive without God's love (Lewis, 1952; "as cited in" Lewis, 2001).

Unlike psychological frameworks that rely solely on human effort to cultivate virtues, the LOVE model emphasises that virtues flow naturally from a secure relationship with God. This divine connection is achieved not through sheer willpower alone but through surrender to God's grace. Scriptures like John 3:16 and Galatians 5:22-23 affirm that a life rooted in divine love leads to true bliss.

Linkedness

Linkedness embodies a sense of secure relationships grounded in unconditional acceptance and belonging. Unconditional acceptance involves being embraced and valued for one's unique qualities, even with imperfections, while belonging refers to a secure sense of identity and connection within a community.

Key beliefs associated with Linkedness include the profound sense of being part of an interconnected family that unites God, people, and nature in harmony and unity. It involves embracing one's identity as a beloved child of God, reflecting His nature and character in daily life. Central to Linkedness is the unwavering trust in God's unconditional and everlasting love, a love that remains steadfast and unchanging despite human mistakes or imperfections.

These elements create the foundation for meaningful relationships that extend beyond the personal to encompass spiritual and cosmic realms. At its core, Linkedness embodies connections with God, others, and the *cosmatos*—a unified, interdependent universal theistic body. The term *cosmatos* merges the Greek roots *kosmos* (universe), *soma* (body), and *os* (divine essence), reflecting an interconnected spiritual entity infused with God's presence. This framework emphasises the divine nature of all beings and their unity within a larger spiritual body. Connectedness to the *cosmatos* ensures a profound sense of oneness (*usness*) and belonging, affirming that we (all of us) are God's children, with the privilege of calling Him "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Linkedness is intrinsic to monotheistic spirituality, where belief in one God forms the foundation for teachings and practices (Gottlieb, 2006; Riggs, 2006). Granqvist (2020) and Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004) use Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory to interpret monotheistic spirituality as a psycho-spiritual bond between believers and God. This secure relationship positions God as a benevolent, omnipotent entity, reinforcing acceptance and belonging (Richards & Bergin, 2005). The Apostle Paul's metaphor of the Body of Christ mirrors Linkedness. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:4-5, Paul portrays believers as interdependent members of Christ's body. Each member contributes uniquely, underscoring the importance of belonging and mutual value within the spiritual framework.

The spiritual roots of Linkedness also highlight humanity's familial connection with God. Genesis 1:27 and 2:7 emphasise humanity's creation in God's image and the divine breath of life, symbolising unity with the Creator. Jesus reinforces this bond, declaring, "Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the most High" (Psalms 82:6; John 10:34). These passages affirm a secure identity within a divine family, where believers are eternally linked to their Abba (Father) (Barr, 1988; Galatians 4:6-7).

Human relationships further illustrate Linkedness. Research by Ainsworth (1969) and Bowlby (1973) highlights humans' innate need for attachment, fostering acceptance and belonging. The Harvard Study of Adult Development affirms that strong relationships are critical for happiness, health, and life satisfaction (Vaillant, 2012; Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Maslow (1964) argued that isolation distorts human well-being, stating that severing interdependent parts leads to dysfunction. Linkedness, by contrast, promotes holistic well-being, connecting individuals to a community and divine presence, ensuring lasting acceptance and belonging as cherished members of God's family.

Opulence

Opulence signifies the assurance of divine provision and the belief in one's worthiness and ability to achieve material and spiritual abundance. It combines trust in divine providence with confidence in

personal efficacy. Key beliefs associated with Opulence include trusting in God's provision to meet all spiritual and physical needs, such as health, shelter, and sustenance. It encompasses a belief in one's worthiness and capacity to achieve material abundance while aligning with God's purpose and personal aspirations. Opulence also involves maintaining faith that needs will be fulfilled through both expected and unexpected means.

Viewed through a psycho-spiritual lens, opulence extends beyond material wealth to encompass a profound trust in God as the ultimate source of all provision. It encompasses an assurance that our needs are met, rooted in the belief that we are part of a divine, interconnected cosmatos. Our spiritual identity as children of God underpins this sense of opulence. Galatians 4:6-7 (NIV) describes believers as heirs to divine resources: "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave but God's child, and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." This inheritance reassures us of God's unwavering care. Similarly, John 10:34 (NIV) affirms our intimate connection with God: "You are gods; you are all children of the Most High." Addressing God as "Abba" conveys a relationship of deep affection and trust, enriching our perception of opulence (Barr, 1988).

The Bible consistently portrays God as a steadfast provider. In Isaiah 49:15-16 (NIV), God's commitment to His people is likened to a mother's unwavering love: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." Similarly, Jesus, in Luke 12:6-29, reassures His followers of God's provision, urging them to trust that the same God who sustains the birds and lilies—creatures of lesser value—will surely care for them as His beloved children.

Self-efficacy within this psychospiritual framework involves a sense of competence, affirming worthiness and capacity to reach goals while fulfilling God's purpose. Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) advises, *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans,"* emphasising the importance of aligning personal goals with divine will. Success, according to Joshua 1:8 (NIV), is rooted in meditating on and adhering to God's Word: *"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*

Self-efficacy, within this context, is not merely a belief in one's abilities but a profound trust in God's empowerment to achieve divinely aligned goals. Philippians 4:13 (NIV) encapsulates this spiritual self-efficacy: *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* This verse shifts the source of personal confidence from self-reliance to reliance on God's strength, affirming that believers can overcome challenges and succeed in their pursuits because of His sustaining power.

This understanding reframes success and opulence as deeply spiritual concepts. Success is no longer a personal accomplishment but a testament to God's glory, reflecting His guidance and faithfulness. Opulence thus transcends material wealth, embodying a life rich in divine purpose. Through this lens, believers are called to live abundantly, achieve their God-given potential, and glorify God in all aspects of life.

By integrating spiritually based self-efficacy, believers not only trust in their ability to act but also rest in

the assurance that their efforts, guided by faith and divine strength, will yield success in fulfilling God's will.

Valory

Valory represents the pursuit of purpose and the peace that comes from living a meaningful life. It emphasizes alignment with God's will as a source of personal fulfilment. Key beliefs associated with Valory include understanding one's life as divinely designed to create a positive impact on others. It involves experiencing core positive emotions such as gratitude, fulfilment, and joy through activities aligned with God's will, ultimately bringing profound satisfaction and tranquillity by living out one's purpose.

At its heart, Valory encapsulates a profound sense of meaning and tranquillity rooted in the understanding of one's identity and purpose in God. This commitment to purposeful living is deeply connected to the recognition of intrinsic worth, as highlighted in Romans 8:35-39, which assures believers that nothing can separate them from God's unconditional love. Such love provides the foundation for self-acceptance and self-worth, redirecting focus from societal measures of success to a more enduring dignity derived from being creations of God (Warren, 2012). This divine perspective reorients one's life towards lasting fulfilment rather than transient achievements. Central to this is the promise of the "peace that passes understanding" (Philippians 4:7), a divine tranquillity that transcends worldly circumstances and anchors individuals in God's unwavering presence.

Living purposefully within the Valory framework transcends ambition or short-term goals, offering a pathway to spiritual growth and fulfilment. This concept is anchored in the belief that life is a divine calling, preordained by God, as reflected in scriptures such as Jeremiah 1:5 and Ephesians 2:10, which affirm the unique roles believers play in God's grand design. Martin Luther King Jr. reinforced this notion, emphasizing that life's purpose must be significant enough to inspire meaningful action and sacrifices. Aligning one's actions with this divine mission ensures that each step taken contributes to a life of fulfilment and alignment with God's will, bringing peace that endures regardless of external challenges.
Engagement is a vital dimension of Valory, involving active and passionate participation in pursuits that reflect one's values and divine purpose. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described this as a state of "flow," where individuals experience deep immersion in meaningful activities. Within Valory, such engagement extends beyond psychological rewards, becoming spiritually transformative as it reflects alignment with God's will. This state fosters not only personal growth but also serves a greater good, resonating with the interconnectedness highlighted in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. By embracing engagement as part of their purpose, individuals not only flourish but also cultivate an inner peace that remains steadfast, even in moments of adversity.

The use of one's signature strengths—core traits that define individual identity—is central to Valory. When aligned with divine purpose, these strengths enhance engagement and contribute to overall well-being. Seligman (2002) emphasized that using these strengths in service to something greater leads to eudaimonia, the highest form of human flourishing. This alignment of strengths and purpose not only enriches personal fulfilment but also uplifts society by fostering compassionate and resilient communities, reinforcing the biblical promise of a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Valory's emphasis on gratitude as a core positive emotion further reinforces its framework of meaning and purpose. Gratitude, rooted in recognising the blessings of life, fosters a sense of abundance and shifts focus from scarcity to the richness of the present moment. Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia echoes this,

viewing life as a precious gift. Gratitude enhances joy and humility, deepens connections to the divine and others, and strengthens social bonds, creating mutual support within communities. As a relational practice, gratitude integrates seamlessly with Valory's principles, promoting both individual and collective flourishing.

Ultimately, Valory integrates meaning, purpose, engagement, and gratitude into a holistic framework for thriving. By encouraging individuals to live fully in alignment with God's will, it fosters profound peace, fulfilment, and a deeper connection to others. This divine alignment anchors believers in the peace that passes all understanding, offering a transformative pathway to a life of spiritual, emotional, and relational abundance. Through Valory, one discovers not only the tranquillity of a meaningful life but also the enduring joy of walking in step with God's eternal plan.

Equanimity

Equanimity embodies the courage to face life's challenges with unwavering resilience and the capacity to grow through them. It reflects a steadfast reliance on divine strength and a positive perspective on adversity, enabling individuals to navigate life's uncertainties with faith and inner peace.

Key beliefs associated with Equanimity include trusting God as an unfailing source of comfort and strength and ensuring that no challenge is insurmountable. This trust fosters the ability to let go of worry, grounded in the faith that God will work all things for good, as promised in Romans 8:28. Equanimity also involves recognising that challenges often carry hidden benefits, even if they are not immediately evident, offering opportunities for growth, deeper understanding, and spiritual refinement.

At its core, Equanimity inspires a mindset that views trials not as obstacles but as opportunities to rely on God's grace and build inner fortitude. This perspective transforms adversity into a meaningful process, reinforcing the belief that every challenge has a purpose within God's plan. Through Equanimity, individuals find the strength to face life's storms with calm assurance, knowing they are never alone and that divine wisdom and guidance are always present.

Equanimity is grounded in what I call the "God is Good" (GIG) Theory. Essentially, the GIG Theory asserts that since God is all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, and ever-loving, everything He allows to happen has an inherent benefit, even if that benefit is not readily known. Jesus taught that nothing happens outside God's oversight. In Matthew 10:30, He reminded His followers that even the hairs on their heads are numbered, and not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without God's permission. This verse suggests that everything, including suffering, occurs under God's divine blessing. If it has the approval of a loving and sovereign God, suffering is inherently profitable, even if its profit is not immediately understood. The GIG Theory thus provides a lens through which believers can view adversity, trusting that every trial serves a higher purpose within God's loving plan.

Equanimity, derived from the Latin terms *aequus* (equal) and *animus* (mind), signifies a state of emotional stability and inner peace that allows individuals to maintain balance even in turbulent times (Etymology Dictionary, 2022). It is characterized by two pillars: tranquillity and emotional resilience. Tranquillity reflects a deep sense of contentment, gratitude, and spiritual abundance, fostering a calm acceptance of life's present realities. Emotional resilience, on the other hand, is the ability to recover and grow through

adversity, sustained by faith and hope. Together, these elements provide a robust framework for navigating life's challenges with strength and grace.

Emotional resilience is not the absence of hardship but the capacity to thrive despite it. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy underscores the transformative potential of adversity, emphasizing that suffering ceases to be suffering when it acquires meaning (Frankl, 1984). This aligns with the biblical perspective that trials are integral to spiritual growth. For example, 2 Corinthians 4:17 teaches that "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all," illustrating the eternal value derived from temporary suffering. By reframing adversity as an opportunity for growth, individuals can develop the resilience needed to endure and emerge stronger.

Resilience also relies on maintaining a balanced perspective and resisting emotional overwhelm. Faith acts as an anchor during turbulent times, providing a sense of purpose and trust in a higher plan, while hope fuels perseverance and optimism. Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) note that these qualities are essential for long-term recovery and growth, enabling individuals to adapt to challenges constructively. Consolation, self-compassion, and emotional processing further strengthen resilience by fostering healing, reinterpretation of adversity, and finding positive meaning in difficult experiences (Beck, 1993; Gale, 2005).

The Bible offers profound insights into reframing adversity. It portrays trials as temporary, universal, manageable, and ultimately profitable. For example, 2 Corinthians 4:17 reminds believers that challenges are temporary, instilling hope that "this too shall pass." John 16:33 underscores the universality of suffering, fostering empathy and mutual support. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 10:13 reassures that adversity is manageable with God's help, while Romans 8:28 emphasizes the profitability of trials, as God works all things for good. These teachings reinforce the idea that challenges are integral to spiritual and personal growth.

The GIG Theory complements this biblical perspective by affirming that suffering is never without purpose. This aligns with the Differential Bliss Receptibility Theory, which suggests that adversity cultivates virtues like perseverance, gratitude, and humility, preparing individuals for a life of greater meaning and fulfilment (Maturlu, 2024a, 2024b). Together, these theories highlight that challenges are not barriers to flourishing but key to achieving it.

Equanimity ultimately integrates spiritual trust, emotional resilience, and a positive perspective on adversity into a framework for thriving. By relying on God's strength, reframing trials as opportunities, and embracing their transformative potential, individuals can cultivate inner peace and fulfilment. This faith-driven approach fosters a life of purpose, resilience, and profound well-being, ensuring that every step aligns with God's greater plan. Through Equanimity, believers discover not only the courage to face life's storms but also the joy of a peace that surpasses understanding.

LOVE Deficiency Syndrome: The Root of a Miserable Life

Just as the body requires physical nourishment, the soul thrives on emotional, psychological, and spiritual sustenance to experience true bliss. This essential nourishment comes from a balanced 'diet' of LOVE. When the soul is deprived of this vital sustenance, it results in what I term 'LOVE Deficiency Syndrome.' Similar to physical malnutrition, which arises from a lack of essential nutrients, miserable life stems from a deficiency of LOVE. In the same way that a balanced diet is critical for physical health, a well-rounded

'intake' of LOVE—comprising Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—is fundamental to emotional and spiritual well-being. Without this balance, individuals become susceptible to feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and despair, the emotional equivalents of physical malnutrition. It is worth noting, however, that the LOVE dimensions of bliss are categorical; they are not rigid and can still overlap, reflecting the dynamic and interconnected nature of human experience.

Christian teachings on sin aim to guide individuals toward a spiritually fulfilling and blissful life. These teachings, through their prescriptions and prohibitions, seek to cultivate virtues that lead to eternal happiness and moral wholeness. In some traditional schools of theology, however, sin has been viewed as a violation of divine law, an "infringement" perspective deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian theology. The Hebrew word "חֵטְא" (*chet*) and the Greek "ἁμαρτία" (*hamartia*) both convey the idea of "missing the mark" (Kittel & Friedrich, 1964; Wolff, 1974). From this standpoint, sin represents moral failings—acts like greed, substance abuse, and sexual immorality—that harm both the self and one's relationship with others and the divine (Plantinga, 1995). Scriptures such as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) and Galatians (5:22-23) highlight virtues like humility, love, and self-control as essential for spiritual fulfilment, while sin is seen as leading to spiritual death and suffering (James 1:14-15; Romans 6:23). Historical theologians, including Augustine (2003) and C.S. Lewis (1952), supported this legalistic view, arguing that adherence to divine law leads to happiness, while transgressions result in misery. However, contemporary scholars such as Martin (2022) and Wilson (2024) suggest that this perspective may overlook deeper emotional causes, focusing more on external behaviours than on inner transformation.

Beyond legalistic interpretations, sin can also be seen as a symptom of a deeper problem: a deficiency in God's love. Imagine the soul possessing a "LOVE space" that requires filling to achieve true fulfilment. This LOVE space can only be filled with genuine love from others or God (Dunbar, 2020; Saramäki et al., 2014). When this space is empty, people often turn to inanimate and material substitutes—such as pets, food, sex, material wealth, drugs or other addictive substances—to fill the void. These actions, which might traditionally be seen as sins, are better understood as attempts to cope with emotional or spiritual emptiness, or what I call "LOVE Deficiency Syndrome". For instance, someone struggling with addiction or greed may not simply be committing moral failings but rather attempting to numb the psychological pain and satisfy an unmet need for love. This reframing offers a compassionate lens through which to view human behaviour, recognising that such actions often stem from a lack of LOVE rather than pure rebellion against divine law.

The LOVE Deficiency concept offers a more compassionate understanding of human failings. Instead of focusing solely on what individuals do wrong, it delves into the emotional and psychological voids that drive these behaviours. By centring on LOVE—both its giving and receiving—the model promotes a kinder, more empathetic approach to addressing human struggles (Walker, 2022).

This perspective encourages individuals to seek divine love as the ultimate solution, fostering spiritual and emotional growth. It moves beyond mere rule-following, advocating for a transformative journey that fills the LOVE space within, allowing people to flourish. Critics may argue that this model risks oversimplifying complex behaviours or diminishing personal responsibility (Davis L., 2022; Davis M., 2022). However, its emphasis on healing through love provides a robust pathway for true moral and spiritual development.

Differential Bliss Receptivity: A New Paradigm for Conceptualizing Adversity

In line with Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP) and Positive Psychology 2.0 (PP 2.0), the LOVE model recognises the significance of both positive and negative experiences in fostering a balanced, fulfilling life. It reframes negative emotions not as hindrances but as essential catalysts for growth. PP 2.0, also known as Existential Positive Psychology (EPP), builds on SWPP by addressing deeper existential concerns, such as mortality and meaning (Wong et al., 2021). This perspective highlights that true bliss arises from integrating life's darker aspects, offering a more resilient and profound form of flourishing. Our studies extend this understanding through the concept of "Differential Bliss Receptivity" (DBR). This builds on the idea of Differential Spiritual Receptivity (DSR) discussed in our earlier work (Maturlu, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

Adversity and Spiritual Hunger

When people face tough times, it often sparks a profound spiritual hunger—a strong need for spiritual resources such as love and meaning. This heightened sensitivity pushes individuals to explore spirituality more deeply and use it as a source of strength. This is a core part of DSR: adversity makes us more receptive to spiritual growth. Empirical evidence shows that people are more likely to turn to religion during personal hardships, such as illness or poverty (Granqvist, 2020) or when their sense of existential security is threatened (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). While some individuals might also seek religious comfort during good times (Granqvist, 2020; Hood et al., 2009) or remain non-religious even in tough situations (Granqvist & Moström, 2014), research generally supports the idea that crises prompt people to seek spiritual resources more actively (Granqvist, 2020). This pattern is also evident on a larger scale. In countries with strong welfare systems, such as those in Scandinavia, people tend to be less religious because their basic needs are met by the state (Barber, 2013; Gill & Lundsgaarde, 2004). Conversely, in countries with less social support and more insecurity, religion often plays a bigger role as it offers essential social support and security (Granqvist, 2020). Diener et al. (2011) found that people in poorer countries, where life is more challenging, are generally more religious. In these contexts, religion provides critical support and welfare.

In effect, while people might turn to spirituality for various reasons, and some atheists might still exist even in foxholes (Granqvist & Moström, 2014), adversity often acts as a strong catalyst for spiritual experiences and growth.

The Role of Spirituality

Spirituality enhances essential virtues that are crucial for bliss. These virtues act like "nutrients" for our mental and emotional well-being. A strong, personal relationship with a loving deity helps individuals tap into the LOVE virtues effectively. While participating in organised religion and maintaining a general sense of spirituality can be beneficial, it is the personal and deep connection with a loving deity that significantly enhances our capacity to flourish.

The Synthesis Process

Virtues need to be properly synthesised for bliss, that is, being "ingested, digested, assimilated, and integrated." Positive coping strategies like worship, prayer, and meditation facilitate this process (Pargament & Exline, 2021). These practices help people absorb and incorporate spiritual virtues into

their daily lives, making their sense of bliss more profound and more lasting. By engaging in these practices, individuals can make the most of their spiritual resources, turn adversity into an opportunity for growth, and lead to greater bliss. If someone lacks a strong or secure spiritual connection, their spiritual needs may not be fully met. This can lead to negative coping strategies, increased stress, and worse mental health outcomes (Folkman, 2013; Pargament et al., 2011). Without a strong spiritual base, it can be difficult to embody virtues effectively, which can hinder true flourishing.
Our research shows that adversity, while difficult, can help people flourish (Maturlu, 2024c). It's not the adversity that directly leads to flourishing but rather how it stimulates spiritual receptivity and growth. Adversity encourages people to seek spiritual resources more earnestly and engage in the process of synthesising virtues, thus enhancing their potential for flourishing. This highlights the role of adversity as a catalyst for spiritual development.

Some critics, including scholars and theologians, argue that the idea of adversity as a source of empowerment can be problematic (Kidd, 2015). They may view it as morally or psychologically troubling. However, our findings support recent evidence suggesting that adversity can indeed lead to empowerment, spiritual growth, and flourishing, especially over time. For example, post-traumatic growth (PTG) is a positive transformation that can follow highly stressful events, leading to improved life appreciation and resilience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

From a Christian perspective, Kidd (2015) argues that suffering is not a virtue in itself, but positive responses to it can cultivate virtues like trust and hope. The concept of a "peace that passes understanding" described by St. Paul is often found in intense adverse experiences, not from fulfilling worldly desires but from enduring and growing through challenges (Grof, 2000; Taylor, C., 2017; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). These experiences can be transformative, leading to profound spiritual growth and bliss.

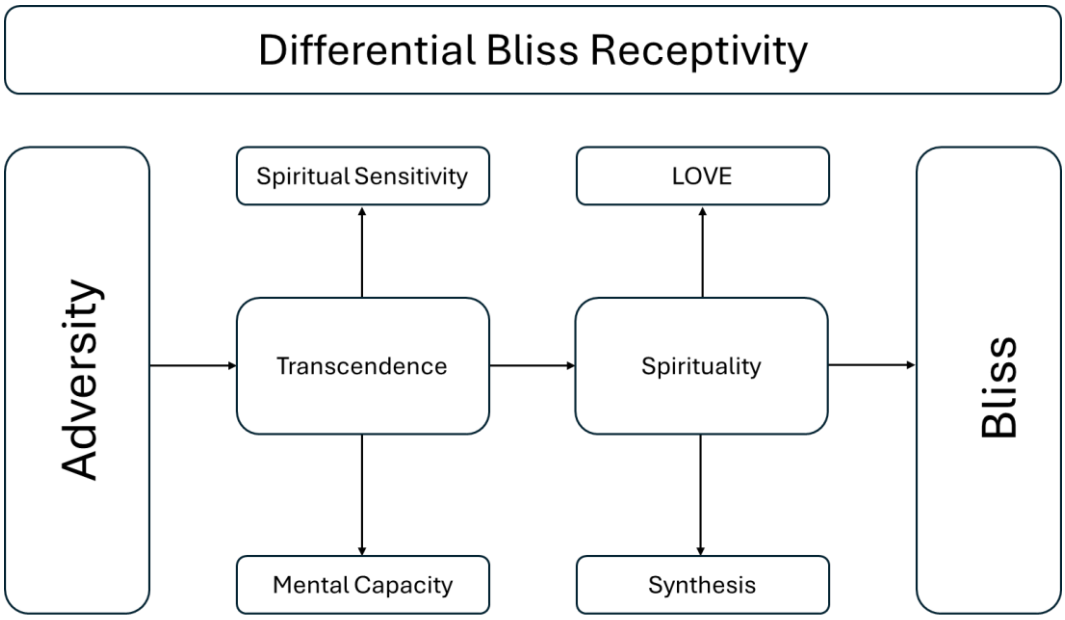

Figure 1: The differential bliss receptivity

In summary, adversity acts as a catalyst for transcendence, creating conditions conducive to spiritual

growth. This process fosters a heightened craving for spirituality and enhances one's mental capacity to embrace it. Spirituality, in turn, serves as a source of LOVE virtues, which act as the foundational nutrients required for achieving a state of bliss. However, attaining true bliss is not an instantaneous event; it is a time-dependent process that requires synthesis. This synthesis is facilitated through positive coping strategies, which involve the systematic "ingestion, digestion, assimilation, and integration" of virtues into one's life.

This model underscores the dynamic interplay between adversity and spirituality in the journey toward bliss. By framing virtues as essential nutrients, DBR highlights the importance of actively engaging with and internalising spiritual lessons, particularly during periods of hardship, to foster enduring well-being.

Bear Pain; Don't Be a Pain

While the LOVE model highlights the growth potential in adversity, it carefully avoids glorifying suffering. Critics may argue that framing adversity as a pathway to growth could inadvertently validate harmful experiences as necessary, neglecting the imperative for systemic change to prevent avoidable suffering. However, the model emphasises a crucial distinction: not all suffering is meaningful or necessary. It identifies a specific form of suffering—termed *cross suffering*—which serves a higher purpose and aligns with God's plan.

Cross suffering is marked by its uncontrollable nature, such as the accidental or tragic loss of health, property, career, business, or loved ones. This type of suffering, beyond human control, is seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth and character refinement. Importantly, the LOVE model draws from the example of Jesus, who did not treat every adversity as His cross. He and His family took measures to avoid harm, as seen when His parents fled to Egypt to escape Herod's decree, or when Jesus evaded capture when His mission was not yet complete (Matthew 2:13-14; John 8:59). These examples demonstrate the importance of discernment in distinguishing between suffering that must be borne and challenges that should be resolved.

Jesus' mission to bring abundant life underscores the Christian responsibility to alleviate suffering whenever possible. His acts of healing and problem-solving exemplify a balanced approach: embracing unavoidable suffering while actively working to mitigate unnecessary pain. The LOVE model encapsulates this philosophy through the principle, *Bear Pain; Don't Be a Pain*, advocating endurance of necessary suffering without inflicting harm on oneself or others.

Suffering, when unavoidable, can serve as a source of meaning and transformation. As Viktor Frankl notes, suffering should not be sought or glorified, but when it cannot be avoided, it offers an opportunity for personal growth and deeper understanding (Frankl, 1984). Scripture echoes this sentiment, commending those who endure unjust suffering for doing good (1 Peter 2:19-21). Such trials refine character and foster a closer alignment with God's will. However, the LOVE model, through the GIG theory (*God is Good*), stresses that unnecessary suffering—whether self-inflicted through extreme asceticism or caused by harming others—holds no redemptive value.

This balanced approach is beautifully encapsulated in Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer:

> *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference* (Niebuhr, 1951, pp. 251–252).

The LOVE model reinforces this wisdom, promoting courage in facing necessary challenges, grace in enduring unavoidable suffering, and discernment in distinguishing between the two. It calls for individuals to embody compassion, seek justice, and alleviate suffering wherever possible, aligning their actions with the principles of love and mercy.

Distinguishing Characteristics of the LOVE Model

Although it applies to people of all monotheistic persuasions, the LOVE framework is primarily suitable for those within the Judeo-Christian tradition, or anyone interested in exploring it. While it has philosophical and theoretical foundations similar to positive psychology, the LOVE Model is firmly rooted in Christ's teachings and his bliss model.

The LOVE Model is the first relational psychological framework of bliss, fully integrating the transformative roles of attachment, spirituality (attachment with the divine), and adversity. It emphasises how secure relationships—with both the divine and others—and the growth that arises from life's challenges, can foster holistic well-being and flourishing. Central to the model is the functional role of spirituality, particularly the virtue of *agape*—the selfless, unconditional love that reflects God's nature (Thayer & Smith, 2016). Unlike other models prioritising ethical principles or human effort, the LOVE Model highlights *agape* as the essential and all-encompassing virtue for true flourishing, experienced through a secure spiritual attachment to God. Pioneering in its relational approach, the LOVE Model is rooted in attachment-based virtues, focusing on fostering a secure, transformative connection with the divine. This sets it apart from models that rely primarily on individual or collective moral cultivation, underscoring instead the profound impact of a deep, personal relationship with God on one's ability to thrive.

The model also contrasts the often conditional and authoritarian portrayals of God in some theistic traditions with the concept of agape. This shift is crucial, as it moves away from religious perspectives that can lead to fear, guilt, and isolation towards focusing on the transformative power of unconditional divine love.

Additionally, the LOVE model of bliss offers an eternal perspective. While many psychological models concentrate on achieving happiness and success within the constraints of earthly life, the LOVE model transcends this, offering a vision of life that is abundant now and in the eternal realm. This perspective provides a profound hope and purpose, guiding individuals towards a meaningful and enduring life.
The LOVE Model also addresses fundamental existential questions about the meaning of life, the nature of suffering, and the path to thriving in this world and the next. Integrating insights from philosophy, theology, and psychology offers a holistic understanding of bliss, making it a valuable framework for academic inquiry and practical application.

Moreover, the LOVE Model is a crucial bridge between psychology and spirituality, addressing a historical divide that has persisted for too long. Under the influence of figures like Sigmund Freud, psychology has often regarded spirituality with suspicion, dismissing it as either pathological or overly sentimental. In fact, some psychologists have historically viewed spirituality as akin to psychosis rather than recognising

its potential as a valuable therapeutic resource (Lukoff et al., 1998).

This perception has contributed to strained relationships between psychiatric care providers and spiritually inclined patients. Many patients perceive mental health professionals as unsupportive, incongruent, or even obstructive to their spiritual growth (Breuninger et al., 2014). By integrating spirituality into therapeutic frameworks, the LOVE Model challenges these outdated views, promoting a more holistic approach that sees spirituality as a source of strength and resilience rather than a liability.
The LOVE Model offers practical guidance for clinicians, especially for those who may not personally subscribe to spiritual beliefs. It highlights how spirituality can protect against mental health challenges, particularly in times of adversity. This understanding allows clinicians to tailor their support to meet the specific needs of their clients, offering a more nuanced and effective approach to promoting holistic well-being.

In essence, the LOVE Model integrates the principles of Judeo-Christian theology, philosophy, and positive psychology, aiming to enhance flourishing through agape—a love cultivated through a secure relationship with a loving God. It offers a powerful and compassionate framework for understanding and achieving true flourishing, both in this life and beyond.

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