

Intersections of Positive Psychology and Christianity

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ABSTRACT

The field of positive psychology (PP) has generated considerable interest across academia and lay audiences. Research and practice in the field has brought an empirical approach to constructs such as happiness, love, spirituality, gratitude, and hope. Notably, many core PP terms and principles appear throughout the Bible and Christian teachings – at times with similar meanings, at other times with different meanings. Through a lexical analysis, crowd-sourced knowledge, and a critical review of theory and research in PP and theology, we identify ways in which PP and Christianity do and do not intersect. PP and Christianity appear to provide two lenses for considering similar constructs. Areas of concordance include human happiness and flourishing, character strengths and virtue, and the importance of social relationships. Area of divergence include their purpose, the role of the self, and conceptions of spirituality, wisdom, and truth. Our review suggests both harmonies and paradoxes; both areas may benefit from greater dialogue between and integration of the two perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Positive psychology, religion, worldview, Christianity, human flourishing, strengths and virtues

INTRODUCTION

*"Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life,
the whole aim and end of human existence." ~ Aristotle*

*"I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are
meaningless, a chasing after the wind." ~ Ecclesiastes 1:14, NIV version*

Over the past two decades, the field of positive psychology (PP) has generated considerable interest within academia and across lay audiences around the world (White & Kern, 2018). PP aims to understand, support, and foster optimal development and functioning in individuals, organisations, and communities. The concepts studied within the field are by no means new (Kristjánsson, 2012), but PP researchers have incorporated multiple methodologies, measurement approaches, and statistical analyses to add rigorous methods to areas that previously were relatively untouched by science, such as love, spirituality, gratitude, and character.

In this paper, we link PP with a text that has been around for millennia – the Bible. This controversial collection of books forms the foundation of Judaism, Christianity, and parts of Islam, and is the best-selling book of all non-fiction. For some, it is the core of their religious doctrines; for others, it is a historical account of times long past; for others, it defines morality; and for others, it is a fantastical account, designed to deceive the multitudes.

Notably, PP uses terms and principles that occur throughout the Bible and Christian thinking. However, different words can have the same meaning, and the same words can have different meanings. It can be challenging for Christians who are interested in – yet sceptical about – PP to make sense of the extent to which the two overlap. We first provide background on PP and the Bible. Then, writing from a Christian perspective, we examine the extent to which PP constructs align with the Bible, drawing on the existing literature and integrating the perspectives of Christians and scholars and practitioners from the PP field. We clarify and contextualize relevant terms and principles, identifying areas of intersection and divergence.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

PP was officially founded as a sub-discipline of psychology during Professor Martin Seligman's 1998 opening presidential address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For centuries, humankind has sought to remedy its societal ills. Medicine creates treatments for illness. Psychology addresses depression, anxiety, and other psychopathologies. The criminal system punishes socially undesirable behaviours. Science and research have made enormous progress in illuminating and attempting to address the problems of humanity. Yet identifying ways to remove sickness, depression, and violence from society is not the same as creating healthy, happy, productive societal interaction. From the PP perspective, our aim

should be not only to help people to survive life, but to truly thrive. Scholars and practitioners in the field aim to draw on scientific methods to understand, build, and sustain wellbeing in individuals, organizations, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Over the past two decades, the number of publications and applications related to PP have rapidly increased, published across a range of disciplines including business, medicine, law, gaming, neuroscience, education, and public policy, among others (Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2015; Rusk & Waters, 2013). PP has also been immensely popular with lay audiences. Leaders in the field have been quick to publish common interest books, spreading pieces of the science combined with their own perspectives and advice to hungry audiences. Turn on the news and most of what one hears is negative. PP offers a fresh perspective, which counters the rather hopeless futility of life that is otherwise emphasized.

The early leaders in PP charismatically popularized the notion of focusing on the positive, even as they ignored and denied the rich humanistic roots of the positive perspective (Taylor, 2001). William James, a prominent psychologist and philosopher of the late 19th century, has been called “America’s first positive psychologist” (Taylor, 2001, p. 15), as he considered what distinguished optimal human function and noted the importance of including subjective perspectives in understanding human experiences. Maslow (1954) first used the term “positive psychology”, suggesting that psychological practice at the time gave too much focus to the negative side of the person. He studied exceptional people, leading to a theory of psychological needs that moved beyond deficiency needs (e.g., physical needs, security, friendship) to a higher level of meta-motivations – the self-actualized person (Maslow, 1943). Carl Rogers (1961) suggested that the fully functioning life is one that courageously embraces whatever life might bring, being open to experiences, taking responsibility for one’s actions, and fully living out each moment, whether those moments are positive or negative. Throughout the 20th century, G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, and numerous other humanist psychologists drew on experiential and phenomenological methodologies to provide a rich and detailed description of the full human experience, including positive, negative, subjective, and objective aspects (Froh, 2004; Rathunde, 2001; Taylor, 2001).

THE BIBLE

The basic moral principles upheld in many western societies primarily stem from Biblical principles. The Bible is a library of 66 books, compiled by more than 40 authors and catalogued over 16 centuries. It has been translated into more than 1,200 languages and its teachings and principles have had a significant influence on literature and history, especially among Western civilization, with over 5 billion copies sold (Guinness World Record, 2016). As such, it is a key source of reference for comparison with modern scholarship.

The Bible is divided into two parts: The *Old Testament* (OT; 39 books) and the *New Testament* (NT; 27 books). There are potentially 12 to 16 additional historical texts, referred to as the Apocrypha, which are part of the Septuagint (Greek) version of the OT, but traditionally these are not included in main Biblical texts. Traditional Judaism ignores the NT, believing that the promised Messiah prophesized

in the Scriptures is yet to come. Muslims view parts of the Bible as authentic revelation: the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the Psalms, and the Gospel as revealed to Jesus (not the same as the Christian gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). However, the Islamic faith believes that the text has been corrupted over time, and the Qur'an supersedes the Bible as a life reference.

Christians – people who believe in and submit to the authority of a divine Christ – view that the entire Bible is inspired or "God-breathed", without error in the original inscription; it is God's instruction book for human life. They believe that the Bible tells one great story: the story of God – Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler over all that exists – and His purpose of redemption for His people through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

While many religions include a system of values and seek to meet emotional needs within the human heart, Christianity is distinctive in at least two ways. First, the centerpiece of Christianity is a personal relationship that God has with individuals. In many faiths and worldviews, a god figure is either absent or impersonal. God is 'up there' while humans are 'down here'. In contrast, Christians believe that every individual can have an intimate relationship with God the Father, made possible solely through belief in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ the Son, and empowered through the Holy Spirit. Christianity offers the view that no matter what one struggles with in this life, struggles are only temporary and in eternity, all things will be made right.

Second, salvation is faith-based, not works-based. Many religions involve a system of work, either to earn entrance to the afterlife or to reach a state of self-emptiness or self-actualization. In contrast, the personal relationship with divinity comes from faith in God alone. Human effort cannot earn salvation, and people can never make themselves good enough to be in the presence of a holy God (Galatians 2:16). Works are the result of faith, not the cause of salvation. The benefit of this ideology to PP is that it offers an eternal perspective on things in this life that appear to lie outside of one's control, no matter how much one works towards something. It does not mean that positive change is not possible, but suggests that the onus is not always solely on the individual to actuate change.

PSYCHOLOGY AND CHRISTIANITY

There is growing interest by some to apply PP within Christian education, research, and clinical practice, but this is challenged by those who are sceptical of PP specifically and of science more generally. Psychology and Christianity are often held apart – with general hostility felt by many psychologists toward the Christian faith, equalled by a strong suspicion of psychology by many Christian communities (Charry & Kosits, 2017). Many psychologists accept the practices and approaches of the field, believing in the superiority of the scientific method as the pathway to knowledge. Yet these methods are a product of philosophy and social and political events that have unfolded throughout history (Reber, 2006). They are also highly influenced by the worldview through which leaders in the field perceive the world.

Traditionally, theologians were the psychologists (Charry, 2011). Greek philosophies strongly influenced both the early Church and our understanding of humanity. It is only over the past few centuries that the secularization of modern society has resulted in religious ideas and practices separating from the human psyche (Reber, 2006). As the scientific revolution unfolded through the 19th and 20th centuries, the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing were separated, with study and treatment relegated to medicine, psychology, and religion, respectively. Spirituality came to be viewed as “unscientific”, as empiricism and a reductionist approach came to dominate scientific inquiry. Throughout the 20th century, James, Allport, Stanley, Rogers, Maslow, and others provided rich phenomenological descriptions of the human experience, but these fell by the wayside, as psychology prioritized the seemingly rigorous scientific method over the messiness of human experience.

Notably, PP has incorporated empirical methods into the study of religious beliefs and experiences, bringing connections between psychology and spirituality back into scientific discourse. Although there are mixed findings, studies have generally linked religiosity and spirituality with higher levels of happiness, physical and mental health, and purpose, and better social relationships and ability to cope with stressful life events (Joseph, Linley, & Maltby, 2006; Lewis & Cruise, 2006; Myers, 2008; Pargament, 1997; van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006). There is sufficient evidence to suggest that faith and religion do matter; the question has become why and how they may be beneficial.

The philosophies and focus of psychology over the past few centuries have strongly impacted perceptions of the psyche and the role of psychologists and therapists. Many of the practices in the field are grounded in a pathological model, and research and therapies are applied to “fix” psychological problems. This same perspective has filtered into the church, such that Christian psychology is often driven by a moral pathological model (Charry, 2011). Efforts to integrate psychology and Biblical thinking have primarily focused on what is wrong with humanity – the sinful human condition (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). Among the general populous, this perspective is illustrated by hellfire and brimstone evangelical methods, which draw on a sense of fear to propel people toward God. From this perspective, God is a wrathful judge and salvation is the necessary route to avoid eternal damnation.

Some scholars have made the case for a theological approach informed by the PP perspective, focusing on what goes right in the world, human strengths, and the goodness of God’s character (e.g., Charry, 2010; 2011; Entwistle & Moroney, 2011; Hackney, 2007; 2010). Rather than focusing on the fallen human condition, these scholars suggest that attention should centre on God’s compassion, mercy, grace, and love. Humans are formed in the image of God, and embracing this identity provides grounds to foster happiness (Charry, 2011). We add to this by suggesting that the phenomenological methods of the humanist psychologists combined with the quantitative approaches of PP allow Christian theology to be an acceptable area of study and application within the psychological sciences.

Still, returning to the core contentions of the humanistic psychologists, the field runs the risk of trivializing the actual human experience. Driven by a desire to contend with hard sciences, psychological research has relished in finding ways to apply rigorous methods to malleable human beings. Yet when God is excluded, we study something that might resemble religion, but is not religion as individuals experience it (Reber, 2006). Indeed, William James (1985) warned against excluding religious, spiritual, and mystic experiences as a core part of the human experience (Yaden et al., 2016).

PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In human experience, every aspect of life carries with it a phenomenological perspective – a way of viewing, understanding, and making sense of things. We perceive and understand the world around us based on our personal experiences. Some are born to parents with strong religious convictions while others never encounter formal religion until they leave home and interact with the larger world. Children often follow in the steps of their upbringing until they have an encounter that sparks something inside them that causes them personally to question their worldview – the filter through which they view the world.

PP approaches interventions to aid in achieving a satisfactory life from a scientific perspective. Among the scientific and faith communities, science is often seen in one of four ways (Barbour 2000):

- (1) Science and faith are *in conflict* with one another and one cannot hold to a strict faith and also be a scientist.
- (2) Science and faith are completely *independent* from one other and address different aspects of reality and influence.
- (3) Science and faith have similarities and can *dialogue* with each other while still preserving the integrity of each.
- (4) Science and faith are two independent realities, but they have some overlapping elements that influence one another. These two domains thus must be *integrated* for a complete picture of reality.

Modern culture tends to hold to the *conflict* view. Indeed, when people who grow up with a strong dogmatic religious tradition encounter the world, they are often led to believe that they must abandon their past, and their 'faith' to embrace the future, instead of integrating the best of both (Kinnaman, 2011). However, we believe that *dialogue* and *integration* provide the best foundation for functioning in reality and for living satisfactorily both within and outside of the church.

THE CURRENT STUDY AND REVIEW

Charry and Kotsits (2017) suggest that Christian theology and PP can mutually benefit one another as they work toward a common good for humanity. In this paper, we aim to support dialogue and integration by identifying ways in which Christian and secular perspectives intersect and diverge. We first use a lexical approach, in which we identify prevalent terms and concepts in PP and consider

where and how these terms occur in the Bible. We complement the lexical analysis with crowd-sourced knowledge from Christians and experts in PP. In addition, we examine theory and research in the PP and theological domains, synthesizing literature across four areas: (1) happiness, wellbeing, and flourishing; (2) character strengths and virtues; (3) relationships with God and others; and (4) spirituality, wisdom, and truth.¹

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY CONCEPTS IN THE BIBLE: A LEXICAL APPROACH

We begin with identifying the extent to which core concepts in PP occur in the Bible. Lexical analyses have a long tradition in psychological research, especially within personality and narrative research (e.g., Goldberg, 1993; Norman, 1967; Thurstone, 1934). As computers have made lexical analyses more time and resource efficient, there has been a recent resurgence in analysing linguistic information to study characteristics of people (e.g., Kern et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2016; Pennebaker & King, 1999). Various dictionaries, or lists of related words, have been developed, based on theory, which represent emotion, social relationships, positive education, among other topics.

We collected PP terms from several existing sources: (1) The 2007 version of the Linguistic Word Count Inquiry Program (Pennebaker et al., 2007), (2) a list of words developed to examine positive education at an Australian school (Faram, 2015), and (3) a list of PP terms manually created at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Positive Psychology. We read through each of these lists of words and pulled out those theoretically most relevant to PP, based on our experience and work in the field. The final list included 183 terms.

We next read through each entry of the third edition of the *New Bible Dictionary* (Douglas et al., 1996) and the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittel, Friedrich, & Bromiley, 1985). Terms, keywords, and concepts relevant to PP were selected, resulting in a list of 127 terms. The combined PP and Bible searches resulted in a total of 243 concepts and terms. Duplicates were eliminated, resulting in a final list of 216 concepts and terms (see Appendix 1 for final list).

We then drew on the knowledge and experience of individuals working and researching in the field of PP, and Christians with a personal understanding of the Bible. Two versions of a survey were developed (see Appendix 2 for surveys). The surveys first presented the 216 concepts and terms, asking participants to indicate which ones "are core things that we study and/or use in positive psychology?" (PP version) or "which are important from a Biblical perspective?" (Christian version). The surveys were sent to: (a) individuals with formal training in PP and (b) Christian friends and church members.²

¹ We attempt to provide a fair overview of the literature, but this is not an exhaustive review.

² The surveys were intended to crowd source perspectives from experts in each area, rather than relying solely on our own knowledge and perspectives. Participants were informed that this was not an official research project but agreed to the anonymous use of their responses. Care should be taken in generalizing the resulting information beyond the responses included here.

Thirty-two individuals with training in PP and 30 individuals with a Christian background completed the survey. Table 1 indicates the frequency (in percentages) of the top 20 terms in PP and the Bible, respectively (see Appendix 1 for occurrences across the full list of terms). Gratitude and character appeared in the top twenty concepts for both sets, whereas other top concepts varied by sample.

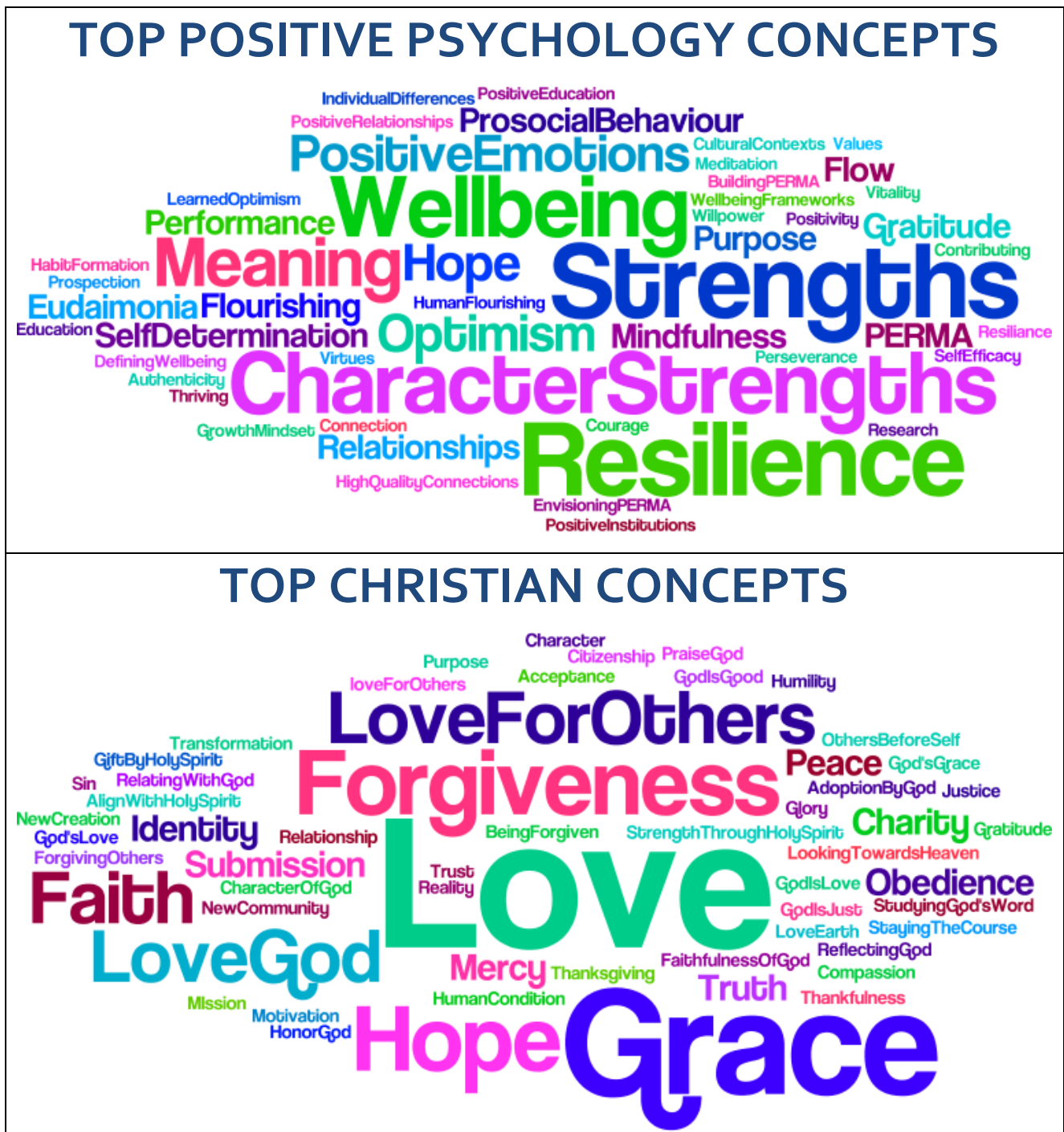
Table 1. Crowd sourcing the relevance of terms in positive psychology and the Bible.

Top 20 concepts in positive psychology			Top 20 PP concepts in the Bible		
Term/ Concept	PP	Bible	Term/ Concept	PP	Bible
meaning/ purpose	90.63%	63.33%	forgiveness	37.50%	96.67%
strengths	87.50%	40.00%	faith	18.75%	93.33%
well-being	81.25%	36.67%	grace	18.75%	93.33%
engagement	78.13%	30.00%	prayer	6.25%	93.33%
flourishing	78.13%	33.33%	gentleness	15.63%	90.00%
eudaimonia	75.00%	10.00%	humility	34.38%	90.00%
grit	75.00%	16.67%	joy	43.75%	90.00%
hope	75.00%	76.67%	mercy	15.63%	90.00%
resilience	75.00%	40.00%	generosity	31.25%	86.67%
character	71.88%	83.33%	honesty	21.88%	86.67%
gratitude	71.88%	83.33%	kindness	53.13%	86.67%
life satisfaction	71.88%	30.00%	love	59.38%	86.67%
mindfulness	71.88%	40.00%	patience	25.00%	86.67%
mindset	71.88%	43.33%	peace	18.75%	86.67%
thriving	71.88%	36.67%	wisdom	50.00%	86.67%
virtue, excellence	71.88%	66.67%	character	71.88%	83.33%
optimism	68.75%	13.33%	compassion	50.00%	83.33%
savouring	65.63%	23.33%	contentment	34.38%	83.33%
pro-social behavior	62.50%	30.00%	courage	46.88%	83.33%
growth	62.50%	63.33%	gratitude	71.88%	83.33%

Note. Numbers indicate the percentage of respondents who endorsed the concept as being core to positive psychology ($n = 32$) or core to the Bible ($n = 30$). Terms appearing on both lists (gratitude, character) are bolded. See Appendix 1 for full set of responses.

To further draw on the knowledge and expertise of respondents, the surveys also included a qualitative question that asked respondents what they perceive to be the three most important concepts, terms, or areas that are studied in the PP field or occur in the Bible. 27 PP participants and 28 of the Christian participants provided responses (see Appendix 3 for full responses). Figure 1 illustrates the concepts noted by PP respondents (top) and Christian respondents (bottom).

Figure 1. Top positive psychology concepts (Top) and Christian concepts (bottom), based on qualitative survey responses.



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF PP AND CHRISTIANITY

To further consider similarities and differences between PP and Christianity, we examined relevant theory and research in the PP and theological domains. In the surveys, some participants also provided more extensive commentary on some of the core constructs, which we incorporate to add additional depth and perspective to the academic literature.

HAPPINESS, WELLBEING, AND FLOURISHING

When asked what people want for themselves and their children, happiness often tops the list (Seligman et al., 2009). Human happiness is the core business of PP. Indeed, the field has been defined as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of peoples, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). This begs the question as to what happiness is and what it means to function optimally.

The concept of human happiness has been debated throughout the centuries. Flourishing, thriving, wellbeing, happiness, health, and optimal functioning are often used interchangeably, and one is often used to define the other. For instance, the World Health Organization (1946) defined health as “a complete state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing, not simply the absence of disease and disability”. As one participant in our survey noted, wellbeing is defined as “complete mental health, absence of mental illness and presence of flourishing, psychological wellbeing, and resilience”. Here we use the terms flourishing, thriving, happiness, and wellbeing interchangeably, although we make specific distinctions at times as necessitated by specific uses in the literature, and we focus on subjective aspects of wellbeing, rather than more objective elements (e.g., income, prosperity).

Numerous PP scholars have proposed wellbeing theories, which intersect and diverge according to their own worldviews. Wellbeing and happiness are often viewed as meta constructs that subsume multiple other affective, cognitive, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions (e.g., Diener et al., 2010; Forgeard et al., 2011; Hone, Jarden, Schofield, & Duncan, 2014; Huppert & So, 2013; Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011). Philosophically (returning to ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Socrates), theoretically (in the theories of PP scholars), and empirically (factor analyses of wellbeing scales), happiness aligns along two primary dimensions: hedonic and eudaimonic (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

HEDONIC HAPPINESS

Lay audiences commonly associate happiness with **hedonic wellbeing**, which primarily refers to high levels of positive emotion (e.g., pleasure, excitement, contentment), low levels of negative emotion (e.g., sadness, anxiety, anger), and a general sense of satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984). Essentially hedonic wellbeing focuses on how wellbeing *feels*.

Positive emotion has been linked with numerous socially-valued outcomes, including better physical health, longer life, good social relationships, career advancement and success, lower levels of divorce, less mental illness, and greater creativity (e.g., Diener & Chan, 2011; Howell, Kern, & Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Fredrickson (2001; 2013a) suggests that negative emotions narrow one's attention to the problem at hand, whereas positive emotions broaden one's psychological, social, and cognitive capacities. Evidence suggests that it is beneficial to have a greater proportion of positive emotions compared to negative emotions during the course of one's day (Fredrickson, 2013b). Positive emotions help people to connect with others and build resources, which can provide a buffer in times of stress (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Positive

and negative emotions can spread to others, potentially passed along through social networks (Christakis & Fowler, 2012; Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014)

Various interventions and exercises that can cultivate good feelings have been developed, which successfully temporarily relieve mental distress and improve self-reported wellbeing (Bolier et al., 2013; Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Yet feelings are fleeting. Emotions change continuously throughout the day. We have a generally stable level of happiness, and despite good or bad experiences, we typically return to our baseline level (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Lyubomirsky, 2011). While an entire industry of self-help books, entertainment, drugs, high-thrill activities, and the like have sprung up over the recent decades to help people 'feel good', the pursuit of pleasure often leaves a person feeling unfulfilled. Studies suggest that it is possible to shift that level over time through one's activities, but it takes time and continued effort (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007). Even while the idea of being happy sounds good, perhaps "all is vanity and a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 2:17, New International Version).

EUDAIMONIC HAPPINESS

Increasingly, PP theory, research, and application has shifted its focus to eudaimonic wellbeing. Defined as "the good life", eudaimonia focuses on what makes life worth living. For example, self-determination theory suggests that humans have three core needs that drive behaviour: relationships, autonomy, and competence; happiness occurs when these needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryff (1995) defined psychological wellbeing across six dimensions: positive social relationships, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and personal growth. She further suggests that "these phenomenological indicators capture core aspects of what it means to be human" (Ryff, 2014, p. 23). Studies over the past 25 years suggest that psychological wellbeing reduces the risk for disease and early mortality (Ryff, 2014).

An aspect of eudaimonic wellbeing that has received a growing amount of attention in recent years is meaning in life. Of our PP survey participants, meaning in life was consistently selected as one of the most important PP concepts. Steger (2009, 2012) suggests that meaning involves two dimensions: comprehension, or an understanding of one's life (who one is, how one fits into the world, and a sense of direction), and purpose (feeling valuable, worthwhile, and that what one does matters). Participants defined meaning as "having an internal reason you do something", "serving something bigger than oneself", "being connected to something bigger than oneself", and "knowing the reason for your existence". Studies have linked meaning and purpose to various subjective well-being measures, active engagement in life, better physical health, and lower mortality risk (Boyle et al., 2009; Friedman & Kern, 2014; Steger, 2012). The meaningful life is not necessarily happy from a hedonic perspective, but appears to lead to a variety of valued positive outcomes (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013).

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Christians are often suspicious of happiness, equating it with hedonism (Charry, 2007; Charry & Kosits, 2017). To outsiders, Christians can be perceived as judgmental and uptight, as the rigidity of moral Christian practices contrasts with the perceived freedoms of the hedonic lifestyle. The Bible's portrayal of happiness aligns more with eudaimonic conceptions of happiness, captured by words such as "joy" and "blessed" (Douglas et al., 1996), which arises from centring one's life on his or her God-given purpose. For instance, Jesus describes the blessed person as poor in spirit, one who mourns, is humble, longs for righteousness, shows mercy to others, has a pure heart, seeks peace, and is persecuted (the beatitudes; Matthew 5:3-11). Christian teachings see happiness as deriving from one's relationship with God, rather than one's circumstances (Philippians 4:12-13). Although Christians must often survive the trials and evils of this world, they can look forward to the hope and promise of what is to come.

Some Christians use the word "joy" to describe the positive experience of life. As one of the spiritual fruits (Galatians 5:22), joy is based on the character of God, and comes from becoming more like Him. True happiness is rooted in understanding, loving, and enjoying God more completely, regardless of circumstance (Charry, 2004; 2007; 2010). As one participant noted, "joy is not a feeling; it is knowing I belong to God and He loves me no matter what". There are hints of God's grace and beauty in everyday life, and by tasting this each day, one moves more toward a life that pleases Him and one that is personally more fulfilling (Charry, 2004). Thus, the happy life comes from living well – peacefully, justly, fairly, and wisely, which blesses both oneself and others.

CHRISTIAN PURPOSE

PP theories focus on *elements* of the flourishing life, but lack a coherent purpose or *outcome*. Christianity adds the importance of *telos* – the realization of one's ultimate purpose, function, or design (Hackney, 2007, 2010). The abundant theories of flourishing and happiness in the PP literature are predominantly self-driven, and interventions and activities aim to improve one's own happiness. The implied *telos* of PP is thus one of individual fulfillment and enjoyment. Yet the Bible suggests that such pursuits are meaningless (Ecclesiastes). In contrast, Christianity calls for a higher purpose that is defined by God. The source and meaning of happiness lie in God, rather than in the success or failure of one's own effort.

The Bible provides a specific purpose for humanity: humans were created in the image of God (the *imago Dei*) for the purpose of glorifying Him (1 Peter 4:11). Creation exists because God created it and humankind can only glimpse part of the full reality of God's purposes this side of heaven (King & Whitney, 2015). Flourishing, or living the good life (i.e., a feeling of happiness and thriving), occurs when one lives in obedience to the design that God intended (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). This obedience is not simply a legalistic obedience confined by specific laws, but rather is a voluntary obedience to God's intentions for one's life, grounded in a close relationship with Him (Johnson, 2011). As one's love for God grows, obedience to His commands becomes a natural response, and a sense of peace and happiness follow. It is a process of becoming who God uniquely intends one to be and

becoming more Christ-like in one's attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours (King & Whitney, 2015). Notably, Christ provides the ultimate example of human flourishing, demonstrating complete obedience to His design within the order of creation (Hackney, 2010).

THE ROLE OF SADNESS AND SUFFERING

The word “positive” within PP often contributes to the misconception that the field only focuses on the positive side of human functioning, casting a blind eye toward the problems and suffering of humanity. Similarly, Christians can be prone to presenting a facade that life is perfect, while doubts, negativity, and struggles lie just below the surface. There is an increasing recognition within PP research and practice that traumatic experiences, trials, and negative emotions can play a key role within one’s life narrative (e.g., Bastian, Jetten, Hornsey, & Leknes, 2014; Rashid, 2015). Although such experiences and emotions can result in mental disorder, they can also play a critical role in growth, especially as such experiences are woven into the personal narrative of one’s life (e.g., Bastian et al., 2014).

Similarly, suffering serves multiple purposes in the Christian faith. It can be an indication that life is disordered. It can help one develop skills, mindsets, and attitudes that are needed to function better in life. It also provides an opportunity for introspection, helping the person identify their worldview and perception of God, and readjust that view to realign their perspective to better match what God intends (Hall, Langer, & McMartin, 2010).

Beck (2006, 2007) suggested a circumplex model of faith, which breaks faith into two dimensions: communion (i.e., a sense of feeling close and intimate with God) and complaint (i.e., setbacks in life such as disappointment, loss, disillusionment, and doubt). While at times one might feel close to God with little doubt, at other times, faith can still be strong despite struggle. Indeed, it is often during the darkest times that a person feels closest to God. The thriving faith occurs both in good and bad times and depends more on one’s relationship and pursuit of God (communion) than a sense of belief versus doubt and negativity (complaint). From this perspective, suffering is detrimental when seen as a barrier to growth but becomes an enabler when woven into one’s life story.

SUMMARY

Numerous theories and perspectives of subjective wellbeing exist. While these theories provide a variety of perspectives of what the good life entails, the Christian perspective adds three important elements. First, *telos* addresses the purpose behind feeling good and functioning well. If life is only about individual fulfillment, as is the case of most PP theories, then something is lacking. Christianity calls for a purpose that goes beyond individual fulfillment, which is found in God alone. Second, flourishing is separate from pleasure, and is inseparable from the good and virtuous life. Living well comes from living according to one’s purpose, which is not always enjoyable. Third, wellbeing and suffering can co-exist. Growth occurs through struggle. From this perspective, thriving is best viewed in terms of one’s life journey and holistic growth, rather than as a snapshot at any single point in time.

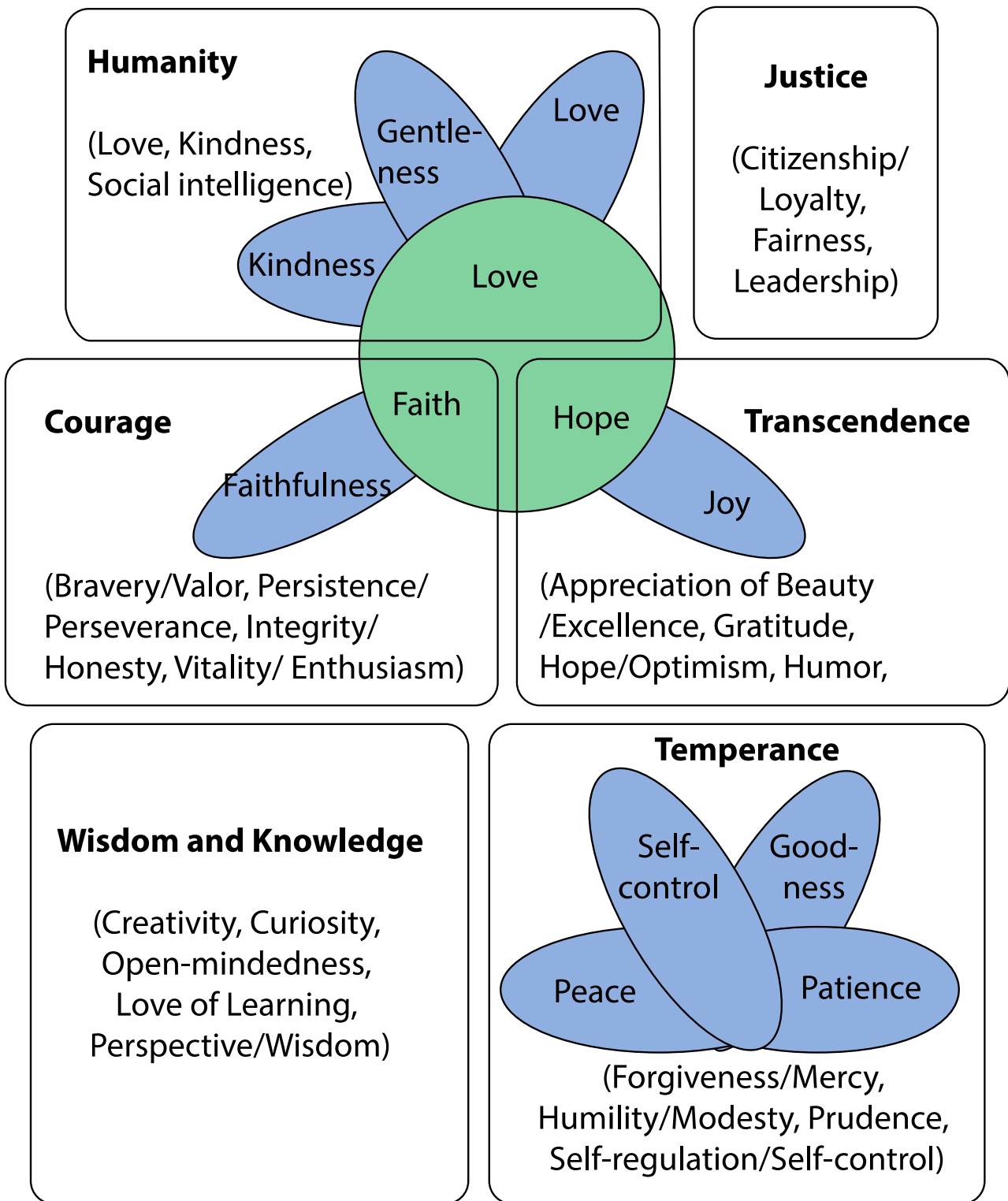
CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND VIRTUES

A second area where PP and Christianity converge is around human virtues and character. In PP, character strengths are a foundational component of the good life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Polly & Britton, 2015). Various models of character exist, but research and practice in PP has been dominated by the Values in Action (VIA) classification of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The VIA identifies 24 strengths that are thought to be valued across most cultures (McGrath, 2015a). The 24 strengths theoretically group into six sets of virtues: wisdom (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective), courage (bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest), humanity (love, kindness, and social intelligence), justice (teamwork, fairness, and leadership), temperance (forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation), and transcendence (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality). Empirically, the 24 strengths group into three factors: self-control, caring, and inquisitiveness (McGrath, 2015b).

Everyone is thought to have all 24 strengths to some degree, with certain strengths being stronger for different people (i.e., signature strengths). Strengths can be developed through instruction and purposeful effort. As they can be taught, strengths underlie most applications of PP within education (Kern, Romer, Park, & Peterson, 2017); by implementing a strength-based model, schools have the potential to become conduits not only of academic knowledge, but also foundations for building strong moral character in young people (e.g., Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Seligman et al., 2009). For instance, McCall, Waters, and White (2015) illustrated ways that character strengths can be incorporated within Christian education. Students can be challenged to explore their own strengths and identify ways to use them to serve God. The parables and the actions of Jesus can be analysed from a strength-based perspective to teach students how they should act, rather than correcting actions that they should avoid.

The idea that strengths and virtues lie at the heart of the good life is paralleled in the Biblical fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), which characterizes a life lived increasingly for God. In the Old Testament, virtue (*hayil*) points to the idea of having moral worth, while the New Testament (*arête*) suggests excellence in a person or object (Douglas et al., 1996). Beck and Haugen (2013) suggest some degree of alignment between the VIA's core virtues and both the fruit of the spirit and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Virtues are relatively stable characteristics that help one to live life according to one's telos (Hackney, 2010). The virtuous person consistently does the right things, regardless of circumstance (Hall et al., 2010). As illustrated in Figure 2, faith and faithfulness align to some extent with courage; love, kindness, and gentleness align with humanity; peace, self-control, goodness, and patience align with temperance; and joy aligns with transcendence. However, the Christian and PP understanding of strengths and virtues differ significantly (Beck, 2014; Entwistle & Moroney, 2011), as we further detail below.

Figure 2: An illustration of how the virtues and character strengths in positive psychology relate to the Christian traditional theological virtues (green) and the fruits of the spirit (blue).



Note. Character strengths and virtues are based on the VIA classification system (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

While some PP research focuses on the value of identifying and using one's strengths as an ensemble, other research focuses on individual strengths. PP studies that identify ways to build these strengths in an individual might provide Christians with practical methods for building a virtuous and victorious life. Here, we highlight a few of these, providing examples of integration as well as illustrating similarities and differences between PP and Christian perspectives.

GRATITUDE

A strength that has gained considerable interest in the PP literature is gratitude. Gratitude has been defined as a positive emotion (e.g., I feel thankful in response to a kind word or a gift from another), an attitude (a general feeling of being grateful for one's life and the things in one's life), a moral virtue, a stable personality characteristic, or as a life orientation (Watts, Dutton, & Gulliford, 2006; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Individuals with higher levels of gratitude are more likely to report positive emotions, fulfilling social relationships, greater life satisfaction, better physical health, and experience less psychopathology (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Waters, 2011; Wood et al., 2010). Gratitude may promote positive social relationships and help maintain them (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Strategies for increasing gratitude include counting one's blessings, writing a heartfelt gratitude letter to another, and sharing with others what one is grateful for (cf. Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013; Wood et al., 2010).

Interestingly, PP scholarship suggests that as one practices acts of gratitude, it changes one's attitude (Wood et al., 2010). One cannot be both miserable and thankful at the same time; by focusing one's attention on what is good in life, it shifts attention away from discontentment and toward satisfaction. Our survey participants noted "gratitude reshapes our attitude" and "in finding things that we can be thankful for, it helps us to have a more positive attitude".

Whereas PP-based gratitude is generally directed towards another person, Biblical gratitude is often directed towards God, the giver of all good things. Thankfulness was well regarded by the Greek world and is a prominent theme throughout Paul's letters (Kittel et al., 1985). Biblical gratitude goes beyond a feeling of appreciation; it is an attitude of thankfulness, which suggests acceptance that a sovereign God knows what is best, regardless of what life brings. Gratitude stems from submitting to God's will, even in difficult circumstances. It involves being thankful for what one has and who one is in God. It is often expressed through "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16). Indeed, praising God is one of the most frequent commands in the Bible – God designed man not just to exist, but also to glorify Him through praise, thanksgiving, and worship (Westminster Catechism).

HOPE

The VIA defines hope in terms of being future oriented, optimistic, expecting good future outcomes, and working to make those outcomes happen. Hope provides motivation and reason to continue to move forward to an unknown future (Douglas et al., 1962). Snyder (1994) suggested a process model of hope, which involves setting goals for the future, identifying multiple pathways for achieving those goals, and believing in one's ability to achieve those goals. Hope is not simply wishful thinking – it is a

drive that motivates behaviour. Hope is realized through goal achievement, greater satisfaction with life, perceived competence, and higher levels of self-esteem (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006).

Whereas the secular perspective of hope is rooted in human agency and effort, Christian hope arises from faith and confidence in God. Hope is one of the three core theological virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). It involves an inner confidence based on God's promise of an eternal future (Hebrews 6:19-20). Christianity, like no other religion, provides an eternal perspective, offering hope beyond humanity, and freedom from self-loathing. Hope does not depend on human capabilities or what a person can do by themselves, but rather stems from belief in a living God who can be trusted to fulfil the promises given in the Bible (Douglas et al., 1962). Agency is both enabled by the Holy Spirit and grows as one becomes more aligned with one's God given purpose. The motivation of the Christian life, ultimately, is the reality of a resurrected life. As Paul writes, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). It is not a form of escapism, but rather is something that humans are designed to have.

SELF-CONTROL

One of the strengths that consistently scores low across most samples is that of self-control (Kern & Bowling, 2015), or the ability to regulate one's attention, emotions, and behaviour, despite temptations that may be present (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Self-control involves regulating behaviour to align with socially valued goals and standards (Duckworth & Kern, 2011). It is a facet of the broader personality factor of conscientiousness (Roberts et al., 2014), which has been linked to better physical and mental health, longevity, healthier behaviours, positive social relationships, and high performance and success in school and work (e.g., Duckworth, Gendler, & Gross, 2014; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Kern & Friedman, 2008; Roberts et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2014).

Socrates believed that self-control (*enkráteia*) was one of the cardinal virtues (Kittel et al., 1985). The term itself is rarely used in the Scriptures, and yet it is one of the fruits of the spirit. The Bible contrasts the licentious living of unbelievers to the controlled lifestyle of the believer (Titus 2). It points to the value of having a sound mind (*sōphrōn*), being self-disciplined in one's lifestyle, and underlies a life lived in obedience to God.

HUMILITY AND PRIDE

Humility is another uncommon strength. Worthington (2008) suggests that humility is a quiet virtue, which speaks more loudly through action than in what a person says or claims. Humility is not low self-esteem – thinking less of one's self – it is thinking of one's self less. Humble people are confident in who they are and have no need to present themselves as being superior or inferior to others. Humility requires having a proper perspective of oneself, recognizing and accepting one's strengths and limitations. It involves keeping accomplishments in perspective, celebrating true victories, and not overemphasizing success. Humble people put others first, not to belittle themselves, but because they choose to overlook themselves for the sake of others. C. S. Lewis (1943) described this quiet virtue as follows:

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, swarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seems a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all (p. 99).

The extent to which humility is valued depends on the culture; Asian cultures tend to value it more, whereas Americans value it less (Worthington, 2008). The Bible clearly emphasizes the value of humility, proclaiming throughout its pages the danger of pride. Humility is part of God's character; although He is all powerful and mighty, He humbles Himself to care about His creation (Psalm 113:5-6). In the OT, humility is praised and often results in blessing (Douglas et al., 1962; Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 22:4, Zephaniah 2:3). In the NT, it is often in being brought low that blessing comes. Humility comes from realizing that apart from Christ, one can do nothing (John 15:5), but through Him, one is a loved and accepted child of God.

While true humility is praised (Philippians 2:1,3), false humility is condemned and reflects a sense of pride (Colossians 2:18). Pride involves thinking and caring about oneself above others. It is considered one of the core sins, stemming from wanting to be like God, outside of God's design. It occurs both when we raise ourselves up to be superior to God or others, but also when we undervalue our identity in God. C. S. Lewis (1943, p. 96) explains:

As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

At the same time, not all pride is bad. One's value should be rooted in belonging to God, not in accomplishment for oneself or for God. While stories throughout the Bible warn of the evils of pride, they also proclaim value in boasting about who one is in God. For instance, Jeremiah 9:23-24 notes:

This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight'.

The New Testament affirms: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

In stark contrast to the Biblical perspective, PP scholarship promotes the value of pride, labelling it as a positive emotion that is associated with achievement and success (Seligman, 2011). Even though humility is considered a strength, pride (its opposite) has come to be defined as a valued positive emotion, taking satisfaction in a job well-done. Thus, while Christian pride is rooted in God, and the virtue of humility involves recognizing and accepting one's place in comparison to the infinite God, PP pride is rooted in human achievement and success.

LOVE

Definitions and descriptions of love are far-reaching and varied. The VIA strength of love involves both a capacity to love others and an ability to accept love. Barbara Fredrickson (2013c), a leader in the PP field, suggests that love is an emotion, involving micro-moments of connection with others. She suggests that love is not sexual desire, lust, kinship, or commitment to another; it is not exclusive, lasting, or unconditional. Micro-moments of connection can happen with close friends or even strangers. Such experiences result in feelings of positivity, which in turn broadens one's perspective, opens possibilities to further connect with others, and results in spirals of positivity for both the self and others.

The Christian perspective stands in stark contrast to this idea of micro-connections with others. Whereas psychology points to the importance of feelings of love, Christianity provides the end to which love should be directed – first toward God, and then toward others (Tjeltveit, 2012). Love is God's image written into the lives of humankind. It centres on loving God and others (Clough, 2006; Oord, 2012) and is the most predominant command in the Bible. Jesus states that the two greatest commands are to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" and, "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27). It is not solely a reactionary emotion, but rather a choice, which for the Christian is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible contains multiple words that in English all translate as "love". *Storge* refers to an empathetic bond or affection-based love, which is both need- and gift-related. C. S. Lewis (1960) suggested that it was responsible for 90% of human happiness. *Philia* is the love between friends, similar to that shown by Jonathan to David in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 18:1-4). *Eros* describes the emotional or sexual "being in love" feeling. *Agape* is God's unconditional love, which is extended to humankind regardless of circumstances or our response (John 3:16). These four types of love are only possible because of God's love for humankind.

FAITH

Beck and Haugen (2013) suggested that faith aligns with the VIA strength of courage, but it is perhaps the one core theological virtue that is not included as a strength. In the secular sense, it involves trusting in a particular reality, given various forms of evidence. While science claims to be objective, belief in the findings and truth of scientific claims requires a degree of trust and faith.

In contrast, in the Bible, faith is both rooted in and comes from God. It involves actively trusting in God's promises (Hebrews 11). Although it entails believing in something or someone that one cannot see, it is not blind. As American pastor Adrian Rogers (1990, para 1) wrote: "A faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted." God places evidence of Himself in His design of the physical world (Kober, Benecchi, & Gossard, 2015) and confirms it in the heart of those who submit their lives to Him. Faith is a requirement of the believer and is also the pathway to pleasing God.

SUMMARY

From both the PP and Biblical perspectives, character strengths and virtues are core to happiness. While terminologies overlap, the manner in which the characteristics are understood often differs between PP and Christian thought. Notably, strengths such as self-control and humility are socially valued and strongly contribute to flourishing, but they often are not top strengths, suggesting that they are not easy to attain (Hall et al., 2010). If virtues are the pathway to the good life, then it is an arduous but worthwhile journey.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND OTHERS

A third intersection between PP and Christianity is found in the importance of social relationships. We are driven by a need to relate with others (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Evidence across a range of fields suggests that the need to belong is core to who we are as human beings, powerfully motivating our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours (Allen & Kern, 2017; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Relationships begin early, and the quality of how we connect with caregivers impacts the trajectory that our children will follow (Brophy, 1988; Brophy & Good, 1986; Dolan, Kellam, & Brown, 1989; Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Poortinga, 2012). Reviews suggest that good social relationships contribute to psychological wellbeing, physical health, longer life, healthy behaviours, and other valued aspects of life, whereas loneliness, social isolation, and a lack of social support place a person at high risk for poor outcomes (Allen & Kern, 2017; Hawley & Cacioppo, 2011; Kern, Della-Porta, & Friedman, 2014; McQuaid & Kern, 2017; Tay, Tan, Diener, & Gonzalez, 2012; Taylor, 2011).

PP generally focuses on horizontal, interpersonal relationships between individuals, such as perceiving that others are there when needed, feeling valued by others, and giving to and caring for others. Relationships often require letting go of one's own desires for the sake of others. For instance, compassion aids cooperation, can provide protection for the weak and suffering, helps to shape moral actions, and is associated with experiencing positive emotions, resistance to stress, and positive social relationships (e.g., Frost, 1999; Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010; Lilius et al., 2008). Compassion also involves an awareness that another is suffering, feeling moved by their suffering, and desiring to care for that person. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) provides a prime example of compassion at work. While the religious leaders failed to help a beaten Jewish man, a Samaritan put aside ethnic differences and went out of his way to help the man. Likewise, compassion goes beyond ethnic boundaries and cares for those in need – even at one's own expense.

The importance of interpersonal relationships also occurs throughout Scriptures. The Bible describes and illustrates relationships of all sorts: positive and negative; parent and child; marital, master and worker; and friendship; among others. An underlying theme woven throughout the Scriptures is the orientation of relationships: first is one's relationship with God, which is vertical, followed by one's relationships with others, which is horizontal. God's purpose from the beginning of creation was to have a relationship with humankind, but this was disrupted through sin. Israel's history illustrates God pursuing relationship with His people, while the people resist and suffer the consequences. From the

Christian perspective, relationship with others is grounded in a restored relationship between God and individuals, which stems from God's amazing grace and compassion for humankind. This is best illustrated through Jesus Christ (John 3:16), in whom we see the greatest example of sacrificial love that paves the way for restored relationship both with God and with other people.

Underlying the Christian relationship with God, then, is grace. While grace in the secular sense often refers to being polite in social settings, the Christian concept of grace holds a much deeper connotation. Grace is God's powerful kindness poured out on the utterly undeserving humankind (Ephesians 2:8-9). If God was fair, then no one would be able to have relationship with Him because everyone is sinful, and a pure God cannot look on sin. Jesus as fully God and fully man paid the ultimate penalty – death – to pay humankind's debt of pride and to restore the relationship between God and humankind.

From the Christian perspective, it is from this relationship with God that all other relationships flow. As a result of being given grace by God, humans can offer grace to each other, extend compassion, and coexist through harmonious relationships. One's relationship with God is thus primary and affects every other relationship in life. Horizontal relationships with others become complete only when one's vertical relationship with God is the foundation. The basic human need identified by psychological theory is left unsatisfied when grounded in human effort alone, but becomes possible through relationship with the God who created that need.

SPIRITUALITY, WISDOM, AND TRUTH

Finally, we turn to three areas where there is a greater discrepancy between the secular and Christian perspectives: spirituality, wisdom, and truth.

SPIRITUALITY

Many of the founders of the PP field are admittedly atheist or agnostic in their beliefs. PP has rekindled the importance of religion and spirituality to the human experience, but it is one that is often devoid of the Christian God (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). Evidence suggests that both religiosity (identifying with a particular religion, which in the PP literature is predominantly Christian) and spirituality (connection to something greater than oneself) relate to better physical and mental health (Joseph et al., 2006; Pargament, 1997; van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006). Religious groups often prescribe healthy behaviours and provide social support. Further, religion can provide a sense of meaning and purpose for one's life, hope for a positive future, and control can be seeded to a bigger, beneficent Being (van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006). Evidence suggests greater benefit stems from an internalized, intrinsically motivated, secure relationship with God, compared to an externally regulated practice driven by imposed regulations and a disconnected relationship with God (Pargament, 2002).

Growing evidence supports benefits of mindfulness, meditation, and related practices (e.g., Khoury et al., 2013; Sutcliffe, Vogus, & Dane, 2016; Waters, Barsky, Rikki, & Allen, 2015; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). The words “mindfulness” and “meditation” are used inconsistently throughout the literature. Both can be defined as states (e.g., being in a mindful state, in which one is focused on the present, observing, and non-judgmental) or as practices (specific behaviours meant to help one reach such a state). Part of the success of secular mindfulness programs lie in the intensity and discipline required to learn and master them. For instance, one of the most successful programs, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) requires training over an eight-week period, usually including a full day retreat and active daily practice. It is not a quick fix, but becomes a habitual practice and approach to life, much like other healthy behaviours. Meditation thus offers a tool for living the good life by taking control of one’s thoughts and emotions (Marais, 2015).

Due to the Eastern religious roots of many common contemplative practices, Christians are often quick to dismiss mindfulness and spirituality, yet references to meditation occur throughout the Bible. For instance, Joshua encouraged the Israelites to meditate on the Book of the Law during both the day and the night (Joshua 1:8). David often meditated on God’s word (e.g., Psalm 1:2; 63:6; 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 148), and Jesus spent considerable parts of His ministry stepping away from people and focusing His attention on the Father through prayer (Matthew 14:23, Matthew 26). Christians are instructed to “[receive] the message with great eagerness and examine the Scriptures every day to see if what [is said is] true” (Acts 17:11).

The distinction here is the source and focus of spiritual connection. In the words of one survey participant, “Biblical Christianity is God-centric, while positive psychology is mostly human-centric”. PP is characterized by anthropocentrism, which depends on the self. Influenced by Buddhism and other Eastern traditions, PP spirituality arises from human contemplative practices. Biblical spirituality focuses on God and the Bible with an understood empowerment by the Holy Spirit to let go of self and to yield to God (Tan, 2011). Another individual noted, “it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that I am able to keep a clear and unblemished view of God’s Word and His plan for my life”. One’s best efforts to stay focused on God fall short when relying on human effort alone. Yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, one has the sustaining motivation and energy required to pursue a closer relationship with God.

The good life from a Christian perspective involves a process of sanctification – being made holy and transformed into the character and image of God, a lifelong process, (Hackney, 2010) — which requires discipline and daily practice. Thus, there is potential for Christians to take meditative practices that have been successful in secular studies and apply them in faith settings to live a more focused, God-centred life. In schools, stillness and mindfulness can be incorporated into activities. In churches, these same techniques can be used to focus attention on God, rather than on one’s own thoughts and emotions (McCall et al., 2012).

WISDOM

Like spirituality, wisdom is often removed from its religious foundation. Definitions of wisdom vary in both secular and Christian scholarship. Wisdom is one of the VIA virtues, defined in terms of cognitive-based strengths that help one to learn and utilize information, including creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). From the PP perspective, wisdom is equivalent to applied knowledge – the ability to learn information and then appropriately apply that knowledge to different situations. Returning to Aristotle, practical wisdom involves having the ability to select and use strengths, and to select goals that are appropriate for a particular context (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). It goes beyond rules and tasks by integrating and applying different aspects of knowledge and experience which arise from life and structured learning.

Wisdom (*sophia*) from the Biblical perspective is God's self-revelation. It is an attribute of God and is often referred to as knowledge given to man by God. It is not only involves seeing a bigger perspective, but also living in ways that are morally upright, socially sensitive, and orderly. Like practical wisdom, Godly wisdom demands both knowledge and practical action (McCall et al., 2015). But going beyond practical wisdom, Godly wisdom points to God as the ultimate source of wisdom (Job 9:4; Proverbs 3:19-20; Daniel 2:20-22; Revelation 7:11-12). Wisdom is best manifest in Jesus Christ. It is a gift of God, which is personal in nature, relational, and helps one to live rightly (McLaughlin & McMinn, 2015). Wisdom offers protection, the ultimate guidance for life (Proverbs 4:6-7) and the foundation for happy living (Marais, 2015; McCall et al., 2015). It does not arise from self-development, but from connection with and obedience to God.

TRUTH

A final area of distinction lies in the concept of truth. One's perspective is determined by one's presuppositions, which define one's worldview. PP and Christianity are compatible in terms of their focus and emphasis, but ultimately are incommensurable because they follow different rational systems and differ in what each defines as their reference frame (Watson, 2011). Both science and Christianity function within boundaries, imposed by their own philosophies and norms.

In the secular PP perspective, truth is relative, as we are evolving creatures, and our ultimate purpose lies in avoiding pain and increasing pleasure (Vitz, 2011). It is human-centric, self-motivated, and self-driven. People believe in their own goodness, and through one's own efforts, one seeks to achieve the highest levels of success in life (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011). There is no single truth or vision of what the flourishing life entails – it is up to each individual to define his or her own destiny. We define our own reality, which defines what truth is.

In contrast, the Christian perspective espouses an absolute truth, founded in God, and revealed through His Word, the Bible (e.g., Psalm 18:30, Proverbs 30:5, Jeremiah 10:10, John 1:17). Christianity claims a Supreme Being – the Creator of the world – who holds everything together, but who also offers a personal relationship with believers. Fundamental Christians further believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1) and the singular path to salvation. Jesus claims that His

purpose in coming to the world was to testify to the truth (John 18:37-38). The Christian perspective recognizes both human potential and the reality of the fallen human condition. Defined by fallen humans, morality becomes diluted, whereas God provides the highest standard of what is true and right.

The foundations of Christianity lay in the assumption that the Bible is the true Word of God. Although many people claim to find contradictions when looking at the Bible, as a whole and understanding its teachings in context, there are none. With respect to its authenticity, of the approximately 2,500 prophecies contained within the text of the Bible, nearly 80% have already been fulfilled to the letter (i.e. without any error). The remaining 20% are related to events still in the future (Ross, 2003). Geological and archaeological evidence also exists to support the historical authenticity of the Bible. Most notably, there is a common flood story among all civilizations (Ryan & Pitman, 1999). Evidence for Biblical events and people groups which are found among ancient artefacts including the Code of Hammurabi, the Nuzi Tablets, the Merneptah Stele and a variety of Biblical cities such as Jericho, Megiddo, and Lachish (Maier, 2004). If truth is defined in terms of what is lasting, the Bible far exceeds any scientific knowledge, which shifts and bends with each new study.

CONCLUSION

Christianity is often suspicious of science and psychology. Yet as Charry and Kosits (2017) argue, “despite the cogent objections from each discipline to the other, each may bestow gifts on the other that bring both closer to their common goal of human well-being” (p. 10).

Notably, calls for incorporating PP into Christian thought and teaching do not suggest a blind application of positivity, but rather a balanced perspective that includes both God’s compassion, mercy, and love, as well as the truth that sin is a constant threat that must be acknowledged, dealt with, and avoided (Charry, 2011). Over the past two decades, PP has challenged the broader psychological field, suggesting that the focus on mental health has been off-balanced, focused too much on the negative, at the expense of the positive. Research and practice in the field has brought a more balanced approach to human experience. Similarly, Christian psychology too often focuses on what is wrong with human beings and neglects what is right. The re-introduction of PP into Christian thinking points to the possibilities for highlighting human potential – what one can be when everyone is striving to increasingly embrace and reflect the image of God in themselves and in their communities. Still, this must be tempered by a continual appreciation of one's potential for evil, and recognition that one is a finite temporal creature compared to the infinite creator God (Entwistle & Moroney, 2011).

Our review suggests numerous harmonies between PP and Christian perspectives of the Bible. The PP field is developing various interventions and practices that can be applied to the practice of Christian faith, potentially helping one to identify and live in greater accordance with God’s purpose for one’s life. Strengths and virtues occur throughout both PP and Christian thinking. Clearly, some

of the desired outcomes of both fields are similar; it is more the definition of, and the approach for reaching, those outcomes that differs.

There are also key points of incompatibility. Most predominantly, the two disciplines are distinguished by their telos and design. In both cases flourishing arises from living according to one's perceived purpose. From the secular perspective, the end goal is relative in nature, defined by the individual, motivated by one's values, and enabled by individual strengths. From the Christian perspective, the end goal is to fully live out God's intention for one's life to the most complete sense that it can be determined. The end is defined by God, motivated by a close and growing relationship with God, and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps C.S. Lewis (1955, p. 136) stated it best:

What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing.
It also depends on what sort of person you are.

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APPENDIX 1: PP AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTS

Full list of main concepts based on survey responses

The table below indicates the frequency that each term/ concept was selected (alphabetically) by experts in PP ($n = 32$) or Christianity/ theology ($n = 30$).

Term/ Concept	PP	Bible	Term/ Concept	PP	Bible
ability	12.50%	20.00%	coping	25.00%	26.67%
acceptance	37.50%	46.67%	courage	46.88%	83.33%
accomplishment, achievement	59.38%	23.33%	creativity	43.75%	33.33%
adaptation	28.13%	26.67%	curiosity	53.13%	20.00%
adjustment	21.88%	23.33%	darkness	12.50%	33.33%
adversity	25.00%	60.00%	death	0.00%	60.00%
altruism	40.63%	33.33%	deception	0.00%	43.33%
anger	3.13%	53.33%	depression	12.50%	40.00%
anxiety	18.75%	53.33%	discipline	25.00%	80.00%
appreciation of beauty	50.00%	50.00%	disease	3.13%	30.00%
attention	37.50%	26.67%	distress	12.50%	33.33%
authenticity	56.25%	56.67%	dreams	15.63%	20.00%
awareness	34.38%	30.00%	dualism	3.13%	16.67%
awe	56.25%	56.67%	education	46.88%	23.33%
bad	0.00%	26.67%	efficacy	53.13%	16.67%
being	25.00%	30.00%	effort	31.25%	33.33%
belonging	46.88%	63.33%	emotion	56.25%	33.33%
benevolence	25.00%	56.67%	empathy	40.63%	56.67%
boredom	3.13%	6.67%	endurance	31.25%	66.67%
bravery	34.38%	36.67%	engagement	78.13%	30.00%
change	34.38%	33.33%	envy	0.00%	50.00%
character	71.88%	83.33%	equality	3.13%	46.67%
cheerfulness	28.13%	53.33%	ethics	28.13%	60.00%
citizenship	28.13%	50.00%	eudaimonia	75.00%	10.00%
commitment	18.75%	66.67%	excellence	40.63%	50.00%
compassion	50.00%	83.33%	expectation	18.75%	36.67%
competence	34.38%	23.33%	experiences	25.00%	26.67%
concentration	21.88%	16.67%	expertise	12.50%	16.67%
connectedness	59.38%	50.00%	failure	12.50%	33.33%
consciousness	21.88%	30.00%	fairness	37.50%	40.00%
contemplative practices	40.63%	36.67%	faith	18.75%	93.33%
contentment	34.38%	83.33%	fear	15.63%	63.33%
cooperation	28.13%	40.00%	fitness	21.88%	16.67%

Term/ Concept	PP	Bible	Term/ Concept	PP	Bible
flourishing	78.13%	33.33%	intelligence	6.25%	20.00%
forgiveness	37.50%	96.67%	joy	43.75%	90.00%
freedom	12.50%	60.00%	judgment	21.88%	60.00%
friendship	34.38%	63.33%	justice	21.88%	83.33%
fulfillment	46.88%	36.67%	kindness	53.13%	86.67%
future	31.25%	63.33%	knowledge	18.75%	63.33%
generosity	31.25%	86.67%	lawfulness	0.00%	50.00%
gentleness	15.63%	90.00%	leadership	34.38%	40.00%
giving	37.50%	66.67%	learning	37.50%	40.00%
goals	43.75%	30.00%	life	31.25%	63.33%
going forward	28.13%	26.67%	life satisfaction	71.88%	30.00%
good	21.88%	53.33%	lonely	3.13%	40.00%
good deeds, doing good	46.88%	70.00%	loss	6.25%	46.67%
goodwill	34.38%	43.33%	love	59.38%	86.67%
grace	18.75%	93.33%	love of learning	56.25%	30.00%
gratitude	71.88%	83.33%	mastery	43.75%	20.00%
grit	75.00%	16.67%	meaning/ purpose	90.63%	63.33%
growth	62.50%	63.33%	meditation	50.00%	50.00%
guilt	3.13%	50.00%	mental health	53.13%	33.33%
habits	53.13%	43.33%	mental illness	9.38%	26.67%
happiness	56.25%	30.00%	mercy	15.63%	90.00%
hardiness	21.88%	23.33%	mind	25.00%	46.67%
hardworking	12.50%	43.33%	mindfulness	71.88%	40.00%
harmony	18.75%	53.33%	mindset	71.88%	43.33%
hatred	0.00%	46.67%	modesty	21.88%	56.67%
health	40.63%	23.33%	money	9.38%	60.00%
hedonia	46.88%	10.00%	morality	21.88%	66.67%
helping	31.25%	63.33%	motivation	53.13%	53.33%
honesty	21.88%	86.67%	nature	15.63%	36.67%
honor	12.50%	60.00%	obedience	3.13%	76.67%
hope	75.00%	76.67%	openness	31.25%	26.67%
hospitality	12.50%	76.67%	optimism	68.75%	13.33%
hostility	0.00%	33.33%	pain	9.38%	50.00%
humanity	40.63%	53.33%	passion	40.63%	43.33%
humility	34.38%	90.00%	patience	25.00%	86.67%
humor	43.75%	30.00%	peace	18.75%	86.67%
ill-being	6.25%	13.33%	peak experiences	56.25%	16.67%
illness	3.13%	36.67%	perfection	3.13%	43.33%
improvement	37.50%	30.00%	perseverance	59.38%	76.67%
inspiration	37.50%	30.00%	person	15.63%	30.00%
integrity	31.25%	73.33%	perspective	31.25%	43.33%

Term/ Concept	PP	Bible	Term/ Concept	PP	Bible
philosophy	37.50%	23.33%	sleep	18.75%	33.33%
physical activity	34.38%	26.67%	social intelligence	46.88%	13.33%
physical health	31.25%	26.67%	social responsibility	34.38%	43.33%
pleasure	40.63%	46.67%	sorrow	6.25%	53.33%
positivity	59.38%	20.00%	soul	3.13%	63.33%
power	0.00%	36.67%	spirituality	37.50%	40.00%
prayer	6.25%	93.33%	strengths	87.50%	40.00%
pride	18.75%	46.67%	stress	15.63%	26.67%
pro-social behavior	62.50%	30.00%	success	34.38%	23.33%
productivity	40.63%	23.33%	success	31.25%	13.33%
progress, advancement	31.25%	13.33%	sympathy	9.38%	56.67%
prudence	34.38%	46.67%	teamwork	50.00%	33.33%
quality of life	56.25%	20.00%	thankfulness	46.88%	83.33%
reality	15.63%	33.33%	thought	12.50%	43.33%
religion	12.50%	30.00%	thriving	71.88%	36.67%
resilience	75.00%	40.00%	time	15.63%	53.33%
respect	25.00%	50.00%	transcendence	46.88%	30.00%
rest	12.50%	76.67%	transformation	31.25%	63.33%
sacrifice	9.38%	83.33%	trauma	15.63%	33.33%
sadness	3.13%	46.67%	troubles	3.13%	46.67%
satisfaction	50.00%	40.00%	trust	28.13%	83.33%
satisfaction with life	75.00%	33.33%	truth	12.50%	83.33%
savouring	65.63%	23.33%	values	59.38%	46.67%
self-acceptance	43.75%	13.33%	virtue, excellence	71.88%	66.67%
self-control	56.25%	83.33%	vitality	53.13%	23.33%
self-determination	62.50%	16.67%	well-being	81.25%	36.67%
self-discipline	40.63%	80.00%	wellness	53.13%	20.00%
self-esteem	31.25%	13.33%	wholeness	40.63%	43.33%
self-regulation	56.25%	40.00%	wickedness	0.00%	50.00%
serenity	31.25%	36.67%	wisdom	50.00%	86.67%
shame	3.13%	43.33%	work	40.63%	50.00%
sickness	3.13%	50.00%	worry	9.38%	56.67%
significance	25.00%	33.33%	wrong	0.00%	36.67%
skill	21.88%	20.00%	zeal, zest	43.75%	46.67%

APPENDIX 2: SURVEYS

Full Set of Questions Included in the Surveys

Note: Black text was included in both the positive psychology (PP) and Christian versions. Purple text was specific to the PP version, Green text was specific to the Christian version.

Welcome!

Thanks so much for taking a few minutes to consider completing this survey. Note that the formatting of the survey will work better in a web browser or ipad than on a mobile phone.

I'm interesting in learning from people within positive psychology as to some of the topics that you think are core to the field, as well as your perspectives of what the current state of knowledge is on those areas.

I'm working on a project connecting my field of research and teaching (positive psychology) with the Bible. Positive psychology is a relatively new sub-field within psychology that aims to bring a more holistic lens to human functioning, and studies topics such as wellbeing, flourishing, and character. I'm interesting in learning from Christians, theologians, and Biblical scholars as to which positive psychology topics occur in the Bible, and especially your perspective as to what the Bible says about those concepts.

This is not an official research project, so this survey has not undergone institutional review board oversight, though I'm hoping to use the results to inform my teaching and potentially will write up my insights from the responses. I'm interested in any thoughts you are willing to share, and greatly appreciate as much or as little information as you care to give. There are no right or wrong answers. There are no rewards for your responses, other than your contributing to developing an understanding of the current state of the field, and my personal gratitude to you for taking time to do this.

Your responses are anonymous unless you choose to reveal your identity. I included an option to provide your name and contact info if you want a follow up report or to stay in touch. I will keep your responses confidential. If I do eventually write anything on this, I will not reveal your name or any identifying info. Let me know if you have any questions, comments, or concerns (email me at pkern001@gmail.com)

With deep gratitude,

Peggy Kern, PhD

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The University of Melbourne

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Below are a series of concepts and terms. Which ones do you think are core things that we study and/or use in positive psychology? Click whichever ones you think apply.

Below are a series of concepts and terms that are studied and applied within positive psychology. Which ones are important from a Biblical perspective? Click whichever ones you think apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> ability	<input type="checkbox"/> acceptance	<input type="checkbox"/> accomplishment, achievement
<input type="checkbox"/> adaptation	<input type="checkbox"/> adjustment	<input type="checkbox"/> adversity
<input type="checkbox"/> altruism	<input type="checkbox"/> anger	<input type="checkbox"/> anxiety
<input type="checkbox"/> appreciation of beauty	<input type="checkbox"/> attention	<input type="checkbox"/> authenticity
<input type="checkbox"/> awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> awe	<input type="checkbox"/> bad
<input type="checkbox"/> being	<input type="checkbox"/> belonging	<input type="checkbox"/> benevolence
<input type="checkbox"/> boredom	<input type="checkbox"/> bravery	<input type="checkbox"/> change
<input type="checkbox"/> character	<input type="checkbox"/> cheerfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> citizenship
<input type="checkbox"/> commitment	<input type="checkbox"/> compassion	<input type="checkbox"/> competence
<input type="checkbox"/> concentration	<input type="checkbox"/> connectedness	<input type="checkbox"/> consciousness
<input type="checkbox"/> contemplative practices	<input type="checkbox"/> contentment	<input type="checkbox"/> cooperation
<input type="checkbox"/> coping	<input type="checkbox"/> courage	<input type="checkbox"/> creativity
<input type="checkbox"/> curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/> darkness	<input type="checkbox"/> death
<input type="checkbox"/> deception	<input type="checkbox"/> depression	<input type="checkbox"/> discipline
<input type="checkbox"/> disease	<input type="checkbox"/> distress	<input type="checkbox"/> dreams
<input type="checkbox"/> dualism	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> efficacy
<input type="checkbox"/> effort	<input type="checkbox"/> emotion	<input type="checkbox"/> empathy
<input type="checkbox"/> endurance	<input type="checkbox"/> engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> envy
<input type="checkbox"/> equality	<input type="checkbox"/> ethics	<input type="checkbox"/> eudaimonia
<input type="checkbox"/> excellence	<input type="checkbox"/> expectation	<input type="checkbox"/> experiences
<input type="checkbox"/> expertise	<input type="checkbox"/> failure	<input type="checkbox"/> fairness
<input type="checkbox"/> faith	<input type="checkbox"/> fear	<input type="checkbox"/> fitness
<input type="checkbox"/> flourishing	<input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> freedom
<input type="checkbox"/> friendship	<input type="checkbox"/> fulfillment	<input type="checkbox"/> future
<input type="checkbox"/> generosity	<input type="checkbox"/> gentleness	<input type="checkbox"/> giving
<input type="checkbox"/> goals	<input type="checkbox"/> going forward	<input type="checkbox"/> good
<input type="checkbox"/> good deeds, doing good	<input type="checkbox"/> goodwill	<input type="checkbox"/> grace
<input type="checkbox"/> gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/> grit	<input type="checkbox"/> growth
<input type="checkbox"/> guilt	<input type="checkbox"/> habits	<input type="checkbox"/> happiness
<input type="checkbox"/> hardiness	<input type="checkbox"/> hardworking	<input type="checkbox"/> harmony
<input type="checkbox"/> hatred	<input type="checkbox"/> health	<input type="checkbox"/> hedonia
<input type="checkbox"/> helping	<input type="checkbox"/> honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> honor
<input type="checkbox"/> hope	<input type="checkbox"/> hospitality	<input type="checkbox"/> hostility
<input type="checkbox"/> humanity	<input type="checkbox"/> humility	<input type="checkbox"/> humor
<input type="checkbox"/> ill-being	<input type="checkbox"/> illness	<input type="checkbox"/> improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> inspiration	<input type="checkbox"/> integrity	<input type="checkbox"/> intelligence
<input type="checkbox"/> joy	<input type="checkbox"/> judgment	<input type="checkbox"/> justice
<input type="checkbox"/> kindness	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> lawfulness
<input type="checkbox"/> leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> learning	<input type="checkbox"/> life
<input type="checkbox"/> life satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/> lonely	<input type="checkbox"/> loss
<input type="checkbox"/> love	<input type="checkbox"/> love of learning	<input type="checkbox"/> mastery
<input type="checkbox"/> meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> meditation	<input type="checkbox"/> mental health

<input type="checkbox"/> mental illness	<input type="checkbox"/> mercy	<input type="checkbox"/> mind
<input type="checkbox"/> mindfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> mindset	<input type="checkbox"/> modesty
<input type="checkbox"/> money	<input type="checkbox"/> morality	<input type="checkbox"/> motivation
<input type="checkbox"/> nature	<input type="checkbox"/> obedience	<input type="checkbox"/> openness
<input type="checkbox"/> optimism	<input type="checkbox"/> pain	<input type="checkbox"/> passion
<input type="checkbox"/> patience	<input type="checkbox"/> peace	<input type="checkbox"/> peak experiences
<input type="checkbox"/> perfection	<input type="checkbox"/> perseverance	<input type="checkbox"/> person
<input type="checkbox"/> perspective	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> physical activity
<input type="checkbox"/> physical health	<input type="checkbox"/> pleasure	<input type="checkbox"/> positivity
<input type="checkbox"/> power	<input type="checkbox"/> prayer	<input type="checkbox"/> pride
<input type="checkbox"/> pro-social behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> productivity	<input type="checkbox"/> progress, advancement
<input type="checkbox"/> prudence	<input type="checkbox"/> purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> quality of life
<input type="checkbox"/> reality	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<input type="checkbox"/> resilience
<input type="checkbox"/> respect	<input type="checkbox"/> rest	<input type="checkbox"/> sacrifice
<input type="checkbox"/> sadness	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfaction with life
<input type="checkbox"/> savouring	<input type="checkbox"/> self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/> self-acceptance
<input type="checkbox"/> self-control	<input type="checkbox"/> self-determination	<input type="checkbox"/> self-discipline
<input type="checkbox"/> self-regulation	<input type="checkbox"/> serenity	<input type="checkbox"/> shame
<input type="checkbox"/> sickness	<input type="checkbox"/> significance	<input type="checkbox"/> skill
<input type="checkbox"/> sleep	<input type="checkbox"/> social intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> social responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/> sorrow	<input type="checkbox"/> soul	<input type="checkbox"/> spirituality
<input type="checkbox"/> strengths	<input type="checkbox"/> stress	<input type="checkbox"/> success
<input type="checkbox"/> sympathy	<input type="checkbox"/> teamwork	<input type="checkbox"/> thankfulness
<input type="checkbox"/> thought	<input type="checkbox"/> thriving	<input type="checkbox"/> time
<input type="checkbox"/> transcendence	<input type="checkbox"/> transformation	<input type="checkbox"/> trauma
<input type="checkbox"/> troubles	<input type="checkbox"/> trust	<input type="checkbox"/> truth
<input type="checkbox"/> values	<input type="checkbox"/> virtue, excellence	<input type="checkbox"/> vitality
<input type="checkbox"/> well-being	<input type="checkbox"/> wellness	<input type="checkbox"/> wickedness
<input type="checkbox"/> wisdom	<input type="checkbox"/> wholeness	<input type="checkbox"/> work
<input type="checkbox"/> worry	<input type="checkbox"/> wrong	<input type="checkbox"/> zeal, zest

We study and use many different concepts in positive psychology. What would you say are the three most important concepts, terms, concepts, or areas within the field?

What would you say are the three most important concepts, terms, or areas in the Bible (beyond the core message of salvation through Christ alone).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I'm really interested in your perspective on the current state of knowledge (research and/or applied) for core areas of psychology. Pick 1 to 5 of your favorite concepts from the list below, or those you use a lot and/or you think are really important to the field.

- How would you define the concept?
- Briefly, what is the current state of knowledge on that concept?
- Any key references, websites, or other resources related to this concept that you'd suggest?

I'm really interested in your perspective on what the Bible says about core areas in positive psychology. Pick 1 to 5 concepts from the list below.

- How would you define the concept?
- Briefly, how is the concept used in the Bible, and/or how is it used by Christians?
- Any key references, websites, or other resources related to this concept that you'd recommend for more information?

List of concepts:

acceptance ~ accomplishment ~ authenticity ~ character ~ compassion ~ courage ~ emotion ~ ethics ~ excellence ~ faith ~ gratitude ~ happiness ~ hope ~ humanity ~ illness ~ joy ~ justice ~ kindness ~ knowledge ~ leadership ~ love ~ meaning/purpose ~ morality ~ nature ~ pain ~ peace ~ pride ~ reality ~ relationships ~ sadness ~ satisfaction ~ self-control ~ spirituality ~ strengths ~ success ~ truth ~ virtue ~ well-being ~ wholeness ~ wisdom ~ worry

Concept 1:

Concept 2

Concept 3

Concept 4

Concept 5

Any other thoughts or comments you'd like to share?

As I noted, I may use the responses and information to inform my teaching and research. If I use the information, I will only report group-level summary information. Please click the boxes below if you do not want me to use your responses for any of these purposes.

- teaching
- research

You are welcome to share your name and email information, if you'd like to hear the results or feel like identifying your responses. This is completely optional; leave this blank if you prefer to keep your responses anonymous.

Name _____

Email _____

Comments _____

THANK YOU!

This brings you to the end of the survey. Thanks so much for taking time to complete this survey! I really appreciate your perspective. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns (pkernoo1@gmail.com).

APPENDIX 3: QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Most important concepts in positive psychology and the Bible, based on participant's free responses

KEY CONCEPTS IN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- Authenticity
 - Connection
 - Courage
 - Education (x2)
 - Eudaimonia (x2)
 - Flow (x2)
 - Gratitude (x2)
 - Hope (x3)
 - Learned optimism
 - Mindfulness (x2)
 - Performance (x2)
 - Positive emotion (x3)
 - Positive institutions
 - Prosocial behaviour (x2)
 - Relationships (x2)
 - Resilience (x6)
 - Self-efficacy
 - Thriving
 - Virtues
 - Wellbeing (x4)
 - Good things individuals can do for themselves, such as perseverance or meditation
 - Good things that create synergy, i.e. good things people do in family and community contexts.
 - A conscious emphasis on what can go right, while rigorously acknowledging that things do go wrong
 - The study of automatic, unconscious heuristics. We need to discover and describe them and analyze when they are adaptive or maladaptive.
 - Character strengths (x5)
 - Contributing
 - Defining wellbeing
 - cultural contexts
 - Flourishing (x2)
 - Frameworks for wellbeing
 - Growth mindset
 - Individual differences
 - Meaning/purpose (x3)
 - Optimism/Resilience
 - PERMA (x3)
 - Positivity
 - Positive relationships (x2)
 - Prospecion
 - Research
 - Self-determination theory (x2)
 - Strengths (x3)
 - Values
 - Vitality
 - Willpower and habit formation
 - Application within real world contexts - mapped to participants and culture
 - Well-being and flourishing - at all system levels
 - Looking beneath the "feeling" for the evidence so that we really know it - how / if it works - for the first time
 - An investigation into what makes life more worth living for each person, on their own terms (~satisfaction with life, but not quite)
-

KEY CONCEPTS IN THE BIBLE

- Acceptance despite sin
 - Character
 - Charity
 - Faith (x4)
 - Forgiveness (x5)
 - God is good
 - God is love
 - Grace (x9)
 - Hope in a recreated future
 - Identity
 - Love (x 10)
 - Love for God (x4)
 - Motivation
 - New Creation
 - Peace (x2)
 - Refinement of personal goals
 - Relating with God
 - Sin
 - Strength through the Holy Spirit
 - Submission (x2)
 - Transformation
 - Truth (x2)
 - Showing honor, praise, and thanksgiving to God - gratitude
 - Obedience, submission, trust - without trust there's no obedience
 - The importance of being forgiven & forgiving others
 - Reflecting God in work and relationships in His creation
 - Adoption in God's family
 - Character of God
 - Compassion
 - Faithfulness of God
 - Glory
 - God is just
 - God's love
 - Hope (x4)
 - Humility
 - Justice
 - Love for others (x5)
 - Mercy
 - New community in Christ
 - Obedience (x2)
 - Purpose/ mission
 - Reflecting God
 - Relationship
 - Staying the course
 - Studying God's word
 - Thankfulness
 - Trust
 - Looking beyond this life towards heaven
 - Know your identity and citizenship > act that way
 - Placing the needs of others above our own
 - The human condition (separate from God, in God's image)
-