

DR NOEL MATURLU

# Love Adversity and Bliss

*The Psychology, Theology and Philosophy of  
Thriving in Hardship*

**The LaB**

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## Preface

In the face of adversity, there is an undeniable yearning for meaning, purpose, and fulfilment. Throughout history, humans, including African descendants on the continent and in the diaspora, have navigated immense challenges. The legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism have left deep scars that still affect millions today. Yet, amidst the hardship, there exists a profound opportunity for spiritual transformation and growth—a path toward a blissful life.

*Love, Adversity and Bliss* was inspired by my personal journey through adversity and spiritual searching. As I faced life's trials, I found myself grappling with questions about prosperity and the role of adversity and the divine in shaping our destinies. These experiences, coupled with my years of service as a Christian Minister, educator, and scholar, led me to discover that adversity can be a catalyst for divine connection, profound spiritual growth and bliss. My research in theology, history, philosophy, and psychology revealed a path toward what I call a *blissful life*—a state of well-being that transcends mere survival and material success, rooted in love, deep spiritual contentment, joy, and peace.

Bliss is not simply about feeling happy; it is the divine harmony of physical, economic, psychological, and spiritual well-being. It encompasses a life of deep fulfilment that is anchored in God's love and extends beyond this world into eternity. This book introduces a new model of LOVE—Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—a framework designed to guide individuals on the path to this blissful life. Grounded in theological, historical, philosophical, and psychological

discourse, the LOVE model offers a practical approach to fostering a secure relationship with God, overcoming adversity, and building resilience.

The journey to bliss does not begin in isolation—it starts within our hearts before spilling over to others in our relationships, homes, families, and communities. This book is an invitation to explore how spiritual growth, love, and resilience can transform not just individuals but generations. It is a call to replace the lingering “slavery mentality” with a “prosperity mentality” that honours our divine potential and aligns with the promise of abundant life.

In *Love, Adversity and Bliss*, I take readers on a journey of self-discovery and exploration that bridges personal, spiritual, and intellectual insights. The book is divided into six sections, each building upon the previous to offer a comprehensive understanding of bliss. Below is a refined overview of each section and chapter.

### **Section 1: Introduction**

The first section introduces the historical and spiritual challenges faced by African descendants (or Afro-descendants), drawing parallels to the Israelites’ journey in the Bible. I explore Africa’s past prosperity, subsequent decline, and ongoing struggles, all within the context of a broader divine plan for transformation. Through personal stories—such as my experience with illness and the collapse of my marriage—I illuminate the pivotal moments that prompted me to seek answers regarding the disparity in prosperity for African communities. This section also addresses how the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and modern challenges stem from a spiritual disconnect, setting the stage for the book’s exploration of how God can liberate and restore Afro-descendants to a life of flourishing.

### **Section 2: Foundations of a Flourishing Life**

In this section, I examine the concept of flourishing (which is

a psychological term for bliss) from religious, philosophical, and psychological perspectives. Drawing on the teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and other religious perspectives, I explore how religious frameworks shape the understanding of prosperity and well-being. Philosophical insights, such as Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, provide additional perspectives on how living a virtuous life leads to flourishing. Furthermore, I introduce psychological models like Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Positive Psychology, underscoring the importance of emotional and mental well-being in achieving a balanced and meaningful life. These foundational ideas set the groundwork for a holistic approach to a blissful life.

### **Section 3: The Adversity-Spirituality-Flourishing Nexus**

In this section, I explore the intricate relationship between adversity, spirituality, and flourishing. Through the lens of empirical research, I examine how spirituality often arises in response to hardship and how this connection fosters resilience, growth, and flourishing. A central concept introduced here is Differential Bliss Receptivity, which proposes that adversity while challenging in the short term, enhances spiritual openness and receptivity in the long run. This, in turn, promotes flourishing. Based on the findings from my empirical studies, I argue that people who experience adversity – such as Afro-descendants – possess a heightened capacity for spiritual growth and are uniquely positioned for personal and communal transformation that could lead to bliss.

### **Section 4: The LOVE Model of Bliss**

At the heart of the book is the LOVE model, which offers a practical framework for achieving a state of bliss through four key virtues: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity. Linkedness highlights the importance of deep connections—with God, others, and the world. Opulence reframes wealth, focusing on contentment and gratitude rather than material excess. Valory encourages purposeful living

grounded in courage and integrity, while Equanimity teaches the art of maintaining inner peace and resilience in the face of life's challenges. Together, these virtues form a pathway to a blissful and flourishing life, guiding individuals toward a state of holistic well-being.

### **Section 5: Worship: The Science of Falling in Love With God**

In this section, I take a deeper look at worship, exploring it not only from a theological perspective but also through a scientific lens. Worship is presented as more than a religious ritual; it is a way of life that fosters an intimate, loving relationship with God—the source of all love and the foundation of the LOVE model. Worship is also a means of engaging with deeper thinking, meditation, and drawing divine inspiration for new ideas, solutions, innovations, direction, visions, and soul-searching. It allows individuals to connect both with their inner selves and with the divine, becoming a channel for creativity, spiritual growth, and nourishment. I also examine how the virtues of the LOVE model can lead to sustainable material prosperity, drawing parallels between religious ethics and the economic success achieved by the Israelites in the Promised Land. Practical aspects of a worship routine are provided to help readers strengthen their divine connection.

### **Section 6: A Vision for the Future: Building a Flourishing Generation**

The final section looks toward the future, offering a vision for how the principles outlined in the book can be passed down to future generations. I address the deep generational trauma caused by slavery and colonialism, presenting a strategy to replace the “Failure to Flourish” mindset—ingrained during slavery—with a flourishing mindset rooted in the principles of LOVE. The process begins with nurturing the younger generation in loving, connected family environments. I outline practical steps for supporting young families and individuals as they develop strong, personal relationships with God.

This section provides a roadmap for building a community grounded in love, resilience, and prosperity, ensuring that future generations can thrive.

Through these sections, *Love, Adversity and Bliss* serves as a guide for both personal and communal flourishing. It is grounded in spiritual wisdom, psychological insights, and practical tools designed to help readers navigate life's challenges and emerge with a deeper sense of purpose, peace, and prosperity. Each chapter offers actionable steps for applying these principles to achieve lasting transformation and fulfilment.

As you journey through these pages, my hope is that you will find inspiration and practical guidance. Whether you are navigating your own struggles or seeking to help others flourish, this book offers a path forward grounded in secure attachment to the God of Love. By drawing from the rich historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage of African communities that parallels that of the Jewish people, *Love, Adversity and Bliss* encourages the pursuit of a life rooted in LOVE.

I hope this book will serve as a guide for anyone seeking to live a blissful life grounded in love, faith, and divine purpose. May *Love, Adversity and Bliss* empower you to rise above adversity and discover the true joy and peace that defies human understanding.

With love,

Dr Noel Maturlu



## PART I: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Part one delves into the historical and theological foundations that shape the modern-day challenges faced by African descendants, whether on the African continent or in the diaspora. The section establishes a narrative that links the struggles of African communities to both ancient historical events and profound spiritual teachings. Drawing upon Biblical stories and theological interpretations, this section aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between adversity and flourishing, particularly in the context of African history.

The introduction emphasises the enduring impact of slavery, colonialism, and racism on African descendants and highlights that these external forces, while devastating, do not tell the entire story of African suffering. The author connects these struggles with the Biblical history of the Israelites, presenting a parallel between the oppression faced by the Jews in ancient times and that of Africans in more recent history. African prosperity, according to the author, was once grounded in spiritual principles, but the rise of idolatry and the failure to maintain a strong connection with the God of Love led to Africa's downfall, including the rise of slavery and continued hardships. This narrative of

decline and eventual redemption frames the book's focus on spiritual growth and flourishing through divine love.

A key theme in this section is the role of adversity in fostering spiritual receptivity, a concept the author refers to as "Differential Bliss Receptivity." This idea suggests that the suffering endured by African descendants has created a fertile ground for spiritual growth, much like the Israelites' time in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. The author contends that the introduction of Christianity to African descendants during the era of slavery, while a result of their suffering, also served as a profound source of spiritual transformation and salvation. This process mirrors the Biblical story of the Israelites who, despite their hardships, found salvation and eventually flourished under God's guidance.

The first section sets the stage for exploring how African communities can overcome the lingering effects of historical trauma and embrace a new, spiritually grounded model of flourishing. This involves moving away from the "slavery mentality" that continues to haunt many African descendants and adopting what the author calls a "prosperity mentality." This new mindset is not about material wealth alone but about cultivating a secure, personal relationship with God, grounded in the virtues of love, faith, and resilience.

In conclusion, Section 1 introduces readers to the idea that true prosperity and flourishing for African descendants must begin with a secure attachment to God and a rejection of the spiritual and psychological chains that have bound them for centuries. It serves as the foundation for the subsequent chapters, which will elaborate on how African descendants can adopt a new model of flourishing through the LOVE model, focusing on the virtues of Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity.

## Chapter 1: The Quest for Bliss

I was born into a close-knit, deeply religious African family where faith was the cornerstone of our lives. Our belief in God grew even stronger after we witnessed what we believed to be a miraculous event: My mother, who had suffered from a severe illness for many years, was suddenly healed. This experience profoundly shaped our faith, leading us to embrace evangelical Christianity with renewed fervour.

Growing up in one of the poorest parts of my country, I was exposed to the harsh realities of life from an early age. I saw the devastating effects of poverty, chronic diseases, and the daily struggle to survive. These challenges left a deep mark on me, shaping my fears and desires. As a child, I was terrified of pain and death but longed for a life filled with love and prosperity.

When I entered college, my awareness of the world expanded. I became acutely conscious of the stark prosperity gap between African communities and others. This awareness only deepened when I moved to the UK in 1999. I was heartbroken to see the inequity and injustice that African descendants faced, not just in the UK but across the Western world. The discrimination that my family and I experienced made me question whether Africans truly shared the same God as

other communities. This question ignited a burning desire within me to uncover the secret to prosperity.

Throughout our lives, we were taught that living a life of holiness—free from sin, giving tithes, and serving a loving, all-powerful God—would protect us from adversity, pain, and even death. Convinced that God would bless me with a prosperous, pain-free life if I remained faithful and avoided sin, I dedicated myself to this belief. By the age of 15, I was already a minister and had founded one of the largest churches in my region. My holiness provided me with a sense of entitlement: I was convinced that God owes me a blessing of prosperity. Like many, I saw morality as a way to use God to fulfil my desires. Prayer became a tool to control my circumstances and ensure a happy, pain-free life. I viewed God as a cosmic helper, ready to grant my every wish as long as I remained holy and faithful.

However, this belief system was flawed. I, like many others, believed that poverty, pain, and suffering were simply the consequences of sin or a lack of faith. This perspective, unfortunately, is common among many Christians today, who expect a problem-free life because they believe that Jesus' sacrifice eradicated all earthly troubles. While it's true that some adversities arise from sin, it is equally true that others arise because of righteousness and strong faith. The deadliest deception in the church today is the notion that pain has no place in fulfilling God's purpose for our lives.

Like many, I became addicted to messages that promised material prosperity, healing, and perpetual pleasure. I wasn't interested in teachings about the importance of pain and endurance because those messages were unpopular. As part of the bandwagon of many Christian preachers, I altered the gospel to make it more appealing, leading people to think of God as a Santa Claus figure who would give them whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, as long as they were holy and faithful. In doing so, I failed to prepare myself—and others—

for the reality of a true walk with God.

Initially, this attitude seemed to serve me well. However, it wasn't long before my world began to crumble. Despite my dedication, my life was anything but pain-free. I spent so much time worrying about adversity, pain, and death that I completely forgot how to live. Over the years, I encountered many painful scenarios, including near-death experiences. Two pivotal moments, in particular, marked turning points in my life.

### *The First Turning Point: A Mysterious Illness*

In my early twenties, I battled a mysterious illness that left me teetering on the brink of death. After nearly a year of suffering, there came a night when I was certain I was going to die. The affliction was so severe that I was vomiting blood and could feel the icy grip of death closing in on me. Though my lips were too weak to utter a word, my spirit remained awake and strong.

After hours of intense struggle, something extraordinary happened. Suddenly, the pain vanished, and I could hear angels singing from afar as an overwhelming sense of peace washed over me. I had a peak experience, a brief glimpse of what I can only describe as "heaven." The scenery and people I saw were mesmerising, but the experience was far too brief. The next thing I knew, I was waking up in a hospital bed—hungry, healthy, and pain-free. From that moment on, the fear of death disappeared from my life, even as poverty and other adversities continued to haunt me.

### *The Second Turning Point: Personal and Professional Crisis*

The second turning point in my journey occurred in the UK, where I had lived for over two decades. By my mid-forties, I had built a life that, from the outside, seemed successful. I was a licensed Minister of Religion, a father of three children, and the founder of a relatively successful non-profit organisation, which included a church ministry and a higher learning institution. For almost ten years, I had dedicated myself fully to my calling, working as a full-time minister. Yet, despite my best efforts to live a life that honoured God, an unforeseen crisis shattered everything I had built.

Out of nowhere, and through no fault of my own, my marriage of over twenty years fell apart. This not only caused significant psychological trauma but also had a profound impact on my children, who began to struggle with academic, economic and mental health issues. At one point, they were on the verge of being taken into care. The collapse of my marriage was not just a personal blow; it was a devastating hit to my pride and career as a clergy minister.

I vividly remember the moment that shattered my world. I was on a church ministry trip in Africa when I received a call from my then-wife. Her voice was calm but firm as she informed me that our marriage was over and that she was filing for divorce. The news hit me like a thunderbolt. I immediately cut my trip short and took the next flight home, desperate to salvage what was left of my family. I did everything I could for the next three years to save my marriage. I fasted, prayed, sought counselling, and even engaged in sacrificial giving, hoping God would intervene and restore what was broken. Despite all my efforts, my marriage ended, leaving me devastated and questioning everything I had believed in.

In the right-wing Christian circles, I was part of, there was—and still is—a strong emphasis on maintaining a “perfect” marriage. Divorce

is often seen as a spiritual failure, a disqualification from Christian ministry. Indeed, after my marriage ended, I lost my ministry. I was left jobless, homeless, and utterly broken. I survived on meals from food banks, relying on the kindness of a few friends who took me into their homes, offering food and comfort. I struggled to understand why a loving God would allow such a tragedy to happen to me, His faithful servant. I was angry with God. My world was dark, and life became a painful, unbearable experience. I was suicidal.

### *Intensified Quest for Understanding*

These two pivotal experiences—my mysterious illness and the collapse of my marriage—shook the foundations of my faith and intensified my quest for understanding. They led me to question not only my personal beliefs but also the broader theological and biblical reasons for the persistent poverty and suffering of descendants of Africa.

Prior to this critical juncture, God had called me to halt my MBA program in London and dedicate my life to studying the reasons for the extreme poverty of African descendants and what must be done to reverse the situation. I promptly responded and was immediately enrolled in a master's degree in Systematic Theology. Since then, I have devoted my life to exploring and disseminating divine instructions that will bring about total freedom to the African descendants globally.

The findings of my study were self-published in my mini-book, *The Pride of Africa*. These findings also appeared on various websites and in journals under the title “Let us Go”, catching the attention of many, including the UK government and Church officials. In recognition of my work, I was invited to attend a special occasion at Westminster Abbey in March 2007 (BBC, 2007). The event was attended by Queen Elizabeth II, Tony Blair (the then Prime Minister),

and other dignitaries. This event marked 200 years since the passage of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, which ended the transatlantic slave trade in the British Empire.

In the next chapter, I will summarise these findings and outline the theological and biblical insights that I believe are key to understanding and addressing the poverty that continues to afflict African descendants globally.

## Chapter 2: The African Struggle: A Historical and Theological Perspective

While many theories attempt to explain the current state of Africa, some suggest that African descendants are inherently inferior, cursed by God, and destined to serve other races. However, this notion is baseless. Others attribute Africa's condition to poor governance, corruption, natural disasters, overpopulation, and political instability. Some believe that slavery, colonialism, trade injustice, apartheid, and racism are the main contributors to African poverty (Nunn, 2007). Undoubtedly, these factors have all played a role in Africa's misery. However, there is a deeper issue at the heart of African problems.

Throughout history, and particularly through the Judeo-Christian lens, the fates of African descendants and Jewish people have been remarkably intertwined, marked by cycles of prosperity and decline, displacement, slavery, and periods of profound suffering. Both peoples have experienced these fluctuations, rising to great heights only to fall into times of hardship before rising to even greater heights again.

It is widely accepted that the first human beings lived in Africa. Fossil evidence and genetic studies support the consensus among

scientists that modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, originated in Africa approximately 200,000 years ago (Smith & Spencer, 1984; Tishkoff, 1996). Some interpretations of the Bible suggest that Adam himself may have been a man of colour, as he was created from the “dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7), which could symbolically reflect the dark, rich soil found in regions of Africa and the Middle East. This interpretation is more symbolic and theological rather than a definitive statement of Adam’s ethnicity (Al-Farabi, 1997).

Nimrod, a figure mentioned in the Bible, is described as “a mighty hunter before the Lord” and credited with establishing some of the earliest cities, including Babel (Babylon), Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10:8–12). While the Bible does not explicitly state Nimrod’s ethnicity, some Afrocentric traditions identify him as a Black man, linking him to the early civilisations of Mesopotamia and suggesting that Black people played a crucial role in the establishment of the first empires (Bauval & Brophy, 2011). This view is supported by some scholars who argue that many ancient civilizations, including those in Mesopotamia, were influenced or founded by people of African descent (Bauval & Brophy, 2011).

Black people were pioneers of modern civilisation. The ancient Egyptians, who were of African descent, developed one of the earliest known writing systems, hieroglyphics. Additionally, the Ethiopian script, Ge’ez, has ancient origins and remains in use for religious texts today (Diop, 1974; Shaw, 2000). Furthermore, while the invention of coins as currency is typically attributed to the Lydians, ancient African civilisations, including Egypt and Nubia, used various forms of money, such as gold bars and rings, in trade long before the advent of coinage (Martin, F. 2014). These civilisations were also known for their extensive trade networks, with kingdoms like Kush, Mali, and Great Zimbabwe serving as centres of commerce, dealing in gold, ivory, and other valuable resources (McKissack & McKissack, 1994).

Africa also holds a significant portion of the world's spiritual heritage. Long before Christ's birth, Africa was a dominant force in the world. During biblical times, Africa was a refuge for many patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, David, and even Jesus—who sought asylum in Egypt. Many of them lived there as economic immigrants (Genesis 12:10; Matthew 2:13–15).

The connection between African people and the biblical patriarchs runs deep. Many patriarchs, including Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Boaz, Obed, David, Solomon, and Joseph, married Black women, contributing to the bloodline of Jesus Christ. For example, the Bible mentions Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, who are associated with African lineage and are included in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1–16 (Van Sertima, 1989). This may partly be due to the extraordinary beauty of Black people (Song of Solomon 1:5).

In short, one striking revelation is that African descendants were among the first to be civilised. Africa, the cradle of humanity, was once a global superpower—a land of economic, cultural, military, and spiritual brilliance (Isaiah 2:6–7). However, today, Africa and its people are often seen as the epitome of global poverty, shame, and despair. What happened to this once magnificent continent? What is God's plan for Africa and its people?

### *Idolatry and Its Consequences*

It is plausible to note that there has been a close relationship between African indigenous religions and periods of prosperity. It is, therefore, essential to acknowledge the ways in which these spiritual systems shaped social, political, and economic structures. African indigenous religions were not only a set of spiritual practices but also a foundation for governance, law, and social cohesion. In ancient Egypt and Nubia, for example, spiritual beliefs played a central role

in the development of strong, enduring civilisations. These religions provided a framework emphasising the balance between the material and spiritual realms, helping maintain social order and promote economic prosperity.

For instance, the religious cosmology of ancient Egypt was deeply tied to their political structure, with the Pharaoh regarded as both a political leader and a divine figure, representing the gods on earth. This connection between divinity and leadership was crucial in maintaining social stability (Shaw, 2003). Similarly, the Nubians' spiritual practices, especially their reverence for deities like Amun, underpinned their cultural and political resilience, even as they traded and engaged diplomatically with surrounding regions (Welsby, 2002).

The goddess Isis held a prominent position in ancient Egyptian society, revered as a symbol of motherhood, fertility, healing, and magic. She was worshipped as the ideal mother and wife, protecting her son Horus and aiding him in avenging Osiris, which contributed to her role in promoting divine kingship and political legitimacy (Pinch, 2004). Kings often sought her favor to secure protection in battle, reflecting her importance in the political and military aspects of rulership. Although not directly linked to warfare, her support for Horus gave her a symbolic military association, often invoked by rulers seeking her protection in battle.

Economically, Isis' temples were significant, serving as religious and economic centers. These temples managed vast estates, receiving offerings and donations, and were involved in agricultural production, contributing to local wealth and commerce (Tyldesley, 1994). Her priesthood played an essential role in sustaining these operations, which strengthened her influence over regional economies.

Socially, the worship of Isis extended beyond Egypt to the Mediterranean, where her rituals and festivals attracted followers from diverse backgrounds, fostering cultural unity and spiritual cohesion (Griffiths,

1975). Her cult included men, women, and children from all social classes, offering a space of healing, protection, and devotion. Isis' universal appeal solidified her as one of the most enduring and influential deities in the ancient world.

Key principles in many African indigenous religions—such as reciprocity, community cohesion, and a holistic understanding of life—helped in maintaining equilibrium between individuals and their communities, as well as between human beings and the natural world (Mbiti, 1990). The emphasis on harmony and balance contributed to successful agricultural practices, trade networks, and social organisation, leading to periods of prosperity. These spiritual frameworks encouraged collective responsibility and cooperation, essential ingredients for both social stability and economic growth.

Furthermore, the integration of religious practices with economic activities, such as rituals for fertility, rain, and harvest, also played a vital role in the agricultural success of these ancient civilisations (Ray, 1976). In sum, African indigenous religions fostered a strong connection between spiritual well-being and material prosperity, creating societies that were both spiritually grounded and economically successful.

In effect, spirituality played a pivotal role in the prosperity of the Afro-descendants. However, their gods and goddesses were inferior to the monotheistic God of Abraham. Moreover, as Africans became more prosperous, they also became more arrogant, brutal, and insensitive. African rulers, led by Egypt and Ethiopia, marginalised the poor, many of whom were Jewish immigrants, reducing them to slaves. They forced them to work hard while denying them civil, spiritual, and economic rights. This oppression was not just a political or social issue—it was deeply spiritual.

Idolatry -the failure to acknowledge, trust, and worship God as the trustworthy source of prosperity-became widespread in Africa.

The word “god” can be defined as “the source of provision” or simply “the provider.” “Worship” can be understood as “a reverential dependency on something.” Therefore, anything you deem as your source or provider becomes your god. Naturally, we tend to worship the god of the thing we seek. The Bible, Torah, and other sacred scriptures teach the belief in one supreme, sovereign God. This monotheistic concept is central to the Judeo-Christian tradition, where God is described as the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe. In the Hebrew Bible, God is referred to as *Yahweh* (יהוה), a name signifying His eternal and unchanging nature, and as the one true God who commanded the Israelites to worship no other deities (Exodus 20:2-3, NIV). Similarly, the Torah emphasizes the oneness of God in the *Shema*—“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4, ESV).

In the Christian tradition, God is also described as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a title reflecting His covenant relationship with the patriarchs of Israel. This same God is acknowledged in the New Testament, where He is referred to as the Almighty (*Pantokrator* in Greek) and the Father of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:8, NIV). The monotheistic belief that God is all-powerful and sovereign is a foundational aspect of both Judaism and Christianity (Anderson, 2007). This belief differentiates the God of the Abrahamic faiths from the polytheistic deities of surrounding cultures, reinforcing the idea that there is only one true and living God, as outlined in the sacred scriptures.

Because He is the source of everything, everything else is merely a resource. To worship a resource instead of the true, invisible, heavenly source is idolatry, which is the highest abomination to God (Jeremiah 17:5-8; Isaiah 31:1-3).

The Bible says that God is a jealous God and cannot stand idolatry. When we worship other gods, both the worshipers and the worshipped

risk destruction by Him. As stated in Jeremiah 17:5–8:

*“This is what the Lord says: Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land. But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.” (NLT)*

Many centuries before, the Israelites, who had become prosperous in Egypt, also fell into idolatry. Just like African descendants have depended on (and even worshipped) the Western world for centuries, the Jewish people adopted the customs of the Africans, worshipping their gods and turning away from the true God. This idolatry led to their misery and eventual enslavement by the Egyptians—a direct consequence of their disobedience to God’s commands (Exodus 20:3–5). Their prosperity, instead of being a blessing, became a snare, leading to their 400 years of bondage.

Africa’s prosperity attracted admiration and even worship from other nations, including the Jewish people. This competition with God for worship led to divine wrath. Through the prophet Isaiah, God condemned Africans to a fate of slavery and deprivation. In the book of Isaiah 20:4–6 (NLT), God said:

The Lord told Isaiah, son of Amoz, “Take off the burlap you have been wearing, and remove your sandals.” Isaiah did as he was told and walked around naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said,

*“My servant Isaiah has been walking around naked and barefoot for the last three years. This is a sign—a symbol of the terrible troubles I will bring upon Egypt and Ethiopia. Then the king of Assyria will lead away the Egyptians and Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks bared to the shame of Egypt. Then the Philistines will be thrown into panic, for they counted on the power of Ethiopia and boasted of their allies in Egypt! They will say, ‘If this can happen to Egypt, what chance do we have? We were counting on Egypt to protect us from the king of Assyria.’*

The prophecy in Isaiah 20:4–6 was fulfilled during the Assyrian campaign against Egypt and Ethiopia (Kush) in the 8th century BCE. This event, likely occurring around 712 BCE during the reign of Assyrian king Sargon II, saw the conquest of the Philistine city of Ashdod, which had rebelled with the support of Egypt and Ethiopia (Kush). As Isaiah had foretold, the Assyrians defeated these nations, leading many Egyptians and Ethiopians away as captives, thus exposing the vulnerability of African powers to external forces (Oswalt, 1986). This defeat was a pivotal moment, symbolising the beginning of a significant decline in African influence and stability.

Over the subsequent centuries, this weakening of African states, initiated by the Assyrian conquest, contributed to a gradual erosion of political and economic power across the continent. The weakening of these African kingdoms made them increasingly susceptible to external exploitation and domination. By the 7th century CE, this long-term decline had set the stage for European powers to exploit Africa further, ultimately leading to the transatlantic slave trade. The earlier conquests and defeats, such as the one prophesied by Isaiah, played a crucial role in disrupting Africa’s autonomy and resilience, paving the way for the profound exploitation that would follow (Lovejoy, 2000).

Since then, African descendants have endured various forms of political and economic slavery. The trans-Saharan slave trade saw Arabs and other foreign nations invading Africa to capture young men and women. This trade lasted for over a thousand years, with millions of Africans being sold into slavery across the Middle East and parts of Asia. The transatlantic slave trade further devastated the continent, with European powers forcibly transporting Africans to the Americas to work on plantations under inhumane conditions. This human trade decimated Africa's population and stripped the continent of its most valuable resource—its people—leading to long-lasting demographic and societal impacts (Lovejoy, 2000; Manning, 1990).

**Political Slavery (Colonialism):** The physical enslavement of Africans weakened the continent significantly, paving the way for political slavery in the form of colonialism. Beginning in the late 19th century, during what is known as the “Scramble for Africa,” European powers, led by Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal, colonised almost the entire continent. This period of colonialism was marked by the exploitation of Africa's natural and human resources, the imposition of foreign governance structures, and the suppression of African cultures and societies. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 formalised European claims to African territories without the consent of African leaders, leading to arbitrary borders that continue to affect African politics and ethnic relations to this day (Hochschild, 1998; Nkrumah, 1965; Pakenham, 1991).

**Economic Slavery (Imperialism):** Colonialism transitioned into economic slavery in the form of imperialism, where even after gaining independence in the mid-20th century, African nations remained economically dependent on their former colonisers. Imperialism manifested through unequal trade relationships, exploitation of Africa's natural resources, and the continued influence of Western powers in African political and economic affairs. Neo-colonialism, a term

popularised by Kwame Nkrumah, describes how former colonial powers continued to exert control over African economies through multinational corporations, debt dependency, and global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This economic enslavement has kept many African nations in a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, unable to fully realise their potential despite their rich resources (Nkrumah, 1965; Rodney, 1972).

These three phases of enslavement—physical, political, and economic—have left a lasting legacy on Africa, one that continues to shape the continent’s challenges and its people’s struggle for true independence and prosperity.

### *The Promise Land*

Praise be to God, for Africa is destined not to perish but to rise to its rightful place of prosperity. God’s promise to restore Africa to greatness is a beacon of hope for all. The biblical prophecy in Isaiah 19:21–25 is a testament to this divine assurance:

*In that day the LORD will make Himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and will worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My*

*inheritance.*'(Isaiah 19:21-25, ESV)

While historically addressing Egypt and Assyria, this prophecy serves as a metaphor for African redemption and the unity of all nations under God's blessing. It offers a vision of a future where Africa will be known for its worship of the true God and will be a source of blessing in the world.

The passage, "And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them" (V22) reveals a profound divine principle: God's "striking" was not intended for destruction but for transformation and restoration. The imagery of God's strike here is not that of wrathful annihilation but rather one of purposeful, redemptive discipline. It mirrors the actions of a skilled surgeon whose precise incision, though painful and invasive, is essential to bring about deeper healing and wholeness.

Much like a surgeon who opens the chest to remove heart disease, God's strike against Africans represented the painful yet necessary process of confronting and uprooting what was spiritually harmful. The trauma of the procedure is real, but it serves a greater purpose—to lead the wounded community into a place of healing and repentance. Though momentarily distressing, this affliction becomes the very means by which Africans return to the Lord, turning from their old ways and seeking divine mercy. It signifies a breaking down of pride, rebellion, or idolatry and a breaking open of hearts to receive healing grace.

The long-term gain from this short-term pain is clear: God's intent is always toward restoration. As Egypt turns back, God listens to their pleas, signifying His intent to forgive, heal, and restore the relationship between them. In this way, divine discipline, even in its most painful form, is an act of love. It is not a punishment leading

to ultimate destruction but a compassionate intervention designed to bring His people into a fuller life.

Just as the surgeon's strike leads to eventual recovery, God's disciplinary action—though initially painful—is a pathway to spiritual renewal, where wounds are healed and life is restored in greater abundance and vitality.

The divine process of the Afro-descendants' transformation would involve three phases: physical liberation from slavery, mental transformation, and starting with the younger generation.

The transatlantic slave trade, from the 7th to the late 19th century, represents a dark chapter in the history of Africa. Millions of Africans were forcibly taken from their homeland and subjected to unimaginable cruelty. The abolition of slavery, which began with Britain in 1807 and culminated in the United States with the 13th Amendment in 1865, was a crucial step toward the physical liberation of Black people. Yet, this was only the beginning of the broader journey toward mental and spiritual freedom.

Christian abolitionists like William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, motivated by their faith, played pivotal roles in ending the slave trade and slavery in British colonies by 1833 (Hochschild, 2005). Their efforts were instrumental in setting the stage for the eventual global abolition of slavery. However, physical freedom alone was insufficient. The real challenge lay in overcoming the deep-seated mental and spiritual chains that had been forged during centuries of oppression.

The journey from slavery to true freedom involves more than just physical liberation; it requires a profound transformation of the mind and spirit. The biblical story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt provides a powerful metaphor for this journey. When God called the Israelites to possess the Promised Land, they faced a critical test of faith and self-belief. The majority of the spies sent to scout the land doubted their ability to conquer it, focusing on the formidable

obstacles rather than the promise of God. In contrast, Joshua and Caleb believed in God's power and promises, understanding that their success depended not on their own strength but on their faith in God (Numbers 13).

This story highlights the importance of overcoming what is often referred to as a "slavery mentality"—a mindset rooted in fear, doubt, and a sense of unworthiness. This mentality can keep individuals and communities in bondage long after the physical chains have been broken. The Bible calls for the "renewal of the mind" (Romans 12:2), a transformation that is essential for living in true freedom. The wilderness experience of the Israelites served as a crucible for this transformation, preparing the younger generation, free from the psychological chains of Egypt, to enter the Promised Land.

### *The Wilderness: A Place of Divine Sustenance*

While the wilderness was a place of transformation for the Israelites, it was also a place of divine sustenance. As they journeyed toward the Promised Land, they were in a transitional phase, unable to sustain themselves fully. God provided for them—manna from heaven, water from the rock, and protection from their enemies—because they could not yet rely on their own resources. This period of divine provision was essential as they moved from slavery toward freedom.

Similarly, many Afro-descendants today find themselves in a metaphorical wilderness. Due to centuries of spiritual, social, economic, and political disadvantage, many African communities have often relied on divine sustenance, foreign aid, or social welfare. Much like the Israelites, who required miraculous deliverance from the mighty power of their Egyptian slave masters and their gods, Africans, too, needed divine intervention to break free from centuries of both physical and spiritual enslavement. Spiritually, Africans required

the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to deliver them from the stronghold of ancestral idols and to overcome the lingering effects of colonial and post-colonial oppression. This liberation, both in the physical and spiritual realms, has been essential for reclaiming their identity and forging a path toward a more empowered future.

This dependency, whilst understandable given the historical context, is not the ultimate destination. Like the Israelites, African descendants need to move beyond this phase of reliance toward a place of self-sufficiency and flourishing.

The Israelites were given the Torah—a comprehensive set of laws and principles—to guide them as they transitioned from the wilderness into the Promised Land. This Torah was essential for rebuilding their identity, culture, and society in a way that honoured God and ensured their prosperity.

In the same way, African descendants today need a new creed or formula relevant to our times—a modern Torah—to address the current challenges or “giants” that stand in the way of flourishing. This new framework must be rooted in the timeless principles of faith, love, and self-reliance but also tailored to the unique circumstances and obstacles that African descendants face today.

My duty has been to try and contribute to discovering the model of flourishing that can be implemented to help African descendants inherit their Promised Land and truly flourish. This model must empower them to break free from the lingering effects of historical oppression, overcome the challenges they face today, and move confidently toward a future of prosperity and influence. Just as God provided the Israelites with the guidance and sustenance they needed to reach their Promised Land, we must also seek divine wisdom and practical strategies to lead African communities into a new era of greater flourishing.



## PART II: FOUNDATIONS OF A BLISSFUL LIFE

This section delves into the core concepts of flourishing (bliss) from multiple perspectives, laying the groundwork for a life of well-being that encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. It begins by defining what it means to flourish, drawing on insights from religious, philosophical, and psychological theories, and moves toward a comprehensive understanding of how individuals can achieve a state of bliss that transcends mere existence.

Flourishing, as explored in this section, is not just about achieving material success or happiness but rather a holistic sense of well-being that involves living in harmony with oneself, others, and the divine. The concept is rooted in the integration of virtues like love, purpose, and resilience, which are seen as essential for overcoming adversity and achieving a meaningful life. The text introduces a deeper understanding of flourishing, emphasising the importance of virtues that enable individuals to thrive regardless of external circumstances. A key theme discussed is the idea that flourishing is a balance of both positive and negative experiences. True well-being does not come from avoiding adversity but from developing the capacity to navigate

life's challenges with grace and resilience. Drawing on religious and philosophical traditions, the book shows that adversity often serves as a catalyst for spiritual and personal growth, expanding one's capacity for love, compassion, and wisdom.

The section also incorporates significant religious insights, particularly from Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as philosophical teachings from Aristotle and modern psychological theories. These perspectives converge on the notion that flourishing is a state of being that involves cultivating virtues, building meaningful relationships, and pursuing a life aligned with higher purposes. For example, the concept of *eudaimonia* in Aristotle's philosophy parallels the theological ideas of shalom in Judaism and abundant life in Christianity, all pointing toward a life of fulfilment through the realisation of one's divine potential.

Psychological models of flourishing, such as those rooted in positive psychology, also play a pivotal role in this section. By examining the work of scholars like Martin Seligman and Abraham Maslow, the section explores how contemporary science supports the age-old wisdom that well-being is found in the alignment of inner virtues with outer actions. The pursuit of meaning, purpose, and personal growth is fundamental to human well-being, and modern psychological frameworks provide practical tools for achieving a flourishing life.

This section serves as a foundational exploration of what it means to live a blissful life. Integrating spiritual, philosophical, and psychological perspectives provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals can thrive in all aspects of life, not just in terms of material success but also through the cultivation of inner virtues, love, and connection with the divine.

## Chapter 3: Defining Bliss

“I don’t want to die—but I don’t know how to live.” These heart-wrenching words, spoken by a beautiful young British woman before she tragically took her own life, encapsulate the deep despair that many people grapple with today. Despite their desire to keep living, countless individuals find themselves ensnared in a cycle of pain, confusion, and disillusionment. For them, life feels less like a journey filled with joy and purpose and more like a relentless struggle to make it through each day.

This sense of living without true fulfilment is a silent burden carried by many. They move through life with a heavy heart, yearning for something—anything—that might bring meaning to their existence. The stark contrast between merely existing and truly living highlights a profound crisis in our modern world. The yearning to find a reason to live beyond mere survival speaks to the fundamental human need for purpose, satisfaction, and a life infused with meaning.

Now, imagine waking up each day filled with a deep sense of purpose, joy, and fulfilment. Instead of dreading the day ahead, you greet it with enthusiasm and a sense of direction. This is the transformative power

of finding true meaning in life—a shift from surviving to thriving, from enduring to truly living.

This ideal state of being, where life is truly worth living, is what we call bliss. Bliss transcends mere existence; it represents a vibrant state of thriving, where individuals not only survive but actively embrace and savour life. Psychologists have a different term for it, though. Flourishing is the term widely used in positive psychology – the branch of psychology studies human strengths, virtues, and factors that contribute to human flourishing and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). We prefer the term, bliss, as it encompasses the essence of philosophical, theological, spiritual and psychological perspectives.

Psychological fulfilment is at the heart of any thriving individual, family, or community. It is not merely an emotion but a vital ingredient for mental health and overall well-being. It's a common misconception that material prosperity—material wealth, health, money, sex, fame, etc—is the key to giving them a head start in life. However, this myth neglects a crucial truth: love and emotional security are far more vital to a child's development than any material provision.

Happiness and life satisfaction that stem from secure, loving relationships are arguably more important than mere survival. Studies such as Easterlin's (2003) consistently show that pursuing and accumulating material wealth alone does not lead to lasting happiness or life satisfaction. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the Western world, where there is a growing sense of unhappiness and dissatisfaction despite unprecedented levels of wealth and comfort compared to previous generations. Research by Twenge et al. (2019) highlights that even as economic growth has led to higher standards of living, there has been a significant rise in anxiety, depression, and overall dissatisfaction. Social isolation, unrealistic societal expectations, and declining community engagement significantly contribute

to this trend (Helliwell et al., 2020).

Moreover, the disconnect between material affluence and emotional well-being underscores the limitations of wealth as a source of fulfillment (Easterlin, 2003). The rise in suicide rates in various Western countries over recent decades highlights the inadequacy of material wealth alone in ensuring overall well-being. Despite significant economic growth and increased standards of living, countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have witnessed alarming increases in suicide rates. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the United States, the suicide rate increased by 35% from 1999 to 2018, particularly among middle-aged adults and young people (CDC, 2019). Similarly, the UK saw a rise in suicides in the early 2010s, with notable increases among middle-aged men (Samaritans, 2019), and Australia experienced similar trends over the past decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This disturbing trend underscores broader concerns about the decline in happiness and the rise in mental health challenges, suggesting that emotional and psychological well-being cannot be secured through material wealth alone.

This paradox can be explained by the fact that true bliss stems from factors beyond material possessions—such as meaningful relationships, a sense of purpose, and mental well-being. Research indicates that happiness and fulfillment are not only more valuable than material wealth, but they can also lead to the acquisition of wealth. Studies have shown that individuals who experience higher levels of life satisfaction tend to be more productive, creative, and resilient, which can contribute to greater economic success over time (NIG & Seligman, 2004; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Moreover, bliss has been linked to better decision-making and stronger social networks, both of which are crucial for financial success (Graham, 2008). This aligns with the wisdom of King Solomon, one

of the wealthiest and most powerful figures of his time. Despite his immense material wealth, Solomon famously declared that all his possessions and achievements were “vanity and a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:11). This expression of disillusionment highlights the emptiness that can accompany material success when it is not paired with deeper fulfilment.

Additionally, the story of Adam in the Garden of Eden further underscores the limitations of material abundance in providing true happiness. Although Adam was placed in a paradise created by God, where he had access to everything he could possibly need, he was still unhappy and restless because something was missing from his life: Eve! This suggests that even the most ideal material conditions cannot substitute for the deeper, more intrinsic needs of the human soul—companionship, love, and purpose (Genesis 2:18).

The lessons from these examples remind us that while material wealth can provide comfort and security, it is not the key to a fulfilling life. True bliss comes from within and is cultivated through relationships, personal growth, and a life lived with purpose. In essence, a life well-lived is one where love is prioritised over mere existence and where wealth, if it comes, is seen as a byproduct rather than the goal.

## Chapter 4: Religious Perspectives of Flourishing

### *Judaism and Shalom*

The earliest understanding of flourishing can be traced back to Judaism, a monotheistic religion centred on the belief in one God and rooted in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). This faith is the foundation of the Jewish people, who have a deep historical and spiritual connection to the land of Israel (Neusner, 2004). In Judaism, flourishing, or “shalom,” encompasses a life of prosperity that includes material, psychological, and spiritual blessings (Exodus 20:1-17). This prosperity is believed to stem from virtues rooted in adherence to the Torah, also known as the Book of the Law. The Torah, traditionally understood to be the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—contains the laws, commandments, and teachings that God delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai and during the Israelites’ journey through the wilderness. Written between the 10th and 5th century BCE, the Torah represents God’s will and purpose for His

people to live prosperous lives, providing guidance on how to achieve this. The “Book of the Law” signifies the covenant between God and Israel, serving as a divine guide for living a life aligned with God’s will. It emphasises that obedience to these laws is crucial for the Israelites to prosper, not only in the Promised Land but also wherever they may live. The many laws and regulations in the Torah were summarised by Christ into two key commandments: to love God and to love others. Jesus said,

*“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest of the Laws. The second is like it, ‘You must love your neighbour as you love yourself.’ All the Laws and the writings of the early preachers depend on these two most important Laws” (Matthew 22:37–40, NLV).*

In Joshua 1:8, the importance of continuously reflecting on and following the law is highlighted as essential for success and prosperity:

*“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall read [and meditate on] it day and night, so that you may be careful to do [everything] in accordance with all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will be successful” (Amplified Bible Version).*

This verse underscores the idea that constant engagement with the Torah’s teachings is key to achieving a flourishing life, reflecting God’s intention for His people to thrive under His guidance.

### *Abundant Eternal Life: Christ's Model of bliss*

Eternal life was Christ's conceptualisation of flourishing, representing a core principle of Christian theology. This concept, often referred to as "abundant eternal life," is central to the teachings and mission of Jesus Christ, who emphasised that His purpose was to bring life in its fullest sense to humanity.

In His public ministry, Jesus made it clear that His mission was to bring "abundant life" to those suffering, marginalised, and in need (John 10:10). In Luke 4:18, He declared that He was sent to "proclaim good news to the poor...to set the oppressed free," highlighting His focus on those in dire need of transformation. The term "abundant life" that Jesus uses in John 10:10 is rooted in the Greek word "Zoë," which signifies not just physical life but a quality of life that encompasses the well-being of the entire human person, particularly the soul. This revolutionary idea shifted the focus from external circumstances to internal transformation and eternal significance, providing a new understanding of what it means to flourish.

### *The Foundation of Love: Agape as the Core Virtue*

The concept of "abundant eternal life" in Christianity is not merely a notion of living forever; it represents the ultimate model of flourishing as envisioned by Jesus Christ. This model is deeply embedded in the love of God and is foundationally distinct from other philosophies and religious frameworks that emphasise human effort and ethical principles. Christ's model of abundant eternal life is unique in its foundation upon the virtue of love—specifically, *agape*, the selfless, unconditional love central to God's nature. Unlike other models of flourishing that may emphasise a broad spectrum of ethical or moral principles, Christianity highlights *agape* as the essential and

all-encompassing virtue necessary for achieving true bliss (Thayer & Smith, 2016).

### *Attachment to God: The Source of Love and Eternal Life*

Another distinctive feature of Christ's model of flourishing is its emphasis on attachment to God as the source of love and eternal life. While other models often focus on the cultivation of morals and virtues through individual efforts—such as discipline and obedience to religious laws (e.g., the Torah in Judaism and Quran in Islam)—Christ's model emphasises forming a close, intimate relationship with God, who is described in 1 John 4:8 as love itself. This relationship is not merely about adherence to rules or the accumulation of virtuous deeds but is centred on a secure, loving connection with the benevolent God.

It is essential to clarify that Jesus was not against the virtues or instructions provided in other models, including those prescribed in the Torah. As a Jew, Jesus observed and upheld these laws, understanding their significance and value in guiding moral and ethical living (Matthew 5:17). However, Christ emphasised that without grace—obtained through the Spirit of Christ Himself—it is impossible to attain or sustain these virtues (John 15:5). The virtues and instructions of the Torah, while valuable, are insufficient on their own for living the eternal life that Christ describes. Jesus encapsulated the essence of all virtues and commandments in two core principles: love for God and love for others (Matthew 22:37–40). These two commandments, fused in love, summarise the entire law and provide the foundation for true flourishing. This love is not merely an emotion but a divine gift, empowered by grace, that enables believers to live out the fullness of life in Christ.

This relationship-driven approach contrasts sharply with legalistic or performance-based models of flourishing. The Apostle Paul,

particularly in his letters to the Romans and Galatians, stresses that eternal life and true flourishing do not result from legalism or personal efforts but from God's grace. This grace is accessed through a loving relationship with God, who, as the source of all love, imparts eternal life to those united with Him (Romans 3:24; Galatians 2:16).

C.S. Lewis, a profound Christian thinker, vividly captured this idea when he wrote,

*“God made us. He invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. God designed the human machine to run on Himself” (Lewis, 1952, cited in Lewis, 2001).*

In this analogy, Lewis emphasises that just as a car cannot function properly without the right fuel, humans cannot flourish without a relationship with God. He further suggests that this relationship is essential because, without love—which is, in essence, God Himself—humans cannot live or experience true life. Love is the “fuel” that enables individuals to experience the fullness of life Christ promised, highlighting that a life disconnected from God is without the essence of existence itself.

### *The Eternal Perspective: Beyond Temporal Flourishing*

The Christian model of abundant eternal life also stands out in its eternal perspective. While many flourishing models focus primarily on life before death, offering guidelines for achieving happiness, success, or moral excellence within the constraints of earthly existence, Christ's model extends beyond these temporal concerns. Jesus consistently pointed His followers toward an eternal reality, where life is not only abundant in the present but also guaranteed to continue in an even

more glorious state after death.

In John 3:16, the promise of eternal life is given to all, emphasising that this life is not confined to the physical world but is a never-ending communion with God. Similarly, in John 17:3, eternal life is described as knowing God and Jesus Christ intimately, highlighting that this eternal life is relational at its core. It is not merely an unending existence but a deep, enduring connection with the divine source of all life and love.

In conclusion, the Christian model of abundant eternal life is distinct in its focus on love as the central virtue and in its insistence that true flourishing comes not from individual effort or adherence to law but from a secure, loving relationship with God. While Jesus upheld the virtues and laws of the Torah, He emphasised that these must be undergirded by divine grace, made accessible through Christ Himself. This model of flourishing is deeply relational, grounded in the understanding that God is love and that eternal life flows from this divine relationship. As C.S. Lewis so aptly put it, humans are designed to “run on” God, and only through this connection can they experience the full, abundant, and eternal life that Jesus came to offer. True life and flourishing are impossible without this divine love, which is the essence of God Himself. This model of flourishing is not only about living well in the present but also about securing a blissful, eternal future in communion with God.

### *Islamic Perspective*

In Islamic thought, the concept of flourishing is closely related to terms like *Falah*, *Sa’adah*, and *Tazkiyah*, each of which embodies aspects of a fulfilling and successful life according to Islamic teachings. *Falah* is perhaps the closest term to flourishing, often translated as “success” or “prosperity.” It refers to holistic success that encompasses both

this life and the Hereafter, achieved by living in accordance with Islamic principles and maintaining a strong relationship with Allah (Qur'an 23:1-11). Sa'adah represents a deeper, more enduring form of happiness or bliss that goes beyond worldly pleasures. In Islamic philosophy, Sa'adah is seen as the ultimate goal of life, attainable through spiritual and intellectual development (Al-Farabi, 1997). This state of contentment and joy is a key component of a flourishing life grounded in faith and righteousness. Tazkiyah is the process of purifying the soul, a fundamental practice for achieving both Falah and Sa'adah. The Qur'an emphasises the importance of Tazkiyah, stating that those who purify their souls succeed, while those who corrupt them fail (Qur'an 91:9-10). This spiritual and moral purification is essential for attaining a flourishing life, as it aligns an individual's inner state with divine guidance.

Together, these concepts form the Islamic understanding of flourishing, which integrates spiritual success, moral integrity, and inner peace. This holistic approach emphasises the balance between worldly life and spiritual obligations, aiming for a state of well-being that leads to ultimate success in the Hereafter.

## Chapter 5: Philosophical Perspectives of Flourishing

Flourishing, as a concept, has been interpreted differently across various philosophical traditions. But Aristotle is among the most prominent one.

### *Aristotle's Eudaimonia*

Modern scientific understanding of flourishing is indebted to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia for its understanding of flourishing. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and polymath widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Western philosophy. A student of Plato and later the tutor of Alexander the Great, Aristotle made significant contributions to numerous fields, including metaphysics, ethics, politics, biology, and logic (Barnes, 1982; Shields, 2014). His works laid the foundation for much of Western intellectual history, and his ideas continue to be studied and debated to this day. Aristotle's philosophy is characterised by a systematic and empirical approach to understanding the natural world and human life, with a particular focus on the concept of eudaimonia,

or human flourishing (Kenny, 1992; Nussbaum, 1995).

Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia is central to his understanding of human flourishing. Eudaimonia is often translated as "happiness" or "flourishing," but it carries a deeper meaning, often interpreted as "the good life" or "living well." According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is the highest good for human beings and represents the fulfilment of human potential. It is not merely a fleeting state of pleasure or satisfaction but rather a sustained and complete life that is lived in accordance with reason and virtue (Aristotle, 1926). Aristotle argues that eudaimonia results from "the exercise of the powers of the soul" in accordance with rational principles (logos) and virtues (aretē) (Aristotle, 1926, I.vii.14–16). He believes that human beings are rational animals, and thus, the good life is one that fully realises the rational aspect of our nature. Virtues, according to Aristotle, are habits that shape stable character traits (hexis) and enable a person to act according to reason consistently (Davis C. et al., 2023).

Aristotle distinguishes between moral virtues, such as courage, temperance, and justice, which govern our emotions and actions, and intellectual virtues, like wisdom and understanding, which guide our thinking. Both types of virtues are necessary for achieving eudaimonia because they allow individuals to live in harmony with their rational nature (Aristotle, 1926).

The term eudaimonia is derived from "eu" (good) and "daimōn" (spirit or deity), which could be interpreted as a "gift from a good deity or God." This suggests that eudaimonia is not just a human achievement but also something that is in alignment with the divine or natural order (Aristotle, 1926). For Aristotle, living a life of eudaimonia is akin to fulfilling one's divine purpose or function (ergon) as a human being, which is deeply connected to the broader cosmos and the principles that govern it.

Although Aristotle did not explicitly refer to God, he used the

term “The Unmoved Mover” instead. In Aristotle’s metaphysics, the Unmoved Mover is the ultimate cause of all motion and change in the universe, but it itself is not moved by anything else. It is pure actuality, existing necessarily, and it is the final cause toward which all things aim (Aristotle, 1934). The Unmoved Mover is often described as the perfect being, and it is sometimes considered analogous to a divine being, although Aristotle’s concept is more abstract and philosophical than the personal God of monotheistic religions. While Aristotle does not directly equate the Unmoved Mover with the “good deity” in the context of eudaimonia, there is a conceptual link between the two. The Unmoved Mover represents the ultimate good and the highest form of reality, which all things naturally strive toward. In this sense, eudaimonia, as the highest good for human beings, can be seen as aligning with the ultimate purpose of the cosmos as directed by the Unmoved Mover (Aristotle, 1934). Living a life of virtue and reason, which leads to eudaimonia, is thus in harmony with the order and purpose of the universe.

Aristotle also suggests that the life of contemplation (*theoria*), which is the highest form of rational activity, is the closest humans can come to the divine. In this contemplative life, one exercises the intellect in a way that resembles the activity of the Unmoved Mover. Thus, eudaimonia can be seen as a way of participating in the divine or aligning oneself with the highest principles of reality (Aristotle, 1926).

### *Other Philosophical Perspectives*

In Stoicism, flourishing is achieved by living according to nature and reason, focusing on cultivating virtues like wisdom and justice and maintaining emotional resilience (Epictetus, c. 50–135 AD). Confucianism views flourishing as fulfilling social roles with virtues such as benevolence and integrity, contributing to societal harmony

(Confucius, 551–479 BCE). Utilitarianism presents flourishing as the maximisation of happiness for the greatest number, linking individual well-being to broader social good (Mill, 1863). Existentialism, on the other hand, sees flourishing as living authentically in a universe without inherent meaning, emphasising personal freedom and responsibility (Sartre, 1946). Buddhism associates flourishing with the cessation of suffering through the Eightfold Path, aiming for enlightenment and inner peace (Buddha, c. 563–483 BCE). Virtue Ethics, particularly in its modern revival, also focuses on the development of virtues but emphasises the role of community and historical context in achieving a flourishing life (MacIntyre, 1981). Taoism offers a unique perspective by equating flourishing with living in harmony with the Tao, embracing simplicity, and finding balance through non-action (Laozi, c. 6th century BCE). Lastly, the Feminist Ethics of Care views flourishing as rooted in relationships, emphasising empathy, compassion, and care for oneself and others as central to a fulfilling life (Gilligan, 1982).

These diverse interpretations reflect the rich tapestry of human thought about what it means to live a flourishing life, each providing unique insights based on its cultural and philosophical context.

## Chapter 6: Psychological Models of Flourishing

### *William James and Pragmatic Faith and Truth*

William James (1842–1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist widely regarded as the “Father of American Psychology” due to his pioneering work in both psychology and philosophy, particularly in pragmatism and the study of religious experiences (Taylor, E., 1996; Taylor, C., 2001). Born in New York City, James became a pivotal thinker whose work significantly influenced both fields, especially in understanding human flourishing—a concept central to his philosophical and psychological endeavours (Pajares, 2003). His interest in human potential and optimal functioning laid the groundwork for what would later be recognised as aspects of positive psychology (Myers, 2004). James’s concept of flourishing was deeply intertwined with his philosophical and religious beliefs, which were rooted in a pluralistic and pragmatic worldview that emphasised individual experience and the potential for personal growth and transformation (Gale, 2005).

William James' concept of human flourishing is rooted in his pragmatic philosophy, where truth and meaning are defined by their practical impact on an individual's life. He believed that beliefs and actions should be judged by their ability to enhance personal well-being and provide a sense of purpose (James, 1907). James emphasised the diversity of human experiences, advocating for a pluralistic approach to flourishing and recognising that each person's path is unique (James, 1909). Central to his idea of flourishing is the "will to believe," where individuals freely choose their beliefs and actions, even in the absence of certainty, thus shaping a meaningful life (James, 1896, pp. 1-3).

Additionally, James also highlighted the importance of emotions and the continuous stream of consciousness in shaping life experiences. Flourishing involves integrating these experiences into a coherent self-narrative (James, 1890). He also explored how both suffering and transcendence, particularly through religious and mystical experiences, contribute to a meaningful life, suggesting that flourishing includes the ability to find meaning even in adversity (James, 1902b). Overall, James' pragmatic approach underscores that human flourishing is a dynamic, individualised process of navigating life's complexities with purpose and emotional awareness.

James viewed human flourishing as a dynamic process of self-realisation and personal growth, achievable through the conscious application of one's energy and will. He believed that humans possess vast reserves of potential energy that, when properly harnessed, can lead to optimal functioning and a fulfilling life. This idea is encapsulated in his famous lecture, "The Energies of Men," where he discussed the idea that humans often live far below their potential, using only a fraction of their available energy (Rathunde, 2001, p. 136). For James, flourishing involved tapping into these reserves to achieve greater levels of personal and societal well-being.

James's concept of flourishing also incorporated a strong ethical dimension. He believed that personal growth and self-realisation should contribute not only to individual well-being but also to the greater good of society. This aligns closely with the later developments in positive psychology, which emphasise the importance of virtues and strengths in achieving well-being, both individually and collectively (Froh, 2004).

William James's ideas about flourishing were profoundly influenced by his spiritual and religious beliefs. Although James was not conventionally religious, he was deeply interested in religious experience and its impact on human life. His seminal work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, explores how religious and mystical experiences can lead to profound personal transformation and a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life. This exploration into the spiritual dimensions of life informed his broader understanding of flourishing (James, 1902a).

James was particularly interested in the practical effects of religious beliefs on individuals' lives. He viewed religion as a powerful motivator that could help individuals tap into their inner resources and achieve higher well-being. In this sense, religious experience was seen as a catalyst for flourishing, providing individuals with a sense of purpose, direction, and inner strength (Misiak & Sexton, 1966).

Moreover, James's pluralistic approach to religion—his belief that there is no single, absolute truth but rather a multitude of perspectives that can each offer valuable insights—mirrored his views on human flourishing. He believed different paths could lead to personal growth and fulfilment through religious faith, philosophical reflection, or scientific inquiry. This pluralism also reflected his broader philosophical stance, which emphasised the diversity of human experience and the importance of individual perspective in determining what constitutes a flourishing life (James, 1907).

James's background in a family with strong religious and intellectual

influences played a crucial role in shaping his views. His father, Henry James Sr., was a theologian deeply engaged with Swedenborgians' spiritual and mystical traditions, which likely exposed William to the idea that spiritual experiences could have tangible effects on personal and moral development. This background provided a fertile ground for William James's interest in the psychological aspects of religion and the potential for religious experiences to contribute to human flourishing (Taylor, E., 2001).

James's pragmatic philosophy also had a religious dimension. He was concerned with the practical consequences of belief and how these beliefs could contribute to a meaningful and fulfilling life. His idea that truth is what works in the service of human flourishing ties closely with his religious pluralism, where diverse religious experiences and beliefs could all potentially lead to a higher state of well-being (James, 1907).

### *Self-actualisation: Maslow's Model of Human Flourishing*

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, is best known for developing the theory of the hierarchy of needs and the concept of self-actualisation, both of which have profoundly influenced modern psychology and our understanding of human flourishing. Born on 1 April 1908 in Brooklyn, New York, to Russian Jewish immigrants, Maslow was the eldest of seven children in a family that faced significant challenges. These early hardships, coupled with a difficult relationship with his domineering and superstitious mother, sparked his interest in understanding human behaviour and the factors that contribute to psychological well-being (Hoffman, 1988).

Although Maslow was raised in a Jewish household, he did not adhere to traditional religious practices as an adult. However, his Jewish heritage, emphasising ethics, social justice, and the intrinsic

value of human life, likely influenced his humanistic outlook. This ethical foundation is evident in Maslow's deep concern for the dignity and potential of every individual, which can be seen as an extension of these principles (Hoffman, 1988). While Maslow did not align himself with any specific religious tradition, his work is imbued with a spiritual dimension. He was particularly interested in what he called "peak experiences"—moments of profound personal significance often characterised by a spiritual or transcendent quality. These experiences are central to his concept of self-actualisation and human flourishing, reflecting his belief that all people have the capacity for profound personal growth and spiritual fulfilment (Maslow, 1964). Later in his career, Maslow introduced the idea of self-transcendence, which extends beyond self-actualisation. Self-transcendence involves connecting with something greater than oneself, whether through altruism, spirituality, or the pursuit of higher ideals (Maslow, 1971). This concept suggests that true flourishing comes not just from realising personal potential but from transcending the self to contribute to the broader human experience.

Maslow's ideas strongly resemble Aristotelian philosophy, particularly the concept of eudaimonia. Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia, often translated as "flourishing" or "the good life," involves living in accordance with reason and virtue, fulfilling one's potential, and achieving a balanced, meaningful life. Similarly, Maslow's concept of self-actualisation represents the fulfilment of one's potential and living in alignment with one's true nature (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs outlines a progression of human motivations from basic physiological needs, such as food and shelter, to higher-order needs, like love, esteem, and, ultimately, self-actualisation. This framework suggests that flourishing involves more than just meeting basic needs; it requires moving towards

higher-order needs that promote personal growth and fulfilment (Maslow, 1943). At the core of Maslow's philosophy of flourishing is the concept of self-actualisation. This involves realising one's full potential, achieving personal growth, and finding fulfilment. For Maslow, flourishing means living in a state where a person fully utilises their talents, abilities, and capacities, thereby becoming the most that they can be (Maslow, 1954).

Maslow's humanistic psychology is rooted in an optimistic view of human nature. He believed that people are inherently good and possess an inner drive towards self-improvement and achieving their fullest potential. This positive view aligns with the concept of flourishing in positive psychology, which emphasises the conditions and practices that lead to a thriving, meaningful life (Maslow, 1954).

Central to Maslow's understanding of flourishing is the idea of intrinsic motivation—the internal desire to grow, explore, and fulfil one's potential. According to Maslow, true flourishing is driven by this internal motivation rather than by external rewards or pressures (Maslow, 1970). Maslow identified several characteristics of self-actualised individuals, such as creativity, autonomy, authenticity, and a deep sense of purpose. These traits are indicative of what it means to flourish, according to Maslow. He believed that flourishing involves not just achieving external success or happiness but also reaching a state of inner fulfilment and self-realisation (Maslow, 1954).

Maslow introduced the concept of peak experiences—intense, transcendental moments of joy, creativity, and deep connection. He viewed these experiences as manifestations of flourishing, where individuals feel most alive and in tune with their highest potential. Regular peak experiences are a sign that an individual is flourishing and moving towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 1964).

### *Integration with Positive Psychology*

Maslow's ideas laid the groundwork for the later development of positive psychology, which also emphasises flourishing but broadens the concept to include a wider range of positive emotions, strengths, and virtues. Positive psychology builds on Maslow's ideas by exploring how individuals can achieve well-being through relationships, engagement, and meaning, in addition to self-actualisation (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Maslow's concept of self-actualisation closely relates to the idea of eudaimonic well-being, which is central to positive psychology. Eudaimonic well-being focuses on living in accordance with one's true self and realising one's potential, reflecting Maslow's vision of flourishing through self-actualisation (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

While Maslow emphasised individual growth, he also recognised the importance of relationships and community in the process of self-actualisation. He believed that flourishing involves not only personal achievement but also the capacity to form deep, meaningful connections with others (Maslow, 1954). Maslow's (1943) inclusion of love and belongingness in his hierarchy of needs highlights the role of social connections in flourishing. He argued that strong, supportive relationships are essential for individuals to feel secure enough to pursue self-actualisation and reach their fullest potential.

## Chapter 7: Positive Psychology and Flourishing

Positive psychology (PP) emerged in the late 20th century as a formal discipline aimed at shifting the focus of psychological research from merely addressing mental illness to exploring what contributes to human flourishing (Seligman, 1999). Traditionally, psychology had been primarily concerned with diagnosing and treating mental health problems, often neglecting the factors that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The advent of positive psychology, spearheaded by figures such as Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, marked a significant shift, seeking to explore the strengths, virtues, and positive emotions that enhance well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

### *The PERMA Model of Flourishing*

In the late 1990s, Martin Seligman, then President of the American Psychological Association, advocated for a new focus in psychological research—one that would study positive human traits, emotions, and

institutions. This marked the formal beginning of positive psychology as a distinct area of study. Seligman's vision was to create a "science of happiness" that would explore and promote the factors leading to a fulfilling and meaningful life beyond the mere treatment of mental illness (Seligman, 1999).

Central to positive psychology is the concept of flourishing, which is understood as more than fleeting happiness; it involves a broad array of positive experiences and life conditions that contribute to lasting well-being and deep satisfaction. One of the most influential models of flourishing is Seligman's flourish model, introduced in his books *Authentic Happiness* (2002) and *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (2011). The flourishing model – commonly known as the PERMA – identifies five critical components of flourishing: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (hence PERMA). These elements collectively contribute to a well-rounded sense of well-being:

Positive Emotion involves regularly experiencing feelings such as joy, gratitude, and contentment, which enhance our overall happiness and life satisfaction. Engagement refers to the state of being deeply involved in activities that are meaningful and absorbing, where individuals often experience a sense of flow, losing track of time due to their intense focus and involvement. Relationships highlight the critical role of supportive and nurturing social connections, as positive relationships with others are fundamental to emotional well-being and personal growth. Meaning is about having a sense of purpose and feeling connected to something greater than oneself, providing individuals with a framework for understanding their lives and their place in the world. Finally, Accomplishment focuses on achieving personal goals and feeling fulfilled by these achievements, which contributes to a sense of competence and self-efficacy. Together, these elements create a well-rounded foundation for flourishing and

lasting well-being. An extended version of the model, PERMAH, also includes ‘Health,’ emphasising the importance of physical well-being as a crucial component of overall flourishing (Butler & Kern, 2016).

Martin Seligman, along with Christopher Peterson, made a significant contribution to positive psychology by developing the concept of character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This work introduced the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths, a framework designed to identify and categorise positive traits that contribute to human flourishing. They identified 24 character strengths, such as bravery, kindness, and creativity, which they grouped under six core virtues: courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom.

These character strengths are considered essential psychological supports for well-being. Within this framework, “signature strengths” are those particular strengths that are most central to an individual’s identity. These strengths are naturally exhibited by the individual and are deeply ingrained in their personality. The use of signature strengths is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including increased happiness, greater life satisfaction, and a stronger sense of purpose. This is because engaging with these strengths feels authentic and effortless, often leading to a state of “flow”—a psychological state where one is fully immersed and engaged in an activity, losing track of time and external distractions.

Signature strengths are not just behaviours or skills; they are central to a person’s core identity and play a crucial role in personal flourishing. When people recognise and cultivate their signature strengths, they are better able to navigate challenges, build meaningful relationships, and achieve their goals. The VIA Classification provides a structured approach for individuals to identify their strengths and actively use them in daily life to enhance their overall well-being.

In essence, Seligman and Peterson’s work on character strengths

and virtues through the VIA Classification has provided a valuable tool for understanding the psychological foundations of well-being. By focusing on signature strengths, individuals can align their lives with their deepest values, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

### *Other Models of Positive Psychology's Flourishing*

Beyond Seligman's contributions, several other models have expanded the understanding of flourishing. The Subjective Well-Being (SWB) model, developed by Diener et al. (2017), focuses on how individuals assess their own happiness and life satisfaction. It considers emotional responses, satisfaction across different life domains (such as work and family), and overall life evaluations. The SWB model underscores the importance of experiencing positive emotions, maintaining low negative emotions, and achieving high life satisfaction.

Another influential model is Huppert's Holistic Well-Being model (2009), which integrates multiple dimensions of well-being, including positive emotions, life satisfaction, personal growth, purpose, autonomy, and positive relationships. This model presents well-being as a comprehensive state in which individuals thrive across various aspects of their lives, not merely the absence of mental illness.

### *Second Wave Positive Psychology*

As positive psychology gained traction, it also faced criticism. Scholars like Kristjánsson (2013) and Lazarus (2003) argued that early models of positive psychology were overly simplistic. They often presented well-being in a binary fashion that glorified positive emotions while neglecting or downplaying negative experiences. This approach risked creating a "tyranny of the positive," where individuals felt pressured to maintain a constant state of happiness, potentially leading to social

and psychological consequences for those unable to do so (Held, 2002).

Critics also highlighted that negative emotions and experiences—such as suffering, anxiety, and sadness—are integral to the human experience and can contribute significantly to personal growth and the development of virtues. The exclusion of these elements from the initial positive psychology frameworks made them seem overly idealistic and disconnected from the complexities of real life (Lazarus, 2003).

In response to these critiques, the field of positive psychology began to evolve, leading to the emergence of Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP). SWPP acknowledges the limitations of the initial approach and incorporates a more nuanced understanding of well-being. It recognises the dialectical nature of well-being, where both positive and negative experiences are essential for a fulfilling life (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016).

SWPP does not dismiss the value of positive emotions and traits but rather situates them within a broader context that includes the constructive role of negative emotions and experiences. It posits that authentic flourishing emerges from the interaction of positive and negative life events, with negative experiences often serving as catalysts for personal growth, resilience, and deeper understanding (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016).

Building on the foundations laid by SWPP, Positive Psychology 2.0, also known as Existential Positive Psychology (EPP), has further expanded the discipline. Championed by scholars such as Paul Wong, PP 2.0 emphasises the importance of existential concerns—such as meaning, purpose, and mortality—in achieving well-being. This approach has gained particular relevance in the context of global challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, which has brought issues of loss, suffering, and existential anxiety to the forefront (Wong, 2011, 2020).

Positive Psychology 2.0 argues that well-being cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the darker aspects of life. It stresses that negative emotions and existential challenges are not merely obstacles to be overcome but are fundamental to the human experience. By confronting and integrating these aspects, individuals can achieve a more profound, resilient form of well-being (Wong et al., 2021).

### *In Summary: The Fundamentals of Flourishing*

Flourishing, a concept rooted in various philosophical, religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions, reflects a state of optimal well-being. It occurs when individuals experience a balance of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, material wealth, and health. Flourishing is not just about thriving in positive experiences; it also involves growing through challenges, integrating life's highs and lows for lasting fulfillment.

The cultivation and experience of core virtues—kindness, hope, meaning, faith, and love—are central to flourishing. While these 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 their connections to external “virtuous” sources. These sources range from inanimate objects to spiritual or divine figures. The quality of flourishing depends on the security and consistency of these attachments, as more dependable sources provide more robust support for virtue cultivation.

Below is an exploration of the varying levels of quality and security provided by these virtuous sources, beginning with inanimate objects and culminating in the most secure sources—spiritual or divine

figures.

### **1. Inanimate Objects**

Inanimate sources, such as material wealth, substances, or hobbies, offer the lowest quality and least secure attachment for the cultivation of virtues. While they may provide temporary emotional satisfaction or a distraction from life's stresses, these sources lack the depth and consistency required for meaningful virtue development. Attachments to material wealth or substances often lead to superficial emotional fulfilment and, in some cases, worsen emotional instability.

For example, individuals who tie their sense of worth to material wealth often experience higher levels of anxiety and dissatisfaction (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Materialistic attachments can foster a dependency on external possessions rather than facilitating deeper emotional or spiritual growth. These attachments are often insecure and fleeting and offer little in the way of long-term fulfilment or flourishing (Dittmar, 2008). As a result, inanimate objects fail to nurture essential virtues like compassion, love, or integrity, offering only short-term gratification instead of sustained personal development.

### **2. Animate Beings**

Attachments to animate beings, particularly pets, provide a moderate level of quality and security for nurturing virtues. Pets offer consistent emotional comfort and affection, which can foster virtues like empathy, care, and responsibility. While the emotional support from pets is generally high in quality, their capacity as virtuous sources is limited, as they do not provide the moral or intellectual guidance that humans or spiritual figures can offer.

Pets, especially dogs, are known for providing unconditional love and companionship, which helps foster emotional stability and virtues like patience and empathy (Beck & Madresh, 2008). However, while pets can offer secure emotional attachments, they are unable to engage in moral reasoning or intellectual discourse, which limits the

depth of virtues they can help cultivate. Thus, although emotionally consistent, attachments to pets provide a more limited scope for virtue development compared to human or spiritual sources.

### **3. Human Figures**

Human attachment figures, particularly parents and caregivers, play a crucial role in shaping an individual's virtues and psychological well-being. The quality of these attachments is generally high when they are secure, as consistent and responsive caregiving fosters virtues like love, empathy, and trust (Bowlby, 1969). However, human attachments are less secure than spiritual ones, as humans are fallible and subject to personal challenges that may affect their ability to provide consistent support.

The security of human attachments depends on the emotional availability and well-being of the caregiver. Secure attachments lead to high-quality virtue development, while insecure attachments (e.g., neglect or inconsistency) can hinder this process, leading to emotional and moral instability (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Sroufe, 2005). Human figures, despite their fallibility, provide deep emotional support and can foster a wide range of virtues. However, their consistency may fluctuate due to life circumstances such as stress, illness, or personal challenges, which can undermine the security of the attachment (Sroufe, 2005).

### **4. Spiritual or Divine Figures**

Spiritual or divine figures, such as God, spirits, or ancestors, are regarded as the most secure and highest quality sources for cultivating virtues. These figures offer a profound sense of consistency and dependability because they are perceived as transcendent, omnipresent, and morally infallible. Attachment to a divine figure provides individuals with a stable sense of purpose, meaning, and moral direction, all of which are essential for flourishing.

Unlike human figures, spiritual or divine sources are seen as beyond

human fallibility. Their transcendent nature allows individuals to maintain a secure and dependable connection, even during times of personal or societal turmoil. Spiritual sources are considered ever-present, offering continuous and unwavering support, making them highly reliable for nurturing virtues. Religious and spiritual frameworks often provide timeless moral guidelines, which further contribute to virtue cultivation. Research shows that individuals with strong spiritual attachments experience greater psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and virtues like forgiveness and compassion (Pargament et al., 2000; Kirkpatrick, 1992).

In effect, the quality and security of virtuous sources vary significantly depending on their ability to offer consistent and dependable support. Inanimate objects, such as material wealth or hobbies, offer the lowest level of security and quality for virtue cultivation, often resulting in temporary gratification rather than lasting fulfillment. Pets provide a moderate level of emotional security but lack the capacity to foster broader moral virtues. Human attachment figures, especially caregivers, play a vital role in developing virtues, although their fallibility can sometimes undermine the security of the attachment. Finally, spiritual or divine figures, such as God, provide the highest quality and most secure sources for virtue cultivation. Their perceived omnipresence and moral authority offer unwavering support, making them the most reliable foundation for flourishing.

## PART III: THE ADVERSITY-SPIRITUALITY-BLISS NEXUS

In this section, we delve into the intricate relationship between adversity, spirituality, and human flourishing. This section takes an empirical and scientific approach to explore how spiritual practices and beliefs can act as buffers against life's challenges, fostering resilience and ultimately leading to a more fulfilled and flourishing life. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, this section illuminates the profound psychological and spiritual transformation that adversity can bring, particularly when integrated with strong spiritual convictions.

Adversity, in this context, is not merely viewed as a negative force but as a catalyst for growth, offering opportunities for spiritual awakening and deepened faith. The concept of *Differential Bliss Receptivity* is introduced, suggesting that individuals facing significant challenges may develop a heightened sensitivity to spiritual experiences, which in turn promotes flourishing. This theory aligns with various psychological models that emphasise post-traumatic growth, showing that hardship often unlocks new levels of spiritual and emotional resilience.

The section also reviews empirical studies that examine the role of spirituality in mental health, particularly within African and di-

asporea communities. These studies reveal how religious coping mechanisms—such as prayer, communal worship, and faith in a higher power—can either enhance or undermine the process of flourishing, depending on the individual’s spiritual orientation and the specific context of adversity.

Cross-cultural studies, particularly those focused on Tanzanian communities, highlight the universal and culturally specific aspects of this adversity-spirituality-flourishing nexus. While the human response to suffering often includes seeking meaning, the pathways to flourishing vary across different spiritual traditions and cultural settings. The role of religious coping is thus contextualised as a double-edged sword: it can lead to greater well-being when positively integrated but may also become a source of distress if misapplied or misunderstood.

At its core, this section proposes that adversity should be reframed not as an obstacle but as an integral part of the human experience that can lead to flourishing when coupled with a strong spiritual foundation. The studies presented aim to validate the LOVE model’s claim that spirituality and adversity are key drivers in achieving holistic well-being. Through scientific evidence and cross-cultural analysis, this section underscores the transformative power of spirituality in overcoming life’s inevitable struggles, leading to a deeper understanding of human flourishing.

## Chapter 8: Introduction

My spiritual awakening, which I now describe as “Falling in Love with God,” was a transformative experience, marking a profound shift in my life. Before this, I had never encountered such an overwhelming sense of divine love and peace. This experience, however, left me with pressing questions: How does this newfound love relate to the emotional turmoil that often accompanies life’s challenges? Is this experience of divine love unique, or is it a common phenomenon that others encounter? To answer these questions, I embarked on a journey of exploration, drawing from the fields of theology, philosophy, and eventually, science.

For the first five years, I immersed myself in theological and philosophical studies, culminating in a Master’s degree in Systematic Theology. This academic pursuit deepened my understanding of divine love and its implications for human flourishing. However, I felt a divine nudge to complement this theological insight with scientific exploration. Psychology, particularly positive psychology, emerged as the most promising field despite my initial scepticism about the historical tensions between spirituality and science.

To formalise this new direction, I pursued a master's degree in psychology, which gave me a robust understanding of the human mind and behaviour. This was the beginning of my journey to scientifically understand the relationship between spirituality, adversity, and flourishing—a journey that continues today as I work as a researcher and lecturer in positive psychology.

### *Philosophical Position: Balancing Belief and Objectivity*

As a researcher, I am acutely aware of how my spiritual experiences and academic background shape my worldview. These perspectives have enriched my research but also present the risk of bias, particularly confirmation bias, where one might favour evidence that supports pre-existing beliefs (Baldwin J. et al., 2022; De Vries et al., 2018). This awareness drives my commitment to a balanced and open-minded approach in my research, recognising that my understanding is only a piece of the larger truth.

Adopting a realistic philosophy, I incorporate three key social science principles: the belief in causal explanations, the understanding that individual interpretations shape social reality, and the recognition that people actively evaluate their environments based on personal experiences. Historically, the tension between positivism (which emphasises empirical verification) and naturalism (which excludes anything beyond the material world) has created a divide between science and spirituality. However, modern scholars like Willard (2018) argue for a more integrative approach, acknowledging that both empirical and spiritual insights contribute to a fuller understanding of reality.

My goal is to seek truth with an open mind, free from the constraints of my prior beliefs. By exploring diverse perspectives, I aim to uncover more comprehensive truths, applying this balanced perspective to

both my theological and psychological studies.

### *Defining Key Concepts: Spirituality, Flourishing, and Adversity*

In psychology, the definitions and measurements used for concepts like spirituality, flourishing, and adversity can vary. For example, the terms “religion” and “spirituality” are often used interchangeably, though they have different meanings. According to Davis E. et al. (2023), religiousness involves seeking and responding to sacred meaning within culturally accepted frameworks, which may include beliefs, values, rituals, and institutions. Spirituality, however, refers to seeking and connecting with anything considered sacred, whether it’s a higher power, nature, or even deep human connections.

Theism, or monotheism, is a spiritual framework in which the belief in one God forms the basis of teachings and practices. Monotheism is a fundamental aspect of major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Gottlieb, 2006; Riggs, 2006). Within this framework, spirituality is defined as individuals’ search for and response to sacred meaning and connection with a transcendent deity, often called God. It encompasses a progressive series of changes in how people engage with these spiritual dimensions, impacting their overall well-being and flourishing (McClintock et al., 2019; Richards & Bergin, 2005). Some scholars, such as Granqvist (2020) and Granqvist & Kirkpatrick (2004), frame spirituality in terms of John Bowlby’s attachment theory, defining it as an attachment to God. This conceptualisation describes spirituality as an enduring psycho-spiritual relationship between a theistic believer and God (Richards & Bergin, 2005). God is used generically to denote the sacred deity conceptualised as the ultimate benevolent power and creator, omnipotent and omniscient (Richards & Bergin, 2005).

In this section, unless stated otherwise, “spirituality” will refer to

either or both religiousness and spirituality.

Flourishing, as defined by positive psychology, is the state of optimal well-being where individuals maintain a balance of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health. It involves thriving in positive experiences and growing through challenges, integrating both positive and negative aspects of life for lasting fulfilment (Seligman, 2011; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016; Wong et al., 2021). Importantly, flourishing is nurtured through cultivating and tapping into core virtues, such as trust in a higher power, kindness, justice, hope, faith, and love.

Adversity, on the other hand, encompasses life's challenges—such as illness, loss, or financial hardship—that threaten a person's sense of security and well-being. These experiences can lead to emotional distress but also have the potential to foster personal growth and resilience (Granqvist, 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2011).

## Chapter 9: Differential Bliss Receptivity

Research consistently shows a positive link between spirituality and flourishing. Spirituality offers individuals a sense of purpose and connection, helping them navigate life's challenges. Practices like meditation and prayer, common in many spiritual traditions, contribute to mental well-being, promoting peace and contentment (Koenig, 2012; Pargament & Mahoney, 2017).

Professor Lisa Miller highlights the protective power of spirituality against mental health challenges, noting that “clinical science has shown personal spirituality to be the most protective factor against depression known to medical or social sciences” (Miller, 2013, p. 333). This underscores the critical role of spirituality in fostering resilience and flourishing, particularly during adversity. It offers a framework for understanding and coping with adversity, which can lead to deeper personal growth and well-being. By fostering a connection to something greater than oneself—whether it's a higher power, nature, or the universe—spirituality gives individuals a strong foundation for flourishing in all aspects of life (Pargament & Mahoney, 2017).

The relationship between spirituality and well-being can also be un-

derstood through John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. According to this theory, a secure relationship with a loving attachment figure fosters a positive view of oneself, others, and the world, providing a stable base that promotes resilience during emotional turmoil. Within a monotheistic framework, this relationship is seen in the attachment to God, where the love and security provided by this connection can support flourishing (Granqvist, 2020; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Conversely, an insecure relationship with God can lead to psychological struggles and enduring negative emotions.

However, the relationship between spirituality and flourishing is complex and influenced by many factors including adversity. While spirituality often promotes well-being, adversity and suffering can have a negative impact, reducing overall well-being and hindering personal growth (Bickel et al., 1998). Chronic stress, often a result of prolonged adversity, is linked to mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, which can significantly impede one's ability to flourish (Schneiderman et al., 2005). Prolonged suffering—whether due to physical illness, financial hardship, or personal loss—can undermine psychological and emotional well-being, making it difficult to achieve and maintain a state of flourishing (Keyes, 2007).

Yet, it's important to note that suffering, despite its challenges, can also lead to long-term growth, mental resilience, and even flourishing. Research on spirituality and mental health has shown that the protective effect of spirituality against depression is even stronger for those who have recently undergone significant life stress (Smith et al., 2003). This phenomenon, known as the "buffering hypothesis," suggests that spirituality can help shield individuals from the worst effects of adversity. For example, Schnitker (2001) found that spirituality, when expressed through spiritual help-seeking and religious commitment, provided significant protection against depression in those facing multiple adversities. Smith et al. (2003)

examined the relationship between adversity (stress), spirituality and mental health (depression). They also reported that spirituality offered greater protection to those experiencing higher stress levels than to those with lower stress levels.

Despite the theoretical strength of the relationship between adversity, spirituality, and flourishing, this connection had yet to be tested empirically. There was a pressing need to address this knowledge gap, particularly in communities outside the Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Developed (WEIRD) countries. Positive psychology has faced criticism for its focus on WEIRD populations, which has led to cultural biases in the research (Henrich et al., 2010). By broadening the scope of research to include non-WEIRD populations, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between adversity, spirituality, and flourishing, ensuring that positive psychology is relevant and beneficial to people from all cultural backgrounds, particularly African descendants.

### *Systematic Review: Spirituality, Adversity, and Mental Health*

To elucidate this, we conducted a systematic review (Maturlu, 2024a) examining the impact of adversity on the relationship between spirituality (operationalised as religiosity or spirituality) and mental health, specifically focusing on depression. Given the limited empirical studies on the adversity-spirituality-flourishing nexus (Hone et al., 2014), our study concentrated on how spirituality, adversity, and mental health problems (particularly depression) interrelate rather than on flourishing. Since flourishing and mental health are closely linked (Keyes, 2002), understanding how spirituality and adversity interact to affect mental health could offer valuable insights into both mental health and flourishing.

Our review revealed several key findings. We discovered that

adversity plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between spirituality and mental health. A notable 88% of the studies we reviewed found a significant negative correlation between spirituality and depression, but this was true predominantly for individuals who had faced serious adversity. This indicates that spirituality acts as a powerful protective factor against depression, especially for those who have navigated significant life challenges. For instance, one study highlighted that individuals raised by parents with a history of major depression experienced a 90% reduction in their own risk of developing depression when they had high levels of spirituality. Conversely, for those with parents who did not suffer from depression, the protective effect of spirituality was still significant but somewhat less pronounced, reducing the risk by 75% (Miller et al., 2012). This suggests that while spirituality provides a buffer against depression, its protective effect is most pronounced in the context of adversity.

Our review also introduced the concept of “differential spiritual receptivity.” This concept posits that individuals who face greater adversity may have a higher potential for spiritual growth and, consequently, bliss and enhanced resilience. Adversity, while painful, may create a neuroanatomical basis that enhances one’s capacity for spiritual receptivity and mental health. Thus, psychological trauma associated with depressive episodes might open new cognitive pathways, fostering spiritual growth and mental resilience. Interestingly, our findings suggested that those genetically or neuro-structurally predisposed to mental health struggles might also have a heightened capacity for spirituality, which can act as a significant defence against depression. This implies that adversity can lead to varied outcomes: it can either foster spiritual growth and resilience or, if spiritual engagement is absent, result in deeper despair and clinical depression.

Our research provided valuable insights into the interplay between adversity, spirituality, and depression. However, the narrow demo-

graphic focus of the studies reviewed—primarily Christian Caucasians from the United States and a few studies from Ireland and Singapore—raised questions about the generalisability of these findings across different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This limitation highlighted the need for further research to explore how these insights might apply more broadly and to better understand the adversity-spirituality-flourishing relationship in diverse contexts.

### *Exploring Spirituality and Flourishing: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.*

Building on our previous review, which introduced the idea of “differential spiritual receptivity,” we aimed to explore whether this concept applies to the relationship between adversity, spirituality, and flourishing (Maturly, 2024b). We wanted to see if our theory holds true beyond the usual focus of positive psychology research, which often centres on WEIRD populations. Researchers like Heine and Norenzayan (2006) have criticised this narrow focus and called for a broader, more inclusive approach. Similarly, Diener et al. (2018) argued that incorporating diverse cultural perspectives can deepen our understanding of flourishing. To address this, we looked at Tanzania to understand how adversity—specifically challenging life situations—affects the connection between spirituality and flourishing among young people there. We had two main goals. First, we wanted to examine the relationship between spirituality and flourishing in an African context, which had not been explored before. Based on existing research, we expected to find a positive link between spirituality and flourishing.

Our findings supported this expectation. We discovered that, among Tanzanian youth, there was a significant positive relationship between spirituality and flourishing. This was an important finding because it

showed that spirituality positively influences flourishing not just in WEIRD countries but globally across different cultures. This positive relationship between spirituality and flourishing among Tanzanian youth was consistent with earlier findings from WEIRD populations. Research by Koenig (2012) and Pargament (2002) had already shown that spirituality is often related to better mental health and life satisfaction. Our study extended these findings to a new cultural context (Africa), addressing concerns about the narrow focus of positive psychology research and confirming that spirituality benefits flourishing across diverse cultural settings (George et al., 2000).

Our second goal was to explore how adversity influences the relationship between spirituality and flourishing (Maturly, 2024b). We hypothesised that the positive link between spirituality and flourishing would be stronger in the face of high adversity. Our analysis showed that adversity partially affected this relationship. Specifically, higher levels of spirituality were linked to better handling of adversity, which in turn was associated with greater flourishing. This suggests that spirituality enhances flourishing by helping people cope with adversity, aligning with earlier research that highlighted spirituality's role in managing challenging situations (Pargament, 2001; Smith et al., 2003).

Interestingly, while adversity did not generally alter the relationship between spirituality and flourishing for everyone, it had a significant effect for a specific group—those with high levels of both spirituality and adversity. For this group, spirituality appeared to have a stronger positive impact on flourishing. This finding supported the theory of differential spiritual receptivity, suggesting that adversity can amplify the positive effects of spirituality on flourishing. This idea aligns with Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) research on post-traumatic growth, which found that adversity can lead to personal development for those with strong spiritual beliefs. Wong's (2010) work also suggests that

adversity can prompt a deeper search for meaning, leading to enhanced flourishing.

In summary, our study showed that while adversity did not generally change the relationship between spirituality and flourishing, it played a key role in enhancing this relationship for those with high levels of both (Maturlu, 2024b). This supports the idea that adversity can strengthen the positive effects of spirituality on flourishing and confirms the theory of differential spiritual receptivity.

### *The Role of Religious Coping: Enhancing or Undermining Flourishing*

One of the major limitations of our previous study was the difficulty in determining whether spirituality and adversity alone shaped their effects on flourishing or if other factors, which were not thoroughly examined or controlled for, played a crucial role (in press). For example, existing research (e.g., Granqvist, 2020; Pargament, 2001) suggests that effective religious coping (RC) mechanisms could be a significant factor in the adversity-spirituality-flourishing relationship. RC refers to the active use of religious beliefs and practices to cope with stressful events (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Rebuilding a resilient mind after adversity requires mental nourishment and sufficient time to heal. This coping process is essential for restoring a strained mental framework and integrating new mindsets for better functioning. Our systematic review ((Maturlu, 2024a) also highlighted that the moderating effects of adversity on the relationship between spirituality and flourishing need time to develop and be observed. RC provides cognitive tools for dealing with adversity, such as finding meaning and using positive appraisal strategies. According to cognitive behaviour theory (Beck, 1993), the meaning we attach to life stressors influences

our feelings, behaviours, and relationships (Pargament & Exline, 2021; Pargament et al., 2001). This connection explains why religious coping styles are linked to mental health outcomes (Folkman, 2013).

Pargament et al. (2011) identify two types of religious coping: positive religious coping (PRC) and negative religious coping (NRC). PRC is generally associated with better mental well-being. It involves a secure relationship with a loving God and a positive view of oneself, others, and the world. People using PRC seek a stronger connection with God, trust in His guidance, and see adversity as an opportunity for growth. In contrast, NRC is characterised by an insecure relationship with God and a more negative view of oneself, others, and the world. NRC often involves feelings of spiritual discontent, punitive religious beliefs, and conflict, which are usually linked to poorer mental health outcomes (Pargament, 2023). Given these insights, our next study aimed to examine the role of RC in the adversity-spirituality-flourishing relationship. Using data from our previous study, we explored how positive and negative religious coping might influence this relationship among individuals facing significant adversity in an African context.

Our analysis revealed that positive coping strategies can significantly enhance the positive effects of spirituality on flourishing, especially in high-adversity situations. Conversely, negative coping strategies tend to worsen stress and reduce flourishing. This underscores the importance of fostering positive coping mechanisms alongside spiritual practices to promote resilience and flourishing. Positive coping strategies, such as problem-solving or seeking social support, help individuals manage adversity more effectively, leading to greater flourishing. Spiritual practices like prayer and meditation can foster a sense of purpose, connectedness, and life satisfaction (Koenig, 2012; Butler & Kern, 2016). This creates a synergistic effect where spirituality and positive coping reinforce each other, building a strong

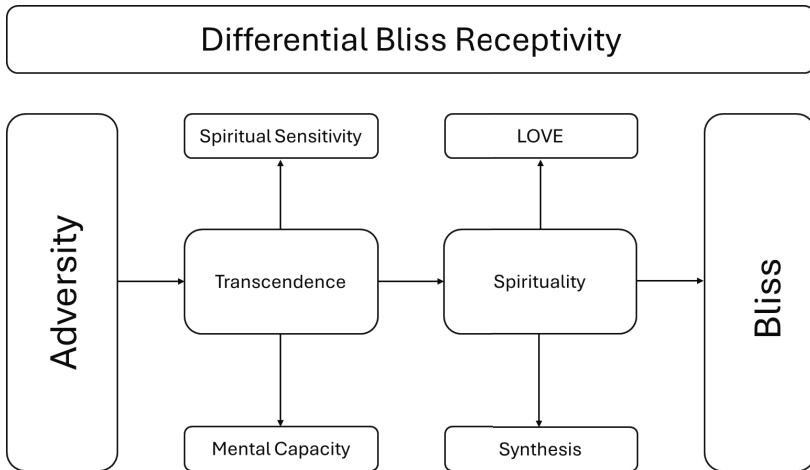
framework for managing stress and enhancing flourishing. On the other hand, negative coping strategies, such as viewing stress as divine punishment, undermine the relationship between spirituality and flourishing. These strategies can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, intensifying stress and leading to poorer mental health outcomes, including increased anxiety, depression, and reduced life satisfaction (Pargament et al., 2001). This negative cycle detracts from the protective benefits of spirituality and hampers flourishing.

The contrasting impacts of positive and negative coping highlight the need to differentiate these strategies in interventions. Promoting positive religious coping while addressing negative coping mechanisms is crucial for improving mental health and flourishing. A combined approach of spirituality and positive coping offers a comprehensive way to manage stress, addressing both the practical and existential aspects of adversity. Moreover, the benefits of spirituality and coping may take time to fully manifest, a point supported by previous studies (Miller et al., 2012, 2014) suggesting that these effects develop gradually. This highlights the importance of using longitudinal studies to fully understand the dynamics between spirituality, coping, and flourishing.

### *Differential Bliss Receptivity: A New Paradigm for Conceptualizing the Adversity-Spirituality-Flourishing Nexus*

Our studies indicate that the best way to understand how adversity, spirituality, and flourishing are connected is through the idea I prefer to call “Differential Bliss Receptivity” (DBR). Adversity creates *transcendence* – favourable conditions for spiritual growth, fostering a heightened craving for spirituality and expanding the mental capacity to embrace it. Spirituality, in turn, provides and enhances virtues—the essential nutrients for bliss. Yet, true bliss is ultimately achieved

through the time-dependent process of synthesis—facilitated by positive coping strategies involving the “ingestion, digestion, assimilation, and integration” of these virtues.



Maturlu, (2024)

### *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. 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 religion 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. This explains why spirituality is on the rise in adversity-laden regions like Africa while it is declining in WEIRD countries where social and economic security reduces the perceived need for religious support.

### *The Role of Spirituality*

Spirituality enhances essential virtues that are crucial for flourishing. These virtues act like “nutrients” for our mental and emotional well-being. A strong, personal relationship with a loving deity helps

individuals effectively tap into the LOVE virtues. 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 LOVE virtues and more reasons why a secure spiritual relationship is so important will be explained later in this book.

### *The Synthesis Process*

Virtues need to be properly synthesised for flourishing, that is, being “ingested, digested, assimilated, and integrated.” Positive coping strategies like worship, prayer, and meditation facilitate this process. These practices help people absorb and incorporate spiritual virtues into their daily lives, making their sense of flourishing 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 flourishing. 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. Without a strong spiritual base, it can be difficult to embody virtues effectively, which can hinder true flourishing. This might help explain why some individuals and black communities, including those in Africa, may not experience higher levels of flourishing despite being highly religious.

Our research shows that adversity, while difficult, can help people flourish. 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 (Taylor, C., 2017; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Grof, 2000). These experiences can be transformative, leading to profound spiritual growth and flourishing.

## PART IV: THE LOVE MODEL OF BLISS

The LOVE Model of Bliss is a comprehensive framework that integrates religious, psychological, and philosophical principles to guide individuals toward a life of flourishing. An acronym for Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity, the LOVE model serves as a pathway to achieving a state of bliss grounded in spiritual growth, emotional security, and divine connection (Maturly, 2024c). This section elucidates how each of these core virtues contributes to a balanced and fulfilling life, transcending the mere pursuit of material wealth to address holistic well-being for individuals and communities.

The model is founded on the premise that true bliss, or flourishing, is rooted in God's love, which acts as the ultimate source of human fulfilment. This divine love forms the foundation upon which the four virtues rest: Linkedness represents unconditional acceptance and belonging, fostering a sense of unity with God, others, and the universe. Opulence denotes divine providence and efficacy, assuring abundance and satisfaction through faith in God's provision. Valory emphasizes

life purpose and tranquillity, encapsulating vitality, engagement, and alignment with meaningful pursuits. Equanimity reflects courage and resilience, embodying peace and harmony, even amidst life's challenges.

Bliss, as conceptualised in this model, transcends superficial happiness and fleeting pleasures. It embodies enduring well-being that integrates physical, economic, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions. This balance enables individuals to live a life deeply connected with God's purpose, promoting not just survival but true flourishing.

### **The PICH: Place I Call Home**

I have found a place, a sanctuary that exists beyond sight, sound, or imagination. This place is secret, personal, private, and profoundly intimate. It cannot be seen by the naked eye, no ear can hear it, and no mind can fully imagine it without divine revelation.

In this sacred space, I experience LOVE in its truest essence—an embodiment of Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity. Linkedness in this place is a profound sense of belonging, an unbreakable oneness with God, others, and the universe. In this divine, universal family, I am unconditionally accepted, appreciated, and cherished as I am. Each being and everything is uniquely beautiful yet deeply connected in perfect harmony.

Opulence here is abundance, achievement, and satisfaction. I am assured of all I need, for God, my loving Father, is the ultimate source of provision. As His child, I am capable and worthy of every good thing. My heart overflows with gratitude and contentment, knowing I am complete and fully provided for.

Valory fills me with a vibrant sense of purpose, vitality, and engagement. My life here is rich in meaning and pursuits worth every effort.

My physical and mental vitality abound, and I am joyfully absorbed in endeavours aligned with God's plan, bringing value to myself and those around me.

Equanimity reigns supreme—a state of ultimate bliss, peace, and serenity. Tranquillity, harmony, and joy flow freely, filling me with an abiding sense of satisfaction and peace that surpasses all understanding.

In God's LOVE, I find fulfilment that words cannot express. It is the ultimate treasure, a divine gift that overshadows every worldly pleasure. Once you taste this LOVE, everything else fades into insignificance. It is a blissful energy that feels as natural as water's inherent wetness—inseparable and unchanging.

This bliss is more fulfilling than wealth, fame, power, or even life itself. In this place, God's presence is my everything, filling me beyond all measure. This place might be secret, but it is not far away. I do not need a canoe, chariot, or rocket to get there. This place is right here in my heart; it is within me!

This home, this sanctuary, is my fortress, my strong tower, my refuge. Accessible at all times, it is God's residence, a place of absolute safety and security. No force—neither life nor death, nor any power in the universe—can separate me from His presence. This is the place I call home, my eternal sanctuary. And here, I will dwell forever.

## Chapter 10: The Fundamentals of LOVE

### Model of Bliss

“Bliss” refers to a life that transcends mere existence, embodying a holistic state of well-being that includes physical, economic, social, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Its defining characteristic is its divine nature, extending beyond the present life into eternity. This life is deeply rooted in God’s love (agape), which serves as the foundational source of the four core composite virtues: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—collectively represented by the acronym LOVE (Maturly, 2024c). In essence, bliss is achieved through a harmonious balance of these core virtues, fostering an optimal state of well-being across all domains of life.

#### **Linkedness (Unconditional Acceptance and Belonging)**

Linkedness signifies a profound sense of connection and belonging that stems from unconditional acceptance. It underscores the harmony between individuals, God, and the wider world.

#### **Key beliefs associated with Linkedness include:**

- Feeling part of an interconnected family encompassing God,

people, and nature, all collaborating in unity and harmony.

- Embracing one's identity as a beloved child of God, embodying His nature and character.
- Trusting in God's unconditional and everlasting love, unwavering despite mistakes or imperfections.

### **Opulence (Divine Providence and Efficacy)**

Opulence centres on the assurance of divine provision alongside belief in one's worthiness and capacity to attain both material and spiritual abundance. It merges faith in divine providence with confidence in personal efficacy.

#### **Key beliefs associated with Opulence include:**

- Trusting that God will provide for all spiritual and physical needs, such as health, shelter, and sustenance.
- Believing in one's worthiness and ability to achieve material abundance while fulfilling both God's purpose and personal aspirations.
- Maintaining faith that needs will be met in both anticipated and unforeseen ways.

### **Valory (Life Purpose and Tranquillity)**

Valory reflects the pursuit of purpose and the tranquillity that accompanies a meaningful life. It highlights alignment with God's will as the foundation for personal fulfilment.

#### **Key beliefs associated with Valory include:**

- Recognising one's life as divinely designed to positively impact others.
- Discovering fulfilment and joy in activities aligned with God's will.
- Attaining profound satisfaction and tranquillity through living out one's purpose.

### **Equanimity (Courage and Resilience)**

Equanimity embodies the courage to confront life's challenges and the resilience to grow through adversity. It represents unwavering reliance on divine strength and an optimistic view of hardship.

#### **Key beliefs associated with Equanimity include:**

- Trusting God as a source of comfort and strength, making every challenge surmountable.
- Letting go of worry, rooted in faith that God will ensure all things work for good.
- Recognising hidden benefits within challenges, even when they are not immediately evident.

### *LOVE Assessment Tool*

The LOVE Assessment Tool (LAT) is a validated instrument designed to assess holistic flourishing through four dimensions derived from the LOVE model: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity (Maturlu, 2025). Each dimension captures a core aspect of personal and spiritual well-being:

The LAT comprises 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, covering these dimensions. Scores are calculated for each subscale and overall alignment with the LOVE model. Higher scores indicate stronger alignment, signifying a flourishing state that transcends temporary happiness by integrating physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being (See appendix<sub>1</sub>).

Psychometric validation has demonstrated the LAT's strong reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.968$ ) and validity, confirming its ability to measure distinct but interconnected constructs. Convergent

validity was established through moderate correlations with existing well-being scales, while low correlations with unrelated constructs supported discriminant validity.

The LAT serves as a practical tool for promoting flourishing across diverse contexts, including clinical, educational, and community settings. It bridges psychology and spirituality, emphasising the role of agape—unconditional divine love—in fostering holistic well-being. By providing insights into personal strengths and growth areas, the LAT empowers individuals to navigate life's complexities with a sense of divine connection and purpose, facilitating a transition from mere existence to thriving.

### *LOVE: Nutrients of Bliss*

Imagine your body as a finely tuned machine that requires a balanced diet to function properly. You need carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and water to maintain physical health. Having too much of one nutrient, such as fat or carbohydrates, does not compensate for a lack of protein or essential vitamins. When any of these essential nutrients are missing, your body begins to suffer, leading to malnutrition. This imbalance can cause fatigue, illness, and a host of other physical issues, making it clear how crucial a balanced diet is for overall well-being.

Now, apply this analogy to your soul. Just as your body requires physical nourishment, your soul needs physiological, emotional, and spiritual nourishment to experience bliss. This nourishment comes from a balanced 'diet' of LOVE. When your soul is deprived of this essential LOVE, it leads to what I call 'LOVE Deficiency Syndrome.' Much like how malnutrition results from a lack of physical nutrients, misery and emotional suffering stem from a deficiency in LOVE.

In other words, just as a balanced diet is essential for physical health, a balanced intake of LOVE is crucial for emotional and spiritual well-being. When we lack this balance, we become vulnerable to feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and despair—the emotional equivalents of malnutrition. By ensuring that our lives are rich in LOVE, we can achieve a state of bliss, just as a balanced diet leads to physical health.

These LOVE virtues will be discussed in more detail in the coming sections of this book.

### *Failure to Flourish: LOVE Deficiency Syndrome*

Christian and biblical teachings on sin aim to guide individuals toward a spiritually fulfilling and ultimately blissful life. These prescriptions and prohibitions are designed to foster virtues that lead to eternal happiness and moral wholeness. Sin, in this context, signifies a deviation from divine principles, resulting in misery and suffering. Here, we explore and contrast two perspectives on sin: the infringement of divine law versus the deficiency of love, particularly through the lens of love deficiency.

### *The Infringement Perspective*

For centuries, most theologians have viewed failure to live a blissful life through the lens of sin—a violation of divine law. This infringement perspective, deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, sees sin as “missing the mark” (Wolff, 1974; Kittel & Friedrich, 1964). The Hebrew word “חַטָּא” (chet) and the Greek “ἁμαρτία” (hamartia) both convey this idea. Sin, in this view, is about breaking rules, straying from the path laid out by God. Consider the familiar moral failings like smoking, substance abuse, greed, and sex addiction. These behaviours are often seen as transgressions, acts that harm not just oneself but also one’s

relationship with the divine (Harris, 2023). Christian scriptures, like the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) and Galatians (5:22–23), emphasise virtues such as humility, love, joy, and self-control as essential for spiritual fulfilment. Sin, then, is seen as the opposite—leading to spiritual death and suffering (James 1:14–15; Romans 6:23).

Historical theologians like C.S. Lewis (1952) and Augustine of Hippo (2003) echoed this belief, teaching that following divine guidance brings happiness, while sin leads to suffering. This legalistic perspective has shaped much of our understanding of morality and spiritual well-being. However, scholars such as Martin J. (2022) and Wilson (2024) have rightly argued that this infringement perspective may overlook the deeper, more emotional causes of these behaviours, focusing too narrowly on external actions rather than inner transformation.

Now, let us explore a different perspective—one that views sin not as a mere breach of law but as a symptom of a deeper problem: a lack of love. Imagine your soul as having a “LOVE space,” a void that needs to be filled to experience true fulfilment. This LOVE space can only be filled with genuine love from others, yourself, or God (Dunbar, 2018; Saramäki et al., 2014). Studies show that when people feel a deficiency in love, they often try to fill that void with substitutes—food, sex, smoking, money, fame, or addictive behaviours (Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Lomas, 2015a). These actions are not just moral failings; they are cravings for love. Take, for example, someone struggling with sex addiction or substance abuse. From this perspective, these behaviours are attempts to fill an emotional or spiritual emptiness, what we might call “LOVE Deficiency Syndrome”. Greed, too, can be seen as a sign of this lack of love—a desperate attempt to fill the void with material wealth rather than appreciating the love already present in one’s life.

*Andes flight disaster*

The harrowing tale of the Andes flight disaster is a powerful example of how human behaviour—no matter how extreme or bizarre—is deeply rooted in the hunger to cope and survive. On October 13, 1972, a Uruguayan Air Force Fairchild FH-227D, carrying 45 passengers, including a rugby team, their friends, and family, crashed into the remote and frigid peaks of the Andes Mountains (Read, 1974). Stranded at over 11,500 feet with no immediate hope of rescue, the survivors were thrust into a brutal battle for survival.

Faced with dwindling food supplies, freezing temperatures, and the harsh reality of their situation, the survivors were driven to an unimaginable decision: to eat the bodies of their deceased friends and teammates in order to stay alive. This decision, while shocking to many, was not made lightly. The majority of the survivors were devout Catholics, and they struggled deeply with the moral implications of their actions. However, in the end, the primal need to survive—a need that overrides moral boundaries when life is at stake—compelled them to act (Parrado & Rause, 2006).

The extreme behaviour of these individuals was not a reflection of their character but a desperate response to their deprivation of essential resources. Their story underscores a broader truth about human behaviour: When people are deprived of what they fundamentally need, including physical resources like food and warmth, or emotional and psychological ones like love and connection, they may resort to extreme and desperate actions in an attempt to cope and survive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Just as the survivors in the Andes had to do whatever was necessary to stay alive, people in everyday life may exhibit behaviours that seem irrational, extreme, or even harmful when they are starved of essential human needs. The hunger to cope and survive can push people to act

in ways they never imagined possible, whether it's in a life-or-death situation in the mountains or in the emotional struggles of daily life.

Understanding this can foster greater empathy and compassion, as we recognise that at the core of even the most extreme behaviour is often a person struggling to survive in a world where their most basic needs are unmet. The drive to cope and survive is a fundamental part of the human experience, shaping our actions in ways that are sometimes difficult to comprehend but are always grounded in the instinct to live and thrive, even in the face of overwhelming adversity (Frankl, 2006).

### *God: The Ultimate Source of Love*

So, where does this love come from? The answer lies in the very essence of God. The Bible tells us in 1 John 4:8 that “God is love.” This divine love—agape—is not just an emotion but the very nature of God. It's the fuel our souls were designed to run on. C.S. Lewis beautifully captured this idea, comparing our need for God to a car's need for petrol. Just as a car won't run on anything but petrol, our souls cannot truly thrive on anything but God's love (Lewis, 1952; cited in Lewis, 2001). This divine connection is the source of all virtues—humility, joy, self-control, and love. Unlike other models that rely on human effort, the LOVE framework emphasises that these virtues flow naturally from a secure relationship with God. This divine connection is not something we achieve through sheer willpower but through surrendering to God's grace. The Bible, in passages like John 3:16 and Galatians 5:22–23, underscores that a life rooted in divine love is one of true bliss.

### *Why the LOVE Deficiency Concept Matters*

The LOVE Deficiency concept has some clear advantages over the traditional way of thinking about wrongdoing. Instead of just looking at what people do wrong, it tries to understand the deeper emotional and psychological reasons behind their actions. Focusing on LOVE—both giving and receiving—encourages a kinder and more understanding response to people’s mistakes. This model helps us see these struggles in a more human way, suggesting that when people do wrong, it might be because they lack LOVE in their lives (Walker, 2023).

Rather than simply condemning these behaviours as sins, the LOVE Deficiency perspective asks us to look deeper, viewing these actions as signs that a person’s soul is in need of God’s love. This approach promotes personal and spiritual growth by encouraging a connection with divine love rather than just following rules. It pushes for real change by helping people fill that gap of love in their lives and encouraging them to experience and express love. When people are finally filled with LOVE, they resort to a blissful life characterised by rational, benevolent behaviours.

Some critics may argue that this model oversimplifies complex issues or reduces personal responsibility (Davis L., 2022; Davis M., 2022). However, by focusing on the healing power of love, the model offers a way to foster true moral and spiritual development, moving beyond just enforcing rules to promote genuine change.

As we journey through life, we are called to nourish our souls with LOVE, to fill that space within us that craves connection, compassion, and divine grace. In doing so, we move from a state of misery to one of bliss, living a life that reflects the love of God in every action, thought, and feeling. This is the true path to personal and spiritual development—a path paved with love.

### *In Summary*

In conclusion, the LOVE Model provides a unique, transformative framework for flourishing by integrating principles from Judeo-Christian theology, philosophy, and positive psychology. Rooted in the teachings of Christ, it emphasises agape—selfless, unconditional love—as the foundational virtue for true flourishing (Thayer & Smith, 2016). Unlike models that focus on personal effort or ethical principles, the LOVE Model centres on the transformative power of a secure, attachment-based relationship with a loving God. This approach shifts the narrative from fear, guilt, and isolation to one of divine love, acceptance, and connection.

A key distinction of the LOVE Model is its eternal perspective, offering a vision of abundant life that extends beyond immediate circumstances to encompass enduring hope and purpose. By addressing existential questions such as the nature of suffering, the purpose of life, and the path to thriving, the model fosters lasting fulfilment and meaning, both in this life and in the eternal realm. This perspective makes the LOVE Model a valuable resource for individuals within the Judeo-Christian tradition and those seeking to explore it.

The LOVE Model also bridges the historical divide between psychology and spirituality. In contrast to early 20th-century views, such as Freud's dismissal of religion as pathological (Freud, 1927), the model highlights the therapeutic benefits of spirituality, particularly its role as a protective factor against mental health challenges. Its holistic approach, which integrates insights from theology, psychology, and philosophy, fosters common ground between clinicians and spiritually inclined individuals, promoting mutual understanding and support.

For practitioners, the LOVE Model provides practical guidance for tailoring interventions that harness spirituality as a resource for resilience and flourishing. By defining flourishing as “bliss”

rooted in agape, and through its four virtues—Linkedness, Opulence, Valour, and Equanimity (LOVE)—the model offers a compassionate, empirically informed, and spiritually grounded path for achieving holistic well-being, particularly for those navigating adversity. It is a powerful tool for both academic inquiry and practical application, uniquely suited to fostering flourishing in this life and beyond.

## Chapter 11: Linkedness

Linkedness embodies a deep sense of attachment, belonging, and relationships. It encompasses our connections with God, others, and our place within the *cosmatos*—a unified and interdependent universal theistic body. Linkedness is rooted in the profound understanding that, while each person is uniquely different, they are an integral part of the *cosmatos*.

Linkedness is essential to monotheistic spirituality. Monotheism, derived from the Greek words “mono”, meaning one, and “Theos,” meaning God, is a spiritual framework where belief in one God forms the foundation of teachings and practices (Gottlieb, 2006; Riggs, 2006). Some scholars, such as Granqvist (2020) and Granqvist & Kirkpatrick (2004), interpret monotheistic spirituality through John Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory, defining it as an attachment to God. Thus, linkedness represents an enduring psycho-spiritual relationship between a theistic believer and God—the sacred deity conceptualised as the ultimate benevolent power, creator, omnipotent, and omniscient (Richards & Bergin, 2005).

Cosmatos: The Universal Body of God

The term “cosmatos” combines Greek roots: “kosmos” (universe), “soma” (body), and “os” (divine essence). Thus, the *cosmatos* represent an interconnected and interdependent universal body infused with God’s presence. This concept highlights the spiritual dimension inherent in the interconnectedness of all beings, underscoring the divine presence within the *cosmatos* and each individual.

Linkedness aligns with the Apostle Paul’s conceptualisation of the Body of Christ in his epistles. Both concepts emphasise the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings, highlighting profound spiritual unity. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 and Romans 12:4–5, Paul elaborates that believers collectively form the Body of Christ. Regardless of their identity, role, or function, each member is vital to the body’s health and functionality. Paul stresses that just as a physical body comprises many parts, each with a unique and indispensable function, so too is the Body of Christ made up of many members, each contributing to the whole.

### *Spiritual Roots and Familial Identity*

Linkedness forms the foundation of our spiritual roots and identity. According to sacred texts, God created humans in His image (Genesis 1:27). After forming the body from clay—symbolising the intertwining of humans and nature—God breathed life (His Spirit) into it, making man a living being (Genesis 2:7). This signifies that God is both our biological and spiritual source, making Him our ultimate parent. We are children of God, bearing His nature within us (John 1:13). Jesus affirmed this by saying, “you are gods and the children of the Highest God” (John 10:34; Psalms 82:6). As His children, we can call God our Abba—a Greek term for “Father,” signifying our source, provider, and protector (Barr, 1988). As God’s children embodying His nature (John 1:13), we are eternally part of a divine royal family (Galatians 4:6–7;

Maturlu, 2009).

In Jesus Christ's worldview, the concept of *cosmatos* extends to the idea of a universal family. We are all interconnected as part of God's creation, forming a single, divine family under His loving parenthood. This universal family embodies the unity and love that reflect God's nature, reinforcing our inherent connectedness through Him.

One day, I walked into a supermarket to buy a drink for lunch. I quickly grabbed the last can of my favourite drink from the shelf and headed to the checkout. To my surprise, after scanning the item, the cashier couldn't find the price for it, as the can wasn't individually priced. It was meant to be sold as part of a pack of four and had no value in isolation. As a result, I had to choose a different drink. In the same way, we, as individuals, cannot exist in isolation. Like that can, we are meant to thrive as part of a greater whole. Our identity and value are deeply connected to something beyond ourselves—the *cosmatos*—the universal family of God's creation.

God created our natural environment before creating humans (Genesis 1:1-31). Not only was nature created first, but our bodies were also made from nature (Genesis 2:7). Thus, God, human beings, and the environment are intertwined. Linkedness involves recognising that we are already part of the *cosmatos*—an interconnected and interdependent world under God. When one's spiritual eyes are opened, one can experience God with profound clarity, becoming aware of one's spiritual roots, identity, and connectedness.

### *We are Gods*

In my book *We Are Gods* (Maturlu, 2009), I explored the profound concept that we are, indeed, the beloved children of our Heavenly Father, God. If God is truly our Father, it follows that we belong to a divine royal family. Just as Maturlu is my "earthly" surname, my

true eternal family name is God. Understandably, some readers found this notion unsettling. The idea that we are gods can seem offensive, unbelievable, or even strange. This reaction is largely because many of us have been taught that God, the Almighty, is too holy, too powerful, and too perfect to be compared to mere mortal beings. While it is true that God, our Father, surpasses us in perfection and power, this does not change the fact that we are His children. We possess His divine nature and the potential to grow and become perfect, just as our Father is perfect. Just as children grow and mature to resemble their parents, God's ultimate aim is for us to mature and grow to match His perfection. As Jesus instructed, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

We call the offspring of a dog a dog without hesitation. Yet, for some reason, we struggle to call ourselves gods. If we truly believe that God created us and breathed His life into us, we should have no difficulty believing that we are His children. The book of Genesis records that God said He created us to be like Him—to bear His nature and character (Genesis 1:26–27).

Jesus Christ faced similar criticism. He was crucified because He—an ordinary human—called Himself the Son of God, and indeed, God (see John 10:33–36). Many accepted Jesus as a genius, a great teacher, and a man of peace. They admired Him for His humanitarian works, for defending the weak, and for His love for the poor. Yet, they stumbled over what they perceived as His "arrogance" and "blasphemy" when He claimed to be God.

However, what Jesus believed was neither strange nor inflammatory. He simply reiterated what all sacred texts had long acknowledged. He did what every one of us is meant to do—publicly and confidently proclaim that God, the Almighty, is our Father and that we are, by nature, gods. In response to the accusations against Him, Jesus cited a powerful statement from God: "I say, 'You are gods, and all of you

are children of the Most High...” (Psalm 82:6–7). God Himself, in this text, officially, publicly, and proudly declared all human beings as His children and, therefore, gods. He delegated His authority to us to care for all creation and each other.

The sense of connectedness to God and others was central to Jesus’ teachings. The first two words of the Lord’s Prayer, taught by Jesus, are “Our Father” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). This prayer emphasises our shared relationship with God as His children. Moreover, Jesus’ last prayer was for His followers to know that they are eternally connected as one with Christ and God the Heavenly Father: “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21).

### *Linkedness and Human Relationships*

To be linked means relating to and belonging not only to God but also to people, nature, and the environment (Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Lomas, 2015b). Humans are hardwired to be securely connected and belong to something larger than themselves. Ainsworth (1969) argues that attachment is essential for existence—a dependency need in its own right. Just as a baby cannot survive in the womb without an umbilical cord, a child cannot thrive outside without attachments (Bowlby, 1973).

Our biological engineering for connection is driven by a system in our brain called the affiliative system, which helps us form and maintain close relationships. According to Berridge (1996) and Berridge and Kringelbach (2015), this system relies on bonding hormones and is activated by behaviours that build connections, such as closeness to someone and gentle touch. Endorphins, important for bonding, are released when soft, slow stroking activates C-tactile fibres (Löken

et al., 2009). This system is also triggered by storytelling, laughing, singing, dancing, and eating together. These endorphins make us feel warm and content, which helps build and maintain relationships. The affiliative system also helps manage stress, supports emotional balance, and boosts our immune and digestive systems (Carter, 1998; Depue & Morrone-Strupinsky, 2005).

When we feel threatened or in need, our aversive motivation system leads us to seek comfort through attachment behaviours like crying or clinging. A caring response from someone we love (or even a spiritual connection) activates the affiliative system, providing comfort and lowering stress hormones like cortisol. This positive interaction relieves stress and strengthens our love bond, creating lasting emotional reserves. Consistent, loving interactions help build secure love bonds, shaping how we view ourselves and others, even when the caregiver is absent (Ainsworth, 1969; Bowlby, 1969).

Consistent scientific evidence shows that quality social relationships significantly enhance recovery from physical or mental illness and improve life satisfaction and longevity (Kim et al., 2016; Pressman et al., 2005; van Harmelen et al., 2016). Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015) found that insecure social attachment negatively impacts mortality more than traditional health risks like obesity, poor diet, lack of exercise, substance abuse, and air pollution. Berkman and Syme (1979) discovered that people with unhealthy habits but secure social connections lived longer than those with healthy habits but insecure social connections.

True and lasting happiness and fulfilment come from loving relationships rather than extreme practices. The Harvard Study of Adult Development, starting in 1938 and following over 700 men, found that strong, supportive relationships are crucial for happiness and health (Vaillant, 2012). The study showed that meaningful connections are key to emotional and physical well-being, leading to greater

life satisfaction and longevity (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). True contentment often comes from a deep relationship with a loving God, offering a more lasting path to happiness than extreme ascetic practices.

As previously discussed, social psychologists have long established that each of us has a unique “LOVE” space to be adequately filled to live a fulfilled life (e.g., Dunbar, 2018, 2020; Saramäki et al., 2014). According to experts, this LOVE space can only be filled by consistently experiencing LOVE from others. This necessity arises from the notion that humans are primordially insubstantial, meaning we are not self-made and are inherently dependent on external sources for existence, growth, and fulfilment (Lomas, 2015a; Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Abraham Maslow articulated that isolation can lead to pathology, and conversely, pathological conditions can exacerbate isolation. In essence, isolation pathologises and pathology isolates. He remarked, “Isolating two interrelated parts of a whole from each other, parts that need each other, parts that are truly ‘parts’ and not wholes, distorts them both, sickens and contaminates them. Ultimately, it even makes them non-viable. [This is because] they need each other in order to be themselves” (Maslow, 1964, p. 24).

This perspective underscores the interdependence of our souls within the cosmatos and how their disconnection can lead to dysfunction and deterioration.

## Chapter 12: Opulence

Opulence signifies the assurance of divine provision and the belief in one's worthiness and ability to achieve both material and spiritual abundance. It harmoniously combines trust in God's providence with confidence in personal efficacy. This concept encompasses key beliefs, including the assurance that God will meet all spiritual and physical needs—such as health, shelter, and sustenance—through both expected and unexpected means. It involves recognising one's capacity to achieve abundance while aligning with God's purpose and personal aspirations.

Viewed through a psycho-spiritual lens, opulence transcends material wealth to embody a profound trust in God as the ultimate source of all provision. Rooted in the belief that we are part of a divine, interconnected cosmos, our spiritual identity as children of God underpins this assurance. Galatians 4:6–7 (NIV) illustrates this inheritance:

*“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 sense of divine inheritance reassures believers of God's unwavering care, affirming their worth and security as heirs to divine resources. Similarly, John 10:34 (NIV) reinforces our intimate connection with God: *"You are gods; you are all children of the Most High."* Addressing God as "Abba" reflects a relationship of deep affection and trust, further enriching our understanding of opulence (Barr, 1988).

The Bible consistently portrays God as a steadfast provider. In Isaiah 49:15-16 (NIV), God's love and commitment are likened to a mother's unyielding care:

*"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."*

This imagery highlights the unwavering nature of divine provision. Similarly, in Luke 12:6-29, Jesus reassures His followers of God's care, urging them not to worry about daily needs. He uses the examples of sparrows and lilies—seemingly insignificant creatures cared for by God—to illustrate that human beings, as God's beloved children, can trust in His provision.

Opulence also integrates spiritually-based self-efficacy—a sense of competence grounded in faith. This perspective affirms one's worthiness and capacity to achieve goals aligned with God's will. Proverbs 16:3 (NIV) underscores the importance of committing personal plans to God: *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans."* Similarly, Joshua 1:8 (NIV) emphasises the role of God's Word in achieving success: *"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."*

Within this framework, self-efficacy is not mere self-reliance but a profound trust in God's empowerment to accomplish divinely aligned goals. Philippians 4:13 (NIV) encapsulates this principle: *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* This verse shifts the source

of personal confidence from individual ability to reliance on God's sustaining power, affirming that believers can overcome challenges and succeed through His grace.

This understanding reframes success and opulence as deeply spiritual concepts. Success is no longer a measure of personal achievement but a testament to God's glory, reflecting His guidance and faithfulness. Opulence, therefore, transcends material wealth to embody a life rich in divine purpose and fulfilment. 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 with trust in divine provision, believers cultivate a profound sense of security and purpose. This dynamic interplay ensures that their efforts, guided by faith and divine strength, yield success in fulfilling God's will, embodying a life of true opulence.

### *Kindness: The Overflow of Opulence*

Kindness, as a natural extension of spiritual and emotional abundance, reflects our concern for the well-being of others. Rooted in a deep sense of interconnectedness and shared welfare, it aligns with the biblical principle articulated by Jesus in Luke 10:27: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (NIV). The Greek word translated as "love" here is *Agapao*, which signifies a profound concern for the welfare of others (Thayer & Smith, 2016). Essentially, kindness, as a subset of agape love, flows naturally from God's love for humanity.

The Apostle Paul reinforces this interconnectedness in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26, where he explains the unity of the body of Christ: "God has put the body together... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured,

every part rejoices with it” (NIV). This passage highlights the collective responsibility, empathy, and mutual care that should characterise Christian communities.

Pastor Rick Warren further explains that loving others is not about diminishing oneself but balancing self-regard with regard for others: “Loving others is not about thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking about yourself less” (Warren, 2012). This aligns with the biblical call to love others as we love ourselves—not more, not less, but equally.

Kindness that stems from a sense of abundance or well-being is particularly significant. When people feel secure and blessed, they often find it easier to be generous. This type of kindness is neither selfish (where self-interest dominates) nor self-sacrificing (where one neglects self-care), but embodies a sense of “usness.” I propose “usness” to describe the mutual and reciprocal nature of true Christian love, where concern for others is balanced with concern for oneself. This “usness” serves as an antidote to selfishness, promoting a balance that reflects the agape love of God.

In parallel to Bowlby’s attachment theory, which suggests that children’s self-perception is shaped by how their parents treat them (Bowlby, 1969), agape love helps us treat ourselves and others with equal care and compassion. The experience of being loved by God equips us to love others, fostering healthy relationships within the community.

Our interconnectedness means that by helping others, we ultimately benefit ourselves. The commitment to protect the vulnerable stems from the belief that a community is only as strong as its weakest member (Lomas, 2015). Paul illustrates this in 1 Corinthians 12:14–31, where each part of the body is interdependent on the others. This notion is echoed by Philip Yancey, who provides a striking analogy: when one group of cells grows at the expense of the rest of the body, it is called cancer. This abnormal growth, which prioritises its own

survival over the health of the whole, ultimately destroys the body if left unchecked. Yancey explains that communities function in a similar way—when individuals or groups act selfishly, focusing solely on their own interests and neglecting the needs of others, the entire community suffers. This selfishness spreads like cancer, disrupting the harmony and balance needed for collective well-being (Yancey, 1997).

A further metaphor for this interconnectedness can be drawn from Somatoparaphrenia, a perceptual disorder where individuals deny ownership of a limb or part of their body, often due to damage in the right parietal lobe of the brain (Bottini et al., 2002; Vallar & Ronchi, 2002). In this condition, the person's brain misinterprets sensory information, leading them to view a part of their own body as foreign or belonging to someone else (Feinberg, 2022). They may even attempt to remove or harm the limb, reflecting a breakdown in their perception of bodily unity. This disorder exemplifies the destructive impact of disconnection. Just as those with Somatoparaphrenia reject their own limbs, communities that lack a sense of linkedness and shared responsibility may fragment and fall apart.

In contrast, when we perceive ourselves as part of a universal, interconnected body, we foster kindness, harmony, and holistic well-being. Recognising this shared sense of responsibility allows communities to thrive, much like a body that functions smoothly when all its parts are properly integrated. A lack of this perception leads to behaviours that harm both individuals and the collective. Just as damage to the brain can cause a person to reject part of their own body, a lack of spiritual or emotional connection within communities can lead to division, apathy, and neglect of the vulnerable.

It is essential to understand that caring for others is not a prerequisite for receiving God's love but rather a natural outflow of it. Our relationship with God enables this flow of kindness. As we experience

God's love, it naturally extends to those around us. Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that we are saved by grace, not by works. This mirrors C.S. Lewis's insight: "[God does not] love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright but becomes bright because the sun shines on it" (Lewis, 1952; cited in Lewis, 2001).

God's love transforms us, enabling us to extend genuine generosity and compassion. Jesus demonstrated this unconditional love by forgiving and loving those who crucified Him. This divine love shapes our hearts, making kindness an effortless, natural extension of our faith. When rooted in the experience of God's love and spiritual abundance, kindness reinforces the essential interconnectedness of all creation, allowing communities to flourish in mutual care and compassion.

When people feel opulent, they often find it easier to be generous. This type of kindness is neither selfish nor selfless but embodies a sense of "usness," a term I propose to describe the mutual and reciprocal nature of true Christian love. This "usness" serves as an antidote to selfishness. According to Bowlby's attachment theory, children treat themselves and others based on how their parents treat them (Bowlby, 1969). Similarly, *Agapao* enables us to treat ourselves and others with equal care and compassion.

### *Opulence and Well-being: A Theoretical Perspective*

The concept of opulence, understood as the assurance of secure provision from a divine source, naturally extends into expressions of kindness—a manifestation of spiritual and emotional abundance. Together, these dimensions offer a holistic framework for well-being that integrates psychological, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual

elements.

### **Psychological Security and Stress Reduction**

A secure belief in divine provision reduces stress and fosters mental resilience. This assurance is not only personal but extends outward, encouraging acts of kindness rooted in a stable, unshaken mindset. As Jesus taught in Luke 10:27, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (NIV). The Greek term *Agapao*, signifying profound concern for others (Thayer & Smith, 2016), underpins this command, emphasising that kindness arises from a foundation of internal peace and security.

### **Emotional Resilience and Kindness**

Opulence nurtures emotional resilience by fostering a sense of interconnectedness and belonging within a divine cosmic order. This interconnectedness naturally leads to kindness, as believers recognize that their well-being is tied to the welfare of others. The Apostle Paul articulates this in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it” (NIV). Such mutual empathy and care enhance emotional stability, creating a cycle of resilience and relational support.

### **Physical Health Benefits of Kindness**

A secure sense of provision reduces stress and improves physical health, as does engaging in acts of kindness. Scientific evidence indicates that kindness, as a form of positive social interaction, supports immune function, reduces inflammation, and lowers blood pressure. Glover et al. (2023) affirm that both mental calm and altruistic behaviour significantly contribute to physical well-being.

### **Social and Interpersonal Relationships: The Role of “Usness”**

Kindness, rooted in a sense of abundance and interconnectedness, enriches social bonds and fosters a collective identity. Pastor Rick Warren explains this balance succinctly: “Loving others is not about thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking about yourself less” (Warren, 2012). This aligns with the biblical principle of mutual concern,

creating what can be termed “*usness*”—a balance between self-care and care for others. *Usness* embodies the reciprocity and mutuality of agape love, promoting a spirit of unity and shared responsibility, as seen in Christian communities.

### **Spiritual and Existential Fulfilment**

The assurance of divine provision, combined with the practice of kindness, leads to profound spiritual and existential fulfilment. Acts of kindness, flowing naturally from God’s love for humanity, reflect the divine agape love and align personal values with a greater cosmic purpose. Pargament (2023) underscores that aligning oneself with spiritual principles enhances overall life satisfaction.

Opulence, when viewed as secure provision from God, is deeply interconnected with the practice of kindness. This perspective fosters psychological security, emotional resilience, physical health, enriched social relationships, and spiritual fulfilment. Kindness, as a subset of agape love, arises naturally from a state of abundance and well-being, reinforcing a sense of *usness* and promoting balance in relationships. Together, opulence and kindness create a virtuous cycle, reflecting divine love and advancing holistic flourishing for individuals and communities alike.

## Chapter 13: Valory

**Valory** represents the pursuit of purpose and the profound peace that arises from leading a meaningful life. It highlights the alignment with God's will as the ultimate source of personal fulfilment. Central to this belief is understanding one's life as divinely crafted to make a positive impact on others. By engaging in activities that align with God's purpose, individuals experience core positive emotions such as gratitude, joy, and fulfilment, ultimately achieving deep satisfaction and peace.

At its core, Valory reflects a deep sense of meaning and tranquillity, grounded in understanding one's identity and purpose in God. This purposeful living is closely tied to the recognition of intrinsic worth, as emphasised in Romans 8:35-39, which assures believers that nothing can separate them from God's unconditional love. This assurance forms the foundation of self-acceptance and redirects focus from societal definitions of success to the enduring dignity of being God's creation (Warren, 2012). Such a divine perspective shifts priorities towards lasting fulfilment rather than fleeting accomplishments. Central to this is the promise of the "peace that surpasses all under-

standing” (Philippians 4:7), a divine serenity that transcends worldly challenges and firmly anchors individuals in God’s presence.

Additionally, tranquillity, often viewed as a natural outcome of a life enriched by blessings, is intricately linked to the practice of gratitude.

### *Gratitude: The Heart of Contentment*

Contentment, often considered a natural extension of a life rich in blessings, is intimately tied to the practice of gratitude. The word “gratitude” itself stems from the Latin *gratus*, meaning “pleasing” or “thankful” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). Gratitude, in its essence, is the heartfelt recognition and appreciation for the good things in our lives, many of which we perceive as unearned or undeserved. This simple yet profound feeling plays a crucial role in our overall well-being, a concept deeply rooted in philosophical traditions, including Aristotle’s idea of *eudaimonia*—the highest form of human good that arises from viewing life as a precious gift from a creator (Aristotle, 1926).

At its core, gratitude is far more than a polite “thank you.” It is a complex emotional state that involves three key components: acknowledging the gift, appreciating its gravity, and recognising the giver. When we view God as the source of our blessings, gratitude takes on a deeply spiritual dimension, transforming into a way of life that fosters contentment, joy, and a strong sense of connection with both the divine and the world around us.

### *Acknowledging the Gift*

The first step in experiencing true gratitude is acknowledging that a gift has been received. In everyday life, this could be as simple as recognising the beauty of a sunrise, the support of a friend, or the comfort of a home. When these gifts are seen as coming from God, this acknowledgement deepens into a spiritual awareness that every good thing in life—whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual—is a manifestation of divine generosity. This recognition is not merely a fleeting thought but a profound realisation that life itself, in all its richness, is a gift. This acknowledgement fosters a sense of humility and wonder, encouraging us to see beyond the mundane and appreciate the divine hand in the blessings we receive.

### *Appreciating the Gravity*

The second component of gratitude is the appreciation of the gift's value. This goes beyond merely recognising that we have received something; it involves deeply understanding and reflecting on the significance of that gift. For example, when we consider the gift of life, health, or love, we begin to see how invaluable these blessings are. This reflection can lead to a greater sense of satisfaction and contentment as we shift our focus from what we lack to what we have. This shift is crucial because it helps us move away from a mindset of scarcity, where we are constantly yearning for more, towards a mindset of abundance, where we recognise and cherish the richness already present in our lives.

Philosophically, this ties back to Aristotle's idea of *eudaimonia*, where true happiness arises not from material wealth or external success but from appreciating life as a valuable gift. By valuing what we have, we cultivate a deep sense of contentment that transcends the

ups and downs of daily life. This contentment is not just about being satisfied with what we have but about finding joy in the very existence of these blessings, seeing them as manifestations of something greater than ourselves.

### *Recognising the Giver*

The final component of gratitude is acknowledging the source of the gift. In a religious context, this means recognising God as the ultimate giver. This acknowledgement is crucial because it transforms gratitude from a personal feeling into a relational practice. When we recognise God as the source of our blessings, we deepen our connection with the divine, fostering a relationship built on trust, devotion, and mutual love. This relationship encourages us to live in a way that honours the gifts we have received, whether through acts of kindness, service to others, or simply by living a life that reflects our gratitude.

This acknowledgement also has a social dimension. By recognising that many of our blessings come through the kindness and generosity of others—who themselves are seen as instruments of divine grace—we strengthen our social bonds. Gratitude, in this sense, becomes a force that not only enhances our personal happiness but also fosters a sense of community and mutual support. It creates a cycle where acts of kindness and expressions of gratitude reinforce each other, building stronger relationships and a more connected society.

### *Types of Gratitude*

There are two types of gratitude: Common and Uncommon gratitude

## 1. *Common Gratitude*

Common gratitude involves being thankful for the positive aspects of your life, even in the midst of suffering. It focuses on appreciating the good that remains despite the challenges or losses you may face.

*Example:* After losing an arm in an accident, you remain thankful for the health of your remaining body.

## 2. *Uncommon Gratitude*

Uncommon gratitude, however, goes deeper. It's an attitude that recognises and praises God's goodness, even for the loss and pain itself. This form of gratitude encompasses all experiences—both positive and negative—and sees God's loving purpose in everything, including suffering. In the Bible, this is referred to as the “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15–17), because it's not easy to praise God when you're hurting. While it's convenient to express gratitude when life goes as planned, uncommon gratitude means praising God even *for* failure, loss, or grief.

Uncommon gratitude counts adversity as a divine gift. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:11–12**:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Similarly, the apostle Paul teaches in **Romans 5:3–5**:

“We also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

James reinforces this idea in **James 1:2–4**:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing [ of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Unlike common gratitude, which can serve as a distraction from pain, uncommon gratitude confronts suffering directly, offering emotional healing by giving a positive meaning to hardship. It transforms adversity into a testimony of God’s love.

This deeper perspective is rooted in the Inherent Good Theory, which asserts that since God is omniscient and omnipotent, nothing happens outside of His will. Furthermore, because God is unconditionally loving, every experience—including hardship--serves a greater purpose for our good.

This is the kind of faith Job demonstrated during his trials. Despite losing his wealth, family, and health, Job declared in **Job 13:15**:

“Even if God kills me, I will still trust Him.”

Alan Redpath similarly described this perspective:

*“There is nothing—no circumstance, no trouble, no testing—that can ever touch me until first it has gone past God and Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand now.” (Redpath, 1955)*

### *Tempering of our Faith*

Uncommon gratitude, then, is rooted in the concept that adversity helps in the process of “testing” or “tempering” of faith. As depicted in the above scriptures, believers are encouraged to view trials and

difficulties as necessary elements in the growth of their spiritual lives. This process of refining faith through hardship can be compared to the tempering of an alloy, where metal is exposed to heat and stress in order to make it stronger and more resilient.

In the same way that metal is tempered, faith is strengthened when it is tested. The scriptures often describe this process as a means by which individuals grow in spiritual maturity and perseverance. Just as metal cannot achieve its full potential without being subjected to extreme conditions, faith cannot reach its true strength without the refining fire of trials. These difficulties serve as a forge, shaping a believer's character and fortifying their trust in God. The testing is not meant to destroy or weaken faith but to enhance its quality and durability, just as tempered metal is more valuable and useful than its untreated form.

Moreover, the scriptures teach that this tempering process results in a more refined, complete faith. As an alloy is made to endure the stresses it will face in use, faith is similarly prepared through trials to withstand the challenges of life. The ultimate outcome of this process is a faith that is "mature and complete," as the scriptures affirm, able to remain steadfast and unshaken even in the face of adversity. It is through the testing and tempering of faith that believers are moulded into the people they are called to be, strong and unwavering, equipped for a life of purpose and perseverance.

In this light, the difficulties we face take on new meaning. They are not simply obstacles but opportunities for growth and transformation, bringing believers closer to the perfected, enduring faith that the scriptures encourage them to strive for. Through this tempering, both faith and character are made strong and capable, ready to reflect the true strength that only comes through enduring life's inevitable trials.

### *The Cycle of Gratitude and Bliss*

The relationship between gratitude and happiness, or bliss, is well-documented in both philosophical and psychological literature. When we practice gratitude, we naturally shift our focus from what we lack to what we have (Kalamatianos et al., 2023). This shift fosters a deep sense of satisfaction and happiness as we begin to see our lives through the lens of abundance rather than scarcity. Neuroscientific research supports this, showing that gratitude activates the brain's reward system, particularly in regions associated with pleasure and bliss (Zahn et al., 2009). This activation reinforces positive emotions, leading to sustained joy and contentment.

Moreover, gratitude creates a cyclical process that perpetuates bliss. As we express gratitude, whether in prayer, through acts of kindness, or simply by reflecting on our blessings, we experience positive emotions. These emotions, in turn, encourage further expressions of gratitude, creating a reinforcing loop of well-being. This cycle not only enhances our personal happiness but also strengthens our social bonds. By acknowledging the kindness and generosity of others, we foster a sense of connection and mutual support, which further contributes to our overall sense of well-being.

### *Living with Purpose on Purpose*

Living purposefully within the Valory framework transcends ambition or short-term goals, offering a profound pathway to spiritual growth and fulfilment. This concept is anchored in the belief that life is a divine calling, preordained by God. Scriptures like Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart") and Ephesians 2:10 ("For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us

to do”) affirm the unique roles believers are destined to play in God’s grand design. This foundational belief underscores the intentionality of human existence and invites individuals to align their lives with this divine purpose.

Martin Luther King Jr. reinforced this notion, emphasizing that a life’s purpose must be significant enough to inspire meaningful action and sacrifices. For King, purpose was intrinsically tied to justice, love, and faith—ideals that called for both personal dedication and social transformation. Aligning one’s actions with this divine mission ensures that each step contributes to a life of fulfilment and alignment with God’s will. The peace that emerges from such alignment, rooted in divine purpose, endures irrespective of external challenges.

### *Engagement as a Dimension of Valory*

Engagement represents an integral dimension of Valory, involving active and passionate participation in pursuits that reflect one’s values and divine purpose. The psychological concept of “flow”, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), captures this state of deep immersion in meaningful activities. In this state, individuals are fully absorbed, experiencing heightened focus, a sense of timelessness, and intrinsic satisfaction. Within Valory, such engagement extends beyond psychological rewards, becoming spiritually transformative as it mirrors alignment with God’s will. This spiritual alignment elevates engagement into a realm where personal growth and collective good intersect.

The Apostle Paul highlights this interconnectedness in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, where he likens believers to the parts of a body, each with distinct but essential roles. This metaphor underscores that every individual’s contributions, when aligned with divine purpose, serve

not only personal fulfilment but also a greater good. By embracing engagement as part of their purpose, individuals flourish spiritually, mentally, and emotionally, cultivating an inner peace that remains steadfast even amid adversity.

### **Strengths, Achievement, and Fulfilment in Valory**

The use of one's signature strengths—core traits that define individual identity—is central to living purposefully within Valory. These strengths, when aligned with divine purpose, enhance engagement and contribute to overall well-being. Seligman (2002) highlights that using strengths in the service of something greater leads to eudaimonia, the highest form of human flourishing. This alignment enriches personal fulfilment while fostering compassionate, resilient communities, reflecting the biblical promise of a peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Achievement, in the spiritual context of Valory, transcends personal milestones. It reflects a profound sense of competence and self-efficacy, affirming one's worthiness and divine empowerment. In John 15:16, Jesus reminds His followers: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." This verse emphasizes that achievement originates from God's purpose, as believers are chosen and equipped for specific tasks that glorify Him.

The assurance that God equips His people with necessary resources, as promised in Philippians 4:19 ("My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus"), extends beyond material provisions. It includes intangible assets like education, resilience, and spiritual gifts. Planning goals in alignment with divine will, as advised in Proverbs 16:3 ("Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans"), ensures that aspirations align with God's purpose, resulting in success that reflects His glory.

### *Meaning, Suffering, and Spiritual Growth*

A deep sense of purpose and meaning, foundational to Valory, often emerges through the experience of adversity. Viktor Frankl (1984), in his seminal work on logotherapy, proposed that meaning can be discovered in suffering. He stated, “In some ways, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice” (p. 117). Frankl’s insights echo the spiritual principle that adversity refines character and fosters spiritual growth, transforming pain into opportunities for a greater purpose.

Frankl also emphasised the importance of love and responsibility toward others, suggesting that awareness of one’s significance to others or a cause provides the strength to endure hardships. As he wrote, “A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being...will never throw away his life” (p. 101). This perspective aligns with the biblical mandate to love and serve others, which amplifies the transformative power of purpose.

Living purposefully within the Valory framework invites individuals to align their lives with divine intention, embracing engagement, strengths, and achievement as pathways to flourishing. It offers a model for thriving that is deeply rooted in spirituality, meaning, and service to others, leading to a life that reflects God’s glory while fostering personal and communal well-being. This purposeful living not only transforms individuals but also uplifts society, creating a harmonious balance between the divine and the practical in everyday life.

## Chapter 14: Equanimity

Equanimity is a profound state of being that embodies both courage and emotional resilience, enabling individuals to face life's challenges with unwavering determination and inner peace. It is a state where individuals cultivate mental balance, effectively managing emotional fluctuations, and drawing on divine strength to navigate adversity. This ability to remain steadfast in the face of difficulty reflects a deeply rooted faith and the belief that challenges are opportunities for growth, rather than threats.

The word *equanimity* itself is derived from two Latin terms: *aequus* (meaning “equal”) and *animus* (meaning “mind”). This etymology reflects the essence of equanimity—maintaining an evenness of mind despite external disturbances, enabling individuals to remain composed in all situations (Etymology Dictionary, 2022). Equanimity, in this sense, can be viewed as emotional balance—the ability to cope with challenges without being thrown off course, to recover quickly from hardship, and to face life's uncertainties with a positive mindset.

## *Emotional Resilience*

Emotional resilience, an essential aspect of equanimity, is the grace to cope well with adversity and rebound from it stronger. True bliss is not the absence of hardship but the ability to enjoy life despite, and sometimes because of, the challenges we face. Studies have shown that this ability to handle hardship, known as Adversity Quotient (AQ), is more important than intelligence (IQ). As Dr. Paul Stoltz explains, those with the highest capacity to overcome adversity are far more likely to be happy and successful, regardless of their intelligence or skills (Reed & Stoltz, 2011).

Resilience can be developed through three key approaches: consolation, self-compassion, and emotional processing.

**Consolation:** Consolation involves receiving compassion and care from others. It's about feeling soothed, unconditionally accepted, and reassured, which helps us navigate difficult emotions and situations. When others offer us warmth and understanding, it creates a safe space for healing and growth (Gilbert, 2005; Gilbert & Procter, 2006).

**Self-Compassion:** Self-compassion is the ability to treat ourselves with the same kindness and understanding we would offer a dear friend (Neff, 2003). It's about generating soothing feelings of warmth and reassurance from within, tapping into an internal reserve of positive emotions. This emotional reserve is built through the loving experiences we've accumulated over time, enabling us to face challenges with greater resilience (Gilbert & Procter, 2006).

**Emotional Processing:** Emotional processing is the ability to change the meaning we assign to our negative experiences. By finding positive meaning in what initially appears negative, we can transform our emotional response. This perspective shift is at the heart of the cognitive-behavioural theory, which teaches that we can't always prevent adversity, but we can control how we think and feel about it

(Beck, 1993; Rachman, 1980).

The Bible offers profound insights into resilience. In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Apostle Paul says, “Our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever.” This scripture suggests that adversity is temporary, universal, manageable and ultimately profitable.

### *Adversity is Temporary*

One of the most comforting aspects of adversity is that it is temporary. No matter how overwhelming or persistent a challenge may seem, it is important to remember that it will not last forever. This temporality is a key factor in developing mental resilience because it allows individuals to maintain hope and perspective during difficult times.

The temporary nature of adversity can be understood through the lens of seasons. Just as nature goes through cycles of growth, dormancy, and renewal, so too do our lives. During tough times, it might feel like winter—cold, barren, and unending. However, just as winter eventually gives way to spring, adversity will give way to better times. Recognising this natural ebb and flow of life helps to cultivate patience and endurance.

Furthermore, the concept of temporality in adversity is deeply rooted in spiritual teachings and philosophy. Many religious texts, such as the Bible, remind believers that suffering is part of a larger divine plan, often leading to personal growth and a deeper understanding of life. For example, in 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, it is written, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” This scripture emphasises that while adversity might seem significant in the moment, it is fleeting when viewed from a larger, more eternal perspective. This understanding of adversity as a temporary phase encourages individuals to focus on

the long-term benefits rather than the immediate pain. It fosters a mindset of endurance and perseverance, knowing that “this too shall pass.” We can navigate difficult periods with greater resilience and hope by holding onto the belief that challenges are not permanent.

### *Adversity is Universal*

Adversity is an inevitable and universal experience, something that every person, regardless of their background, status, or circumstances, will face at some point in their life. This universality of adversity is a powerful equaliser, reminding us that we are all part of the same human experience, bound by the common thread of overcoming challenges. In fact, our life starts with pain:

Your world is dark, safe, secure. You are bathed in a warm liquid, cushioned from shock. You do nothing for yourself; you are fed automatically, and a murmuring heartbeat assures you that someone larger than you fills all your needs. Your life consists of simple waiting – you’re not sure what to wait for, but any change seems far away. You meet with no discomfort, no threatening adventures. Ah, it’s a fine life.

One day you feel a tug. The walls seem to be falling in on you. Those soft cushions are now pulsating and beating against you, crushing you downwards. Your body is bent in half, your limbs twisted and wrenched. You’re falling upside down. For the first time in your life, you feel pain. You’re in a sea of roiling matter. There is more pressure, almost too intense to bear. Your head is squeezed nearly flat, and you are pushed harder, harder...oh, the pain, the noise, the pressure. You hurt all over. You hear the sounds of screams and crying and groaning, and an awful fear rushes in on you. It is happening – your world is collapsing. You’re sure it’s the end of whatever there is. You see a piercing, blinding light. Cold, rough hands pull at you; then a painful

slap. Welcome to the world you have been born! (Yancey, 1990, p. 203).

The universality of adversity fosters a sense of connectedness and empathy among people. Knowing that others have faced and overcome similar struggles can be incredibly reassuring, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. It helps us realise that we are not alone in our suffering and that others can understand and support us through our challenges. This shared experience of adversity also enhances our capacity for gratitude and humility. When we recognise that adversity is not unique to us, but a natural part of the human condition, we are better able to appreciate the good times and remain grounded during the bad. It also allows us to approach others with greater compassion and understanding, knowing that they, too, have faced or will face their own battles.

In religious and spiritual teachings, the idea that everyone will face adversity is often highlighted. For instance, in Christianity, Jesus tells His disciples that in this world they will have trouble but encourages them to take heart because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). This teaching underscores the inevitability of adversity but also offers hope and reassurance that we can overcome these challenges.

By accepting the universality of adversity, we can better prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally to face life's challenges. It also encourages us to seek and offer support within our communities, fostering a culture of mutual care and resilience.

### *Adversity is Manageable*

The notion that adversity is manageable is a cornerstone of mental resilience. It is the belief that no matter how difficult a situation may be, we have the inner strength, resources, and support to navigate and overcome it. This perspective shifts the focus from feeling overwhelmed by challenges to actively engaging with them as problems

to be solved. Adversity is manageable because, at its core, it is an opportunity for growth. Each challenge we face is a test of our resilience, problem-solving abilities, and emotional strength. By approaching adversity with a mindset that it is something we can handle, we empower ourselves to take proactive steps to address the situation. This might involve seeking help, breaking the problem down into smaller, more manageable parts, or simply taking things one day at a time.

This belief in the manageability of adversity is also supported by spiritual teachings. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:13, it is stated,

“God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

This scripture reinforces the idea that no challenge is insurmountable and that we are equipped with the necessary resources and strength to overcome any adversity that comes our way. In practical terms, managing adversity often involves developing coping strategies, building a support network, and maintaining a positive outlook. Coping strategies might include mindfulness practices, stress management techniques, or finding constructive outlets for emotions, such as creative activities or physical exercise. A strong support network of friends, family, or a faith community can also provide the emotional and practical support needed to manage tough times.

Moreover, maintaining a positive outlook—believing that challenges can be overcome—plays a crucial role in managing adversity. Optimism doesn’t mean ignoring the difficulties but seeing them as temporary and solvable. It involves cultivating hope and acceptance, believing in your capacity to cope, and trusting that you can navigate through to the other side. In effect, the belief that adversity is manageable is a powerful tool for building mental resilience. It shifts our mindset from victimhood to empowerment, enabling us

to face life's challenges with confidence, determination, and hope. By embracing this perspective, we are better equipped to not only survive adversity but to grow stronger through it.

Emotional resilience is not just about surviving adversity but thriving because of it. By embracing challenges with grace, compassion, and faith, we can find meaning and growth in every experience, drawing closer to God and becoming stronger, more compassionate individuals. Our struggles shape us, not only for our benefit but also for the benefit of others, as we learn to serve and love more deeply through our shared journey of resilience.

### *Adversity is Profitable*

Adversity, like the cost of doing business, eventually yields profit in the form of lasting benefits. This concept is grounded in what I call the “God is Good” (GIG) Theory. Essentially, the GIG Theory says 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 argued that everything happens under God's watch. Nothing – not even a single sparrow – can be harmed without Him allowing it. Even every hair on our head is numbered, and none of them can fall off without His permission (Matthew 10:30). Jesus appeared to suggest in this verse that everything, including suffering, happens by divine blessing. If it has the approval of a loving God, suffering is inherently profitable, even if that profit is not readily understood.

The GIG theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of suffering, discipline, sacrifice, asceticism, and adversity

in achieving success across various aspects of life. It emphasises the inherent goodness in all experiences, including challenges and setbacks, and underscores the importance of hope, resilience, and discernment in navigating life's difficulties.

Most of the benefits of adversity are not immediately known to us. However, some of them are. In the coming moments, we will learn some of the notable benefits of hardships. By focusing on these benefits, we will be able to navigate difficult moments on our way to emotional fulfilment.

### *Adversity as a Path to Strength and Success*

Success in any field—whether in business, finance, sports, or academics—requires a commitment to discipline and sacrifice. These practices often involve enduring discomfort and overcoming significant obstacles, which are essential for long-term achievement.

Discipline involves consistently applying self-control, focus, and dedication, while sacrifice requires giving up immediate pleasures or comforts for a greater goal. Both are integral to success. In business, discipline might mean adhering to a strategic plan despite setbacks, and sacrifice could involve investing time and resources without immediate returns. In finance, discipline is crucial in managing resources wisely, and sacrifice may involve living frugally to build wealth over time. Athletes must endure rigorous training and make personal sacrifices to achieve peak performance, while students often forgo social activities to excel academically.

The GIG theory suggests that these forms of induced discomfort are inherently good because they contribute to personal and spiritual growth. Every successful person has a story marked by adversity—

whether it be a broken family, a shattered relationship, a failed dream, a bruised career, or a tarnished reputation. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross once remarked:

*“The most delightful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths...” (Kubler-Ross, as quoted in Ayyappan, 2015, p.1).*

Similarly, in his book *The Roots of Resilience*, Brian Tracy states that 95% of people who set goals succeed in their plans. Remarkably, all of those who achieved success encountered significant adversity just before their breakthrough.

Simply put, adversity is not a hindrance to success; it is key to achieving it. People succeed not in spite of adversity but because of it. The trials we face—whether they take the form of sacrifices, failure, ridicule, or disappointment—serve to shape us and prepare us for success. The price we pay enables us to handle success with grace and resilience. Conversely, those who achieve great things without enduring adversity—such as heirs or lottery winners—often struggle to derive lasting satisfaction from their success. In fact, studies show that sudden, unearned wealth can lead to greater unhappiness. For instance, research by Brickman et al. (1978) found that many lottery winners experience a decrease in happiness. Nearly one-third of these individuals not only declare bankruptcy but also suffer from mental health and relationship problems (Hankins et al., 2011).

A famous story is told of a biology teacher who brought a caterpillar to class to observe its transformation into a butterfly. He instructed his students to watch but not interfere with the process. As the caterpillar struggled to emerge from its cocoon, one sensitive student, unable to bear the sight of its suffering, decided to help by breaking the cocoon.

Although the butterfly emerged, it had a swollen body and shrivelled wings. It tried to fly but soon fell and died. Upon his return, the teacher explained that the struggle inside the cocoon was necessary to give the butterfly the strength it needed to fly.

Reflecting on this, Charlie Dexter noted:

*People who patiently toil towards worthwhile dreams and goals, building strong character while overcoming adversity and challenge, grow the strong internal foundation to handle success.*

This idea echoes Christ's description of the road to success as narrow and fraught with difficulty (Matthew 7:13–14). Through both His teachings and personal experiences, Jesus demonstrated that greatness comes through enduring struggle and pain.

John Newton (2015) offered a similar perspective when he suggested that trials are like carefully prescribed medicines given by wise and gracious physicians tailored to our needs. He determines both the frequency and intensity of these challenges according to what is best for us. Therefore, we should trust in His expertise and be thankful for the difficulties He allows us to face. Newton reminds us that every success is accompanied by a proportionate amount of adversity. In fact, one might even suggest that for every trial, an even greater blessing awaits. This reflects the truth behind the old saying, "there is no sweet without sweat." More than just a clever phrase, it implies that sweat is the essential ingredient in the sweet.

Most successful individuals have faced significant obstacles on their journey. According to Forbes et al. (1997), many self-made millionaires have experienced bankruptcy or near-bankruptcy multiple times before achieving success. Their struggles, like the butterfly's, are essential for developing the resilience and strength needed to succeed. These experiences demonstrate that adversity is not something to be

avoided but embraced. It is through overcoming challenges that we build the character necessary to manage and sustain success.

Jesus also taught that the road to greatness is narrow and filled with struggles (Matthew 7:13–14). These struggles are not meant to defeat us but to prepare us for the responsibilities and challenges that come with success. The GIG theory emphasises that adversity is part of God’s plan to refine us, strengthen our faith, and prepare us for greater things.

Central to the GIG theory is the belief in the inherent goodness of all experiences, including suffering. This perspective encourages the development of “informed hope”—a confident expectation that the benefits of adversity will ultimately be revealed.

Informed hope is not blind optimism but a trust rooted in the understanding that God’s goodness is present even in the midst of suffering. This hope provides the strength needed to endure challenges, knowing that they serve a greater purpose in God’s plan. Adversity, while painful, builds mental resilience. Just as physical muscles grow stronger through microtears sustained during exercise, our minds become more resilient through the challenges we face (Miller et al., 2014).

### *Adversity Builds Mental Resilience*

Emotional turmoil, while often overwhelming, can have unexpected benefits. Beyond drawing individuals closer to their faith, it also creates an environment for experiencing deeper love and fostering mental strength. This partly explains the differential spiritual receptibility we discussed earlier in this book.

Scientists have found various ways to assess mental resilience, one of which involves measuring the thickness of brain cortices. Thicker cortices—especially in areas like the parietal, occipital, mesial, cuneus,

and precuneus regions—are linked to stronger mental resilience. On the other hand, thinner cortices suggest a lower capacity for mental toughness (Miller et al., 2014).

Building stronger brain walls is similar to building muscles in the body. Dr. Michael Karns (2018) explains that muscle growth happens through the microtears we sustain during exercise. “The body sends good nutrition and blood to the area to heal, and this process is how muscle mass grows. You have to break muscle down to build it back up stronger” (p. 6). It requires muscle damage, proper nutrition, and rest to grow stronger muscles. In much the same way, emotional trauma can promote thicker brain cortices, much like muscle tears enable growth. Research suggests that emotional distress, like a torn muscle, increases the chances of building mental resilience. Dr. Lisa Miller and her team used MRI scans to study how spirituality influences cortical thickening. Their findings revealed that people who valued spirituality and had experienced major depressive disorder (MDD) had thicker cortices than those who also valued spirituality but hadn’t suffered from MDD (Miller et al., 2014). The study suggested that depression contributed to the growth of thicker cortices. “[Depression] may have allowed for a greater effect of religiosity on cortical thickness [in those with depression], compared to the group without depression, where ceiling effects may have limited the extent to which religiosity could affect brain morphology” (Miller et al., 2014, p. 133).

Dr. Miller’s study suggests that depression may open the mind to divine love, promoting thicker cortices and better well-being. This mirrors the process of muscle recovery, where a damaged muscle combined with proper care leads to strength. Similarly, a mind impacted by depression and nurtured with faith can become more resilient. Other studies have shown that people who endure significant emotional trauma often have a greater capacity for experiencing profound divine love than those with less emotional distress (Pargament, 2002; Smith

et al., 2003).

*Pain: One of the most precious divine gifts*

Many people, myself included at one time, have thought that God's inclusion of pain in the creation of human beings was a mistake. If given the chance to suggest one improvement in God's grand design, many would likely choose to eliminate pain and suffering altogether. After all, pain is often seen as the source of our deepest struggles and sorrows. However, the more we delve into the nature and purpose of pain, the more we realise that pain is, in fact, one of the most important gifts—a divine invention crucial to our survival and well-being.

Pain serves as our body's most reliable warning system. It alerts us to danger, signalling when something is wrong and needs immediate attention. Without this signal, we would be oblivious to injuries and illnesses that could become life-threatening if ignored. For example, the sting of a burn prompts us to withdraw our hand from a hot surface, preventing more severe damage. The sharp ache of a twisted ankle forces us to rest and recover, avoiding further injury. In this way, pain acts as a guardian, protecting us from harm and encouraging healing.

Dr. Paul Brand's work with leprosy patients offers profound evidence of the vital role pain plays in our lives. In their book *The Gift of Pain: Why We Hurt and What We Can Do About It*, Paul Brand and Phillip Yancey (1997) explain that leprosy patients who have lost their ability to feel pain do not suffer less; they suffer more. Without pain to guide them, they inadvertently cause themselves severe injuries, leading to disfigurement, disability, and even death. Their bodies, unable to sense danger, deteriorate in ways that are unimaginable to those who can feel pain. Dr. Brand observed this firsthand and famously said,

If I held in my hands the power to eliminate physical pain from the world, I would not exercise it. (p 13)

This stark reality demonstrates that pain, far from being a flaw in our design, is essential to our physical integrity.

To fully understand the significance of pain, Dr. Brand dedicated decades of his life and millions of dollars to research. His work focused on trying to recreate the sensation of pain for those who had lost it, particularly leprosy patients. He realised that without pain, these patients could not protect themselves from harm, leading to a devastating cycle of injury and infection. Dr. Brand's efforts to recreate a functional pain system were not merely theoretical; they involved practical, painstaking attempts to develop prosthetics and sensory devices that could mimic the protective role of pain. Despite the enormous financial and time investments—spanning over 20 years and costing millions—the goal remained elusive, underscoring the complexity and indispensability of pain in the human experience.

Nevertheless, pain's role extends beyond the physical realm. It also has a profound impact on our emotional and spiritual development. It is through pain that we often grow in empathy, understanding, and compassion. Pain teaches us our limits and helps us appreciate moments of comfort and joy. It connects us to others who suffer, fostering a sense of shared humanity and encouraging us to support one another. In many spiritual traditions, pain is seen as a path to greater wisdom and enlightenment, a catalyst for personal growth and transformation.

Emotional vulnerability, often induced by pain and adversity, can deepen our relationship with God. In times of great distress, many people turn to their faith, finding comfort and strength in their connection with the divine. This increased reliance on God during difficult times is a testament to the inherent goodness in adversity, as it brings us closer to our Creator. The more we struggle, the more we are driven to seek solace in our faith, leading to increased worship and spiritual growth.

Pain also serves as one of God's most effective teaching tools. It acts as a natural alarm, guiding us away from danger and toward growth. When we experience pain, it is often a sign that something in our lives needs to change. By accepting and learning from our challenges, we grow in wisdom and strength. Furthermore, adversity equips us to serve others. Those who have faced hardship are often the best suited to help others through similar struggles. Their empathy and compassion are born from their own experiences of pain and recovery. As Dr. Brand wisely noted, "Thank God for inventing pain." He understood that the suffering we endure not only contributes to our personal growth but also prepares us to be of service to others, embodying the principle of loving and supporting one another.

Consider the story of childbirth. The intense labour pain is a precursor to the incredible joy of bringing new life into the world (Labor & Maguire, 2008). This pain is not a punishment or a flaw but a necessary part of the process that leads to one of life's most profound experiences. Similarly, many of life's greatest achievements and moments of fulfilment are born out of pain and struggle. The endurance of pain often leads to strength, resilience, and a deeper appreciation of life's blessings.

If pain were eliminated, so too would be the depth of our experiences. We would lose not only the ability to protect ourselves from harm but also the profound lessons that pain imparts. Our capacity for empathy, growth, and connection would diminish, leaving us less human in the truest sense. Without pain, we would lack the impetus for personal and spiritual growth, and our understanding of life's meaning and purpose would be shallow.

In effect, pain is not a mistake in God's creation; it is a divine invention, a crucial gift that allows us to live fully and meaningfully. It is through pain that we learn, grow, and connect with others. Pain protects us, teaches us, and ultimately, it is an integral part of what it

means to be human. Science-optimised by Dr Paul Brand's work, the Bible and Christ's persecution and triumph remind us to see pain not as a curse to be eradicated but as a vital, life-affirming force—a reminder of the intricate and purposeful design of our existence. By embracing the lessons that pain teaches us, we come to understand that it is not only a necessary part of life but also a profound and essential one, leading us toward greater wisdom, compassion, and spiritual fulfilment.

### *Asceticism: A Double-Edged Sword in the Pursuit of Spiritual Growth*

Asceticism, characterised by severe self-discipline and the renunciation of physical comforts, has been a significant practice in Christian spirituality. Ascetics often pursue this path to subdue bodily desires, which are viewed as potential obstacles to spiritual growth (Taylor, S., 2005). By denying themselves pleasures, ascetics aim to achieve a closer relationship with God. However, the practice of asceticism must be approached with caution, as it can easily lead to self-harm and psychological distress.

The GIG theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the potential dangers of asceticism. While ascetic practices are intended to foster spiritual growth, they can sometimes result in significant physical and mental harm (Brown, 2018). Extreme forms of asceticism, such as prolonged fasting, sleep deprivation, or self-flagellation, disrupt the body's homeostasis and can lead to altered states of consciousness. These practices, though aimed at spiritual enlightenment, can induce symptoms similar to those of severe mental disorders, such as hallucinations, paranoia, and schizophrenia (Oswald, 1970; Becker, 1973).

The GIG theory suggests that while suffering can lead to spiritual growth, not all suffering is beneficial or necessary. There is a fine line between constructive suffering—suffering that is part of God’s plan for spiritual development—and destructive suffering, which arises from misguided practices, excessive self-denial or self-abuse. Asceticism, when taken to extremes, can cross this line, resulting in harm rather than spiritual benefit. The GIG theory cautions against such practices, emphasising that the inherent goodness of suffering does not justify intentional self-harm.

Despite the dangers, asceticism can have genuine spiritual benefits when practised with wisdom and moderation. By voluntarily relinquishing worldly comforts, ascetics can develop greater self-discipline, humility, and detachment from material possessions. These virtues are essential for a deeper relationship with God, as they help to purify the soul and align the individual’s will with the divine.

The GIG theory acknowledges the value of asceticism when it is practised within the framework of inherent goodness. When ascetics endure hardship not for the sake of suffering itself but as a means to a greater spiritual end, their suffering can indeed be part of God’s plan for their growth. This type of suffering is seen as a “cross” that one is called to bear—a burden that, while difficult, leads to spiritual enlightenment and a closer connection with the divine (Louth, 1996).

## *Not Every Suffering Is Your “Cross”: Discerning Necessary from Unnecessary Suffering*

While the GIG theory acknowledges the inherent goodness in suffering, it also stresses the importance of discernment in understanding which forms of suffering are necessary—referred to as “cross suffering”—and which are avoidable. The cross suffering has the following characteristics:

**Beyond One’s Control:** Cross suffering is marked by its uncontrollable nature. It is the kind of suffering that cannot be avoided or easily alleviated, such as chronic illness or the loss of a loved one. This type of suffering serves a higher purpose in God’s plan.

**Extremely Intense:** Cross suffering is often severe and requires divine assistance to endure. It drives individuals to seek God’s strength, as seen in Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane or Paul’s plea regarding his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

**Purposeful:** Cross suffering has a specific purpose within God’s plan, often related to spiritual growth or fulfilling a mission. While the purpose may not be immediately clear, enduring this suffering with faith leads to deeper spiritual development.

Jesus did not treat every adversity as His cross. He and His family took appropriate measures to avoid danger—Jesus’ parents fled to Egypt to escape King Herod’s plot, and Jesus avoided capture when His time had not yet come (Matthew 2:13–14; John 8:59). These actions illustrate the importance of discernment in dealing with challenges. While Jesus accepted the suffering necessary for His mission, He did not seek out or passively accept all forms of adversity. Jesus’ mission was to help humanity achieve abundant life. He consistently alleviated pain and resolved problems, demonstrating that Christians are called to address situations that can be changed and endure those that cannot. The core Christian teaching is to view every problem as potentially

solvable and to surrender only when nothing can be done or when God directs otherwise. When faced with such moments, Christians are advised to pray, “May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

### *Bear Pain; Don't Be a Pain*

Peter J. Daniels is a renowned Australian businessman, author, and motivational speaker, celebrated for his remarkable journey from illiteracy and poverty to financial success. Overcoming significant challenges, Daniels educated himself and built a global business empire, becoming a sought-after speaker on personal development and wealth creation. His teachings emphasise the importance of perseverance, discipline, and faith.

I had the privilege of interviewing Daniels on the subject of pain and financial success. When asked if one could succeed in business or life without suffering, his answer was a resounding, “No, there is no other way one can succeed without pain.” However, he added that to live a fulfilling life, one must “bear pain, but don’t be a pain.”

The GIG theory, therefore, emphasises the principle of “Bear Pain; Don’t Be a Pain,” which advises that while we may be called to endure certain sufferings, we should not unnecessarily inflict suffering on others or ourselves.

To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic. It is important to note that suffering is not necessary to find meaning. However, when suffering is unavoidable, it can be meaningful (Frankl, 1984, p. 70).

Dr. Viktor Frankl clarifies that suffering should not be sought out or glorified, but when it is unavoidable, it should be approached with

the intention of finding meaning. This mindset empowers individuals to endure suffering without being overwhelmed by it. Scripture also teaches that enduring unjust suffering—suffering for doing good—is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:19–21). Such suffering refines our character and deepens our faith, aligning us more closely with God’s will. However, the GIG theory emphasises the importance of avoiding unnecessary suffering, whether through misguided practices like extreme asceticism or causing harm to others. While suffering can have a redemptive quality, it does not justify causing pain without purpose. Christians are called to alleviate suffering wherever possible, embodying compassion and mercy in their actions.

The GIG theory offers a robust framework for understanding the role of discipline, sacrifice, asceticism, and adversity in life’s journey. By recognising the inherent goodness in challenges and the importance of hope, the GIG theory empowers individuals to embrace the difficulties associated with pursuing success in business, finance, sports, academics, and other areas of life.

Through the lens of the GIG theory, discipline and sacrifice are not burdens but essential elements of personal growth and achievement. Asceticism, when practised wisely, can deepen one’s spiritual connection, but it must be approached with caution to avoid the pitfalls of self-harm. The theory also provides guidance on discerning which forms of suffering are necessary for spiritual development (“cross suffering”) and which should be avoided or alleviated. By following Jesus’ example of addressing solvable problems and surrendering only when necessary, individuals can navigate life’s challenges with resilience, purpose, and a deeper connection to the divine.

This approach is beautifully encapsulated in Reinhold Niebuhr’s (1951) Serenity Prayer, which encourages a balanced response to adversity:

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.  
(pp. 251–252)

The GIG theory echoes this wisdom, promoting the courage to face necessary challenges, the grace to endure unavoidable suffering, and the discernment to understand the difference.

## Chapter 15: Agapology: Studying the Peace that Passes Understanding.

Following my personal and family challenges, I turned to fasting, praying, meditating, and seeking wisdom from others who had weathered their own storms. My soul was burdened with emotional trauma, and on one particular night, the weight of it became nearly unbearable—more intense than the near-death experience I had endured two decades before. I was hurting because the people I loved and cherished the most – my wife and children– were taken away from me. It felt like my heart had been brutally plucked out. My heart was bleeding.

However, in that dark hour, something extraordinary occurred. The agony that gripped me so fiercely was suddenly lifted, replaced by a peace beyond measure. As I tried to comprehend what had just happened, I heard a still, small voice from God whisper, “Today, I have baptised you in My love.” In that moment, my spiritual eyes were opened, and my perception of life was forever transformed. From that night forward, the world around me took on a new radiance. Everything seemed beautiful, infused with a beauty I had never before noticed. I felt an overwhelming love for all of creation. Even the most ordinary

things—like dustbins—now seemed beautiful. For the first time, I fell deeply in love with nature. I felt a profound connection with flowers, gardens, plants, and the flowing waters of streams. I spent countless hours in parks and on bushy hills, listening to the sweet melodies of birds and marvelling at the mesmerising wonders of God’s creation. The tranquillity and love that permeated everything I saw were too evident to ignore.

In all my years as a “born-again” Christian and preacher, I had never heard of this baptism or gift of God’s love. Until that night, prosperity meant nothing more than material wealth and love from my wife, children and people who mattered to me. However, now, I realised there was another love—a far better love—that transcended material possessions and human relationships. I felt truly born again, experiencing what I now call the “blissful life.”

For me, a blissful life did not necessarily mean that the experiences and everything else in my environment changed. Everything around me remained practically the same. I was still without the love of my wife, a relationship with my children, a home, a job, and without a steady income. What changed, however, was my perspective about life around me. It’s like I had a new pair of eyes. Seeing the same life through God’s love made me enjoy life like never before.

It took time for my new perspective to fully integrate, but now, my life overflows with gratitude, humility, and concern for others. I have since grown in every aspect of my life. Today, my life is richer and more rewarding than ever before. I am blessed to be married to an incredible woman, a soul more beautiful than I could have ever imagined. My relationships with my children, and even with my ex-wife, have never been more enriching. Professionally, I thrive in a career that harmonises my spiritual, psychological, and material goals. I am living proof that one can flourish not just despite adversity but because of it, turning trials into triumphs and hardships into bliss.

Beneath the wreckage of my broken life, I found something precious and eternally true. I found the love of God. As Vaneetha Risner (2016) so beautifully expressed, God offered His presence when I sought His presents—because He had a much grander plan for me, one that would glorify Him and bring me everlasting joy. Indeed, God’s presence –the essence of love– is more valuable, more precious, and more fulfilling than anything He could give me. He alone is the ultimate treasure. Knowing Him is worth suffering for, living for, and dying for. And in His love, I have found my bliss.

### *What is love?*

The term “love” has a rich and diverse etymological history, tracing through Old English, Hebrew, and Greek, each adding layers to its meaning. In Old English, *lufu* broadly referred to affection, care, or desire, originating from the Proto-Germanic *lubō*, which is also the root of Old High German *luba* and Old Norse *lof* (Harper, 2023). This Proto-Germanic term derives from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *leubh-*, meaning “to care, desire, or love.” Variations of this root appear in other languages, such as Latin’s *lubet* (“it is pleasing”) and Sanskrit’s *lubhyati* (“desires”). In early English usage, “love” encompassed a broad range of relationships, from friendship and familial care to romantic affection.

In Hebrew, the term for love is אהבה (*ahavah*), derived from the root אהב (*ahav*), meaning “to love” or “to desire.” *Ahavah* appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible, where it conveys deep affection, duty, and covenantal love, particularly in human relationships and divine connections. For instance, Deuteronomy 6:5 commands the love of God with all one’s heart (Strong, 1990; Vine, 1996). This Hebrew concept of love extends beyond emotional connection, emphasizing commitment, loyalty, and responsibility, especially within familial

and divine contexts.

In Greek, *agape* refers to a profound, selfless love that transcends personal desires or conditions. Its verb form, *agapao* (ἀγαπάω), describes the deliberate act of caring for another's welfare (Thayer & Smith, 2016). These Greek concepts highlight love as an intentional, unconditional expression of care that seeks the well-being of others, often in the context of divine love.

The etymological roots of love reveal its diverse meanings and help explain how it is understood as a holistic process involving cognition, affection, and behavior. The cognitive aspect—how we perceive and evaluate others—forms the foundation of love. Love is not merely an emotional response but a multifaceted process rooted in perceptions of interconnectedness and shared well-being.

At its simplest, love can be understood as the consciousness and appreciation of another's worth. "Worth" here refers to alignment with personal values connected to features, attributes, resources, attitudes, or behaviours beneficial to personal happiness, fulfilment, survival, and general well-being. When one says, "I love XY" or "XY is lovely", it often implies acknowledging and appreciating that XY has qualities or attributes that are perceived to bring happiness, fulfilment, or well-being. The type of love—familial, brotherly, friendly, romantic or intimate—depends on how we perceive the value of the other party who is the subject of our love. The affection and behavior toward someone are shaped by how integral we perceive them to be to our survival, well-being, and ultimate bliss. Those we deem worthy are viewed as "lovable," while those perceived as harmful may be deemed unworthy of love (Gilbert, 2005; Bowlby, 1969; Siegel, 2010). This cognitive evaluation aligns with Christakis and Fowler's (2009) argument that human relationships, including love, are often formed to ensure protection and survival. Scholars such as Lomas (2015) and May (2017) argue that the strength of love is closely tied to the degree

to which one's life is perceived as interconnected with another's.

This cognitive recognition of interconnectedness leads to affection. When we perceive value from others, it evokes benign feelings of self-worth, contentment, and security. Affection is not purely emotional; it also involves a sense of commitment, passion, and the desire for close proximity, relationship and to promote the well-being of those we love. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love posits that love consists of three components: passion, intimacy, and commitment (Sternberg, 1986). However, all three components are rooted in perception or cognition. Feeling loved often extends outward, inspiring a reciprocal desire to love others (Neff, 2003a). Thus, affection is both an emotional experience and a deliberate commitment to another's well-being.

Affection, in turn, leads to benevolent behavior, manifesting through tangible acts of care, kindness, and protection. Research demonstrates that caregiving behaviors benefit not only the recipient but also enhance the caregiver's well-being by stimulating the brain and increasing its resilience (Kolb & Whishaw, 1998; Madroñal et al., 2010). Actions such as affectionate touch reinforce emotional bonds, showing that love is an active process driven by behavior, not just emotion, and plays a vital role in fostering human connection and survival.

Gilbert's (2015) "Don't eat the kids" narrative emphasises the biological drive to care for kin, which activates the parasympathetic nervous system and enables the necessary cognitive and neurological responses for caregiving (Siegel, 2010). For example, a mother's perception of her newborn triggers hormonal responses, such as the release of oxytocin, which enhances her sensitivity to the child's needs (Cozolino, 2014; Xerri, Stern, & Merzenich, 1994).

In summary, the concept of love has evolved across cultures and languages, but at its core, it represents a blend of cognition, affection, and behavior. Love is shaped by the perceived worth of others, and the

greater the perceived worth, the greater the love. Since perception is relative, love is also a subjective phenomenon. It serves as a survival tool, driven by a need for connection and the adaptive function of ensuring protection, survival, and flourishing. As dependent creatures, humans seek to form relationships where they are loved, respected, and accepted to ensure survival (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Our capacity to love and care for others is determined by our perception of interconnectedness and the value we place on others, making love a vital component of human flourishing.

### *Agapology 101: Fundamentals of Agape*

For the past few years, I have developed a keen interest in what I call “agapology”—the study of God’s love. The term “agapology” is derived from the Greek word “agape,” meaning selfless, unconditional love, combined with the suffix “-ology,” which signifies “the study of” (Kittel & Friedrich 1964). My aim has been to gain a deeper understanding of divine love, a fundamental cornerstone of Christ’s teachings and a core ingredient of true bliss (Schaeffer, 1974).

Engaging in agapology can gain profound insights into the transformative power of God’s love, which transcends human understanding and influences every aspect of life (Browning, 1996). Through this exploration, the boundless and selfless nature of divine love becomes clearer, revealing its pivotal role in shaping our spiritual journey and enriching our everyday existence. Thus, agapology explores the profound and limitless love of God, delving into its nature, characteristics, and far-reaching implications. While God’s love is complex and understanding it may take a lifetime, this study briefly outlines the fundamentals.

In Christian theology, the Greek term “agape” represents God’s divine, unconditional love, which is distinct from the love typically

expressed by humans (Cohen, 2014; Kittel, & Friedrich, 1964). This divine love is encapsulated in the verb “agapao,” which refers to human expressions of love that often mirror the outpouring of God’s love. In essence, agapao stands for all kinds of human love, which includes the following.

**Romantic Love (Eros):** This type of love involves a deep emotional and physical attraction between partners, characterised by passion, desire, and intimacy. Romantic love seeks to form a profound connection with another person (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006).

**Companionate Love (Storge):** This love is rooted in deep friendship and emotional connection, evolving over time. It is marked by mutual respect, trust, and a strong bond, often found in long-term relationships where initial passion has developed into a lasting connection (Sternberg, 1986).

**Familial Love:** Experienced between family members, such as parents and children or siblings, familial love is characterised by unconditional support, loyalty, and a sense of belonging. It is associated with caregiving and protection (Klaus & Kennell, 1982).

**Platonic Love:** This is a deep, non-romantic affection between friends, involving emotional closeness and intimacy without physical attraction. It is based on mutual respect, shared interests, and emotional support (Sternberg, 1986).

**Self-Love:** Involves a healthy regard for oneself, encompassing self-acceptance, self-compassion, and self-respect. Self-love is essential for personal well-being and serves as a foundation for healthy relationships with others (Neff, 2011).

**Pragma (Practical Love):** Characterized by practicality and rationality, pragma involves making decisions based on long-term interests and compatibility rather than passion. It is seen in enduring relationships committed to mutual goals and stability (Sternberg, 1986).

The next paragraphs discuss the difference between “agape” and “agapao”. Grasping these differences is essential for understanding how divine love not only supports but transcends human affection.

### *The Nature and Characteristics of Agape*

Divine love, or agape, can be conceptualised as a high-frequency energy that profoundly influences human consciousness and perception. This perspective integrates metaphysical and psychological viewpoints to explore the transformative nature of love. Schachter and Singer (1962) describe emotions as involving physiological arousal and cognitive interpretation, suggesting that emotions, including love, can be seen as dynamic forms of “energy in motion.” This metaphorical approach supports the idea that emotions are active and influential, akin to how energy functions. Eckhart Tolle (2006) offers a complementary perspective by discussing how higher states of consciousness, which can be achieved through spiritual awakening, transform one’s perception and experience.

Describing spiritual experiences, particularly God’s love, is a daunting task. The closest we can come to explaining them is through analogy—finding something familiar to convey what is almost indescribable. Just as you might describe honey to someone who has never tasted it by comparing it to sugar, so too can we attempt to explain the profound experience of God’s love through comparisons to more common experiences.

But here lies the challenge: God’s love is unlike anything else. Even the Apostle Paul, one of the most eloquent minds in history, struggled to find the right words. After fourteen years of silent reflection on his sacred encounter with pure love, he could only describe it as “peace that passes understanding” (Philippians 4:7, ESV). If Paul found it

difficult to articulate, then how much more so for ordinary souls like ours?

Dr Steve Taylor likens God's love to blissful spiritual energy, akin to how water inherently possesses wetness (Taylor, S., 2019, 2020a, 2020b). This analogy underscores the inherent and inseparable nature of bliss within God's presence, suggesting that encountering His love is an experience of pure, unadulterated joy and peace. Despite his many accomplishments, Paul considered all his previous achievements as "faeces" compared to the value of God's love (Philippians 3:8, NIV).

According to the testimony of Christ, scripture, and those who have tasted it, God's love surpasses all worldly pleasures. It is more fulfilling than the combined ecstasies of wealth, sex, drugs, fame, power, and even life itself. While these earthly pleasures often come with strings attached—addiction, short-lived satisfaction, and eventual emptiness—God's love is pure, lasting, and free of any negative side effects.

God's peace, in particular, defies logical explanation. Most pleasures are tied to specific causes: a good meal, a new car, a promotion, or a romantic encounter. However, God's peace is different; it exists without any apparent material or psychological reason. Often, it is experienced in the face of circumstances that should logically cause distress. Take Job, for example. He lost everything—his children, possessions, employees, friends, and health—yet he was still full of peace, joy, and worship. Despite his immense suffering, Job held onto the most precious treasure of all—God's presence (Job 1:21, ESV).

Agape is a tranquilliser that causes individuals like Karla to smile even when facing death (Karla, 2004).

Karla Tucker had a turbulent childhood. Her mother lived in wildlife of drugs and prostitution. With no better guidance, Tucker followed

in her mother's footsteps. She started smoking when she was only eight years old. When she was ten years old, Karla learned that her birth resulted from an extramarital affair, a situation that plunged her into deeper trouble. Karla started doing drugs and having sex two years later. She dropped out of school at age 14 and soon dived into prostitution. From that moment on, Tucker's life spiraled into anger, confusion, violence, and brutality. Aged only 24 years, Tucker was sentenced to death following her conviction for the brutal murder of two people.

One month into her death row, Karla's life took an unexpected twist. One night, Tucker started reading the Bible that she had stolen earlier that day. Before she knew it, she was on her knees, asking for forgiveness from God. From that moment, Tucker was a changed person. For 14 years spent on death row, Karla's life was filled with serenity and fulfilment beyond measure. In an interview with Larry King one month before her death, Karla explained the source of her turnaround." I have experienced real love", she said. I know what forgiveness is. Even when you do something so horrible.... like what I have done... and you're loved, that has a way of changing you.

On February 3, 1998, aged just 38 years, Karla was executed by lethal injection. As the deadly chemicals were being administered, she was asked if she had anything to say. Her response was... "Yes, sir, I would like to say to all of you that I am so sorry. I hope God will give you peace with this. I love all of you very much". While smiling, Karla continued, "I am going to be face to face with Jesus now. I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you."

Karla's expression of serenity melted even the hardest hearts of her atheist executioners. She kept praising God even as the lethal injection

was administered right until she took her last breath (NeoSentience1, 2019).

This is not to diminish the value of material pleasures. After all, God created everything for our enjoyment. Nevertheless, there is something even more significant, something often overlooked—God’s love. The blessing of His love is more fulfilling and everlasting, and, as King Solomon wisely noted, brings riches and pleasures without undesirable side effects (Proverbs 10:22, ESV). In essence, the love of God puts everything else into perspective, offering a satisfaction deeper than anything else. To value anything above God’s love is a sign that one has yet to truly experience it.

God’s love, in its purest form, redefines what it means to be fulfilled. It is the ultimate treasure, a gift that transcends all worldly pleasures. Once you have tasted this divine love, everything else pales in comparison.

In contrast, agapao is often less pure and more transactional. Human love is influenced by personal desires, expectations, and societal pressures, which can lead to mixed motives and conditional affection. The impure nature of agapao makes it more susceptible to fluctuations and imperfections compared to the ideal quality of agape.

In effect, divine love, or agape, represents the highest form of spiritual energy, capable of elevating consciousness and profoundly altering our perception of life. Agape operates at a high frequency, providing a transformative impact on human awareness. This form of love naturally imbues one’s life with a sense of bliss and joy. When one aligns with agape, life itself becomes more blissful and enjoyable. The experience of divine love allows individuals to perceive life through a lens of profound contentment.

In this context, bliss is not about finding the life you can enjoy but enjoying the life you can find. This means that true bliss is not simply about seeking out a life filled with external sources of pleasure but

about finding joy and fulfilment in the life that is already present. Agape enables individuals to cultivate this inner joy, transforming their perception of their circumstances and allowing them to fully embrace and appreciate the life they have.

Moreover, this newfound blissful perception opens up profound possibilities and creates a platform for greater material wealth and experiences of joy. As one's consciousness expands through the transformative power of agape, it enhances the ability to attract and enjoy more abundant material resources and fulfilling experiences. This elevated state of awareness not only deepens one's sense of contentment but also facilitates the manifestation of a richer and more rewarding life.

### *The Security of Agape vs. the Insecurity of Agapao*

Agape embodies unconditional love—love that is freely given without preconditions or expectations. This divine love exists independently of the recipient's actions or behaviour. As highlighted in John 3:16, God's love for humanity existed before any human actions and remains constant, underscoring the perfection and absoluteness of His love.

In contrast, agapao, or human love, is often conditional and transactional. It depends on meeting specific criteria or engaging in certain exchanges, such as fulfilling expectations or behaviours. Human love operates on a give-and-take basis, where affection, care, and support are offered with the expectation of receiving something in return. This transactional nature makes human love susceptible to fluctuations, influenced by the actions and behaviours of others.

Agape is secure and eternal. Its divine nature ensures that nothing can sever God's love for us. This love is unaffected by the changes and

uncertainties of life, as emphasised in Romans 8:35–39, which assures that no force—be it angels, demons, life, death, or any other—can separate us from God’s love. This security provides a stable foundation, offering constant and unwavering love.

Conversely, agapao is often insecure and temporal. Human relationships are vulnerable to disruptions such as physical separation, emotional divergence, or circumstantial barriers. These factors can weaken bonds over time, making human love fragile and transient. The inherent insecurity of agapao means that love can diminish due to external conditions or personal issues, unlike the eternal nature of agape.

### *Agape: The Ultimate Virtue*

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul eloquently defines the supreme nature of agape, stating that “if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2, ESV). He describes agape as patient and kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude (1 Corinthians 13:4–5, ESV). Paul further emphasizes that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” and that “love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:7–8, ESV). Paul concludes this profound discourse by insisting on the supremacy of love, stating, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, ESV). This verse underscores that while faith and hope are essential virtues, love surpasses them all, standing as the highest and most enduring virtue. The supremacy of love as the ultimate virtue reflects the essence of God’s nature and His expectations for how we are to live and relate to others.

Agape, the divine love, transcends human limitations and earthly existence, reflecting its divine and eternal nature. This form of love

endures beyond the constraints of time and the imperfections of the human condition, underscoring its profound and lasting value. The significance of agape lies in its dual role as both the source and the ultimate end of all virtues embodied in agapao. As the source, agape provides the foundational principle from which all other virtues derive their meaning and strength. It serves as the driving force behind acts of kindness, compassion, and justice, motivating moral behaviour and ethical living.

Furthermore, agape represents the highest and most complete expression of agapao, embodying the ideal that all other virtues aspire to achieve. In this sense, agape is not just an attribute but the ultimate culmination of a virtuous life, guiding individuals towards a state of perfect love and fulfilment. This divine love stands as the greatest and most enduring quality in both this life and the life to come. It is eternal and unchanging, offering a profound sense of purpose and direction that extends beyond temporal concerns. The eternal nature of agape ensures that it remains a constant and reliable source of love, making it the ultimate ideal for a life of fulfilment.

In essence, agape's divine and eternal character underscores its supreme importance as the highest virtue, providing both the foundation for all other virtues and the ultimate goal towards which they strive.

## Chapter 16: Economic Prosperity

African communities, particularly in Africa and the diaspora, are often characterised by a deep religiosity that surpasses that of other global communities. Following the end of colonialism in the early 1960s, many expected a decline in African religious and spiritual practices, particularly the Abrahamic religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Orthodox faiths (Gifford, 1998). However, the opposite has occurred, with a steep rise in religiosity ever since, with over 98% of the African population reported to be religious in 2015 (Jenkins, 2016). Maxwell (2000) asserts that the total number of African Christians was approximately 75 million in 1965; by 2000, it had risen to approximately 351 million. This growth is particularly evident in countries like Ethiopia and Nigeria, where Christian populations have surged and are projected to continue rising sharply (Maxwell, 2000; The World Factbook, 2022). In Ethiopia, the Christian population, which was about 6 million in 1900, is expected to reach 100 million by 2050. In Nigeria, the growth has been even more dramatic, from 180,000 Christians in 1900 to 80 million by 2015, with projections of reaching 100 million by 2050 (Jenkins, 2016). Data from Pew Research

Center (2017) indicates that 26 per cent of all Christians currently live in Africa, a figure expected to increase to 40 per cent by 2060. This rise in religiosity has been accompanied by an increase in religious infrastructure, such as churches and mosques, which in some African countries outnumber hospitals (This is Africa, 2019).

African descendants, both in Africa and in the diaspora, have consistently demonstrated higher levels of religiosity compared to other ethnic groups. Studies show that African Americans, for instance, report higher rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, and the belief that religion plays an important role in their lives compared to other racial groups in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2018). Similarly, African communities in the diaspora, such as in the UK, Australia, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America, continue to hold strong ties to religious practices, both Christian and African traditional religions, reflecting a deep-rooted spiritual heritage (Sherkat, 2014).

Despite the high level of religiosity, many black people are still relatively poor compared to other communities.

Economic deprivation and poverty among people of African descent, both in Africa and the diaspora, are major challenges shaped by historical inequalities, systemic barriers, and structural disadvantages. In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 40% of the population, or roughly 430 million people, live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 a day (World Bank, 2023). Poverty is more severe in rural areas, where around 80% of those affected by extreme poverty live. Countries such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo contribute a significant portion of these numbers, with Nigeria alone having over 87 million people living in extreme poverty. Furthermore, income inequality is a critical issue in the region, with Sub-Saharan Africa having a high Gini coefficient, averaging around 43, indicating deep economic disparities (World Bank, 2023). Youth unemployment is particularly concerning in countries like South Africa, where it exceeds

60%. This high unemployment, combined with the prevalence of informal work (which makes up 70%–90% of the labour force), leads to economic insecurity for millions of people (ILO, 2022).

In the diaspora, particularly in the United States, Black Americans face stark economic challenges. The poverty rate for Black Americans stands at 19.5%, more than double the rate for White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Additionally, Black Americans have a median household income of around \$48,000, significantly lower than the \$78,000 earned by White households. The racial wealth gap is even more pronounced, with White households holding 8–10 times the wealth of Black households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). In Europe, Black African and Caribbean communities in the UK experience a poverty rate of 40%, compared to 19% for the general population. This economic inequality is also reflected in wage disparities, where Black workers earn less than their White counterparts (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

In Latin America, particularly in Brazil, Afro-Brazilians, who make up 54% of the population, are disproportionately affected by poverty. Around 75% of those living in extreme poverty in Brazil are Afro-Brazilians, and they earn, on average, only 56% of what White Brazilians earn (IBGE, 2022). Similarly, in the Caribbean, countries like Haiti experience widespread poverty, with around 60% of the population living below the poverty line. Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with extreme poverty affecting 24% of its people (World Bank, 2023).

Beyond material poverty, Afro-descendant communities also suffer from mental and emotional poverty, compounded by systemic racism, discrimination, and social exclusion. These factors exacerbate stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly among those living in marginalised or disadvantaged circumstances. In the United States, African Americans experience a poverty rate of 19.5%, more than

double that of whites, and this economic hardship is often linked to mental health struggles and lower subjective well-being (Ipsos, 2023). This combination of material, mental, and emotional poverty leads to lower life satisfaction across Afro-descendant populations, both in Africa and the diaspora.

African countries generally rank lower on the World Happiness Index compared to other regions globally, due to challenges such as lower GDP per capita, limited access to healthcare, and political instability. Nations like South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and the Central African Republic are among the lowest-ranking globally, primarily because of ongoing conflicts, poverty, and fragile infrastructure (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2023). These factors severely impact overall well-being compared to wealthier nations.

However, countries like Mauritius and Seychelles outperform other African nations, ranking higher due to stronger governance, economic stability, and more robust social services. Despite this, their happiness scores still fall below the global average when compared to Northern and Western countries like Finland, Denmark, and Switzerland, which consistently top the index due to higher standards of living, greater social support, and political stability (World Happiness Report, 2023).

In contrast, the global leaders in happiness, mainly from Europe, benefit from factors such as low corruption, comprehensive healthcare, and higher incomes, highlighting the stark differences in conditions between African countries and these wealthier nations. This disparity reflects the ongoing developmental challenges faced by much of the African continent.

### *What is wrong with African Religion?*

The question is why economic prosperity among people of African descent remains dire whilst religiosity—which is meant to be the force for material success—booms.

True faith, in its most authentic form, must lead to a life filled with bliss –that includes economic prosperity- not just for the individual but also for those around them. A spiritual experience or practice that does not result in a positive, transformative impact on one’s life and the lives of others falls short of its purpose. This notion is deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and highlighted by his brother James, who argued that faith without works is dead (James 2:26, NIV). According to James, genuine faith is demonstrated through actions that reflect love and compassion toward others. For him, faith was not a mere intellectual exercise or a set of beliefs to be held in isolation; it was a pragmatic and dynamic force that must manifest in one’s actions, especially in the way one treats others.

James’ perspective was deeply influenced by a practical philosophy where true and living faith is defined by its tangible effects on an individual’s life and the community. He believed that beliefs and actions should be evaluated by their capacity to enhance personal well-being and extend that well-being to others. This aligns with the broader Christian understanding that love is the highest expression of faith.

The Apostle John, who was considered the closest friend of Jesus, echoed this sentiment. He stated unequivocally, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20, NIV). John emphasises that love for others is not optional for those who claim to know God; it is the very evidence of genuine faith. To love God is to love others,

and this love must be practical, visible, and transformative. Jesus Christ himself provided the ultimate criterion for true discipleship: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:35, NIV). Here, Jesus makes it clear that the distinguishing mark of his followers is not theological knowledge or religious rituals but the love they exhibit toward others. He also highlighted that the abundant life he offers—eternal life that begins here and now—naturally overflows to others. This life, characterised by love and service, begins in our immediate context (“Jerusalem”) and then spreads outward, impacting the broader world (“to the ends of the earth”) (Acts 1:8, NIV). Moreover, true faith is not confined to one’s personal or spiritual life; it must inform and translate into all areas of one’s existence. This includes relationships where faith should inspire love, respect, and selflessness. In one’s career, whether in business, employment, scientific, or innovative endeavours, faith should drive ethical behaviour, integrity, and a commitment to the common good. In politics and governance, faith should promote justice, compassion, and the pursuit of policies that uplift and empower all members of society.

Faith that is authentic and alive must permeate every facet of life, transforming not only the individual but also the environment. It should inspire innovations that serve humanity, foster relationships that build communities, and influence governance that promotes the well-being of all. In this way, true faith becomes a force for holistic transformation, aligning personal well-being with the flourishing of society at large. This is what I call pragmatic spirituality.

### *The Role of Religion in Bridging Service Gaps*

It must be said that religion and faith have played a significant role in improving material prosperity and addressing socio-economic challenges in African communities, both in Africa and across the diaspora. Historically, Christianity was instrumental in ending slavery and discrimination and continues to advocate for economic, political, and civic rights. In the face of widespread poverty, racism, discrimination, conflict, and disease, religious institutions often step in to fill the gaps left by inadequate government services or international aid. For instance, in regions affected by conflict, such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, religious institutions have been essential in delivering humanitarian aid, running schools, and providing healthcare services. The Catholic Church, in particular, operates an extensive network of hospitals and schools across Africa, often in areas where state infrastructure is non-existent (Chitando & Togarasei, 2010). These institutions provide between 30% and 70% of healthcare services in some African countries, particularly in rural areas where government services are limited (World Health Organization, 2018). Faith-based organisations also contribute significantly to social welfare and education, often delivering between 40% and 60% of social services, including schooling and community care, especially in rural regions (Pew Research Center, 2020). Additionally, they contribute between 20% and 30% of economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance programmes and vocational training aimed at reducing poverty (World Bank, 2021). These efforts are critical, particularly in communities where government resources are stretched thin or absent.

In the diaspora, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, religious institutions play a vital role in supporting African immigrants, contributing around 35% to 50% of social services,

including language classes, counselling, and community support (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Economically, they help with job placements and financial literacy, contributing around 20% to 30% of economic support activities, such as remittances (International Organization for Migration, 2021).

While significant challenges like inadequate healthcare and education remain, the role of faith in alleviating poverty and social inequalities cannot be understated. Rather than being a mere response to adversity, faith-based organisations actively address these challenges, particularly where other institutions fall short (Kgatlé, 2019; Schliesser, 2023).

Throughout history, numerous black individuals have drawn on their Christian faith to lead in enterprise, innovation, and governance. These leaders have not only achieved personal success but have also contributed to the advancement of their communities and the broader society. Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid revolutionary and former President of South Africa, is one such leader. Mandela's Christian upbringing instilled in him a strong sense of justice and compassion, which guided his lifelong struggle against racial oppression. His faith played a role in his ability to forgive his oppressors and seek reconciliation, rather than retribution, after the fall of apartheid (Lodge, 2006). Mandela's leadership in establishing a democratic South Africa and his emphasis on forgiveness and unity had profound impacts on the country and the world.

Martin Luther King Jr., one of the most iconic leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement, was profoundly influenced by his Christian faith. As a Baptist minister, King drew on biblical teachings to advocate for nonviolent resistance against racial injustice. His belief in the power of love and forgiveness, as exemplified in the teachings of Jesus Christ, was central to his philosophy of nonviolent protest. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech and his leadership in events like the

Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington were deeply rooted in his Christian conviction that all people are equal in the eyes of God (Chappell, 2004). His faith not only guided his activism but also provided him with the moral authority and resilience needed to lead the movement for civil rights in the United States.

Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, also exemplifies how Christian faith can inspire leadership in governance. While Obama's religious journey was complex, his Christian faith played a significant role in shaping his values and approach to leadership. He often spoke about the importance of faith in providing hope, fostering a sense of community, and guiding moral decision-making. During his presidency, Obama emphasised themes of social justice, compassion, and the common good—principles deeply rooted in his Christian beliefs (Glaude, 2010). His administration's focus on healthcare reform, economic recovery, and reducing inequality reflected his commitment to these values.

Harriet Tubman, an African American abolitionist and political activist, is another prominent figure whose Christian faith was the driving force behind her work on the Underground Railroad. Tubman led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom, guided by a belief that her mission was divinely inspired. Known as "Moses" among her followers, Tubman's unwavering faith gave her the courage to undertake dangerous missions and resist the brutal institution of slavery (Clinton, 2004). Her contributions to the abolitionist movement and her advocacy for women's rights have left a lasting legacy in American history. In the realm of African politics, Thomas Sankara, the former President of Burkina Faso, is notable for his efforts to promote social and economic reform grounded in ethical principles influenced by his Christian beliefs. Often referred to as "Africa's Che Guevara," Sankara implemented policies aimed at reducing corruption, improving public health and education, and promoting women's rights. His Christian-

inspired ethics emphasised self-reliance, humility, and social justice, which were central to his governance (Harsch, 2014).

In the sphere of enterprise and innovation, Madam C. J. Walker stands out as a pioneering African American entrepreneur. Born to formerly enslaved parents, Walker became the first female self-made millionaire in America through her development and marketing of hair care products for black women. Her Christian faith was central to her business philosophy, which emphasised not only personal success but also the empowerment and upliftment of her community. Walker used her wealth to support civil rights causes and to mentor young black women, leaving a lasting impact on American society (Bundles, 2001).

The paradox of high religiosity coexisting with widespread poverty and conflict in many African communities suggests that the quality of religiosity—specifically, the depth of one’s understanding and practice of divine economic principles—requires significant improvement.

### *Cardinal Principles of Material Prosperity*

The cessation of manna and the Israelites’ transition to eating the produce of the Promised Land is recorded in the Book of Joshua, marking a significant moment in their journey. For 40 years, God provided manna to sustain the Israelites during their wilderness journey (Exodus 16). However, upon entering Canaan, this miraculous provision ceased. As described in Joshua 5:10–12,

On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

Ironically, the produce that the Israelites consumed did not come

from the infrastructure built by the Canaanites—the giants who previously occupied the land. Instead of inheriting the economic prosperity and infrastructure of their predecessors, the Israelites were commanded by God to destroy almost everything: farms, cattle, houses, city walls, and even the people themselves (Deuteronomy 7:1–5). The only items spared were precious metals, which were placed in God’s treasury in the temple (Joshua 6:18–19). This destruction symbolises the eradication of the ungodly economic systems that had been established in the land.

In essence, God dismantled the old economic machinery built by the Canaanites, a society that did not follow His laws, and called the Israelites to establish a new prosperity founded on the principles outlined in the Law of Moses. This transition underscores a key biblical principle: the importance of building a society and economy rooted in righteousness and obedience to God rather than simply adopting the systems of those who had previously lived outside of God’s covenant. The Israelites were to cultivate the land and develop their society according to God’s instructions, ensuring that their prosperity was aligned with divine principles rather than inherited from ungodly practices (Deuteronomy 8:18). This foundational approach was crucial for the Israelites as they settled into their new home in Canaan.

What distinguishes this formula is the role of divine, bespoke instructions. Unlike generic principles that might apply uniformly, God’s laws are tailored to the specific circumstances of each group of people and their unique environment. This bespoke nature is essential because of the inherent differences among people—differences in biological, psychological, and socio-cultural orientations, such as personality, interests, cultures, and experiences. Likewise, the land itself varies, with different landscapes and diverse types of resources embedded within it. These variations mean that a one-size-fits-all approach to prosperity is insufficient.

Instead, divine instructions provide the necessary guidance for aligning the distinct characteristics of both the people and the land with God's overarching plan for economic and societal well-being. By fostering a secure relationship with God, these instructions are not only received. However, they are also internalised and lived out, ensuring that the unique potential of the land and its people is fully realised in a way that is sustainable and in harmony with divine principles. Thus, in this formula, divine guidance is not just an added element but the defining difference that ensures the successful and righteous transformation of natural resources into enduring prosperity.

The wilderness was a place of divine sustenance. As they journeyed toward the Promised Land, they were in a transitional phase, unable to sustain themselves fully. God provided for them—manna from heaven, water from the rock, and protection from their enemies—because they were not yet in a position to rely on their own resources. This period of divine provision was essential as they moved from slavery toward freedom. Similarly, many African descendants today find themselves in a metaphorical wilderness. Due to centuries of social, economic, and political disadvantage, they often have to rely on divine intervention, foreign aid or social welfare. This dependency is understandable, given the historical context, but it is not the ultimate destination. Like the Israelites, African descendants need to move beyond this phase of reliance toward a place of self-sufficiency and flourishing. Black people's economic prosperity must be built on cardinal yet bespoke principles God prescribes. We do not necessarily need to copy and paste the economic systems that, even if they worked for others previously, might not necessarily work for us. All we need is the God-given natural resources: our regenerated selves, our lands, and God's LOVE.

## *The 75/25 Principle of Economic Bliss*

Economic bliss is achieved when three essential elements converge: resources (both human and natural), economic machinery (enterprise, innovation, and governance), and divine blessings (authority and power). These components form the foundation of a prosperous, interconnected community where individuals thrive through the harmonious balance of human effort, natural abundance, and spiritual guidance. We believe that true bliss comes from this balance, fostering both personal growth and communal well-being.

### *The Foundation: Human and Natural Resources*

The first element, resources, includes both human and natural assets. Human resources represent the talents, skills, knowledge, energy, and experience that individuals possess—divinely bestowed gifts meant to be used wisely to benefit not only the individual but the entire community. By sharing these gifts, we enable the collective to grow, promoting a spirit of unity and prosperity.

Natural resources, such as land and raw materials, are also viewed as divine gifts, to be managed responsibly for the good of society. Proper stewardship of these resources ensures that everyone's needs are met, helping create a thriving community where both human potential and the environment are harnessed for the collective good.

### *The Catalyst: Economic Machinery*

The second essential element is economic machinery, which includes enterprise, innovation, and governance. This machinery transforms resources into wealth by producing goods and services and ensuring that wealth is distributed efficiently to meet societal needs. We firmly

believe that there are ample resources in the world to meet everyone's needs, but the challenge lies in processing and distributing these resources effectively.

Through effective governance and innovation, human and natural resources are put to their highest use, creating employment, self-employment, and meeting the demands of society in a sustainable manner. However, even the most efficient systems cannot guarantee lasting success without divine blessings—a higher power that guides and sustains human efforts.

### *The Ultimate Key: Divine Blessings*

The third and most crucial element is divine blessings. These blessings consist of both authority—God's permission and favour, which opens doors and creates opportunities—and power, which enables individuals to act upon those opportunities. At the heart of divine blessings lie the core virtues of LOVE, particularly the sub-virtues of compassion, diligence, integrity, and wisdom. These values shape all personal and economic activities, ensuring that wealth creation aligns with spiritual and moral principles.

Without divine guidance, human resources and economic machinery alone cannot produce lasting prosperity. It is through a strong, trusting relationship with God that our efforts are transformed into meaningful abundance and true bliss.

### *The 75/25 Law of Exchange*

A key principle within this framework is the 75/25 Principle of Economic bliss, which emphasises the importance of giving to make room for receiving. Imagine that each person is naturally endowed with one of the four key nutrients—Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, or

Equanimity—in abundance, but true bliss and prosperity come from balance, not overabundance of one nutrient. Having too much of one nutrient does not compensate for the deficiency of others.

In this model, each person must be willing to give away 75% of their natural strength to those in need, creating space to receive 75% of the remaining three nutrients from others. This act of giving and receiving is vital to achieving equilibrium. For example, a person with an abundance of Linkedness (connection) must share it to make room for Valory (courage) or Opulence (abundance), ensuring a more complete and fulfilling life.

The key lies in this exchange: By giving away the majority of what we have, we create a room within ourselves to receive the nutrients we lack from others. Only when we retain 25% of what we have and make room for the 75% we need can we experience true bliss.

Refusing to share—hoarding 100% of our natural resources—creates an internal imbalance. By clinging too tightly to our gifts, we limit the space for other essential nutrients, leading to LOVE deficiency. Areas we neglect to cultivate leave us impoverished. For instance, someone rich in Opulence (abundance) but lacking in Equanimity (balance) may be overly generous but struggle to find peace in their own life.

On the other hand, over-giving—sharing more than 75% of our resources—leads to depletion. When we give more than we can afford, we risk burning out, feeling dissatisfied, or even exploited. Rather than filling us with bliss, over-giving creates a void and an imbalance.

Balance is essential. While generosity is virtuous, overextension is harmful. The 75/25 principle serves as a guideline for sustaining personal fulfilment while contributing to the community's well-being. Giving too little leads to LOVE deficiency, and giving too much causes exhaustion. By giving 75% and retaining 25% while allowing space for the 75% we need from others, we create the conditions for a

harmonious, blissful life.

### **Bliss is a Collective Business**

The 75/25 framework emphasises that a blissful life is not a solitary pursuit but a collective journey. Each individual's unique gifts are essential to the prosperity of the whole community, but true flourishing occurs when we are willing to give and receive in a spirit of mutual support. This dynamic exchange fosters equilibrium, allowing every individual to experience the fullness of life.

When human and natural resources, economic machinery, and divine guidance work together, they create a community where prosperity flows freely and individuals thrive. It is through this dynamic exchange—where we give 75% of what we have and retain 25%, making room for the 75% we need from others—that we experience true bliss.

This is the vision of the Network: a community where LOVE is the guiding principle, and bliss is not just personal but shared, creating a ripple effect of prosperity, well-being, and spiritual fulfilment for all.

### *The Widow and the Law of Miraculous Financial Freedom*

In the bible (2 Kings 4:1-7), there is a powerful story: a widow approaches the prophet Elisha in desperation. Her husband, a member of the company of prophets, has passed away, leaving her in serious debt. The creditors are threatening to take her two sons as slaves to pay off the debt. The widow tells Elisha that she has nothing left of value, except a small jar of oil. Elisha, in response, gives her specific instructions.

He tells her to borrow as many empty jars as she can from her neighbours. Once she has gathered these jars, she is to pour her small amount of oil into the empty jars, filling each one. Miraculously, the oil continues flowing until all the jars are full. Elisha then instructs

her to sell the oil, pay off her debts, and live on what remains with her sons.

This story is often viewed as a miraculous intervention, but it also offers a profound economic principle. Elisha didn't simply provide the widow with a miraculous bailout; he offered her a sustainable economic strategy that brought her long-term financial freedom.

The Widow's Story Embodies the 75/25 Principle of Economic Prosperity in the following ways:

### **1. Giving 75% of Resources**

Elisha's instructions begin by identifying the widow's limited resource—a small jar of oil, which represented all that she had left (100%). Though it seemed insignificant, the oil was something of value. Elisha asked her to borrow as many empty jars as possible from her neighbours. In this context, the empty jars symbolise people in her community who are in need—those who have gaps to fill, much like the needs in a marketplace.

By pouring her oil into these jars, the widow was effectively giving from her personal resource—multiplying what little she had and distributing it to fill the needs of others. After all the jars were filled, Elisha instructed the widow to sell the oil. The act of “selling” the oil represents more than just exchanging goods—it signifies the widow's need to identify people in her community who had a demand for her excess (75%) resource and were willing and able to pay for it at a fair price. These people, her customers, represented the market that needed what she could offer, thus enabling her to generate income.

In the context of the 75/25 principle, selling the oil reflects the economic exchange where she capitalized on her surplus resource (75%) by meeting the needs of others through business. This act of selling is a key component of financial sustainability—the widow didn't give the oil away but engaged in a business transaction, ensuring that her resource had market value and generated a profit.

## **2. Retaining 25% for Personal Sustenance**

After selling the excess oil, the widow was instructed to pay off her debts and live on what remained. This mirrors the 25% of resources that the 75/25 principle teaches we should keep for ourselves to ensure personal well-being and future security. By keeping a portion of the oil, she had enough to live on, ensuring her financial sustainability. The profit generated from selling the oil would also allow her to buy the other 75% of what she needed from the community—resources and services she lacked.

## **3. Creating Room for Abundance (The Law of Exchange)**

The miracle of the oil continuing to flow only occurred when the widow began to pour—when she gave from what little she had. This act of giving created room for God’s abundance to fill her life. The widow’s faith and willingness to follow Elisha’s instructions allowed her to receive far more than she could have imagined. This reflects the Law of Exchange within the 75/25 principle: by giving away 75% of what we have, we make room to receive the 75% of what we need from others and from God.

Had the widow held onto her oil and refused to pour it out, she would have missed the opportunity for the miracle to occur. Similarly, the hoarding of personal resources—keeping 100% for oneself—leads to LOVE deficiency syndrome, as it prevents us from receiving the balance we need from others even as it deprives others in need. The widow’s willingness to give away her resources reflects the principle of letting go of 75%, creating space for the abundance she needed to be filled.

## **4. The Danger of Over-Giving**

Elisha’s instruction also teaches the importance of balance. While the widow was to give generously, she was also to keep enough for herself to live on. This aligns with the 75/25 principle’s warning against over-giving. Had the widow given all of the oil or not retained enough, she would have depleted her resources and ended up in a

state of deficiency, unable to meet her own needs. Similarly, in life and business, over-giving can lead to burnout, dissatisfaction, or exploitation, which disrupts personal balance and long-term well-being.

### **5. A Sustainable Economic Strategy**

Elisha's guidance wasn't simply a miraculous solution to the widow's immediate problem—it was a sustainable economic strategy. Rather than magically cancelling her debt, Elisha provided the widow with a business model. By using her limited resource (oil), identifying a need (empty jars and customers in the community), and selling the surplus to meet that need, the widow generated enough profit to pay off her debt and sustain herself and her family.

This approach mirrors the 75/25 principle of economic prosperity: we are to give from our resources to meet the needs of others, and through that exchange, we create room for abundance and profit. The widow's story demonstrates how wise resource management, faith, and community engagement lead to long-term financial freedom and prosperity.

### *Economic Implications of the LOVE Model*

As discussed in the LOVE model, a blissful life is the product of spirituality—a secure relationship with God that leads to the cultivation of LOVE virtues: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity. When these virtues are fully embraced, they create a foundation for both personal and communal prosperity. However, the current religiosity in many black communities often lacks this deep spiritual foundation, which could explain why the positive impacts of religion have not been as significant as they could be.

In the following section, we discuss how the LOVE virtues power

enterprise, innovation, governance, and the machinery of material prosperity impact both individual (micro) and communal/country (macro) levels. Firstly, though, let us discuss how the economic machinery of enterprise, innovation and governance works.

**Enterprise** is the driving force behind economic activity. In the LOVE model, enterprise refers to the deployment of resources—including effort, skills, and time—to meet the needs of others. This concept can be applied broadly to describe any venture or organisation, whether large or small, public or private, where the primary aim is to supply goods or services that fulfil people’s needs. While profit generation or achieving a particular purpose may be secondary goals, the central focus of enterprise in this model is addressing the requirements of others through the effective use of available resources.

At the individual level, enterprise provides the means for people to engage in productive work, whether through employment or self-employment. This participation in the economy allows individuals to meet their own needs while also contributing to the broader community by supplying goods and services that others require. This concept resonates deeply with the teachings of Jesus, who said, “Love one another” (John 13:34, NIV). The Greek word used here, “*agapao*,” means “serving one another.”

Christ’s commandment of *agapao*—the unconditional, sacrificial love—is central to His teachings and is vividly illustrated by His actions, especially during the Last Supper. In John 13:34, Jesus commands, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This commandment calls for a love that is not merely based on emotion, but on humble and selfless service to others.

The Greek word *agapao*, used here, refers to a love that goes beyond personal desires or expectations. It emphasises service to others, likened to a waiter attending to the specific needs of a customer, serving them according to their requirements, not according to their

own preferences. This idea suggests that Christ's love is about meeting others at their point of need—understanding and fulfilling what benefits *them* the most.

During the Last Supper, Jesus embodied *agapao* by washing His disciples' feet (John 13:1–17). This act of humility was not only symbolic but a practical demonstration of how love requires lowering oneself to serve others. Further, Jesus prepared the meal, served the bread and wine, and foretold His ultimate sacrifice—laying down His life for humanity (John 15:13). This sacrifice represented the highest form of *agapao* love, one that does not seek personal gain but offers itself for the well-being of others.

Thus, Christ's commandment of love is deeply personal, sacrificial, and understanding. It calls for believers to not only love others as they would want to be loved but to meet the unique needs of others, serving them with empathy and humility. This divine standard of love challenges individuals to go beyond their own desires and consider what is best for those around them, much as Jesus did through His life, service, and ultimate sacrifice.

This interpretation underscores the idea that love, particularly in its forms of *agape* (selfless, unconditional love) and *agapao* (active love expressed through service), is intrinsically linked to meeting each other's needs. Thus, the enterprise can be seen as a practical expression of this love, where individuals and businesses actively engage in serving the community by providing goods and services that fulfil essential needs. In this way, the key element of love—meeting each other's needs—is manifested through the mechanisms of enterprise, making it a vital aspect of societal well-being and economic prosperity.

On a macro level, enterprise fuels the economy by generating employment, fostering competition, and encouraging the efficient allocation of resources. It creates a network of interdependence where

mutual support and service become the foundation of a prosperous society, embodying the principle of love through the practical workings of the economy.

**Innovation** is the engine that propels enterprises forward. It is the process of developing new ideas, products, and methods that improve efficiency and effectiveness in meeting human needs. It involves creativity and the introduction of novel approaches, which are crucial in addressing challenges across various sectors, such as technology, business, and healthcare. On an individual level, innovation often translates to personal growth through wisdom and inspiration, enhancing productivity, job satisfaction, and income (Tidd & Bessant, 2013). For businesses, it is essential to maintain competitiveness and relevance in an ever-changing market. Companies that foster a culture of innovation are significantly more likely to stay ahead in today's fast-evolving business landscape. Innovation enables companies to adapt swiftly to shifts in consumer demands and technological advancements, helping them remain competitive. Research shows that organisations with strong innovation cultures are not only better at scaling new technologies but are also more agile in responding to market changes (McKinsey & Company, 2023). These companies leverage emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and data analytics, which allow them to streamline operations and improve customer experiences, thus giving them a competitive edge (VisionX, 2023).

Moreover, innovation is closely linked to revenue growth, as companies that continuously introduce new products and services can tap into new markets and expand their customer base. This leads to improved sales and profitability while also enhancing operational efficiency (Culture Partners, 2024). In essence, innovation is not just about technological adoption but also involves a mindset that encourages creativity and adaptability, positioning companies for long-term success in a rapidly changing world.

At the macroeconomic level, innovation is a key driver of economic growth, increasing productivity and raising living standards. Countries that prioritise innovation are better positioned to adapt to global challenges, seize emerging opportunities, and ensure sustainable long-term prosperity (Mulgan, 2006). By fostering innovation, nations can promote more efficient resource use, create new industries, and address societal needs more effectively. Thus, innovation not only enhances individual and business success but also plays a critical role in shaping broader economic and social well-being.

**Governance** is the framework within which enterprise and innovation can thrive. At the individual level, governance refers to how people manage their decisions, time, and resources to achieve personal and financial goals. Good personal governance involves setting clear objectives, exercising self-discipline, and taking responsibility for one's actions. Individuals who practice effective personal governance are more likely to experience economic success, as they tend to make informed decisions, seize opportunities, and manage their resources wisely (Schliesser, 2023). This not only leads to personal financial stability but also contributes to the broader economy, as responsible individuals are more likely to save, invest, and engage in productive economic activities.

On a broader scale, good governance at the micro level ensures a stable environment where individuals and businesses can operate securely. Effective governance protects individual rights, enforces contracts, and ensures fair competition, encouraging both small and large businesses to function confidently (OECD, 2020). By maintaining these essential conditions, governance promotes innovation and productivity, motivating individuals to participate actively in the economy. For example, in economies where property rights are safeguarded, people are more inclined to invest and expand their businesses, knowing that their assets are secure (World Bank, 2017).

At the macro level, governance shapes the overall economic environment by providing security, peace, and the rule of law. It involves the creation of policies that foster enterprise and innovation, manage resources efficiently, and maintain social order. Countries with strong governance structures are more likely to attract investment, support business growth, and experience sustained economic development (World Economic Forum, 2019). These policies create an enabling environment where businesses can flourish, and innovations can thrive, driving long-term economic growth.

In effect, enterprise, innovation, and governance are interdependent principles that together form the foundation of material prosperity. At the micro level, they enable individuals to meet their needs and contribute to the economy, embodying the principles of love and service as taught by Jesus. At the macro level, they drive economic growth, improve societal well-being, and ensure the stability and sustainability of communities and nations. By fostering a culture of enterprise, encouraging innovation, and upholding effective governance, societies can achieve lasting prosperity.

### *The Role of LOVE Virtues in Inspiring Enterprise, Innovation, and Governance: A Christian Perspective*

Material prosperity, often pursued as an ultimate goal in human society, is viewed in the Christian worldview not merely as a materialistic pursuit but as a byproduct of a deeper spiritual journey rooted in virtues that emerge from a secure relationship with God. In this section, we examine how the LOVE virtues—Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity—have played a crucial role in shaping enterprise, innovation, and governance in the United States, Europe, and the broader Western world, using historical examples of Christians who

have profoundly influenced these domains.

### *Understanding the LOVE Virtues*

As a recap, the LOVE virtues form a conceptual framework illustrating how a life rooted in spiritual fulfilment can lead to holistic prosperity: **Linkedness** embodies a deep sense of belonging and connection with God, others, and the broader creation. **Opulence** signifies not just material wealth but also a secure sense of provision, contentment, and achievement, grounded in the belief that God is the ultimate source of all resources. **Valory** encompasses a profound sense of meaning, vitality, and engagement with life, underpinned by a purpose aligned with God's will. **Equanimity** reflects a state of peace, joy, and resilience, enabling individuals to navigate life's challenges with grace.

These virtues inspire individuals and communities to engage in enterprise, innovation, and governance in ways that transcend mere economic gains, fostering environments that support the flourishing of all.

### *Enterprise and the LOVE Virtues*

Enterprise, the engine of any economy, is significantly influenced by the LOVE virtues. In the Christian tradition, work and business are not merely means of survival but are seen as forms of stewardship, where individuals are called to manage resources wisely and ethically.

Linkedness, as a virtue, fosters a sense of community and responsibility that is essential for a successful enterprise. The Protestant work ethic, which emerged from Christian teachings, emphasised hard work, honesty, and responsibility. This ethic became a foundational element of capitalism in the Western world, particularly in the United States and Europe.

For example, the Quakers, a Christian group known for their commitment to integrity and fairness, played a significant role in shaping early American enterprise. Quaker businesses, such as those founded by George Cadbury and John Rowntree, were not only successful but also deeply ethical, prioritising fair treatment of workers and social responsibility. Their sense of Linkedness to the broader community and to God's creation informed their business practices, making them pioneers in what we now call corporate social responsibility (Gillett, 2020).

Opulence, when understood as a secure sense of provision and achievement, drives individuals to create and sustain businesses that contribute to the common good. The idea that wealth is a blessing from God and should be used to help others finds strong support in both the Old and New Testaments. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, gives clear guidance on how those who are rich should approach wealth:

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:17–18, NIV).

This passage emphasises that wealth is a gift from God, but it should not be the source of one's security or pride. Instead, those blessed with wealth are encouraged to use their resources for good by sharing generously and contributing to the well-being of others. The notion that wealth can enable service to others aligns with broader biblical teachings that advocate for justice, generosity, and social responsibility (Proverbs 11:25; Acts 20:35). The biblical perspective sees wealth not as an end in itself but as a means to serve and bless others, thus fostering a spirit of enterprise rooted in moral and spiritual values. John D. Rockefeller, one of the wealthiest men in history and a devout Christian, exemplified this virtue. Rockefeller

believed that his wealth was a gift from God and that he had a responsibility to use it for the betterment of society. He founded the Rockefeller Foundation, which has contributed billions of dollars to public health, education, and scientific research, reflecting the virtue of Opulence as more than material wealth but as a force for good (Chernow, 2007).

### *Innovation and the LOVE Virtues*

Innovation, the lifeblood of economic and social progress, is also profoundly influenced by the LOVE virtues. Many of the greatest innovations in Western history were driven by individuals whose Christian faith inspired them to explore, create, and improve the world.

Valory, with its focus on meaning and vitality, is a key driver of innovation. Individuals who see their work as a calling are more likely to push boundaries, explore new ideas, and persist in the face of challenges. God is often seen as the ultimate source of innovation and wisdom, providing divine guidance and inspiration to those who seek Him through worship and a close relationship with the divine. The Bible frequently speaks of wisdom as a gift from God, available to those who ask for it. In James 1:5 (NIV), it is written, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”* This highlights the belief that wisdom, which fuels innovation and creativity, comes directly from God. Moreover, Proverbs 2:6 (NIV) states, *“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”* This reinforces the idea that true wisdom is a divine gift accessible through a deep spiritual connection with God.

In biblical narratives, figures like Solomon demonstrated how wisdom from God could lead to innovative solutions and prosperous leadership. In 1 Kings 3:12, God grants Solomon exceptional wisdom,

making him renowned for his judgments and leadership. Through prayer, worship, and a close relationship with God, individuals are believed to tap into divine wisdom, unlocking the creativity and understanding necessary for innovation and problem-solving in all areas of life. This is evident in the lives of many Christian scientists and inventors who saw their work as a way to honour God and serve humanity. Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, and Blaise Pascal are prime examples of this. Newton's work in physics and mathematics, Kepler's laws of planetary motion, and Pascal's contributions to mathematics and philosophy were all driven by a sense of Valory. These scientists saw their work as a means to understand God's creation and to contribute to the well-being of humanity. Their innovations were not just intellectual achievements; they were acts of worship and service deeply rooted in their Christian faith (Westfall, 1980; Caspar, 1993; Davidson, 1995).

Isaac Newton explicitly illustrates this. While celebrated for his groundbreaking scientific discoveries, Isaac Newton consistently attributed his insights and understanding to his faith in God. He believed that the laws of nature, such as gravity, were expressions of divine order. According to Westfall (1980), Newton famously stated, "Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who sets the planets in motion. God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done" (p. 287).

This quote reflects Newton's conviction that while science could uncover the mechanisms of the universe, it was God who orchestrated the underlying order and purpose.

Newton's personal writings and reflections show that he spent considerable time in prayer, meditation, and the study of Scripture. As he once expressed,

"I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by those who were inspired. I study the Bible daily" (Westfall, 1980, p.

371).

According to Westfall, “*Newton devoted more of his time to theology than to science,*” underscoring the centrality of his religious beliefs in his life and work (Westfall, 1980, p. 371). Furthermore, Newton often retreated for periods of prayer and reflection, believing that divine wisdom was essential for his scientific innovations (Westfall, 1980).

The Lunar Society of Birmingham provides an excellent example of how “Linkedness” fosters collaboration and drives innovation. This group, which included renowned figures such as James Watt, Matthew Boulton, Joseph Priestley, and Erasmus Darwin, played a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution by combining their intellectual resources and talents to achieve groundbreaking technological and industrial advancements (History West Midlands, 2023). Their collaboration led to significant innovations, including advancements in steam engine technology, pottery manufacturing, and gas lighting systems, all of which transformed industries and society (Historic UK, 2023).

More than just an intellectual endeavour, their sense of Linkedness extended to shared spiritual and philosophical values. Members often engaged in discussions not only about science but also about ethics and societal well-being, reflecting their commitment to the greater good. Their collective faith and philosophical grounding helped foster an environment of trust and cooperation, essential ingredients for their innovative success. The Christian ethical framework that many of the members adhered to emphasised the importance of improving society, which reinforced their dedication to using their innovations for the benefit of others (Lunar Society Korea, 2023).

Thus, the group’s combination of corporate prayer, philosophical discourse, and scientific exploration created a fertile ground for innovation. This holistic approach, blending faith, ethics, and intellectual rigour, allowed the members of the Lunar Society to collaborate effectively, producing lasting innovations that not only advanced

technology but also sought to align with the moral and social values of the time.

### *Michael Faraday: A Model of Faith-Driven Innovation*

Michael Faraday (1791–1867), one of the most influential scientists in history, provides a compelling example of how Christian faith and the LOVE virtues can inspire groundbreaking innovation. Faraday's contributions to electromagnetism and electrochemistry laid the foundations for much of modern technology, including electric motors, transformers, and generators (Hamilton, 2004).

Faraday's deep Christian faith, rooted in the principles of the Sandemanian Church, profoundly influenced his approach to science. He saw his work as a way to reveal the wonders of God's creation and believed that scientific inquiry was a form of worship. Faraday's sense of Valory—his commitment to finding meaning and purpose in his work—drove him to persist in his experiments despite numerous challenges (Cantor, 1991).

Faraday's Linkedness to his faith community and his commitment to Christian values also shaped his character as a scientist. He was known for his humility, integrity, and generosity—qualities that made him not only a great scientist but also a beloved mentor and teacher. Faraday's innovations were not just technical achievements; they were expressions of a deeply held belief in the unity of God's creation and the moral responsibility of using knowledge for the betterment of society (Gooding & James, 1981).

Faraday's work exemplifies the LOVE virtues in action: his Linkedness fostered a collaborative spirit, his sense of Opulence provided the drive to achieve and share his discoveries, his Valory gave him the sense of purpose and his Equanimity enhanced his resilience to overcome obstacles, allowing him to maintain a serene and focused

approach to his work. Faraday's legacy is a testament to the power of integrating faith and science in the pursuit of innovation.

### *Governance and the LOVE Virtues*

Good governance, which creates the environment for enterprise and innovation to thrive, is also influenced by the LOVE virtues. The Christian faith has profoundly shaped the development of governance structures in the Western world, particularly through its emphasis on justice, the dignity of the individual, and the rule of law.

Equanimity, which includes tranquillity and resilience, is crucial for effective governance. Leaders who embody this virtue can maintain peace and stability, even in challenging times. The Christian concept of leadership as service, exemplified by Jesus Christ, has influenced Western governance models, promoting the idea that leaders should be humble, just, and focused on the welfare of their people.

William Wilberforce, a British politician and devout Christian, exemplified the role of Equanimity in governance. His tireless campaign to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire was driven by his Christian belief in the equality and dignity of all people. Despite facing enormous opposition, Wilberforce's resilience and commitment to justice eventually led to the abolition of the slave trade, a monumental achievement in the history of governance and human rights (Hague, 2007).

Valory also plays a significant role in governance, particularly in inspiring leaders to pursue meaningful and just causes. The Christian emphasis on justice and the inherent value of each individual has deeply influenced Western legal and political systems. This is evident in the development of democratic governance, where the rights and dignity of individuals are protected, and leaders are held accountable to their people. The United States' founding fathers, many of whom

were influenced by Christian principles, embedded these values in the nation's founding documents. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution reflect a commitment to justice, liberty, and the protection of individual rights—principles that are rooted in the Christian understanding of the inherent worth of every person (Wood, 2009).

### *The Broader Impact of Christian Virtues on Western Prosperity*

The influence of Christianity on the material prosperity of the Western world is undeniable. The LOVE virtues have inspired countless individuals to pursue enterprise, innovation, and governance with a sense of purpose, responsibility, and commitment to the common good.

The prosperity enjoyed by Western societies today is not merely the result of economic policies or technological advancements but is deeply rooted in a moral and ethical framework shaped by Christian teachings. This framework has fostered environments where enterprise can thrive, innovation can flourish, and governance can promote justice and peace.

In effect, enterprise, innovation, and governance are core principles of material prosperity. These principles are fuelled by the LOVE virtues—Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity. LOVE virtues are obtained through a secure relationship with a loving God through worship. These virtues, deeply rooted in Christian faith, have inspired enterprise, innovation, and governance that transcends mere economic success, fostering a society that values ethical responsibility, social justice, and the well-being of all.

*What must be done?*

The historical examples of the Israeli people and Christians, who have profoundly shaped Western prosperity through business, scientific discovery, and political leadership, demonstrate that a life guided by virtuous principles not only leads to personal fulfilment but also fosters the flourishing of society. These communities embody how faith, rooted in strong moral and spiritual foundations, can drive innovation, leadership, and economic growth. In a world often dominated by materialism and individualism, the **LOVE virtues**—which emphasise love, openness, value, and enterprise—serve as a powerful reminder that true prosperity is holistic. It encompasses not only material wealth but also spiritual and social well-being, all grounded in a secure and deep relationship with God.

However, the paradox of high religiosity coexisting with widespread poverty and conflict in many African communities suggests that the **quality of religiosity**—specifically, the depth of one's relationship with God—requires significant improvement. Although African descendants are often highly religious, they may be less spiritual in their practice. This distinction is crucial. Many individuals have strong ties to their religious institutions and leaders, but their personal connection to God may remain superficial. In many African churches, God is frequently associated with His omnipotent power and knowledge, while His unconditional love is less emphasised. This focus on miraculous power rather than the economic and transformative principle of love can lead to a form of religiosity that prioritises external practices over internal spiritual growth.

To fully realise the transformative power of faith and unlock the potential for economic prosperity, African communities must learn to tap into the LOVE model, which emphasises not only a secure relationship with God but also the active cultivation of virtues that are

essential for enterprise, innovation and governance. If implemented, this model could lead to a deeper, more spiritually grounded form of spirituality, one that promotes not only personal fulfilment but also societal prosperity by aligning spiritual values with practical, everyday living. The economic principle of love, when fully embraced, has the potential to create lasting, holistic prosperity across African communities, fostering growth that is both sustainable and inclusive.

## PART V: WORSHIP:THE SCIENCE OF FALLING IN LOVE WITH GOD

This section explores the concept of worship, presenting it as a vital practice that extends far beyond traditional religious rituals. Here, worship is presented not just a religious ceremonial activity but a way of life that fosters a deep, intimate relationship with God, who is the ultimate source of love and the foundation of the LOVE model (Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity). Through worship, individuals can connect with both their inner selves and the divine, allowing them to cultivate virtues essential for holistic well-being and flourishing.

The section delves into the theological and scientific dimensions of worship, illustrating how it can enhance spiritual growth and personal development. The author presents worship as a mechanism that engages individuals in deeper thinking, meditation, and reflection. This process enables people to access divine inspiration, which can guide them in generating new ideas, finding solutions to life's challenges,

and aligning themselves with their true purpose. The act of worship, according to the author, is not limited to moments of prayer or praise but involves a continual engagement with God and self that nurtures creativity, wisdom, and spiritual resilience.

In this context, worship becomes a channel through which individuals can draw upon divine guidance to navigate the complexities of life. By engaging in worship, people can access a higher level of consciousness and insight, which can inform their decision-making and inspire innovative thinking. This form of engagement is essential for those seeking to live a flourishing life, as it provides the spiritual nourishment necessary for personal growth and the development of key virtues within the LOVE model.

Moreover, the section explores how worship can lead to sustainable material prosperity. The author draws parallels between the worship practices of the Israelites in the Promised Land and the economic success they achieved by adhering to religious ethics. The author suggests that the virtues cultivated through worship—such as discipline, integrity, and generosity—can contribute to economic well-being and overall success in life. This link between spiritual devotion and material prosperity underscores the holistic nature of worship as both a spiritual and practical tool for flourishing.

Practical guidance for readers is also provided to incorporate worship into their daily lives. Steps are outlined to help individuals build a meaningful worship routine that strengthens their connection to God and enhances their overall well-being. The section emphasizes the importance of attunement, contemplation, and communion as key practices that help individuals deepen their spiritual connection and experience divine peace, purpose, and creativity.

## Chapter 17: Theological Perspective of Worship

There are two moments that define your human life: the moment God fell in love with you and the moment you fall in love with God. Falling in love is a personal and enduring relationship with God, who is the source of LOVE. Falling in love is the equivalent of worship- the Judeo-Christian term which involves an encounter with the peace that passes understanding, which leads not only to a sense of linkedness but also to psychospiritual metamorphosis.

“worship” refers to a deep, personal relationship with God involving affection and reverence. In the Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, the Greek word *proskynéō* (from *prós*, meaning “towards,” and *kynéō*, meaning “to kiss”) is translated as “worship” in John 4:24. This term means “to blow a kiss towards...” (Strong, 2009). Worship involves showing reverence, adoration, or intimate affection towards God.

Falling in love with God is akin to what Professor Lisa Miller describes as a close and direct two-way relationship with a loving and guiding Creator. It is an ongoing relationship involving communication and living side-by-side with the Ultimate Presence. It is an

intimate, daily lived relationship of love and guidance from the sacred Higher Power (Miller, 2013, p.335).

### *Worship in the Judaism*

In ancient Judaism, all worship took place in the Temple located in Jerusalem. The ancient Jewish Temple, which included both the First Temple (Solomon's Temple) and the Second Temple (Herod's Temple), was an impressive religious structure designed with a clear three-part division. Each compartment served a distinct function in the practice of worship. At its most basic level, the Temple was divided into three main areas: the Azarah (Outer Courtyard), the Heikhal (Holy Place), and the Debir (Holy of Holies), each with its unique role and significance in the spiritual life of the Jewish people (Horsley, 2015).

The Azarah, or the Court of the Gentiles, was the outermost and most accessible area of the Temple complex. This expansive space was open to all, including non-Jews (Gentiles), making it a hub of activity and interaction (Kaufman, 2020). The courtyard featured various amenities such as marketplaces for sacrificial animals and money changers, facilitating the logistics of Temple worship. Its primary function was to serve as a preparatory area where worshippers could gather, make their offerings, and engage in activities related to the sacrificial system. The inclusion of Gentiles in this area underscored the Temple's role as a focal point of religious activity and exchange, welcoming all who wished to participate in the sacred practices (Levine, 2000).

Beyond the Azarah lay the Heikhal, a more restricted area where the daily rituals of Temple worship were conducted. This compartment was a rectangular space set apart by a barrier from the Azarah (Fine, 2005). The Heikhal contained three key elements: the Table of

Showbread, the Menorah (Lampstand), and the Altar of Incense. The Table of Showbread held twelve loaves of bread, symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel and their perpetual covenant with God. The Menorah provided light and was a symbol of divine enlightenment and guidance. The Altar of Incense was used for burning incense, representing the prayers of the people ascending to God. This area was crucial for the regular, daily functions of the Temple and reflected a more intimate engagement with the divine, preparing the way for the most sacred aspect of the Temple (Meyers, 2004).

The temple's innermost and most sacred compartment was the Debir, also known as the Holy of Holies. It was separated from the Heikhal by a heavy veil or curtain and housed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments (Mazar, 2012). The Debir was considered the dwelling place of God's presence on Earth and was entered only once a year by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This ritual was performed to atone for the people's sins and maintain the sanctity of the divine presence. The Debir represented the ultimate point of spiritual connection, emphasising the profound reverence and awe of God's presence (Bockmuehl, 2013).

Each compartment of the Temple played a crucial role in ancient Judaism's religious practices and spiritual framework. The division of space facilitated the organisation of worship and underscored the hierarchical nature of divine interaction, from the accessible Azarah to the profoundly sacred Debir. This structure reflected the importance of the Temple as both a physical and spiritual center, central to Jewish worship and identity (Schiffman, 2006).

### *Worship in the Christian Era*

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, symbolised by a dramatic shattering of the veil that separated the holy of holies and the rest of the temple, ushered in a new way of worship. Following the subsequent destruction of the Temple, it meant that people no longer needed the physical structure to worship God (Hebrews 10:20). The dramatic tearing of the curtain, as described in Matthew 27:51 and Mark 15:38, symbolises the new access to God provided through Christ. In John 4:24, Jesus said that because God is spirit, worship must now occur in the spirit. This means that the human body (or rather, the human soul) is now the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). Worship, therefore, occurs in the “heart” or “spirit” and requires a private, personal, and intimate setting (Hardy, 1971, 1979).

The terms “heart” and “spirit” need more explanation.

A spirit is an intangible and immaterial aspect of existence, such as consciousness, meaning, and transcendence, which extend beyond the material world. A spirit world is an intangible reality that is beyond the material state. The spiritual world encompasses spiritual things such as virtues, knowledge, affection, thoughts, emotions and love. Spiritual beings are entities or individuals believed to exist beyond the physical realm, typically possessing consciousness, intelligence, and the ability to interact with or influence the material world in ways that are not bound by physical laws. These beings are often considered immaterial and connected to spiritual, religious, or supernatural dimensions. In many belief systems, spiritual beings include deities, angels, demons, spirits, ancestors, or even souls, each playing specific roles within a cosmological or religious framework. According to spiritual science, all phenomena –including spiritual things– continuously vibrate with energy, emitting and receiving distinct waves at specific frequencies and speeds (Epstein, 1988;

Metcalfe & Jacobs, 1998). Spiritual things are experienced on an emotional and physiological level, largely non-verbal and implicit, operating outside of conscious awareness and within the psychological preconscious and unconscious realms.

To experience the flow of spiritual energy, a person must have a mind attuned to this frequency. This concept can be likened to accessing the internet: just as a device like a smartphone needs to be powered on to connect to the World Wide Web, a spiritually tuned-in mind is necessary to perceive and understand the essence of spiritual experiences, such as love (Joseph, 2000; Miller W.R, 2021).

In spiritual psychology, the term “spirit” or “mind” refers to the human soul (Wundt, 1879). The word “soul” is derived from the Greek word “Psyche,” which also serves as the root for the term “psychology,” meaning the study of the human soul or mind. In a broader sense, the soul is the essence of a human being.

## Chapter 18: The Anatomy of the Human Soul

A soul is generally understood as the immaterial, spiritual essence of a person, often considered the core of one's identity and consciousness. Across many religious and philosophical traditions, the soul is considered the true self, separate from the physical body, and is often believed to live on after death. The concept of the soul is central to questions about the meaning of life, morality, and what happens after we die.

In Christianity, the soul is viewed as immortal and eternal. It is considered the essence of a person who will either be rewarded or punished in the afterlife based on their actions and relationship with God. Matthew 10:28 in the Bible mentions, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* This highlights the distinct nature of the soul in Christian belief.

The ancient Jewish Temple, consisting of the Azarah (Outer Courtyard), the Heikhal (Holy Place), and the Debir (Holy of Holies), can be metaphorically compared to the three aspects of the human soul: the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious mind. The Bible describes

the body as God's Temple, reflecting a profound spiritual truth. In Christianity, the "Temple of the Holy Spirit" underscores the belief that the human body is a sacred dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. This idea is articulated in the New Testament, particularly in 1 Corinthians 6:19, which states, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

By drawing analogies between the areas of the Temple and the dimensions of the human soul, we gain insight into how these components interact and contribute to our personal relationship with God and spiritual growth.

### *The Conscious Mind: The Azarah of the Soul*

Similar to the Outer Courtyard, or Azarah, of the Temple—which some theologians liken to the physical body, carnal or the flesh as it represents the most accessible and outward-facing part of the Temple—the conscious mind encompasses our immediate awareness and interactions with the external world. Just as the Azarah is the area where daily activities occur, such as purchasing sacrificial animals or participating in rituals, the conscious mind is where we process current experiences, make decisions, and engage in purposeful activities (Kaufman, 2020). While spiritual interactions do not occur within the conscious mind, this realm plays a crucial role in preparing for deeper spiritual experiences. The Azarah of the soul, akin to the Temple's Azarah, is essential for setting the stage for these profound spiritual encounters.

### *The Subconscious Mind: The Heikhal of the Soul*

The subconscious mind encompasses the affiliative system located primarily in the right hemisphere of the brain (Garzon, 2007; Cozolino, 2017). This aspect of the mind holds deeper thoughts, feelings, and memories that shape our behaviour and perceptions. It functions as an automated, spiritual antenna attuned to spiritual sensitivity. The Heikhal, or Holy Place, within the Temple, represents this inner realm, symbolising the subconscious mind. While the Heikhal is central and accessible within the Temple, it is more restricted than the Azarah, reflecting its more private and introspective nature.

Within the Heikhal, sacred elements such as the Table of Showbread, the Menorah, and the Altar of Incense correspond to the internal processes that nourish and enrich our spiritual and mental lives (Meyers, 2004). Likewise, the subconscious mind acts as the worship chamber of the soul, where the profound processes of sacrifice—symbolising loss and pain—initially occur. This private and sensitive domain is well-suited for spiritual practices such as study, prayer, supplication, and meditation. In psychological terms, the unconscious mind can be seen as this deeply profound inner sanctum, holding buried memories, instincts, and unresolved conflicts that are not readily accessible to conscious awareness.

The initial stages of spiritual experience in the Heikhal of the soul involve confronting and emptying negative memories and emotions, creating space for positive ones. Therefore, the heikhal of the soul is an emotional reservoir; it stores memories of love. As the wellspring of deep emotions, it provides a source of happiness, comfort, tranquillity, and solace,

*The Unconscious Mind: The Debir of the Soul*

The Debir, or the Holy of Holies, was the most sacred and private part of the ancient Temple, housing the Ark of the Covenant and symbolising the highest point of divine presence (Mazar, 2012). This inner sanctum can be likened to the soul's unconscious mind, often considered the heart of our being. Just as the Debir was revered and accessible only to the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the unconscious mind represents the deepest, most sacred aspect of our soul, where our fundamental identity, values, and spiritual essence reside (John 4:24; Proverbs 4:23).

The Debir was a place of profound spiritual connection and divine interaction, akin to the unconscious mind, where the core of our existence is shaped. This area signifies a deep covenant with God, reflecting our values, identity, and purpose. The Debir's sacredness meant that access was highly restricted, with the High Priest entering only once a year after meticulous preparation. Similarly, the heart of our soul is reserved for the most profound and transformative spiritual experiences.

Such moments of worship in the Debir—like those in our unconscious mind—are rare but immensely significant. They lead to profound revelations, spiritual transformation, and life-changing insights. The Debir, exclusive to God and accessible only with divine invitation and careful preparation, mirrors the sacred nature of our own innermost spiritual chamber.

The Debir could be likened to the pineal gland, often referred to as the “third eye,” is considered a spiritual gateway for intuition and higher consciousness. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul refers to the concept of spiritual insight as the “eyes of your understanding” in Ephesians 1:18:

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may

know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” (KJV).

Paul uses this metaphor to describe a form of spiritual vision or perception, enabling believers to grasp divine truths and deeper insights beyond the physical realm. This concept aligns with the idea of the pineal gland or third eye, symbolising spiritual enlightenment and the awakening of inner wisdom (Baker, 2012; Jaseja, 2004). In Hinduism, it is associated with the Ajna chakra, representing inner vision and divine wisdom (Jaseja, 2004). Spiritual traditions suggest that the pineal gland allows access to spiritual awakening, enabling one to perceive beyond physical reality (Baker, 2012).

### *Subjective Consciousness: The Katapetasma of the Soul*

The conscious and subconscious mind together form the subjective consciousness (Taylor, S., 2005) or the ego (Tolle, 2006). Consciousness comprises our inner working models that modulate our sense of self, others, and the world. The concept of carnality is the theologian’s counterpart to consciousness and ego. It is derived from the Latin word “carnalis,” which means “of the flesh.” In a broader sense, it can also describe a focus on or preoccupation with physical pleasures and bodily needs that usually happen in the azara of the soul. This term can carry neutral and negative connotations, depending on the context in which it is used.

### *Functions of the Consciousness*

### *Essential Earthly Garment*

The conscious mind acts as an essential outfit for living and fulfilling life's mission on earth. Just as an astronaut cannot survive or perform their space mission without the proper attire, no entity can function in the physical world without the conscious mind. It is an essential tool for navigating and understanding material existence.

Consciousness plays a key role in homeostasis, the process by which organisms regulate their internal environment to maintain stability, ensuring that vital conditions like temperature, pH, and ion concentrations remain within optimal ranges despite external fluctuations. This regulatory mechanism is essential for survival and proper functioning. For instance, in humans, homeostasis manages the regulation of body temperature, blood pressure, and glucose levels, all of which are critical for sustaining cellular processes (Pocock & Richards, 2006). Through various physiological mechanisms, such as sweating to cool the body or the release of insulin to manage blood sugar, homeostasis maintains the equilibrium necessary for health (Guyton & Hall, 2011).

Homeostasis is vital for the survival of organisms, as deviations from the stable internal conditions can disrupt cellular function, leading to illness or death. For example, the regulation of glucose levels ensures that cells receive enough energy while avoiding the harmful effects of excessively high or low blood sugar (Sherwood, 2015). This delicate balance, governed by homeostatic mechanisms, illustrates the body's remarkable ability to adapt to changing external conditions while preserving internal harmony. Keeping life running facilitates a healthy existence, daily living, workings and interactions with the material world, i.e., surviving, reproducing, nurturing, being active, relating, communicating, etc. (Taylor, S., 2005).

Consciousness acts as the central processing unit for humans,

integrating and interpreting sensory inputs from both the material and spiritual realms into meaningful information (Ward, 2015). It serves as a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds, allowing spiritual insights—such as divine inspiration, revelations, visions, and abstract ideas—to be translated into practical, tangible forms that can address human material needs. Spiritual experiences, which are often abstract and non-physical in nature, must be processed and made comprehensible through consciousness for them to be applied effectively in the material world.

For example, a spiritual vision or divine inspiration may initially appear in symbolic or abstract form, but through the conscious mind, these spiritual insights can be transformed into innovative ideas, inventions, or services that meet practical human needs. This is evident in the way many scientists, inventors, and leaders have credited their breakthroughs to moments of inspiration that seemed to transcend ordinary thought. When these spiritual ideas are processed by the conscious mind, they can lead to concrete outcomes, such as new technologies, businesses, or systems that improve lives and society.

The conscious mind, therefore, plays a vital role in mediating between the spiritual and material realms, making it possible for individuals to convert spiritual ideas into practical goods and services. The unconscious mind captures and holds spiritual information, while the subconscious stores and processes this information, impacting our conscious experiences and decision-making. This dynamic process allows deep, spiritual experiences to influence and shape our actions, ultimately manifesting as tangible contributions to society. For example, someone may receive an abstract vision about improving healthcare, and through the conscious mind's ability to process and refine that vision, they might develop a new medical technology or a more effective system of care delivery.

Contrary to some theological views that perceive the conscious

mind (or carnal mind) as anti-spiritual or evil, the conscious mind is essential in making sense of both the material and spiritual worlds. Rather than being disconnected from spirituality, it is the key instrument through which spiritual insights are applied to practical needs, thus harmonising the spiritual and material dimensions of human existence. As long as one still lives in the physical world, one needs a healthy and well-functioning conscious mind.

### *The Shielding and Regulating Katapetasma*

Consciousness can be likened to an invisible “wall” separating the material and spiritual worlds. This concept parallels the Katapetasma, the veil in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem that separated the Holy of Holies (Debir) from the rest of the Temple (Pritchard, 1962). Similarly, the Katapetasma of the soul acts as a barrier between the heart and consciousness and, by extension, between the individual and divine presence. While this separation can be viewed as a barrier to God’s presence, it also acts as a protective mechanism, shielding the soul from direct encounters with divine energy that might otherwise be disruptive, overwhelming or harmful (Taylor, S., 2005).

This notion has led some religious and philosophical scholars to contrast the ego with spiritual or intellectual pursuits. This conceptual framework often supports asceticism—a practice of rigorous self-discipline and denial of physical or material comforts to pursue higher spiritual or personal development. Asceticism is sometimes criticised as a bleak and neurotic expression of the dualistic belief systems inherent in monotheistic religions such as Christianity, which view carnal desires as symbols of humanity’s sinful nature in contrast to spiritual purity (Horsley, 2001). However, consciousness’s role in this dynamic is significant. Just as the Katapetasma shielded the ancient Israelites from the overwhelming power of the divine,

consciousness protects the soul from the divine presence. Without adequate preparation, direct exposure to such potent spiritual energy could be spiritually hazardous (Tolle, 2006).

Different types of spiritual energy possess distinct frequencies and vibrational speeds, influencing their energy demands. Tolle (2006) notes that positive emotions like happiness emit positive energy that travels at higher frequencies and speeds than negative emotions like fear. Consequently, high-frequency energies require more mental effort to process than low-frequency energies. This explains why negative emotions are more easily perceived when fatigued (Taylor, S., 2005). As energies (thoughts and corresponding feelings) flow at varying frequencies, positive states (e.g., life satisfaction, calmness, compassion) flow at higher frequencies, thus necessitating a higher level of consciousness compared to negative states (Tolle, 2006; Azemati & Matracchi, 2020). Superior positive spiritual energies, such as love, are associated with higher frequencies and are correlated with gamma brainwaves in the prefrontal cortex, which are linked to heightened states of consciousness (Ardana & Dewi, 2020; Cahill, 2014). Processing these high-frequency energies demands greater neuro-cognitive capabilities (i.e., consciousness) than processing low-frequency energies (Buzsaki, 2006; Lutz et al., 2004).

The strength of consciousness, or *Katepetasma*, determines one's sensitivity and accessibility to the spiritual realm. A weaker *Katepetasma* means greater sensitivity and receptivity to spiritual energy. Conversely, a higher state of consciousness requires a more robust *Katepetasma* to handle intensified sensory input. Suppose the *Katepetasma* is insufficiently developed to process high-intensity spiritual inputs. In that case, it must be strengthened beforehand to avoid potential disruption or dismantling, much like an electrical appliance that can safely operate on a lower current but risks damage when exposed to a higher voltage (Buzsaki, 2006). Thus, the *Katepetasma*

functions as a spiritual regulator, managing the flow of elevated spiritual energy to prevent overwhelm or harm.

The intensity of divine love one can experience is contingent upon the robustness of the conscious mind. The resilience of the mind can be assessed by the thickness of brain cortices, with thicker cortices indicating a greater capacity to process high-voltage spiritual energy (Miller et al., 2014). If the brain nerves are too thin, they must be fortified before encountering higher-intensity spiritual energy or risk severe disruption (Taylor, S., 2005). This mental enhancement process is discussed further in the chapter on Mental Resilience.

The significance of this protective role is underscored by the Holy of Holies in ancient Israelite worship. Only the High Priest could enter this sacred space, and only on Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:2). The elaborate rituals and preparations required for entry—purification, specific garments, and atonement offerings—reflect the intense reverence and preparation needed to approach the divine presence. The High Priest's attire included bells, and a rope tied around his ankle to ensure that if he fell or died within the Holy of Holies, his body could be retrieved without entering the sacred space (Leviticus 16:2–34). This practice illustrates the protective function of consciousness, which, like the High Priest's preparations, helps manage and moderate the sensory inputs to prevent cognitive overload (Taylor, S., 2005; Floyd et al., 1994; Saint John of the Cross, 2007).

Sometimes, being cut off from God's presence can be a blessing in disguise, as it may protect an individual from being overwhelmed or irreparably harmed by the immense power of the divine. This idea can be likened to an electric fuse that dislodges following a power surge to prevent further damage to an appliance. A clear biblical example of this is the story of Adam and Eve, who, after sinning, were expelled from the Garden of Eden—essentially, from God's direct presence. In Genesis 3:24 (NIV), it is written, "*After he drove the man out, he placed on*

*the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”* While some may argue that this separation was a punishment due to the immediate negative changes in their lives, such as hard labor and mortality, the expulsion was also an act of protection.

God removed them from the Garden to prevent them from eating from the Tree of Life and living forever in a fallen state, which would have led to eternal separation from Him (Genesis 3:22). By distancing them from the Tree of Life, God ensured they would not face eternal damnation. The separation allowed Adam and Eve—and, by extension, humanity—time to develop a more conscious spiritual mind that would become more robust and capable of handling greater spiritual power for an eventual, more blissful life. This temporary detachment was, therefore, part of God’s greater plan to redeem humanity and prepare it for an even more profound connection with Him in the future. It allowed for spiritual growth and maturity, transforming the momentary trial into an opportunity for future spiritual readiness and eternal union with God.

### *Consciousness Development*

Falling in love with God is not just about experiencing love itself but recognising and perceiving God’s unconditional love. While God’s love for us is constant and unwavering, our awareness of it is crucial for it to impact us positively. To lead a fulfilling and blissful life, one must cultivate an awareness and receptivity to this divine love. According to the Holy Scriptures, God’s love for us existed before our creation (Jeremiah 1:5), but we are not born with an innate understanding of this love. Gaining this awareness requires mental and spiritual development, which are intertwined (Cozolino, 2014; Taylor, S., 2012).

Spiritual scientists suggest that the ability to experience spiritual

energy is closely linked to cognitive development. The conscious nervous system's capacity to handle spiritual experiences develops over time, typically maturing during puberty or early adulthood (Piaget, 1971). This aligns with observations that significant spiritual transformations often occur at key cognitive and physical developmental stages (Miller, 2016, 2021). For instance, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick found that religious conversions are notably prevalent during adolescence (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004).

St. Paul described falling in love with God as a process of enlightening the eyes of understanding (Philippians 1:18). Similarly, Jesus equated this process with being “born of the spirit” (John 3:3). When our spiritual understanding matures and our spiritual eyes open, we experience God's love with profound clarity. Just as children need to depend on milk for nourishment before they can handle solid food, those with less developed spiritual faculties must rely on spiritually mature individuals for guidance. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it” (1 Corinthians 3:2). This metaphor illustrates that immature believers need spiritual nourishment that is more suited to their level of development, much like how infants depend on milk before they can digest more solid food.

The development of consciousness involves complex processes of organization, integration, and orientation, known as synthesis. This process can sometimes lead to psychological disruptions, such as developmental depression, due to the strain on homeostasis and cognitive upheaval (Miller & Barton, 2015). These disruptions often correlate with increased activity in the limbic system (Taylor, S., 2005; Tart, 1991), which can cause psychological turmoil during spiritual growth. As cognitive faculties undergo reorganization or are engaged in psycho-mystical experiences, individuals may experience significant mental changes (Cozolino, 2014; Menezes & Moreira-

Almeida, 2010).

Therefore, just as children depend on their mothers for milk and guidance, spiritually immature individuals need to rely on mentors and teachers who can provide the spiritual nourishment they need. The journey toward spiritual maturity is complex and necessitates both cognitive and emotional development to fully embrace and integrate God's love.

## Chapter 19: The Worship Protocol

Worship practice typically involves three main processes: attunement, contemplation, and communion. This protocol prepares the worshiper's mind to navigate the three soul chambers, from the conscious to the unconscious. Just as in the ancient Jewish Temple worship, attunement occurs in the conscious mind (Azara), contemplation takes place in the subconscious (Heikhal), and communion occurs in the unconscious mind (Debir).

### *1: Attunement*

Attunement refers to connecting the worshiper's mind with God to the point that she is ready to absorb God's love (Brown & Fromm, 1986; Hammond, 1990; Williams et al., 2020).

Attunement also means surrender- lowering consciousness defences to connect with God. Falling in love with God is an enduring relationship in which God assumes the role of the dominant partner while you, the beloved, are the subordinate partner. Love requires the lover to lower her defences and expand her boundaries, merging her needs and desires with those of her beloved (Marazziti & Canale,

2004). Falling in love with God involves becoming vulnerable and willingly surrendering your interests in favour of living for Him. This vulnerability, though it can be intimidating, is essential to developing a loving relationship with God.

Our lives contain elements within our control and others that are beyond it. A relationship with God can become complex when we attempt to control the uncontrollable. Our beliefs and feelings can make letting go challenging. However, surrendering to God is crucial for beginning this process of release. As Pastor Rick Warren articulates:

Surrendering your life to God means following His lead without knowing where He's sending you; waiting for His timing without knowing when it will come; expecting a miracle without knowing how God will provide; trusting His purpose without understanding the circumstances. Trusting God means relying on Him to work things out instead of trying to manipulate others, force your agenda, or control the situation. You let go and let God work. You don't have to always be in charge. Instead of trying harder, you trust more (Warren, 2012, p.91).

Attunement involves two processes: Intensification and Tuning.

### *Intensification*

Intensification involves practices designed to conserve and focus conscious energy, essential for deeply engaging in spiritual experiences, such as feeling God's love. This idea is based on the understanding that significant conscious energy is required for a profound divine connection (Braboszcz et al., 2017). By minimising distractions and redirecting mental and physical energy, these practices can enhance spiritual experiences.

**Closing Eyes:** Closing the eyes is a practice that reduces visual stimuli, helping to conserve mental energy and enhance focus during spiritual activities. Jesus often withdrew to solitary places to pray, closing his eyes to fully concentrate on his communion with God (Mark 1:35). This practice allowed him to maintain a deep, undistracted state necessary for meaningful spiritual connection.

**Being Still and Quiet:** Being still and quiet conserves energy by minimising external noise and movement. The Bible encourages stillness for connecting with God, as in Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.” This stillness helps worshippers direct their full attention to spiritual practices, fostering a space for profound insight. Jesus’ retreating to isolated places, such as the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, demonstrates how stillness and quietness contribute to deep spiritual engagement (Matthew 26:36).

**Being Alone in a Private Environment:** Solitude helps conserve energy by removing external distractions. Jesus frequently sought solitude for prayer, often retreating to quiet, natural settings like mountains or gardens (Luke 5:16; Matthew 14:23). These solitary environments enabled him to focus deeply on his spiritual practices, undisturbed by social demands and external interruptions.

**Fasting from Essential Needs:** Fasting from food, sleep, and sex conserves physical energy and enhances spiritual sensitivity. The Bible emphasises fasting as a practice for spiritual growth. Jesus’ 40-day fast in the wilderness, done in solitude and often in darkness, highlights how fasting sharpens focus and deepens spiritual experiences (Matthew 4:1-2). This practice aligns with conserving energy for spiritual purposes and enhancing one’s sensitivity to divine connection.

**Celibacy:** Celibacy conserves energy by removing the distractions associated with sexual activity, allowing individuals to focus more on spiritual pursuits. Paul discusses celibacy to devote greater attention

to spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). This practice supports the conservation of energy for deeper spiritual engagement and connection.

**High Places and Flowing Waters:** High places like hills and mountains often hold profound spiritual significance in the Bible. They are frequently seen as locations where the divine is closer, much like elevated spots can improve reception for internet, radio, or TV signals. This idea reflects a broader notion that just as physical elevation can enhance connectivity with technology, spiritual elevation can heighten sensitivity to divine presence and spiritual insights. Unsurprisingly, high places were places where people went to worship or seek divine guidance. This is seen in various instances, such as when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Jesus often prayed to mountains, using these elevated, serene locations to gain a clearer perspective and deepen his spiritual connection (Matthew 14:23). The Torah prescribes high or elevated settings for building altars for sacrificial worship, emphasising their spiritual importance. In Exodus 20:24-26, God instructs the Israelites to build altars of earth or unhewn stone, and the altar's placement is often associated with elevated locations to signify a closer connection to God:

“Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep, goats, and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honoured, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool. And do not go up to my altar on steps, or your private parts may be exposed” (Exodus 20:24-26, NIV).

The Temple in Jerusalem was constructed on Mount Moriah, a hill, reflecting its sacred status (2 Chronicles 3:1). Furthermore, Jesus Christ, the sacrificial lamb, was crucified on a hill at Golgotha, highlighting the enduring significance of elevated settings in Biblical traditions (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22). Similarly, flowing waters

like rivers and springs symbolise renewal and purification in the Bible (Harris, 2017). Jesus refers to himself as the “living water” (John 4:10–14), representing spiritual sustenance and renewal. These natural settings help maintain tranquillity and focus during spiritual practices.

**Natural Settings and Night-time:** Gardens, bushes, and forests offer peaceful environments for spiritual reflection (Edwards, 2004). The Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed before his crucifixion, exemplifies how natural settings can enhance spiritual engagement (Matthew 26:36). The darkness of night-time, particularly the early morning hours, provides an opportunity for introspection and heightened spiritual sensitivity. Jesus’ practice of praying at night or early in the morning illustrates the benefits of using the quiet, dark hours for spiritual connection (Mark 1:35). Similarly, Jacob’s vision of the ladder to heaven occurred during the night, demonstrating how darkness can facilitate profound spiritual encounters (Genesis 28:10–17).

**Darkness:** Darkness symbolises introspection and transformation in spiritual practices. The Holy of Holies in the Temple was completely dark, representing the ultimate spiritual sanctum (Exodus 26:33). The progression from the illuminated outer court to the dark inner sanctum emphasises the role of darkness in fostering intimate spiritual experiences. This use of darkness aligns with closing eyes and seeking solitude, reinforcing how these conditions contribute to a deeper, more focused spiritual connection. The importance of natural darkness and divine light in worship practice is explained more in the following paragraphs.

**Secrecy:** Secrecy and privacy are crucial for the effectiveness of spiritual practices. Jesus taught that prayer should be conducted in secrecy to foster a genuine connection with God, free from public scrutiny and external influences (Matthew 6:6). This principle extends to fasting as well; Jesus emphasised that fasting should be a private matter between the individual and God, not for public display (Matthew

6:16–18). By keeping spiritual practices private, individuals can focus more fully on their spiritual experiences and cultivate a deeper, personal relationship with the divine.

It's important to clarify that while certain conditions and settings may symbolise spiritual significance, they do not imply that God's presence is confined to specific locations. The Bible teaches that God is omnipresent—His presence fully encompasses all creation at all times (Jeremiah 23:24; Psalm 139:7–10). However, our ability to perceive and connect with this divine presence can vary depending on our environment and mental state. While certain settings or conditions may enhance our spiritual awareness or receptivity, they do not increase God's presence, nor are they necessary for experiencing it. Our connection to the divine is influenced more by our focus and openness than physical settings.

## *Tuning*

Tuning is the process of enhancing spiritual sensitivity. Technically, tuning refers to the process of engaging hypnotic techniques to induce relaxation and heightened attention, bypass the conscious mind, tap into the unconscious mind, and achieve a sense of connectedness with the spiritual world (Cozolino, 2017; Miller, 2014). As mentioned, God's love vibrates in the unconscious "spiritual" frequency and can only be experienced through the unconscious nervous system (Garzon, 2007; Cozolino, 2017; Miller et al., 2021). Therefore, tuning aims to shift the processing priority from the conscious to the unconscious mind (Brown & Fromm, 1986; Elkins, 2014, 2020). In so doing, the various cognitive defenses of the conscious analytical process may be sufficiently reduced to prevent spiritual experiences from being questioned, contradicted, or ignored (Hammond, 1990; Williams et

al., 2020). During the tuning process, the worshiper bypasses the conscious, rational system and loses the power of voluntary attention, increasing the likelihood that God's love will be experienced and integrated (Spiegel, 2016).

All the intensification practices mentioned above can potentially tune the worshiper's mind. However, stimulating melodies, music, songs, and dancing are well-known tuning practices (Tylor, 2005).

**Stimulating Melodies:** Stimulating melodies can evoke strong emotional responses, helping individuals connect more deeply with their spiritual experiences. Uplifting or calming melodies can create a sense of peace, joy, or transcendence, facilitating a more profound spiritual engagement (Tylor, 2005). Additionally, melodies influence brain activity by activating reward systems, releasing dopamine and endorphins that enhance pleasure and connection (Bradt & Dileo, 2014). This neurological response contributes to a heightened spiritual experience by making it feel more intense and meaningful (Bradt & Dileo, 2014). Engaging melodies also help worshipers focus their thoughts, entering a state of flow where they are fully immersed in the activity, which deepens their spiritual practice (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

**Musical:** Music is crucial in setting the tone and creating an atmosphere conducive to worship. It influences mood and energy through meditative calmness or vibrant energy (Tylor, 2005). Music can evoke memories and associations, aiding in recalling past spiritual experiences and enhancing present engagement (Huron, 2006). Additionally, communal music activities, such as group singing, foster a sense of unity and collective spiritual connection, enriching the worship experience (Hargreaves & North, 2010).

**Singing:** Songs with spiritually uplifting or thought-provoking lyrics can guide worshipers in meditation and reflection, providing

a framework for their worship experience (Tylor, 2005). Repetitive singing helps memorise and internalise spiritual messages, reinforcing concepts and enhancing awareness (Huron, 2006). Furthermore, songs facilitate emotional expression, allowing worshipers to process and articulate a range of feelings, from joy to sorrow, which enriches their spiritual practice (Hargreaves & North, 2010). For example, the Psalms express deep spiritual truths and emotional experiences (The Holy Bible, New International Version, n.d., Psalm 139:7-10).

**Dancing:** Dancing involves physical movement that helps worshipers release tension and become more attuned to their bodies and emotions (Tylor, 2005). This physical engagement makes spiritual experiences more tangible and immediate. Dance also allows for the free expression of spiritual joy, gratitude, and reverence, liberating worshipers from constraints and enabling a more uninhibited connection with their spirituality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Communal dancing strengthens social bonds and enhances collective spiritual experiences, enriching the worship experience (Hargreaves & North, 2010). The Bible also illustrates how physical movement can be an expression of worship, as seen in various passages that highlight the importance of bodily expression in spiritual practice (1 Kings 8:27).

### *The Role of Nutrition and Fasting on spiritual Sensitivity*

The concept of spiritual sensitivity is closely linked to the idea of enhancing one's connection to higher consciousness, intuition, and inner wisdom. In many spiritual traditions, the pineal gland, often called the "third eye," is considered essential for accessing this spiritual awareness. However, modern lifestyles, including poor diet and environmental toxins, are believed to lead to the calcification of the pineal gland, reducing its effectiveness in both physical and

spiritual functions. One popular approach to address this is through decalcification practices, which often include nutritional adjustments and fasting.

### *The Role of Diet in Decalcification*

Diet plays a crucial role in either contributing to or reducing pineal gland calcification. Certain foods and substances are believed to encourage calcification, while others may help decalcify the gland, restoring its function and enhancing spiritual sensitivity.

#### *a. Foods and Substances to Avoid*

Certain elements in modern diets are thought to contribute to pineal gland calcification. These include:

**Fluoride:** One of the most frequently mentioned causes of pineal gland calcification is fluoride. Found in drinking water and toothpaste, fluoride accumulates in the body and the pineal gland. Reducing fluoride exposure by drinking filtered water and using fluoride-free toothpaste may help prevent further calcification (Luke, 2001).

**Processed Foods and Additives:** Many processed foods contain phosphates, preservatives, and artificial additives that can increase calcium deposits in the body, including the pineal gland. Limiting processed and fast foods can reduce exposure to these harmful substances (Mahoney et al., 2008).

**Calcium-Rich Processed Products:** While calcium is essential for

health, excess calcium, particularly from fortified processed foods, may contribute to calcification. It's advisable to get calcium from natural sources like leafy greens rather than supplements or processed foods (Kakhlon et al., 2010).

### *b. Foods That Promote Decalcification*

To assist in the decalcification of the pineal gland and enhance spiritual sensitivity, certain foods are believed to be helpful. These include:

**Raw Cacao:** Raw cacao is rich in antioxidants and is thought to stimulate the pineal gland. The flavonoids in cacao may help break down calcium deposits and support pineal health (Keen et al., 2005).

**Turmeric:** Known for its powerful anti-inflammatory properties, turmeric contains curcumin, which may help protect the pineal gland from calcification and support overall brain health (Aggarwal & Harikumar, 2009).

**Garlic:** Garlic is considered a natural detoxifier and can help dissolve calcium deposits in the body. It also has anti-inflammatory properties that support the health of the pineal gland (Banerjee et al., 2003).

**Apple Cider Vinegar:** Apple cider vinegar is believed to help break down calcium buildup in the body, assisting in the detoxification process (Budak et al., 2014).

**Tamarind:** Tamarind is thought to help remove fluoride from the body, reducing calcification of the pineal gland. It is often used in traditional remedies for this purpose (Chinoy et al., 1997).

**Chlorella and Spirulina:** These algae are often used in detoxification programs as they help remove heavy metals and toxins from the body, which may assist in decalcifying the pineal gland (Merwe et al., 2010).

## *2. Fasting for Spiritual Sensitivity and Decalcification*

Fasting has been a part of many spiritual traditions, believed to purify the body and mind, making one more open to spiritual insights. Fasting may also support the decalcification process, as it gives the body time to rest and detoxify.

### *a. Types of Fasting*

**Intermittent Fasting:** This involves eating during a limited window of time (e.g., 8 hours) and fasting for the remaining 16 hours of the day. During the fasting period, the body undergoes detoxification processes, which may help reduce calcification. Intermittent fasting is also thought to stimulate autophagy, the body's process of cleaning out damaged cells, which may support pineal gland health (Madeo et al., 2019).

**Water Fasting:** More intense than intermittent fasting, water fasting involves abstaining from all food and drinking only water for a period of time (usually 24–72 hours). Water fasting may accelerate the detoxification process and enhance spiritual sensitivity by promoting mental clarity and inner focus (Longo & Mattson, 2014).

### *b. What to Eat After Fasting*

After fasting, it's important to consume nutrient-dense foods that support detoxification and spiritual health:

**Leafy Greens:** High in magnesium and chlorophyll, leafy greens like spinach and kale are excellent for detoxifying the body and reducing calcification (McCarty, 2007).

**Nuts and Seeds:** Rich in magnesium and essential fatty acids, nuts

and seeds support brain health and may help decalcify the pineal gland (Rondanelli et al., 2016).

**Herbs and Teas:** Herbal teas like ginger, turmeric, and dandelion support the body's detoxification processes and can be consumed regularly after fasting to maintain spiritual and physical health (Williamson, 2001).

### *3. The Spiritual Benefits of Nutrition and Fasting*

Proper nutrition and fasting practices not only help decalcify the pineal gland but also enhance spiritual sensitivity. By consuming foods that support detoxification and avoiding those that promote calcification, individuals can maintain a healthy pineal gland, which is believed to be crucial for accessing spiritual insights. Additionally, fasting allows the body to cleanse itself, making the mind more receptive to higher states of consciousness and inner wisdom.

In summary, nutrition and fasting play essential roles in maintaining the health of the pineal gland and promoting spiritual sensitivity. Reducing the intake of fluoride and processed foods while incorporating antioxidant-rich and detoxifying foods can help decalcify the pineal gland. Coupling these dietary measures with regular fasting can further enhance spiritual clarity, making one more attuned to inner wisdom and higher consciousness. These practices, though rooted in both spiritual and health traditions, can offer holistic benefits for those seeking a deeper spiritual connection.

## *Natural Darkness and Divine Light: A Recipe for Spiritual Enlightenment*

The interplay between natural darkness and divine light has long been seen as essential in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Both are considered crucial for creating the right conditions for heightened spiritual sensitivity, with natural darkness preparing the mind and body for introspection, while divine light symbolises the clarity and wisdom that comes from higher consciousness. This process is facilitated by biological agents such as the pineal gland, which sits at the intersection of the physical and spiritual realms, regulating the body's responses to light and darkness while serving as a conduit for spiritual insight.

### **Natural Darkness: The Foundation for Spiritual Sensitivity**

Natural darkness, particularly during the night, is not only vital for our physical health but also serves as an important backdrop for spiritual reflection. Darkness triggers the production of melatonin in the pineal gland, which regulates sleep and the body's circadian rhythms (Foster & Kreitzman, 2019). This hormone helps induce a state of calm, preparing the mind for rest and inner stillness. During periods of darkness, the mind is freed from the distractions of the external world, allowing for introspection and deeper self-awareness. This quietude is essential for spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and contemplation, where spiritual sensitivity is heightened (Acuña-Castroviejo et al., 2014).

### **The Role of Night in Spiritual Practices**

Throughout history, night has been considered a sacred time for spiritual practices. Many religious and mystical traditions encourage meditation or prayer during twilight or before dawn, when natural darkness prevails. These periods are thought to offer a gateway to spiritual realms, with the pineal gland playing a central role in making

the mind more receptive to higher consciousness. In this state of reduced external stimuli, the brain can more easily attune to subtler experiences, opening the “third eye” to spiritual insight (Harris, 2018). Natural darkness creates the stillness necessary for accessing divine light, which brings illumination and clarity.

### **Darkness as a Symbol for Inner Exploration**

In spiritual terms, darkness is often a metaphor for the unknown or the inner journey. By embracing natural darkness, individuals can turn inward, away from the external world, to explore hidden aspects of the self. This inner exploration is thought to facilitate spiritual growth, with the pineal gland acting as the biological agent that allows access to these deeper realms. The secretion of melatonin during periods of darkness is believed to help quiet the mind, enabling the individual to perceive spiritual truths that are not accessible in the light of day (Foster & Kreitzman, 2019). In this way, natural darkness becomes a critical element in the process of spiritual enlightenment, offering a necessary balance to the divine light that follows.

### **Divine Light: The Source of Spiritual Enlightenment**

While natural darkness provides the conditions for reflection and spiritual sensitivity, divine light is the source of spiritual enlightenment. Divine light represents higher wisdom, clarity, and the presence of divine knowledge. Just as the physical eyes perceive natural light to navigate the material world, the spiritual “third eye,” often associated with the pineal gland, is believed to perceive divine light, illuminating the spiritual path and offering insight into the nature of existence (Harris, 2018).

### **Light as a Metaphor for Spiritual Awakening**

In many spiritual traditions, light is a powerful metaphor for divine presence and spiritual awakening. For example, in Christianity, Jesus is referred to as the “light of the world” (John 8:12), symbolising divine wisdom that leads individuals out of spiritual darkness. In this context,

the pineal gland's role in receiving divine light during moments of stillness and introspection becomes crucial for accessing spiritual truth. Just as darkness quiets the mind and opens it to reflection, divine light illuminates the mind, bringing wisdom and enlightenment (Strassman, 2001).

### **The Pineal Gland: Bridging Darkness and Light**

The pineal gland sits at the centre of the brain, symbolically bridging the dualities of light and dark, physical and spiritual. Its biological function in regulating melatonin production ensures that the body responds appropriately to cycles of light and dark, maintaining health and balance. However, in spiritual terms, the pineal gland is thought to act as a receptor for divine light during moments of spiritual practice. This “third eye” is believed to open during meditation, prayer, or quiet reflection, allowing for the perception of divine energy and spiritual truths (Harris, 2018). In this way, the pineal gland serves as a key facilitator of spiritual sensitivity and enlightenment, guiding individuals through the balance of darkness and light.

### **The Balance Between Natural Darkness and Divine Light**

The journey toward spiritual enlightenment requires a delicate balance between natural darkness and divine light. Natural darkness prepares the mind and body for introspection, offering a state of stillness where the distractions of the external world fall away. In this state, biological agents like the pineal gland can function optimally, producing melatonin to induce a calm, receptive state. This period of inner quiet is crucial for spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer, where the mind can open to divine light, bringing clarity and spiritual insight (Foster & Kreitzman, 2019).

Divine light, representing higher wisdom and spiritual illumination, follows this period of natural darkness. The pineal gland, functioning as the “third eye,” bridges these two states, allowing individuals to move from introspection and quietude into the realm of spiritual

understanding. The combination of physical rest induced by darkness and the reception of divine light during spiritual practices creates the perfect conditions for spiritual sensitivity and enlightenment (Harris, 2018).

In summary, natural darkness and divine light work together as essential components in the recipe for spiritual enlightenment. Natural darkness, particularly during the night, provides the necessary stillness for introspection, where the mind becomes quiet and receptive to spiritual truths. The pineal gland, as both a biological and spiritual agent, plays a central role in facilitating this process, producing melatonin to regulate the body's responses to light and dark, while also serving as the "third eye" that perceives divine light. Through the balance of these two forces, individuals can achieve a heightened state of spiritual sensitivity, opening the door to spiritual enlightenment.

### *Falling in love with God is a divine appointment.*

It is worth noting that tuning into spiritual realms involves connecting to the right frequency. Just as each website or radio station has a unique address, channel, or frequency, each spiritual energy has its unique resonance. In the digital world, we navigate many sites, including the dark web, which can be harmful. Similarly, the spiritual realm contains a variety of energies, including both benevolent and malevolent entities. Simply seeking spiritual experiences does not guarantee a connection to divine love or truth. This underscores the importance of spiritual understanding and guidance from knowledgeable mentors. Attempts to elevate consciousness or connect to spiritual realms can lead to dangerous outcomes without proper guidance. For example, ascetic practices without a clear understanding of divine will can be

spiritually perilous.

The most reliable way to connect with God is through direct instructions from Him, facilitated by the Holy Spirit. In Christian theology, God reserves the right to invite individuals into His presence, much like a secure website requires specific login credentials. Access to God's presence is not merely a personal decision but requires divine invitation and readiness.

The Bible illustrates this with various examples:

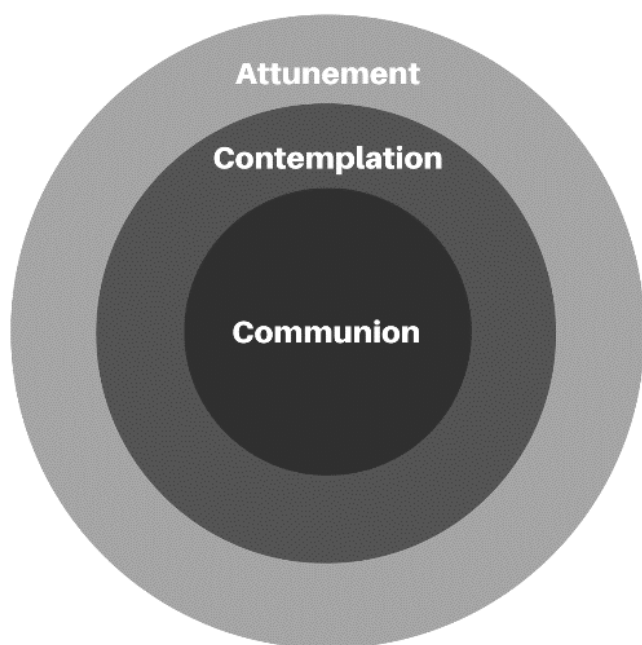
**Moses:** Moses received specific instructions from God for worship and leading the Israelites. In Exodus 3:5, God told Moses, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for where you are standing is holy ground." This was a direct divine instruction on how to approach Him. **Jesus:** Jesus exemplified perfect obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance. In Matthew 4:1, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The Spirit directed Jesus' spiritual journey, demonstrating the importance of divine guidance in navigating spiritual trials. **Abraham (Ibrahim):** Abraham's relationship with God involved specific divine instructions, particularly concerning worship and sacrifices. God commanded Abraham to build altars and offer sacrifices as acts of worship and covenant. For example, In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. This event was a profound test of Abraham's faith and obedience. However, God provided a ram as a substitute offering at the last moment, emphasising His provision and mercy.

These examples show that God provides bespoke instructions for worship and spiritual encounters, which can vary based on His plans and our readiness. Just as web owners use cybersecurity to protect their sites, God's divine presence may be restricted to ensure our spiritual readiness and protect us from potential harm. Thus, engaging in spiritual practices without seeking divine guidance can be risky. True

spiritual engagement involves being led by the Holy Spirit and adhering to God's instructions, ensuring that our spiritual practices align with His will and protective measures.

Falling in love with God is often seen as a divine appointment rather than a result of human effort. According to the Apostle Paul, it is God who chooses to introduce Himself and awaken His love within us. This concept contrasts sharply with religious practices that involve striving for God's approval. Instead, falling in love with God is a response to His unconditional acceptance. In the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 16, Jesus tells His disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you!" This emphasises that our relationship with God is initiated by Him, not by our own choosing.

The Apostle Paul also reflects this idea by indicating that God's love is established before our birth. In the book of Jeremiah, God says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart..." (Jeremiah 1:5). This illustrates that God's choice and love precede our existence and actions.



The process of falling in love with God can be likened to a traditional courtship where the future bridegroom initiates the relationship, rather than waiting for the bride to make the first move. It is God who takes the initiative to reveal Himself to us. Once we encounter Him, we are naturally drawn to adore Him, surrender to Him, and appreciate His enduring love.

Each of us is chosen by God. Although His love is available to all, the timing and manner of His revelation vary. Some individuals are entrusted with a profound capacity to experience and share God's love, which can be particularly impactful for those who struggle to connect with it, such as children or individuals with learning disabilities.

## *2: Contemplation*

Contemplation is a practice designed to focus one's attention on God's love through affirmations—realistic, concrete, and communicable self-suggestions that can subtly influence or change one's experience and behaviour (Halligan & Oakley, 2014). By engaging in contemplation, worshipers aim to deepen their connection with God and experience His love more profoundly. The essence of contemplation lies in focus: through affirmations and targeted meditation, individuals visualize, affirm, and reaffirm desired spiritual outcomes, specifically God's love.

## *The Anatomy of Focus*

Several factors influence how effectively contemplations are absorbed and maintained in the mind, thereby affecting the intensity of our feelings. To simplify these factors, use the acronym F-O-C-U-S, which stands for ferocity, occupation, clarity, uniqueness and savoring

**Ferocity** refers to the intensity and impact of contemplation. More vivid and dynamic images—akin to a large, colourful movie with loud sound—tend to have a stronger effect than small, static images. Real-life scenarios are often more compelling than fictional ones, capturing attention more effectively and producing lasting feelings. For instance, an actual image of a cow has a more immediate impact than a mere verbal description, particularly if one has never encountered a cow before (Lifshitz et al., 2020).

**Occupation** pertains to the duration and frequency with which a contemplation occupies the mind. Contemplations that linger or frequently reappear tend to have a more pronounced impact. Similar to how frequent advertising can increase product recognition and purchase likelihood, repeated exposure to a contemplation enhances its effect on belief and emotional experience. As Lifshitz and colleagues note,

marinating the mind in a specific idea can modulate highly automatic and even unconscious processes that are normally immune to volitional control and lead to profound changes in subjective experience, brain function, and behaviour (Lifshitz et al., 2020, p. 193).

This suggests that internalising specific thoughts or ideas can significantly alter our perception of reality.

**Clarity** refers to the quality and detail of a mental image. Detailed and vivid mental images have a stronger impact on belief. For example, a high-definition video will leave a more lasting impression than a low-

resolution one. Similarly, a clear and vivid mental image of God's love is more powerful and impactful than a vague or blurry representation (Halligan & Oakley, 2014).

**Uniqueness** involves the distinctiveness or contrast of a contemplation. Unique or novel ideas attract more attention than common or repetitive ones. A striking, unusual image is more likely to capture our imagination and make a lasting impression. This principle explains why new experiences, even if not objectively better, often feel more exciting and why negative events sometimes capture more attention than positive ones (Lifshitz et al., 2020).

**Savouring** means appreciating and focusing on the positive aspects of an experience. Concentrating on the positive dimensions of God's love can enhance these aspects within their consciousness. In spiritual terms, attention equates to love, and focusing on positive aspects intensifies the experience of that love (Halligan & Oakley, 2014).

### *Factors that affect contemplations*

The effectiveness of contemplations is significantly influenced by the 4Ps: Personal, Present, Positive, and Precise. These elements enhance the impact of affirmations and help make them more meaningful and transformative.

**Personal** affirmations are those recited in the first person. Scientific studies suggest that using the first person in affirmations, combined with imagery and mental techniques, can enhance their effectiveness (Elkins, 2014; Lifshitz et al., 2020; Spiegel, 2016). When affirmations are stated in the first person, they create a more direct and personal connection, making them feel more real and impactful. For example, stating, "I am cherished by God's love, which guides and nurtures

me every day”, utilises personal pronouns to foster a deeper, more individual connection to the affirmation.

**Present** tense affirmations describing God’s love as a current reality helps to reinforce the affirmation’s immediacy and relevance. Research in cognitive psychology indicates that affirmations framed in the present tense are more likely to be internalised and integrated into one’s self-concept (Kross et al., 2014). For instance, “I am embraced by God’s unconditional love right now, feeling His presence in every aspect of my life” situates the affirmation in the present, thereby enhancing its emotional impact and alignment with one’s current experience.

**Positive** framing of contemplations focuses on the uplifting aspects of God’s love, which has been shown to be more effective in influencing mood and behaviour. Studies have demonstrated that positive affirmations can improve emotional well-being and cognitive functioning by fostering a more optimistic outlook (Creswell et al., 2005). For example, affirming “I am filled with God’s love, which brings me endless peace and joy, guiding me through every moment” emphasises the beneficial and uplifting nature of the affirmation, promoting a positive emotional state.

**Precise** description of God’s love involves being specific and detailed, which can enhance the vividness and emotional resonance of the affirmation. Research supports that detailed and clear imagery can increase the effectiveness of mental practices by making them more engaging and memorable (Ochsner et al., 2004). An example would be, “God’s love is like a radiant sunrise, brightening my path with warmth and hope, filling my heart with boundless compassion and strength.” This precise description helps to create a vivid mental image, making the affirmation more impactful and compelling.

### 3: *Communion*

Communion is the crescendo of worship: a profound spiritual practice that involves tapping into the flow of God's love, allowing worshipers to experience a direct and intimate presence of the Divine. During communion, individuals often encounter a unique and personal connection with God, characterised by various transformative experiences. These might include soothing emotional states, receiving divine guidance, experiencing vivid visions, or receiving profound inspiration and other life-changing encounters (Taylor, S., 2005, 2010, 2017).

The nature of the communion experience is highly individualised, reflecting the personal relationship between each worshiper and God. Research and theological insights suggest that communion can evoke a range of experiences, such as:

**Soothing Feelings:** Worshipers may experience a deep sense of peace and comfort, akin to a calming presence that alleviates stress and anxiety (Taylor, C., 2017). This soothing quality of communion often helps individuals feel reassured and spiritually renewed.

**Divine Instructions:** Some worshipers report receiving direct guidance or instructions during communion, which can provide clarity and direction in their spiritual or everyday lives (Taylor, 2005). These moments of divine communication are often perceived as deeply meaningful and insightful.

**Visions:** Communion may also involve receiving visions, symbolic or literal representations of spiritual truths or insights. These visions can significantly impact an individual's spiritual understanding and personal growth (Taylor, S., 2010).

**Divine Inspiration:** During communion, individuals might experience sudden bursts of inspiration or creative insight that can lead to profound realisations or changes in their lives (Taylor, C., 2017). This inspiration is often seen as a direct outpouring of divine influence.

**Life-Changing Encounters:** The communion experience can lead to transformative encounters that profoundly affect an individual's spiritual journey and personal development. These encounters often result in lasting changes in perspective and behaviour (Taylor, S., 2005, 2010).

During the communion stage, worshipers are typically encouraged to remain silent and fully present. This silence is not merely a lack of activity but a deliberate practice of openness and receptivity to the Divine presence. The profound nature of the communion experience leads worshipers to avoid rushing through this time, instead choosing to linger and fully absorb the sense of God's presence (Taylor, S., 2010). This contemplative approach allows for a deeper and more meaningful connection with the Divine.

## Chapter 20: The Divine Love Pill: The worship Routine

This worship protocol is intended to help you connect with God and experience His love. The routine involves three stages: Attunement, Contemplation and Communion.

### *Preparation*

Before you begin, keep the following in mind:

**Time:** Set aside around 30 minutes and find a quiet, private, and secure location for this experience.

**Setting:** If possible, choose a natural setting like a woodland area, forest, or a hilltop. If safety and convenience allow, these are ideal locations. If outdoors isn't an option, select the highest room in your home or property.

**Moving water:** Worshipping near flowing water, such as a river, stream, or seashore, can enhance the experience.

**Timing:** Nighttime, particularly between midnight and 4 a.m., is ideal for worship. If that's not feasible, try worshipping in low or no light.

**Food:** It's recommended to practice worship on an empty stomach or at least two hours after eating a heavy meal.

**Taking Notes:** Keep a pen and writing pad nearby—you might need to jot down thoughts during the experience. Also, keep a daily record of your worship activities, noting what you did, what happened, and how you felt.

### *Attunement*

Start by listening to or singing along with a worship song, such as “God is Here” by Hillsong Worship (5 minutes).

Now, imagine yourself as a baby cradled in the tender arms of God, your heavenly Father. Picture His loving face smiling at you, feel the warmth of His embrace, and sense His safe hands holding you close to His heart. Feel your heartbeat align with His, and relax into His presence, experiencing His divine peace (1 minute).

Listen to or sing along with another worship song, such as “Glorious Ruins” by Hillsong Worship (5 minutes).

### *Contemplation*

Speak the following contemplation text aloud, with intention and belief (5 minutes):

"I am a precious child of God. I am part of Him, and He is part of me. He created me exactly as He intended. He meticulously planned my life before I was born. I am wonderfully and fearfully made. God accepts me as I am. His love for me is unconditional and eternal. Nothing can cause God to reject me. My failures and imperfections cannot make God hate me. Neither angels nor demons, neither life nor death, nothing in heaven, on earth, or in hell, nothing in the past, present, or future, is strong enough to stop God from loving me or disrupting His plan for my life. I receive God's love, a love like no other. I receive divine peace, a peace beyond understanding. Even in my darkest hour, I will praise God, for He is always good."

Listen to or sing along with a worship song, such as "I'm Loved" by Mack Brock (5 minutes).

### *Communion*

Take your time to reflect on God's love for you. Don't rush this moment. Bask in His presence and remain open. Listen for any gentle whispers that may bring guidance or instructions, and be ready to write them down (5 minutes).

\* \* \*

You can engage in this worship session whenever you feel the need, adapting it to suit your personal style and preferences. Feel free to incorporate other inspirational or biblical texts that hold special

meaning for you, whether you've discovered them on your own or been guided by the Holy Spirit. For instance, Romans chapter 8, particularly verse 39, is a verse that resonates deeply with me, and I use it frequently. Consider writing down your signature verse and placing it where you'll see it often—on a sticky note on your mirror, fridge, or other prominent spots. You might even want to create several copies to keep in various places you visit throughout the day. Additionally, choose a playlist of Christian worship music that you find particularly calming and uplifting.

This protocol is just a starting point to help you as you learn how to worship. With practice, you'll develop your own worship routine that feels most natural and meaningful to you.

May the love of God that defies human description fill your heart through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

## PART VI: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE: BUILDING A FLOURISHING GENERATION

This final section outlines a transformative path for passing down the principles discussed throughout the book to future generations. The focus is on addressing the deep generational trauma caused by slavery, colonialism, and systemic oppression, highlighting the lasting effects of these historical experiences on the collective psyche of African descendants. Central to this vision is the necessity of replacing the “Failure to Flourish” mindset—an ingrained mentality shaped by the legacy of slavery—with a flourishing mindset rooted in the principles of the LOVE model: Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity.

The transformation begins with nurturing the younger generation in loving, connected family environments. This section emphasises the importance of creating secure, emotionally supportive homes where children can develop strong personal relationships with God. These environments are crucial for counteracting the transmission of intergenerational trauma, fostering a sense of security, self-worth,

and divine connection. Practical strategies are provided for parents, caregivers, and community leaders to guide children in establishing their spiritual foundation and adopting the principles of the LOVE model from an early age. The goal is to cultivate a flourishing mentality that will empower future generations to break free from the constraints of the past and thrive.

Practical steps are also outlined to support young families and individuals in developing these deep, personal relationships with God. The emphasis is on fostering environments where spiritual growth is prioritised, and the virtues of the LOVE model are lived out daily. By nurturing spiritual and emotional well-being within the family unit, this section argues that communities can lay the groundwork for a flourishing future where love, resilience, and prosperity are central to daily life.

The roadmap offered in this section extends beyond individual families, providing a vision for building a broader community grounded in love and connectedness. By creating spaces where spiritual, emotional, and economic well-being are intertwined, future generations will be better equipped to navigate life's challenges with resilience and a strong sense of purpose. The goal is not only to repair the wounds of the past but to ensure that future generations are empowered to achieve lasting prosperity, peace, and fulfilment.

The section also highlights the need for communal support systems that reinforce the values of the LOVE model. These systems are essential for encouraging both personal and collective growth, promoting a mindset that thrives on love, collaboration, and divine connection. Readers are encouraged to actively contribute to this vision by taking responsibility for nurturing not only their own spiritual development but also that of others, particularly the younger generation.

For generations, African descendants have faced immense challenges, leading to lives marked by hardship and struggle. Across

the globe, African descendants remain disproportionately vulnerable to mental health issues and often experience a lower quality of life compared to other ethnic groups. Historical and social maltreatment, including racism, discrimination, and systemic abuse, have been identified as major factors contributing to these disparities. While addressing these issues has been crucial in efforts to reverse these trends, a deeper, more profound strategy is required—one that, if fully embraced, promises to bring lasting happiness for generations to come. This strategy centres on replacing the “Failure to Flourish” mindset with a flourishing mindset nurtured through God’s love. Such an approach is not only more effective and quicker but also independent of the often unreliable civic, political, and financial resources traditionally relied upon.

Drawing on the example of the Israelites’ transition from slavery in Egypt to flourishing in the Promised Land, the methodology outlined in this section mirrors God’s three-part strategy. First, it frees people from physical bondage; second, it provides them with a new framework for living; and third, it focuses on the younger generation to carry forward the vision of freedom. While the first two strategies are discussed earlier in the book, the final strategy—nurturing the younger generation—is central to ensuring a lasting legacy of flourishing.

## Chapter 21: The Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a Slave

The infamous “Willie Lynch” letter, allegedly dating back to the early 18th century, is said to be a speech delivered by a British slave owner named Willie Lynch. The letter, titled “Let Us Make a Slave,” outlines psychological methods, not only for controlling slaves but also for making black people slaves for generations by instilling brutality, fear, hatred, division, distrust, envy, lack of self-efficacy, inferiority, and dependency. The letter claims that the best way to achieve this goal is to start with a family.

The process involved the father or male:

"Take the meanest and most restless n\*gg\*r, strip him of his clothes in front of the remaining male n\*gg\*rs, the female, the n\*gg\*r infant, tar and feather him, tie each leg to a different horse in opposite directions, set him fire and beat both horse to pull him apart in front of the remaining n\*gg\*rs. The next step is to take a bullwhip and beat the remaining n\*gg\*r male to the point of death in front of the female and the infant. Don't kill him, but put

the fear of God in him, for he can be useful for future breeding" (p.30)

The second process involved the mother:

"Then take the female and run a series of test on her to see if she will submit to your desire willingly. Test her in every way because she is the most important factor for good economics. If she shows any sign of resistance in submitting completely to your will, do not hesitate to use the bullwhip on her to extract the last bit of b\*tch out of her. Take care not to kill her, for in doing so, you spoil good economics. When in complete submission, she will train her offspring in the early years to submit to labor when they become of age" (p.31)

Despite questions about its historical authenticity (Harris, 2001), the Willie Lynch letter has undeniably had a significant cultural impact. The themes it discusses align with the actual methods employed by slaveholders to maintain control over enslaved populations (Wood, 1998). These methods have had profound and lasting generational consequences, which are still reflected in the struggles faced by Afro-descendants today (Gates, 1993). Although the letter primarily addresses strategies used in the United States, its formula has relevance in any context where slavery was practised, including Africa, the birthplace of many enslaved individuals.

These tactics were deliberately designed to break the spirits of enslaved mothers and their children, ensuring that the psychological damage of slavery would persist across generations. This inter-generational trauma continues to manifest in various ways, with some arguing that Afro-descendant families globally exhibit more dysfunction compared to other communities, a legacy of slavery's dehumanising effects.

The effectiveness of these strategies can be attributed to their foundation in the psychological theory of enculturation—the process through which mental, social, and material aspects of culture are transmitted from one generation to the next. By systematically undermining the familial and cultural structures of the enslaved, slaveholders ensured that the damaging psychological and social effects of slavery would be passed down, entrenching cycles of dysfunction that are still observable today.

### *The Dysfunctionality of African Families*

Family dysfunctionality, while prevalent across various communities worldwide, manifests differently in African communities compared to non-African communities due to the legacy of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racism.

### *Single-Parent Households*

One of the most striking disparities between African and non-African communities is the prevalence of single-parent households. In many African communities, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, the rates of children being raised in single-parent households are significantly higher than in White or Asian communities. For instance, in the United States, about 65% of African children live in single-parent households, compared to 24% of White children (Pew Research Center, 2019). This trend is echoed in the UK, where 63% of African Caribbean children are raised by single parents, primarily mothers, compared to 22% of White British children (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2020).

In contrast, single-parent households are less common in many non-African communities globally. For example, in Asian communities,

particularly in countries like China and India, family structures tend to be more stable, with lower rates of divorce and single parenthood due to cultural norms that strongly emphasise marriage and family cohesion (Park & Raymo, 2013). Similarly, in many European countries, although single-parent households are increasing, they do not reach the levels seen in African communities, partly due to stronger social safety nets and different socio-economic dynamics.

### *Domestic Abuse and Substance Abuse*

Domestic abuse is a global issue, affecting all communities regardless of race or ethnicity. However, studies show that African women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence. In the UK, African women are more likely to experience prolonged abuse and are less likely to report it or seek help due to cultural stigma and distrust of authorities (Women's Aid, 2021). This is also evident in the United States, where African women face higher rates of intimate partner violence compared to White women (Smith et al., 2018).

In contrast, domestic abuse in non-African communities, while still prevalent, may be influenced by different factors, such as cultural expectations and the availability of support systems. For instance, in some Asian cultures, domestic violence is underreported due to the stigma associated with bringing shame to the family, leading to lower recorded rates of abuse (Merry, 2009). However, this does not necessarily indicate less prevalence but rather reflects different cultural and social pressures.

Substance abuse also presents differently across communities. In African communities, particularly in the United States, substance abuse has been exacerbated by historical and socio-economic factors, including the War on Drugs, which disproportionately targeted Black neighborhoods (Alexander, 2010). This has led to higher rates of

incarceration and family disruption. In contrast, substance abuse in White communities may be more associated with different social issues, such as economic decline in rural areas or the opioid crisis, which has primarily affected White populations in the U.S. (Cicero et al., 2014).

### *Mental Health and Familial Depression*

Mental health issues, including familial depression, are prevalent across all racial and ethnic groups, but they are often more stigmatised and less addressed in African communities (Mental Health Foundation, 2022). African descendants are less likely to seek mental health treatment due to barriers such as lack of access to healthcare, cultural stigma, and mistrust of the medical system (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). This contributes to higher rates of untreated depression and anxiety, which can exacerbate family dysfunctionality.

In non-African communities, while mental health issues are also widespread, there may be better access to mental health services and less stigma associated with seeking help. For example, in many European countries, mental health services are more integrated into the healthcare system, making it easier for individuals to access care (Thornicroft, 2011). However, even in these communities, there are significant barriers, such as in African cultures, where mental illness is highly stigmatised and often hidden from public view, leading to underreporting and untreated conditions (Ng, 1997).

**Social Care Systems:** African children are disproportionately represented in social care systems, including foster care, child protection services, and other forms of state intervention. In the UK, for instance, Black children are overrepresented in the child protection system, with rates significantly higher than those of White or Asian children (NSPCC, 2019). This over-representation can be attributed to a combination of

factors, including higher rates of family dysfunctionality, economic hardship, and systemic bias within social care systems.

Family dysfunctionality in African communities often stems from socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, and housing instability, which are more prevalent due to systemic racism and historical disenfranchisement. These stressors can lead to higher incidences of neglect, domestic violence, and other forms of family breakdown, which in turn result in greater involvement in social services (McLaughlin et al., 2015). For example, financial instability may lead to neglect, not out of malice, but out of an inability to provide adequately for children, prompting intervention by social services.

Systemic bias within social care systems also plays a significant role in the over-representation of Black children. Research has shown that social workers may unconsciously harbour racial biases, leading them to intervene more readily in African families than in White families under similar circumstances (Bywaters et al., 2015). This bias can result in Black children being more likely to be taken into care, even when the risks are comparable to those faced by children of other ethnicities.

### *Criminal Justice System and Prisons*

Black people are similarly over-represented in the criminal justice system and prisons, a phenomenon that is particularly well-documented in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the U.S., African descendants represent approximately 13% of the population but account for about 38% of the prison population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020). In the UK, African descendants make up about 3% of the population but constitute over 12% of the prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2021). The disparities are even more pronounced when looking specifically at men and boys, who make up the majority of

the prison population. In the United States, male African descendants constitute about 6% of the population but represent over 34% of the male prison population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020).

The link between family dysfunctionality and involvement in the criminal justice system is well-established. Children raised in dysfunctional families, particularly those experiencing poverty, domestic violence, or parental substance abuse, are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour as adolescents or adults. Research has shown that adverse family environments increase the risk of delinquency, substance abuse, and violent behaviour, contributing to later involvement with the criminal justice system (Murray & Farrington, 2010). Additionally, children exposed to domestic violence or living with parents who abuse substances are at a heightened risk of emotional and behavioural problems, which further exacerbate their likelihood of engaging in criminal activities (Fagan & Wright, 2012). In African communities, where these forms of dysfunctionality are more prevalent due to historical and socio-economic factors, the likelihood of interaction with the criminal justice system is correspondingly higher. For example, African youth growing up in single-parent households, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas, may be more vulnerable to negative influences, such as gangs or drug-related activities, leading to higher rates of criminal behaviour and subsequent incarceration (Murray, 2009). This is further exacerbated by the lack of access to quality education and employment opportunities, which are critical protective factors against criminal involvement.

Systemic racism within the criminal justice system also contributes significantly to the over-representation of c in prisons. Black individuals are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, and sentenced to longer prison terms than their White counterparts for similar offences (Alexander, 2010). This bias extends to the judicial process, where Black defendants often face harsher sentencing due to racial

stereotypes and discrimination. Additionally, the legacy of policies such as the War on Drugs in the United States has disproportionately targeted African communities, leading to mass incarceration and the subsequent destabilisation of African families (Alexander, 2010). In the UK, similar biases are evident in the over-policing of Black neighbourhoods and the disproportionate use of stop-and-search tactics, which contribute to higher arrest and incarceration rates among Black individuals (Lammy Review, 2017).

The over-representation of African men in prisons also has profound effects on family structures. With a significant percentage of African men incarcerated, many African women are left to raise children alone, contributing to the high rates of single-parent households in African communities. This absence of fathers due to incarceration not only strains families economically but also has long-term psychological impacts on children, who may struggle with the emotional loss and social stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

### *The Cycle of Over-Representation and Family Dysfunctionality*

The over-representation of African descendants in social care and criminal justice systems is both a symptom and a cause of family dysfunctionality. This cycle perpetuates itself as systemic inequalities lead to higher rates of family breakdown, which in turn increases the likelihood of state intervention or criminal justice involvement. Once involved in these systems, African descendants and families often face further discrimination and bias, making it difficult to break the cycle. For instance, children taken into foster care are more likely to experience further disruptions in their lives, such as multiple placements or poor educational outcomes, which can lead to long-term emotional and psychological issues. These issues may persist into

adulthood, contributing to difficulties in forming stable relationships and maintaining employment, which can then lead to further family dysfunctionality and potential interaction with the criminal justice system (Murray, 2009).

Similarly, the incarceration of a parent, particularly a father, can have devastating effects on a family, leading to economic hardship, emotional trauma, and increased risk of criminal behavior in children. This creates a cycle where children of incarcerated parents are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system themselves, perpetuating the over-representation of Black people in prisons.

### *Family Dysfunctionality in Africa: A Different Context*

While Africa may experience less direct racism compared to African descendants in the diaspora, family dysfunctionality still exists, albeit in different forms. In many African societies, particularly among affluent or highly educated families, family dysfunction manifests not through the structural racism seen in Western countries but through issues such as emotional neglect, lack of parental presence, domestic violence, gender discrimination, and reliance on external caregivers. These factors can lead to significant emotional and psychological challenges for children, impacting their development and future relationships.

### *Emotional Neglect and Lack of Affection*

In some African cultures, particularly in more traditional or patriarchal societies, there is a tendency for parents, especially fathers, to maintain a more distant, authoritative role in the family. This can

result in a lack of open affection and emotional support for children. Fathers may see their role primarily as providers, focusing on financial stability rather than emotional bonding. This cultural norm can lead to children feeling emotionally neglected despite being materially well provided for (Kang'ethe, 2014).

The lack of affection in most African households can create a sense of emotional isolation in children. They may grow up feeling that their worth is tied solely to their achievements or the financial status of the family rather than being valued for who they are as individuals. This can lead to issues with self-esteem, difficulty in forming intimate relationships, and a tendency to seek validation through external means, such as academic or professional success, rather than through healthy personal connections (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

### *Parental Absence: The Case of Educated and Wealthy Families*

In more affluent African families, particularly those where both parents are highly educated or hold demanding jobs, there is often a significant physical and emotional distance between parents and their children. Parents in these households may spend long hours at work, leaving little time for meaningful interaction with their children. This dynamic can be exacerbated by the cultural expectation that successful individuals should prioritise their careers and financial achievements (Hoffman, 2016).

While these parents may provide for all the material needs of their children, the lack of quality time spent together can lead to a sense of neglect. Children may feel that they are not a priority in their parents' lives, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness and insecurity. This lack of parental involvement can also hinder the development of strong family bonds, leading to a fragmented family structure where emotional support and guidance are lacking (Mokomane, 2012).

### *Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls*

Domestic violence, particularly against women and girls, is a significant issue in many African societies, cutting across socio-economic lines. Cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and inadequate legal protections often contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence. In many communities, women and girls are expected to be submissive to male authority figures, which can lead to the normalisation of violence as a means of enforcing control (Jewkes, 2002). Domestic violence has profound effects not only on the victims but also on the entire family structure. Children who witness domestic violence are at a higher risk of developing psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. They may also internalise these behaviours, leading to the perpetuation of violence in their adult relationships. The trauma of domestic violence can result in long-term emotional scars for both the victims and their children, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships and function effectively in society (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

The impact of domestic violence is often exacerbated by the lack of effective legal recourse for women and girls. In many African countries, laws against domestic violence are either weak or poorly enforced, leaving victims with little protection. Additionally, social stigma and fear of retaliation often prevent women from reporting abuse, further entrenching the cycle of violence within families (UN Women, 2021).

### *Gender Discrimination Against Women and Girls*

Gender discrimination is another pervasive issue in many African societies, significantly contributing to family dysfunctionality. In many cultures, women and girls are still seen primarily as homemakers whose primary roles are to manage the household and raise children.

This societal expectation often limits their access to education, employment opportunities, and equal pay, reinforcing gender inequalities (Morrison et al., 2007).

### **Access to Education**

In many African countries, girls are less likely to have access to education compared to boys. Socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and traditional beliefs often prioritise boys' education over girls'. Girls are sometimes expected to stay home and help with household chores or are married off at a young age, cutting short their educational opportunities. This lack of education limits their future prospects, often trapping them in cycles of poverty and dependence (UNESCO, 2020).

### **Employment and Pay Inequality**

Even when women do have access to education, they often face significant barriers in the workplace. Gender discrimination in hiring practices, unequal pay for equal work, and limited opportunities for career advancement are common issues faced by women across the continent. These barriers reinforce the notion that women are secondary earners, further entrenching their roles as homemakers rather than as equal participants in the workforce (World Economic Forum, 2020).

### **Social Expectations and the Role of Women**

The social expectation that women should primarily be responsible for child-rearing and household management further restricts their opportunities. Women who pursue careers often face criticism for neglecting their "duties" at home, leading to social pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. This expectation not only limits women's potential but also places enormous pressure on them to balance both professional and domestic responsibilities, often without adequate support (Ampofo et al., 2008).

### **Reliance on External Caregivers and Boarding Schools**

In many African households, especially in urban areas or among the wealthy, children are often raised by nannies or housemaids or sent to boarding schools at a very young age. While this practice allows parents to pursue demanding careers or maintain their lifestyle, it can also result in children growing up with limited parental interaction. Nannies and housemaids, while providing essential care, cannot replace the emotional and psychological support that a parent can offer (Hoffman, 2016).

Children raised primarily by caregivers or in boarding schools may develop attachment issues, where they struggle to form secure bonds with their parents. The early separation from parents can also lead to difficulties in emotional regulation and social development. Additionally, the reliance on television or other electronic devices as “babysitters” can further isolate children, reducing opportunities for meaningful human interaction and the development of social skills (Mokomane, 2012).

Boarding schools, while providing a structured environment and quality education, can also contribute to family dysfunctionality if children are sent away too young or if the school environment lacks emotional support. The experience of being separated from family at an early age can be traumatic for some children, leading to issues such as homesickness, anxiety, or difficulty in trusting others (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

The long-term impact of these forms of family dysfunctionality can be profound. Children who grow up in environments where they feel emotionally neglected, where parental presence is minimal, where they witness domestic violence, or where gender roles are rigidly enforced may struggle with forming healthy relationships as adults. They may also experience difficulties in expressing emotions, setting boundaries, or seeking help when needed. Essentially, children grow up with a deficiency in love. Since they are starving for love themselves,

they raise children who crave love, which can perpetuate a cycle of dysfunctionality. The next generation may also prioritise material success over emotional well-being, continuing the pattern of neglect (Kang'ethe, 2014).

Moreover, the emphasis on material provision over emotional connection can lead to a skewed perception of success, where personal achievements are valued over relationships and personal well-being. This can result in a society where individuals are successful in their careers but struggle with loneliness, depression, or a lack of fulfilment in their personal lives (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

## Chapter 22: Let Us Build Blissful Generations

Research consistently shows that many parents believe providing their children with a solid educational foundation and financial resources is crucial for giving them the best start. Parents view education as the cornerstone of future success and often prioritise access to high-quality schooling, tutoring, and enrichment activities (Lareau, 2011; Vincent & Ball, 2007). This belief transcends various socioeconomic groups, with parents investing significant time and money to ensure their children are well-prepared for the challenges of the modern world. According to a Pew Research Center study (2015), most parents, regardless of background, consider a good education essential for their children's future success. Financial planning, such as saving for college and investing in extracurricular programs, is also seen as a critical component of parenting to secure long-term success and opportunities for their children.

However, while these efforts are undoubtedly important, they are not sufficient on their own. The core principle of raising flourishing generations lies in passing on God's love to their children, raising

them in a loving way and preparing them to form their own direct relationship with God during adolescence. This approach addresses the root causes of “failure to flourish” by cultivating loving and supportive family environments, ensuring that future generations are not bound by cycles of trauma (Miller, 2021).

### *The Importance of Love and Emotional Security*

Love is not merely an emotion but a vital ingredient for mental health and overall well-being. It is a common misconception that providing children with the best material essentials—such as healthy food, top-tier education, toys, and gadgets—is the key to giving them a head start in life. However, this myth neglects a crucial truth: love and emotional security are far more vital to a child’s development than any material provision (Field, 2010).

This is powerfully illustrated by both Emperor Frederick II’s 13th-century experiment and Harry Harlow’s experiments with rhesus monkeys in the 1950s and 1960s. Frederick II sought to discover the “natural” language of humanity by raising infants in total silence, with caregivers meeting only their basic physical needs but providing no emotional interaction. The result was devastating—all the infants died, highlighting that even with adequate physical care, the absence of love and emotional connection can be fatal.

Similarly, Harlow’s experiments demonstrated the primacy of emotional comfort over physical needs. In his studies, infant rhesus monkeys were given a choice between two surrogate mothers: one made of wire that provided food and another made of soft cloth that offered comfort but no sustenance. Despite their hunger, the monkeys overwhelmingly preferred to cling to the soft, comforting mother (Harlow, 1958; Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959). This preference highlighted that emotional security, derived from warmth and contact,

was more important to these infants than food.

Together, these examples reveal that while material needs like food and education are important, they are not sufficient on their own. Emotional nurturing and love are the true cornerstones of a child's development, without which no amount of material wealth can compensate. This nurturing is a reflection of God's love, which parents are tasked with passing on to their children (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1979).

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping a child's ability to thrive. Dysfunctional family environments, marked by trauma, neglect, or rigidly defined gender roles, can have long-lasting effects on a child's ability to form healthy relationships, set boundaries, and seek help when needed (Cassidy, 1994; Widom, 1989). This cycle of dysfunction often repeats across generations, perpetuating struggles with emotional well-being and prioritising material success over genuine connection.

In Africa communities, this cycle is further complicated by historical and systemic factors. For example, children raised in single-parent households due to a father's incarceration might face economic hardship, leading to stress and emotional instability (Murray, 2009). These children might struggle in school, limiting their job prospects and continuing the cycle of poverty. If they also experience or witness domestic abuse, they are more likely to repeat these behaviours in their adult relationships, perpetuating the cycle of dysfunction (Clark et al., 2010; Weissman et al., 2006).

Moreover, research suggests that African parents, particularly those in lower-income brackets, may spend less time with their children due to economic pressures that require them to work longer hours or multiple jobs (Hochschild, 2005). This reduced time spent with children can negatively impact their overall sense of well-being and flourishing. For instance, children raised by highly educated mothers,

who are more likely to be working professionals, may have limited time with their parents, relying instead on childminders or being sent to boarding schools at an early age (Nsamenang, 2006). These factors collectively contribute to the reduced time parents may spend with their children, which can impact their development and well-being (Kang'ethe, 2014; Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014).

### *The Power of Passed-On Spirituality in Breaking Cycles of Trauma*

A secure relationship with God is the most significant source of love and can serve as a lifeline, particularly for young African women who are vulnerable to mental health challenges (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). By fostering a strong spiritual connection, these women can build an internal reservoir of love that enhances their well-being and positively impacts their children and future generations (Miller, 2021).

Professor Lisa Miller's research underscores the profound protective effects of "passed-on spirituality," where spiritual practices and beliefs are transmitted from parents to their children. Her findings show that children who inherit a strong sense of spirituality from their parents are up to 80% less likely to suffer from depression and other mental health issues (Miller, 2013; Pargament et al., 2013). This protection is even more pronounced when spirituality is passed from grandparents to grandchildren, offering up to 90% protection against depression.

In essence, the protective effects of passed-on spirituality are more powerful than the Combined family risk factors for depression, such as genetics and a history of depression, were identified by Miller (2013). Additionally, research suggests that inherited spirituality is significantly more protective against depression compared to other known sources of resilience in medical or social science. In fact, it

is four times more protective than favourable demographics, such as privileged social class or education, and twice as protective as favourable family functioning or parenting style (Miller, 2021). Furthermore, Professor Lisa Miller points out that no mental health intervention, whether clinical or pharmacological, has come close to these prevention rates. She underscores that spirituality stands out as the most robust protective factor against depression in medical and social sciences (Miller, 2021).

Furthermore, our recent research on African youth (details yet to be published) discovered that high family income either had no correlation or a negative correlation with youth flourishing. Notably, children raised by parents—particularly mothers—with higher levels of education reported lower levels of flourishing compared to those raised by mothers with lower levels of education (Clark et al., 2010). This finding may be attributed to the fact that in many African contexts, children are predominantly raised by their mothers. Highly educated mothers, who are more likely to be working professionals, may have limited time to spend with their children. Consequently, these children often rely on childminders or are sent to boarding schools at an early age, which may impact their overall sense of well-being and flourishing (Nsamenang, 2006).

### *How Parents Pass on Spirituality to Their Children*

According to Lisa Miller (2013, 2021), parents play a crucial role in passing on spirituality to their children through several key practices and behaviours. Children primarily learn spirituality through observation, participation, practice (role-playing), and experience. When parents model spiritual behaviours, such as prayer, meditation, or participating in religious rituals, children observe these actions and begin to understand their significance. This observational learning

helps children internalise spiritual practices as valuable and meaningful parts of life alongside the spiritual values, such as compassion and forgiveness, that parents demonstrate in daily interactions.

Participation is essential in addition to observation. By involving children in spiritual practices—whether through family prayers, attending religious services, or engaging in spiritual discussions—parents allow children to actively engage with spirituality. This hands-on participation deepens their connection to spiritual life, enabling them to experience the practice of spirituality in a supportive environment.

Practice through role-playing is another important aspect, as it allows children to rehearse and embody spiritual behaviours in a safe and guided manner. For example, parents might encourage children to lead a family prayer or imitate a religious ceremony, which helps reinforce their understanding and comfort with these practices.

Finally, experience solidifies their learning. When children participate in communal spiritual activities, such as celebrations, rituals, or religious festivals, they encounter spirituality in diverse, real-world contexts. These experiences help them integrate spiritual practices and values into their everyday lives, fostering a deeper spiritual identity (Miller, 2021).

Miller emphasises that all these elements—observation, participation, practice, and experience—are most effective when coupled with modelling through an **authentic emotional connection** between parent and child. In effect, parents pass on spirituality and spiritual values through their behaviors and conduct. Children internalise their parents' spirituality by observing and experiencing how their parents live their daily lives. This transmission goes beyond direct instruction; children learn by watching how their parents interact with others—partners, family members, neighbours, or strangers. Importantly, parents also teach their children how to treat themselves and others

by how they treat their children. These behaviors deeply shape how children understand relationships and develop their sense of self-worth. When children feel secure, loved, and valued, they are more likely to adopt their parents' spiritual beliefs and practices, which creates a lasting spiritual foundation. As Paul the Apostle said, "You are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2, NKJV). In essence, parents' lives become living examples—spiritual "letters"—through which children learn to live with purpose, faith, and love (Miller, 2013, 2021).

The transmission of spirituality from one generation to the next is more than just the sharing of religious practices; it is the passing on of a deep, internalised sense of faith, purpose, and connection to something greater than oneself. This "spiritual inheritance" provides children with a profound sense of belonging and identity that can fortify them against the challenges of life (Miller, 2013). When children grow up knowing they are part of a larger, divine plan, it instils in them a sense of hope, resilience, and moral grounding that can guide them through difficult times (Pargament et al., 2013).

The Differential Bliss Receptivity Theory suggests that individuals who are more vulnerable—due to emotional distress, social disadvantage, or other factors—are more likely to experience significant benefits from divine love through spirituality. For young African people, this theory offers hope, suggesting that their heightened emotional sensitivity can lead to profound healing and strength through a relationship with God (Miller, 2021).

Historically, the deep religiosity and spirituality within African communities have played a crucial role in social justice movements, community-building efforts, and improving lives and societal conditions. Religious faith has served as a powerful force for social, academic, psychological, financial, civic, and political empowerment, helping to narrow the inequity gap between African communities and

other ethnic groups (Baldwin, L., 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

### *Sensitive Windows: The Importance of Early Childhood and Adolescence in the Transfer of the LOVE Mentality*

The concept of “sensitive windows” refers to specific developmental periods during childhood and adolescence when individuals are particularly receptive to certain influences, experiences, and learning (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). These windows are crucial for the transfer of foundational values, beliefs, and behaviours from parents and caregivers to children. Understanding these sensitive windows is essential for effectively nurturing a child’s development and ensuring they grow into resilient, flourishing adults (Bowlby, 1988).

### *Sensitive Window Below 12 Years: The Foundation of Love and Security*

The period from birth to around 12 years old is a critical, sensitive window for developing emotional security, attachment, and the internalisation of love (Ainsworth, 1979). During this time, children are highly impressionable and absorb the values, behaviours, and emotional cues from their caregivers with great intensity. Several factors make this window particularly important:

**Attachment Formation:** According to attachment theory, the bonds formed between children and their primary caregivers during early childhood are foundational to their emotional development (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachment, characterised by consistent care, affection, and emotional support, helps children develop a sense of safety and trust in the world. This security lays the groundwork for their ability to form healthy relationships and maintain emotional stability

throughout life (Cassidy, 1994).

**Internalisation of Love:** Children below 12 are in a phase where they are learning to understand and express emotions. The consistent expression of love through hugs, verbal affirmations, and quality time helps children internalize a sense of worth and self-esteem (Field, 2010). This internalised love acts as an “internal pot of gold,” providing children with a reservoir of emotional strength that they can draw upon in times of stress or difficulty (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005).

**Limited Cognitive Capacity for Spirituality:** At this stage, children do not yet possess the advanced cognitive abilities required to process abstract spiritual concepts or form a direct attachment to God (Baron-Cohen, 2011). Instead, their understanding and experience of God’s love are mediated through their relationships with their parents and caregivers. Just as children are physically dependent on their caregivers for sustenance and protection, they are also spiritually dependent on them to experience divine love (Bowlby, 1988). Essentially, children below 12 experience God’s love through the love and care they receive from their parents, who act as conduits for this spiritual connection (Ainsworth, 1979).

### *Sensitive Window 12-18 Years: The Emergence of Spirituality and the Consolidation of the LOVE Mentality*

The period from 12 to 18 years, commonly known as adolescence, is another critical sensitive window, but it serves a different purpose compared to early childhood. While the earlier years focus on laying the foundation, adolescence is a time for the emergence of spirituality, consolidation, exploration, and the application of the values and beliefs internalised during childhood. Here’s why this window is crucial:

**Cognitive Development and Spirituality:** Around the age of 12, children begin to develop more advanced cognitive abilities that allow them to understand and engage with abstract concepts, including spirituality (Baron-Cohen, 2003). This is when they can start to form a direct attachment to God, independent of their parents. Adolescents begin to explore their own spiritual beliefs and experiences, seeking to establish a personal connection with the divine (Joseph, 1999). This process is critical for their spiritual growth and can significantly influence their moral and ethical development (Pargament et al., 2013).

**Identity Formation:** Adolescence is a time of significant identity exploration. Teenagers begin to question and refine the values and beliefs they inherited from their families, seeking to establish their own identities (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). During this period, the LOVE mentality, if well-rooted, can serve as a guiding framework that helps adolescents navigate the complexities of growing up (Miller, 2021). They start to apply the love, emotional security, and spiritual insights they have absorbed, using them to form their own moral and ethical viewpoints (Miller, 2013).

**Increased Cognitive and Emotional Capabilities:** As teenagers mature, their cognitive and emotional capacities expand, allowing them to think more abstractly and critically (Baron-Cohen, 2003). This period is ideal for deeper spiritual and moral education, as they can now comprehend and integrate more complex ideas about love, relationships, and their place in the world (Pargament et al., 2013). It is also a time when they are more capable of understanding and committing to long-term goals, making it an ideal phase to reinforce the LOVE mentality (Miller, 2013).

**Peer Influence and Independence:** Adolescents begin to spend more time with peers and less time with family, making them more susceptible to outside influences (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). However, if they have a strong foundation of love and emotional security from

their early years, they are better equipped to resist negative influences and make decisions aligned with the LOVE mentality (Miller, 2021). This period is crucial for teaching adolescents how to maintain healthy boundaries, make wise choices, and cultivate relationships that reflect the values of love and respect (Miller, 2021).

**Emotional Resilience:** The teenage years are often marked by heightened emotional experiences and challenges, including the pressures of school, social dynamics, and the onset of romantic relationships (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). Adolescents who have internalised a strong sense of love and emotional security during their earlier years are more likely to exhibit resilience in the face of these challenges (Baldwin, L., 2007). They are better equipped to manage stress, recover from setbacks, and maintain a positive outlook on life (Miller, 2021).

### *Why God Focuses on the Younger Generation*

The Bible provides a powerful narrative that underscores the importance of focusing on the younger generation for the future of a community (Woodson, 1990). When the Israelites were on the brink of entering the Promised Land, God declared that only those aged twenty and below, along with Joshua and Caleb, would enter the Promised Land. This was because the younger generation had not yet been fully conditioned by the slavery mentality that plagued the older generation (Woodson, 1990). The older generation had witnessed the hardships of slavery in Egypt and, despite their liberation, struggled to shed the mentality of bondage, doubt, and fear that slavery had instilled in them (Woodson, 1990).

God knew that for the Israelites to truly flourish in the Promised Land, they needed a generation that was unburdened by the past, one that could be moulded and guided without the chains of old fears and

limitations (Woodson, 1990). The younger generation represented a clean slate—a group that could be shaped into leaders who would embrace the promise of a new beginning without the doubts and fears of the past (Woodson, 1990). By focusing on this younger generation, God ensured that the Israelites would have leaders who were resilient, faithful, and capable of bringing about a flourishing future (Woodson, 1990).

Joshua serves as a prime example of this divine strategy. Closely mentored by Moses, Joshua was raised in an environment of faith and leadership, learning directly from Moses' experiences and spiritual guidance (Woodson, 1990). This close mentorship was essential in shaping Joshua's mentality and faith, making him capable of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land (Woodson, 1990). The story of Joshua illustrates how investing in the younger generation can create leaders who are prepared to overcome challenges and guide their people to success (Woodson, 1990).

### *Let's Build a Blissful Generation*

The LOVE model seeks to counter the toxic legacy of strategies like the "Willie Lynch" letter, which aimed to destroy families and perpetuate cycles of trauma. By targeting the younger generation—supporting young families and individuals in connecting with God—the LOVE model aims to envelop them in love, washing away the mindset of failure to flourish and enabling them to live joyful and fulfilling lives.

This approach is more effective, reliable, and cost-efficient because it leverages spiritual principles—such as compassion, community support, and resilience—that are universally accessible and can be implemented at the grassroots level. By focusing on personal and familial growth and then extending support to others, we can build a future where every family has the opportunity to thrive.

The journey to a life of bliss, much like the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land, is a gradual and deliberate process. The Israelites did not conquer the land all at once; instead, they secured it city by city, tribe by tribe, relying on divine guidance and persistence. Similarly, Black people's journey toward flourishing must begin within our own families, gradually expanding to uplift entire communities.

The key to raising thriving generations lies in helping parents guide their children to form a deep, secure connection with a loving God. When parents nurture this spiritual bond, they can pass on God's love to their children, raising them in an environment filled with care and compassion. As these children grow into teenagers, they're better equipped to develop their own personal relationship with God. This approach addresses the root causes of why some families struggle to flourish, breaking the cycle of trauma by fostering loving and supportive homes.

Supporting young African descendants—especially parents and teenagers—in building a strong, secure relationship with God gives them the emotional stability they need to truly thrive. By focusing on creating nurturing, loving families, we can ensure that future generations are free from the burdens of past traumas.

Professor Lisa Miller's research on the power of spiritual inheritance shows how vital this passed-on spirituality is in breaking cycles of hardship and creating a generation that flourishes. Just as God chose the younger generation to lead the Israelites into a new era, we must also invest in our youth today. By equipping them with love, faith, and guidance, we can help them to grow into strong, resilient individuals.

The Differential Bliss Receptivity Theory offers a beacon of hope, particularly for African communities. It suggests that those who face emotional distress, social disadvantage, or other challenges are uniquely positioned to experience profound benefits from divine love. For African descendants, this means that the hardships they have

endured as individuals and as a community have not only deepened their capacity to receive God's love but also enabled them to gain more from it.

African descendants have wandered in the wilderness of misery for far too long. As the Lord declared to His people, *"You have been wandering around in this hill country long enough; turn to the north"* (Deuteronomy 2:3, NLT). The time has come for us to move forward. The season of wandering is over, and now is the moment to embark on the journey toward the Promised Land—a life of fulfilment, purpose, and complete bliss.

This journey starts today. Now is the time to build a flourishing generation rooted in LOVE—Linkedness, Opulence, Valory, and Equanimity. It begins with the simple yet powerful act of love—love for ourselves, love for our families, and love for our communities.

Together, with God, we will build a future where **LOVE** forms the foundation of our communities. Through Linkedness, we will strengthen our families and deepen our relationships. Through Opulence, we will embrace abundance and security. Through Valory, we will live with courage, purpose, and vitality. Through Equanimity, we will face life's trials with peace and resilience.

Picture this: generations from now, children will hear the stories of how their ancestors rose from the wilderness to create a legacy of thriving families and flourishing communities. They will know that it was us through **LOVE**—not just in word, but in action—that they inherited a world filled with joy, abundance, and peace. Let this be our story—the story of a people who turned to the north, who embraced their divine calling, and who left behind a legacy of light for their children, grandchildren, and future generations.

This is our time. This is our journey. Together, with God, we will build a future that echoes in eternity.

## CHAPTER 22: LET US BUILD BLISSFUL GENERATIONS

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## About the Author


Dr Noel Maturlu brings over three decades of expertise as an entrepreneur, pastor, psychotherapist, academic, and researcher, dedicating his life to guiding others in discovering the meaning of love, resilience, and purpose. His interdisciplinary work bridges Theology, Positive Psychology, and Business Psychology, offering a holistic approach to personal growth and flourishing.

As a founder of several business organisations across the UK and Africa, Dr. Maturlu has championed initiatives that empower disadvantaged communities through education, leadership development, and spiritual growth. A Christian minister and educator, he is deeply committed to helping individuals unlock their potential and live meaningful, purpose-driven lives.

Dr. Maturlu holds an MSc in Psychology, an MSc in Health Research, a Master's in Systematic Theology, and a Doctorate in Business Administration. Currently serving as a university lecturer in the UK, he continues to work on his PhD in Positive Psychology and inspire and equip others with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive.

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