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The Love Effect: Crossing Our Divides Together Into Flourishing

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

THE LOVE EFFECT: CROSSING OUR DIVIDES TOGETHER INTO FLOURISHING



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

LANG CHARTERS

PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

APRIL 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Lang Charters

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 16, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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Dedication

Words can't express how grateful I am to my family and friends for not only supporting and encouraging my work on this project, but also for helping make it better! Whether it you helped via a conversation, online survey, workshop, or otherwise, I am in your debt. Thank you, mom (Kathy), dad (Lee), dad (Rick), Leia, Erick, Scott, Lawrence, Kathleen, Ian, Megan, Becky, Rachel, Michael, Mark, Crystal, Jay, Nita, Aileen, Tiffany, Dylan, Brian, Danny, Sue, Kathy, Amber, Tiffanie, and everyone else! Kato, thank you for your love, support, and encouragement through this ordeal. Much love to you! And Lisa, I couldn't have done this without you! My heart bursts with gratitude for how you joyfully took on more of our household responsibilities, while getting less of me during this. I love you SO much!

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Much gratitude and appreciation to Rochelle Deans for editing and formatting my project, as well as her encouragement. What is more, Dr. Ekaterina Lomperis, the project faculty for this endeavor, was an absolute rockstar for the way she helped me shape and create this.

Please note, all the names in my project are used with consent, have been changed for their protection, are deceased family members, or are public figures.

Epigraph

Love is bigger than anything in its way.

–U2

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Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

NPO Statement

In a polarized, “us” versus “them” society: How do we embrace and cultivate the richness of ourself, recognize the goodness of “others,” and come together as one diverse human family; wherein, we grow into greater individual and collective flourishing?

Key Benefits or Insights from Research

The clearest, most helpful insight from my research and reflection is that “strengthening” one’s ability to be in relationships, is much like strengthening one’s muscles. Getting stronger physically, isn’t easy. It takes sweat, perseverance, and effort. You have to wisely push your limits in safe and healthy ways.

Relationships, especially when it comes to difference and bridging divides, are much the same. A person must mindfully grow their ability to lovingly be with otherness—whether it’s political, religious, racial, or otherwise. When we do it well, it can leave you, metaphorically, out of breath, bent over, and spent. Yet, also feeling more alive and radiant.

Vocational Context

I currently teach yoga, both online and in person. Part of this includes being a mentor for Blissology, an international yoga community that does a lot of online training. I also write, primarily online. After getting this doctorate, I will add life coaching and spiritual direction certificates to my resume.

Description of the Project

The foundation of the project is a book, titled *The Love Effect*. Love, quite simply, brings out the best in ourselves and others. Its hallmarks of gratitude, curiosity, understanding, grace, compassion, vulnerability, presence, laughter, nonjudgment, and kindness, heal, nourish, and draw people together. After the book is published, I will use it to create communal workshops, shape coaching and direction sessions, and hopefully craft an interactive college course.

Introduction

Journey of Discovery

The Spirit moves in mysterious ways. In 2010, I started the MDiv program at The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology (TSS), to become a traditional pastor—one who works at a local church. While this remained my expressed plan and intention until 2017, in retrospect I can see God was guiding me elsewhere all along.

Early on at TSS, I got “hooked” on the way the early church was so communal, interrelation, and interactive, compared to my church experiences. I even wrote my project about nontraditional, open to all manner of people, meal-centered gatherings. When I graduated in 2014, I figured this would be something I did on the side, in addition to being a pastor.

At the same time, the owner of Kitsap Hot Yoga invited me to start teaching there. So, I did. While working to be a pastor at a local church, I figured teaching yoga would be a way for me to also be involved in our local community. With a heart to help people grow into greater flourishing, then, over the next three years I honed my yoga teaching, pastoring, and writing skills.

By 2017, though, after a good deal of self-reflection and many conversations with trusted friends and family, I realized: *Yes, I am a pastor, only—at least for this season—not one at a traditional church, but one via yoga and writing.*

My life purpose is to awaken, open to, and be love together. I bring that up because it fuels my passion to help people taste the abundant life Jesus offers in John 10:10; which, is why Spirit called me in 2020 to add life-coaching and spiritual direction to my resume. Thus, my present context is in-person and online yoga, and online writing, with life-coaching and spiritual direction on the way.

A deep desire for love and flourishing, then, is what led to this project. Its original NPO was:

In a divided and tribalistic society full of wounded people, we need a path to spiritual formation that crosses divides to transform and unite us.

With that in mind, the stakeholders in my Discovery Workshop included a therapist with a DMin in Semiotics, a life-coach/Lifespan Integration therapist, a small business owner and former VP of an international software company, a former missionary and author of two books on Jesus and the love ethic, and a retired navy nurse who serves as a VA spiritual wellness professional and Methodist lay minister.

One of the key takeaways from this workshop was that, people who want a solution to the problem I’m addressing, need to opt in. Not only because love and connection can’t be forced on people, but because growing one’s relational and love “muscle,” like building one’s physical muscles, takes commitment, persistence, and effort. It’s not easy to become and stay fit—physically, relationally, mentally, or spiritually.

Concerning the root cause of the problem of polarization, there were two insights from the workshop and interviews. One, is that Homo Sapiens are biologically and evolutionarily wired to fear, oppose, and be unsettled by difference. It takes a leap to leave the perceived safety of people like you, and relate with those unlike you. Relatedly, there are also societal pressures that teach us to fear and name otherness as wrong.

As we explored the root causes of this predicament, we asked ourselves: *What will lead people to opt out of our nation's "us" versus "them" mentality?* The stakeholders and I observed, from experiences and studies, that great loss and great love seem to be the two main catalysts for people to become more Christlike in this, and other ways. Thus, was born the idea that the cadre of people who buy in to my project, will form something like an avalanche of lovingkindness, which starts small and grows large. The love that crosses and bridges divides that they show, then, will awaken much the same love in others—starting an avalanche of love.

To put it differently, just because only a certain segment of people forms my project's natural audience, doesn't mean others won't follow suit. These "early adaptors," I believe, will inspire others to do likewise. Akin to how a friend or family member on a journey to get physically fit moves others to do likewise; the growth in lovingkindness and wellbeing displayed by this endeavor's participants, will encourage some of those who are initially uninterested or resistant to join in as well.

I write this with confidence because I've frequently been on the skeptical, or "that's not for me," side of such things, only to have the proof displayed by others win me over. For instance, when the first iPhone came out, I thought: *meh*. But, as I learned more about it and watched others use it, I changed my mind, and have had an iPhone ever since. Likewise, two decades ago, the practices and mental dispositions this project lays out would not have resonated with me. Yet, after seeing the fruits they brought in others—such as deep joy, peace, wellness, and love—I was won over by their beauty. I'm confident much the same will happen for others.

Following the Discovery Workshop and interviews, the following NPO emerged:

In a nation of "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

In an effort to further broaden my project's horizons, most of the stakeholders for my Design Workshop were new. The repeat supporters were the former missionary who has published two books, as well as the retired navy nurse and lay minister. A life doula and community builder, who successfully integrated two families from previous marriages with their spouse was one of the new additions. A high school teacher in media arts, at a diverse school, who is the type of person youth who are struggling and hurting turn to, also participated. A spiritual healer, who happens to be one of the most beautiful and wise people I know, was a key member. What is more, a lifelong intelligence analyst and teacher provided an especially helpful perspective; having traveled around the world, while interacting with and studying many different cultures. Finally, rounding out the group was a recovered addict who works as a therapist, with an emphasis on youth and addiction.

A helpful preface to the results of this workshop, and the ways things continued to evolve, is a phrase one of my interviewees began most every response with: “I don’t know.” Their humble preface highlighted how, at least part of what drives the divides my project seeks to heal and bridge, is our desire for certainty. Our fear of not being “right,” leads us to strongly align ourselves with the people and ideals we believe are correct. As another person I interviewed pointed out, these desires combine with humanity’s bias toward authoritarianism, to lead to people doubling down on their tribe and side, often with encouragement from that group’s outspoken leader(s). Finally, the interviewees also pointed out how, in post-Christendom, we no longer have a Grand Narrative, or common ground, for us to unite under. One recommended several books offering a nonreligious, but inclusive of religions, meta storyline for people to embrace together across divides, which helped shape, what I named: The Universe-Earth-Human Story.

After the resultant research, what was a gap in my project—I believe—became a strength. The unifying narrative they revealed is that, as near as we can tell, all reality comes from one source. From this sprang our one universe, from which came one earth, on which lives one humanity. In short, we are all Earthlings, and, thus, part of one human family.

This Grand Narrative, along with another I named “The Love Center,” sets my work apart from others. Nobody else I’m aware of approaches healing divides (societal and relational), or flourishing, with broadly inclusive Grand Narratives like this. The three works I came across most closely related to mine—*No Future Without Forgiveness* by Desmond Tutu, *Love Matters More* by Jared Byas, and *See No Stranger* by Valarie Kaur—address more specific instances of division from Christian, Christian, and Sikh contexts, respectively. I believe keeping my Big Stories nonreligious and, as best as I could, inclusive of all manner of people, will give people the common ground we’re lacking, to stand upon. The gap this fills, I believe, greatly amplifies my projects odds for success.

The first Concept Pitch from the Design Workshop aimed to use a facilitator to help people remember this. The idea was for a trained facilitator to meet with people on different “sides,” with the goal of helping guide them into a better understanding of not only one another, but also of themselves. The healer in the workshop brought up how people tend to get along and understand one another far better, when they’re doing some form of activity together for the greater good. So, the idea was for that to be one way the facilitator could help people develop greater harmony.

While the first pitch was highly hands-on, the second one wasn’t. The aim of this one was to create a toolkit of sorts for people to use and apply in their regular lives. These mental dispositions and practices would come from a book and/or workshop. This idea stuck, and—along with an examination of why people polarize and divide, as well as practices and inner dispositions that help one flourish (especially across said divides)—forms the book I wrote to form the project’s foundation. With that in mind, it’s important to note that no other work I came across unveiled why we fight and divide like mine does—and knowing the “why” helps us to do better. What is more, while Byas addresses divides within a Christian context, Tutu engages them in the area of systemic racism, and Kaur started a national movement; my project gives everybody and anybody practical tools for flourishing and crossing divides within their everyday lives.

Another thing the group observed during our time together, was how people's hearts are warmed toward each other—regardless of differences—in the face of loss, hurt, and trauma. The third Concept Pitch, then, was to create a group, and/or, space for people to gather and share their stories of trauma, hurt, and loss. While people already do this, what would set this apart is the intention of said stories helping participants break down the boundaries that divide them, while creating deeper understanding of one another. When you know a person's story, it's much easier to empathize and care for them, than it is to dislike, or even hate them.

Armed with three quite different ways to address my NPO, my first prototype was an anonymous survey to discover what format will be most appealing to people. Consider, for instance, the simple word *please*. When spoken, depending on what tone is used, "please" can convey anything from a request, to demand, piteous plea, politeness, kindness, and beyond. Viewing "please" as my project's message, and the tone as the optimal way to deliver my message, this prototype set out to discover the optimal shape(s) for the project's launch.

Participants rated each of seven options on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being most effective), with space for comments at the end. The choices I gave were: book, in person course, online course, in person retreat, online retreat, in person event, and online event. The fifty-four people surveyed Identified in person event, in person retreat, and in person course as the favored formats—with average scores of 7.50, 7.50, and 7.46. Yet, notably, twenty-five percent of comments named a book as a best first step. Their rationale was that a book allows people to learn, and let sink in, the practices and mental attitudes—at a safe distance from potential relational conflict—before putting them into practice with people of difference. It's also important to note, three commentators recommended podcasts.

My key takeaway from this was that, for this project to succeed, its words on ways to think, believe, and behave, must become flesh. In other words, relational helps, need to be lived out in relationships. That said, both the people surveyed, and those in the workshop were also very clear that it is vital to meet people where they're at, by helping them feel safe, and giving them space to progress at their own rate. With all this in mind, my plan became to lay the project's foundation in book form, which would allow time for its ideas to seep into people's lives. Alongside this, I'd use podcasts to both spread the word, and further help the notions germinate in people's hearts and minds. Finally, at that point, I planned to fully launch the project by creating hybrid events, retreats, and/or courses.

Since the first prototype concentrated on the project's ideal form(s), the second honed in on optimizing the message. Similar to the first one, I used an anonymous online survey to gauge how effective twenty practices and inner dispositions I'd distilled from research, personal experience, workshops, interviews, and conversations, would be when attempting to bridge divides, and move into greater flourishing together. The nineteen responders were asked to rate the effectiveness of each idea on a scale of 1-10.

To my delight, in the comments, six people wrote they believed *all* the ideas are beneficial for addressing my NPO. Additionally, I included several concepts that overlapped one another—*Cultivate Curiosity* and *Deep Listening* for instance. So, the results helped me gauge which verbiage

landed the best, and, thus, put ideas together under the “umbrella” of what scored the highest. Thus, deep listening ended up becoming a part of the “Cultivate Curiosity,” and other chapters.

With the scores ranging from 7.37 to 9.16, my biggest takeaway was that I was on the right track. Second, as referenced, the order of ranking allowed me to nest some notions under ones that resonated more. Finally, two concepts I hadn’t planned to have stand on their own, *Gratitude* and *Laugh*, ended up tying for the highest score! So, those then became their own chapters in the book.

I’ve long been a poet. I bring that non sequitur up because, all of the above, and more, showed me a multifaceted approach with a unifying theme is what best fits a complicated problem for a simultaneously singular and diverse humanity. At that point in the process, then, the MVP was to write a book, spread the word via podcasts, and create follow-on hybrid courses and/or events, wherein the practices and mental dispositions of this book would be lived out.

As an Enthusiast, a Seven on the Enneagram, I dream big. Until January 2023, I planned on this project reaching multitudes, with events numbering in the hundreds. Then, in the mysterious way she does, Spirit asked me to look at my actual context, and tailor the project to that. Thus, the delivery plan for this project is simultaneously similar to, and different from what I’ve written above. As the book at the heart of my project is published, I plan to be on several podcasts (including ones I was featured on when my memoir about a life-changing accident was released in 2020); while also launching my own podcast. Then, I will use the book’s precepts to create workshops to teach within my yoga communities’ contexts. Furthermore, after getting certificates in life coaching and spiritual direction in 2024, I will also use this material to aid my clients. Finally, since 1995 I have had a vision of one day being a professor. This fire has not gone away, or been diminished. What is more, some of my most transformative and powerful moments, when it comes to formation, came during intensive, conversational college courses on racism and sexual abuse. I hope and plan to do much the same for others, by creating and teaching a college course from this material.

With that in mind, the benchmarks for my project are:

Success Benchmarks

- 75% of people who read the “Declaration of Loving Out Loud” during the Fall 2022 term, report that doing their best to live this way would lead to greater thriving and ability to cross our societal divides.
- 100 people sign the “Declaration of Loving Out Loud” within the first week of launch. (Note: When the book is published, the Declaration will be featured as a page on my website—this is where people will sign up for it. They will be directed there via a link accompanying the Declaration at the end of the book, social media engagement, my blog, podcasts [both ones I’m a guest on, as well as the one I start for this], other portions of my website, and interpersonal interactions.)
- After thirty days, 75% of surveyed participants report “noticeable growth” in *Soul Seeing*, *Love ALLways*, and a regular (5-days-a-week for 5-minutes or more) meditative/contemplative

practice. (Note: All surveys will be generated and sent from my website 30-days after people either sign the “Declaration of Living out Loud,” or attend an in-person event.)

- After thirty days, 75% of surveyed participants report an increase of civil dialogue with people on the “other” side—politically, religiously, racially, and/or other beliefs.
- After thirty days, 75% of surveyed participants report an increased sense of inner peace, gratitude, joy, and laughter.

Quality Benchmarks

- 250 copies of the book sold within three months of release.
- Three podcasts highlight the book and project within two months of book’s release.

The only benchmark thus far measurable is the first. Of thirty-six respondents, thirty-four, or 94.4% responded “yes.” I can’t help but think we’re on the right track!

Evaluate Your Experience

Whether it’s my enthusiasm, ego, and/or something else, one of my biggest obstacles in this process was thinking too big. I’m grateful Spirit, with the help of some shares from other students, put me “straight.” Even more though, I have a severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) from a family hiking accident that should have killed me in 2008. I mention that because, since then, it takes me *much* longer to do things than others. Because of that, this endeavor—wherein I worked until seven at night Monday through Friday—took a toll on my relationship with my wife and, about to graduate high school, child.

My heart is for all people. I love and want the best for everyone. The biggest gap in my project is simultaneously honoring my heart, working to increase my work’s accessibility, and letting go of the need to reach and touch everyone.

As I write this line, I also realize that, within my desire/hope to reach all people, there’s something of letting go of my impulse to be god. Many people and organizations—such as The Revolutionary Love Project, The Poor People’s Campaign, and Together Rising—are doing related work, and I celebrate that. People like this, approach addressing what I’m doing through ongoing podcasts, online courses, in person rallies, political appeals, letters to the editor, sharing their personal stories of being ostracized and/or hurt because of their otherness, and beyond.

Words can’t express how much I’ve learned from this journey. I’d summarize it in two ways. First, the more grateful and in awe of this thing called life we are, the more our toils and troubles go away. Second, love is the point.

Next Steps

I mentioned earlier that great loss and great love seem to be what it takes to, not only get people out of the “us” versus “them” dynamic, but also lead them into the fullness of life abundant. My question to ponder and research further is: *Is that all? And, if so, how better can we show great love?*

Related to this, I've heard it said, and believe: "When you know better, you do better." How, then, do I help people to know better? How do I help show people that polarization, tribalism, and division isn't the only option they have? Especially, when they might not be aware that's the paradigm they've bought into? In tandem with this, I believe it's important to also investigate the ways the systemic forces of our society, like the Republican versus Democrat dynamic, pressure us into polarization—and how to escape this "trap."

Conclusion

This project has informed my entire life. It's shaped me—in every way—into greater Christlikeness. I have no words, because it has taken everything I have, and that brings me joy. I both dream of this work touching the lives of many, and know that it has already blessed a few—and that is enough.

Doctoral Project

Preface

What follows are excerpts, plus fill-in information from my book, *The Love Effect*. It captures the heart of my work, while allowing for its later publication. Professors will find a link to my full project in Appendix E.

Our Polarization Stew

No dark fate determines the future. We do. Each day and each moment, we are able to create and re-create our lives and the very quality of human life on our planet. This is the power we wield.

—from *The Book of Joy* by Desmond Tutu and Dalai Lama

There is a story about two young fish swimming around together, when an older fish comes by and asks, “How’s the water?” Confused, one of the youngsters turns to the other and wonders, “What is water?” One of the points of this parable is how people can get so immersed in a situation, relationship, or belief, they don’t realize there are other options. Just because polarization and division are rampant across political, racial, gender, religious, and other gulfs in the US, for instance, does not mean there aren’t ways to bridge these chasms, come together, and move to a greater place of unity, understanding, and flourishing as one human family. As Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama conclude above, you and I have the ability to change our collective storyline for the better.

The dilemma this work seeks to address, then, is: *In a polarized, “us” versus “them” society: How do we embrace and cultivate the richness of ourself, recognize the goodness of “others,” and come together as one diverse human family, wherein, we grow into greater individual and collective flourishing?*

I believe our problem is spiritual, but what does that mean? Our dog, Biscuits, is a mostly adorable twelve-pound, tan, wire-haired terrier. While she certainly has a spirit of cuteness, she also has a protective energy. Biscuits yaps at most every delivery truck of any sort that drives by because she has a guardian spirit. Likewise, I have spirits that inform all my behaviors, my family has a collective spirit of communal care that guides us, our city of Poulsbo has a Norwegian spirit to it, and so on. Spirit—whether it’s one of love or apathy, peace or fear, and so on—is what animates, moves, and guides us. While a defensive one leads to Biscuits’ yapping, a spirit of hospitality informs much of my wife Lisa’s behaviors, and one of love compels me to write this work. In other words: Everything is spiritual. From the mundane to the miraculous, it’s the energy that gets people to do what they do. Importantly, remembering “everything is spiritual” is to recognize everything and everyone is connected, all life forms one tapestry that cannot be unraveled, and everything and everyone is sacred and holy.¹

Yet, if that’s true, why do we have the problems of polarization, division, and “us” versus “them” mentalities? *Because* it’s true. Meaning, we are born and created to do life together. In other words, people innately have a spirit of belonging, a deep desire to be part of a trusted circle of people to

¹ Rob Bell, *Everything is Spiritual: Who We Are and What We’re Doing Here* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2020), 61-2.

walk the road of life with.² Yet, the easiest way to belong is to join a “tribe,” a group of people with a collective identity that is formed—at least in part—by the ways it’s different from, and better than, other tribes.³ While the term “tribe” can seem colloquial or antiquated, it is also useful for pointing out how we, to our detriment, differentiate ourselves “either along lines of race and class or along lines of thinking and behavior.”⁴

Behaviorally, I am *not* particularly “manly,” in that I’m not skilled at fixing or installing things, don’t like working on cars, and would much rather cook dinner than do traditionally masculine tasks. I bring that up, because for years I was ashamed of how I am wired, and shame is also a key coconspirator in our predicament of division and polarization. “Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging.”⁵ Aware of it or not, shame is a powerful influencer of human behavior—and always has been. In the story of Adam and Eve, whose names mean “human” and “living” (a clue this tale applies to us too), the shame they felt after eating the forbidden fruit led them to hide, deflect, and blame others—much as our wounds, wrongs, and insecurities lead us to do today.⁶

If we view the factors pulling people to polarize and divide as a stew, an ingredient intimately related to shame is humanity’s impulse to scapegoat. When individual and/or communal stress levels grow to a boiling point, people shift the blame and/or repercussions of the issue onto someone unlike them—and have done so for ages.⁷ This “scapegoat”—coming from a literal goat the Jews of antiquity would place their collective sins on, before driving it off into the wilderness, presumably to die—which can be an individual or a tribe, works as a means to release the uncomfortable energies of stress, struggle, and shame. What is more, scapegoats also serve as a hated “other” for people to bond against. We see this regularly in American politics, with the president getting belittled and blamed by the other party for the country’s woes.

Canadian Bacon, a comedy from the 1990s starring John Candy, hilariously drives home the power of tribalism, shame, and scapegoating. While during the Cold War, Americans of all types and perspectives could rally together against the Soviet Union, after the fall of the USSR, the US no longer had a tribe to unify against by scapegoating it. Set in the early post-Cold War era, the film

² Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn’t): Telling the Truth About Perfectionism, Inadequacy and Power* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), 231.

³ Sandra Mayes Unger, *Tribe: Why Do All Our Friends Look Just Like Us?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 187.

⁴ Unger, *Tribe*, 26.

⁵ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 5.

⁶ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1999), 82-3.

⁷ Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 215, Kindle.

features Alan Alda as a president of the United States who is ashamed by his dismal approval ratings and eager to find a way to boost them. One of his top cabinet members, a shady figure played by Kevin Pollack, comes up with the idea of making Canada the new enemy for America to rally against, and all sorts of hilarity ensues.

Two finishing ingredients for the polarization stew, ego and righteousness, also show up in *Canadian Bacon*. It's the egoic call to win at all costs that drives the American government to begin self-righteously telling people how evil the Canadians are. Now, let us pause to note: Our ego gets somewhat of a bad rap, in that it's a necessary and valuable ingredient for a good life. Kato, my only child, really enjoys, and is quite good at, cooking. They used a healthy dose of cloves for an Indian dish one time, and it totally made the meal. Recalling this triumph, not long later, Kato mistakenly overpowered the flavors of a soup with cloves. Our ego is like cloves, in that it has times and places to shine—it's what motivates and pushes us after all—but it needs to be used mindfully and in doses.

Yet, the ego wants to be the main ingredient. It wants to drive our lives, because it is wired to go and win at all costs. Based on years of research, Dr. Brené Brown concludes:

Ego is an eager and willing conspirator when it comes to locking away the heart. I think of my ego as my inner hustler. It's that voice in my head that drives pretending, performing, pleasing, and perfecting. The ego loves gold stars and craves acceptance and approval. It has no interest in wholeheartedness, just self-protection and admiration.

Our ego will do almost anything to avoid or minimize the discomfort associated with feeling vulnerable or even being curious, because it's too risky. *What will people think? What if I learn something unpleasant or uncomfortable about myself?*

While ego is powerful and demanding, it's just a tiny part of who we are. The heart is giant by comparison, and its free, wholehearted wisdom can drown out the smallness of needing to be liked.⁸

Our egos are wired for competition and comparison, which is great for sports, but terrible when it comes to thriving in relationships, communities, and doing life together—*especially* when it comes to embracing diversity and difference. Its aggressive nature even has the power to taint otherwise positive endeavors. Barbara Holmes mourns how this spirit has infected the civil rights movement, making it oriented toward “unending struggle and ongoing battle readiness,” which saturate life “with tension, guarded awareness, limited communications, overachieving, and an inability to connect to other realities.”⁹ Individually and collectively, this impulse to battle and win in all aspects of life becomes especially problematic and divisive when paired with the human impulse to righteousness: our desire to be, do, and be on the right and good side.

⁸ Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. (New York: Random House, 2018), 74.

⁹ Barbara A. Holmes, *Race and Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently*, 2nd ed. (Albuquerque, NM: CAC Publishing, 2020), 62-3.

An “obsession with righteousness,” social psychiatrist Jonathan Haidt observes, is simply part of being human. While, unlike other animals, this allows humanity to form “large cooperative groups, tribes, and nations” around commonly held morals, “without the glue of kinship,” it also curses us with “moralistic strife,” because when a tribe is united by morals it believes correct, it is automatically at odds with tribes with different values.¹⁰ Thus, the glue of righteousness both binds and blinds people, uniting people of the same beliefs, while simultaneously blinding them to the good people and values on the “other” side.¹¹ We see this writ large in America’s politics, with those on the Left and Right equally convinced their team is right, and the other wrong.

The polarization stew—tribalism, shame, scapegoating, ego, and righteousness—set before and ingested by us all, to varying degrees, is potent. It lies at the belly of our “us” versus “them” problem, and the divides it creates. Another way to think of and see this dynamic is to realize human nature is innately both “selfish” and “groupish,” as Haidt puts it; we deeply crave to be safe and valued as individuals, while also needing to belong to a group we support and champion.¹²

This is why bullying is so damaging. After I finished fifth grade at a Department of Defense school in Erlangen, West Germany, the army gave my dad orders to move back to the US, and my parents decided to divorce. So, with my dad stationed in California and mom suffering from depression, I started the tumultuous time of middle school in Washington as a new student without friends. While it didn’t take long to form a few good friendships, I remained an outsider. Even worse, for most of these three years, a group of three boys bullied me mercilessly. And, when they did, the little tribe of friends I did have consistently melted away. It was a painful and hurtful time that continues to impact me decades later. Bullying cuts at the heart of our need to be our self, and celebrated as such, as well the vital importance of belonging to and being part of a “team.”

When I cook, after I’ve let a stew simmer for a while before taste-testing it, I’ll often realize it could use a little something more. In this regard, the scars on my heart from being bullied, remind me there is a flavor missing from the polarization stew: Brokenness. One need look no further than the nightly news and daily headlines—replete with wars, mass shootings, political fighting, racial tensions, unrest between citizens and the police, economic crises, and beyond—to realize there is an ongoing wrongness in the world. Whether one names this brokenness, sin, shadow, or something else, it affects us all, and is a part of our polarization problem.

¹⁰ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), xix-xx.

¹¹ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 366.

¹² Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 221.

While specifically exploring the roots of, and solutions to our individual and collective brokenness is beyond the focus of this work, all is not lost. The practices, lived behaviors, and mental dispositions described in the following chapters, mix together to form a counter-stew of sorts. One whose grace, curiosity, understanding, compassion, and love, outdoes and undoes polarization's tribalism, shame, scapegoating, ego, righteousness, and brokenness. Bringing us from divided to united. From suffering to flourishing. I invite you to taste and try it for yourself.

That said, it is important to realize that at least part of what is often chalked up to sin, or brokenness, is less of an "evil" one chooses, and more of an unconscious, animalistic response. These behaviors, while unhelpful and/or damaging in our current reality, are biological and evolutionary actions and reactions hardwired into humanity, that previously helped us survive, grow, and thrive for thousands of years—and occasionally, like in a crisis, continue to aid people.

With that in mind, an interesting part of the human experience that sheds light on why our divides can seem so insurmountable is we are animals with consciousness—and the possibility of mindfulness. In the face of danger, our animal nature knows to fight, fly, freeze, or fawn in order to survive. Meanwhile, our consciousness has the ability—which takes training and time—to choose civil dialogue, kindness, curiosity, understanding, compassion, and love, even of enemies (real or perceived). The problem is, the animal in us places a threatening tiger in the same category as a coworker who tells us, "You're wrong" or "I believe differently." As silly as this may sound today, for the vast majority of humanity's existence, we have depended upon these instinctive reactions to literally stay alive when threatened by things like the teeth and claws of the wild animals we long lived around.

What is more, we tend to intertwine our selfhood with our tribe, which means when another tribe opposes, contradicts, and/or attacks ours, the animal in us literally views it as a life-and-death situation. Our animal nature easily and quickly perceives difference as dangerous and an enemy. Is it any wonder we find ourselves so at odds?

Part of the problem of polarization and division, then, stems from when our consciousness fails to soothe and let our animal instincts know we are nearly always safe in the face of political, religious, racial, financial, and further forms of "otherness."

A big part of what helps our full selves—animal, consciousness, and otherwise—feel at home with difference is common ground. To collectively get along and unite, whether it's for a moment, season, or life, we need a common storyline, language (literal and metaphorical), belief, and/or interest to unify under.¹³ Whether it's a shared fandom for the Seahawks, love of Jesus, or season

¹³ Unger, *Tribe*, 194-5.

of parenthood, commonalities combine people into communities. The deeper the commonality goes, the thicker the bonds are.

This speaks to the power and pull of religion, as it gives a deep and broad center-point for people to circle together around.¹⁴ Further, America used to have the Grand Narratives of Christianity and American Exceptionalism to unite under, so with these both fading away, it makes sense we have such a sharp struggle with diversity and difference. There is something about the Transcendent Glue of Christianity, American Exceptionalism, and a host of other religions and big beliefs that elevates people to their best and/or worst self.¹⁵ Christianity, for instance, is to praise for the establishment of hospitals and education systems, and to blame for anti-Semitism and authorizing the somewhat hostile takeover of America and Africa in the Colonial Age. Meanwhile American Exceptionalism, the belief the US is uniquely good, great, and favored among nations, has blessed the world with the spread of freedom and democracy, yet cursed it with America overthrowing other governments and establishing hundreds of military bases in foreign countries around the world.

What we need, then, is common ground, a Grand Narrative we can circle around, featuring depth, breadth, *and* a commitment to the common good. One that honors how “the most powerful words” each of us can hear are, “You are not alone,” because shame pulls us in unhealthy directions when we think we are alone, cut off from our people.¹⁶ In 2008 in a freak, family-friendly hiking accident I surreally slipped, slid, and fell thirty feet off a cliff headfirst. I mention that because—although I should have died, I spent two months in the ICU and nearly four in inpatient rehabilitation and lost two months of my memory, ability to drive, and a great career as an officer in the air force—by far, the worst part of my life wasn’t this, but going through two divorces. Why? At the core of each of us is a profound need and desire to be valued, included, and loved,¹⁷ meaning any common ground we find, I believe, must have those needs at the center.

This is why an essential part of bridging all manner of differences and oppositions, to bring people together as one human family, will take a common ground, or Grand Narrative, that touches all of us both deeply and broadly. While, admittedly, I’m both a hopeful romantic and a hopeful human, I fully believe we can find transcendent stories that bring us together in diverse and loving ways. As Rob Bell writes: “We’re free to do whatever we want. Love, hate, build, tear down. We can stay, or

¹⁴ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 303.

¹⁵ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 318.

¹⁶ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 107.

¹⁷ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 127-8.

we can get in the car and drive away. The world is free to be a world. It's free to be beautiful and safe, and it's free to break our heart in a thousand ways. That free."¹⁸

The choice of what to do with that freedom is ours.

¹⁸ Bell, *Everything is Spiritual*, 28.

Common Ground

All humanity comes from the same source, and is interconnected and interdependent. This is a theme, by-and-large, religions and sciences agree on. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—for instance—each declare us children of the Divine, made in the image of God. From the beginning, this concept names every person as co-equal, co-valuable, and co-worthy of love and belonging.

Likewise, the sciences' best understanding of the evolution of life, points to all of physical reality originating from the singularity of the Big Bang. Over time, from this creative explosion came stars, planets, asteroids, moons, water, particles, air, cells, plants, fish, animals, and humans. Scientifically, then, we all have the same origins. Evolutionarily, biologically, and religiously, then, we are related and connected. We are one human family.

This is why the United Nations, and many other organizations, seeks the common good for all people—no matter their race, religion, nation, gender, worldview, or politics. It is also why we have the term “Earthlings.” It names our inherent and fundamental sameness. If an expedition of aliens from a different galaxy appeared on Earth today, that’s how’d they view us, as *Earthlings*.

To put it differently: *Yes, there is a rainbow of diversity when it comes to humanity. But, deeply and truly we are more alike than different. We have the same longing to belong, be valued, and be loved.* Living from this perspective helps us bridge divides and flourish together; because, the more we choose and practice this point of view, the more we see and treat one another as the coequal kin we truly are.

What is more, when we “step back” and look at our life together from a big picture perspective, we see how much we need and depend on one another. Predominately speaking, in the western world, our food, shelter, fuel, transportation, clothes, appliances, electronics, therapies, medicines, surgeries, and beyond, all come from the work of other people. My flourishing depends on you, your flourishing depends on me, and so on.

To put it differently: *We need one another.* Or, as Jesus effectively said in Matthew 22:36-40: *Love is the point.* “Love,” as I understand it, is aligning one’s thoughts, words, and deeds to foster flourishing. It seeks the common good, while seeing and honoring the inherent light in everyone. Given there’s biological, evolutionary, spiritual, and religious connection between us all, love is the fitting response. It is the flow of reality. To the degree we don’t love, we suffer. But, when we do, we thrive.

When we live, then, with a heart for one another, with the knowledge we’re part of one human family, with love as our center, we have a grand narrative that leads to flourishing across divides. We are all Earthlings and here to love. This is common ground, I believe, we can all “stand” in together.

Practices and Mental Dispositions Overview

Knowledge is only rumor until it lives in the bones.

–Asaro tribe proverb

While I was an undergrad at Washington State University, “Wazzu” for short, I learned to play the guitar. Although it didn’t take long for my mind to know what I was supposed to do to play songs, it took months of practice for my fingers to develop the ability to make music that sounded musical. In much the same way, good ideas in our heads about living and loving well remain nothing more than thought bubbles until we embody them in the world. The dream Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned, the blessed kingdom Jesus proclaimed, the equality Gandhi championed, and the good we want to see in the world only become real to the extent that we live them “out loud.”

Jared Byas names such lived knowledge: Wisdom-truth. “Wisdom-truth is that truth that has moved from our heads to our hearts and then out to our hands and feet. That is to say, ‘Wisdom is not beliefs in our head but a life well lived.’”¹⁹ With that in mind, this chapter will outline sixteen practices and mental dispositions that research, surveys, conversations, workshops, and lived experience show will help shift us from polarized, stressed, and elevated emotionally to united, harmonious, and elevated spiritually. While the following chapters will go deeper into each practice/mental disposition, this section will set them up, and can be used as a quick reference.

1. **Labor of Love** – To get and stay fit physically, one must sweat and get uncomfortable. Giving birth to a baby is called “labor” for a reason. In much the same way, growing into and maintaining relational and spiritual “fitness” requires putting in time and effort, as well as being stretched. This is especially true when it comes to reaching across the divides of difference. It’s a labor of love, though, because it is worth it and leads to mutual flourishing. Day by day, to see the world we long for—with pauses for rest and recovery—we put our “workout clothes” on to grow our love muscles.
2. **Big + Humble Perspective, Big Life** – A big-picture perspective, one that simultaneously sees people and things from as many angles as possible, and recognizes we are fallible and finite, is essential. This point of view honors the liberal/left, conservative/right, and centrist/middle sides of things, because they have *all* been around throughout history for a reason. They all belong. They each have gifts we need, and dark sides we do not—though, we do still need to acknowledge and address the latter. Adopting such a perspective helps free us from tribalism, scapegoating, our egos, and righteousness—the bulk of the polarization stew. Studies show

¹⁹ Jared Byas, *Love Matters More: How Fighting to be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2020), 36.

people who are able to put “themselves into another person’s shoes” and look at things from “that person’s perspective” are the “most morally advanced.”²⁰

3. **Gratitude: Cultivate Awe** – At, perhaps, the darkest moment in my life, a yoga teacher I followed invited people to join her in journaling three things they were grateful for each day for a month. In the midst of my second divorce, I figured I’d give anything a try. Her invitation turned out to be so powerfully healing, joy-making, and enlivening, I ended up doing it for years. Practicing gratitude is like a free wonder drug, with no side-effects ... other than bliss. It reframes everything in a positive, yet realistic way. When this is combined with choosing to see and celebrate the beauty and many miracles of/in nature and life, I’ve found it’s like one’s reality going from black and white to 4k Ultra High-Definition color!
4. **Laugh** – Laughter is both a pressure release and joy-maker. In other words, mirth is literally a way to move the energy of life’s stresses, struggles, and sadness. What is more, it makes us more joyous and loving, and shame has a hard time clinging to a mirthful spirit. Laughter is both medicine and magic for the soul.
5. **Clear-Center-Connect** – Clearing away the clutter of life, centering within this moment and ourselves, and connecting to a Power bigger than and beyond us is the essence of a meditative, or contemplative, life. This is essential because study after study, and experience after experience, demonstrate practicing meditation/contemplation brings people to a higher stage of consciousness.²¹ There is something about quieting our minds that connects us to a peace that passes understanding, and a love bigger than ourselves.
6. **Cultivate Curiosity: Greet with Grace, Wonder, and Listen Deeply** – While society preaches comparison and competition (attributes of one’s ego), Love nudges us toward curiosity (a hallmark of one’s True Self). Whereas comparison and competition separate and divide us, curiosity brings us together. It humbly recognizes my mental map of life is not only different from yours, but also *none* of them are fully accurate grasps of reality.²² To cultivate curiosity is to greet the “other” with grace, a spirit that seeks to include and understand. When we adopt this mentality, we decide to wonder about the story that led a person to be who and how they are. In this, we become ready to listen deeply to what they share about themselves, which honors and affirms them, just as they are. Isn’t that what we all desire?
7. **Be Real. Be Safe. Be Present.** – This is the companion of curiosity. When we—and others—share our “things,” when we demonstrate we’re a safe space, when we live in the moment, life gets

²⁰ Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 9-10.

²¹ Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2010), 119-20.

²² Unger, *Tribe*, 244-5.

messy in the most beautiful and healing of ways. The shame and righteousness that divide us fade away under the warmth of authenticity and hospitality.

8. **Sharing Our Stories & Sorrows, Creates Space for Healing & Belonging** – When we curiously invite others to be real, empathy is essential. Shame is not only a powerfully debilitating force, but it is also a part of most everyone’s life. Yet, when it is met with empathy, it melts away like water melted the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Some of the greatest gifts in my life came when I shared my stories of shame to empathetic ears.
9. **“We’re Always Telling a Story in Our Heads, Choose a Good One”** – The most powerful words “spoken” to us are the thought bubbles in our minds. Humans are storied creatures. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we tell ourselves stories about ourselves, others, and reality—often defaulting to finger-pointing and scapegoating. Yoga and other mindfulness practices, though, help us become aware of this inner chatter. Then, like a master gardener, we can prune, water, weed, and sculpt our thoughts into a good story.
10. **Soul Seeing: The Namaste Revolution** – “Soul seeing” is choosing to view everyone as coequal family members of the human race. It is acknowledging we all come from the same Source, meaning we all have the same inherent and immeasurable worth. Soul seeing is looking deeper to see at a soul level. It is seeing through the eyes of love, which believes the best. It’s remembering we’re all in the image of the Divine. Soul seeing reminds us, “we all need to feel valued, accepted and affirmed” because, “regardless of who we are, how we were raised or what we believe, all of us fight hidden, silent battles against not being good enough, not having enough and not belonging enough.”²³
11. **Look for the Good** – What we focus our thoughts, attention, and awareness on deeply shapes us. When we look for the good—in experiences, others, ourselves, etc.—we not only cultivate and grow goodness in ourselves, we bring it out in others. In this regard, Saint Paul’s words in Philippians ring true and bless people of all types: “Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.”²⁴ Focusing on the good, like this, leaves little space for the polarization stew’s ingredients of tribalism, shame, scapegoating, ego, and righteousness to take up residence in our hearts and minds.
12. **Pause. Slow. Reflect.** – In the air force, I learned the best tacticians and operators are formed in the debriefs. The same is true in life. Regularly taking time to take a moment—or more—to slow down and look back on our day in order to learn and grow from what transpired makes us better

²³ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 127-8.

²⁴ Philippians 4:8 (The Message).

people. Not only that, the very act of mindfully opting out of life's frenetic pace to enjoy the bliss of being makes a world of difference for one's health, wellness, and disposition.

13. **Movement is Medicine.** – In a real way, everything is energy. Our feelings, thoughts, and bodies are all energy, and energy wants to move. The sweat of a workout is therapy, in the sense that it processes one's stresses, struggles, hurts, and traumas in a healthy and healing way. Naturally, the energies of frustration, anger, anxiety, and the like, can also be "worked out" via a conversation with a safe person, journaling, prayer, and a variety of other, non-sweaty, ways too. The key is to let it, whatever the issue might be inside of you, healthily move out of you.
14. **Nonjudgment and Non-Dualistic Thinking** – While judgments are helpful, and sometimes essential, when it comes to deciding what to eat, concluding a trial, determining a job to pursue, and so on, they are less than helpful in relationships. When we judge, we generally place ourselves in a superior position, while deeming others inferior. Likewise, dualistic, or either/or, thinking is perfect for deciding which way to turn, whether to get out of bed or not, if it's wise to touch a hot stove, and so on, but falls woefully short when it comes to the complexities of the human experience. Non-dualistic, or both/and, thinking is like a rainbow—it embraces diversity, difference, and more than one answer being correct.
15. **Love ALLways** – "Love ALLways" means to love always and in all the ways. It means to do our best—remember, that's all we can ever do—to align one's thoughts, words, and deeds to foster flourishing. It seeks the common good, while seeing and honoring the inherent light in everyone. What is more, while we sometimes separate and distinguish various types of love—friendship love, passionate or sexual love, self-love, familial love, and selfless (or Big) love—loving ALLways honors that *each* of these is an essential part of love's fullness.²⁵
16. **Life is a Team Sport** – At a deep level, we know it is not good to be alone in our journeys.²⁶ On our own, it is easy to think we're the only one who struggles with X, is hurt by Y, or desires Z. That is why we need each other. Some of "the most powerful words we can hear are 'You are not alone.'"²⁷ I believe the diversity of humanity indicates we are not meant to do life with people just like us. We're meant to have, and greatly benefit from, a circle that is simultaneously diverse and intimate. Diversity (a variety of strengths and weaknesses) plus intimacy (kinship and closeness) add up to form a great team.

²⁵ Paul Weller, "The Potentialities of Love in Social, Political, and Economic Contexts" in *Love as Common Ground*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes, 324.

²⁶ Genesis 2:18 (The Message).

²⁷ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 107.

The Love Effect

All of the practices, mental dispositions, and common ground, summarized above, lead to the love effect. You know how the sun both warms and tans your skin? The sun, when we're in its rays, affects us. I live in Washington state, and while it doesn't really rain as much or badly as we tell people who don't live here; in the winter, our days are quite short and dark. The lack of sunlight, makes people- to varying degrees-depressed, sad, and lethargic. Conversely, though, in the summers ... wow! Fueled by longer, sundrenched days, people in the Pacific Northwest are largely active, joyful, vibrant, and happy.

Akin to how the presence or absence of sunlight impacts a person, so does love. When love shines on us, it's like we receive a blood infusion of kindness, calm, curiosity, compassion, and understanding. Much like how a rock thrown into a lake sends ripples of waves through the water; giving and receiving love sends swells of goodness from person-to-person.

When we lead with love, the walls of division, difference, and misunderstanding, dissolve into unity, understanding, and flourishing.

Declaration of Loving Out Loud

The "Declaration of Loving out Loud" is a commitment to doing one's best to see other people as kin and love accordingly, via the following four simple mentalities. It captures the heart of this project in a concise way that can be easily referenced, remembered, shared, and lived:

1. **Love ALLways.** "Love ALLways" is a commitment to loving always and all ways. It's choosing to love continually (always) and contextually (all ways), as best as one can. Love is aligning one's thoughts, words, and deeds to foster flourishing. It seeks the common good, while seeing and honoring the inherent light in everyone. Curiosity is a hallmark of Love ALLways, and the three points below, because it allows us to wonder about and learn the stories that shape and mold others. Understanding cultivates lovingkindness.
2. **Soul Seeing.** Yoga practices generally end with everyone bowing to one another and saying "Namaste." Namaste is taken to effectively mean: "The beautiful and precious light at the center of me, sees, names, and celebrates the beautiful and precious light at the center of you." Soul seeing is taking this mentality into one's regular life, choosing to see the beautiful and precious light at the center of everyone you meet. It is a reminder we are all coequal and co-needed members of one human family. Soul seeing invites us to speak, think, and act with the awareness we're all kin.
3. **Meditative/Contemplative Practice Five Days a Week for Five Minutes (or More).** Practices that help us quiet our minds, calm our spirits, and connect to something bigger than and beyond ourselves quite simply make us better people. Whether it's meditation, prayer, a gratitude practice, yoga, journaling, Pilates, a breath practice, mindful walks, being in nature, a self-examination practice, going for a run, or any number of other practices, pick something(s) that resonates and is consistently doable for you.
4. **Choose Grace, for Yourself, and Others.** We all have bad days. We all make mistakes. Over time, in the absence of grace, these "weights" drag us down. Grace interrupts the way we beat ourselves up and/or judge others with the reminder our wrongs don't define us. Grace features a spirit of forgiveness, which frees one from getting stuck in frustration, anger, fear, and such. While grace sometimes includes healthy boundaries, it always leaves us and others shining a little more brightly.

Project Launch Plan

Doctoral Project Description

The NPO for this project is:

In a polarized, “us” versus “them” society: How do we embrace and cultivate the richness of ourself, recognize the goodness of “others,” and come together as one diverse human family; wherein, we grow into greater individual and collective flourishing?

Honoring the complexity and contextuality of this issue, the project approaches it in multiple ways. The submitted portion of the project is a future book, titled *The Love Effect*. This memoir-style work lays out why we are so polarized, two conjoined Grand Narratives (or worldviews) that help us move to a different space, and a toolkit of mental dispositions and practices that equip people to flourish across divides. That said, as detailed below, the book will lay the basis for multiform interpersonal events that will help people practice and live *The Love Effect* out.

Audience

While my current context and profession is teaching yoga at two local studios, as well as writing (primarily via blogs and social media); following this doctoral program, I will obtain certificates in life-coaching and spiritual direction, and add those to the mix. Thus, my audience will come from a hybrid of in-person and online interaction. What is more, it bears mentioning, four Facebook groups I’m an active member of and/or participant in, include: Love Heretic (a Jesus and love-centric Christian group of 4,100+), Blissology (an international yoga community with nearly 700 members, which I teach online with), Live Well Community Kitsap Group (300+ people in my county, Kitsap, committed to greater wellness), and Loving Your Neighbor Kitsap (280 local people seeking to love like Jesus).

As the book nears publishing, I will share the news in all these venues. What is more, the writings I share then, will revolve around the issues my project addresses; while pointing people toward the book, workshops based on it, and the Declaration of Loving Out Loud on my website (lightlovelang.com). Further, working through divides to a place of greater flourishing, will also be a featured service I provide via coaching or direction.

Development Plan

My project will be published as a book, titled *The Love Effect*, that forms the foundation for what follows. Leading up to the book’s release, I will launch a podcast promoting it, seek to be featured on other podcasts, and center my online writings on the issues my project addresses—as well as answers it provides. At the same time, I will put the “Declaration of Loving Out Loud” (a single-page distillation of *The Love Effect* into four, actionable points) on my website for people to digitally sign as a declaration of their commitment to flourish across divides. The rest of my website will also be tailored to promote the book and follow-on endeavors.

Once the book is released, I will then use it as a basis for workshops I do through yoga studios. What is more, the principles of *The Love Effect*, will also form a service I will explicitly offer via spiritual direction and life-coaching—this will also be detailed on my website. Finally, because of the healing, growth, and greater understanding I’ve experienced in college courses with teachings and conversations about race and gender issues—as well as my long-standing dream of becoming a professor—I hope to find a school where I can teach *The Love Effect* as a course. With that in mind, here is the project’s roadmap:

Summer 2023: Polish *The Love Effect* for publication, while seeking a publisher.

September 2023 - May 2024: Do coursework at George Fox for spiritual director certificate, while attending a life-coaching program for that credential.

May 2024: Earn life-coaching and spiritual director certificates.

Summer 2024: Book Release Buildup. Be featured on at least three podcasts, as a measure of success. Create my own podcast. Online writing will focus on building toward the release of the book and follow-on workshops.

September 2024: Book Release (I will seek a publisher, with self-publishing on Amazon as my backup plan). Effectiveness measured by 250+ books sold in first three months, and 100+ people signing the “Declaration of Loving Out Loud.”

October 2024: First workshop. Also, the first round of 30-day surveys will come in, allowing me to measure the project’s effectiveness, and make tweaks and changes as warranted.

Spring 2025: Use feedback from surveys to continue to hone *The Love Effect*. Begin exploring having this become a college course.

Development Process

Thirty days after people sign the “Declaration of Loving Out Loud” on my website, or participate in a workshop or coaching/direction sessions centered on *The Love Effect*; they will be emailed a survey asking them if they: (1) Report “noticeable growth” in Soul Seeing, Love ALLwys, and a regular (5-days-a-week for 5-minutes or more) meditative/contemplative practice. (2) Report an increase of civil dialogue with people on the “other” side—politically, religiously, racially, and/or other beliefs. (3) Report an increased sense of inner peace, gratitude, joy, and laughter.

While the measure for success is 75% reporting “yes,” whether that occurs or not, their feedback will be used to adjust, change, and/or add to *The Love Effect*, as applicable. What is more, while this is my official vehicle for evaluating and gathering data concerning the project, there are several other ways I will collect insight from others in order to improve this project. Online engagement around my writing, in-person feedback from workshops or sessions, Amazon book reviews, insights from podcast interviews, and beyond, will all provide “soil” from which the project will continue to develop and grow.

Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Introduction

In 2010 I began the Master of Divinity program at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology intending to be a regular pastor, i.e., a person who focuses on caring for Christian souls. Yet, “life” and my deep love for *all* people, has recently allowed me to realize my pastoral calling transcends religions.

With that in mind: The events, experiences, and elections of 2020, traumatic, divisive, and as Book of Revelations-like as they have been, have also been apocalyptic in the best sense of the word. 2020 has *revealed* our individual and collective need for healing, transformation, and unity. Not only that, but healing, transformation, and unity that transcends warring political parties, religious differences, racial divides, and beyond. I believe a gift of 2020 has been, and is, an invitation to a path of spiritual formation that fosters greater aliveness and togetherness. Although my hunch is Jesus-like love, which embodies 1 Corinthians 13 and sacrificially gives for the thriving and flourishing of all, is said way, I could be wrong.

Personal Research Manifesto

I commit to practicing introspection to be alert to my biases and errors, and make space to listen deeply to the Spirit and others for wisdom, guidance, and ideas.

NPO Statement

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences while fostering community and thriving/flourishing.

NPO Scope and Constraints

In my view it is non-negotiable that this NPO brings greater wellbeing, unity and freedom/choice to people. The cost of this is it cannot be as definitively all-encompassing/inclusive as my heart desires it to be. Along those lines, one of the boundaries is “participants” have to opt in—unity and love cannot be forced on people. What is more, there is a definite cost for growing a place of a love big enough to include and embrace difference, both internal *and* external. As I understand it, this heart-space is only created by great loss and/or great love; either commands a price.

NPO Context

It is said we love God because the Divine first loved us—the context of the NPO is similar. In a real sense the goal of this is to create an avalanche, which starts small and grows big. Specifically, people who are sick and tired of the “us” versus “them” divides and battles in our society will be a primary target audience. Yet, this cadre, which has the potential to include all races, ages, parties,

and religions (or lack thereof), will form a “snowball” that hopefully will create a landslide-like movement by winning others with the radical, inclusive, and healing Christlike love they display. As the sun brings warmth and light, love cultivates transformation and awakens love.

Root Causes

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of this project is one of the root causes and solutions is biology. *Homo Sapiens* are simultaneously animals and humans, in that we both have the biological evolutionary instinct to oppose, fear, and/or be unsettled by difference, as well as the ability to choose a different path and include it. Fear, thus, is a significant hurdle to overcome, as we are hardwired to prefer comfortable situations and people with similar looks and beliefs, which leads us to mistrust, and fight or fly from, the unknown and “other”.

Drilling down this fear “rabbit-hole” leads to two further observations. The workshop identified, “Thinking salvation is retribution, not restoration.” as the main root cause. This is because our views of God and the ever-after shape our engagement of the present, and we live in a society of people who want winners and losers. They want someone to pay for wrongs, because the U.S. has a guilt versus innocence worldview. This ties in with another root cause, the condition of one’s heart. While biology and culture move us toward fear and retribution, when big love touches and fills our hearts, our disposition shifts from retribution and scapegoating to restoration and grace.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders in my Discovery Workshop included a therapist with a DMin in Semiotics, a life-coach/Lifespan Integration therapist, a small business owner and former VP of a software company, an author of two books on Jesus and the love ethic and former missionary, and a retired navy nurse who serves as a VA spiritual wellness professional and Methodist lay minister.

One on One Interviews

My one-on-one interviews included a MDiv and former pastor who leads an adventure ministry named Youth Dynamics, a Christian author/therapist, and a seminary professor/author/founder of a ministry to street youth.

3-5 Key Biblical Texts

1 Corinthians 13

John 17:20-23

Matthew 5:38-48

John 13:34 + Philippians 2:1-11

Romans 13:8-10

1 John 4:7-12

Academic Resources

One primary research avenue is investigating what motivates and drives people into “us” versus “them” mindsets and actions, and how we transform and heal this divisive energy. A second pillar involves exploring how Christlike love can shift us from many warring (literally and metaphorically) human tribes, to one harmonious human family full of differences. A third key direction to research is what this love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, looks like in practice. How does a person practically put it into action? Desmond Tutu’s legacy of reconciliation and Sharon Salzberg’s mindfulness practices are two of the paths I will explore in this regard.

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Appendix

Discovery Workshop Description

The Discovery Workshop included the five aforementioned stakeholders, on October 24, 2020 for four hours on Zoom. The format followed the template from DMIN 750 syllabus assignments. We used Google Docs throughout and Mural for Activity 2.

Discovery Statement

We made a small deviation from the syllabus as we added our best take on a solution to the Discovery Statement.

Considering rival groups (audience),

we've discovered: In a nation of "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences while fostering community and thriving/flourishing (NPO),

which is caused by thinking salvation is retribution, not restoration (root cause).

If solved through the practices of Love (solution),

it would mean salvation as restoration (outcome).

Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop

As much as my heart is to heal the world and get everyone united, people need to opt in for this. The primacy of fear and the way it divides us in our society, and is reinforced by leaders, was a major topic, which means this NPO is a movement from being driven by fear to being lifted by love. The "trick" is to help people realize abundant life comes through difference, as we make room for the rainbow of humanity. Yet, difference is hard and embracing it brings suffering—meaning the solution involves discomfort, growth, and time.

In a real way this is a call to a spiritual workout, in that we must build our spiritual resilience and recognize that on the other side of fatigued spiritual "muscles" comes new strength. That said, marathons like this are aided by showing people how blessed those who've "ran" before are, while also harkening them back to the importance of doing life together with kindness, compassion, and respect.

One-on-One Interview Discoveries

A theology of retribution, and the driving force of fear, as the root cause was so foreign to one of the interviewees, that she wondered if it isn't more about the condition of one's heart. Along those lines, another pointed out what is missing is a common narrative, while the third concluded "a spiritual path that teaches love, grace, and community" will be key.

Perhaps the most important revelation from the interviews was how essential face-to-face relationship is for overcoming the divide of difference. Relationships cultivate trust, and trust is a bridge that spans the gap people feel toward otherness. Doing life together in a space full of love and grace will be vital for this. That said, the "unknown" (i.e., people unlike us) is scary, so courage and perseverance must be cultivated, while also creating spaces of safety. Important to note here is that the playing field is *not* level, as some are born to privilege and a leg-up, while others begin disadvantaged and behind, so to speak. So, this needs to take into account the creation of equity, which will help us become "more fascinated by difference, than frustrated."

Synthesis

An interviewee shared how a dear friend of nearly fifty years, who together have journeyed through divorces, the loss of children, adoptions, and more, told her 6 months before the election she did not think they could talk because they were on opposite political sides. This is because our culture does not know there is a pain and struggle that leads to life. None of us want to struggle, but turns out it is as pivotal to spiritual formation as it is to how our "muscles" are formed. While we crave quick fixes and commercials sell us easy solutions, instant cures, and such, the lasting and holistic growth, change, and development take time, effort, discomfort, pain, and patience. The question is, how to nudge people this direction?

The condition of one's heart seems central here, as we endeavor to transition from living in a world and mindset of fear and retribution to one of love and restoration. Many people have unhealed hurts, which manifest in fear, division, and anger, so healing these will be important. To do so, this project must incorporate our past lineage (with its wounds and gifts), present relations (and their opportunities), and future imagination (with its possibilities). That is why, just as God first accepted and loved us, which freed us to do likewise, we must do the same for others to invite them to join this dance of abundant life.

Next Steps

Two potentially related things to explore in developing this project are investigating what is inside us that draws us to spiritual formation, and what truly keeps us divided? While the negative, i.e., what one is against, fears, differences, and such, works for bringing people together for a time; it is not deep or lasting. So, understanding what lights people up from the inside out and draws them

together like moths to a flame, as well as what the roadblocks and biases are that hinder this will be crucial.

There are so many inborn and enculturated predispositions humans have, like confirmation, complexity, and confidence biases (to name a few)—which we often are not even aware of—it seems deconstructing these for people will be essential. Yet, deconstructed is no place to stay, so real-life stories of inclusive, boundary-crossing love being lived out in practical ways will also be a key next step for this project.

Discovery Workshop Documentation

The Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) Statement: In a divided and tribalistic nation of wounded people, we need an all-inclusive path to spiritual formation that transcends differences to transform and unite us.

Initial feedback on NPO = Consider removing “all-inclusive” due to questions and issues that potentially brings up.

Workshop Overview: After the Discovery Workshop, we will be able to:

- (1) Articulate the boundaries of the primary audience
- (2) Gain a better understanding of the Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) affecting the primary audience
- (3) Identify potential root causes of the NPO
- (4) Determine how a solution may impact the audience

ACTIVITY 1: NPO DEFINITION AND AUDIENCE

Question 1: What is the key issue you are trying to address and why is it important?

- All-inclusive path... from my perspective would need something that can not be drawn into individual interests... that which is beyond corruption's influence. What is a true authentic and genuine point of unity that is practical and life-giving?

- Intolerance of others ideas and worldviews - Important because very few people focus on commonality vs. what makes us different.
- How can we come together as a people when our political and spiritual leaders are often at odds with inclusivity and lack decency. Can we ignore our leaders and force the issue from the ground up?
- A divide in our country due to a culture war that has gotten worse over the last four years
- Becoming increasingly tribalistic as a society
- How to identify root causes and come up with solutions to address each one
- To bring together a divided congregation so they can "be the church", so we can be the parts of one body working to transform the world to bring the world closer to the reality of the kingdom of God; this transformation is in answer to the call of God;
- To help people in the political and religious divides find common ground to begin to understand and respect one another
- I would consider what is inside of us that draws towards spiritual formation.
- What truly keeps us divided?
- This is important in order to prevent further divisions and help people pursue solutions for our country and world that are constructive, not destructive
- List some areas of potential common ground that different "sides" can agree on.

Patterns:

- **Importance to focus on commonality/common ground**
- **Intolerance**

- **Accepting and celebrating differences, while working toward what we share in common**
- **Respect**

Commonalities:

Differences:

Outliers:

- **Come together in spite of leaders and forces that urge us to do otherwise**
- **All-inclusive path**
- **Consider what is inside of us that draws us toward spiritual formation**

Question 2: WHO is it an NPO for?

- Political identities, Democrats, Republicans, libertarians, socialists, conservatives, liberals
- Human Kind - Prioritized today (Who needs it more): Democrats/Republicans, White/Black, Conservative/Liberal, Male/Female (me too)
- All people are affected by the problem of disrespectful division; we are designed to be in connection with one another and when we break that connectedness we break the world; even people who are not part of the divide are still affected by it
- Religious identities - conservative, progressive, liberal faiths, Christians across spectrum, other faiths or people of non-faith
- Whoever longs for life-giving community.
- For those tired of living in an "us/them" ethos.

- News Outlets identities: people who have various sources, often contradictory sources, of news outlets
- Talk radio or right media vs. mainstream or left media
- Those who would like to learn to see beyond dualistic / binary paradigms.
- Anyone who is concerned with the divides in our country and in our faith or political communities
- For those who want to “make love and not war”.
- Emotional identities: anyone who is adopting an “us vs. them” mentality that divides the world that way, whether religious, political, or otherwise

Groupings

- Rival groups (political, races, religious)
- Those who want “it”
- People longing to live in an us AND them, instead of us vs. them reality
- Rival Leaders/Influencers
- Rival Sources of Truth

Who should we most focus on to *understand* the NPO?

- Those impacted by the ripple effect of the us vs. them divide

Who should the core audience be for this project?

- People in rival groups

Question 3: What social/cultural factors shape this NPO?

- Some cultural circles will be suspicious of the motivation to do this and whether it should be done
- Tribal thinking, driven by fear of “the other” vs. a gentle curiosity about “the other”; the ability to hold divergent points of view in tension and accept these differences; knowing what our collective priorities are even if we have different ways of reaching our joint goals
- Individual backgrounds, upbringing, experiences, fears, perceived advancement
- Some political/religious groups are not open minded enough to pursue a community that transcends different religious and politics
- It will be important to point to real world examples of how the NPO can work in the real world, or otherwise some people won't be able to envision it and buy into it

Themes

- Groups that want our loyalty
- Getting to know others so perceived danger of difference is overcome
- Working through our baggage

Must be Researched to fully understand NPO

- Groups/Forces that demand our loyalty and allegiance -- “Why We Hate” series on PBS
- TED Talk with abuser and survivor admitting and forgiving
- The Story of Daryl Davis TED Talk

- Desmond Tutu and Dalai Lama
- How to help people want to change and come together
- Orthodox Jew and Christian pastor who became friends and ministered to each other -- leaders of places with shootings?
- Ginsberg and Scalia

Question 4: What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

- Stories of restoration of tribal/political/religious/racial rivalries
- E.g. Daryl Davis befriending KKKs and influencing them to leave the KKK
- Republicans and Democrats coming together over common goal of restoring decency in white house - (a good example for some)
- Bipartisan and ecumenical movements in history
- Research into the benefits of being spiritually fit; the value of overcoming absolute certainty and allowing space for questioning what we think we know; peace with justice examples

Themes

- Real life comes through difference
- Flourishing on the other side of suffering
- Building our spiritual resilience

Question 5: How might you think of this NPO in a different way? How might you reframe it?

- I agree to reword it like this: "...we need a spiritual formation path that transcends differences..."
- Have it address building a sense of community among people of different political, religious, and cultural beliefs
- Is it possible to receive life and offer love more fully -- amidst conflicts and differences -- and not absent of them? And if so, how exactly is that done practically?
- Make sure we are leaving room for what makes people special and different.
- The outcome of not resolving this NPO vs. the outcome of resolving it - what are the risks associated with each possible outcome
- In a nation of "us/them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors the danger of differences while uniting and transforming people.
- Need a sense of connectedness with one another

Revised NPO Definitions:

Considering people in rival groups, we've discovered:

In a divided and tribalistic nation of wounded people, we need a spiritual formation path that includes and celebrates differences to unite and transform us.

In a nation of "us/them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors the danger of differences while uniting and transforming people.

In a nation of wounded, "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors the danger of differences while fostering community and flourishing.

ACTIVITY 2: UNDERSTANDING THOSE IMPACTED BY THE NPO

Themes (Themes repeated in quadrants noted by "I" for each quadrant)

- Listening - II
- Friendship/Togetherness - IIII
- Surprise
- Mutual respect - IIII
- Realizing our commonality without compromise
- Cruciform differentiation
- Love -- people feel loved and loving and hence safer and less fearful
- Empathy and embrace both of self and others
- Knowing other and being known
- It's a struggle, uncomfortable, challenging, and a lengthy process - II
- A proactive mindset and way of being that goes across tribes to build joyful solutions to problems

Gaps?

- Interview people who have gone through radical transformations (ex. KKK member who changed his/her mind)

"Why wouldn't they say (think, feel, do) that now?"

- Mistrust of goodness
- Fake news
- Fear over being wrong
- Fear of being on the wrong side
- Theology
- Fundamentalist fear of not being extreme enough, not going to heaven - the end of the game dictates the rules of the game
- Only hang out with people on your side and only watch/read views on your side

ACTIVITY 3: FINDING THE ROOT CAUSE

Stakeholder A 5 Whys

1. Because real unity comes *amidst* differences and not absent of them.
2. Because that's how God has seemingly set it up.
3. So that we may discover that love is not based on *beliefs* but, instead, within *body*.
4. So that we may know we're the body -- and not the belief -- of Christ.
5. So that we may know God even as we're known by God in knowing others.
6. Because the end game is presence: God's presence and our presence continually unfolding the glory of God that we are in the bounty of beautiful difference.

Stakeholder B 5 Whys (had to take a break)

1. Goes back to fear
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Stakeholder C 5 Whys

1. This is a need because we don't have unity in our society, we have tribes that insist on uniformity, which divides us
2. We have tribes that insist on uniformity because of religious and political beliefs and fears
3. We have religious and political beliefs and fears because for decades our society--both religious and political elements--has slowly demonized "the other"...
4. This is true because religion has created an us vs. them mentality... saved vs. lost... heaven vs. hell... raptured vs. condemned... regenerated vs. depraved, pro-life vs pro-choice, religious freedom vs. gay/atheist/non-faith rights so that adherents don't trust anyone outside their religion
5. This is true because politics has done the same... demonizing those who who differ on big vs. limited government, tax cuts, government programs, originalist courts vs. activist courts, etc.

Stakeholder D 5 Whys

1. People are missing out on others perspectives and beliefs
2. People stick to their own kind
3. Its comfortable

4. You don't have to put yourself out there and advance beyond your comfort zone.
5. Sometimes, you just want to be comfortable.

Stakeholder E was unable to stay for this part

5 Whys Consensus (one stakeholder did this six times, and the group agreed to do likewise for the final answer):

1. Because difference is uncomfortable, which feels "bad" and scary, but unity includes difference.
2. Because we're enslaved by dualistic, either/or thinking, which confines us to fear.
3. Because it's hard work to overcome fear and have unity with differences.
4. Because we don't realize there is a pain/suffering/struggle that leads to life.
5. Because we're afraid of and unaware of the glory that everyone already is.
6. Because we think retribution is the only path to salvation, yet haven't tasted the sweet fruit of restoration to unity.

Root Cause: Because we think salvation is retribution, not restoration.

ACTIVITY 4: PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Key Takeaways

- Our sense of feeling connected to others and to a Higher Power

Points of friction, clarification, or questions

None

Conclusion:

Considering rival groups (audience),

We've discovered: In a nation of "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences while fostering community and thriving/flourishing. (NPO),

Which is caused by thinking salvation is retribution, not restoration. (root cause).

If solved through the practices of Love (solution),

it would mean salvation as restoration (outcome).

Parting Shots :)

As Lang continues researching this NPO:

1. What should he be sure to examine?

- Already mentioned

2. What are potential blind spots that Lang best explore?

- His Enneagram 7 personality hates the death part and would love to skip it. Don't be afraid of this, conflict and such.
- Don't sacrifice the good enough/good for perfection. It's not all or nothing. There are steps to get us there and it's not going to come quickly. **What are baby steps?**
- We're all a work in progress and hopefully will be until the day we die. This is the beginning of a journey, not the end.

3. What are potential pitfalls that Lang best avoid?

- Stay true to who I am. Honor the power of community in my life.
- Thinking that I have to conquer it all.
- **Land the plane!**

One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Thank you SO much for taking the time and energy to lend your expertise, experience, and insight to my project. YOU are a Rockstar! Here is a summary of our key conclusions, findings, and things to explore further:

NPO AND DISCOVERY STATEMENT FINDINGS

Core Audience: Rival Groups

NPO: In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences while fostering community and thriving/flourishing.

Root Cause: Thinking salvation is retribution, not restoration.

Solution: The practices of love.

Outcome: It would mean salvation as restoration.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- This is about our feeling of and desire to be connected to others and a Higher Power.
- Some of the key themes noted include: friendship/togetherness done in community, mutual respect, listening, and how it’s an uncomfortable struggle to embrace and kindly engage a person on the “other” side, which takes time and effort to build the spiritual “muscles” for.
- This is about coming together in spite of forces and leaders urging us to do otherwise.
- Accepting and celebrating difference, while working toward what we share in common.

- Fear is a big underlying issue driving this need—relatedly, people don't know there's a pain/struggle/suffering that leads to life.
- Flourishing on the other side of suffering and building our spiritual resilience.
- The importance of understanding one another IN/WITH our differences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, DISCUSSION, ETC.

- Consider what is inside us that draws us toward spiritual formation.
- Investigate how to help people want to change and come together (is great suffering and/or big love the only paths?)—consider people caught up in this “us” vs. “them” dynamic without choosing or knowing it.
- Interview people who have gone through radical transformations (ex. KKK member who changed his/her mind).
- Explore the dynamic of Groups/Forces that demand our loyalty and allegiance - watch “Why We Hate” series on PBS.
- Watch Thordis Elva and Tom Stranger TED Talk (abuser and survivor admitting and forgiving)
- Watch Daryl Davis TED Talks (black man who reaches out to KKK members)
- Look into Desmond Tutu and Dalai Lama's joyous relationship amidst religious differences.
- Look into Orthodox Jew and Christian pastor who became friends and ministered to each other (Shlomo Riskin and John Hagee?)
- Explore example of Ginsberg and Scalia

If I missed anything you think is important, you have any questions, or anything else comes to mind, please let me know. Thank you so much!

Blessings,

Lang

One-on-One Interview Documentation

Interviewee A - Christian author, therapist

- Our culture doesn't want to know that there's a pain and struggle that leads to life (passage that says suffering produces character and this that and that this). None of us want to suffer, but turns out it's a pivotal aspect of spiritual formation. It's how our "muscles" are formed. Spiritual formation/maturing comes out of suffering is really key point.
- It's so foreign to think that positive can come from suffering, yet it's so true. Struck by how the things that we view as so negative are actually so important. If we avoid them, do we get to a place of ripeness and fullness? Seems our society doesn't get, like, or receive this, and many don't move into this space.
- Growth and development are a long journey and process. We don't want to go through the process, we just want to be there. Culture wants the fast food solution, God wants us to go through the process ("struggle" and "suffering" are things that go on, and have this truth built into the word).
- Theology of retribution is so foreign to her for root cause. Wondering about the condition of one's heart as the root cause. Fear didn't resonate with her.
- Important to keep in mind the damage and impact of isolation, especially when forced, through life situations, COVID, etc. For instance, divorce or death and no longer being in the demographic of that "couples" fellowship.
- She sees a tremendous need for this. Talking to a lifelong, dear friend about 6 months before the election (almost 50 years of friendship) and said she didn't think they could talk because of her support of Trump. They'd been through divorces, loss of children, adoption, etc. Where did it come from that 50 years of relationship could have ended because of political divides? How do we talk about these things? "I'm still called to love people, whether they agree with me or not."
- Death avoidant society. When death is in our face, we hide, ignore, push away, etc. We often don't realize this, but we are SO avoidant of death in all its forms, including struggle, discomfort, unknown, etc. Ex. Interviewee losing her baby and being ostracized from young couples groups and when Larry died from couples groups. We can't bear death.

- The condition of one's heart is important too. A lot of people have unhealed wounds, hurts, etc. that manifest as hatred (anger to hostility to hatred to violence).
- If we can learn to love, and we can learn to accept, like Christ does.
- Acceptance and love are key, just as what God did first for us, and that's what transforms us. So, repeating this dance/pattern is what will change people.
- Recommended reading *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande. Had to learn there's a time when it's okay to let someone die.

Interviewee B - MDiv, former pastor, leader of adventure ministry named Youth Dynamics

- This us vs. them mentality is creating so many lines in the sand and boundaries, that it's making it impossible to truly love because the opposite sides can't see eye to eye. It's anxiety producing, because it's counter to living out the Way of Christ and you get push back for not taking sides. Crucified on the center of opposites—we're in trouble if we go either way.
- We're created to be in community like the Trinity, and when we're taken out of community, we don't know what to do and it destroys us. Do we join a tribe just for the need of connection and not because of agreement with XYZ?
- Important to flesh out the practicality of what this looks like. How does this get put into action?
- How do we teach everyone to love? How do we show them? How do we live this? How do we walk them thru this spiritual formation journey? How do we encourage our natural desire to love?
- Restated NPO as: In our divisive world we need a spiritual path that teaches love, grace, and community.
- Characterized audience as Christians who aren't representing who we should be well as they put denomination, politics, etc. above the Way of Christ. And the black versus white is saddening.

- Viewed root cause as fear and mistrust of the unknown. Also fear without love. And misunderstanding or not willing to buy in with the unknown (BLM preaching from black pastor who is unknown + fear of black pastor to let her kids go out in unknown community). It can be so terrifying and scary to venture into the unknown (ex. Of going down the rapids in raft, and doing it changes our mentalities about what we can do). Growing courage and perseverance and inclusion muscles takes time and effort and pain like working marathon. WE DON'T GROW WITHOUT PAIN!
- Saw solution as: Being really willing to do life together, sharing it ALL from/in a safe and loving place that's full of grace. Displaying and giving grace/forgiveness in community is going to be key. Many haven't experienced this.

Interviewee C - Seminary professor, author, founder of ministry to street youth

- With love justice always has to be negotiated
- The importance of having a face to love. Faces make all the difference in the world!
- The one common denominator in acceptance is relationship (will accept if know before know gay, for ex., but not if not)
- The interviewee believes in relationships. The Truth of Jesus is relationships.
- The playing is not level. We can't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Equity is key, in that we take actions to level the playing field taking into account history, experience, race, gender, trauma, ability, etc. Beautiful example of equity is the wheelchair cutouts at sidewalks, which also benefits blind, elderly, those with babies in wheelchairs, etc. – Equity benefits us all in some sort of way.
- What is missing? A common narrative. Ex. Is COVID a real thing or is it fake? Fake news on TV pulls us in different directions.
- What else is missing? Conversation. Social media is like a bathing suit, we only reveal what we want and hide what we want to as well.

- Key to untangling this knot is a line a minority shared with the interviewee: "When you become more fascinated by difference, than frustrated." How do we position and aid people to be here? How do we cultivate this? By helping people understand they don't need to defend the ground their standing on (which can be challenging with Stand Your Ground Laws and such). There's a True Self beyond the ego that doesn't need to be defended or protected. When we feel held and loved we don't feel the need to protect and defend.
- **Viewed root cause as: People want winners and losers. They want someone to pay! Thinks it comes from a guilt vs. innocent worldview. Africa is very much an appease the gods to get good results. Scapegoating. Main one in Asia is honor vs. shame. In North American construct is a guilt vs. innocent worldview ... gets into someone has to pay ... comes back to American exceptionalism, predestination, needing to be one of the chosen people.**
- Insights on solution: Posture and proximity. For instance, if I'm a Christian and my posture is I hold the Truth, and if you don't agree you're going to hell ... does NOT help! The way forward is putting yourself in position with people you don't know who are different, and deal with the excruciating pain of the revelation that you don't know a bunch of shit! VITAL to admit you don't know and can't help to cross tribal boundaries.
- Recommended research: *Jesus and John Wayne* - goes into some of white tribalism. Connecting gender and patriarchy. *Black Bodies and the Justice of God* - talks about the psychological framing of stand your ground (the white body is preferred).

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Introduction

In 2010 I began the Master of Divinity program at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology intending to be a regular pastor, i.e., caring for Christian souls. Yet, “life” and my deep love for *all* people, has recently allowed me to realize my pastoral calling transcends religions.

With that in mind: Recent events, experiences, and elections, traumatic, divisive, and as Book of Revelations-like as they have been, have also been apocalyptic in best sense of the word. This time has *revealed* our individual and collective need for healing, transformation, and unity. Not only that, but healing, transformation, and unity that transcends warring political parties, religious differences, racial divides, and beyond. I believe a gift of this time of upheaval has been, and is, an invitation to a path of spiritual formation that fosters greater mutual flourishing—wherein blessings like the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-3) increasingly become ever-present realities. Although my hunch is Jesus-like love, which embodies 1 Corinthians 13 and sacrificially gives for the thriving and flourishing of all, is said way, I could be wrong.

NPO Statement

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

Section 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Key Biblical Texts

Operating from the assumption life is meant to be done together, diversity is beauty, and love is the most fundamental law of reality (meaning to go against love is to go against the “grain” of the universe), the following are the key biblical texts for this project:

1 Corinthians 13

John 17:20-23

John 13:34 + Philippians 2:1-11

Romans 13:8-10

1 John 4:7-12

Living Faith, Hope, and Love in the Biblical World

“A house divided, cannot stand.” It seems Jesus and Abraham Lincoln were onto something. When we are divided, whether it be internally, communally, and/or globally, we suffer. As I read the sacred story in the Bible, Galatians 5:16-26 and John 17:20-23 help point us toward two contrasting ways of living in the world—one of division, competition, tribalism, and violence, and one of unity, diversity, lovingkindness, and flourishing.

Desmond Tutu describes how the biblical worldview believes the universe has moral laws, that, when broken lead to such distress:

One such law is that we are bound together in what the Bible calls ‘the bundle of life.’ Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. We are human because we belong. We are made for community, for togetherness, for family, to exist in a delicate network of

interdependence. Truly, 'it is not good for man to be alone,' for no one can be human alone. We are sisters and brothers of one another whether we like it or not and each one of us is a precious individual.²⁸

With that in mind, in the aforementioned Galatians passage this project adopts the interpretation of Paul's reference to "sin nature"/"flesh", as humanity's temptation to ego-centricity—in other words, the common pull toward competitive, insecure, and divisive, "us" versus "them", living. This means Paul is saying everyone has the option to live from the siren's call of this spirit of selfishness, or the wooing of the lifegiving Spirit. In a world where we are bombarded with messages to be afraid of, separate from, and/or act against "the Other"—those different from us in politics, race, religion, gender, ethnicity, beliefs, etc.—more than ever it is vital to heed the Spirit's call to unity, wholeness, and love.

In *The Seventh Story*, Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins describe how historically, and presently, humanity has lived out/from six main storylines; worldviews characterized by violence, division, greed, fear, rivalry, and power.²⁹ While these narratives work well to form tribes—for a time—they are literally tearing us apart, as the present state of affairs in U.S. politics, racial relations, economic schisms, and the environmental crisis makes clear. Biblically, though, this is not surprising, as from the start, the Satan has been tempting humanity with plotlines leading to death, literal and figurative.³⁰ Fortunately, though, Christ gives us a new story to embody, one that unites, heals, enlivens, and is marked by faith, hope, and love.

²⁸ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1999), 196-7.

²⁹ Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins, *The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence* (United States: 2019), chap. 1, E-book.

³⁰ John 8:44, 10:10 (New Revised Standard Version).

What keeps people from “signing up” to live this abundant life of diverse oneness though?³¹ Fear. It is not the only thing, but if it is not at the root, it is near (its close kin, shame, will be addressed in Section 2). As I can personally attest to from my story of divorces, abuse, and trauma, this “illness” keeps us insecure, isolated, and injured. Conversely, though, I can also testify that realizing our inherent belovedness is the cure. And when we feel deeply cherished and treasured, we naturally flow into the energies of faith, hope, and love.

Textual Discussions

THE SLAVERY OF FEAR

I believe the temptations of Christ are akin to what we go through in life. Central to those is the enticement of a sense of scarcity, the fear of “not enough”; hence the phenomena of FOMO, Fear of Missing Out. As Henri Nouwen writes, this egoic message of lack, which the serpent/Satan used with Eve and then with Jesus, tempts people to desire relevance, popularity, and power.³² Yet, not to skip ahead, we are called to move away from these into love!

Still, as pastor and author Jonathan Martin points out, “*fear’s a powerful thing, baby ... [and] as we live and grow in a world that tells us we’re never enough*”, the lure to prove one’s worth, value, and belonging by their doings leads people to fear anything that can undo or outdo said doings.³³ Jesus’ warning one cannot serve both God and mammon speaks to this predicament, in that while the latter’s economy of wealth and possessions is animated by a spirit of lack, fear, and competition,

³¹ John 10:10, 17:20-23 (New Revised Standard Version).

³² Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 91.

³³ Jonathan Martin, *Prototype: What Happens When You Discover You’re More Like Jesus than You Think?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2013), 22-3.

God's economy is generous, uplifting, and celebratory, overflowing with abundance and love.³⁴ While trusting leads to connection, care, and love, fearing results in competition and striving to "win" at life by dying with "the most toys", so to speak.³⁵ Even though many "voices" tempt people with a story emphasizing "winging" over loving, Christ invites us to faithfully value people above mammon.

Not that Jesus' path is easy. There is a reason why he repeatedly speaks about taking up our cross to follow him, and the need to lose our life to find it.³⁶ Like Rob Bell, I have discovered it is *after* "our plans fall apart", we realize "our strength isn't enough", and "our cleverness fails us", that we are set free from our fears.³⁷

THE FREEDOM OF BELOVEDNESS

I never thought about this until I heard Richard Rohr mention it, but in nearly every theophany in the Bible, the first thing the angel, or God, says is some form of "fear not"—I have heard him say many times, it is the most repeated phrase in the Bible. While the fear narrative keeps people disconnected and never feeling enough, the Divine created humanity to love and be loved. Like a parent rocking a baby into calm with lullabies, our Heavenly Parent is forever reassuring us, all will be well.³⁸

³⁴ Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13; Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 4:7-12 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁵ Matthew 6:19-34 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁶ Matthew 16:24-26 (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁷ Rob Bell, *Everything is Spiritual: Who We Are and What We're Doing Here* (New York: St. Martin's Essential, 2020), 41-3.

³⁸ Romans 8:31-9 (New Revised Standard Version).

As Jesus says, it is when we come to the end of ourselves that we realize our true selves. We try to “build” our way to heaven, earn love, and prove our worth, only to fail and realize “our true identity is found in God”, and we discover: “Being the beloved expresses the core truth of our existence”, with no caveats or exceptions!³⁹ *This*, as I continue to learn and receive, is freedom to be fully alive in the most exquisite way. I even have a tattoo with “Beloved” on a cross to remind me.

On that topic, Martin writes: “We were conceived in delight and baptized into wonder before we even had a name. There was one who beheld us in our unformed substance, singing over us, delighting in us. ... the enchantment of divine love ... is native to us”.⁴⁰ Part of why Martin, and this project, dares to name this true for everyone, is because Jesus is the prototype for the new, most *real* humanity—as Paul names in 1 Colossians 1:15:20, and John 1:1-5 echoes, where the Greek for “Word”, *Logos*, can mean “blueprint” or “design”. And, before the Christ even began his ministry—meaning no doings required—the Father named him, and by inference us, “beloved”.⁴¹

Likewise, on the other side of murder and disobedience, the moving poetry of Psalm 139:1-18 shows David awakening to the truth of being “loved simply because he existed.”⁴² In the sacred story’s account of the early church in the Book of Acts, one can see people collectively realizing and living from this truth. Being beloved freed them from fear to love others so boldly and deeply, they “had all things in common” and would sell or give goods to help *any* in need.⁴³ They knew in their bones, and lived/loved from my favorite summary of the Good News: “Gospel is the divine

³⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca J. Laird, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 26 and 138-9.

⁴⁰ Martin, 22.

⁴¹ Matthew 3:17 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴³ Book of Acts 2:44-5 (New Revised Standard Version).

announcement that you are loved and accepted exactly as you are, that everything has been taken care of, that everything you've been striving to earn has been yours the entire time, that you belong, in exactly this condition that you are currently in, nothing additional required or needed."⁴⁴

LIVING FROM FAITH: TRUSTING ALL IS WELL

As we relax into our belovedness, and experience the unending adoration of the God who is love and would do anything for us, we move into a space of faith.⁴⁵ By "faith", this paper primarily means "trust"—as in because God is on our side and good, people can trust reality, the world, and life are not only fundamentally safe, they are gifts to be savored. Understandably, this is *not* some people's experience, as those caught in violence, abuse, oppression, illness, and the like can attest. Faith, from this angle, is talking about a deeper sense of goodness, one that does not negate terrible experiences or make them "okay". Instead, it is trusting beneath its hardships, life is fundamentally safe and good. The "all is well" here, is like gravity, always there for us, while life's worst is like a passing rainstorm one is temporarily caught in.

As this applies to relationships, progressively, by faith one begins to believe and see how Christ already transcended the identity definitions that put people at odds with one another; as today's versions of "Jew or Greek", "slave or free",⁴⁶ and such have been done away with to make us all coequal members of one human family.⁴⁷ Understanding some would argue this only applies to Christians, texts referencing the Cosmic Christ, like Colossians 1:15-20, paint a bigger picture,

⁴⁴ Bell, 53.

⁴⁵ 1 John 4:7-12 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁴⁶ 2 Cor. 5:14-7; Galatians 3:26-8 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁴⁷ John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 28-9.

declaring Christ to be the Creator who is in, above, and through *all* things, holding them *all* together, and has already reconciled “all things” to God.⁴⁸

Grace, like this, takes our breath asway, and is paramount in this unifying narrative. Part of love is having faith that believes the best of others.⁴⁹ Jesus modelled grace by eating with people of all sorts—sinners, outcasts, prideful, rich, poor, etc.—as, in antiquity, table fellowship communicated acceptance. In other words, “God is a place of radical acceptance”, and invites us to do likewise.⁵⁰ Nearly half of the New Testament letters, all 13 Pauline epistles, begin with a prayer/wish of grace and peace for the recipients. What if, by faith, we did the same with every person we met?

LIVING HOPE: LOOKING FOR AND ANTICIPATING GOODNESS

That may seem unrealistic, but Christianity is “foolish” like that, inviting people to imagine a better future ... and see and live into it today! The prophet Isaiah paints a picture of a unity infused with diversity, harmony, and peace so beautiful the wolf lies with the lamb, children play safely with snakes, and so on, because “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD”.⁵¹ Since Christ, hope has led people to not only look for this too beautiful to be true goodness, but find it!

A hope that sees and brings forth the good from the most unexpected people and places is what Paul champions in 1 Corinthians 13, and can be traced all the way back to Genesis 1. Since the beginning the Spirit has brought beauty and goodness out of the “chaos and formless abyss” of life, as from people’s loss, pain, sorrow, and death, over-and-over again, God brings wellness and

⁴⁸ Colossians 1:15-20 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:7 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁵⁰ Jared Byas, *Love Matters More: How Fighting to be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2020), 183.

⁵¹ Isaiah 11:6-9 (New Revised Standard Version).

abundance.⁵² This biblical hope beckons us to break our age-old cycle of “us” versus “them” tribalism by envisioning and moving into greater collective and individual unity, wellbeing, and thriving.

LOVE IS THE ANSWER

Living into the narratives of faith and hope carries us into the master story of love. Put differently, trusting in, looking for, and anticipating goodness, brings people increasingly into a space of lovingkindness for everyone ... at least that has been my experience. While our phones tell us “you’ve arrived” when we reach a destination, Christlike love recognizes people are *always* in process, continually figuring things out, and forever doing the best they can. Humans are, in that sense, more verbs than nouns—constantly learning, changing, and becoming. Even God’s self-given name, “I AM is less noun, more verb. Less a destination and more a direction.”⁵³

I bring this up because the Christlike love Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13 takes, accepts, and cherishes others, ourselves, and reality just as they are; recognizing none of us have “arrived”. This grace frees people to love big by caring for enemies, giving themselves for the benefit of others, and living with the attitude of Christ.⁵⁴ *This* is the spirit and story that will allow us to bridge divides, heal wounds, grow, unite, and love each other amidst our differences well. Truly to be fully alive is to live “a nuanced life of love patterned after Jesus.”⁵⁵

While I have naturally approached this from a Christian context, the heart of this project is for all people, and I trust and hope we can meet together and unite, amidst our differences, in a space

⁵² Bell, 273.

⁵³ Bell, 213.

⁵⁴ Matt. 5:38-48; John 13:34; Philippians 2:1-11 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁵⁵ Byas, 45.

of Christ-like love. This kindness, as portrayed throughout the Gospels, invites us to “eat” with otherness, hang-out with difference, and peacefully dialogue with dissimilarity. In short, the new story Christ woos us with is one where we shift our emphasis from what we believe and think to *how* we believe and act, just as Jesus did.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ibid., 75.

Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

Topic History

Hangovers are the worst! While certainly unpleasant, I am not referring to the feeling after overdrinking. Instead, I mean the “morning after” sharing something tender, important, or scary—the vulnerability hangover. I cannot tell you how many times the day after a small group gathering, during which I talked about something I am passionate about, a revealing part of my story, and/or my faults, worries, or troubles, I wanted to take my words back, apologize, and/or was anxious about what people thought of “me”. Vulnerability hangovers are shame’s familiar voice saying, “you are worthless.”

This points toward a truth I have heard from multiple wise figures over the years: We can neither carry the weight of our glory, or burden of our shame alone. We are meant to hold them communally. When we do not, letting shame diminish and divide us, we suffer. We end up projecting our worst on others, dividing into “us” versus “them”, and scapegoating. Ironically, people’s deep seeded needs for approval, belonging, and love, and the fear of not receiving them, are the very things that drive them to divide into opposing “tribes”! Yet, the good news is to be human is to be possibility, in that we have the potential for both great good and evil within us. Tutu paints a vivid picture of this, observing how “ordinary people ... are capable of some extraordinary accomplishments. ... Wonderfully, forgiveness and reconciliation are possible anywhere and everywhere”.⁵⁷

Division, especially across diversity, has long been, and remains, normal though. Why? This is where shame, “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore

⁵⁷ Tutu, 154-5.

unworthy of love, belonging, and connection”, joins the aforementioned pull of fear.⁵⁸ While fear is the sense an external threat will harm you, shame is the belief revealing your authentic self will get you “cast out” or harmed. The Bible’s story of Adam and Eve illustrates how fear and shame have compelled people to blame and judge others, hide, divide, and “cover” our true selves up, since our origins.⁵⁹

McLaren and Higgins give further weight and texture to this line of thinking in the aforementioned, *The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence*. Historically, all six of the worldviews people have grouped around claim, “the path to peace, security and happiness is about ‘winning’” by us ruling over, overthrowing, “staying apart from”, “cleansing ourselves of”, having valuable things not possessed by, or “being more important than ... because of our competitive suffering” others.⁶⁰ For as long as we know, a primary tie people have used to unite themselves together is by naming others as wrong, bad, or dangerous.⁶¹

Shame and fear are oppositional energies, in that they are against things. It is heartbreakingly ironic how frequently people use them to “unite”. Barbara Holmes points out how even the Civil Rights movement, with all its positives, fell into their trap. “[Its] commitment to unending struggle and ongoing battle readiness,” while helping bring more freedom and safety to minorities, did so in a manner “that engenders a particular stance toward the world. When struggle becomes the main construct of human life, reality tends to be saturated with tension, a guarded awareness, limited

⁵⁸ Brené Brown, *dare to lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts* (New York: Random House, 2018), 126.

⁵⁹ Genesis 3:1-13 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁶⁰ Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins, chap. 1, E-book.

⁶¹ Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't): Telling the Truth About Perfectionism, Inadequacy and Power* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), 231.

communications, overachieving, and an inability” to move into spaces of restoration and unity.⁶² Something within humans, it seems, wants to win and be right—which requires others to lose and be wrong. While shame and fear are factors here, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt lends further insight into the history of this issue from a scientific and evolutionary perspective.

Haidt’s research and studies show “an obsession with righteousness (leading inevitably to self-righteousness) is the normal human condition”—not by accident, but as “a feature of our evolutionary design”—and this inclination toward morality “made it possible for human beings [to be the only animals] ... to produce large cooperative groups, tribes, and nations without the glue of kinship”; though “our righteous minds [also] guarantee that our cooperative groups will always be cursed by moralistic strife.”⁶³ In other words—especially when it comes to the key issue of morals—people’s need to belong battles their desire to be right, which leads to division. Possibly even more insightful and eye-opening is his theory, supported by research, on why good people divide and fight about politics and religion, among other things.

As much as people believe they form views rationally and logically, generally speaking, humans do not arrive at moral truths logically, but intuitively. Haidt explains 99 percent of our mental processes (what he refers to as “intuition”) are shaped by our biology, culture, experiences, communities, emotions, practices, and the like, and occur outside our awareness; while the other 1 percent (our conscious thoughts, words, and actions) simply makes logic back up our prelogical conclusions.⁶⁴ To help people see the common goodness in those on “other” sides, Haidt shares how time-and-time again tests revealed people make moral judgments “immediately and emotionally”, wherein

⁶² Barbara A. Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently*, 2nd ed. (Albuquerque, NM: CAC Publishing, 2020), 62-3.

⁶³ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), xix-xx.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xx-xxi.

reason is merely “the servant of the passions”; as even when a person is dumbfounded, and cannot explain why they find something wrong, they stick to their guns.⁶⁵

Throughout *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt uses an elephant and rider metaphor to paint a picture of this phenomenon, where the “elephant” is our intuition side, and the “rider” our rationality. The elephant is the aforementioned 99 percent of a person’s mental processes, one’s “automatic processes, including emotion, intuition, and all forms of ‘seeing-that’”. Meanwhile, the rider is one’s cognition, their “controlled processes, including ‘reasoning-why’”. The key point to take away from Haidt’s research and observations is the elephant has long been and remains the “boss” when it comes to people’s moral reasoning, meaning the majority of one’s morality, i.e., one of the topics we get most fired-up about, argue over, and divide because of, is formed pre-rationally. The rider, then, steps in and forms “post hoc explanations for whatever the elephant has just done, and it is good at finding reasons to justify” one’s past, present, and future actions and views, whatever they may be.⁶⁶

Understanding this, Haidt and I believe, changes everything; as it gives us patience and insight for others (and ourselves), as we realize the underlying drivers to our beliefs and behaviors, and why people will go to great lengths to rationally defend stances that seem illogical to others.⁶⁷ Humans are social creatures; depending on and needing one another, while craving approval. This deep, prerational need is why shame, the terrifying fear of our existential needs to belong, be valued, and be loved *not* being met, impels us to divide into camps that demonize “others”. The good news,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53-4.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 367.

though, is while this is a truth, it is not *the* truth. As key voices in the research come together to show, there is a different way. A path fueled by love and unity.

Key Voices

BRENÉ BROWN

Dr. Brené is a researcher, professor, author, speaker, and podcaster, who is also a Doctor of Philosophy in social work. For decades, her studies have focused on courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. In other words, she explores what it means to experience the fullness of life. Integral parts of flourishing, studies show, are “self-awareness and self-love”, because, as Jesus noted in Matthew 23:25-8, who one is on the inside is what matters most.⁶⁸ As people do this inner work, they progressively understand how intensely humans crave approval, affirmation, and belonging—while dreading disconnection and devaluation—which helps them move toward greater health and unity, realizing people are able to go “back” to learn from mistakes, and grow into greater wellness.⁶⁹

From this self, and others, awareness, one is able to recognize perfection is a myth, progress is the path, and one of the most enlivening things a person can do is show up authentically, while inviting the same from others.⁷⁰ One of the prime things getting in the way from this whole hearted living, though, is ego. “I think of my ego as my inner hustler”, Brown shares—it’s “that voice in my head that drives pretending, performing, pleasing, and perfecting” to win “acceptance and approval”, and “will do almost anything to avoid or minimize the discomfort associated with

⁶⁸ Brown, *dare to lead*, 11.

⁶⁹ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 28 and 199.

⁷⁰ Brown, *dare to lead*, 21.

feeling vulnerable or even being curious, because” authenticity is simply “too risky.”⁷¹ Fortunately, though, while shame and fear are the taskmasters driving the ego, our loving hearts are “giant by comparison”, move from abundance, recognize our inherent worth and unique gifts, and uses “its free, wholehearted wisdom [to] drown out the [ego’s] smallness”.⁷²

One of the keys Brown identifies for shifting from shame, fear, and division to love, wholeness, and unity is transcendence. In referencing how her research reveals faith helps people grow into their “best selves”, Brown says Marianne Williamson is spot on in concluding: “We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous. Actually, who are you NOT to be? ... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our own Light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”⁷³

Another aspect of this communal movement toward flourishing is humbly and curiously seeking to understand others. The simple realization how deeply people’s experiences shape them, informing their beliefs and actions, helps one better appreciate and move “toward” others—even those appearing adversarial.⁷⁴ The more humble, curious, and understanding one becomes, Brown’s evidence practically shouts, the more they understand every person has a unique “lens” through which they see the world, none are right or wrong, all are needed for a more true picture of reality, and the more we include diverse perspectives, the more “successful” we become.⁷⁵ Not that this is easy. It takes work and trust to create circles “in which people feel safe, seen, heard,

⁷¹ Ibid., 74.

⁷² Ibid., 74 and 98.

⁷³ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 260-2.

⁷⁴ Brown, *dare to lead*, xii.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 143-4.

and respected”, and even more to form the more intimate and powerful bonds wherein people “love you not *despite* your vulnerability and imperfections, but *because* of them.”⁷⁶

Love, naturally, is arguably the most essential ingredient to individual and communal flourishing. Brown names three elements of this as “power with”, “power to”, and “power within”. Power with is building “collective strength” by bringing together diverse people in a space of mutuality, collaboration, and respect, whether it be to form a community or complete a project. When we are “with” people, love then gives power to others by affirming, trusting, hearing, and empowering them. Power within is one’s inner pilot light, so to speak. It is the awareness you, like everyone else, are inherently valuable and your views matter; which helps you move confidently and creatively toward the “highest common good.”⁷⁷

ROB BELL

In 2011 *Time* magazine named the author of *Love Wins*, Rob Bell one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. This former pastor is a speaker, author, podcaster, creator, and mystic who endeavors to help people find flourishing in life via the lenses of spirituality and science. His memoir *Everything is Spiritual* shares vulnerable, painful, and redemptive aspects of Bell’s story, echoing the importance of knowing thyself when it comes to growing into Christlikeness and connecting with others. Growing to deeply and honestly know oneself, in his experience, is to increasingly recognize and receive the incredible gift of being loved, accepted, and adored by the Creator and Sustainer of all things exactly as you are—no doings, or undoing, required.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12 and 22-3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁸ Bell, 53.

In line with this, Bell observes there is no word for “spiritual” in the Old Testament, “because to call something spiritual would be to imply that other things *aren’t*. In the Bible, everything is spiritual. All of life. ... Nothing exists in isolation, it’s all connected”—meaning “[all] of life is permeated with the divine presence, all of it is sacred.”⁷⁹ Contrasting the hit show *Breaking Bad*, while honoring doubts, hurts, and terrors, the author paints a picture of a mysterious, purposeful, intimate, compelling, and inviting reality breaking good!⁸⁰

With this worldview, it is no wonder Bell is incredibly curious. This spirit of intrigue humbly brings people closer together. “Curiosity is underrated”, he writes, “In many ways, it’s the engine of life”; as approaching life like a treasure hunter for goodness disrupts despair and expands hope and awe.⁸¹ Curiosity leads to community, because this practical mystic understands: “When I look far enough inside of you, I’ll find me. When I look far enough inside me, I’ll find you.”⁸² With that in mind, and from the lenses of the Cosmic Christ and science, he takes people connecting with others and forming circles to the widest possible level. While the bible declares “Christ is in, above, thru, and holds ALL things”, quantum physics indicates “[we’re] all literally entangled, as we’re made of particles and that’s what particles do”—which leads him to speculate the next stage in evolution, “particles then atoms then molecules then cells, etc.”, is humanity forming a larger body (what Paul names the “Body of Christ”).⁸³

This experience, and feeling of connectedness naturally leads people to love like Christ, the giving of oneself for collective flourishing. Early on as a pastor Bell saw this firsthand; as he

⁷⁹ Ibid., 61-2.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 20-1.

⁸¹ Ibid., 43-4.

⁸² Ibid., 266.

⁸³ Ibid., 249-50.

witnessed how freely helping others in need, whether it is buying milk for a baby without it or listening to a hurting friend, lights people up from the inside out.⁸⁴ As his book title says: *Love Wins*.

JONATHAN HAIDT

Social psychologist, professor, and author, Jonathan Haidt focuses his studies on morality—from the lenses of psychology and emotionality—while exploring the evolutionary development of people’s moral reasoning. In addition to his aforementioned elephant-rider hypothesis, he also posits “human nature is 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee”—“like chimps in being primates whose minds were shaped by the relentless competition of individuals with their neighbors”, and “groupish”, “like bees in being ultrasocial creatures” with the potential to cohere and cooperate to work for the greater good.⁸⁵

Haidt’s research shows one of the best ways to activate a person’s bee-like impulse to connect with and care for others is transcendence. When people experience something bigger than and beyond themselves—often in nature, at religious services, at concerts, and via psychedelics—they are moved to awe, which “acts like a kind of reset button: [making] people forget themselves and their petty concerns. Awe opens people to new possibilities, values, and directions in life.”⁸⁶

Another “key” to unlocking the possibility of collectively flourishing is understanding. Studies show “the most morally advanced kids” were those with frequent opportunities to put “themselves into another person’s shoes”, looking at things “from that person’s perspective.”⁸⁷ I heard Mr.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 48-9.

⁸⁵ Haidt, 258.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 264.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

Rogers carried a note in his pocket as a reminder there is nobody you cannot love once you know their story. I share this because this open-minded, curious, and gracious mentality has reaped rich rewards over the last decade, and sets up a bombshell of sorts Haidt drops. “Moral pluralism is true descriptively” he observes, because “[as] a simple matter of anthropological fact, the moral domain varies across cultures”—with “Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies” engaging the world, and others, as objects, while the other cultures (the majority of the globe) are much more relationally centric in their morals.⁸⁸

Part of coming together, though, is having “common ground” to connect around. Haidt identifies six moral foundations across all cultures: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression.⁸⁹ Relating with others via these “commons” is a way to mindfully move from division and shame toward unity and love. Patience and kindness/friendliness are key elements of love not only from Paul’s spiritual perspective, but from Haidt’s scientific one as well. While our brains are hardwired to evaluate and respond instantly, sending us into fight/flight/freeze mode during a conversation, for instance—listening, pausing, pondering, and reflecting goes a long way when it comes to relationships and civil dialogue.⁹⁰ What is more, when one chooses to approach others with “affection, admiration, or a desire to please the other person”, they will lean towards you and be far more open to hearing your point of view, and perhaps being changed by it.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid., 129-30.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 178-9 and 215.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 81-2.

⁹¹ Ibid., 79-80.

BRIAN McLAREN

Brian McLaren is an author, speaker, pastor, and leader in the emerging church movement. Observing with dismay the fighting and dividing in America, he investigated why this happens. Noticing, “people who think they’re reasonable don’t agree on much, except that anyone who disagrees with them is unreasonable”, McLaren realizes “there’s a lot more going on in the communication process than logical reasoning.” Namely, often without realizing it, people carry a plethora of assumptions, likes and dislikes, prejudices, fears, triggers, passions, and blind spots that hinder and block them from seeing and understanding those different from them. These biases fall into thirteen different categories, like confirmation, complexity, and community biases, and as people understand them, they can begin to move past them.⁹²

Knowledge truly is power for good, as the better one knows themselves, the better they understand others. “Nothing will make us so charitable and tender to the faults of others,” McLaren quotes Francois Fenelon, “as, by self examination, thoroughly to know our own.”⁹³ The importance of such understanding and ownership goes beyond individuals and interpersonal relationships, though, as people are greatly informed by the worldviews given them. While the six storylines societies, nations, etc. have historically formed around revolve around competition, violence, and “us” versus “them” thinking, that is not the way it has to stay.⁹⁴ Jesus, McLaren asserts, invites humanity to a Seventh Story. In Christ’s narrative, “human beings are not the protagonist of the world. ... Love is.”⁹⁵ The “Story of Love” invites people to participate in “the evolution of the good”, “the expansion of consciousness to include the restoration and healing of

⁹² Brian McLaren, *Why Don't They Get It? Overcoming Bias in Others (and Yourself)* (United States: 2019), intro., E-book.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ McLaren and Higgins, chap. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

all things”, bridging divides, and caring for those on the margins, because “our purpose is not merely ourselves, but all of us. Some of us for All of Us.”⁹⁶

DESMOND TUTU

If there is a person who has seen the worst humanity can do, and still believes and sees the best of people, it is Desmond Tutu. This Anglican cleric and theologian helped shepherd South Africa from apartheid into freedom. Time and again, in *New Future Without Forgiveness*, he comes back to the refrain that all humans are truly “children of Adam and Eve”—created for unity with others and God, tempted by the “fruit” of judging and separating from others to be above them, reluctant to own our faults, prone to blame shift, holding the potential for immense goodness, and loved by the Creator without measure.⁹⁷

One perspective the other key voices are largely silent on he adds is the reminder there are unseen forces behind the scenes, what Paul names “powers and principalities”, shaping and influencing people. “We might say they were programmed”, Tutu says in reference to those who perpetuated apartheid’s atrocities.⁹⁸ It seems one of the biggest lies these spirits profligate is that people are fundamentally different, distinct, and in competition, when the truth is we share “a common humanity”—“race, ethnicity, and skin color [are] really irrelevancies”—as people all have “the same concerns and anxieties and aspirations.”⁹⁹ As much as disagreement, division, and violence get centerstage in the media, that potential for “hell” lies in each of us, Tutu practically shouts from the roofs there is also the potential for “heaven”. His evidence for this is how over-

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Tutu, 82-3, 85, 92-3, and 144-5.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 252.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 7.

and-over-and-over again, people hurt deeply by the evils of racism were forgiving, generous, understanding, gracious, and loving toward the harmers. He imagines God was gleefully rubbing the Divine hands at the sight!¹⁰⁰ “We can be very good”, the archbishop concludes: “*That* is what fills me with hope”.¹⁰¹

JARED BYAS

Blend former Professor of Philosophy and pastor, with current author, podcast host, speaker, leader of several organizations, and Jesus-lover, and you get Jared Byas. Whatever angle one approaches things from, he notes, “it’s important to be self-aware”, as being “aware of the feelings, opinions, and baggage you’re bringing to the conversation” helps you to love well.¹⁰² The more people know themselves, he points out, the more aware they become how limited and biased their perspective is. While buzzards see mice from nearly three miles away, dolphins can hear at ridiculously high pitches. This diversity of perspective is so common, “scientists have come up with a word to help describe it: *umwelt*.”¹⁰³ *Umwelt* is the “lens” through which an animal, or person, sees the world. Shaped by biology and conditioning, it means people can only experience some of reality through their *umwelt*, which means we need one another, especially people *different* from us, to more fully see and understand reality.¹⁰⁴ This ties in with the recurring theme of how important humility is for mutual flourishing. Limited, no person has access to ultimate truth—seeing it “in a mirror dimly”—which means realizing and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 144-5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 253.

¹⁰² Byas, 164.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9-11.

admitting “I don’t know” and “I could be wrong” are essential elements of living and loving well.¹⁰⁵ After all, love, not telling “them” they are wrong, is what changes people. “I have seen hundreds of lives changed by human beings who have shown up to love without judgement, without feeling compelled to ‘speak the truth in love’”, Byas shares, “I have seen almost no lives changed when we begin by ‘speaking the truth [meaning one’s biased perspective of reality] in love.’”¹⁰⁶ Love leaves people feeling more whole and valued, period.¹⁰⁷ As Søren Kierkegaard writes: “[Our] task is not to find the loveable object, but to find the object before you loveable ... and to be able to continue finding this one loveable, no matter how that person changes.”¹⁰⁸ Byas’ book title says it all: *Love Matters More*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 15 and 20.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁷ Byas, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 197.

Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion

"We are all one in love. ... When I look at myself as an individual, I see that I am nothing. It is only in unity with my fellow spiritual seekers that I am anything at all. It is this foundation of unity that will save humanity."¹⁰⁹ Julian of Norwich's words drive home a message this project's key voices agree on: While diverse community is what humans are designed for, the poison of division keeps us from experiencing the fullness of life. As Desmond Tutu writes, "We are different so that we can know our need of one another, for no one is ultimately self-sufficient. The completely self-sufficient person would be subhuman."¹¹⁰

Yet, it seems, driven by fear and shame, humanity's egoic side still leads them to divide, fight, and suffer for it. While worth, belonging, and love are all core human needs, the ego's sense of lack and need to compete biases people to deny those needs to others as a means to secure them from one's own tribe!¹¹¹

This touches on another place of agreement: To move from division and individual unhealth, to unity and wholeness, it is vital people realize they are intrinsically worthy. When they know their value, it frees them from their ego's demands, unlocks their gifts, and gives them a solid foundation to engage difference from.¹¹² Helpfully here, from a Christian perspective, being in the image of God means the Creator endows "every single human being without exception, with worth, infinite worth".¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Julian, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: A New Translation*, trans. Mirabai Starr (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2013), 23-24.

¹¹⁰ Tutu, 82-3 and 265.

¹¹¹ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 231.

¹¹² Brown, *dare to lead*, 98.

¹¹³ Tutu, 92-3.

Naturally, a related common thread is knowing thyself/others. To grow and come together, people must examine themselves deeply, while realizing who they believe themselves to be greatly informs how they act and behave.¹¹⁴ What is more, it is vital to wake up to the ways society, experiences, circles, and media shape everyone, as the more aware of these storylines one is, the more understanding and loving they become.¹¹⁵

Relatedly, the idea that: To be human, is to be possibility—forever able to transform toward and live into goodness—shows up regularly.¹¹⁶ Being authentic, living with one's whole heart, and realizing/feeling they are truly "enough" is possible for anyone.¹¹⁷ Tutu experienced this first hand in South Africa. While there was an overabundance of torture, oppression, and murder during apartheid, he emphasizes: "It is quite incredible the capacity people have shown to be magnanimous", shirking anger, fear, and revenge, for forgiveness, reconciliation, and community.¹¹⁸

There is a link between humanity's potential for goodness and the repeated importance of transcendence. This connection to something bigger than themselves not only gives people purpose and value, it greatly aids their ability to bridge the "walls" between diverse peoples, as if they were spiritually "flying".¹¹⁹ One of the gaps in research here, though, is what a unifying source, or sources, for this could be. Tutu gives a potential solution by referencing people opening themselves "to the movement and guidance of the transcendent Spirit, however conceived or

¹¹⁴ Brown, *dare to lead*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Jared Byas, 164.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 196.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *dare to lead*, 107.

¹¹⁸ Tutu, 120.

¹¹⁹ Holmes, 106.

named.”¹²⁰ Still, a significant pressure point remains the reality certain religious sects are adamant their specific beliefs on transcendence are the only right ones.

Hand-in-hand with this is another point of consensus: Humble understanding of others fueled by curiosity is part of mutual flourishing. A gift of postmodernity, here, is the realization everyone has a unique perspective, biasing the way they perceive reality. Each person has a “lens”, shaped by many factors, through which they see and engage the world, which makes it important to realize: “[What] we see is *one* view of the world, not *the* view.”¹²¹ People literally need multiple, diverse perspectives to get a clearer view of reality.¹²² What is more, as Tutu’s experience of reconciliation revealed, when one listens to another’s story, they realize if they had had the same experiences, they would likely believe and behave likewise.¹²³ How one wakes up to this, though, is a place of tension, only Bell mentions the importance of failing and hitting bottom in this regard.¹²⁴

This is why having circles one can be vulnerable and real within is essential. People need one another, deeply desiring to be seen and affirmed by others.¹²⁵ Time and again, the key voices talk about the importance of having communities of safe and trustworthy people, who hold one another well. A limitation here is Brown is the only writer who emphasizes how it takes resilience, a relational “muscle” formed only with time and effort, to be in authentic relationship with others.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Tutu, 81.

¹²¹ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 37.

¹²² Sandra Mayes Unger, *Tribe: Why Do All Our Friends Look Just Like Us?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 202-4.

¹²³ Tutu, 271.

¹²⁴ Rob Bell, 41-3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 233-5.

¹²⁶ Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, 44.

This happens more naturally when one lives from the space of a final common thread: Faith, hope, and love. It takes trust to believe *all* of humanity are truly brothers and sisters.¹²⁷ These three spirits—trusting in goodness and abundance (faith), looking for and anticipating the good (hope), and naming and believing the good (love)—allow people to realize no divide, disagreement, or “problem anywhere can ever again be considered to be intractable. There is hope”.¹²⁸

It is said love is colorblind, in that it gives and cares indiscriminately. Love loves diversity, and studies show dissimilar people working together literally yield greater results.¹²⁹ Love, the giving of oneself for collective flourishing, as Jesus tells us, is the Law. Perhaps when people let love matter more, as Byas urges, together they will experience the fullness of life they long for. The question not fully answered thus far, though, is what tangible and practical steps does one take to do so?

¹²⁷ Yoder, 28-9.

¹²⁸ Tutu, 282.

¹²⁹ Brown, *dare to lead*, 144.

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Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

Introduction

It was heaven on earth. At the first in-person retreat for this doctoral program, students shared their stories, views, theologies, and more. These beautiful people, of *many* different flavors of theology, politics, and beliefs, spoke their truths—and were not met with the usual adversity that comes from “otherness”, but with love and acceptance. It moved me to tears to be held so well, especially as someone with a non-binary child, and as a believer in Christian Universalism.

Conversely, whether the issue is masks, vaccines, Black Lives Matter, the president, or a host of other hot topics, at face value it “seems” Americans are more polarized and at odds than any time since the Civil War. Whether that’s literally true or not, this tribal storyline is spreading fear, anxiety, and mistrust like a plague. That said: To be human, is to be an animal with consciousness. Meaning, while our fight, flight, etc. instincts drive us to divide and polarize over issues we deem important, our consciousness gives us the “possibility” to choose and practice something different—radical, unifying love. If our aforementioned time at Cannon Beach taught me anything, it is that people truly can meet, heal, and grow into flourishing together through love.

NPO Statement

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

NPO Scope and Constraints

Since this project aims to bring diverse people together, it is imperative for anyone involved to remember: First, do no harm. Whatever form this takes, it must be a safe “space” that accounts for the effects of trauma, marginalization, patriarchy, racism, and such. In order for this to happen, participants must be secure in their own identity, and from that place, consent to dive into the relational friction that comes with difference. To aid both of these, it will also be vital to emphasize,

and return to—as a harmonizing and unifying “bassline” of sorts—things participants have in common.

NPO Context

This project is intended for people of any religious affiliation (or lack thereof), race, demographic, generation, or location, at least within the U.S. The context of working to grow into greater flourishing—while transcending divides—can range from one person practicing this in their regular life, to a couple working through differences with a mediator, to a group of interested people meeting for a guided retreat, and beyond.

Naturally, there will be a “self-selection” aspect to this endeavor, in that only people who are ready, willing, and/or eager to do the hard work of stretching themselves spiritually, by engaging with and learning to understand “otherness”, will participate. Learning and leaning into one another’s stories is an important piece of this, which, will likely limit the size of any gatherings or intentional communities that come from this—at least in the beginning.

Root Causes

One interviewee began nearly every response with, “I don’t know”. This wise preface illuminates how the human need for certainty, along with the fears of being incorrect, on the wrong side, or excluded, lay at the root of this NPO. Fear is a powerful force, pushing people to not only “fight” for and defend their tribe (political, racial, religious, etc.) and beliefs, but often double-down on these—closing their minds to other points of view.

Both interviewees noted how the human tendency to divide into tribes is in our DNA, as banding together for survival purposes is how we evolved. Relatedly, humanity has a bias toward authoritarianism. There are evolutionary survival advantages to being told what to do or believe by your group’s leader. Mix this with how, in post-Christendom, diverse people no longer have a Grand Narrative to unite under, and it is no wonder we are so divided!

Three Big Ideas

1. A trained facilitator guides two “sides” into greater understanding of themselves and one another. Possibly combine with doing a “project” for the greater good together.
2. Create a toolkit people can take into their regular lives.
3. Create a space/group for people to share their stories of loss, trauma, etc. together.

Definition of “Done”

People are doing life together—with mutuality, and shared understanding and respect for one another—as peacemakers and agents of love for the common good.

3 Concept Pitches

1. **Big Idea 1:** A trained facilitator guides two “sides” into greater understanding of themselves and one another. Possibly combine with doing a “project” for the greater good together.
 - **Audience:** People with a desire and willingness to “see” across divides, in order to heal and grow together into flourishing.
 - **NPO:** In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.
 - **Benefit:** People have a chance to feel heard, felt, and understood, as well as feel connected to humanity and that they are part of the solution.
 - **Approach:** There will be a way of training people to do this, akin to nonviolent communication, which will allow this relationship building approach to be replicated.

- **Risks:** If participants do not feel safe, which requires taking stories, traumas, privilege, etc. into account, they will be unable to come and grow together.
 - **Assumptions/hypotheses to test:** All sides, there may be more than two, report increased understanding, lessened division, and personal/communal growth into flourishing.
 - **Benchmarks of success:** An exit survey will indicate whether participants feel more peaceful, connected, etc., and able to articulate three ways they feel more connected to the "other".
 - **Other Approaches:** Nonviolent communication trainings/workshops move this direction, teaching kind and compassionate communication skills. That said, this will add not only a greater sense of mutuality, it will also help people better understand themselves and others as a large part of growing into a collective life of abundance.
2. **Big Idea 2:** Create a toolkit people can take into their regular lives. This could come from a book and/or a workshop type event with take-home materials.
- **Audience:** People with a desire and willingness to "see" across our divides, in order to heal and grow together into flourishing.
 - **NPO:** In a nation of "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.
 - **Benefit:** This would allow people to feel more "at home" (safe, connected, included, and valued) in their day-to-day interactions with people of all views and types.
 - **Approach:** Give people practices, guidelines, and mentalities to employ as they progressively lean into and expand their "edge" when it comes to lovingly relating with "otherness".

- **Risks:** Since this will be a spiritual/relational “workout”, minus a communal/accountability element, participants may be tempted to give up, or hold their “enlightened” position over others.
 - **Assumptions/hypotheses to test:** If successful, participants will report increased ease, peace, understanding, and unity *while* relating to those different from them.
 - **Benchmarks of success:** Surveys will indicate whether participants feel more peaceful, connected, etc., and able to articulate three specific/tangible ways they feel more connected to the “other”.
 - **Other Approaches:** Nonviolent communication books, trainings, and workshops move this direction, teaching kind and compassionate communication skills. That said, this will add not only a greater sense of mutuality, it will also help people better understand themselves and others as a large part of growing into a collective life of abundance.
3. **Big Idea 3:** Create a space/group for people to share their stories of loss, trauma, etc. together, as this style of sharing breaks down boundaries and fosters understanding.
- **Audience:** People with a desire and willingness to “see” across our divides, in order to heal and grow together into flourishing.
 - **NPO:** In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.
 - **Benefit:** Sharing one’s stories of hurt and loss not only heals and grows them, it has a way of breaking down boundaries and bringing people together.
 - **Approach:** Bring people together in a safe space, likely mediated, to share their stories of wounding as a path toward healing, understanding, and unity across differences.
 - **Risks:** Witnesses to the sharer’s story may not hold the teller well by rejecting, diminishing, trying to fix, or becoming overly enmeshed with the sharer/story.

- **Assumptions/hypotheses to test:** Participants will report increased understanding and ease with difference and closer relationships with “others”, as well as the growth of self toward flourishing.
- **Benchmarks of success:** Surveys and/or interviews will indicate the aforementioned assumptions are coming to pass.
- **Other Approaches:** Organized storytelling is not a new thing, and often focuses on peoples’ stories of trauma and loss. Currently, though, sharing and receiving one another’s stories for the purpose of understanding and bridging divides, while growing together does not appear to be something others do.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

- A former missionary who has written two books about capturing and following the historic Way of Christ.
- A retired navy nurse, who then worked at the VA. They have multiple graduate degrees, including one that allows them to work as a lay minister in the Methodist Church.
- A Life Doula and Community Builder. Successfully integrated two families from previous marriages with their spouse, in addition to having and raising kids together.
- A high school teacher (at a quite diverse school) in photography and other media arts, who is one of those people youth who are hurting, down, struggling, etc. flock to.
- A healer and medium. One of the most beautiful and wise people I know.
- A lifelong intelligence analyst and teacher who has worked for the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency. Their worldwide travels and experiences of many different cultures and peoples provided a great outsider perspective.
- Recovered addict who works as a therapist for people struggling with addiction.

One-on-One Interviews

- Speaker and former pastor who is the author of numerous books that help people follow and experience Jesus and life to the fullest in our present context.
- Former pastor and author who approaches Christianity from a mystical slant. Uses nature as a place to meet the Divine.
- Internationally known yoga teacher with deep wisdom on connecting both to our True Self and others. They were launching a new online studio and got sick, so we moved their interview to the week of Thanksgiving, but they became quite ill again, so we had to postpone it until after this paper.

Annotated Bibliography

Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Adams. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*. New York: Random House Large Print, 2016.

The Book of Joy is a collaborative memoir of sorts from two of the world's most influential and joyous religious leaders. Desmond Tutu lived through Apartheid and was an instrumental part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while the Dalai Lama had to flee his country during a forceable Chinese takeover, so has lived as both an emissary for peace and exile for decades. The book reveals how, even in the midst of hardships, deep joy is available to everyone. These two figures are such shining examples of ongoing joy and unity across extreme divides, that they set aside a week of their time to meet in person to share and talk about what became this book. This book addresses much of what this NPO is investigating poignantly and powerfully—reminding people "differences" are secondary, as we're truly one human family created for compassion, interdependence, and generosity. What is more, the Eight Pillars of Joy they share (perspective, humility, humor, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity) capture the spirit that will allow this NPO to succeed.¹³⁰

Dass, Ram. *Be Love Now: The Path of the Heart*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

In many ways, *Be Love Now* is about waking up to the love that animates reality and is at the center of each person. The cares, worries, and messages of the world, combine with people's experiences, traumas, beliefs, and such to "cover" their love up, like a garbage bag blocking the view from a window. Ram Dass invites readers to realize life is a school of love,

¹³⁰ Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Adams, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (New York: Random House Large Print, 2016), 282.

constantly teaching people how to love and be loved better—without borders or boundaries. He says there is a Grand Narrative we can live, unite, and flourish together under: We are all one human family, all connected, all interdependent, and all Beloved.¹³¹ While the way *Be Love Now* approaches spiritual formation from a guru-system is not particularly relevant to this project, its call to using meditative practices to return to love, and invitation to see ourselves and other humans as fellow, co-equal souls is quite helpful.¹³²

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019.

In *Talking to Strangers*, Malcolm Gladwell explores how people get one another wrong, sometimes with disastrous results (such as when the UK's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met Adolf Hitler, while tensions were rising before WWII, and was convinced he could trust him *not* to go to war), and posits why that's so and how we can do better. While Gladwell's journalistic and scientific book does not have a lot to offer the project, there are a few gems. For instance, Gladwell observes how while part of the human condition is to believe we know better than others do, the truth is we do *not*, so would do well to listen more.¹³³ Other highlights include the reminder how deeply context shapes people, and a call to view one another in a positive light, because: "To assume the best about another is the trait that has created modern society."¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ram Das, *Be Love Now: The Path of the Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 57-9.

¹³² Ibid., 152 and 158.

¹³³ Malcolm Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2019), 49-50.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 342-3.

Leslie, Ian. *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

Calling on evidence from psychology, economics, education, and business, Ian Leslie argues curiosity is an essential part of connecting, growing, and flourishing in life. "A desire to know", *Curious* shows, not only helps people discover, heal, and transform as individuals, it's a vital spirit for bringing different people together. Curiosity urges people to go "deep" relationally, wondering and discovering why each of us is the way we are, believes the way they do, and so on—thus, creating understanding, compassion, and community.¹³⁵ While *Curious* does not add much breadth to this project, its deep dive into the power of curiosity is valuable.

Salzberg, Sharon. *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World*. New York: Flatiron Books, 2020.

Real Change is Sharon Salzberg's manifesto on how to process and move through the anger, grief, pain, fear, anxiety, and division saturating our media and lives, and into a place of calm, connection, curiosity, confidence, and community. Like a couple of the aforementioned books, she touches on a Grand Narrative that may be invaluable for this project: Spirituality, science, economics, and beyond show humans are truly and deeply interconnected.¹³⁶ The biggest addition of this work is the many meditative and contemplative practices it gives for helping people calm, center, tune into love, connect, heal, process, and transform. Salzberg, a leader in lovingkindness meditation, invites

¹³⁵ Ian Leslie, *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 156-7.

¹³⁶ Sharon Salzberg, *Real Change: Mindfulness to Heal Ourselves and the World* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2020), 2-3, 138-9, and 145-6.

people to love across “lines”, safely, and use the practices of meditation and mindfulness to “uncover” their True Self, a non-reactive, loving presence.¹³⁷ *Real Change* figures to add a lot to this project, as it approaches things from an inclusive /universal spirituality, while noting how one’s inner journey of healing and becoming quite naturally leads people to connect and commune across “difference” outside themselves.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93-4.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 141.

Appendices

Design Workshop Description

Location: Zoom

Date: 10/16/21 2-6pm

Agenda: Using *Gamestorming* activities, we explored the NPO from multiple angles in order to begin to better understand how to solve it. Using the fruits of our activities and thoughts, we then developed three big ideas, the definition of done, and three rough draft napkin pitches.

STAKEHOLDERS:

1. A former missionary who has written two books about capturing and following the historic Way of Christ.
2. A retired navy nurse, who then worked at the VA. She has multiple graduate degrees, including one that allows her to work as a lay minister in the Methodist Church.
3. A Life Doula and Community Builder. Her and her husband successfully integrated two families from previous marriages, in addition to having and raising kids they had together.
4. A high school teacher (at a quite diverse school) in photography and other media arts, who is one of those people youth who are hurting, down, struggling, etc. flock to.
5. A healer and medium. One of the most beautiful and wise people I know.
6. A lifelong intelligence analyst and teacher who has worked for the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency. His worldwide travels and experiences of many different cultures and peoples provided a great outsider perspective.
7. Recovered addict who works as a therapist for people struggling with addiction.

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED:

1. **Pain-Gain Activity:** Used to assess the pain (what's preventing, hindering, scary about, etc.) and gains (what's the benefit, blessing, and good) of solving the NPO.
2. **Cover Story Activity:** This used creativity to help people look at and approach the project from different angles. The task had people imagine a future when the NPO had been "solved" and write newspaper headlines, quotes, images, sidebars, and such that could be in the imagined newspaper article declaring this "done".
3. **Mission Impossible Activity:** This asked for stakeholders to come up with ideas for how to invite people to see, understand, and engage, lovingly, with people on the "other side".
4. **Concept Pitch:** After determining three concepts to prototype, stakeholders worked on concept pitches for each idea.
5. **Debrief:** In this closing segment we looked at areas I should explore further, potential blind-spots, potential pitfalls, and things to research before prototyping.

LIKERT SCALE ASSESSMENT: 5. I felt the workshop went quite well. Participants came up with ideas for possible solutions—like having a mediated event for two or more people to learn how to bridge divides well—I never would have thought of on my own. What is more, they revealed some of the blind spots I could have missed, such as making sure the book, plan, activities, and/or mediators involved in putting this project into action, take trauma, marginalization, patriarchy, racism, and such into account. Note, my Zoom connection stopped working, despite many attempts to return, during the prototype and conclusion portion of the workshop. Participants did their best to type in their thoughts/responses, the amount of documentation in those parts is less than it would have been otherwise.

Design Workshop Documentation

NPO

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

(An alternate way to present this that came to me as helpful for getting us going): To be human, is to be an animal with consciousness. Meaning, while our fight, flight, etc. instincts divide and polarize us, our consciousness gives us the “possibility” to choose and practice something different.

PAIN-GAIN ACTIVITY

Pains

Uncomfortable

Shame - both known and unknown/unacknowledged

Risk of acknowledging other paths/beliefs could be valid

Fear of not being right, if the “other” is right

Fear of losing identity, because it’s bound up in our tribe, and by expanding to include other tribes, what makes me/us, me/us might be lost

Fear of not being loved and accepted. Being kicked out of your tribe by including and/or moving toward “others”, and you’re stuck in between

Fear of not being accepted, or having to change your identity to fit in

The possibility of harm - coming contact with people who retraumatize you (whether it's from patriarchy or racism or LGBTQ+ or religious or ____)

Gains

Inner Growth (character)

Feeling of embodying God's love by living nonjudgment

Being able to agree to disagree agreeably

Everyone is free to remain or change as they see fit

Gaining a bigger perspective, being able to understand and connect with "otherness"

Peace - freedom to let go

Freedom from ideologies, stories, ways of thinking, etc. that hinder, harm, or hurt

Compassion

Feeling Safe

Understanding & Respect - gaining a respect of and honor for those who see things differently than you - a person who see fins as dolphins being able to meet, walk with, and aid a person who sees fins as sharks

Becoming an example and inspiration to others - what we see modelled inspires us to become like "that"

Greater awareness of self + greater freedom for others to be their self

→ **First, do no harm (but, you have to know what harm is). The “space” this project is done in MUST be safe, inclusive and diverse, which means it needs to set firm ground-rules, and even exclude some people (must be trauma-informed).**

→ **Consent is necessary. People have to buy in.**

COVER STORY ACTIVITY

Cover

- Miracle on Human Street
- Spiritual Formation Leads to Individual and Collective Flourishing. This Path Honors Our Differences, While Fostering Togetherness.
- Doctorate Project Spurs Deep Conversations with Diverse Participants and Makes an Equitable “Table” with a Seat for Everyone Seem Possible

Headlines

- Curing Racism thru Empathy and Education
- A Community United
- Love Wins
- Together at Last
- “Unity think tank: discovering the universal threads that lay between us.”
- Bridge Building Group Brings Conservatives and Liberals Together
- Inclusive Movement Influences More Bipartisanship
- Fundamentalist and Liberal Churches Find Common Ground

- Truth and Reconciliation Movement Comes to _____.
- **Taking a brick out of the wall.**
- **Opinions build walls between us. Dr. Charters has developed an approach that seeks to take bricks out of the walls that separate us and use those bricks to build bridges to establish meaningful connections between people.**

Quotes

- "Diversity is difficult, but it's divine!"
"This project started conversations I've only dreamed of starting." - Oprah
- It turns out creating groups whose goal is to envision unity is all that's needed to create unity.
- "Unity Thinktank is making waves that collapse all barriers."
- "This workshop helped me understand the LGBTQ community like I hadn't before."

Sidebars

- Dramatic decrease in violent acts
The robust advisory group for this project included LGBTQ+ leaders, representatives from several different community faith groups, as well as representatives from Black, LatinX, Asian & Pacific Islander and Indigenous communities.
- "When the mind is in brainstorming mode - it deactivates and overrides its own judgmental/fear-based centers."
- I felt safe in this "perfection-free" zone, where I was able to explore different worldviews with a sense of curiosity.

- Dr. Charters created the blueprint and now groups all over the world are forming with powerful intentions and even more powerful results.

Images

- Hugs
- Smiles
- Image of fins in a body of water, an angry person on one side points and says "sharks!" while a joyful person on the other side points and says, "dolphins!"
- I think we need a bigger boat to include everyone in this discussion.
- Those suffering from poverty and those who are rich, young/old, white/people of color, all sexual orientations at the same "table" - a round table.
- Photo of trans person and conservative looking person smiling and being together
- A pebble thrown in the water with ripples of rings moving outward.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE ACTIVITY

How do you invite someone to truly see, value, and love someone on the "other" side?

Being pushed, gracefully, into discomfort, as far as a process, is key here

1. Create specific environments/examples of conflicting views, and bring both sides equally into this moment with a facilitator (must understand the concept of neutrality, and be at peace/zero) to create understanding and unity.
2. Take this, with "5" helpful tips, into your real-world relationships with people who have different views. Relationships are what change people.
3. Create an "I voted" "sticker" that for people, businesses, etc. that helps create and expand this culture of rainbow unity.

4. Storytelling is super helpful in moving people.
5. Seek out opportunities to be a participant in truth and reconciliation type environments

Key: First, be secure in a person's own identity. Second, be in a safe space with others who are willing to explore different world views. Third, find out what you have in common, then continue the conversation.

2. Consider these broad questions or develop a set that is more specific to the challenge:

- **Why do we have such a problem with otherness?**
 - Fear of loss of love, acceptance.
- **What is at stake for people in this bind?**
 - Living in a world that does not feel safe.
- **What perceived, or real, issues here can be eliminated, replaced, or altered in some way?**
 - Create an environment where people can feel safe to explore getting to know one another. Each participant has responsibility for what that person says.
- **What before, or after, a person interacts with someone "other" than them, can change the oppositional energy that divides and polarizes us?**
 - Finding what both persons value that is in common
- **Can time, space, experiences, environment, practices, or people have an effect?**
 - Finding points of connection has an effect

3. A reflective discussion about both common and uncommon approaches should yield a list of possible solutions to explore further.

- Create incentive of positive collective identity
- Personal relationships developed in various ways
- Story-telling is a way to touch one another and build relationships

- Reference: Loretta Ross lecture series on white supremacy; calling in the Call Out Culture
- Klan-destine Relationships by Daryl Davis
- Being secure enough to deeply question own beliefs, be solid in own identity

3 PROTOTYPE IDEAS:

1. Create specific environments that are safe for diverse participants and bring both sides in to create understanding and unity
2. Relationship building with people who are different from you - toolkit
3. Create a logo promoting creating a culture of rainbow unity and use it for outreach
- 4.

Concept Pitch

Having selected your three big ideas, you now need to draw up a *rough* draft of your Concept Pitch for each idea. For this exercise, you will be drawing upon what you discovered in the earlier activities.

Utilizing a guided conversation, address the key components listed below within the worksheet:

1. Create specific environments that are safe for diverse participants and bring both sides in to create understanding and unity:
 1. **NPO: What is the unmet need/problem/opportunity we are addressing?** "Safe houses" intended for dialogue and connection
 1. Disunity, polarization
 - **Approach: What is our approach to meeting that need, and how is it novel?**

- Have a way of training people to do this. A certificate.
 - Relationship building approach that can be replicated
- **Benefit: How does the user benefit? How do you benefit?** They have a chance to feel heard, felt and understood as well as feel connected to humanity and feel like a part of the solution.
 - Participants feel accepted
- **Others: How are others addressing this NPO? What sets this approach apart?**
 - "Others" are coming from a perspective of "needing to convince" and this approach is coming from the perspective of "wanting to create neutrality."
 - The work toward reconciliation is a pattern that can be used
- **Risks: Why might it fail?**
 - Spiritual/harm bypassing
 - Harm (microaggressions, etc.) due to lack of privilege/bias being examined and use of trauma-informed principles
 - If participants do not feel safe, they will not be able to create relationships
- **Assumptions/hypotheses to test: What critical hypothesis or assumption does each prototype 'test'?**
 - Test effectiveness of approaches to finding points in common; building relationships between people who are unlike
- **Benchmarks of success: What information do you need to either confirm or disprove your hypothesis? Articulate the 2-3 benchmarks (or indicator, clue, criteria, test, metric, or milestones) that verify that the project is successfully addressing the NPO.**
 - Exit survey (do participants feel more peaceful, connected, etc. did participants experience "safe space")
 - Solicit testimonials from participants and stories that prove success

- At completion of the workshop/exercise the participants will be able to identify at least 3 things they have in common

- 2. Mindful relationship building with people who are different from you, during your regular life.
 - toolkit
 - **NPO: What is the unmet need/problem/opportunity we are addressing?**
 - "Giving oneself permission" to build relationships with those who are different
 - **Approach: What is our approach to meeting that need, and how is it novel?**
 - Our approach is to create a training program on relationship building that is targeting diverse demographics and their counterparts.
 - **Benefit: How does the user benefit? How do you benefit?**
 - The user benefits by having the tools to neutralize potentially challenging confrontations. Although the point is to give tools of how to "set up" an initial dialogue that feels safe from the start. The above is a side-benefit.
 - **Others: How are others addressing this NPO? What sets this approach apart?**
 - **Risks: Why might it fail?**
 - **Assumptions/hypotheses to test: What critical hypothesis or assumption does each prototype 'test'?**
 - **Benchmarks of success: What information do you need to either confirm or disprove your hypothesis? Articulate the 2-3 benchmarks (or indicator, clue, criteria, test, metric, or milestone:**

- 3. Create a logo promoting creating a culture of rainbow unity and use it for outreach
 - **NPO: What is the unmet need/problem/opportunity we are addressing?**
 - **Approach: What is our approach to meeting that need, and how is it novel?**

- **Benefit: How does the user benefit? How do you benefit?**
- **Others: How are others addressing this NPO? What sets this approach apart?**
- **Risks: Why might it fail?**
- **Assumptions/hypotheses to test: What critical hypothesis or assumption does each prototype 'test'?**
- **Benchmarks of success: What information do you need to either confirm or disprove your hypothesis? Articulate the 2-3 benchmarks (or indicator, clue, criteria, test, metric, or milestone)**
 - You know that you have succeeded when you better understand the point of view and feelings of people with very different views.

DEBRIEF

As you conclude your Design Workshop, explore knowledge gaps that require further research in the final debrief questions to ask your stakeholders before they leave. This input will help you identify materials you will consult to fill knowledge gaps, either in the Annotated Bibliography or in the one-on-one interviews.

In light of what emerged today...

1. What should I be sure to examine?

1. Making sure that pressure/responsibility isn't put on marginalized people to use their trauma to educate others.
2. Who is "we" - everywhere "we" is used, ask who you are referring to and IF they are actually a homogeneous group, or if it might be better to define the various groups that might be answering the question or participating.
3. Small groups for reconciliation

4. What is the race, gender, sexuality, etc. of the authors/teachers of your primary source material? Are they predominately cis/heterosexual male, Western perspectives?
5. Understand Impact vs. Intent

2. **What are the potential blind spots that I best explore?**

1. You have to constantly ask yourself if you are moving to unite people or press your own values. How do you check your ego at the door?
2. White male privilege

3. **What are the potential pitfalls that I best avoid?**

1. Tools are only as good as the persons using them
2. Start small, do betas, a prototype, learn from early mistakes
3. People feel like they are objects of conversion... make sure your approach is neutral and fair to all concerned

4. **What *must* I research before I begin prototyping?**

1. Who are the people already doing this work? (especially those who are in traditionally oppressed groups)
2. **CREATE A TEAM FOR THIS! (a DIVERSE team!)**
3. Participate in groups where you are observing a facilitator and experience what it is like to be a member of one group
4. Research successful models like Daryl Davis' example and Peace Catalyst International: <https://www.peacecatalyst.org/>

One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

Thank you again for being a part of the Design Workshop. Your insights, observations, and ideas were invaluable, and will help this project be *far* better than it would have been without you. You quickly grasped the need I'm seeking to address (In a nation of "us" vs. "them" people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing), and expertly shed light on areas I was missing, while creating potential solutions I wouldn't have thought of. Thank you! Here's a summary of what we discovered together:

The three big ideas we developed for the project were:

- 1) Create specific environments that are safe for diverse participants and bring both sides in to create understanding and unity.
- 2) Mindful relationship building with people who are different from you, during your regular life—fostered by a "toolkit" we provide.
- 3) Create a logo promoting creating a culture of rainbow unity and use it for outreach.

While "done", as in mission complete, would look different in these three paradigms, the idea of things like exit interviews, surveys, and such, appears promising. Honoring this will be an ongoing, and likely lifelong, process, "done" seems best defined as progress. So, participants self-reporting their progress will be a good indication of success. In many ways, the proof will be in the "pudding" as people witness themselves bridge divides with greater and greater ease.

Safety, awareness, and mediation were three big themes that emerged for further investigation on my part. Namely, that people will not be interested in, or able to, participate unless they feel safe. This is especially applicable to marginalized peoples. Creating a safe "space" for them takes an awareness—which leads to action—of the issues at play, such as patriarchy, racism, ablism, and

beyond. In line with that, looking for mediators, or others, already doing work along these lines will also be helpful to look into.

If you think of any other ideas, blind spots, areas to investigate, and/or important points I missed, please let me know. It sounds like we do another workshop next year, and I'd love for you to be a part of it if you're interested and able. You're amazing and I hope you have a great day!

With Love and Gratitude,

Lang

One-on-One Interviews Documentation

Interview A

"I DON'T KNOW." He said this multiple times and it said everything!

- 1) In your experiences and thoughts, what are some of the major reasons why people polarize, take sides, and fight over issues?
 - A tendency towards tribes is in our spiritual/social DNA. It's part of our evolutionary biology and isn't going to go away. Part of human consciousness is to band together, even if some of our banding is artificial.
 - Especially in challenging situations we bind ourselves together.
 - Part of how we come to know ourselves and form our identities is by saying "I am not that", "I am not like them".
 - In the 5 Factor deal, which is basically innate, Openness in and of itself will bias us toward greater or lesser connection with others → Our psychological makeup and DNA influences this a good bit
 - Polarization will always be present, but maybe we can call it something different like tension between opposites or introvert vs. extrovert, etc.
 - There is SO much anxiety in our "air" from economics, not understanding how our banks work, pandemic, etc. → which leads us to fight, flight, freeze, feint response. → **And We don't have a Grand narrative to live under together which helps us get through anxiety. And, unlike W2 and Cold War. It's hard to put a face a pandemic (the need for an enemy is both somewhat immature and something we never completely outgrow) → Scapegoating and Cancel Culture and hating Trump and pinning all the blames on him or on Hillary or Biden**

- 2) Conversely, in your experiences and thoughts, what are some of the major reasons why people of different types and/or persuasions are able to not only communicate amicably, but grow and change into more whole and loving people together?
- Ironically, the progressive camps pride themselves on inclusion, diversity of opinion, including non-dominant narratives, etc. While these are great, with the “Woke” Culture it’s become obvious that they/we are just as intolerant of “other” people as the Right side is.
 - A Healthy Religious tradition or Greater Storyline that we are part of give us ethical and moral obligations that transcend the divides. → these convictions led to the invention of hospitals, orphanages, schools, the end of slavery and such. While there were also religious wars, there’s also this good.
 - **A context (storyline or religion) that transcends the challenges of today and my tastes and proclivities.**
 - **Proximity → Community, sharing meals together, making friends across the divides**
 = It’s easy to hate someone online, but when that “other” is your neighbor it changes things. Like living in Israel living near Palestinian Christian, atheist Israeli, Palestinian Muslim, scholar from England, and orthodox Jew → how did they get along? I don’t know! It’s like the food is good. ☺ When you sit and eat at a table together, you can’t scapegoat the “other” any more.
 - **Imagination is key. We lack it, but imagination will take us to love, unity, nonviolence, diversity, etc. Let the Imagination take the raw ingredients of where we’re at and cook up something new. → The problem is corporate media is high jacking our imagination.**
 - **Accidental Meeting Aspect** = Just accidentally being in relationship with different people

- **Liberal and Conservative have always been around, we need both, both belong → Talking about this with others will help**

3) What are some ways people can choose to be formed in a manner that would enable them to grow, become, and flourish *with* people unlike them ... even ones they disagree with?

- **Teaching, practice, and community → James Finley said find your teacher, find your practice and practice, and find your community and enter.** = Human beings need help, we need a teacher, practices, and community. Are we going to humble ourselves and admit we need a teacher? There are 100s of spiritual practices, am I going to humble myself enough to do ones that resonate with others.

4) If you could name one practice, spirit, or mentality that would bring this project to fruition, what would it be?

- Eating meals together
- Engaging in community projects that benefits all (wouldn't say social activism as that's been politicized, but fixing your stream and such works)
- **The psychological maturity of individuals is going to determine that of the group. So, take responsibility for your own psychological and spiritual wellbeing and growth. Which means I'm going to have to get help, look outside myself, look in a mirror, maybe have therapy, etc.** is Depth psychology has shaped him = There is a correlation between one's individual maturation and the depth of the whole. **When you see your own inner "other", darkness, and gifts, it's hard to not see those and honor them in others.**
- **You have to descend into your wounds first.** – Robert Blythe

- **What do we have to learn from monastic traditions? Monks traditionally stood on the edge of culture and society so can speak into this.**
- David Abram *The Spell of the Sensuous* (or something) – looking at the social plagues from the natural world. **Thomas Berry** *The Dream of the Earth* **and something like** *Christianity in the 21st Century* – earth based and evolutionary point of view

Post Interview Email:

I was really struck by how you frequently began your answer with "I don't know". I have a hunch there's something of having a spirit that starts there that's key for flourishing across divides together. Another one of my big takeaways was simply that "tribalism" is an innate part of us, meaning naming and recognizing this is a key step to moving "beyond" it. I like to think of humans as possibility, in that we have the potential for great goodness baked into us. Along those lines, honoring the goodness of tribes and polarization, I appreciate how you indicated it could be helpful to reframe and rename this propensity we have.

Looking at the Thomas Berry and David Abram books you recommended, in combination with the observation that we lack a Grand Narrative that unifies us and helps us transcend divides, it seems to me you're offering a earthy, science backed storyline that could help us in that journey. Does that sound right?

Another avenue to unity, I heard from you, is simply being united, as in eating and doing things together, which also greatly helps us transcend divides.

To approach it from still another angle, I really resonated with your emphasis on the importance of doing our own inner-work via depth psychology, shadow work, and what not. Our insides is, in many ways, where it all starts.

Finally, I loved the three words you used, which really sum up these previous 3 ideas: Teaching, Practice, and Community.

Interview B

1) In your experiences and thoughts, what are some of the major reasons why people polarize, take sides, and fight over issues?

- 1 stream is evolutionary. We evolved as tribal societies (Celts, Goths, Visigoths). The modern nation state is newer, but really is just a combination of tribes. The tribes combined and got bigger.

- Another stream is theological, which goes back deep in Xian history. Xian supremacy, which expresses itself in White Supremacy. We see this in the Doctrine of Discovery in 1452, where the Pope gave permission to kings to colonize the world → make slaves of people and steal their lands and resources in the name of the Trinity. We can see this even in the Declaration of Independence. We see this in Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism.

- Another stream is from slavery and such, white people became desperate to stay in power when we took it away.

- A final stream, is we humans are susceptible to authoritarianism. (Bob Altemeyer leading scholar in authoritarianism). We're happy when see someone tells what to do. There's a survival element to this, but it creates social problems. The Republican party has become authoritarian, which intensifies this and combines with RC and Evangelicalism.

2) Conversely, in your experiences and thoughts, what are some of the major reasons why people of different types and/or persuasions are able to not only communicate amicably, but grow and change into more whole and loving people together?

- Spiritual stream. Jesus was born a Jew, a people who were oppressed and lived from that mentality + their purity culture. In that context, Jesus said to love the outcast, Roman soldier, prostitute, etc. **Love beyond boundaries because we are all one (neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, etc. Also see in Revelations and the gathering of different nations together).**

- Practical dimension. We depend on each other ecologically, economically, politically, etc. We come together for the common good. We are practically interconnected. → **Really thinks ecology is going to push us this direction, as with nearly 9 billion people we have to figure out how to live together and with the planet in a sustainable way.**

3) What are some ways people can choose to be formed in a manner that would enable them to grow, become, and flourish *with* people unlike them ... even ones they disagree with?

- Every person makes a choice between love and war. They decide is my primary identity as a warrior who defeats others or as a lover who brings people together. Is my goal domination and elimination of the other, or is my goal reconciliation and living at peace with the other. Jesus invited us to be lovers, but within Christianity we have many warriors as well as lovers/servants.

- Even if we have a commitment to be a lover, there's a set of skills we have to learn. Churches don't really teach this, more than anything they reinforce the warrior mentality.

- Don't lie to each other, CALL EACH OTHER NAMES (FOOL FROM JESUS), Let your yes be yes and no be no. Learning how to forgive each other instead of getting revenge on each other is a key Xian practice we miss here.

Cassidy Dale - *The Knight and the Gardener* = free short book online

4) If you could name one practice, spirit, or mentality that would bring this project to fruition, what would it be?

- One way to talk about the call to be peace makers or agents of love, is the call to live for the common good rather than personal good and gain. Philippians 2 beginning. To seek the common good resonates with all. **Organization called Vote Common Good which talks about how Xian, atheists, Hindus, etc. call people to the common good. If you quote Jesus also quote a Jew, Buddhist, Muslim.**

→ **Organizations doing this: Jim Hendersen 3 Practice Groups, Jared Byas (How to Disagree or something podcast), *How to Heal Our Divides* book by several authors, field of non-violent communication. Book Valerie Kaur *See No Stranger* one of the most comprehensive books he's ever seen.**

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

introduction

Scott and I have been best friends since 1995. The thing is, though, we do *not* agree politically. Yet, we are able to not only have kind conversations on the topic, we also (mostly) put our guard down, hear each other well, and move into a space of greater understanding and unity—not only as friends, but also ideologically. Honestly, it is not always easy, but it *is* always more than worth it.

While, recently, my mom, stepdad, and I have been able to do likewise when it comes to talking about the LGBTQ+ community from a Christian perspective, my dad and I have not been as successful when it comes to politics. Feeling the harmony of connecting across “gulfs” with the former, I also deeply feel the discord from the ways my dad and I are not able to do likewise. I share this not only because a “household”, community, or nation divided against itself cannot stand,¹³⁹ but also because such divides also mute the flourishing Jesus says we are created to enjoy.¹⁴⁰

Although the political, religious, racial, economic, gender, and other ways people fight and polarize are all over the news, my experiences—with Scott, my mom, stepdad, my George Fox cohort, and beyond—show a different way is possible. In many ways, it is as “simple” as realizing *Love Matters More*, as Jared Byas’ book proclaims. I have a tattoo on my heart with the simple mantra: *Love Always*, as a reminder to love continuously in all the ways. As it pertains to this project, by letting love lead, I am realizing: The more people are able to see themselves in others, and others in themselves—across whatever ideologies may separate them—the more they flourish.

¹³⁹ Matthew 12:25 (New Revised Standard Version).

¹⁴⁰ John 10:10 (NRSV).

Prototype Summaries and Findings

Prototype #1 Description

Delivery matters. Imagine someone saying, “something’s wrong”, for instance. Depending on the tone and volume of voice, where they are at, what they are doing, and more, this phrase can communicate anything from a “no big deal” type of musing, to a life-or-death situation, and everything in between. Delivery matters.

Along those lines, the task of the first prototype was to determine the optimal way to deliver the solution for this NPO. Participants filled out an anonymous survey, which asked: What means do you think would be the most effective for reaching people from various “sides” to grow into thriving across divides? They rated each of seven options on a scale of 1-10 (1 being least effective and 10 most), with the option to add comments and suggestions at the bottom. The options included: book, in person course, online course, in person retreat, online retreat, in person event, and online event.

NPO STATEMENT

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In a polarized and divided society, what are the optimal modalities for reaching people on all “sides” of the ideological, political, racial, and beyond gulfs, to facilitate their movement across these “borders”, and into a place of greater individual and communal flourishing?

ASSESSMENT BENCHMARK(S)

Fifty-four people took the survey. The average score out of 10 for each surveyed modality, in descending order, was:

1. In Person Event: 7.50
2. In Person Retreat: 7.50
3. In Person Course: 7.46
4. Online Course: 6.56
5. Online Event: 6.04
6. Book: 5.70
7. Online Retreat: 5.44

Notably, of twenty comments, five people indicated a book is an optimal first step, as it allows people to get a feel for the practices and mental attitudes from a neutral, safe space, before trying them out in person. Likewise, eight respondents wrote a hybrid approach (both online and in person) would be best. Finally, three comments recommended podcasts.

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Participants were anyone from young adults on up who was interested. Recruitment came from personal and social media invites. As this project seeks to be as diverse as possible, the invitation was sent to a wide assortment of friends and social media groups. Since the survey was anonymous, though, the exact “spread” of participants is unknown.

LEARNING SUMMARY

The prototype was successful in that it resoundingly indicated in person activities, whether an event, retreat, or course, is the best context to address this NPO in. What is more, while the survey did not

include hybrid options, the comments strongly indicated this would be the most effective, ideally with a book laying the groundwork.

The difference in ratings between in person events, retreats, and courses (7.50, 7.50, and 7.46) was miniscule, signifying any of these solutions can be effective. Ironically, while the course option scored lowest for in person, it was easily the highest for online (6.56 to 6.04 for event, and 5.44 for retreat). Given the number of comments indicating a hybrid option is best, in hindsight, the survey should also have included those for rating.

What matter most to participants was also clear from the comments: Relationality. Time and again respondents mentioned the importance of getting to know one another and forming bonds by working together, and such. What is more, people recommended hybrid options because it would be more inclusive, and several talked about the importance of helping participants feel safe and being able to ease their way in, so to speak.

MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

The key takeaway from the prototype is this project's solution needs to be lived out in relationship, meaning the context must include meaningful interactions between people. That said, it is also important to meet people where they are at, help them feel safe, and allow them to progress at the pace they are ready for. To facilitate these, it seems wise to lay the foundation of this project with a book, further spread the word and let the ideas "marinate" with people for a time via podcasts, and then create hybrid events, retreats, and/or courses.

Prototype #2 Description

This prototype sought to test the effectiveness of various practices and mental dispositions for addressing the NPO. Initially, participants were invited to try out the six ones listed below for 10-14 days, before taking a survey to rank their effectiveness (as well as that of fourteen others). However,

after getting only six responses, I then asked people to just take the survey. The practices/mental approaches for participants to do their best to bring into their lives, and notice the impact, were:

1. **Soul Seeing:** The practice of seeing and treating people with their inherent, coequal with others value, beauty, belonging, and love.
2. **Love AllWays:** A mantra reminding one to love always and in all the ways that care for people, as they are.
3. **Wonder Squared:** "Wonder", as in choose to marvel at the miracles and beauties of life.¹⁴¹ And "wonder", meaning wonder about why people are how they are, what they like to eat, etc.¹⁴²
4. **Deep Listening:** Love and wonder lead to deep listening, wherein, as context allows, people choose to listen deeply to and be impacted by others' stories.¹⁴³
5. **Clear. Center. Connect.:** When a person takes time to clear the "clutter" of life, center inside themselves, and connect to the deep wisdom inside them, they "step" into the best version of themselves.¹⁴⁴ The possibilities here are numerous, from yoga to being in nature to prayer to running and beyond. The invitation is for a person to do something to "clear their mind", center themselves, and connect to something transcendent.
6. **Look for the Good:** "The way we see the world is the way we experience" and live into it.¹⁴⁵ In other words, without turning a blind eye to evils, looking for the good honors that

¹⁴¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Place: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 52.

¹⁴² Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love* (New York: One World 2020), 26-7.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 156-7.

¹⁴⁴ Ram Dass. *Be Love Now: The Path of the Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 158.

¹⁴⁵ Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Adams, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (New York: Random House Large Print, 2016), 284.

how we choose to perceive life, others, and ourselves deeply shapes us. This practice, then, is deciding to believe and name the best of others, choose gratitude, *and* stay safe.

NPO Statement

In a nation of “us” vs. “them” people, we need a spiritual formation path that honors our differences, fosters togetherness, and cultivates both individual and communal flourishing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In a polarized and divided society, what are a few practices and mental approaches a person can repeat—over time—to move across the ideological, political, racial, and beyond gulfs, and into greater individual and communal flourishing?

ASSESSMENT BENCHMARK(S)

Nineteen people completed the survey, scoring each practice or mental attitude on a scale of 1-10 (1 least effective, and 10 most effective), for how well they helped one heal and thrive while bridging divides. The average scores of each, from most to least effective, were (Note: each item is defined in the Appendix):

1. Gratitude: 9.16
2. Laugh: 9.16
3. Clear. Center. Connect: 8.89
4. Cultivate Curiosity: 8.74
5. “We’re Always Telling a Story in Our Heads, Choose a Good One”: 8.74
6. Soul Seeing: 8.68
7. Greet with Grace: 8.63
8. Look for the Good: 8.58
9. Set the Bar Low (Santosha): 8.47

10. Deep Listening: 8.42
11. Pause. Slow. Reflect.: 8.37
12. Imagination Opens Your "World" to New Possibilities: 8.37
13. Wonder Squared: 8.32
14. Non-Dualistic Thinking: 8.32
15. Love AllWays: 8.26
16. Share: 8.11
17. Safely Express Inner Fire: 8.05
18. Believe the Best: 7.95
19. Life is a School of "Life" ("Life" was meant to be "Love"): 7.58
20. Journaling: 7.37

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Participants were anyone from young adults on up who was interested. Recruitment came from personal and social media invites. As this project seeks to be as diverse as possible, the invitation was sent to a wide assortment of friends and social media groups. Since the survey was anonymous, though, the exact "spread" of participants is unknown.

LEARNING SUMMARY

Overall, prototype #2 shows this project is on the right track. Six of nine commentors indicated they thought *all* the ideas were helpful and useful for addressing the NPO. What is more, it successfully indicated which practices and mental dispositions are most effective. Furthermore, since some of the practices have commonalities, like Cultivate Curiosity and Deep Listening, the results indicate which verbiage best resonates with people—meaning the two can be combined under "Cultivate Curiosity".

The biggest drawback of this was not knowing how many people actually tried living out these ideas, which is what matters most in the end. That said, since all of these came from research and personal experience, the high scores and positive comments, again indicates the project is on the right path. Finally, that gratitude, laughter, calm, curiosity, and telling a good story were the five highest scores, indicates participants are tired of the negativity bombarding them and want, together, to move to a more positive and brighter place.

MOST IMPORTANT DISCOVERY

Easily the key lesson from this prototype is the essentialness of gratitude and laughter for this project. They will now have a prominent place in this project they might not otherwise have had.

Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

Why do people polarize and divide? Belonging. We need and crave it, and tend to find it tribally, meaning in groups defined by similarities we hold tightly and differences we oppose strongly. The problem with this, and a hopeful solution, can be illustrated by a couple of stories from my circle.

Two siblings in my family are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, firmly and vocally believing their side is categorically right, and the other wrong. This has, and does, lead to hurt, anger, confusion, and sorrow. I have witnessed the shame and shaming this brings forth in these loved ones. While they do love each other and are able to connect, it does not seem as close and life-giving as it used to and/or could be. *That* is what tribalism does. It is heartbreaking.

Sean is one of my good friends, and he hates humus. As in *hates*! We tease him about it all the time. I bring this up because “humus” comes from the same Latin root word human, earth, and soil come from. There is an intimate connection between humans and the planet people have long recognized. To bring this full circle, in people’s need and effort to belong, they, through little fault of their own, sell themselves short. They settle for *only* belonging to a little tribe, which pits itself against other tribes. Whether it’s Republican, Democrat, Christian, Muslim, Atheist, Black, White, or Latinx, with some exceptions, the story generally stays the same. It results in us versus them. What we lack, and desperately need, is a universal “tribe”, a Grand Narrative to live together and unite under. Yet, the truth is we are literally all earthlings. Humans are the “soil” of earth with consciousness. In this foundational, literal sense all humanity is one family of one planet of one universe. The Big Story people can all unite under is the interconnected Story of the Universe, Earth, and Humanity.

This Grand Narrative provides an essential element for communal flourishing: Common Ground. “Common ground is, literally, a common area in which to stand and understand”, meaning it is a

space/means for people to honestly and respectfully converse, connect, and unite *with* their differences.¹⁴⁶ To have common ground, especially when it comes to bridging divides, is to see and be seen, to listen and be heard, to value and be valued, to know and be known—all while feeling safe and at home amidst diversity. It is what Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis refers to as, living “in the spirit of *ubuntu*”, a Zulu way of being that names and lives from humanity’s “inextricable and irrevocable connection.”¹⁴⁷

Judy Cannato (spiritual director), Thomas Berry (cultural historian and religious scholar), and David Abram (ecologist and philosopher) all champion the Universe Story, within which “nests” the Earth Story, within which lay the Human Story—all part of a Grand Narrative for people to unite and flourish under. This story “is about acknowledging that we all flow from a single source, call it quantum vacuum or Holy Spirit”, it connects not only all humanity, but all creation.¹⁴⁸ While science shows people are the product of a long line of evolution—beginning with the singularity of the Big Bang—and religions believe humanity comes from the Divine, not that these two narratives are necessarily in conflict, they both point to the same storyline: Everyone’s ancestry starts from the same place, meaning we are all family.

Berry observes the three scriptures available to everyone—Cosmic (the observable universe), Written (the Bible, Koran, etc.), and Inner Awareness—each, and together, tell the same story of interconnected and interdependent unity, from stars to planets to people to atoms.¹⁴⁹ Relatedly,

¹⁴⁶ Paul S. Fiddes, *Love as Common Ground: Essays on Love in Religion*, ed. Paul S. Fiddes (New York: Lexington Books, 2021), viii-ix.

¹⁴⁷ Jacqui Lewis, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2021), 11-2.

¹⁴⁸ Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2010), 22.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 23.

why is it people have long told tales, from mythological to fanciful, featuring talking plants and animals? Because something within us knows the deep interconnectedness of all life. The Koyukon, an indigenous people in Alaska, for instance, believe “the other animals and the plants once shared a common language with human beings”, and still do in “Distant Time”.¹⁵⁰ On the theme of humanity, and the rest of creation, all originating and evolving over 13.8 billion years from/with one Source, Berry blends poetry, eloquence, and science to observe:

The story of the universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of expression emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen in the presence of some millions of degrees of heat emerges into helium. After the stars take shape as oceans of fire in the heavens, they go through a sequence of transformations. Some eventually explode into the stardust of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures and in the variety and splendor of living forms, until humans appear as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. The human emerges not only as an earthling, but also as a worldling. We bear the universe in our beings as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged.¹⁵¹

While the Universe-Earth-Human Story may seem new; like when one buys a Toyota Camry for the first time, and *then* begins noticing them all over the place, this narrative is all around. For instance, Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder wax poetically on the intimate relationship of all humanity and creation. Meanwhile, Paul Winter, Carmen Moore, and Maia Aprahamian express much the same musically. Likewise, Earth day communicates this same spirit globally, governmental policies concerning ecofriendly policies regarding building and businesses give legality to it, and global organizations like the U.N. make the harmony of humanity a worldwide priority, to name a few.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 146.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Berry, *the dream of the earth* (Berkley, CA: Counterpoint, 1988), 132.

¹⁵² Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 85-6.

A common refrain here is celebration, as in celebrating the earth, creation, and humanity. In other words: “We might say that the universe throughout its vast extent in space and its long sequence of transformation in time, is a single multiform celebratory event. The human might be described as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself and the deep mysteries of existence”.¹⁵³

Continuing on the theme of celebration, another beautiful aspect to the Universe-Earth-Human Story is its inclusiveness, especially concerning religions. Their stories, beliefs, and sacred texts have long done humanity well in its evolution into unity and flourishing, and continue to. *And* this narrative does not preclude or usurp them, but complements and uplifts them—amplifying their core messages.¹⁵⁴ Take Christianity, for example. It begins with the announcement all humans are in the image of God (Genesis), continues with *many* verses in the Bible “encouraging” the care and love of the marginalized and outsiders, and culminates with Jesus telling followers to love everyone, because their neighbors include their enemies (Luke 10:25-37).

For ages, countries and cultures have, and do celebrate their “origin stories” (like America’s Independence Day), and other landmarks, via holidays. Such communal celebrations bond people together, and give them collective meaning and purpose. Emphasizing universal holidays, like Earth Day, then, stands to help unite people of all sorts. After all, “this”—everything in existence—is a real life miracle, in that the Earth is perfectly distanced from the sun to have the right temperature to sustain life; “if [the Earth] was closer to the moon, the tides would overwhelm the continents; if more distant, the seas would be stagnant and life development could not have taken place”; and if the radius of the Earth “were a little greater, it would be more gaseous, like

¹⁵³ Ibid., 95-6.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 97.

Jupiter, if a little less, the Earth would be more solid, like Mars"; and those are merely a few of the variables that have to be just right for people and the planet we enjoy to exist.¹⁵⁵

Three essential elements of the Universe-Earth-Human Story, worth celebrating for how they draw people together, are differentiation, increased subjectivity, and communion. Berry observes how stars, comets, planets, organisms, humanity, and beyond have all differentiated themselves from both the single Source they all came from, as well as each other. Consider how:

In our own solar system, within the sequence of planets, we find the planet Earth taking shape as the most highly differentiated reality we know about in the entire universe. Life on planet Earth finds expression in an overwhelming variety of manifestations. So, too, with the human: as soon as we appear, we immediately give to human existence multiple modes of expression.¹⁵⁶

The second "primary principle" of this story is increased subjectivity, in that, just as individuals generally grow in awareness and intelligence/wisdom, looking back over the course of history—from hundreds to billions of years—we see how organisms trend toward greater complexity (the evolution of humanity's central nervous system for example), awareness, and self-determination/freedom.¹⁵⁷ "A third principle of the universe is the communion of each reality of the universe. Here our scientific evidence confirms, with a magnificent overview, the ancient awareness that we live in a *universe—a single, if multiform, energy event.*"¹⁵⁸ Differentiation, increased subjectivity/freedom, and communion—as observable longstanding, essential elements of life, and the evolution of the universe—demonstrate humanity truly is *one* family, simultaneously diverse, conscious, and intimately alike, interconnected, and interdependent. The Universe-Earth-Human Story, then, is not a cold and calculated one, but a tale of love.

¹⁵⁵ Berry, *the dream of the earth*, 222.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 45-6.

A parent's love encourages their children to become their own person (differentiation), with their own voice and choice (subjectivity), while remaining a key part of the family (communion). In this regard, the Universe-Earth-Human Story is a Love Story. They are companions in a multifaceted path to bring people together amidst and *with* difference. Professor and theologian Werner Jeanrond observes: "All love deals with particular manifestations of otherness – divine love as well as human love. In order to flourish, love needs otherness. ... Love is always linked with will – the will to allow the other, the self, and the radical other to flourish".¹⁵⁹ Our reality, which fosters and promotes both otherness and flourishing, then, is a loving one.

The loving nature of the universe is clearly seen in both evolution and gravitation. Just as I find fulfillment in connection with my circle, intimacy with my wife, and closeness with my family, so too with all reality. Consider how particles commune to form atoms, which commune to shape molecules, which commune to make organisms, and so on. This loving communion goes all the way up the Great Chain of Being, with humans forming families and states, planets gathering with stars to make solar systems, and solar systems joining to form galaxies—love truly makes the "world" go round.¹⁶⁰ "This law of communion finds its most elementary expression in the law of gravitation whereby every physical being in the universe attracts and is attracted to every other physical being in the universe."¹⁶¹ Whether the "cause" is love, gravity, or both, from atoms to humans to planets, everything is drawn to join and commune with others.

The Universe-Earth-Human Story, then, is a 13.8-billion-year-long Love Story of all reality expanding from a single Source, in an interconnected and interdependent web of life. From "that unimaginable first moment of cosmic emergence through all its subsequent forms of expression

¹⁵⁹ Werner G. Jeanrond, *Love as Common Ground*, 281.

¹⁶⁰ Berry, *the dream of earth*, 106.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

until the present. This unbreakable bond of relatedness that makes of the whole a universe becomes increasingly apparent to scientific observation, although this bond ultimately escapes scientific formulation or understanding."¹⁶² What a joyous and miraculous reality!

While my personal story is only 47-years running, and the one my wife Lisa and I are writing together is only 5-years old, they are both similar to the Grand Narrative. There is much known, and much mysterious. I will spend my entire life getting to know Lisa, as well as myself. In this way, the universe, planet, you, and I are each simultaneously well known, *and* have endless depths to be learned and explored. In this regard the Universe-Earth-Human Story is an ongoing journey. It's an endless adventure. It is the ongoing evolution of love into the beautiful paradox of ever-greater differentiation, choice and voice, and communion. It is a Tale of Love we get the privilege of participating in as coauthors.

¹⁶² Ibid., 91.

MVP (Most Valuable Prototype)

The prototypes, workshops, interviews, and research all point the same direction for this project: A multifaceted approach with a unifying theme is necessary. In other words, the means must match the ends; since this project seeks to help people move into greater unity *with* diversity, it too must create space for both. The MVP, then, is to write a book, which forms the conceptual foundation for future hybrid (online and in person) events and/or courses, where this project will begin to be lived out. Additionally, a strong consideration will be given to using a podcast to help spread the word, as well as bridge the gap between the book and events.

With that in mind, and based on feedback from Prototype #2 and research, here is a rough outline of the book:

1. Introduction
2. Universe-Earth-Human Story
3. Practices and Mental Dispositions Overview
4. Gratitude – Cultivate Awe
5. Laugh
6. Clear. Center. Connect. – Share Vulnerably and Safely (Perhaps a separate chapter on meditation, which is implied here, as research and experience shows this to be essential for this project)
7. Cultivate Curiosity – Greet with Grace, Wonder, and Listen Deeply
8. “We’re Always Telling a Story in Our Heads, Choose a Good One”
9. Soul Seeing – Believe the Best
10. Look for the Good – Set the Bar Low (Santosha) *and* Imagine/Dream Big
11. Pause. Slow. Reflect – Journal and Safely Express Inner Fire. Remember Life is a School of Love
12. Movement is Medicine
13. Non-Dualistic Thinking

14. Love AllWays

That said, I do also plan to go back through research notes from previous terms, reach out to stakeholders, and touch base with interviewees to better refine these.

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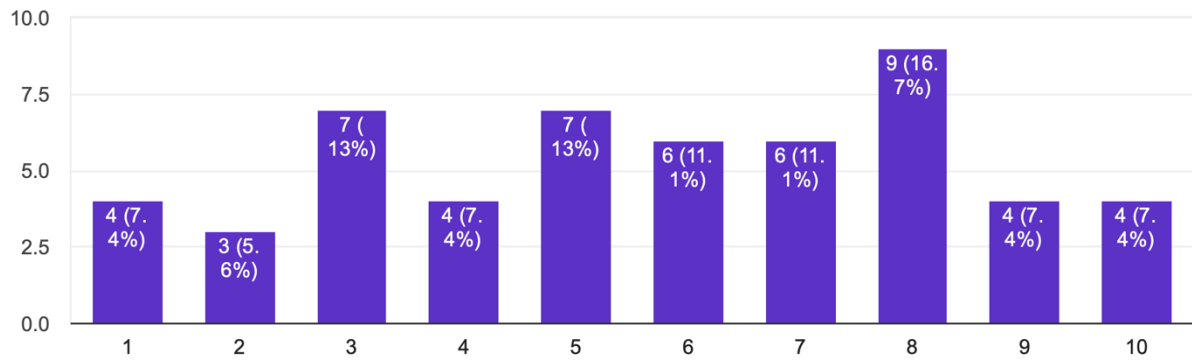
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Appendices

Prototype #1 Survey Results

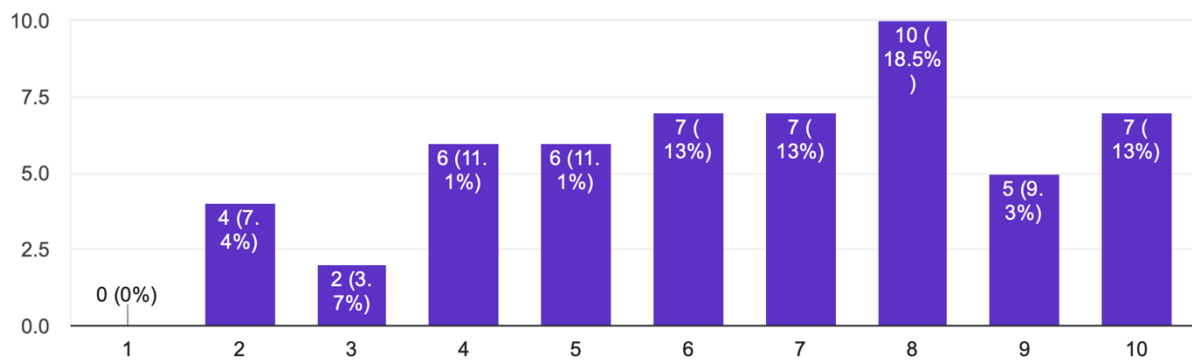
Book

54 responses



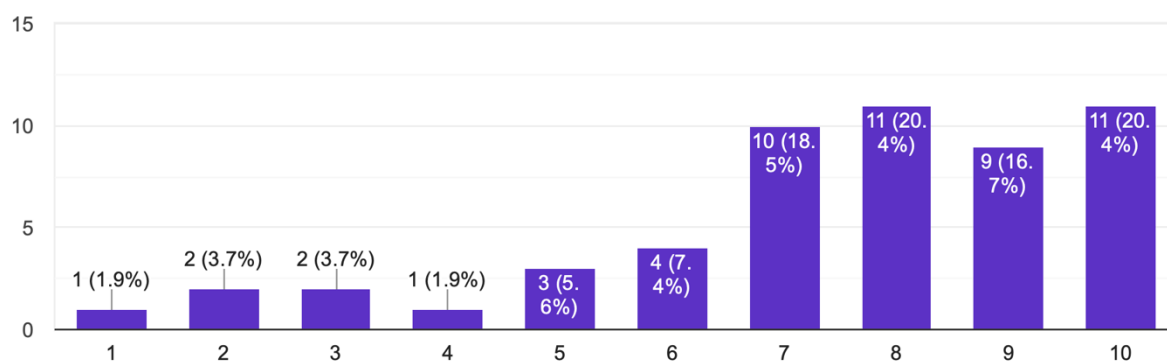
Online Course

54 responses



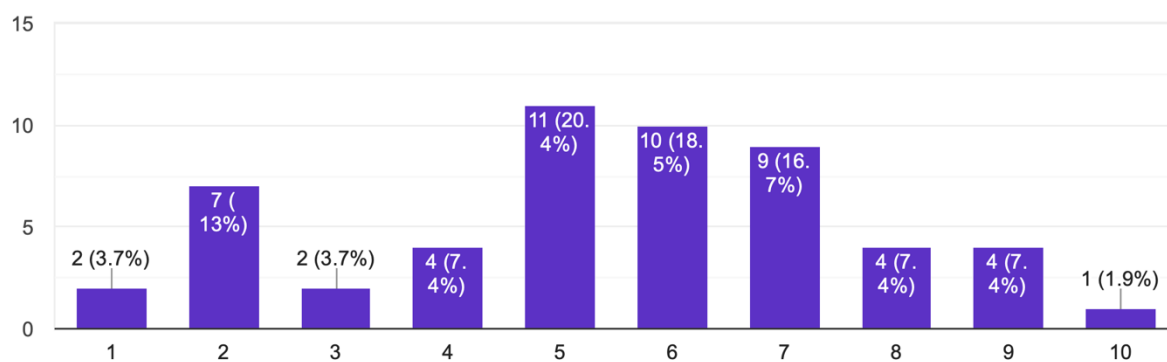
In Person Course

54 responses



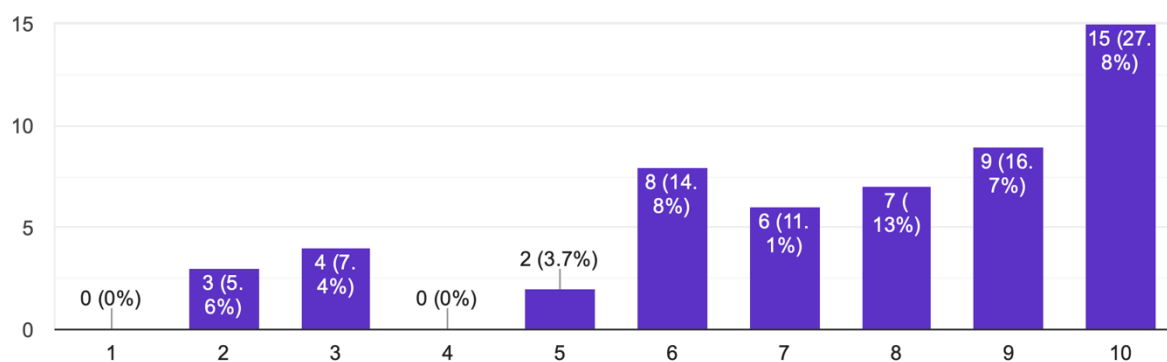
Online Retreat

54 responses



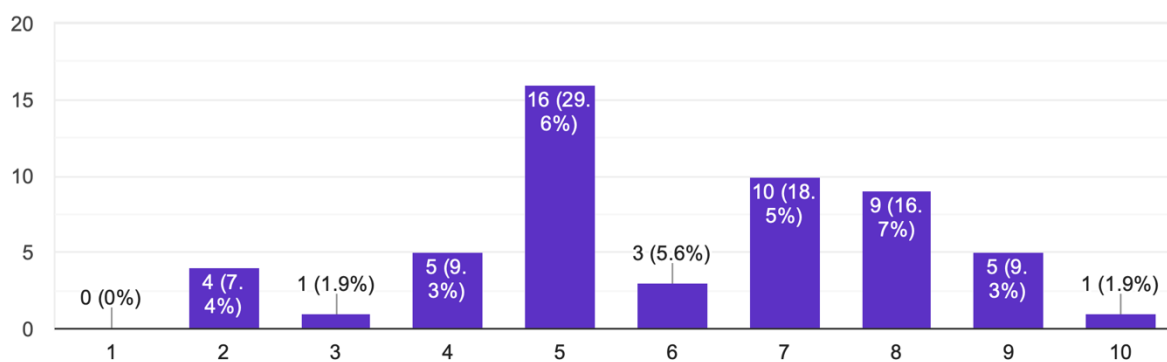
In Person Retreat

54 responses



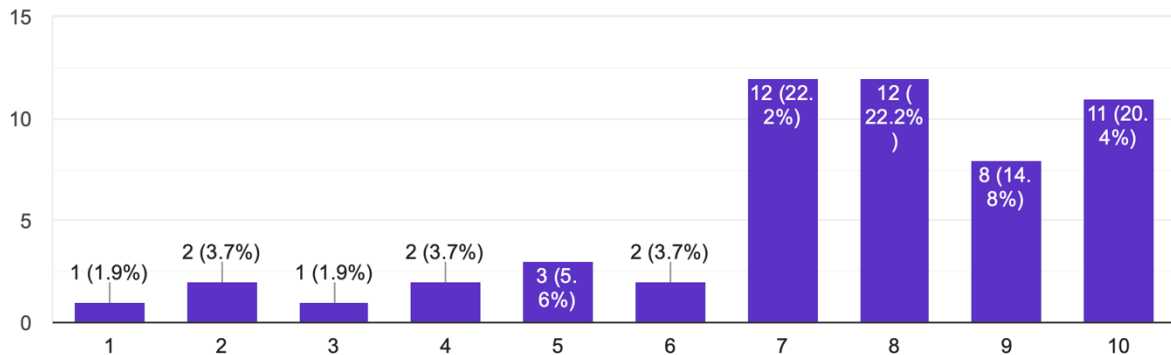
Online Event

54 responses



In Person Event

54 responses



Prototype #1 Survey Comments

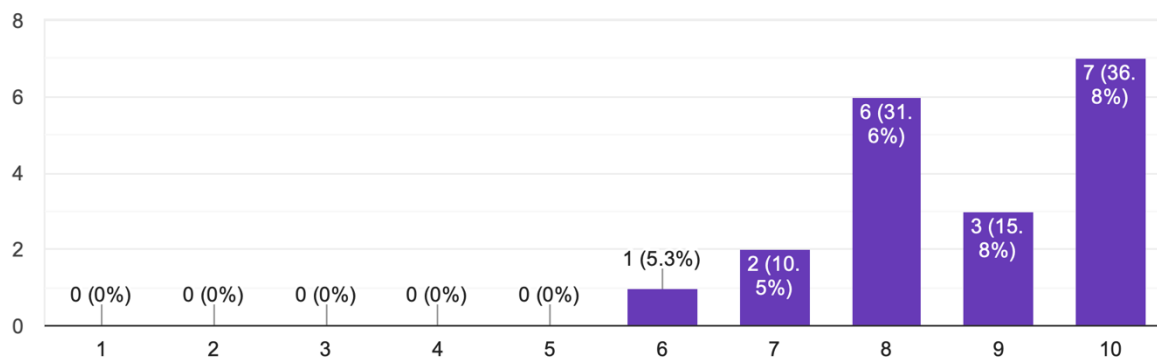
- I think a book and online course is the best option ultimately. However, I would do book first. Then do maybe three in person workshops where you can get lots of in-person feedback that will help you tweak the online course. The book helps people initially explore the ideas and later to retain and expand on them. Good luck.
- In person retreat with a zoom link combined
- Put people with opposing views on a topic to work on a completely separate topic. If these people with opposing views can work together on a project that is unrelated, they may be able to work in good faith on all future projects. For example put people with opposing view on racial tensions to work together on a regenerative agriculture project. :-)
- I think choosing a topic in a broad way so that people from all sides can agree that the topic has worth and should be supported. If people are willing listen to other people's ideas in support of a topic, maybe when they realize people for the other side are involved, they can listen/learn instead of reacting in a negative way. Maybe more to the point of your survey, I feel the internet with its ability for people to anonymously criticize and say outrageous things is a major contributor to the civil discord we now are witnessing. In person methods where we can actually see and hear the person from the other viewpoint, I feel have better chance of success. I for one think if you wish to say something on the internet it should be linked to your actual name just like if you wish to submit an opinion to the local newspaper for publication.
- Reaching people requires building relationships. An online or in person course followed by an online or in person retreat would help build relationships.
- Pod cast series would reach the millennials best I believe.

- Maybe something in the news to get attention, a study maybe, because this goes out to everyone and not only the ones that are already interested
- An online retreat with practice in the real world and follow up check ins for accountability of positive change.
- book(s) w/in-person course
- I like a lot of your ideas I think #1 would be a book as a lot of people will feel vulnerable doing this inner work in person or with others first. You will also get more people willing to begin the journey if they know it is at their own pace. That being said coming together is powerful & could be the next step, online is the way to go right now, even tho in person is the best as we know. Online again people can step in from the safety of their own environment especially when they are meeting others with differences, plus the best way to heal these divide is multi-cultural & this will be greater reach online.
- Guest speaker in churches, university, elementary & high schools
- Immersion Opportunities
- I love anyway people can be brought together- I feel often I my emotions and feelings are softened towards opposing views when I'm sitting in a room with people and not behind a computer screen. However to reach a wider audience I feel hybrid is a must- regardless of class, course or retreat.
- Podcasts
- Podcast with different sides having honest kind discussions
- Maybe online course of event with in person retreat/event? A mix could be powerful. I'm thinking of how to best access the most people and being aware of cost. Amazing work Lang!
- In person always best for connection but online effective at reaching more people. Retreats let you hide away and get into it more but not always so easy to escape to so online may suit more people. Always a tricky balance. Covid had pushed online further but I think the safest solution (I'm speaking as a person with compromised immunity) is in person but outdoors! Good luck.
- A series, like weekly gatherings over 4 to 6 weeks, or monthly like a book club.
- I love in person combined with online. I'm a big fan of books, so I have to say that is a great option for me!
- Online works best for people already motivated to explore ways of healing, but large segments of the population cannot or will not participate in online events. Books work great for people incline to read a book; that is a small minority of the population. In-person events work best, but again, people will usually attend only if they feel inclined to explore. Political, racial, religious, and knowledge-based divides are difficult to overcome. I suspect you need to try all of the above.

Prototype #2 Survey Results

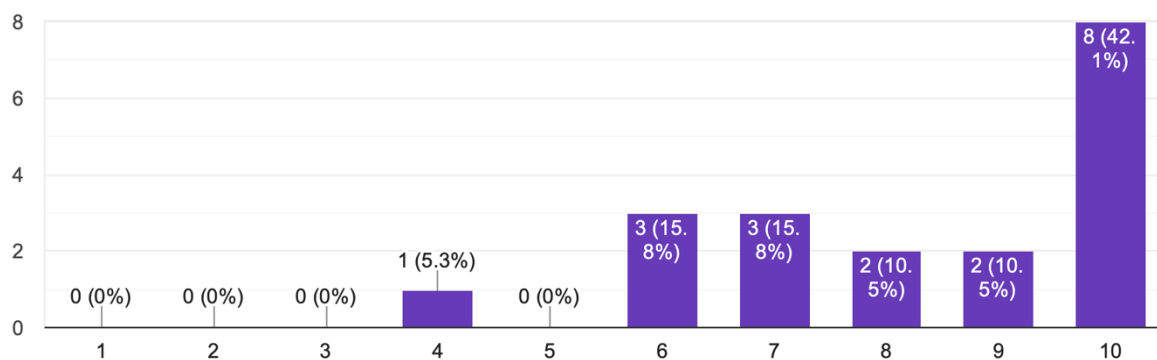
Soul Seeing - The practice of seeing and treating people with their inherent, coequal with others value, beauty, belonging, and love.

19 responses



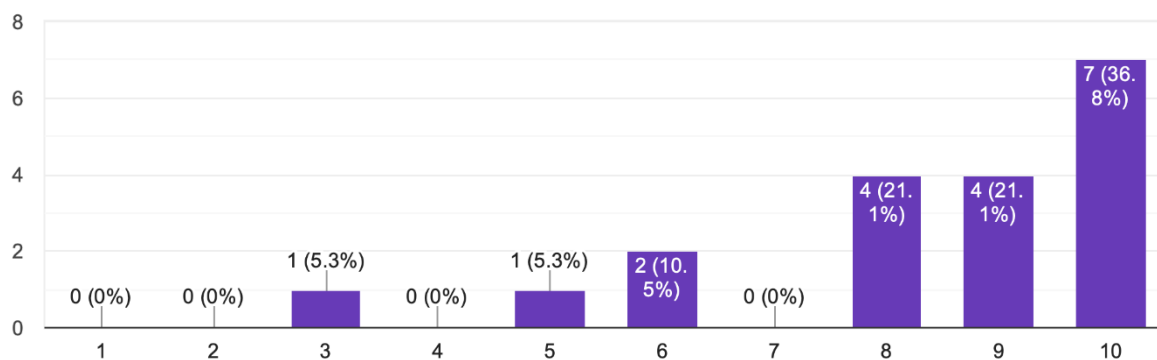
Love AllWays - A mantra reminding one to love always and in all the ways that care for people, as they are.

19 responses



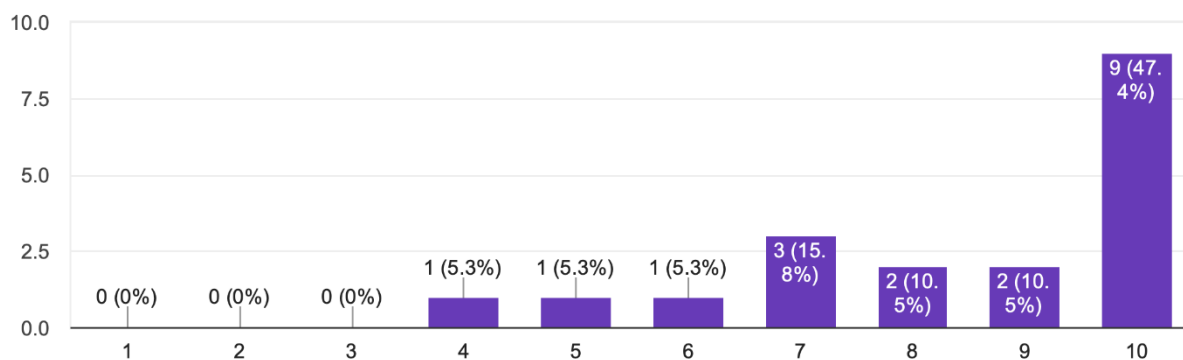
Wonder Squared - “Wonder”, as in choose to marvel at the miracles and beauties of life. And “wonder”, meaning wonder about why people are how they are, what they like to eat, etc.

19 responses



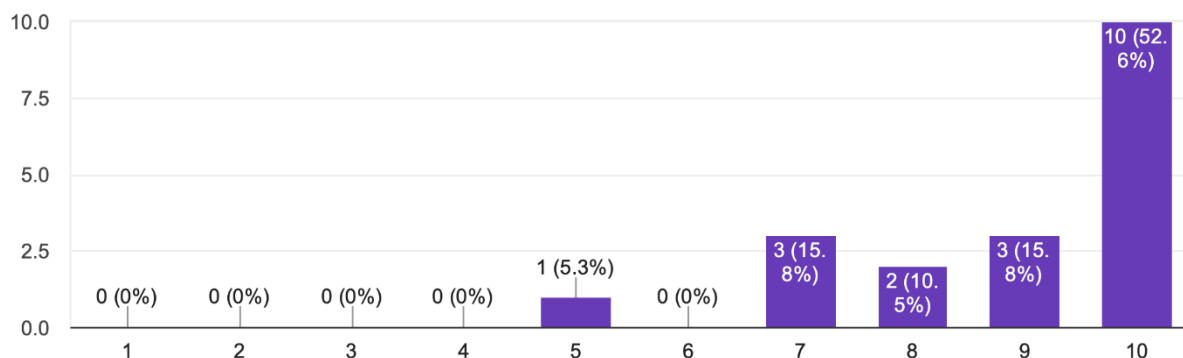
Deep Listening - Love and wonder lead to deep listening, wherein, as context allows, people choose to listen deeply to and be impacted by others' stories.

19 responses



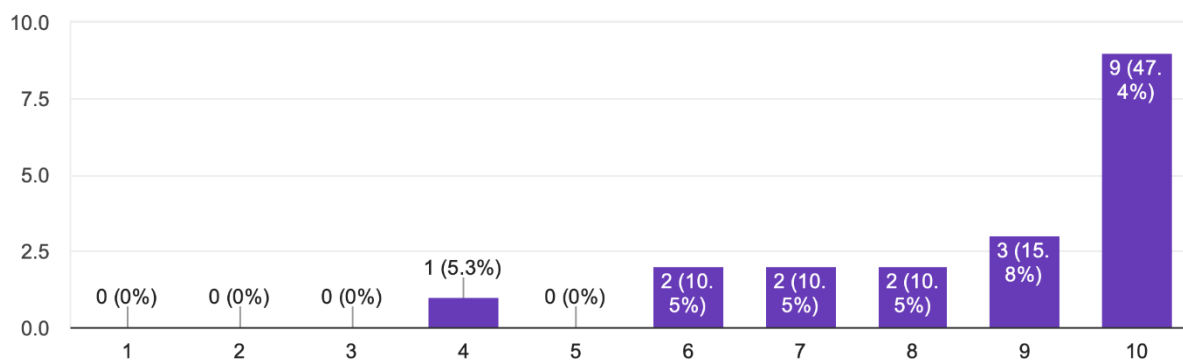
Clear. Center. Connect. - When a person takes time to clear the “clutter” of life, center inside themselves, and connect to the deep wisdom inside themselves, and connect to something transcendent.

19 responses



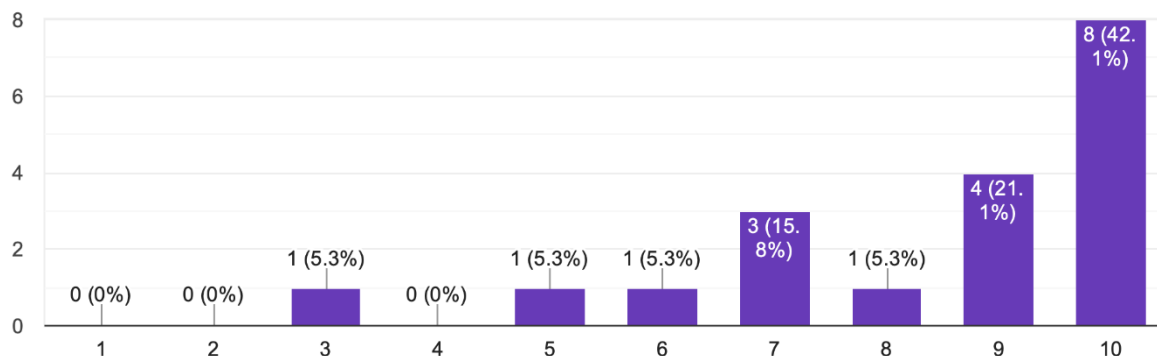
Look For the Good - “The way we see the world is the way we experience” and live into it. In other words, without turning a blind eye to evils, looking...the best of others, choose gratitude, and stay safe.

19 responses



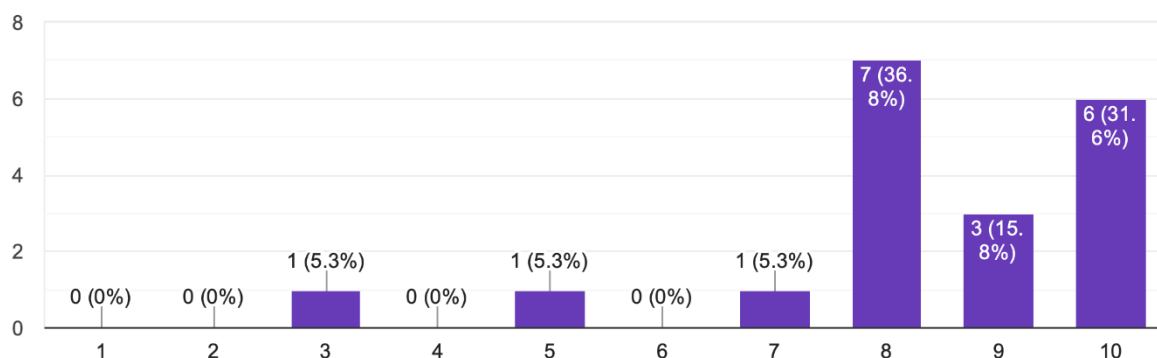
Pause. Slow. Reflect. - There's something about mindfully taking time in our day to pause, slow down, and reflect on the past, present, and future, that grounds, nourishes, and uplifts one's spirit.

19 responses



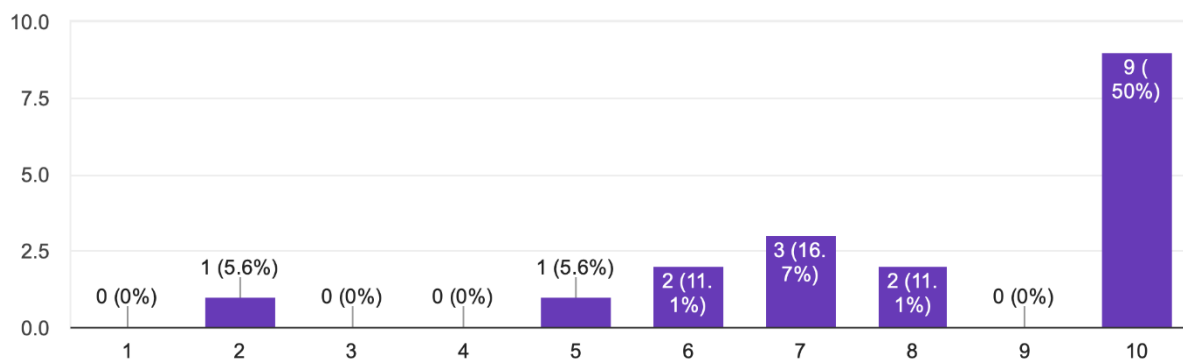
Non-Dualistic Thinking - We are programmed to think, and see the world/others in terms of either/or. In that we're taught to categorize "thing...ve is both the best and worst thing ever, and so on.

19 responses



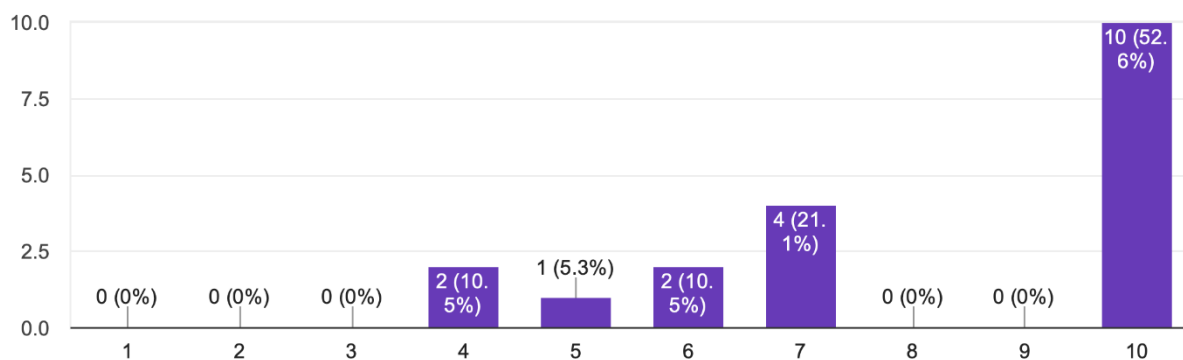
Share - The cares, stresses, pressures, joys, celebrations, and highs of life are all like energy that goes into the "container" of our being. But contain...t for us to share these highs and lows with others.

18 responses



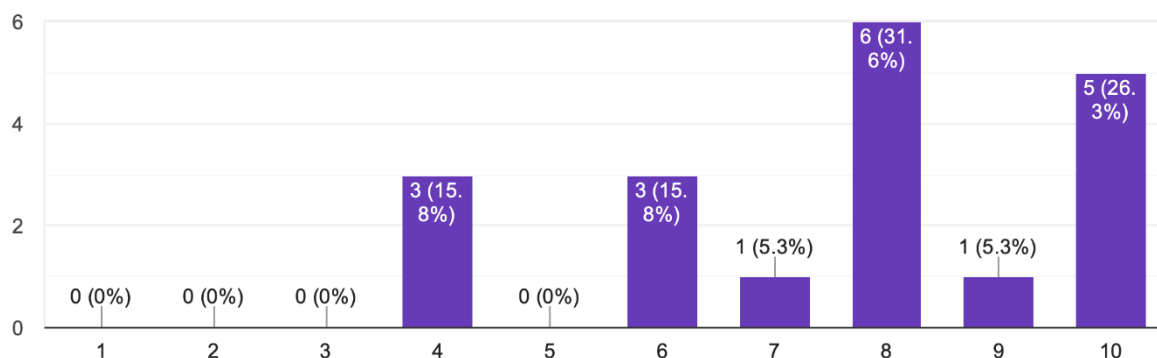
Safely Express Inner Fire - Think of Martin Luther King Junior's passion for racial equality, or a "mama bear's" fierce love for a "child", or Mother T... so the key is to let that energy move in safe ways.

19 responses



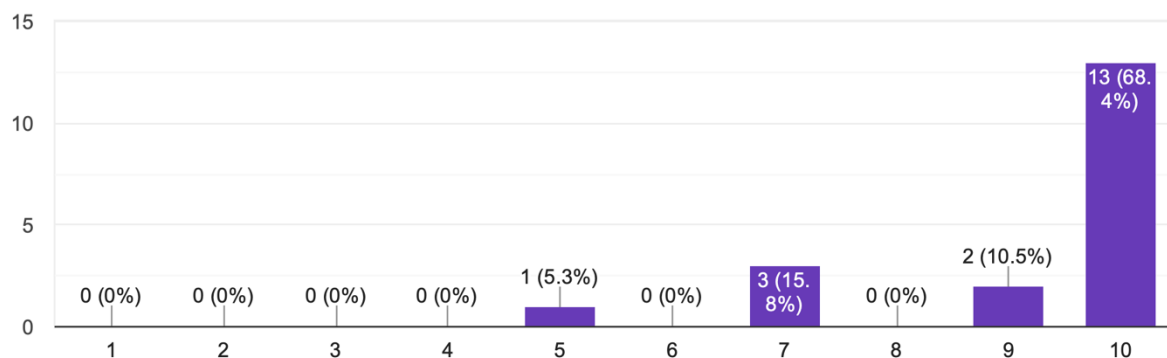
Life is a School of Life - I do my best to view each situation, especially the trying ones, as a lesson from above on learning how to love well. "What abo...h take the "edge" off things, and make me better.

19 responses



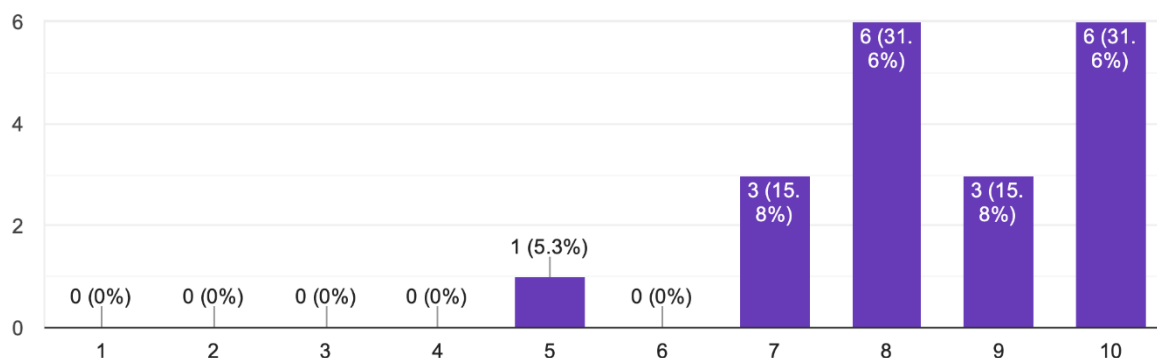
Laugh - There's something magical about being able to laugh at ourselves and life with others.

19 responses



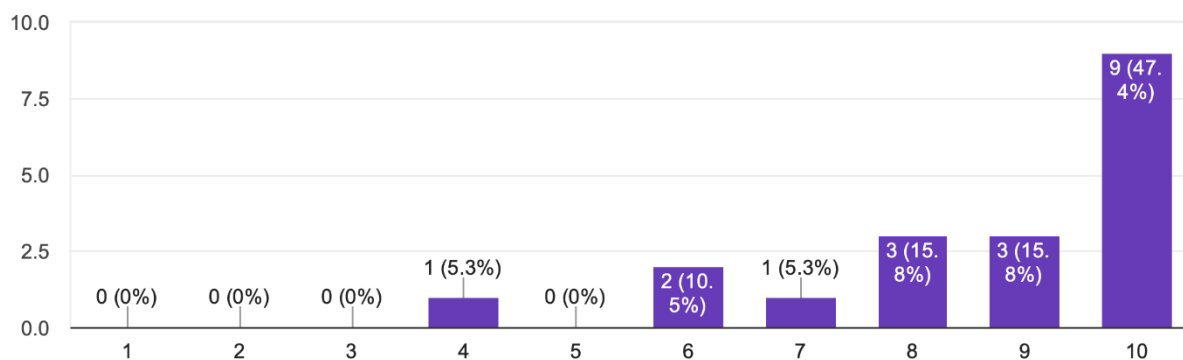
Set the Bar Low (Santosha) - In recent years I realized much of my frustration with others came from expectations of them I had. I find moving away f...what is (life). I think that gets at the same thing.

19 responses



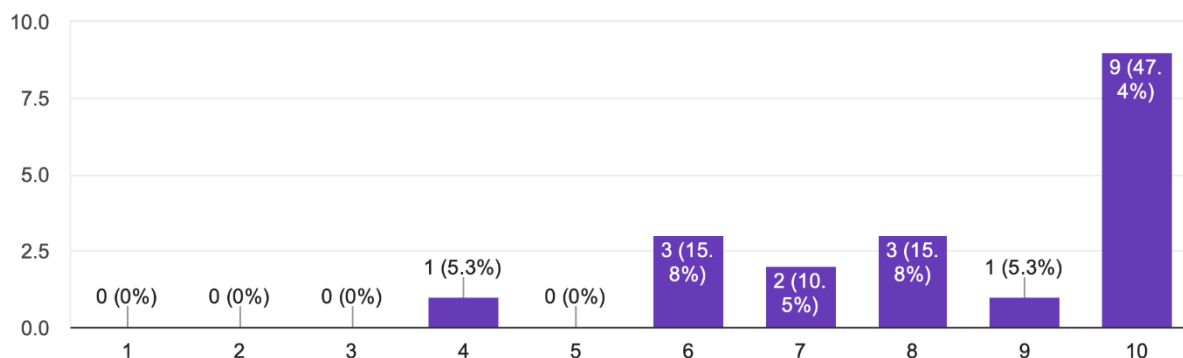
Greet with Grace - Grace is a gift, the free gift of lovingkindness, with it's care, compassion, curiosity, and understanding. Do your best to start with that for others, and yourself.

19 responses



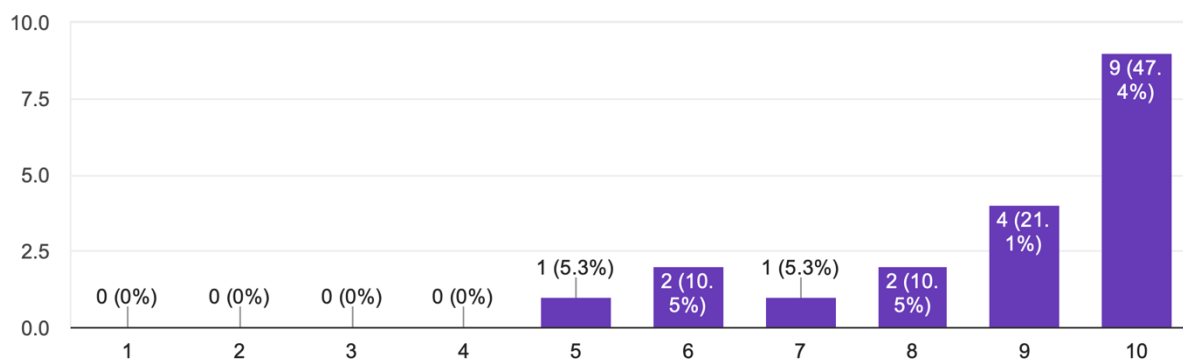
Imagination Opens Your "World" to New Possibilities - All better futures, big or small, started as an imaginative vision in people's minds. Dream of better...ecide to believe they can be true, and live into it.

19 responses



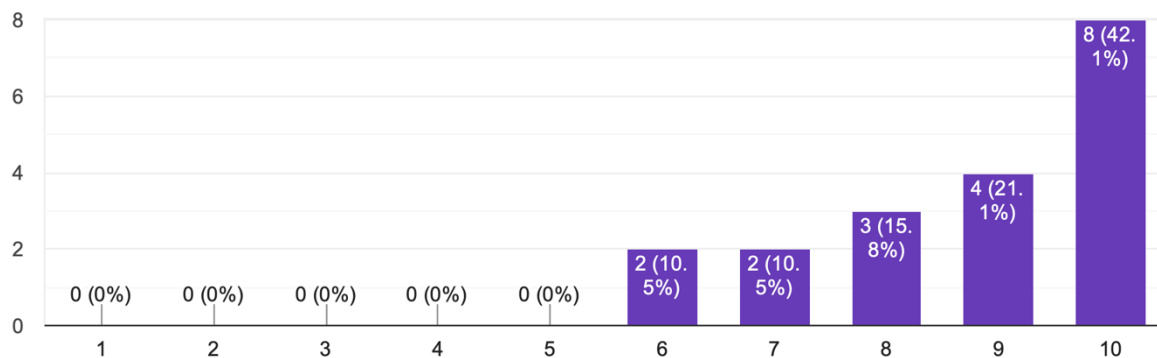
Cultivate Curiosity - Curiosity opens our hearts, and the hearts of others. It "leans" us towards others, and vice-versa.

19 responses



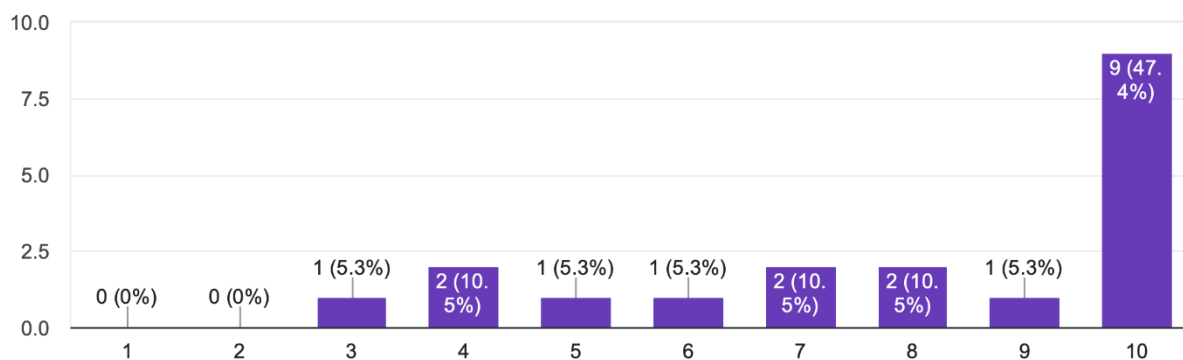
"We're Always Telling a Story in Our Heads. Choose a Good One." - You know that ongoing mental narrative about yourself and others? Make it a good one!

19 responses



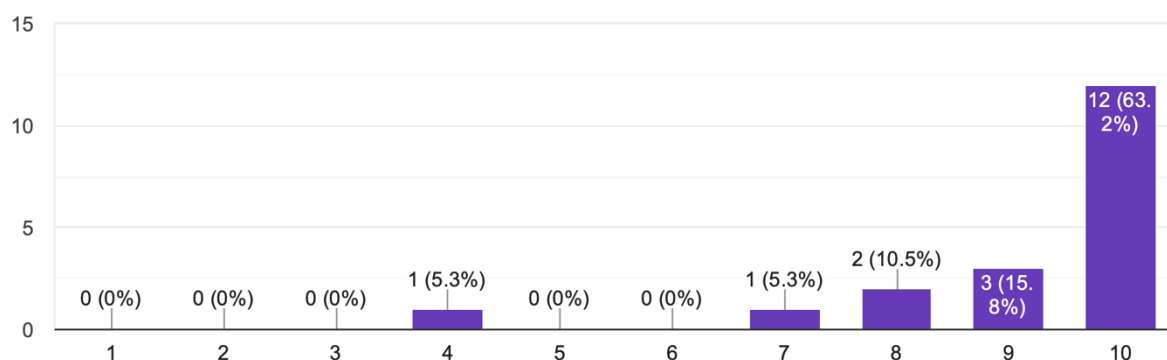
Believe the Best - Love starts by believing the best in/of others (and yourself), which has a way of bringing out the best in one another.

19 responses



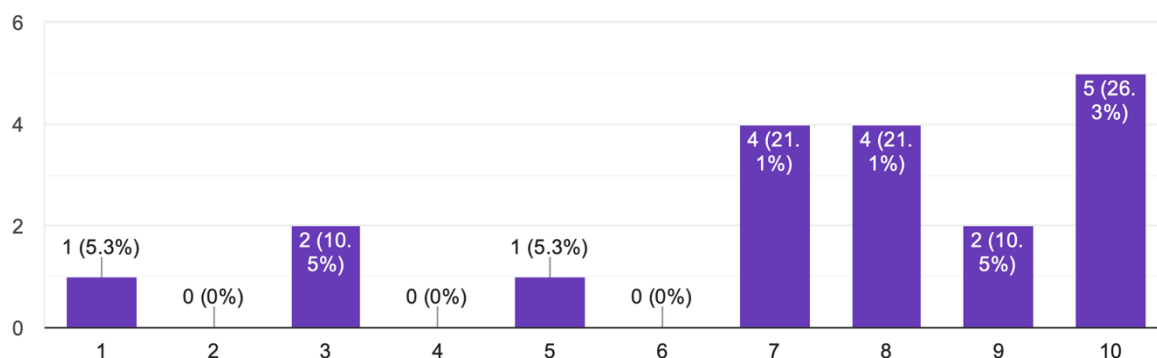
Gratitude - Practicing gratitude literally wires our brains to be more joyful.

19 responses



Journaling - There's something about expressing our inner realities via writing/drawing that helps us both clear and grow.

19 responses



Prototype #2 Survey Comments

- It's hard not to rate these as all "10s" as I can definitely see the intense value in each aspect. So, in answering, I tried to score the highest on the things that seem to make the biggest impact in my relationships.
- As I was reflecting upon the last 10 to 14 days I appreciate where I'm thriving and I appreciate where there is room to grow and to be more aware of these ideas and desires within me. Great questions and thought provoking ideas

- Although all these ideas are wonderful in and of themselves, I had/have serious difficulty in applying them. I am, always, a work in progress.
- Interesting. All makes sense.
- I love all of this laying and having all of these conceptual and integrative practices in one place is so helpful. Journaling for me is different as I journal through my songwriting. It can be expanded I do believe into other practices that are the same nature. Also, I've been so obsessive in my thinking about the past that I find for myself being present on what I'm feeling right now is enough. I rather practice around tuning into something that is transcendent and the oneness of our true nature etc. is so powerful. Thank you for being you!
- I would add artistic expression as an extension of journaling. For dualism, I struggled a little with that - although I see it as very important as a strategy, with respect to politics, I do believe there is right and wrong - when the policies and passions in question quite literally make society worse by causing harm and removing rights (actual rights not imagined). There, a line is crossed and if someone does harm with their beliefs, I see them as "bad" even as I seek not to. I still ranked this one high because I believe it is a strategy we should all engage, but needless to say, it's tricky :)
- I ranked highest what resonates most for me.
- Wonderfully thought provoking reflections and true thoughts of consideration for a good majority of us that are unsure of how to move from a place of discontentedness and disease, to a place of fulfillment and contentment. Again, thank you for providing the opportunity to complete this survey.
- I love all of these! Thank you for bringing them to my awareness today!!

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